

The sublime



The concept of sublime had become of use in the eighteenth century to describe pieces of art that indicate 'awe and wonder' along with the grandiose or great whereas now it is used as a vague superlative. It was a term where people believed it held the meaning of power, unimaginable and ungraspable. The sublime was mainly used for art pieces such as landscapes, waterfalls, the sky, stormy seas, etc. It's believed to be the passion caused by the greatness of nature.

For my exhibition, I have taken inspiration from the terror that nature can hold along with Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Edmund Burke looked into the theory of the sublime being an experience which conveys a thrill or shudder that people both have an emotional effect of fear and delight. He discussed the theory of images that would fill us with a degree of horror and not normally fitted in the same category or considered as beautiful or stunning as nature should be. It was a new form of 'awe' in his words and to others.

Both Edmund Burke and Turner context of sublime indicated the same, in the second half of the nineteenth-century Turner was one of the most influential painters by the aesthetic of the sublime. He was able to capture boundlessness that represented verbal and visual content. His work would convey terrifying realistic moments in historical times. He would use dark obtrusive features to blend his painting in a distortion of scales. Another theory was Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Judgement (1790), along with Burke he wanted to explore what happens when reason finds its limits. He categorized the sublime into three naming them; the lofty, the splendid and the awful. His main focus point was to inform you that how you view the sublime is based on the experience of the viewer's limits, where there negative or positive? Experiencing the sublime has the power to change the self, whereas some artwork people can not understand because of the length a person will allow them to or the capacity. Kant's discussion in his 'Analytic of the Sublime,' in The Critique of Judgment (1790), he says that the sublime is "a pleasure that only arises indirectly, being brought about by the feeling of a momentary check to the vital forces followed at once by a discharge all the more powerful, Since the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respect, i. e. merits the name of a negative pleasure." (Judgment, SS.23)

My exhibition looks into artists who mainly focus on nature pieces where they have displayed them in a realistic feature, the images all display the terror nature can offer while displaying it beautifully thought art. Taking into consideration the theme I want I have decided to call the exhibition 'Pleasurable terror'. Not only is the name described but it is also a quote Burke uses when discussing his theory on the sublime.

'The great day of his wrath' is a piece of artwork created by John Martin where it is influenced by a poet "And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and lo, there was a great earthquake. And the Heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places; And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and every bondsman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains. And said to the mountains of rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand." Joseph Wright of Derby used his style by painting landscapes, for example, the piece I have chosen shows the terror of the Vesuvius in Eruption. He was able to witness the event himself, therefore, allowing him to create a historical image that not only makes him famous but also displaying the historical event of Vesuvius. When speaking about the event he explained it as "interesting and horribly wondrous sight", it made art lover and artist themselves go into a state of dread and awe ever since the romantic period. Turner created an image of a shipwrecked which would've truly terrified any travel in the time period but as you look at the use of colour tone of the painting where he captured the dark tonality. The influence of ship wreckage was common throughout romantic paintings, and it was said that Turner had a fascination for the sea which you can tell through this image as it had not been said if it was created through an experience of imagination. Johan Dahl a Norwegian artist who was considered the first and greatest romantic painter based in Norway. The piece was created between 1821-1826. His use of colours is what truly stands out, how one half of the image holds a dark shading and the other you can see the slight light trying to peek through.

Each art piece held their own style, while John Martins, Joseph Wright, and Johan used colour as one of their main aspects to represent the terror of the sublime, such as using the dark shading and the bold red. J.M.W used his toning of greys and the relasium the image held to display the danger and terror, they all hold the same meaning of the sublime being the emotion fear and delight nature can hold. They show the relationship between man and nature.

When looking at art pieces from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the art still holds the same meaning to modern times, they all show the how sublime can mean awe in a concept of power and darkness. How nature is more powerful than mankind. Like Burke said, "to have a sublime feeling is to experience the most intense emotion as possible, which is being feared and pain." Therefore the feeling of awe and terror created by this vast of emotions are beyond words that will create overwhelming rational thoughts. Therefore I wanted to base my exhibustion on this, that beauty isn't the only concept to sublime it's the emotion the piece of art will make the viewer feel which will then create their own theory of the meaning of sublime and awe.

Bibliography

- Edmund Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful (1757).
- 'Analytic of the Sublime,' in The Critique of Judgment (1790),

