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# Abstract Expressionism And Pop Art: Philosophy And Creative Style

So, who does get to decide if art is great? To answer this question, I begin with discussing the two biggest art movements that dominated the 20th century, Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

Abstract expressionism was a post-world war 2 movement developed in the 1940's the name for it was first applied by art critic, Robert Coates in 1946. It was spontaneous, expressive in its style producing visual effects that were powerful and monumental. It challenged popular views on what constituted art, abandoning conventional painting, it was met with great criticism. Art at the time had close links to government and politics and war time art held product marketing potential. Abstract expressionists wanted art to have a life of its own.

Inspired by the surrealists that came before them, abstract expressionists held the belief that art should come from the unconscious mind. The movement was unlike the typical realist painting seen throughout art history. There is no representation of object, figure or place within them, instead the focus of the abstract expressionist, is on the medium itself, it's a celebration of it.

People often describe the abstract expressionist style as childish and easy to imitate, it created a void of any notion that is the job of the artist to interpret the art to the viewer this led to strong criticism. Abstract expressionism challenges traditional art norms, but does this make it less great? As I have found within my own work, abstract liberates the artist from the constraints of reality allowing for more experimentation with form and imagination giving freedom to expression.

Abstract expressionism is very expressive and emotional and work like that of Jackson Pollock aimed to communicate with the emotions of humans. Pollock thought to paint in flat form destroyed illusion and revealed truth he was very aware of spiritual dimension some of his work even been described as religious.

Pollock abandoned the traditional painting methods of easel and brush, instead he worked on large surfaces laid flat on the floor and used sticks, knives and trowels to pour, fling, and drip the paint to his works. Pollock said of his paintings "on the floor I am more at ease, I feel nearer and more part of the painting." Pollock's technique was so radical in its invention it liberated the possibilities of painting; his lack of recognisable imagery is deliberate the splashes of paint were to communicate what he was feeling it is both detached from reality and spiritual.

Pollock painting 'Blue poles' also known as Number 11, 1952 is one of the artist's most famous paintings. Made in a period of deep depression, his friend Tony Stark, helped start the painting to distract Pollock from the suicidal thoughts he was experiencing at the time. During its production, both men became very intoxicated and by the end were smashing glass on the work and walking across it bare footed. Shards of glass can be seen within the painting when it is viewed in real life and possibly even blood.

A painting with drips of blue, silver, green and red paint and a barely visible bare footprint on the

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top right. The eight blue 'poles' are the only really recognisable forms the rest seems crazy and meaningless. This painting faced a lot of criticism some said that you spend so much time looking for poles you don't even see the rest and that even the name is too distracting. Some people called it a masterpiece the question of whether it is, or it isn't, like the painting, is only the opinion of the person standing in front of it.

Blue poles is completely abstract and open for interpretation by the viewer. To me it looks like millions of electrical charges firing all at once overwhelming the canvas it could also represent millions of crazy thoughts firing all at once overwhelming the mind, but that is only my interpretation and someone else looking at it could see something completely different. In my opinion that's what makes this painting beautiful, it can tell a million different stories that completely differ from one another depending on who is standing in front of it. In my opinion that makes this piece of art, great.

At the time he was painting Jackson Pollock made very little money from his art it was mocked for its lack of talent often viewed as something anyone could do. The work of Pollock like the works of other abstract expressionists was highly regarded within the art world but deemed inaccessible to the average viewer that looked for something within the art to relate to, but other artists started to realise that his process liberated art from previous boundaries and his work opened the gate to diversity within the art world.

Jackson Pollock's work now sells for millions of dollars and his work is both timeless and unaffected by shifts in culture.

The abstract expressionist movement and artists like Pollock, William De Kooning and Hans Hoffman changed the way the world viewed art and they expanded the scope for all of the art that followed them, and I think that in itself could be considered great.

Another art movement that challenged art norms was Pop art. The pop artist ideology was in direct conflict to that of the abstract expressionists where abstract expression was open to interpretation Pop art was direct and easy to recognise. Where abstract expressionism searches for trauma in the soul, Pop art searches for the same in the world of media and popular culture. Where abstract expressionists detached themselves from reality and connected to spirituality, Pop art focused on reality using emotionally detached methods to produce their work. Both movements challenged what could be considered art and what could be considered great in their own unique way.

Pop art emerged in the United Kingdom and the United States in the mid to late 1950's. In stark contrast to the work of the abstract expressionists the subject of pop artists' work was very easy to recognise and rather than creating pieces that reflected the medium, pop artists used screen and machine printing to mass produce their works.

Pop artists drew viewers into the familiar using imagery from mass media. With highly recognisable subject matter taken from popular culture Pop art was much more accessible to the outside world than abstract expressionism. Pop artists aimed to blur the boundaries between high art and low culture. This enraged art critics at the time who didn't think things such as soup cans (Andy Warhol) and comic book characters (Roy Lichtenstein) could hold any artistic merit.

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Like the work of the abstract expressionists pop artists faced great criticism. With sources like Roy Lichtenstein's 'Hey Mickey' taken directly from a book, some even went as far as to say at worst it was plagiarism of the graphic artists responsible for them.

Roy Lichtenstein's 'Look Mickey' is thought to be the bridge between abstract expressionism and Pop art. It has strong elements of the pop art style with its bold colours on flat popular imagery but still holds some of the painterly techniques of the art that came before it. The image is widely thought to have been taken from an illustrated children's book, but some people have suggested it actually came from a bubble gum wrapper. He's said to have modified the colour scheme and changed the perspective of the source image. This piece marked the first of many paintings where Lichtenstein cropped a source image to bring the viewer closer to the scene portrayed within it.

I personally find this painting uninteresting to look at and feel I could have just looked at the original children's book and saw the same, but does this make it less great? In my eyes it does but to someone else looking at it might not.

Whether you like the painting or you don't, the decision to take a scenario from a child's book certainly marked a serious challenge to values of abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock who dominated the art world at the time. Lichtenstein himself concluded that people who continued to adhere to abstract expressionist values would detest his work.

This style was never seen before and work of the pop artists directly offended the techniques and the mindset of the abstract expressionists and this led to widespread criticism and to mass debate of the merit of the artworks some said that the flat imagery and bold colour schemes made the work look more like design rather than art. Lichtenstein said of the movement "Pop art looks out into the world, it doesn't look like a painting of something it looks like the thing itself" ([www.roylichtenstein.com](http://www.roylichtenstein.com), n.d.)

Pop artists too recognisable images and changed them to make the their own and aimed to highlight the banal elements of any culture often through the use of irony.

Andy Warhol's soup cans are 32 individual paintings produced by a semi mechanized screen printmaking process in a non-painterly style each portraying a can of soup sold by the Campbells company at the time. The subject matter of the paintings caused great offence to the subscribers of the abstract expressionist movement as it was very commercial and abandoned painterly style.

Pop art can be interpreted as a direct reaction to the abstract expressionist movement with its conflicting ideology after looking at a lot of art movements within the art timeline it seems that very action brings a reaction and a change in what is considered art.

I personally dislike the pop art style which is the reason I chose to include it I much prefer the open to interpretation works of the abstract expressionists, but does this mean its not great art? I think everything has its value and pop art certainly has made its mark on the art world just not on mine.

Both the Abstract expressionist and the Pop art movements were met with criticism when they first arrived in the art world but now both are highly valued and considered important events in

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art history timeline.