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Question 4: From the series of FINE ART MAKING research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practise or interests, and construct a 2500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

What uses does metal have other than structural?

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Introduction

The concept of metal and reflections within it, what it does to serve us and how its purpose is used for more than one thing. Everything that is made of metal has been through a process of detailing, designing and manufacturing; everything made of metal is an artwork in itself. Works made by Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee and explored the uses of metal for protection purposes by portraying how metal can be used to not only protect oneself, but also their loved ones. While artists such as Joseph Bail and Clara Peeters depict metal in their paintings by what it can be made into to serve us in a convenient way that is also decorative such as items like water jugs and vases. Artworks made by Louis Bourgeois show ways metal can be used itself to make wonders; artworks that are large sculptures made of various metals. These artists show that metal can be used for other things than convenience. These artworks are

responding to longing and interest of the people, and how the public interact and react to them.

Metal has been used in art for centuries, but most were never considered art, more practical items and a craft, such as forging weapons and armours. This craft and skillset was not achievable to just anyone, it had to be practised and mastered and needed to have reputation. Of course, over the years this craft has died out, but has also been reworked into sculpture. Hannah Evans wrote in an article from 'DartFabrication', 'Techniques like welding, forging, and casting are integral to the process' when talking about metal sculpture. Evans believes the skillset from crafts that were imagined hundreds of years ago are still present to this day, but do not work in the same way, they create large installations that tower over the public and dominate the space they occupy, they have a big significance to the artist that creates them. Evans also speaks how metal isn't just metal, 'Its versatility and durability are key. Iron, steel, aluminium and bronze are some of the most popular choices for artists.' Most metal sculptures are displayed and exhibited outside, where they're at risk of not only the elements, but to the people who encounter them. One person not agreeing with or not liking the sculpture, can ruin the whole process and exhibit. Evans speaks about the importance of choice for outside sculptures for this very reason, she states, 'Metals like aluminium and stainless steel resist corrosion and rust. This makes them ideal for outdoor settings.' The idea that metal can be turned into something worthy to look at, something beautiful, not practical, something that conveys truth and emotion, and brings the public into a space that is not normal for them. This comes into place with Louis Bourgeois' metal sculpture, 'Maman'.



Louis Bourgeois, Maman 1999

‘Maman’ is a sculpture made by Louis Bourgeois, the sculptures title directly translates to ‘Mummy’ in French, giving the viewer a hint at what this piece is really trying to convey. Themes of motherhood and longing originate from the sculpture, the piece is a large arachnid shape, which appears daunting and towering over anyone who looks up at it. But this wasn’t the case, Tate said in an article, directly quoting Bourgeois, “Like spiders, my mother was very clever... spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother.” (Anonymous, Tate, Unknown date). This piece by Bourgeois seems to be paying homage to her mother, a way to share with anyone who sees this, the comfort and love her mother gave to her and just how much it impacted her art, life and emotions. Bourgeois wanted people to see this, to show the importance of parental love, to tell her mother’s story, she said ‘Tell your own story and you will be interesting.’ (Anonymous, Tate, Unknown date).

Bourgeois chose metal as a material because of its durability and long-lasting qualities, the sculpture is over 30 feet tall, she made six versions of this piece, using three different materials for them, bronze, stainless steel and marble. The original Maman lives in Ottawa, Canada, but her other versions are in various different locations around the world.

The sculptures features consist of long, thin legs working their way up to the main body, where they support the body of which is connected to what looks like an egg sac, which, if you look close enough, contains eggs, showing the connection between the spider and her mother, as they are enclosed inside of the sac, keeping them safe and protecting them from harm far off the ground. This is exactly what Bourgeois wanted as she described her mother as protective. The materials used for the variations of the sculptures are important as each different medium has its own qualities of dealing with its surroundings. Marble is quite fragile in a way, while it can't rust, it can become very fragile, this shows the reality that even a strong mother has parts that can break easily. Stainless steel is strong and rust resistant, however it still needs treatment to stay strong, look well-polished and clean, which shows that even a mother can wear down after time without proper care. Bronze is also rust resistant but needs further treatment of waxing as over time it oxidises which can lead to corrosion. All materials point to signs that Bourgeois knew her mother was strong and protective, but that even she needed that same treatment back to keep her from falling apart.



Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee, The Two Crowns 1900

The Two Crowns is an original piece by Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee, which depicts a view of a king seated on a white horse, surrounded by admirers and lovers. The painting is titled this, as according to 'thehistoryofart' and the article written by Tom Gurney, 'refers to the crown of the king that we see in front of us, as well as the thorned crown as was worn by Christ whilst on the cross' (Gurney, TheHistoryofArt, 2020). Dicksee painted in a Pre-Raphaelite style, which is often seen as tales from the past shown in painting, he painted this scene completely from his imagination showing his intensity toward God and passion.

In this painting we see the king wearing a fully plated golden armour, to protect himself from harm and attackers. The way Dicksee has painted this armour is interesting and intricate, as this image came from his imagination, he has made a direct light source that seems to be coming from the right side of the painting, as the reflections and shadows within the armour show this. Dicksee painted a sea of admirers and lovers of the kind surrounding the main subject, throwing flowers at him and giving devotion to their king, Gurney states, 'There is certainly a romantic element to this passion and power found in this composition.' (Gurney, TheHistoryofArt, 2020), giving the viewer more insight into the reality of what is happening in this painting.

The armour is important, as a king does not always wear his armour, he is on his horse riding away and it seems he is leaving for battle; his female companions or admirers are there to see him away. The armour is a sign of protection, not just for the person wearing it, but for everyone surrounding them, the armour keeps the wearer safe but also allows them to protect those around with a less likelihood of being harmed. The king seems to be teary-eyed, he is seen looking up at the sky, knowing this painting has religious themes and context, it is obvious that he is looking up at his God, possibly praying and asking for omnipotent protection in his next encounter with battle.



Clara Peeters, still life with dainties, rosemary, wine, jewels and a burning candle 1607

This is one of Clara Peeters many still life paintings, this specific one shows an array of items and confectionary including three distinct metal objects, all specific in their purpose. There is a plate, candlestick, and a goblet. Peeters would often reference herself within her paintings themselves, and in this one she painted a biscuit in the shape of a 'P'. According to an article written by Andra Patricia Ritisian in 'dailyartmagazine', the painting can be interpreted symbolically as stated, 'sprigs of rosemary were often placed on wedding tables'...'Together with the ring and the heart-shaped biscuit'...'the painting was created to commemorate a wedding.' (Ritisian, DailyArtMagazine, 2025)

The way Peeters has painted the metal belonging to these individual items is interesting as each one has its own unique colour and shape and possibly made from various metals. The plate seems to be stainless steel while the candlestick could be bronze or even gold, and the goblets base appears to have a dark sheen. The second goblet however is made entirely of glass, which Peeters has depicted brilliantly, showing the light shining through it, within the liquid its holding and each small detail on the glass base. Ritisian said, 'directly observing material reality, yet in her work, both approaches to still life coexist.' (Ritisian, DailyArtMagazine, 2025), meaning that Peeters made her paintings with the intention of bringing to life what was already in front of her, in painting, while still maintaining a whimsical look that would make viewers question the meaning of the work. With this painting, the use of metal is interesting as it has marital themes. As metal, if not treated properly, slowly corrodes or rusts with time, which could be interpreted as a metaphor for marriage, if it's not nurtured properly, it will corrode.

There are subtle religious themes also, as there appears to be a cross made from foil, crumpled next to different shapes also made from the same material, while this could tie into the marital themes as the time period of this piece was in the 15th century, and in Belgium where Peeters was born it was predominantly Catholic. As it remains in the Catholic religion today, it was very important to have the presence of God within a marriage.



Joseph Bail, Les petits cuisiniers (no date)

This is an original artwork painted by Joseph Bail, its title, 'Les petit cuisiniers' directly translates to 'The little cooks'. This title implies the figures in the painting are children or young adults. An unknown reporter from 'Artvee' stated that Bail was taught by his father how to paint, and that his artworks were very recognisable at the time as he often used sources of light from a window, 'Bail became best known for these paintings of maids and cooks and with them "Bail continually mirrored the virtues of middle class home life and the traditions of an earlier time," wrote Gabriel Weisberg'. (Anonymous, Artvee, unknown date)

Bails figures in this painting are of what looks like two young cooks who are taking a smoke break from working in the kitchen. In this same article, it is stated, 'they often exhibit light-hearted expressions bordering on the humoristic.' (Anonymous, Artvee, unknown date), This statement shows the viewer of the painting that the two young cooks are having a smoke break, and they probably shouldn't be. The way the cook on the right is sitting is lazy and has a tired expression to it, that he wants to get off his feet. He is sitting on a chair next to a metal pot on the floor, this pot could be full of food or ingredients. It's interesting as the pot is a practical use of metal, used for cooking or storage, something to help humans along the way with household tasks and chores, and in this case, possibly a job.

The reflections on this pot almost give us an unclear view around the room in front of the subjects, Bail has included every light source and reflection within this one pot, and

if you look closely enough, you can see the feet of Bail and the base of his easel in the pots reflection; because of this the pot holds a lot more importance to the painting than just being a prop, as it shows us the reality behind the work. The placement of the pot wasn't just for composition purposes, the pot being where it is inconspicuous, it isn't the first thing you look at when viewing this painting, but at a longer glance, the eye starts to wonder around and leads to the pot where it can see every detail of the objects that are not present in the main scene.

Conclusion

The importance of how and what metal is made into has much more depth than once would expect. For example, with Bourgeois' Maman sculptures, she was able to express love and grief through the medium of metal, creating large pieces to showcase her appreciation. Dicksee's The Two Crowns painting expressed his imagination and showing his love for God, and this fantasy world he created, he painted a gold-plated metal armour that would protect his main subject from harm and show protection to his admirers. Peeters still life paintings have much deeper meaning to them than just an array of items placed together, this one has themes of marriage and commitment, which is displayed through foil crosses and rosemary, with various metal objects that make up the painting. Bails work Les Petit Cuisiniers shows two young cooks taking a rest, and a large cooking pot on the ground by their feet reflecting the surfaces surrounding them.

Metal is used in all different ways, for practical purposes, decorative and protection; all of which have been shown in each artwork. I believe to have successfully answered the question I posed to myself with what uses metal has other than structural, how it can be used for art, decoration and purpose. With each artist selected has their own connection to metal in different ways and chose different mediums to represent it.

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