Contemporary Art And Pop Art: Differences And Interconnectedness

Pop Art

Pop Art was a new art movement of the late 1950s and 1960s in England and US which followed Abstract Expressionism. This era used mass-produced items and images which had a powerful impact on modern life. The specific popular commodities were used to show that it is possible to create high art from objects that surround people in everyday life. Artists wanted to blur the limits between high and low culture to eliminate the hierarchy because art can be created from everything (The Art Story, n.d.). Moreover, they wanted to shift the understanding of art back to reality after Abstract Expressionism who depicted their feelings rather than true objects (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019).

Since this movement started in the period after World War II and blossom of capitalism, artists were influenced by this and in their works, they were trying to join the notion of the goods to the notion of art. By this, they acknowledged art as a commodity. Pop artists believed that everything is interconnected ranging from what we feel to what we see and tried to show those connections in their works (The Art Story, n.d.).

Eduardo Paolozzi was one of the earliest representatives of Pop Art who was influenced with his personal experience growing up with love to technology and airplanes as well as by working in ice-cream and confectionery shops where he developed love to colourful designs. His works were impacted by Dada and Surrealism and particularly Max Ernst and Marcel Duchamp (Gompertz, 2013).

I Was a Rich Man’s Plaything is a collage of cut-out images from different magazines with pictures, logos and phrases. This work is rough and not the most beautiful one, but it provides an important message to people. The military postcard is used to associate political life with a commercial one since it is put onto the magazines. Moreover, the slice of a pie means female genitalia and the gun is pointed at the word “pop” as well as a woman. The comic-type of the font and the use of popular magazines shows the appeal to mass culture while at the same time it is supposed to be destroyed by those who do not support it. This was one of the first times when the word “pop” was which led to naming the whole movement as Pop Art. The distinctiveness from other movements lays in the idea of showing what is consumerism which constitutes new values in the modern world. A great example in this collage is the Coca-Cola bottle which means that people value mass-market. He believed that low art that he showed in his collage has the same value as high art of previous times and desired to vanish the difference between them (Gompertz, 2013).

Richard Hamilton was a representative of Pop Art and showed his own ideas in his work Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing? He made a collage from lifestyle magazines to show how he sees modern homes. There is a bodybuilder representing a husband, a naked woman, a wife, sitting at the couch, TV, a vacuum, luxurious carpet, posters of the movies etc. He had also placed the word “pop” into his artwork to show what it represents. The artist compared his characters with Adam and Eve but believed that we are not

supposed to be afraid of the temptation, indeed follow it. Moreover, he said that Pop Art is a separate movement with its political message. Popular art is designed to make the audience enjoy the new style of life with changing technologies, leisure and entertainment (Gompertz, 2013).

Another way of looking at Pop Art was introduced by two American artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg who were also called Neo-Dadaists. They worked together and believed that Abstract Expressionists had lost connection with reality showing only their emotions. Artists wanted to show a real modern life that was surrounding them (Gompertz, 2013).

In one of John's works Flag, he used a difficult technique and mix of materials and paints to draw the American flag. He had also painted the whole canvas leaving no space for the frame and questioning whether it is a real flag or piece of art. By this, he adds a new feature to Pop Art when the art becomes a commodity and vice versa. Moreover, the motifs for his works are everyday stuff which he shows from a new perspective. The artist aims at making people pay attention to what surrounds them (Gompertz, 2013).

Rauschenberg's approach to Pop Art was a little bit different as he thought that art was made for consumerists. He used mass-produced things in order to merge life and art. In his sculpture Monogram he combined a stuffed goat with a tire, shirtsleeve, a heel, a tennis ball which are argued to hold symbols from his past. Moreover, he borrowed some elements from Abstract Expressionism by painting the goats face with some brushstrokes. It reflects the idea of hiding the truth because we are not shown a real image. In another artwork White Paintings, he showed that even though the painting is a simple canvas covered in white paint, everything can happen to it and it would be "activated by incident and chance" (Gompertz, 2013). This gave a push to new art movements such as Minimalism in art, silence compositions etc.

Andy Warhol is probably one of the most known representatives of Pop Art who was influenced by John and Rauschenberg. He was working in advertising as a commercial artist but wanted to create something that would support the message of Pop Art. During a long time, he was trying to come up with his own style and after trials and errors formulated what art is. Warhol realized that the popular things of consumerism can be interpreted in two ways: either as a cliché or as classicism. He has drawn Campbell's Soup Cans at thirty-two canvases each showing a different taste of soup. This art eliminates any personal reflections pointing out at art being original and with no changes. Even though from the distance the cans look the same, the technique and brushwork differ from each other saying that even without personal motifs there is an artist behind the canvas. Also, it is a parody of advertising since people are exposed to the same product all the time. He wanted the audience to understand what this experience of seeing the same thing is doing to us and how we should question the consumerism. Warhol was interested in why the brands become so familiar that they turn into a desire as well as grab people's attention more than important issues (Gompertz, 2013).

Pop Art has some features that contradict Modernism and that is why cannot be considered a part of it. Firstly, Pop Art uses the objects of everyday life and shows reality rather than feelings. The artists desired to eliminate themselves from the art piece and do not show how they feel about, indeed show that mass-produced items can be appreciated as well. In Modernism, artists were creating to express themselves and projecting their own attitude toward the subject matter. The features and methods of every Modernism movements were new and unique, so the author was able to escape previous art forms. The main source for Pop Art is consumerism and the

main goal was to shift people's attitude towards mass production. They aimed at either making people appreciate the objects and see their beauty or think about how blindly they are spending money on commodities that are highly advertised. Moreover, pop artists wanted to merge high and low culture and make it possible for everyone to enjoy art, not only high class. Art for them was a commodity. On the other hand, Modernism set its goal as depicting the feelings on a particular topic on any medium of art. Each movement was different but all of them wanted to challenge false logic and sequence in which they believed. The artists rejected previous traditions while Pop Art is often based on past movements. Last but not least, Pop Art is a commercial art and wants to highlight the importance of commercialism in a good and bad way. When Modernism tried to stand against mass culture since they thought it was a wrong ideal.

Contemporary Art

After Postmodernism from the 1980s until now, there has been a new wave of art pieces created, yet there is no one name for it. Gompertz believes that there is "a common denominator that unites much of the work that has been produced by the avant-garde of late". Moreover, he thinks there are some trends for this period.

Firstly, one of the trends is called "Experiential" art and was created since the monumental sculptures have spread out in public space in recent years. They grabbed people's attention and are shown in museums which lost their primary meaning. Nowadays, the art displayed in the museums is seen as a way of entertainment but still has its political meaning. Moreover, these artworks show that the difference between high culture of modern art and mainstream entertainment has blurred. For example, Carsten Holler created spiralling slides and revolving beds in one of the museums to help the audience have some interactions with each other. He argues that in the modern world of technology, humans forgot about socializing. This approach to art was called "relational aesthetics". The question that Gompertz asks is whether the audience understands this shift and message or only visits it to have fun in the museum.

Secondly, art was deeply influenced by sex and violence, deformation of bodies and horror. The works of Jeff Koons included explicit sexual acts when Chapman Brothers were showing wounded bodies and blood.

Gompertz identifies a new era between 1988 and 2008 which is associated with artist Damien Hirst. In 1988 he organized an exhibition in one of the warehouses in London called Freeze. He included works of sixteen fellow students and himself with Spot Paintings. These were rows of coloured circles on a white background meaning "to pin down the joy of colour" (Gompertz, 2013). All of the artists gave a push to the contemporary art movement. A provocative and risky move was made by Damien Hirst in 2008 when he decided to sell his paintings on his own on the auction omitting the dealers as it was accepted. During this time, the financial crisis was taking place in the US and despite this, collectors were spending an enormous amount of money on Hirst's lots. The art world did not pay attention to the collapse and the auction brought a fortune to the artist. This is thought to bring an end of capitalism and modern art while starting the era of Entrepreneurialism.

The artists were enthusiastic, wanted to "take control over their destinies" and show themselves in the artworks while self-promoting. The idea of being in the center of own life and being defined by himself or herself was reflected in art. Contemporary art is not about aesthetics

or money, but about attitude namely enterprising one. They used people from advertising to help them show and sell their works. Contemporary artists take the ideas of the past and remake them in their own way. Hirst has mentioned that there is no shame in stealing other people's ideas.

Hirst himself created a lot of outstanding sculptures one of which is For the Love of God. This is a cast of a human skull covered in diamonds and with a set of human teeth. When he presented it, he put the sculpture in a dark room on a black background, so the audience would be able to admire the diamonds. The message of this artwork is that wealth and money have taken over our lives and is what kills people.

Another representative of this era is Sarah Lucas who has been showing her attitude towards the representation of women and sex in society. In her sculpture Au Naturel, she showed a woman, who was portrayed by two melons for breasts and a bucket for vagina, and a man, who was portrayed by the cucumber and two oranges from each side. The couple was laying at the old mattress that has been bent double. Her message was that men could do everything that wanted while women were restricted from that. Yet, the new wave of feminism and girl power was launched, and artists were depicting this in their works. Because of the specific motifs that were rather provocative and up-to-date, her works are easily recognized, and she made herself a name.

An example of the symbiosis of an artist and a dealer who worked together to gain fame for both is Tracey Emin and Jay Jopling. Emin was an unknown artist who was laughing-off museum exhibitions and magnificence of a painter in the past. Jopling has made an exhibition of Emin's autobiographical work and called it Tracey Emin: My Major Retrospective 1963-1993. This set of works showed her attitude towards art and herself as the major subject of it. For example, Everyone I have Ever Slept With is a tent where all names of the artist's past lovers were put. She has put her identity as a focus of the sculpture and has also connected to the public through the essence of art. The dealer saw talent and showed it to everyone. The artist used the help of a dealer to become famous. This is a clear example of Entrepreneurialism.

Takashi Murakami made a big influence on contemporary art by making his art a commodity. He was a real artist-entrepreneur who used commercial opportunities to sell his works. Murakami used anime and manga as an inspiration for his sculptures and paintings. Yet, they were of sexual nature. In this way, he was pointing out on the popularity of anime among young people but he believed that men played with them in the imagination. Nevertheless, Murakami's works were sold for a good portion of money. For example, My Lonesome Cowboy, a statue of a masturbating anime character who was a sexed-up satire on Andy Warhol's movie, was sold for $13.5 million. Furthermore, he aimed at bringing back the appreciation of Japanese culture which was now set aside in the world if compared to past eras. This shows that contemporary art does not only reveals past in a new manner but also treats it as a way of making money.

The last thing to be mentioned about contemporary art is the street and unknown artists. With the spread of technologies and the Internet, everyone can become an artist and show his disrespect to the dominant culture in a unique way. For example, Banksy is an unknown artist who creates satirical paintings and posters. He does not reveal his name since all of his works are placed illegally on the streets. However, he reproduced his works with the help of stencil pieces even over existing masterpieces in the museums which made him even more popular. Thus, anonymity is a key concept of a new are with political messages.

Conclusion

In my opinion, contemporary art, or as Gompertz defines “art now”, is closer in its values to Pop Art rather than Modernism. I would even suggest that contemporary art contradicts Modernism in various ways. Firstly, the art that was produced within the last 20 years does not have one specific idea of what and how it is supposed to be shown. The techniques and messages are diverse because they are influenced by technology, diversity, feminism movements, consumerism etc. Pop Art had different approaches to it as well as the first artists were showing popular commodities in a good light, then next representatives talked about how mass-production lost the value and is not seen as art while others used it to question our blind consumerism.

Secondly, Pop Art used mass-produced commodities as a driving object of art and Andy Warhol once said that good business is the best art. They were creating art from what businessmen are making money. Contemporary artists use this idea but look at it in a little bit different way. Because this era is defined to be Entrepreneurism, artists think that every art can be a good business. I do not think that this is what drives them to create but they realize that there is nothing wrong in making money from good art. Yet, you need alliances to create your name and be recognizable. I feel that this is related to Pop Art in a way that they were closely related to advertising. Moreover, a lot of the artists from both movements have the advertising background.

Thirdly, contemporary art is not afraid of taking past ideas and creating their original works. They do not want to come up with new methods but to take the best from the past as well as reject themselves in the artworks but self-promote. The roots of Pop Art are lying in Dada and photomontages. They do not “steel past ideas” as contemporary artists do, but do not reject history. Furthermore, Pop Art eliminated personal view of the object. They were trying to question people’s opinion on a particular topic by showing the commodity from a different perspective.

Last but not least, art now combines a lot of objects that are thought to be oddly unpaired. In this way, they want to challenge the audience understanding of real life and what surrounds us. Why we perceive the world around us in this way is often based on common ideas, so this is to be changed. Meanwhile, Pop Art was often represented in a medium of collages where different footages were combined. Then this work has a specific meaning which is connected to consumerism. It has to challenge people’s attitude towards the world we leave in and how we under- or overestimate commodities.

And the most important idea that is common for Pop and contemporary art is that both movements wanted art to become available for everyone. Pop artists started this notion of art becoming a commodity and desired to eliminate the difference between high and low culture. Contemporary artists support this idea and come up with different means of expressing their ideas such as street art which is available to everyone. They even changed the experience of museums and made it possible for the general audience to admire and appreciate art.