

Art analysis essay



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Artists are influenced by a variety of factors that show reflection in the works they create. They express their emotions and feelings in a visual way because they are appreciative of what they see; hence the environment they see every day -whether being natural or manmade- can be a major influence for many artists. Eugene von Guerard (traditionalist), Howard Arkley (modernist) and Andy Goldsworthy (post-modernist) are three examples of artists from three different time periods that are influenced by the physical environment around them.

Eugene von Guerard (1811- 1901) was born in Italy and trained there as an artist, and later studied landscape painting in Germany. Von Guerard interests excluding art involved exploring, such as taking long treks in Australia and New Zealand, and it was on these trips that he created finely detailed pencil drawings of the environment around him which he later used as the basis for his paintings. Von Guerard expressed environment by the feelings it evoked from him whether that being awe or terror, and specifically focused on the colouring and lighting. His paintings are also known for being astonishingly detailed.

Von Guerard predominately worked in oil painting which was a traditional aspect in the art world at that time. Von Guerard can be seen as a romantic artist- who takes major influence from the nature around him and the grandeur and beauty that comes with it. He investigates developments in colonial art, such as issues with isolation and parochialism, as well as European traditions. Von guerard was an individual who contributed to the movement that effectively drifted from only painting English landscapes, however he used that tradition to influence his own works.

Artists that influenced his personal style of painting include Claude Lorraine, Nicolas Poussin, and Salvator Rosa. In 1870 von Guerard was appointed first Master of the School of Painting at the National Gallery of Victoria, and influenced the training of different artists for the next eleven years. Von Guerard is known for his unyielding devotion to a picturesque subject matter, and the complexity of the detail in his paintings. One of von Guerard's most famous paintings is North-east view from the Northern Top of Mount.

Kosciusko (1863) – oil on canvas, 66. 5cmx 116. 8cm, and currently resides in the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, being purchased in 1973. The painting itself is very meticulous in detail with rocks in the foreground, mountains in the middle-ground, and distant mountains and sky in the background being finely complex. The foreground of the image not only shows rocks but very small people which indicates a narrative within the painting- members of Professor Niemeyer's scientific expedition undertaking a ' magnetic survey'.

The central figure of the painting is possibly von Guerard himself, and the painting is very topographically accurate. The composition and framing of the painting reflect the conventions of art in the time period it was produced. Von Guerard was influenced by the westernized world around him, as well as other beliefs of his involving science and God. He effectively moves away from the traditional English landscape paintings and focuses on the feeling of isolation in a subject, and the one-sided parochial view of a landscape.

Being a romantic artist, von Guerard strived to depict beauty using meticulous detail to enhance this. Guerard's paintings were often praised by

contemporary critics for their grandeur and faithfulness to nature as they were criticised for their photographic nature. Viewers find the painting unique for its time and very reflective of von Guerard's awe of nature. The tiny human figures at the base of the painting make the viewer's sense of isolation and insignificance in relation to the powerful nature around the people shown. Critics quote "the painting depicts nature as endlessly evolving, powerful and dramatic".

It was originally a commercial failure and was found by James Gleeson who passed it onto the Australian National Gallery who purchased it a century after the painting was created. Von Guerard's strong interest in the romantic side of nature was a postmodern element of his time. The exaggerated features such as the rocks, created for a poetic purpose was also not a conventional aspect in the art world. The artist Imants Tillers can be compared to von Guerard with his appropriation of North-east view from the Northern Top of Mount. Kosciusko called Mount.

Analogue (1985) – oil stick and synthetic polymer paint on 165 canvas boards. Tillers was heavily inspired by von Guerard and created this large scale piece to reflect the breathtaking view that Guerard was aspiring to achieve himself. Howard Arkley (1951-1999) is an Australian artist generally known for his iconic airbrushed paintings of houses as well as architecture and suburbia. Arkley's early works were for the most part abstract, often depicting different patterns lines and textures you can create by airbrush. His early works were also black and white and further long into his career Arkley would experiment with colour, eventually creating works which are astonishingly vivid. By the end of his career his creations showed strong

visual colour, bold forms, and brash designs that resembled advertisement qualities. To create these images of vibrant houses Arkley would use handmade stencil such as perforated plastic laundry baskets and fly screen doors to achieve very rich textures. Other than Arkley's typical subject of suburban houses he also airbrushed interiors of houses and a few portraits.

Arkley was born in Melbourne, his mother being Jewish and his father German. He first became interested in art after visiting an exhibition of artist Sidney Nolan, who now is one of Australia's most well-known painter and printmaker. He was inspired by Nolan's use of abstract materials which initiated the start of his career creating abstract works. Arkley studied at college from 1969- 1992 and it was there that he discovered techniques using the airbrush. Arkley's motivation to create suburban pieces sparked after one day when he was walking home he noticed the pattern on the front gate of his house.

Afterwards Arkley proceeded to walk around the neighbourhood taking note of patterns other houses create to use as inspiration. Arkley's work Triple Fronted (synthetic polymer on canvas, 166x 240cm) was created in 1988 and is the most commercially successful of five paintings released in a series. The airbrushed image depicts a triple fronted house in the middleground, and a driveway to the left of it, as well as a patterned gate in the foreground and cloudy sky in the background. The painting has a strong cartoon like quality and uses block colours and bold edges to enhance this.

There is a very strong use of distinct lines, which in the driveway create a sense of perception and depth to the painting. All colours are very vivid and

bright; and hence the house being a vibrant yellow and centred, it is the key focal point of the painting. Arkley has experimented with texture in the roof of the house and plants shown, which displays a more distinct texture than the smoother areas of the painting such as the lawn. Arkley was inspired to create Triple Fronted as well as the other four paintings in the series after he became fascinated with the patterns and textures around his local suburban neighbourhood.

We can then determine that the Australian culture and environment at the time the artwork was made –late 1980s- was the main contributor of what influenced the painting. The painting symbolises the suburban streets of Australia by displaying vibrant colours and bold lines which emphasises the key features of the typical Australian house found in the 1980s. The title of the painting accentuates this idea of the stereotypical Australian house by being called “ Triple Fronted”- a very common form of architecture in suburban areas. Arkley’s works were generally accepted by the art world at the time they were produced.

Viewers found the artwork refreshing unique, resembling other currently ‘ accepted’ artists such as Andy Warhol. Viewer’s also found the painting very surreal despite its cartoon-like qualities. Critics of Arkley’s work have noted things such as “ The suburban picture never features a single living soul yet the garish colours suggest that is not a bad thing”; and from this we can conclude that the painting reflects a positive and vibrant tone to its viewers. Arkley’s innovative use of the airbrush was a very unique practice in the art world at the time it was made, with very few artists ever having experimented with the form.

Arkley also explored the postmodern aspect of suburbia which was not a subject that conformed to the conventions of art world when created.

Another one of Arkley's works that could be compared to Triple Fronted is Riteroom which is a perfect example of Arkley's use of intricate patterns and variety of textures created by airbrush. The picture however depicts the inside to a typical suburban house, and illustrates many of the thick lines and vibrant colours found in Triple Fronted.

Andy Goldsworthy (1956) is a British sculptor, photographer and environmentalist, however he is most known for his installations in the natural environment using the organic resources around him. Goldsworthy often uses bright coloured flowers, icicles, leaves, mud, stone, twigs, and thorns to create interesting patterns within the natural environment. Goldsworthy states " my remit is to work with nature as a whole" as he creates most of his installations using his bare hands, teeth and found tools at the location.

Goldsworthy also uses strictly no Photoshop manipulation to the installation. Photography is also a major part of his works as Goldsworthy believes that it is an essential element due to his creations often ephemeral and transient state. Goldsworthy was born in Cheshire however currently lives and works in Scotland. Being an environmentalist part of his philosophy is to work with nature instead of " making his mark", so when constructing a project he works instinctively after ' taking in' the nvironment around him. In addition to this, Goldsworthy does not plan what season of the year to create his sculptures- he simply explores nature and works with what he find at that point in time. His viewpoint of how an individual should understand nature is

the major influence on the works he creates; as he believes an ever changing thing such as nature should be treated in a reflective way.

Goldsworthy's work Woven branch arch (1986) is an installation sculpture made in Langholm, Dumfriesshire.

The photograph of the sculpture depicts a forest of leafless thin trees interrupted by a pathway, including trees and many branches leading from one side of the pathway to the other, creating an archway of branches. The inside of the archway appears to be a smooth semi-circle, especially in comparison to the sharp branches pointing out in multiple directions on the outside of the archway. Goldsworthy created this sculpture by using natural materials found around the location he was working, and using them to intricately tie each branch together and create a sturdy archway.

Materials used to hold the branches together include vines found in the woods around him and the architectural support of other branches to hold the shape. The photograph itself uses the archway for the viewer to see the cleared path behind it; and it is this path that contrasts with the branches and enable its shape's visibility. The photograph is rich in texture due to the sharp branches and displays a gloomy and a somewhat eerie tone.

Goldsworthy was inspired to create this work, just as all his others, due to his ideologies and philosophy of the natural world.

He believes that by creating a delicate and intricate piece using only natural materials that create a fragile sculpture, he will therefore reflect the forever changing ways of nature by capturing the moment in time before the sculpture is likely to break or fall apart. He believes man should work with

nature instead of altering it and taking advantage of its resources, and this reflects heavily in his art making of Woven branch arch. Growing up Goldsworthy lived and worked on a farm and became familiar with the repetitive tasks that come with being a farmer.

Eventually he likened the repetitive quality and reintroduced this aspect into his art making with the production of his sculptures being a very time consuming and repetitive process. Generally, Goldsworthy's constructions were very much accepted into the art world with his art making processes being seen as a refreshing idea. Critics comment " it represents a moment of ingenious, sometimes labour-intensive improvisation that transforms humble, readily available materials" (New York Time art critic).

In Woven branch arch audiences are in fact left in a state of shock and wonder to how the archway could have been created, and Goldsworthy produces this same response of wonder and awe in all his other works. Goldsworthy's entire ideology was a postmodern approach to the art world. The strict use of only organic materials, creating an installation in a natural setting was an entirely new convention for its time in the art world. It is thought that Goldsworthy's postmodern approach is what made his artworks including Woven Tree Branch so commercially successful.

Goldsworthy's other work Rowan leaves laid around hole (1987) can be compared to Woven branch arch by similarly creating a ' striking' display to the audience, but instead using the fine layout of coloured leaves. The artwork shows a vibrant gradient of yellow to deep red leaves arranged in a circle, and is a good example of Goldsworthy's repetitive nature of

constructing his works. All three artists mentioned previously take the environment as their major inspiration towards the works they create.

Eugene von Guerard creates his paintings to display his love and awe of nature, as well as his fascination with the beauty it comes with in landscape environments. Howard Arkley alternatively approaches the physical environment to reflect his passion for textures and patterns found in suburbanised areas. Andy Goldsworthy appropriates the environment himself, whilst conforming to its natural state by only using native elements to create his works. These artists all appreciate and interpret different sides of nature in alternative ways, which as a viewer should reflect on ourselves and enhance our different ways of appreciating artworks.