The Interpretation And Forms Of Contemporary Art

Some of us might enjoy admiring art, some of us have no clue as to what it means and if you are a curious soul, you might want to know what it means. Art is, when boiled down to a basic meaning, a means of communication and each artist has a language of his own so interpreting it is just a matter of understanding the language, in a general sense of course. When we say ‘art’, the traditional artworks, like the Mona Lisa, or the Picasso might pop up in our heads, for people who dabble a bit deeper in art might even know the works of the likes of Salvador Dali, Miro, Van Gogh. But if we are to visit an art exhibit today, how many of us are familiar with the mind boggling, seemingly bizarre and outlandish works of art? Some of us might even doubt, is this art? This is what this essay attempts to elucidate and break it down for you.

The form of art which is prevalent today is known as ‘contemporary art’. The contemporary art movement started around the 1960’s transitioning from the ‘modern art movement’ and is prevalent till date. Now, the vernacular translation of ‘contemporary’ is ‘modern’ but contemporary art differs from modern art as they are artforms from two different time periods. The modern art prevailed in the period from 1880’s to about the 1960’s and mostly focussed on a definite theme like surrealism. Many of the famous artist you know, like Van Gogh, Picasso, Dali are artists of the modern art era. So how are we to understand the difference between Contemporary and Modern Art? What seems to be one of the biggest differences between the two categories is in this – Modern Art referenced the past and with this reference, it attempted to understand the present time. Contemporary art also aims to understand the present, but the present itself is now more fragmented and shapeshifting. In this setting, the works produced can reflect on political ideas, climate change, and any of the present day situations and how it might affect the future, and since the category demands one be aware of the world around them, the issues questioned are just like the wind. They are there and they influence how we see and relate to the world but the next minute, something new comes up and the focus shifts.

Contemporary art offers works with a dynamic combination of materials, methods, concepts and subjects that challenge the traditional and defy the easy definition. Because of its widespread range of ideas and themes, there isn’t a definite way to exactly interpret what the artist wants to convey. But there are a few widely used themes which we will attempt to interpret. Contemporary art usually refers to the art that is created by an artist who is still living. The artists explore ideas, concepts, and questions of the past with an aim to understand the past and envision the future. And it is due to this diversity of themes is what usually perplexes the audience and leaves them wondering if they are indeed missing something or doubt their interpretation. Since the time that the Contemporary art is created is the time of constant questions, re-evaluations, and experimentation. This experimentation is leaving nothing sacred. For contemporary artists, everything is up for grabs and everything can be Art.

Now let us look at some of the popular forms of contemporary art

Pop Art

Pop Art is a distinctive genre of art that first “popped” up in post-war Britain and America.

Primarily characterized by an interest in popular culture and imaginative interpretations of commercial products. Let us try to interpret one of the popular pop art pieces from the 1950's, by artist Andy Warhol called 'Marilyn Diptych'

Marilyn Monroe died in August 1962, having overdosed on barbiturates. In the following four months, Warhol made more than twenty silkscreen paintings of her, all based on the same publicity photograph from the 1953 film Niagara. Warhol found in Monroe a fusion of two of his consistent themes: death and the cult of celebrity. By repeating the image, he evokes her ubiquitous presence in the media. The contrast of vivid colour with black and white, and the effect of fading in the right panel are suggestive of the star's mortality.

Photorealism

What if you could look at a photo and reproduce it as a drawing or painting? Well, that's exactly what photorealism was all about. Photorealism came to life in 1960s through the 1970s in America as an opposing force to Abstract Expressionism which is often characterised by gestural brush-strokes or mark-making, and the impression of spontaneity. In its opposition, photorealism aligned itself with Pop Art, and both fields of art worked with photography in mind. Photorealism was an American art movement in which artists attempted to recreate the image in a photo using a different artistic medium such as drawing, pastels, painting, charcoal, etc.

Conceptualism

Conceptual art is based on the notion that the essence of art is an idea, or concept and may exist distinct from or in the absence of an object as its representation. In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. Conceptual art can be – and can look like – almost anything. This is because, unlike a painter or sculptor who will think about how best they can express their idea using paint or sculptural materials and techniques, a conceptual artist uses whatever materials and whatever form is most appropriate to putting their idea across – this could be anything from a performance to a written description. Although there is no one style or form used by conceptual artists, from the late 1960s certain trends emerged.

Minimalism

Minimalism is defined as the concept of minimizing distractions from what's truly valuable or essential. As a result, a minimalist work offers a direct view at – and raises questions about – the true nature of the subject or object. It invites the viewer to consider it for what it really is: a shape, a thought, a movement—reminding us to focus on what's important. Minimalist artists show us there is still beauty in simplicity. The main idea here is that you can represent the idea without shrouding it in mystery by using many different elements. As the unattributed quote goes, 'Minimalism is not subtraction for the sake of subtraction. Minimalism is subtraction for the sake of focus.'

Street Art

For most of us, street art being classified under contemporary art seems a bit uncanny but contemporary art is again art in the present day. Assuming that street art began with graffiti is no mistake. Street art is one of the most hybrid forms of artistic expression in our modern world

because its purpose is to draw upon what the viewers know and manipulate the physicality of the subject to make their point. Street art does not really have any definite meaning, initially, it was considered as an act of rebellion since street art is not legal in many regions. Some artists use this as a way to raise awareness of social and political issues Others simply see urban space as an untapped format for personal artwork, either way, if we are honest, street art is indeed very interesting and beautiful, sometimes even thought provoking.