

History of Art: A Chain of Movements and Counter-movements

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Abstract

Art movements and counter movements are appearing and disappearing in terms of shared-ness and innovation throughout the history of art. Existing trends and techniques in the mainstream are questioned by the new experiments in arts. New ways of creation put organized effort to break away from the earlier movement. This is called counter movement. The new art trend sometimes partially shares from the earlier one and sometimes completely opposes the existing style. In some cases, history reappears in renewed form with new relevance. There is not only departure but also connection. After a long period of time, the old fashion appears to be new. Beauty, aesthetic and taste of art are changing. Hence, art forms and presentations are changing. The new trend innovative and creative. The new insights in the creator bring a departure. New perspectives provide new aesthetic experience to the viewer. When the same techniques are repeated for long period, the works become ordinary like daily commodities. Great artists break the established boundaries and codes. Change, departure and reconnection are the significant elements are movements.

Keywords: art movement, counter movement, aesthetic, departure, reconnection, trends, techniques

Introduction

One art movement is different from other art movement due to creativity in it. The new art provides new aesthetic pleasure to the viewers. Artworks are renewed. Greek arts focused on humanism, nature and freedom whereas the arts of middle ages focused on spirituality, faith and the life after death. The emphasis of art and creativity shifted from the human body to heaven. This is the counter movement. Paintings and sculptures were created to decorate church (Osborne, 2009).

History of art shows that several trends, techniques, and styles have evolved by going beyond the existing trend (Greenblatt & Gunn, 1992). New forms appear and disappear. Sometimes, similar contents reappear in disguise. Innovative work emerge with new



flavor and taste.

Prehistoric men painted pictures as the rehearsal of hunting in the caves. Figures of animals are created and hit with a spear. This is the preparation for the forthcoming encounter and success. Nevertheless, we have never known exactly about the reasons behind such performance. It is the matter of research even our time (Strickland and Boswell, 1992).

Egyptians arts are related to immortality. The rulers focused on the comfort of after-life. The pharaoh's dead body is preserved and surrounded by arts for his eternal glory. His spirit was believed to be immortal. The corpse was mummified and saved from decay. Wall paintings and sculptures represent the dead person's life.

Man is at center in Greek arts. Human values, freedom and order are emphasized. Greek artists focused on the balance of intellect and emotion. Human figure is the main subject matter for visual presentation (Strickland and Boswell, 1992). Greek artists celebrated the beauty of human body. The ideal proportion in the human figure depicts the perfection with aesthetic appeal. Art improves the nature and reality. The errors and the weaknesses in the figure are removed. The Greeks synthesized human passion and reason. Human figures appear in perpetual youth.

Religion and faith are at the center of medieval arts. The emphasis shifted from the here and now to the heaven and hereafter. The artists saw that the beauty of the body was corrupted. The focus is on salvation for a glorious afterlife. Nude figures were forbidden. Medieval artists were interested in the soul. The works are magical and mystical.

Research Methodology

History of art is the research area of this paper. Key features art movements and counter movements have been discussed in terms of similarities and differences. Thus, it is a comparative study. Books on history of art and articles related art are secondary sources of the study. Artworks like paintings and sculptures are primary sources. This research is qualitative, for the research area can be explored in multiple ways, and the thesis statement is derived from the researcher's understanding.

Analysis and Discussion

New art movement is the revolution against the earlier art forms. Renaissance comes after the medieval period. Renaissance signifies the rebirth of classical Greek arts, literature and philosophy (Matthews & Platt, 2001). During the middle age, Greek arts and civilization almost died. The features of Greek art reappear in Renaissance period. There is a shift in focus. The emphasis shifted from faith and religion to reasoning, humanity



and nature. Renaissance boosted man's confidence in himself. Exploration and innovation are key features of Renaissance man. The contents of classical myths were presented using realistic form. Renaissance reached the height of harmony and order in the visual composition. Mannerist movement revolted against Renaissance art trends. Mannerist works depict emotions and lack of balance. In other word, art declined from perfection, harmony and order. In Mannerist works, artists did not presented the nature in objective manner. There is exaggeration, asymmetry and instability in composition. The disorder in artworks suggest the disorder in the context. Politics was unstable. The compositions of paintings were. There is void in the middle suggesting chaos. Mannerism is a style that does not imitate the nature. The figures are elongated and distorted.

Baroque arts synthesize the techniques of the Renaissance and the emotion of Mannerism in grand manner (Arnold 2020). The artists used dramatic light. The contrast provides the strange new experience. The works suggest the authority and confidence of the strong nation. Artists presented triumph and energy with exuberant colors.

Rococo arts break away from Baroque arts presenting playful wavy, swirling and delicate shapes. Artists avoided straight lines. Furniture, ivory and shells are lavishly carved. Fabrics and utensils are decorated. Rococo represents declining aristocracy submerged in luxury. They presented frivolous life focusing on pleasure. There is a shift from serious to superficial aspects. The lines and shapes are sinuous creating the rhythm.

Neoclassicism celebrated the glory of Greek classical art. Neoclassicism revolted against the ornate Rococo style. The shift from gentleness to strength. The artists focused strong rules, logic and reason (Matthews & Platt, 2001). The society valued bravery, dedication and virtue. They rejected sweet and frivolous luxury. Ethical lessons and patriotism replaced the pleasure and flexibility. The public had passion for the Greco-Roman manner and civilization. The signature of the Neoclassical art is precisely drawn figures. Artists used straight lines with clarity instead of curves. Arts do not show pretention. The composition is resolved and stable. The theme of devotion glorious nation were valued.

Romanticism revolts against Neoclassism (Matthews & Platt, 2001). It rejected reasoning and followed intuition and feelings. The artworks are introvert and reflective. Intense passion guided the creative activity. The subjective works are spontaneous. Romantic artists were not satisfied with the present (Canady, 1959). They always dreamt of distant future or past. Their imagination contributed to capture the brighter side of life. They perceived the divine in the things of nature (Matthews & Platt, 2001). There is the blend of mysticism and supernatural power. Their colors are intense and expressive.



The brushstrokes are sweeping. Art forms are turbulent. Neoclassical artworks are rational, objective and precise but romantic compositions are energetic, vibrant and fluid suggesting emotional ecstasy. The focus is on the inner personality of the characters. The idiosyncratic artists rejected the tradition.

Realism is the art movement in the nineteenth century that focuses on objective imitation of the things in the world. Realists attempted to present the contemporary reality. Divinities, magical and supernatural things were avoided. Figures of working class people and farmers were included in the artworks. Artists attacked the pomposity and hypocrisy of the lords through their works. Ordinary people get space in the canvas. They disliked imagination and dream. This is the counter movement against Romanticism. They rejected to paint angels because they had not seen them. They hated artificiality and pretention. Artists painted the rough figures of everyday works and life. They painted the portraits of peasants, farmers plowing the field and harvesting crops.

Impressionists created distance in art and real things. Postimpressionism, fauvism, expressionism and cubism increased this distance using subjective elements like feelings, and emotions in their works (Matthews & Platt, 2001). Such subjective trend art reaches to the climax with the evolution of abstract art. Impressionism ignored perspective. Impressionists captured the immediate visual sensations of the scene through colors and light (Canady, 1959). They represented an impression of the thing in a brief moment. They attempted to capture the fluctuating and fleeting qualities of light with the use of short, choppy and quick brushstrokes of primary colors. The canvas is full of dots, dabs, patches and fragments. The works presented a slice of contemporary life. The composition is extremely rough.

Fauvists used wild and unpredictable colors to present inner emotions and feelings (Canady, 1959). Their colors do not resemble to actual appearance of things (Beckett 1994). This is their emotional response to the external context and reality. Fauvism refused to imitate nature. Their paintings have intense bright colors and distorted forms. Sometimes, they used clashing colors to intensify the effect. The choppy and flowing brushstrokes convey a sense of movement. Colors were not used to imitate things but to express own emotions.

Cubists like Pablo Picasso simplified art form using geometric shapes like triangle, rectangle square, cylinder and circle. He shocked the viewers by inventing a new technique for his expression (Sharma, 2014). He shattered the artistic convention. He broke human figure into bits and then reassembled parts like a broken glass (Beckett, 1994). About



Picasso's paintings, the novelist Gertrude Stein said, "Every masterpiece has come into the world with a dose of ugliness in it. This ugliness is a sign of the creator's struggle to say something new." Picasso presented multiple perspectives in a work of art. For the Cubists, art is not copying things but inventing. Cubism analyzed the form of an object by breaking them into bits.

Futurism brought hope in the atmosphere of melancholy, sadness and pessimism. It encouraged artists to present courage and revolt to celebrate the beauty of machine, technology and speed. They were fascinated by the scientific miracles of contemporary life brought up by railroads, ships and airplanes. They captured the cinematic sensation of change. For them, the roaring racing car seemed more beautiful than the masterpiece of historical art. Futurists celebrated the power and dynamism of contemporary life in their artworks.

Expressionists expressed artist's inner feelings and emotions instead of the images of the external world through distorted and altered colors and forms (Sharma, 2009). From 1905-30, Expressionism dominated western art. The exaggerated forms and colors have emotional impact. This is a subjective trend in art. They created anguished pictures with distorted images and clashing colors. Expressionists used dramatic crude forms and jagged lines to express the sickness of the individual. There is a sense of tragic loss caused by the war. The brutal angularity of shapes suggest the violence. Hideous human figure and masklike faces suggest a deformed spirit. Loud colors and coarse forms communicate the evils (Sharma, 2014).

Abstract arts abandoned any reference to recognizable things in the world. The paintings lacked contents and subject matters. There are only lines, colors and shapes but no identifiable images in the abstract visual compositions. Colors convey emotion and beauty irrespective of contents. It is a bold step to go beyond realistic art (Kandinsky, 1977). The nonobjective compositions stand for their own sake. The art forms are ambiguous. Abstract art does not reproduce the visible things but it makes visible to the invisible reality (Sharma, 2021). Creative artists have crossed the boundaries and codes of creating art. Conventions have been crumbled and dismantled. The creative process and styles fully depend on the individual artist's new invention.

Dadaism protested the madness of the war and revolted all traditions and civilizations. There is no faith in human reasoning. Dadaists did not have faith on establishment and so-called development. They questioned and opposed all authority (Sharma, 2025). Dada



attempted to denounce and shock. Poets recited nonsense poems in different languages. They attempted to create awareness about the tragedy and absurdity of contemporary life. Their works are accidental and free (Strickland et. al, 1992). Marcel Duchamp created art by putting a bicycle wheel on a kitchen stool. He presented a urinal as a work of art. Arp made random collage by accident. Kurt Schwitters subverted accepted concepts making art out of discarded junk, bus tickets and buttons. These “non-art” materials are integrated in art. Dada was against everything including itself. The artworks are unpredictable.

Surrealists used free-association and dream images in their artworks. These poets and painters experimented with automatism and created strange form. They attempted to tap unconscious imagery through the juxtaposition of contrary images and symbols. The bizarre and the irrational images to express hidden desires unreachable by reasoning (Arnold, 2020). Max Ernst distanced himself from conscious control in the process of creation. Salvador Dali presented hallucinatory scenes rejecting common sense. His works seemed to have been painted in a trancelike state. Miro's arts present a mixture of fact and fantasy playful and whimsical manner. He works present fevered visions as in sickness. The artist exposed the psychic hidden world. Dali has used paranoia and neuroses in the Surrealist artworks. There is the presence of irrational fears. He recorded the dream world on the canvas. He has created surreal effect with distorted images and in a hallucinatory context. Rene Magritte painted ordinary figures with an irrational twist with a sense of absurdity. Abnormal juxtapositions appear in unnatural setting presenting a new vision of reality beyond our logic and reasoning.

Abstract Expressionism focused on the active process of creating art rather than finished final product (Graham- Dixon, 2008). The artists emphasized the dynamism and action. Artists like Arshile Gorky and Jackson Pollock gave free rein to emotion, impulse and chance. Pollock left easel and the paintbrush pouring and dripping onto the huge canvas on the floor. He flung and slung paints all over the canvas without a sense of focal point, foreground, background, proportion and perspective. This art does not imitate visual appearance. The vital energy smashed conventions. This is the discovery of images during work.

Harold Rosenberg used the term ‘action painting’ to explain the Abstract Expressionist working technique. He wrote: “The canvas began to appear ... as an arena in which to act. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.” The painting records a moment in the life of an artist. Pollock's drip paintings present a nexus of fluid and interlacing lines. The sweeping curves create a complex visual rhythm without defined



center of interest (Strickland et. al, 1992).

Minimalists used minimum lines, colors and shapes for visual communication. Pop artists took consumer culture and commercial imagery in their works. Conceptual artists emphasized the idea and concept rather than physical art product. For them, art exists in the mind as a vision more than an image on the canvas.

Rauschenberg integrated real objects on the canvas. He claimed that if art isn't a surprise, it's nothing. He pointed out the essential element of art. For him, art is the sport of making something that he has not seen before. Art makes visible to the invisible objects. Arts renew our perception and de-automatize our experience. Pop artists revealed the frivolousness of modern culture. The popular contents like mass-produced figures and images like Marilyn and Campbell's Soup cans take important space in the artwork. Some of these works are satire on mechanical and industrial world (Sharma, 2014). The artists showed the horror of contemporary time.

In performance arts, artists use their body to express along with singing, talking, dancing, painting or other different activities (Sharma, 2014). Such happenings have taken art out of the canvas into real life and society. Objects like videos, photos, words, beer cans, coke bottles, paintings, sculptures or ordinary objects are installed in the space. Even the audience become participant in the artwork. Despite the presence of various things and multiple genres of art, the role of the performing artist is central. The boundaries are blurred and the conventional rules are broken. Every work of art is unique. New art movement questions the earlier trend. The process of innovation and creation is never-ending. Movements and counter movements in art make an open-ended chain of aesthetic revolution.

Conclusion

History of art shows many art movements and counter movements. Existing art trends and techniques are questioned by the new insights. A work of art breaks away from earlier arts. This is the unique feature of art, creativity and innovation. There is the infinite chain of movements and counter movements from the early age to the present. The process renews the art forms and provides aesthetic pleasure. Human centered Renaissance arts breaks away from medieval religious arts. Romanticism breaks away Neoclassicism. Strict rules are questioned and opposed for the sake of freedom. Objectivity of the Realist breaks away from romantic imagination. Roughness of Impressionism breaks away from the fineness of Realism. Abstract compositions break away from realistic representations. Postmodern art questions the organization and certainty of modern art. Hope of futurist



arts question the melancholy and sadness of expressionism. Dadaism rejects every art and civilization. A work of art is related to its context including the mood and attitude of people. Society and cultures are changing. Art is also changing in response to the external world. The movements and counter movements appear, disappear and reappear to maintain the uniqueness of art in response to the contemporary context.

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