

Adam Ellis

Essay question 3

An essay on the painting American Gothic by Grant Wood (1930)

I began by analysing every aspect of the painting by Grant Wood, upon first basic viewing I was immediately intrigued by quite a few things such as: what's is the going on? Why is the painting being created? A question that also came to mind is whether the two people that are in this painting are expressing their expressions in body language or facial expressions. Fo example the woman on our left is creating an almost confused face creating curiosity for the viewer to try and figure as to why she is looking this way as the Grant Wood clearly included it for a reason. To answer this question, I began my research on who the two people in frame are. My research brought me to this website: (Biel 2005 p.76) On this website I discovered that the man on the right is 62-year-old Byron Mckeeby who was Grant's dentist as for the woman on the left she is simply referred to as Nan, little is known as to the connection of these two people. To this day it is debated whether they are father and daughter or husband and wife.

It was painted in the great depression which was between the years 1929 to 1939 as seen in this article from this website: Samples (last updated in 2021) The style of painting is classed as regionalism which means, and I quote from the dictionary: "the theory or practice of regional rather than central systems of administration or economic, cultural, or political affiliation:" which basically means the development of political and economic systems based on loyalty to distinct geographic regions. Now we know who is in the painting and when it was set/created, and what style of art it is. The next question is where he is painting is set. On first inspection there is clearly a house in the background and that tells us rather little as to where it is based so referred to the internet and found this website: anitalouiseart.com. (2022). Why The Painting American Gothic Is Called That? | Anita Louise Art. [online] Available at: https://anitalouiseart.com/why-the-painting-american-gothic-is-called-that/?expand_article=1 [Accessed 15 Oct. 2023]. In one of the first paragraphs, it says the paintings background is based on a real house in Eldon, Iowa. This is also where the name comes from as the house head American gothic windows. An alternative name for the house or another words a common name given to it is Dibble House, the house was built in 1881 to 1882 by Cathrine and Charles Dibble. Interestingly the house has been occupied by one of the more recent owners named Beth Howard popularly known as "Pie Lady" who moved out in 2014, my research tells me there is present occupier of the property.

So far, we have established who the people are, where it is located, what movement it is a part of. But now I wish to discover why this painting has captured many people including my own eye. In my personal it has a sense of depth while keeping the simplicity of the image, what I mean is the image is simple enough to break down for example you could say its two people one man one woman on either side with neutral expressions standing a few hundred yards from a gothic style house. But then you could argue yes you can say that, but the image has made up for the lack of other details

by again creating depth via the facial and body expressions. So, in my conclusive opinion I think that the audience are drawn in by its sense of mystery as it makes you wonder what is going on? It causes you to stand there for multiple hours trying to debunk the meaning of the painting and the hidden key details.

On the topic of hidden details here are some things hidden in plain sight, for example the pitchfork is to suggest a determination and possibly a will to work hard and survive during the great depression of the 1930s. It also means that fork is positioned in a defensive manner maybe to show he wants privacy and no trespasses. This was found on the following website: Jackson, Kitty (2019) On the other hand, many understand this piece to mean the "Midwesterners" were content with their life and they did not want to engage in modern ways and technology this I represented through the pitchfork and its symbolism. But Grant Wood wanted this to depict a positive meaning and image of true American values, because he was trying to offer through the medium of art that even though the great depression was just beginning, and times were going to get worse. He wanted to show you could still carry on your duties no matter the troubling times.

Moving on to the inspirations of the artist, he studied painter such as Jan Van Eyck or and Albrecht Durer he noticed how they painted ordinary people in everyday situations this inspired Grant Wood so much that on his return to Iowa he decided try it himself and began painting scenes and people that he had seen throughout his own life, this eventually led to the creation of American Gothic. Grant when painting did not paint as most artist of the time would paint so to speak, he went against tradition and wanted to capture the everyday life of his models/subjects in the Midwest. He strayed away from brighter and vibrant colours because he was inspired by other artist such as Thomas Hart Benton, John Stewart Curry as seen on the website referenced here: The Art Story (last updated 2023)

Last but not least, we must now discuss the artist himself Grant DeVosion Wood, he was born on 13th of February 1891 in Anamosa Iowa and died the day before his 51st birthday on 12th of February 1942 in Iowa City. He was married to Sara Sherman Maxon from 1935 to 1938, in early days before art when his father passed away 1901 the remaining family moved to Cedar Rapids where he became an apprentice in a metal works shop, this did not work out he then applied and graduated from Washington Highschool after this he immediately enrolled in 1910 into the Handicraft Guild which was in Minneapolis. After completing his course in 1913 he enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he tried to become a silversmith. Then along came The Great War (WW1), towards the end of the war he joined the US military where he designed Camouflage scenes and other art which it's not disclosed this can be found in the following website: WikiArt (Last updated 2023) After the war in 1919 he taught art to Junior High Students in Cedar Rapids. This continued until 1925. This employment gave him financial dependability which allowed his travel to Europe on holidays to study art. During the years of 1923 to 1924 he took a gap year to study in Europe his love of art. Eventually during 1928 he went to Munich to oversee the production of his designed stain glass windows, which were created for the Veterans Memorial building in Cedar Rapids which can still be seen today.

In conclusion I like this piece because of its in-depth meaning and secret key details this painting withholds, I found very interesting to read and research on the painting and enjoyed the journey of discovery and learning new things. I can a hundred percent see why this painting is such an iconic as it has appeared throughout history whether it is parody or a direct replicate, this really is up to viewer and their interpretation and their ways of seeing. When assigned this task I thought of many different art pieces but this one stood out the most, as it spoke to me personally. As it holds personal detail and history to me and makes me feel happy when viewing and thinking of it. On the other hand, there are a few key details that I did not like such as the use of in my opinion bland colours and flat feeling to the painting this is not a criticism this is more of an honest opinion to the work. I know I have learned

quite a few things or two about art, a subject matter i never really investigate to a full extent and the interesting artist behind this iconic piece of work. In my final conclusion I believe there will not be another painting with such depth and detail beyond the naked eye for a very long time as modern-day work is nothing like it used to be. These are not just art pieces that are causally hanged up on a wall, they are pieces of history and are well deserved of their place on a gallery wall and will most certainly be there for many more years to come for future people to see for years. As in my opinion most art and artists today are rather boring.

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