

Title: Art and its importance in Historical Documentation.

Name: Matilda Frances Griffiths

Student Number: 1900122

Programme of Study: Illustration

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Tutors Name: Martin Bush

Historically, art has long been an important way we can understand events and viewpoints from different parts of history. From the French Revolution depicted within works by Eugene Delacroix, to the war painters such as Paul Nash of the 20th century, art is a medium that can be tracked in its use in historical documentations for centuries. The rise in technology in the 1900s gave rise to the photographic documentation of events, as photojournalists such as Margret Bourke White used photography as a way of documenting history. Even now, the importance of endeavours such as court room artists or photojournalism in presenting news to the world cannot be overstated, and thus the aim of the exhibition is not only to examine the different ways historical art documentation and its ways of accuracy has changed, but also to highlight the importance of these practices continuation in a world which is consistently questioning the truth of media.

“The Camera is Just as capable of lying as the typewriter.” (Bertolt Brecht).

This is especially relevant in today's world of media and knowledge, where the term ‘fake news’ can be thrown out at anything from blatantly misleading articles to articles one simply does not agree with. Why is artistic documentation of events, whether through photography or otherwise, important now, when all documentations of events we know could be falsified, and thus we cannot trust what is shown to us to be real? But our history is understood through paintings and photos. We understand the world our ancestors lived in through facts, but we picture this world through art. If we lose this want, this need to understand and remember our history, we will be doomed to repeat it. But in a world of literacy, why images? “On its own, information is not knowledge” (Penelope J Corfield). To know facts of a time, and to understand ideas of a people at that time are not the same. Artistic interpretations of true events have existed for centuries, and although the historical accuracy of such paintings at times can be said to be questionable, it can be argued that these paintings not only aim to depict a certain scene, but also evoke a specific reaction upon viewing, and present ideas to viewers at the time of its creation and thus this can be used to further understand contemporary ideas at the time.

You can look at Delacroix's 'Liberty Leading the People' and perhaps not gain a full understanding of the details of the battle of 1830, but you can look at it and understand the hope of the promise of freedom and liberty that it represented. It presents an unglorified yet triumphant, hopeful air, one that lets you understand the battle rather than just know it.

Even within photography, which nowadays is a much more common way of documenting events, staging and lighting effect how you see the subject matter. Two people could capture the same image, but depending on their opinions on the subject, could evoke two very different responses to their photos. This is part of the reason art and photojournalism is so important: it does not just recount events; it recounts them from a personal, emotional perspective.

The pieces would be displayed in chronological order:



Fig 1: 'Liberty leading the people' – Eugene Delacroix, 1830

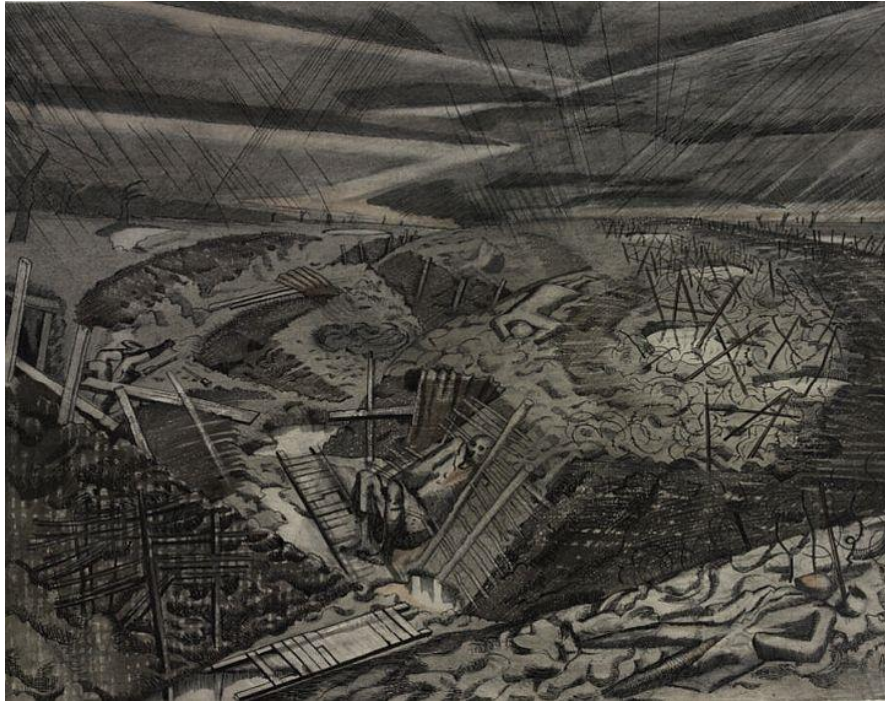


Fig 2: 'After the Battle' - Paul Nash, 1918



Fig 3: A photo depicting a Czech doctor in 1945, having just performed some sort of operation, leaning over a malnourished Hungarian Jew, taken by Margaret Bourke-White, 1945

The Exhibition would be held at the Solomon R Guggenheim museum in New York.



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6

The creator's original plan was for guests to ride to the top in an elevator, and descend the slope with the added unique experience of viewing other works from the bays, along with interacting with other guests (Perez, Adelyn). There is a lot to be said about the symbolism of circles and history, repeating a cycle etc. However, the main reason for this choice is it allows a fluid, singular path of viewing. As you descend the building, the Paintings and Photographs chosen will be placed in order of when they were created, showing a flow of history throughout the exhibition. The walls, floor and ceilings are white, which creates a blank space around the pieces, viewing each as a snapshot of history. Each would also be surrounded by historical artifacts from each's original time, as both a comparison of two methods of historical remembrance and acting as a reminder of the truth within the art shown. The pieces would be greatly spaced apart on the spiral slope, with the artifacts linked with each piece leading up to the piece, and ending at the piece, filling the space between them, combining both a traditional historical exhibition, with an art exhibition.

The Specific pieces of each artist included in the exhibition vary greatly in style, context and time period, however they all have in common one aspect: they each depict a hardship documented in a

way that allows for the understanding not only of the event, but also of contemporary thoughts on the event at the time. 'Liberty leading the people' is a Republican and anti-monarchist symbol commemorating the revolution of July 1830 which toppled King Charles X of France. The painting depicts Liberty: A Goddess like figure, bare-breasted, wearing the Phrygian cap (a symbol of the revolution), stood atop mounds of corpses of the battle. She waves the French flag, signalling to the revolutionaries behind her, of all social classes, to follow her lead into battle. The historical accuracy of this painting can be debated: this scene did not happen, and there was most definitely no literal lady liberty leading the battle. However, when looking upon this work, it is hard not to feel a triumphant pride. And it can be argued that the historical significance of this painting is not held back by its artistic liberty. "True art lies in a reality that is felt" (Jodi Hauptman). And this I think perfectly encapsulates the importance of art in understanding human history. Human history does not exist without emotion. We understand from this painting the battle it depicts, not because it is completely accurate, but because we can feel the emotion Delacroix wanted us to when looking at it. Triumph, sorrow, hope, all encapsulated in this piece. Similar to how Delacroix has, photographers can change the way you interpret a piece in a number of ways. Lighting, effect, exactly what moment it chooses to show to you. It is not inherently a more reliable source, but it works in much the same way art does.

Take White's photograph, taken in 1945. Whilst yes, it depicts something that happened in that specific way, the way in which the photo is staged, where it was taken from, all of these contribute to the emotion we feel as a viewer, and therefore our understanding of the mood in the room, our pity for the thin man on the bed, is enhanced. We feel what White felt. The photograph is taken from an almost staged position, as if one was watching a play or performance, as if White wanted to contrast that idea with the fact that these are real people, living real lives cursed by the horrors of World War Two. The way in which White decided to take the photo, where to stand, what to include, all adds up to the message she was trying to send: not only documenting events, but giving an opinion of the events non verbally through the feelings conveyed. This is important to remember, as both art and

photography convey messages about historical events in similar ways and allows for us to understand the humanity and feelings behind what they depict.

This is again the reason why Paul Nash's work was important to include. Before he became a War Artist, he fought in World War One, and started 20 sketches before being injured and returned to England. There, he completed them, showing his time and experiences in the War. This Letter written on 16 November 1917 shows this well.

"I am no longer an artist [] I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on for ever [] and may it burn their lousy souls." (Richard Cork)

Looking at just one of Nash's pieces, 'After the Battle' from 1918, you can see just how much his anti-war sentiment, spurred by the horrors he endured in the trenches, has influenced his work, and therefore has influenced how we view it. Inspired somewhat by cubism, it depicts four deceased soldiers spread out over an angular, sharp, and desaturated backdrop. The one face visible in the piece is ghastly, warped into an eternal scream. The surroundings of the body are unclear, confusing, mixtures of nature, wire, barricades, and other manmade and natural things alike, and they serve to accentuate the overwhelming nature of this piece. Even the sky is not left bare: sets of parallel lines fill the sky, perhaps shots from the enemy or attacks from the sky, though it is left unclear. A recount of a battle will likely not give you as clear a picture of the realities of battle than Nash's piece. Whilst it is not showing entirely exactly what the scene was like as a photo would, the way Nash has merged the surroundings to be so overbearing, the way the dead soldier seems to constantly stare at the viewer, these things present an emotion that reflects the fear and horror Nash is trying to convey about his experiences, and the experiences of thousands of other soldiers.

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Fig 1: Delacroix, E., 1830. *Liberty Leading The People*. [Oil on Canvas].

Fig 2: Nash, P., 1918. *After The Battle*. [Charcoal on Paper].

Fig 3: Bourke-White, M., 1945. *Czech Doctor Leaning Over Malnourished Hungarian Jew*.
[Photograph].

Fig 4: 2012. *The Interior Of The Guggenheim Museum*. [image] Available at:
http://3.bp.blogspot.com/L6nOkcezIEo/T5CGF1kINxl/AAAAAAAAAxo/uhexx2IdNAg/s1600/Lloyd_Wright_Guggenheim_Museum_interior_1955-59.jpg [Accessed 9 May 2020].

Fig 5: Avance Creative Visions, 2014. *Interior Of The Guggenheim Museum*. [image] Available at:
https://avancecreative.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/gugg_interior-1256x889.jpg [Accessed 9 May 2020].

Fig 6: n.d. *Interior Of The Guggenheim Museum*. [image].