INDUSTRIALISM’S IMPACT: REFLECTIONS OF ARTISTS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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ART 2210: History of Art
March 27, 2013
Throughout history artists have used art making as a tool to reflect, express, and explain their attitudes, feelings, or opinions about what was going on in society at the time. For this reason art can act as a portal, allowing the viewer to experience a glimpse of the past, present, or future through the eyes of the artist. The Industrial Revolution was a time in history that marked a series of “advancements in technology that caused social, cultural, and economic changes in many countries.”1 From the beginning of the First Industrial Revolution in 1760, to the end of the Second Industrial Revolution into the late 19th century, society experienced many changes that affected nearly every aspect of everyday life. The Industrial Revolution “marked a shift to powered, special-purpose machinery, factories and mass production”2 Such shifts were a direct result of the introduction of new forms of energy generation such as coal burning, the steam engine, and waterpower. Agriculture, the iron and textile industries, economic policy, and transportation were also impacted by the increase in technology and innovation of the Industrial Revolution. All of which had a direct effect on the social structures, labor, and wealth classes of the people at the time.3 As society began to experience these changes, the reflection of attitudes, opinions, and emotions of the Artists can be observed through the resulting art movements and paintings created in response to the Industrial Revolution.4

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One of the first art movements that resulted in response to the Industrial Revolution was Romanticism. Romanticism was at its peak in the first half of the 19th century. Romantic paintings were “aimed at evoking viewer’s emotions” with “flaring passion in every stroke of the brush”.

Romanticism began during the industrial revolution and often depicted soft natural colors to paint peaceful landscapes. Cite Romantic painters often painted picturesque nature landscapes that represented the “rejection of the city” culture. Romantic artists were known to represent nostalgia for a simpler time. The artists often drew upon the past lifestyles of their ancestors for inspiration. Common subjects of the Romantic paintings of the time were peasants or shepherds, agricultural scenes, pastoral or rural landscapes. These paintings attempted to portray the attitudes of the time concerning man’s relationship with, existence in, and power over nature. “Before the Revolution most people lived in small villages, working either in agriculture or as skilled craftsmen.” These paintings depicted an obvious appreciation for how things were before the dawn of industrialism and were often valued by the artists and viewers as an escape into the more simple but superior past. A famous Romantic painting that exhibits

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these attitudes towards nature is Constable’s “Salisbury Cathedral” of 1825. This landscape painting is of a church courtyard. The Cathedral is painted with soft diffused details off in the distance. It is framed by natural looking trees and a sky full of swirling grey clouds. In the foreground of the painting is a stream where several cows are grazing nearby. A couple dressed in their Sunday best can be observed taking a stroll down a dirt pathway, the man pointing off into the distance at the animals and the distant cathedral. The painting is done is gentle brush strokes and makes use of a cool calming color palette.

Another art movement that responded to the Industrial Revolution was Realism. Realist painters aimed to represent the world around them as accurately as possible. In contrast to Romanticism, Realism depicted common every day scenes that lacked emotion or drama. Realists also rejected many of the prior Romantic historical subjects and themes because they believed that such ideas had no current relevancy to the present times. The Industrialism of Europe resulted in both positive and negative consequences to the people. One positive change that was brought forth by the Industrial Revolution was an increase in wealth, efficiency, and standard of living for the upper and middle class. However, the poor endured a constant struggle as a result industrialism. During the Industrialist Era, machines began to replace human labor which resulted in unemployment for many unskilled laborers. Those who had lived in the country side

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moved to urban cities in search of employment and the “urban working class grew in number.”

 Those who were successful in finding work in the newly established factories often suffered low wages and hazardous working conditions. Artists of the Realism movement focused their attention to representing aspects of everyday life. According to Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website, “Realism was based on direct observation of the modern world.” Courbet was one realist artist who was known “the subjects of the paintings were poor, ordinary working class people” Courbet received many negative critiques for portraying such “ugly” and un-artistic subjects, but in the spirit of realism Courbet responded to his critics that his paintings of the peasants allows “a new light to be shone upon the working class and illuminated the realities of life.”

 Courbet’s painting titled “Stone Breakers” of 1849 embraces these themes by representing two men hard at work breaking stones with metal tools. The Metropolitan Museum of art says that Courbet’s “Stone Breakers” represents an "irony directed against our industrialized civilization ... which is incapable of freeing man from the heaviest, most difficult, most unpleasant tasks, the eternal lot of the poor.” Artists Millet, Corot, and Daumier are also realist painters who dedicated work that depicted similar themes.


http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/rlsm/hd_rlsm.htm

After the Realism Movement emerged the Impressionism Movement.

“Impressionism is often regarded as the forerunner of modern art.”16 The Impressionism movement occurred during the late 19th century and gave way to an entirely different style and technique of painting. The Impressionists were concerned were observing nature directly and often painted in outdoor settings in order to capture changes in light and atmosphere. The style of the Impressionist painters is characterized by soft hazy brushstrokes and intense blending of colors to simulate the effect of changes in light.17 “Impressionist artists painted using lighter and brighter colors very often un-tinted or blended and in a style completely different to that accepted by the generation before them.”16

One famous Impressionist painter was Claude Monet. Monet painted several scenes that were inspired by aspects of the Industrial Revolution. In Monet’s “La Gare Saint Lazare” of 1877, he paints the scene of a train station. The introduction of the steam locomotive in 1804 provided Europe with a quicker and more efficient method of travel.18 Monet was influenced by the changing times and innovation of transportation when he decided to paint a train station. Monet’s choice of subject for his multiple train station paintings became a perfect metaphor for modernism. “After all, the train is the

16 Mobbs, Richard. "IMPRESSIONISM: What were the circumstances and events that led up to the first Impressionist Exhibition and why was this significant in 19th Century Art?"


quintessential symbol for the Industrial Revolution.” Monet’s paintings also seem to encompass a reference to smog or pollution in the hazy treatment of light and atmospheric conditions. Monet’s depiction of polluted atmospheres also connects his work to the adverse effects of the increase in factories due to industrialism.

A post-impressionism piece by Whistler titled “Nocturne in Black and Gold- The Falling rocket” is a painting with abstract qualities depicting soaring fireworks in the night sky over the 1870 industrialized city of London. \(^{20}\) Whistler uses a similar approach to atmospheric smog as Monet, using a dark hazy color pallet with gold paint splatters to represent the exploding fireworks in the night sky. The use of fireworks and the depiction of the industrialized cityscape are both components that derive inspiration from the Industrialist Revolution.

After the Era Industrial Revolution ended artists continued to incorporate urban themes and subjects. Cityscapes, factories, ships, trains, and machinery are now all commonly represented in art during the Cubist, Futurist, Expressionist, and Dada movements of the 20th century. Without the Industrial Revolution, none of these themes would be commonplace in modern and contemporary art. Since the late 18th and 19th century when the rapid changes of industrialism and urbanization took place, artists have continued to expand upon urban ideas and technology in art.

The Industrial Revolution paved way for many inventions that changed artistic methods. The invention of photography in late 1700’s gave birth to a whole new study of

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20 Richardson, Edgar Preston. *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket by Whistler*. 
Photography had a very dramatic impact on the art world and Realist movements. With the use of the camera, the photographer was for the first time able to “capture an event in the moment as it actually occurred.” It also allowed for artists to use the camera to “truthfully and accurately depict scenes as the eye actually saw them.”

Also, the invention of the printing press led to advancements in art that made use of technology and techniques such as Lithography, Silk-Screen printing, and Transfers to be used for artistic purposes. Famous artist Andy Warhol of the mid 1900’s is one artist who used the process of silk screening in much of his most famous pieces.

The Industrial Revolution has had many influences on art over the past couple centuries. My idea for an exhibit would be centered on the themes, reactions, and subject matter of the paintings and artists who made work during the Romantic, Realist, Impressionist, and Post Impressionist paintings. The exhibit would be titled “Industrialism’s Impact: Reflections of Artists Of the Industrial Revolution.” The gallery where this exhibit would take place would be divided into multiple sections to split up the artwork based on the movement it belonged to. Paintings that depicted similar themes would be grouped together and displayed in chronological order in reference to their date produced and art movement to create a timeline-like treatment to the gallery space. Those who visited the exhibit would walk through the different movements while being informed by detailed descriptions of how each piece fit into the time line and how the


artist felt about or was influenced by the Industrial Revolution. After the viewer made his or her way through the selected pieces belonging to the Romantic, Realist, Impressionist, and Post Impressionist spaces they would enter a separate room where they would be exposed to Industrialism related or urban themed paintings of the 20th century. In this separate room that is concentrated on artwork from the 20th century, the viewers would be introduced to the invention of photography and printing processes. The types of photographs and prints that would be selected for this portion of the exhibit would allow the viewer to gain insight on how industrialism set the scene for these kinds of innovations and how it changed art making forever. After walking through the entire exhibit the viewer would leave the gallery with a new understanding of the Industrial Revolution and how it impacted artists and society at the time. The viewer would not only know what kind of changes occurred due to the urbanization and advancement of multiple industries, but they would also have gained an understanding of how the people made sense of the changes and how the attitudes, feelings, and opinions of industrialism were incorporated into art. Viewers would then be able to generate personal reflections on how industrialism has affected other areas of their daily life, and acknowledge how important the Industrial Revolution was to modern day society.
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Gustave Courbet “Stone Breakers” 1849

Gustave Courbet was born at Ornans in a mountainous Swiss region in the province of Franche-Comte. He was born on June 10 in the year 1819. He was the son of a well off landowner in the area of Flagey near Ornans. Courbet was a smart child and was described to be “enlightened” for he liked to read about philosophy. Courbet was raised well off in a time where enthusiasm was beginning to take hold about the Revolution. Courbet absorbed this enthusiasm for the Revolution at a young age. Courbet had a love for the countryside and his appreciation for nature can be seen in his artwork.¹

As Courbet emerged as an artist he became one of the most important art figures of the 19th Century. He is often credited with founding the movement of realism. Through Realism, Courbet replaced some of the earlier Greek and Roman or Classical subjects and themes that were often portrayed in Romanticism and focused on representing reality in a true and honest way.² Courbet often chose to depict ordinary working class or poor people as subjects for his paintings. He received some criticism for doing so but he countered such negativity and stuck to his beliefs about the importance on shedding light on the true and honest conditions of life.³

Claude Monet “La Gare Saint Lazare” of 1877

Monet was raised in Normandy but eventually moved to Paris where he became one of the most influential impressionist painters of the late 19th century.¹ In his artwork Monet used impressionist techniques and style of painting to create several luminous and softly colored landscapes paintings. Monet’s style is described as “His mature style is marked by broken brushwork and pure, bright colors, which complemented his careful observation of the effects of sunlight.”² Monet is known for painting series of the same subject. He did many studies with repeated ideas and themes revolving around haystacks, water lilies, cityscapes, and train stations.

It is Monet’s train station and cityscape paintings that most depict elements inspired by the Industrialism of Europe at the time. Painting such urban subjects shows that Monet was inspired by this time of change. Monet’s style often involves a hazy or smoggy treatment to the application blending of paint and colors to portray the polluted atmospheric conditions of an urbanized environment. Such an effect can be seen in his painting “La Gare Saint Lazare” as well in many of his cityscapes.


**John Constable “Salisbury Cathedral” 1825**

Constable was an English landscape painter who was born in 1776 and died in 1837. His work is classified to be a part of the Romantic Movement. Constable’s style of painting is described as “a unique style combining objective studies of nature with a deeply personal vision of the countryside” ¹ Constable rejected the popular romantic themes of historical figures or classical themes and chose to focus his work on the humble and quietness of the countryside. When painting his English countryside scenery, Constable used “short strokes and a restricted color palette to train his hand and eye, and to enhance the realism of his later paintings” ¹

Constable’s English Landscape paintings resonated with those who were opposed to the changing industrialization and urbanization of the expanding cities at the time. Many romantic landscape painters such as Constable chose to depict scenes of agriculture that reminded people of a more simple past before the age of innovation and technology. Those who were opposed to the Industrial Revolution at the time found Constable’s landscapes to be an appreciated escape from urban society. ³

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