

The relationship Between Photography and Art

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In my dissertation proposal I will be arguing the case both for and against photography's influence on the modern art world. I will base my proposal on four images by different content creators, Van Gogh (chairs), controversially suggesting photography as inferior in some cases, juxtaposed with Gijon Mili (drawing with light), which battles for the superiority against fine art. Finally, I wanted to conclude my essay with the impact of widespread photography and the damage it causes to fine art mentioning Edvard Munch (the scream). I plan to dive into my three main key words, relations, preservation and repercussions and how these notions marry up. I will illustrate the aspects and consequences of photography for the world of art. I will hopefully come to a final question to research and explore for my dissertation.

Relations between art and photography



Firstly, I would like to address van Gogh's portraits of two chairs from 1888—one of the most analysed images of his. On the left is *Gauguin's Chair* and on the right Vincent's chair. "The two paintings represent the different personalities of the two artists" (vangoghmuseum.nl, 2021). The duo were painted when van Gogh's relationship with fellow artist, dear friend and unchallenged idol, Paul Gauguin, became strained whilst living together. Gauguin was reluctant to reside there but the promise of a steady income for one canvas a month from van Gogh's brother Theo, a well-established art dealer, pushed him towards van Gogh's home Titled '*The Yellow House*' or what Van Gogh called '*A Studio of the South.*' (Murphy, 2019).

Initially, for a brief 63 days, began a creative competition (Sonya, 2012). The pair soon discovered their conflicting attitudes towards art which led to heated debates and violent outbursts, until the incident with Van Gogh's ear.

It was a highly productive period, Gauguin painting 21 canvases, Van Gogh far surpassed with 36 (Chernick, 2018). Van Gogh foresaw the blowout in their relationship and painted the two chairs, acknowledging the demise of the relationship and thus his dream of his own artistic colony.

The first painting above is Gauguin's chair, painted at night under artificial lighting, this is clear from the glowing lamp behind, the deep tones of the paint

and the strong light reflections on the side. The chair itself is grand, strong dark walnut wood which matches his bed; in a letter to his brother, van Gogh wrote “walnut bed for my guest” which is much more expensive. This is the first element in the piece which shows a clear imbalance of power (Murphy, 2019).

Van Gogh saw himself as inferior to the great artist and offered him only the best. This is not something that would be visible as a photograph, the eccentricated curves of the chair, how the arms of Gauguin’s chair seem to imperfectly wrap around like an embrace. On the closely woven seat of the chair, there lies two wonky books. Vincent’s chair is painted with his signature blue and yellow pigments, it is light and has an optimistic mood to it, like the daytime of which it was painted. It is a plain functional chair, unpolished coated yellow with a rush seat (Jones. C. P, 2020). On the seat there lays a pouch of tobacco and a pipe which both merge into the chair’s brown tones, along with the onions. These details were painted on top of the painting. The unevenness of the lines and the paint make it appear like it could wobble on the tiled floor below.

A photograph of an empty chair could never capture the raw emotions here, the imperfections which divide the chairs; they are the same scale similar colour scheme, it would not work as a photograph, even now with heavy editing.

Additionally, these perceived faults give the portrait of these chairs character, people can relate to these inanimate objects.

Impressionism was the first artist rebellion against the camera, when artists realised, they couldn't contend with the realism of a camera. They had to make the viewers feel something, not just impress them with their skill, it was the rebellion that pushed modern art into what we know it to be today.

Previously paintings were priced and valued by the hierarchy of genres in European art theory which was formulated in 17th century. It was upheld until the early 19th century. The most well-known formulation was provided in 1667 by André Félibien, he states in a prologue, the division between content/pictorial themes. The categories were based on this hierarchy, and the following genres are classified...

“from most to least ‘noble’:

History painting, including historically important, religious, mythological, or allegorical subjects

Genre scene (scènes de genre or petit genre): representation of scenes from everyday life.

Portrait painting

Animal painting

Still life” (hisour.com, 2021)

The camera obscura obliterated the hierarchy as it takes no more skill to photograph an animal than a snapshot of a scene from a daily life. Reality can be reclaimed by anyone with mediocre snapshots- by anyone with a cheap camera.

With the new invention of the camera, a brand-new term surfaced: ‘the decisive moment’. Founded by henri Cartier-Bresson in 1952, this is defined by a split second that highlights the context of said moment (FotoRoom, 2021). This theory is the main characteristic that separated photography from art at the time, as a photographer would snap at a time, they believe defines the moment, but the masters create their own moment.

Preservation (of a moment)



The next image I would like to discuss is a photograph known as Picasso's light drawing, taken by Gijon Mili taken in 1949 and commissioned by the magazine 'life'. Mili was one of the first to use electronic flash and stroboscopic light to create photographs that added a creative edge to their scientific purpose.

With his newfound techniques, he could make a cyclically moving object appear to be slow-moving, or stationary in order to capture a sequence of actions in one photograph. (Artlark, 2020)

The prolonged decisive moment captured in the image seemed impossible before that time, it was something that was never considered- a frozen moment yet still in motion. In Edvard Munch's diary he expresses this; "The camera will never compete with the brush and palette until such time as photography can be taken to Heaven or Hell." I believe it is now that photography can be taken into heaven and hell as it has caught up with art and is attempting to dominate it.

Picasso gave Mili 15 minutes to try one experiment. He was so fascinated by the result that he posed for five sessions, projecting 30 drawings" in light.

"By leaving the shutters open, he caught the light streaks swirling through space." (Campbell, T, 2021). Picasso stands in front of two cameras with open apertures and creates long trails of light, capturing the frenzy of Picassos mind, his free-flowing thoughts and his trust in the power of his line. This series

captures the confidence of both artists, from Picassos stability in his line and Mili's trust of his equipment.

A photograph can capture a person's true essence. Here- playful and enthusiastic, despite being elderly he looks joyous, like a child. We know well Picasso wasn't a particularly nice person but, in that moment, we see an innocent man. A painting of him by a friend or a stranger would have their own beliefs engrained into the canvas. We believe the photograph as we perceive it to be real. It is easy for me especially, to see these artists as gods as I have idolised them and followed every theory they suggest, and read their books like the bible. To see the artists as men takes them down from the heavenly pedestal. To feel like you know them. In a way this is similar to ancient family portraits, photographs are the only reason we know our relations to the past however once the names are lost, they become just pictures of ghosts of the past.

Do photographs bring us closer to the artists, to humans? It marks the beginning of a fighting debate, photography versus fine art. From this moment we have to consider photography as an art form, not just documentation. Painting had to progress to stay in this battle. Photography became art, just painting with the invisible ink of light.

Who Is the artist here? Both artists are image creators, this photograph couldn't exist without the subject and the drawing of the light could not have been seen if it weren't for the camera.

The image Picasso created was gone before it was even finished yet it hangs on the walls 60 years later. Once the moment was captured it exists as long as that piece of paper or that reel of film.

Consequence of Photography

Lastly, I wanted to touch on how photography and mass media has dampened the meaning of art. Art has become more accessible since the invention of the camera, and I do not think the widespread imagery that floods the internet is positive for famous artworks.

Galleries just become landmarks to tick off the itinerary printed from Pinterest, and not from any particular interest, but just to say you've been. People say: "You haven't visited that gallery?"... "Have you even been?". The fame of these places due to the mass publication of images grows far more valuable than the art itself.

There was a survey conducted by Lisa F. Smith and Jeffrey K. Smith in 2001 focusing into the length of time people would stare at a work. They found that the mean time spent looking a painting was 27.2 seconds, while the median time

was 17 seconds, and the longest time was 3 minutes, 48 seconds. (Kaplan, I 2017)

I think it is the widespread imagery online that eliminates the need to look at a piece for longer than 'is necessary'. Once you've seen a picture of it online you've seen as much as there is to see. These are the people who clog up the galleries like hair down a sink. This makes galleries an unpleasant place to meander. This is what I consider the consequence of photography on art. I believe a busy gallery is the opening to hell itself. An empty gallery is a religious experience like meditation. That sacred feeling of going in is like a time warp, coming out several hours later than expected.

My 17th birthday present was to go to Norway to visit the Edvard Munch gallery. It was empty and I felt a strong bond to the works, as art is intended to do. The atmosphere was breath taking. The next day I went to the national gallery of Oslo to see Edvard Munch's *'Frieze of Life'*. The paintings were displayed in a rectangular room. There was a constant stream of people striding over to *'The Scream'* cupping their hands around the face and opening their mouths wide- imitating the painting just for a picture, hardly a glance for the painting itself. What troubles me most about this is that painting is of a man's despair and an overwhelming fear that floods him and takes his breath away. And people are mocking it, mocking him. This is not what art should be about,

it should be a connection that makes people think of how the artist felt. Online there are memes and pictures which devalues and belittles the painting. I, as a practitioner would not appreciate this type of 'fame'. Does that lessen the impact of a painting?

Galleries sell clothes and novelty items in their gift shop, as a practitioner I question if "I want a piece of art I have created and poured my heart a soul into on somebody's socks, a tote bag or a t-shirt.". I am a complete hypocrite. I buy as much 'merch' as I can afford, I collect postcards, its nice to be reminded of the work wherever you go. It sparks joy, I see the things I love around me. You can see someone has the same interest and it can spark friendships and interesting conversations.

I think by continually taking the image out of context is watering down what it is or what it stands for. Especially directed at people who don't know that context of a painting or the context of a painting, I saw a lady walking around with a tote bag, this tote bag had a painting by Paul Gauguin printed on it. It was a painting of an underage Tahitian girl, a naked child. The famous imagery of renowned artwork has devalued the work itself by turning these works of art into attractions just to see, but not appreciate, and there for not truly experience either.

In conclusion I have observed the battle between images and paintings, and I've debated the positives and negatives of photography on fine art. From how a camera couldn't contend with abstract movements such as impressionism, and how artists desperately escape from realism. How it obliterated the European hierarchy of genres thus causing, a loss of value realism in painting. People no longer needed to decorate their homes with paintings they couldn't afford, they could capture personal images and line their homes with memories. Yet traditional fine art allows us to create things that cameras could never achieve and that is something that can never be changed.

But the camera fought back, challenging painting with something a paintbrush could never touch on. In real life, the camera can capture movement and light in a way the eye cannot. It captures moments that will never be seen again and immortalises the world in a different light. Photography brings us closer to one another as we believe the camera, it appears to never fail to tell the truth. Though we believe we are seeing the real, this is only partially true as we are still seeing an image through someone else's eye.

Finally, I believe that there are a lot of damaging effects of mass-produced images in regard to artwork and its value. Because of photography, art has become less desirable and in some people's eyes, less important. The online

accessibility is a double ended sword, showing the work online raises awareness and accessibility but equally people don't want to look at something they've already seen, which is exactly why galleries get less appreciation than they deserve by many.

Ultimately think the invention of the camera propelled art in every movement. To look at the relations domino effect. I wanted my proposal to focus on art history as art and the correlation between photography, like domino effect, one could not be able to exist without its prior/predecessor- from artist to artist, from photographer to artist. In my decertation I want to further explore the pros and cons of art against photography, I want to look into artists who combine the two methods, the impact photographs have, assessing art before and after photography? The unconscious inspiration for art has evolved from only the mind and the actual, as photography has become more relevant in artists' lives. Widespread imagery is now often pivotal to the source of ideas for artwork. Exploring photography and how it has changed our lives.

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