

# Art history narrative essay

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Every piece of art has a story to tell, a message to deliver, a meaning to reveal, a purpose behind it. In her paintings *Vanitas Still Life*, Maria van Oosterwyck (Kaldenbach [www. xs4all. nl/~kalden/](http://www.xs4all.nl/~kalden/)) displayed her feelings of happiness in the midst of grief.

She alluded to and suggested her essential passion. Maria used several vehicles to convey her enthusiasms: personal thoughts and imagery of flowers, fruits, yarn, books, papers, bench, skull on a table, and a globe.

The personal thoughts are not descriptions of what Maria is feeling but rather are testimonials of what she was thinking: people have to interact to pursue life, a balance of personal concern and social interest (Lustig & Koester 1996), culture dictated and limited a woman's world to a specific nook in this world as expressed by the cramped, sullen space of her setting.

Regardless of beauty, intelligence, creativeness, and riches she is restricted to a stillness that is of deafening reverberations.

She was not as free as women these days. Although supplies of food may be abundant as symbolized by the fruits, her freedom has its specified limits by the restricted angle of space. It is such a small world to move around, typical of ancient traditions, where a woman can not get out on the streets unescorted.

As though she was not permitted to have friends, consequently, she became a loner, a painter. She was kind of oppressed, depressed and repressed (Lustig & Koester 1996), an emblem of a contemporary Dutch woman (Albemarle of London 1996-2005).

It looks like she belongs to a society of people who stoops down at a woman who is outgoing. More like a conservative community. Otherwise, it may be a portrayal of stillness in the lives of women in those days.

The imagery suggests Maria's feelings. This is conveyed by the intensity of colors of her flowers and fruits symbolizing liveliness. One's ability to care and love, but simply bundled down to a vase in a lonely, desolate spot which is contrasted to the dullness of a human skull, symbolizing male egocentricities, stubbornness, and stiffness.

The skull must be that of a man who loves to drink and read beside her lady, a lady who can only be busy with the upkeep of her beauty, her knitting and her household chores. Today is it called a lousy, awful, and boring life? It is just like marriage to a dead man.

Although the painting was done in 1668, it is still relevant for its symbolism and portrayal of a woman's abilities. Expressions of a sullen, cramped and lonely nook are seldom seen these days though, where women are avant-garde.

Canaletto, 1697- 1768, is a painting of notable contrast to the work of Oosterwyck. It was painted by Giovanni Antonio Canal (Albemarle of London 1996-2005).

The paintings depict the inanimate perspectives of life, the outside world, away from the confinements of a home. His paintings were described to be dazzling and lively pictures of canals, churches and squares, a popular male thought (Albemarle of London 1996-2005). It is a masculine expression of interest on infrastructure rather than food feelings and emotions.

For what is a canal but a thoroughfare, a church and a building are nothing but gravels, sand, stones and pieces of wood from a once living thing. This would also show that men's hands are tied to building structures out of stones, iron and sand, so as to ensure the ease and comfort with which women, family and society can do their daily chores.

Images expressed in portraits and paintings are rather direct statements of artists' personal life, history, culture, passions and emotions.

#### Reference

Lustig, M. & Koester, J. (1996). Intercultural Competence. U. S. A.: Harper Collins College Publishers.

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