

## Postmodern Art



***American Gothic Comes to the City, Steve Furman***

Postmodern art is a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary, philosophical concept, referring to art movements, styles, forms, disciplines and techniques. The term helps define art that contradicts and reacts against various aspects of modern art. It involves drawings, paintings, collage, assemblage, animation, videos, photography, documentation, installations and conceptual art.

Other characteristics of postmodern art include: the use of words as a central artistic element, the juxtaposition of the old and the new, performance art, appropriation, the recycling of past styles and themes, and the breakdown between fine or high and lowbrow art. The latter — often employing pop culture imagery — emphasizes that distinctions between high and low art are no longer relevant.

Postmodern art blurs traditional distinctions between painting, sculpture, film, performance, architecture, dance and other visual and performance art disciplines. The artworks may also include elements from natural and physical sciences, industry, technology, popular culture, words, literature and poetry.

Postmodern artists appropriate or adopt, borrow, steal, or recycle styles from contemporary, modern and classical works. They combine and/or alter these images to create new contemporary artworks. Many artists fill their works with a

strong sense of self-awareness. They also work with scientific, technological, media and digital elements.

With postmodern art, the defining line between painting and sculpture is blurred, technology has helped expand its tools and mediums, while the works explore conceptual, political, social and other cerebral ideas.

### **Exploring Daily Life**

In the online news source, examiner.com, Jim Benz theorized that postmodernism explores daily life by whatever standards, materials or methods the artist prefers. Sometimes, that material does not actually exist within the artwork itself, but instead is composed of social forces, including the role of the viewer, the museum or gallery, the means of production, or the specific site of display. "Briefly stated," Benz writes, "a postmodern work of art can oftentimes confound a viewer who might have neither the education nor the inclination to contemplate the full impact of its conceptual (and sometimes political) composition." He added that modernism celebrates profound, timeless meanings in the work; while postmodernism also embraces cultural influences as well as a continual process of re-creation.

Steve Furman wrote in his blog, "Expedient MEANS," "Postmodernists look at modernism and say, 'This could be done more effectively.' A postmodernist recycles, borrows and rebuilds older models and styles into newer ones that can be more easily understood today. Postmodernism's birth occurred approximately when technology and especially computers took a quantum leap forward. Postmodernists create, arrange and distribute methods, styles and data whether it is artistic or technological differently than people did a generation ago. If something can be digitized, then it will survive. If it can't, then it is at risk for being lost forever. There is also a desire to connect with people and make introductions that might lead to something good for all parties involved."

### **Understanding Postmodern Art**

While modern art included formal purity, art for art's sake, authenticity, universality and originality, postmodern art strives to deconstruct this movement's values to more fully explore political, social and cultural issues. Later movements in the modern art period, particularly Pop Art, helped usher in postmodernism because of the rejection of purity and authenticity as standards, as well as the use of appropriation in the work.

Michelle Marder Kamhi wrote in her blog in 2012, "Postmodernist work has been more aptly referred to as anti-art, even by critics who praise it. Its anti-art nature is especially evident in the recurring emphasis on blurring the very boundary between art and life. The influential early postmodernist Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) wrote whole essays on that subject. He also invented "Happenings"--the

precursors for installation and performance "art."...In fact, Kaprow himself admitted that he was "not so sure" whether what he was doing was "art" or, as he put it, "something not quite art."

In the *Huffington Post* article, "So These Three Artists Walk Into a Jeff Koons Show," John Seed wrote: "(He) believes that the postwar dominance of Abstract Expressionism -- and later Conceptualism and Post-Modernism -- diminished the centrality of skill in art-making and generated this widespread negative bias. More recently, in a dense and thoughtful blog about the rise of 'Post Contemporary' art... 'skill' is the first of three 'pillars' (the others are creativity and empathy) that form the foundation of a new movement in painting that sees itself as reconstructive. 'The unskilled genius may have the vision,' but he or she is condemned to failing it, without first acquiring the eloquence of skill.'"