

History of one art: coming to terms with loss

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Art history functions as documentation of the past and can provide a window to connect to the present. The way people of any society view art of the past depends on the narrative structured by art historians, yet those views can be altered. For example, civil rights and feminist movements lead to the reevaluation of Western views of past historians when awareness of the lack of diversity in museums and history books was revealed. The current study of art history is the analysis and interpretation focuses on use of time, location, and overall visual experience of the work which is then categorized and chronicalized, whereas in the past, focus was on Greco-Roman perfectionist standards, as well as Western elitism.

In order to study pieces of art, one must understand the history of the time and place in which a piece was created since art is influenced by economics, literature, education, religion, government, and society. In general, societal factors can change drastically from time period to time period and one geographical region to another. Art is essentially the embodiment of the movements, conflicts, innovations, ideals, and values of its time of creation, allowing the viewer to look inside the minds of the people of that period. In addition to the history of the region and time, the history of the artist who created the piece is valuable information as the artists' personal experiences and perceptions are embedded into their works. By understanding the artists' backgrounds, one can possibly understand how and why they developed their work.

Though history is a significant part of studying art, another major factor is the visual experience the art creates and presents. The validity of a piece was once based solely on its beauty and esthetic; now, with modern

technology and forms of expression, focus has transitioned to the meaning behind the piece and its overall purpose. The function, emotions, stories, and concepts presented in art are developed through the use of elements and principles of art design. By analyzing the different colors, line work, shapes, forms, textures, value scales, balance, proportion, emphasis, etc., one can break down an image into its basic foundation. One must also identify the type of art they are viewing by determining whether it is two-or three-dimensional and if it is considered abstract, representational, or descriptive. By taking all of these variables into consideration, the viewer is more equipped to identify the likely artist, when and how the work was created, as well as the symbolism and underlying meaning behind the piece.

Art history is the combination of history and visual literacy of art and covers a broad range of subjects such as culture, language, literature, politics, and economics of the period in which they were produced. Because art history reflects societal issues, it could be used to enrich students' studies of any and all periods of time in a variety of subject areas. A specific piece might be used to generate discussions about historical social events and the individuals involved. A body of work could be used to encourage students to investigate areas of science, technology, and exploration prompted not only by images within the work, but also the mediums, materials, and techniques used to create the work. The study of art and history associated with works of art opens up many student enrichment possibilities.