

M.LiT Tour by Sarah Walskak

Title:

Description:

Location:

Introduction: Welcome to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. My name is Sarah Walshak and I'm enrolled in the Museum's Leadership in Training program. This evening, I will be showing you three different art pieces and we will be looking at how the concept of beauty is shown through clothing.



Object 1:

This first piece of art is actually three statues known as Figures from an Altarpiece: St. John the Baptist, the Virgin and Child and St. Gregory Artist Unknown

These statues are made of Linden wood with polychrome and gilding. The date of these sculptures is around 1502 during the Gothic period. These realistic carved portraits were from a German church. The Virgin and Child piece is the center of the altarpiece with St. John the Baptist in the animal skin coat and carrying a lamb and St. Gregory, a pope [leader of the Catholic church] identified by the crown on his head, on each side. So what is an altarpiece? [a painting or such that is placed behind an altar] St. John was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first saint of the New Testament. He was Christ's cousin and he foretold the coming of Christ and that is why he holds the lamb---"Ecce Agnus Dei"---"Behold the Lamb of God"--. St. Gregory was seen as a great theologian and writer of his time. The dove at his ear symbolizes his divine inspiration of his writings. Notice the gilding---[the applying of gold powder to the art work.] These statues have a subtle beauty but are very realistic in detail.

Why do you think these pieces were done in this way? To create an emotion of awe in the hearts of the church attendees, to distract from the reason to attend church [which was to worship of God].

These statues show the theme of beauty because in this time most pieces of art were depicting someone or something from the Bible which most people of that time considered beautiful. They also show beauty because of the clothing because it would have been vibrantly colored.

This piece could have been seen by any common church-goer while our next piece would have only been observed by the wealthy and high-class people.



Object 2

Object Number: 63.54

Present Location: Off View

Artist: De Jongh, Ludolf

Culture: Dutch

Title: "A Young Boy"

Period: 17th century

Medium: oil on canvas

Date: 1661

Credit Line: Museum Purchase, The Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund

This next piece is titled Portrait of a Young Boy by Ludolf De Jongh.

This is an oil painting by Ludolf De Jongh from the 17th century. De Jongh was born in the Dutch town of Rotterdam. At the age of 19, he went to Paris and studied art for seven years and came back unable to speak his native tongue. During the 1650's he became a very productive artist painting all most anything from portraits, landscapes, historical subjects and military life. This was due to the lack of prominent artists in the Rotterdam area. Most of his work was not signed so it is often credited to other artists of the time.

This particular painting is of a young boy. What do you notice most in this picture? [The exquisite lace work on the clothing worn by the boy? The repetitive crimson color? Or the King Charles spaniel?]

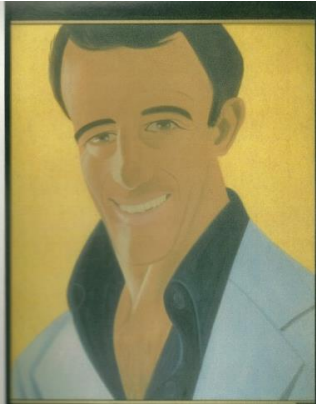
He is wearing a high class garment that would have been very expensive during this time and it suggests that he came from an aristocratic family. As you can see he is sitting on an outside porch step.

What is the boy doing with his right hand? He is telling the dog to stand on his hind legs. Since the dog is calmly complying with his master this shows the themes of obedience and discipline. Obedience during this time period was seen as a virtue that must be attained before you were considered socially acceptable. The rose by his foot represents the brevity of life. It suggests that the boy depicted died at a young age and this was painted after his death. As you may or may have not noticed there is a small rose garden in the background. This is most likely where the young boy picked the rose. As you can tell there is no signature on this painting like many of De Jongh's works. We know that it is De Jongh's because he used the color crimson red as a trademark of his work. We also can see his skill through the elaborate brush strokes in the dog's fur and the boy's clothing.

Notice that the boy's skin is lily white and that he quite chubby and how amazing his clothing is. These are characteristics of the aristocratic class in the 17th century. Peasants were usually thin and tanned from the hard work outside and lack of adequate nutrition. This portrait demonstrates the ideal of beauty in the 17th century.

The way beauty is portrayed has changed over the centuries. When there were no cameras, the artists had to be precise in the representation of people and places they experienced. It has evolved because no longer do artists have to express beauty through realistic means. Artists can now express beauty through abstract designs.

The next piece of art is also a portrait but instead of having great detail it has almost none.



Object 3

Object Number: 85.551

Present Location: Lewis Contemporary Galleries

Artist: Katz, Alex

Culture: American

Title: "Self Portrait"

Period: 20th century

Medium: oil on canvas

Date: 1977

Credit Line: Gift of the Sydney and Frances Lewis Foundation

The third piece of art work this evening is entitled Self portrait by Alex Katz and is dated 1977. It is quite different from the previous portrait of the young boy. Does anyone know what is meant by Pop Art? It was an art movement that began in the 1950's in England and spread. It was more about the *attitude* than the art. It challenged "fine art" and theme and techniques were drawn from modern culture instead of from the conventional techniques of the past. Alex Katz was considered a pop artist. Andy Warhol was another artist of this movement.

Alex Katz was born in New York and studied at The Cooper Union and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. It was through his studies in Maine that he realized that he could make painting his career. He is known for his bright paintings with orange being his favorite color. Even though his art looks simplistic, it is not. His paintings are always of someone he knew well: other artists, his friends, his relatives, gallery hoppers and himself. All his subjects are well dressed and chic. In the 1950's, his paintings usually featured a full-length figure and in the 1960's that changed to a more cropped version, a bust like portrait. As you see his paintings have changed again and feature an enormous portrait which reflects a coolness and toughness. His portraits have a common theme of detachment, isolated from the surrounding environment with no background details. Today Alex Katz is 83 years old and lives in New York.

As you can see from the title of this piece, it is a "Self Portrait" done with oil on canvas. So, do you think this is actually what Alex Katz looked like in 1977? Katz has done a number of self portraits over the years but the pieces are more about the symbolism than the actual subject matter. In this piece he depicted himself as another character---Richardo Montalban (you may or may not know him know him from the show Fantasy Island). Alex Katz has said that "my self-portraits are a comment on the whole genre of artists' self-portraits. There is always something funny about them. They have a kind of beauty that has never been seen on the face of the earth! It just never existed!"

Conclusion: As you can tell from the three pieces of art we've seen, the definition of beauty differs during the various ages. In the 20th century, beauty was seen more in the symbolism of the art, bright colors, use of contrast and use of everyday objects than from the actual realistic scene or subject matter.

Sources:

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