

Chapter 28

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ITS LEGACY

Art of the Late 18th through the Mid-19th Century

Summary:

This chapter addresses the Enlightenment and its impact on subsequent generations of artists. It was a new way of thinking; no longer was faith the sole factor in constructing a dialog and an analysis of the world and the environment. Critical thinking now was based on empirical evidence, questions were asked and answers were sought.

This was the age of encyclopedias and compilations of humankind's knowledge. Knowledge was compiled and documented. Experiments were used to create a body of factual knowledge based on provable evidence.

This ever-expanding body of knowledge brought about change. Sometimes violent change, the American Revolution and the French Revolution were consequences of a population, which was no longer, satisfied with poor economic conditions and even worse social conditions. A more peaceful revolution was the Industrial Revolution, which occurred at around 1740 in England. The starting point was the invention of the steam engine, which changed the course of human productivity. This revolution advanced the idea of technology as an aide for the promotion of increased productivity. Technology also increased the number of questions asked regarding the natural environment and its relationship to humanity; answers were sought.

With the advance of technology assisting in critical thinking, artists and architects also took advantage of pursuing new uses of technology for creating certain aesthetic visions. Cast iron as a construction tool was now being employed and not to the detriment of an aesthetically pleasing creation. In the wake of this technology comes the desire to return to the "natural state". The "natural state" as defined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a state of ignorance and happiness; a state of being which was "primitive". These two opposing definitions, clear, calm, rational thought and emotional primitivism appeared in the arts as well.

This chapter examines the rational and the scientific as presented by Joseph Wright of Derby and the emotional primitivism of Jean-Baptiste Greuze or Henry Fuseli among the many artists working during this period. This chapter also explores the impact the archaeological discoveries at Pompeii and Herculaneum had on Europe at this time. The discovery of the "classical past" and its revival of interest in Antiquity and the subsequent rise of Neoclassicism impacted both Europe and the United States will also be investigated. In conflict with the moral and heroic tone of neoclassical art is the emergence of romanticism, which was predicated on "feeling" and imagination. In this period (c.1740-1840) we will explore the rich diversities of the artists and the works they created that defined them and their age. We will examine critical inventions, photography; the emergence of women as vital artists recognized for their contributions.

This chapter will also explore the consequences of these inventions and revolutions within Europe and the United States, the impact of "manifest destiny" and the landscape, both in the aesthetic and political and social senses.

I. Lecture Model

This chapter allows for a broader range of methodologies. Placing the art and the explanations in context will help in bringing a greater understanding to the student. It would be useful to place the works in context and illustrate the impact of not only those works but also the perceptions that promoted this change in not only the visual world but also the intellectual time they fit. A number of possible approaches can be used: sociological, political and some formal analysis to illustrate the continuing thread of development.

1) The chapter opens with the scientific applications of the investigative process, which was becoming a focus for the intellectuals. It touches upon the discovery of the natural world or environment and the archaeological discoveries as well as the colonization of the "New World" and the "primitive" world. Africa and India as well as the New World and the islands of the Pacific bring an exoticism to Europe. These fascinating locations also inspired the artists who were members of the team of explorers and who went on the exploratory expeditions.



28-11 JEAN-BAPTISTE GREUZE, *The Village Bride*, 1761. Oil on canvas, 3' x 3' 10 1/2". Louvre, Paris.

Greuze epitomized the sentimental, which became an important component in the late 18th century French school. His *Village Bride* (28-11) creates the *atmosphere of sentimentality* by the positioning of the characters. ***The diagonals formed by the figures' placement keep your eye moving in a gentle flow across the canvas.***

The narrative moves freely and is easily understood by the gesture of the petitioning groom, placing the dowry in the father's hand, and the shyly down turned head of the bride and her hand winding through the groom's arm.

In the sociological context, the artist created a tableau for the viewer to look into a household, which was not wealthy. We see the nobility of the father, the sweet shyness of the daughter and the determination of the groom. However, **Greuze** has also given us a *peek at another human quality, the jealousy of an older daughter (peering over father's shoulder)*. **The emotional content of this work was easy to grasp** and it became a popular work. ***It expressed the values of the day, good hard working people, not members of the aristocracy, who pursued the joys of life.***



28-13 ÉLISABETH LOUISE VIGÉE-LEBRUN, Self-Portrait, 1790.

Oil on canvas, 8' 4" x 6' 9". Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

The charm and naturalness of Vigée-Lebrun is mirrored in her work. Her *Self-Portrait* (28-13) illustrates a confident, warm, and relaxed artist. She dialogs with the viewer directly.



Another artist who followed in this fashion was Chardin. He created works, which were insightful and emotional without creating great melodrama.

Compare

The Village Bride (28-11) and *Grace at the Table* (28-12), absent are the dramatic gestures and turbulent emotions. Chardin has given great dignity to this mother and her daughters.



28-14 WILLIAM HOGARTH, Breakfast Scene, from Marriage à la Mode, ca. 1745. Oil on canvas, approx. 2' 4" x 3'. National Gallery, London.

Across the Channel, in England, we see a similar treatment of society and its foibles. William Hogarth's *Breakfast Scene* from *Marriage à la Mode* (28-14) touches upon the *silliness of British society* and the *socially arranged marriage to the "quality"*. The artist describes visually the mentality of the nouveau riche and the poverty stricken aristocracy. **Hogarth begins his series with the arranged marriage between a young lady, nouveau riche, and a dissolute aristocrat, in this case a young viscount.** Hogarth has created a narrative following the lives of these two individuals, their beginning and their end. The artist by creating this type a multiple

narrative (8 episodes) was able to make a visual criticism of British society itself. Hogarth condemns both elements, which existed at this time in British society, the foolish family of the newly rich seeking to "make a marriage" and the grasping nature of the indigent aristocracy predicating family solvency on money rather than character.



Counterbalancing this critical works is the portraitist, Gainsborough. He captures a gentler quality in British society. In the portrait *Mrs. Richard Brinsley Sheridan* (28-15), the artist has caught the sitter in a quiet moment. He has added to the pose a background landscape, which "places" the sitter in a woodland setting creating a theme that was analogous of British gentry. Mrs. Sheridan is serene and lovely; the artist has created a hallmark version for British portraiture, emphasizing the "quiet and lovely lady".



28-17 BENJAMIN WEST, The Death of General Wolfe, 1771. Oil on canvas, approx. 5' x 7' National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (gift of the Duke of Westminster, 1918).

The American painter Benjamin West created a drama based on an actual event in the formative years of the United States or as it was known in 1759 the British Colonies.

The *Death of General Wolfe* (28-17) has been elevated to the same state as the death of a religious figure.



By **comparing** this work with the *Dormition of the Virgin* from Strasbourg Cathedral (18-48), one can see how *these works represented the theme “the sentiment of loss” and martyrdom.*

The figures gathered around both dead individuals, the Virgin and St. Sebastian create a sense of mourning, which is also reflected in the *Death of General Wolfe*. Both scenes are quiet and controlled, gone are the great gestures.

Similar to Velasquez's *Surrender of Breda* (24-31), West has employed parallel motifs, the smoking ruins in the background, a pyramidal configuration of the dying Wolfe and his staff focus the eye of the viewer on the poignancy of the scene.

2) The resurgence of interest in Antiquity was based on the precepts of the Enlightenment and also on the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, Roman Republican cities destroyed by volcanic eruption in 79 CE. One of the principal exponents of the neoclassical style of painting was Jacques-Louis David. He exemplified the classical style both artistically and intellectually. David overlaps both the Rococo and the Neoclassical, he, in fact, followed the Rococo style. He studied in Rome and "discovered" the neoclassical style and never returned to the Rococo. One can see the impact the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii had on David. *The Oath of the Horatii* (28-21) done in 1784 recounts a portion of the history of pre-Republican Rome. The background is a Doric arcade and in the foreground are the sons and the daughters. The sons swearing to commit to Rome regardless of consequences describe the emotion of the moment. The heroic stances and drama of the raised arms and swords is counterbalanced by the pathos of the women. One is a bride-to-be and the other is a daughter of the Curatii, the opposing family, present the image of women suffering from the knowledge of the coming confrontation and its awful consequences while the mother of the Horatii comforts herself and prepares herself for the worst by leaning over her youngest mourning the inevitable loss. This dichotomy the heroism of the men and the emotion of the women was understood by the French audience. The French audience and David understood what was brewing, revolution was coming and this work reflected that cognition.

Neoclassicism had a great impact on other European countries and the United States as well. Those virtues of patriotism, idealism and service became principle components in the work of Thomas Jefferson. In his estate, Monticello (28-31), this classical style of architecture came to fit Jefferson's intellectual needs. The balance and symmetry, which are hallmarks of the classical as well as the neoclassical, are seen in Jefferson's home. That same idealism was carried over into his design for the University of Virginia. The Rotunda (1817-26) reflects that idealism as it is applied to education. 156

An educational space was created which would create an environment conducive to learning for the joy of learning.

3) The contrast to the heroism of the Neoclassical style is the emotionalism of romanticism. In Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (28-39), one sees a fantasy based on mythology with overtones bordering on the erotic. The imagination of the artist created an image of demonic possession or perhaps death by creating an image of a young and beautiful woman helpless before two monstrous figures. The disturbing and perverse nature of this work fits appropriately within the context of Romanticism and its mandate for raw feeling. In opposition to the perverse quality of Fuseli, is the Spaniard Goya. His work presents a testimony to the range of artists working during this period and their diversities, which they brought to the period. In Goya's *Family of Carlos IV* (28-42), the artist has continued the tradition of portraiture as a vehicle for identification. His predecessors in the 17th century established a formula for capturing that psychological moment. Such is the case in this family portrait. It has been suggested that this portrait is a political statement regarding the inept ability of the king and the unscrupulous stupidity of the queen. Has Goya caught those character traits forever? The positioning of the family members allows the viewer to create a personal dialog with the various characters. But there is an ambiguity in the portrait, some of the family members do establish eye contact with the viewer while others are simply staring off into space or as one female member turning her head to the back of the interior space the family occupies.

The work of Gericault did respond to both the politics of the period and to the forces of nature. In his *Raft of the Medusa* (28-45), he created a moment that is highly charged with emotion and turbulence. Gericault created this emotion by using movement

and color. The figures form a pyramid counterbalanced by a diagonal line of the figures looking toward the top figure holding a garment as if waving it. The gestures and the color focus the viewer's eye upward on out to the distant background. We become members of the crew frantically searching the horizon for help. Each gesture and figure works together in unity to create the emotion of despair. The whitecaps in the lower foreground lap at the raft, the draped figure to the right, barely hanging on, all focus our

eye to the apex of the pyramid and the figure waving, these motifs do create emotion so essential to Romanticism.

The Romantic response from the United States took a different form. The size of the nation created a notion of "manifest destiny" and the obligation of the settlers to grow and "civilize" the country. In this political and social environment, landscape painting became an important vehicle to illustrate the wonders of the new land and to augment that "westward" movement mandate. In Albert Bierstadt's *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* (28-56), the magnificent landscape is depicted. What is also illustrated is the vast open landscape; absent of people or towns, as the 19th century viewer knew them. By creating a breathtaking landscape, Bierstadt emphasized the "right" and obligation of the settler to bring civilization to this new and unoccupied land.

The Native Americans were not considered as occupants as they were "uncivilized" and did not engage in any of the essentially Western lifestyle activities: farming.

5) This was a period of innovation not only in architectural styles, but also, in new technologies used for architecture. Iron and steel were rapidly becoming construction components. The Coalbrookdale Bridge (28-10) used a cast-iron armature for construction this innovation laid the foundation for other innovative materials to be used

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in architecture. This, in turn, led to the revivalist styles which became popular, for example, Barry and Pugin Houses of Parliament (28-58), Garnier's Paris Opera (28-60).

These buildings were revitalizations of national pride and vigor. They became statements

for the civilization they represented, the leadership of their respective countries.

Finally photography allowed for more technologically precise records of events or people. Photography allowed for the scientific recording of subjects to be catalogued instantly (or as close to instant as the process allowed). In Hawes and Southworth's *Early*

Operation under Ether, Massachusetts General Hospital (28-65), the surgeons had a record of the operation and a portrait at one and the same time. The daguerreotype became a document of the event and also created a portrait of the participants instantly. The instant photograph as a portrait became popular, it was less time consuming, as the sitter did not have to sit still for endless hours. People and events could be recorded quickly.

The instantaneous quality of the photograph and its impact as a vehicle for instant communication of recording monumental events was discovered during the American Civil War. It became a fully realized tool to convey the horror and absolute expression for war and destruction. Timothy O'Sullivan's *A Harvest of Death, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1863* (28-68) was so grim and realistic that it impacted the nation with

the reality of this civil war. But the grim reality could also be transformed into an evocative, ethereal portrait of a theme taken from literature as seen in the work of Julia

Margaret Cameron (**Figure 28-67**). She uses the lens of the camera in much the same way a painter uses a brush she creates an enchanting mood. This was the other side the camera, not only did it record, verbatim, the events; it also allowed the photographer to

become as imaginative as their talent allowed them.

This period saw change and upheaval, innovation and tradition, it started the progress toward the future and the coming twentieth century.

Resources:

Videotapes

Building of Bath 25 min. BVL6620 \$149.95

Capability Brown 52 min. BVL2144 \$89.95

Eugene Delacroix 29 min. BVL7785 \$89.95

Malmaison and Empress Josephine 26min. BVL1504 \$89.95

Mr. Jefferson and his University 58 min. BVL4108 \$149.95

Versailles: Le Petit Trianon and Louis XV 26 min. BVL1508 \$89.95

William Blake 52 min. BVL6278 \$149.95

European Garden 50 min. BVL3339 \$149.95

Architectural Techniques 23 min. BVL5590 \$89.95

Films for the Humanities

1-800-257-5126

<http://www.films.com>

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Books

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Web Resources

<http://www.yale.edu/ycba>

<http://sgwww.epfl.ch/BERGER/Vertige/english/index.html>

<http://humanities.uchicago.edu/homes/mckee>

<http://www.georgianindex.net/Napoleon/Malmaison/Malmaison.html>

<http://www.monticello.org/>

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwphome.html>