Cultural Daily

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Why modern art should absolutely still be important to you

Carolyn · Wednesday, August 4th, 2021

What do you feel when you visit art museums, old castles, and ancient churches?

Ever since I was a young girl, I've felt drawn to these places, as well as the artwork that hangs within them. So when I moved to New York City in my early twenties I was very excited at the possibility of spending time in the many museums the city had to offer. Yet going to the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) became one of my favorite pastimes, and I found myself there over and over again.

I would get lost wandering its halls and looking at its great works before settling down on a bench in front of a piece of work that moved me. I'd just just sit there taking it in, experiencing how it made me feel. While sitting there I became fascinated in watching others view the work, and listening to their reactions, especially when it was about an abstract work of art.

Inevitably there was always one person that would comment "that looks so easy," or "anybody could have painted that." As somebody who loved modern art, and understood its importance, I felt as if those people just didn't understand the true value this medium of artistic expression had to offer our world.

Abstract art isn't about how well you can reproduce a bowl of fruit with paint, it is about evoking a strong emotional reaction through an artist's own emotional creation. This form of art is imaginative, expressive, experimental, and above all emotional; it allows the artist to critique and comment on society's deepest questions while promoting thought-provoking reactions meant to trigger an emotional response.

Pink Mop Painting by Carolyn Mara

Maybe that’s why I love modern art so much. I’ve always been an experimenter artistically and I’ve felt drawn to the abstract art that was produced in the ninty or so years after the American Civil War. The whole abstract art movement tossed aside the idea of “the traditional” and what was known as art in the past, and replaced it with new ways of looking at the mundane. New ideas and new materials took over, and new ways of creating became a hallmark of art from the era. No longer did there need to be a narrative or a realistic interpretation of what was being shown within modern art. z

This modern art movement spawned a host of different submovements like Pop Art, Impressionism, Surrealism, Expressionism, and one of my personal favourites—Abstract Expressionism. At the time all of these genres were being created and defined, their critics were divided. Some thought the work was genius—new, inventive, and beautiful—while others thought it was… well, complete trash.

But I believe that is because those people just didn't understand what artists were trying to convey. Again, abstract art is about creating art at an emotional level. When the artwork connects with you, it's not just beautiful, but emotional. If art is a form of communication, then abstract art is akin to the subtle body language that humans rely on to communicate our deepest emotional states.

Take Jackson Pollock's arguably most famous work, The Deep.

Jackson Pollock “The Deep”

This tragic and haunting painting came late in Pollock's life, and it was clear to many of his critics that his chronic alcoholism had played a role in its creation. The painting's deep, central chasm draws the audience in, and makes one feel as if they're suffocating in the center as the off white background swallows up everything on the canvas.

But was this painting a symbolic reflection of the author's mood? Or his attempt to illustrate to the world the deep emotional pain he was suffering from? I don't know, nobody knows. Pollock never explained the painting. This simple yet vastly complicated painting speaks to my soul, and perfectly evokes the deep emotional pain I've experienced in my own life, and it is a beautiful representation of how modern art allows us to connect with thoughts and feelings in a way that is disconnected from the literal.

How you should view modern art:

Often people don't know what to do when looking at modern art, or how to understand it. They don't know how to understand abstract expressionism and instead of trying to see something in the painting, you have to try to feel the painting. See what kind of emotions it brings up. Just let your eyes relax and look around the piece. Examine the colors, the form, the texture. Take time to let it in and see how it makes you feel.

The resulting emotional reaction is what modern abstract art has to offer our world. It is an unconnected artistic medium that allows us to tap into our emotions without being sold a message, and in a time where it seems like anyone and everyone is telling you how to feel, abstract expressionism provides us an escape to feel what we want to feel, and feel what we need to feel.

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Carolyn Mara is a writer, photographer, painter, and online performance artist who specializes in creating artwork with a mop and bucket. You can see all of her other work on her Instagram or TikTok and you can view her current gallery inventory on her website!

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