

Kelvin Gani

Prof. Johnson

Art-1

13 November 2008

The Influence of European Art Movements to Abstract Expressionism

Before World War II, the center of art was in Paris, France. The European artists were the group that created most of the art movements and it inspired a lot of American artists. Right after WWII, most of the Europe region was destroyed and a lot of European artists immigrated to US (Johnson). Under the guidance of European émigrés artists, American artists blossomed in New York. They were creating a new kind of art; an abstract art that essentially express their feeling. This art movement was called abstract expressionism. Its influence was so enormous that it also influenced both American and European artists. As a result of this movement and WWII, New York came to replace Paris as the center of modern art. Even though Abstract expressionism was the first American art movement that influence abroad, it was actually inspired by the combination of European Art Movements and artist; Cubism, Kandinsky, Dada, and Surrealism.

The first European art movement that influenced abstract expressionism is Cubism. Cubism was an art movement begun by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in 1908, which built up in three phases and lasted until the early 1920s. The phases are Facet, analytical, and synthetic. Cubism has very unique styles. The styles are refusing traditional ways of representation, stressing on the flat or two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, and making several sides visible at the same time by taking the objects out (“Cubism”). According to Delahunt, “In

Cubism, the artwork is broken up, analyzed, and reassembled in an abstracted form” (par. 2). Its abstract style was very similar to the abstract expressionist artworks; it reached levels of expression that surpass beyond the understanding of the viewer, (“Cubism”). In Hopkins’ book, he mentioned that Jackson Pollock used the abstraction style of Cubism, especially in his *Guardian of the Secret* painting (8). Therefore, the Cubism style of abstraction was one of the styles that influences the abstract expressionist in creating abstract art.

The other inspiration for abstract expressionist came from the work of Wassily Kandinsky. He was considered as one of the most influential artists of his generation. He was born in Moscow, December 4, 1866; His early paintings were made in a regular style, but in 1909, after traveling to Paris, his paintings became more highly colored and loosely organized because of the influence from the works of the Fauves and postimpressionists. Around 1913, he started working on paintings that later considered the first totally abstract works in modern art; he made no indication to objects of the physical world and got his inspiration and titles from music (“Wassily Kandinsky”). Kandinsky can be considered as an artist who inspired abstract expressionism for he was the first artist that created a “pure” abstract artwork.

The third European art movement that influence abstract expressionism is Dada. Dada was a European art movement against the pretensions of Western civilization, begun in Zurich in 1916 as a response to World War I.

“The movement advocated the use of irony, nihilism, iconoclasm, the absurd, and emphasized the importance of chance in the creation of poems, performances, and artworks, which were typically commonplace objects, set in an artistic setting” (“Dada”).

For all of its offensive behavior, chaotic images, and funny wordplay, Dada held at its foundation a serious ethical position against modern social and political conditions. Their strategies are abusing the nontraditional artistic materials, removing mass media, attacking the traditions of art history, and destructing language. Those were a form of protest that echoed the aggressive tactics witnessed in World War I. The Dadaists permanently pushed the boundaries of what qualifies as art, paving the way for much of what has followed. Dada questioned and affected what art can look like, as well as what art can do, and set the stage for many avant-garde movements including surrealism, pop art, and performance art (“Dada”). Generally, Dada’s concept of challenging traditional way of making an art influenced the abstract expressionist.

The last influence to abstract expressionism was surrealism. Surrealism was an intellectual movement centered mainly in Paris from the 1920s to the late 1940s. This movement was taking on some of the artistic experiments of Dada. It is characterized by an emphasis on combining reality with the instinctual, the subconscious, and the dreams, in order to create a real artwork (“Surrealism”). According to Delahunt, “surrealist works can have a realistic, though irrational style, precisely describing dreamlike fantasies,...” (par.2) In addition, it can also have an abstract style, as in the works of Joan Miró, Max Ernst, and André Masson, who invented automatism techniques. The automatists believe that the only way to express the workings of the unconscious mind is through abstraction (“Surrealism” par.2). With its technique and concept, Surrealism significantly influenced the abstract expressionist in the 1940s (Hopkins 7).

The abstract expressionism was inspired and influenced by European art movements and artists. Cubism style of abstraction, Kandinsky’s pure abstract work, Dada’s concept of defying traditional way, and Surrealist’s automatism technique were the key influences in the foundation of abstract expressionism. Thus, with all those significant influences, Abstract expressionism

was able to draw the center of modern art to New York from Paris. Furthermore, as the first American art movement, it had already been able to influence the world and later set the step for many art movements.

Work Cited

Hopkins, David. *After Modern Art 1945 – 2000*. Great Clarendon Street, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Johnson, Denise. *The Slide Projector*. 2008. November 7, 2008.

<<http://www.theslideprojector.com/art1/art1onedaylecturepresentations/lecture1-2.html>>

“Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism.” The J. Paul Getty Trust. 2008. November 7, 2008.

<<http://www.getty.edu/>>

“Cubism and Surrealism.” *ArtLex Art Dictionary*. 2008. November 7, 2008.

<<http://www.artlex.com/>>

“Dada.” National Gallery of Art. Washington D.C. 2008. November 8, 2008.

<<http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2006/dada/cities/index.shtm>>

“Wassily Kandinsky (1866 - 1944)” Artists Rights Society (ARS). 2000. November 8, 2008.

<<http://www.mcs.csu Hayward.edu/~malek/Kandin.html>>