

Midterm Exam - AHIS 2414 In and Around Abstract Expressionism

Comparison I, II, III

In a short, well-structured essay, consider the differences and similarities between the two works shown. Your response will be graded for:

- 1) Structure (clarity of writing + organization of your argument)
- 2) Visual Analysis (connecting the argument to specific observations)
- 3) Relevant References (articles, terms, movements, artists, artworks)
- 4) Command of material (the degree to which your discussion demonstrates an understanding of the individual articles and the larger themes of the course)

Formal Content || Historical Context || Themes of the course

⇒ express the different ways which this shows in different paintings
(point to things to support claims, give concreteness to the argument)

Visual Analysis

+

Context through articles

A. Tagore, Mother India (1905)

- Conscious return to watercolor, recognition that the Bengal school had overlapping ideas with European abstractionism.
- Mitter's article: conscious rejection of naturalism, instead of considering it to be the universal/superior rules of art, it is just a series of conventions.
- The painting itself is a representation/dification of mother India

Matisse, Blue Nude (1907)

- The usual nude (female), in a pose similar to the Venus of Urbino
- Most of the body is pink (European identity), but the secure codes are not in effect.
Wright's article says that the reaction shows some anxiety towards races mixing (mestizaje as a contamination of Frenchness)
- Painting as the provocation of classicism, as the first step of primitivism, beginning of modernism that is met with desire and disgust.

Picasso, les Femmes d'Alger (1907)

- Masks serve to geographically and temporally distance the work
- Riben: connect primitivism to the primal, subconscious energies, early human dpt
- Ghirardi: connects the painting to the mystical.
- The painting is a proof of how the sustained practice of colonialism stresses society, confounding of western and primitive: methodical tearing apart of western notions.

Picasso, Ma Jolie (1912)

- Scaffolding, proto-grid of black lines, indication of volume.
- Different textures, material, hues, shading that folds are made of; introduction of text, musical stamp/sheet music; text turns looking at painting into reading it
- Limited color palette (ocre/brown/grey), making color superfluous to break up the painting into individual methods

Boccioni, Dynamism of a Soccer Player (1913)

- Futurism is the immediate response to the effervescence of technology in Italy
- Cubism's fragmentation is read as suggestion of movement - a heightened energy
- Desire to continue/incorporate tradition.
- Arendt writes that the dream of new materialism creates nightmares in the millions
- There is a divide between the ideals and needs of a nation

Delaunay-Terhn, Electric Prisms (1914)

- Use of grid, but with pure hues of color and circular radial disks to lock colors into place, creates a sense of translucent windows
- Logic of the grid: Kraus' article on the grid signaling modernity (temporal isolation or disconnection from the non-XXth century)

Malevich, The Black Square (1915)

- Using the material facture of his work to create a plane surface
- Intentionally imperfect geometry: speaks to the material presence of paint "fabbrica" (emphasize materiality in painting)
- compare to Mondrian, for who the grid has a relation to the spiritual (vs material)

Hoch, Cut With the Dada Kitchen Knife... (1919)

- Benjamin: the "cut" strategy is a collage of found pieces of newspaper
- The dadaist montage retains the identity of the found materials, and brings energy around which the pictures are juxtaposed
- TJ Dones analyzes dadaism as a rejection of nationalism, a departure from the roots

Piet Mondrian, Composition with Red, Blue, Black, Yellow and Gray (1921)

- Neo-Plasticism: short-circuit forms/figures emerging from flatness in the picture plane
- Black lines are independent, finite, making the viewer unsure of continuity
- Depth can't be read, what line is above the other: Blocks of color and black lines lock elements to flatness in the picture plane
- Krauss' article on grid being exclusive to the XXth century

Klee, Mask (1922)

- Bauhaus in Calcutta exposition in 1922: Klee taught at the Bauhaus (workshops of decorative & fine arts, integrating modern style)
- Exposition as a momentary bringing together of objects in a space (dialogues)
- Shared rejection of naturalism with the Calcutta school

Mason, Automatic Drawing (1924)

- Automatic painting/drawing as a strategy of accessing surrealism
- Exceeding current mind and accessing unconscious thought - repressed dreams - *to vines*
- Conley article: precedent found in outsider art, romanticizing the figure of the mentally ill, prenatal understanding - "pure vision"

G. Tagore, Untitled (1920-25)

- Mitter: Resonant of Picasso's cubism, both use sources taken out of context, but transform them in light of their own needs and experiences
- Common rejection of European naturalism through the use of modernism

Ernst, The Forest (1928)

- Strategy for surrealism: Grattage - adding layers of paint then scraping it off the canvas. let the image create suggestions for him to add something to the composition.
- The image begins with something externalizing (awake creativity with external stimuli)
- Art as an attempt to restore national order that has been lost.

Sher-Gil, Self-Portrait as Tahitian (1934)

- Conscious move back to oil painting, european naturalism
- Self-exoticization, she's even standing in front of japanese prints
- Mobilizing signs of culture but opposed to how cultural femininity had been defined by male painters

Rivera, The History of Mexico (1935)

- Muralism brings a new scale, address to a larger audience (collective subject versus the individual)
- Minister of public education sponsors the contemporaneity to the mural program to channel feelings of national pride (post civil war), relationship with Aztec heritage mixed with catholic civilization
- Role: create a national representation of national myths (but, masculinization of the revolution, women only allegorical)

Kahlo, The Two Fridas (1939)

- Statement of mixed heritage: split herself into European and Mexican and connects the two via their heart (artery is shared)
- Breton on her work: "like a grenade wrapped in a bouquet" (sweet & strong)
- Constant awareness of contingency of hybrid, multicultural identity

Matta, Years of Fear (1941)

- Image initially created by automatic / unconscious intentions, then adjusted in an intentional way: building up colors using sponges
- Instead of landscapes, perspective is to be read as inscapes (from inside the mind)
- Rosenberg article: Paris represented the capital of culture, modernism exists without reference to any particular nation: modern art is heterogeneous at its core (that some energy moves to New York)

Rodwell, Girl Reading the Post (1941)

- Kitsch as mass-produced, industrial culture
- Greenberg sees kitsch as pre-digested superficial art (Marx Pabulum) where they paper over the differences. It is wiping out "authentic" folk culture (associate with globalization)
- Benjamin sees in kitsch a way to reach the collective self-portrait of yourself without the need for myths

Fautrier, Sorah (1942)

- Ethnic identifiers in title, very suggestive of degraded human body (attack of the human form); challenge to the fascist imaginary
- Oil on paper - Haute pâte (thick impasto), emphatically material + pressed down
- Art brut (emphasize rawness of material), suggestion of the scatological

Pollock, Stenographic Figure (1942)

- Answer to Picasso's Painter and Model; analytic cubist with an absolute divide between the loops and the planes of color
- Marks written on top of the composition. Disregard the scribbles and you see two biomorphic figures on the sides of a table, loose indication of the room. (two ways of reading the painting)

Lam, The Jungle (1943)

- Formal language developed in cubo. The jungle is a psychic state, not a place.
Must be looked at in terms of deployment of landscapes and convolutions of trees
- Sims' article: second wave of primitivism is reappropriating the first wave and using their tradition, as descendants of said natives
- Masks (references to Picasso)

Torres-Garcia, Universal Art (1943)

- Garcia is involved in developing art of the south. He advocates a regionalism but his mode of appeal is the universal
- He introduces symbols as references to: Mayan pictographs, christian symbolism (the Fish → Jesus), modern technology and construction (material)
- Albano article: Archaic forms have a connection to the primordial past
Irony: immediate artists in Rio de la Plata reject him completely

Mondrian, Broadway Boogie Woogie (1943)

- Introduction of repetition of parallel, identical lines; "blobs" of color (unbounded)
Getting rid of black lines, broadening the strips
- Illusory depth of perception coincides with material depth
- Boogie Woogie is a type of jazz; associated with the grid lines of Broadway
BUT no melody - no figure coming out of the ground: the musical allusion short-fuses the figure coming out of the ground

Boarden, Poor Thirsty Souls (1946)

- Reading culture plays a role in oppression (Negro oppression)
- Boarden's responsibilities are at once:
 - 1) Continue the traditions of African Art
 - 2) Attempt a unique social & nationalistic expression
 - 3) Show political aspiration

Arden Quin, Trio 2 (1951)

- Neo-plasticist vocabulary, but with irregularly-shaped frames, de-emphasize canvas: materiality and physical construction is more emphatic
- Move away from the European constructivism, drive away from the wall, from the illusion to raw, untransmuted material
- Irony: Torres Garcia is rejected by Arden Quin, who instead just uses him as a bridge introducing European Modernism while drawing straight from Europe: take one stream from modernism and push it even further

Al-Ghazzar, An amorous djinn (1953)

- His surrealism reads no more as emphasizing individual freedom, but a growing nation and nation-state
- Move away from the canvas (gouache & ink on paper)
- Inclusion of writing, script (indicative of the book), it is also explicitly egyptian, as a call to the national unconscious (Shalem article)

Okeke, Land of the Dead (1961)

- Figures in front of planes of color
- Bringing out art to painting through techniques of EU Modernism (Okeke article)