

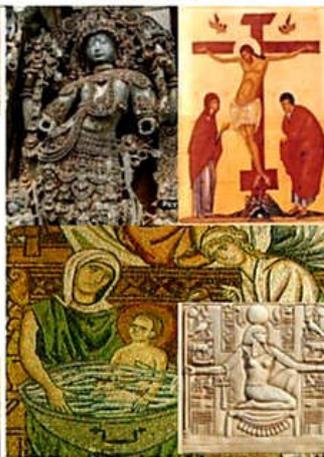
ART TAKES SOCIETY FORWARD

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Primitive art



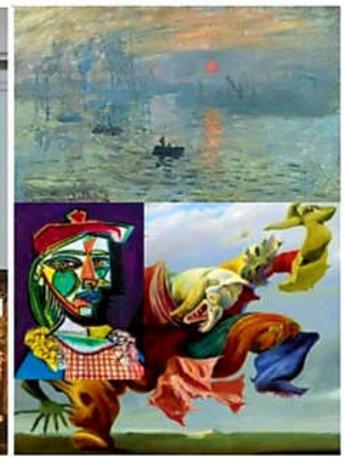
Religious art



Western Realism art



Western Modern art



Art gives traceability of time

Century after century, fine art has remained the trigger of society's latent advancement. But from the Industrial Revolution onwards, art has contributed enormously to industrial evolution in society. Artistic substance now plays a role in differentiation, elegance, breaking the monotony, and delivering shock of the new in all kinds of day to day life products from livelihood to lifestyle.

Since the 1870's Modern Art era, industries in western developed countries have been influenced by art in their design, communication, fashion, architecture, cinema and theatre, among others. Art has given them endless money spinning access to build up aspiration for industrial products and services. In developing countries, fine art is highly necessary to empower the economy and to excel in the global competitive challenge. This paper records the evolution of art.

CAN ART ALWAYS REFLECT THE STATE OF ITS TIMES?

Yes, of course, art has shown the perspective of its time, as also a canvas to the future. We may not have enough recorded historical documents of that time, but the visual archive of art, since before the start of civilization, clearly shows its time in civilization. Let me take a few recorded cultures of different periods in different continents to illustrate this.

Cave art: India's Bhimbetka caves in Madhya Pradesh have a magnificent repository of rock paintings done by people who lived in these natural rock shelters from 100,000 BP (before present) to 1000 AD, from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Chalcolithic periods to the Mediaeval period. Discovered In South Africa's Blombos Cave are drawings done 73,000 years ago. In Caceres, Spain some 64,000 years ago pre-historic cave paintings like the red hand stencil were made in Maltravieso cave by a Neanderthal. All such prehistoric art have spontaneity to flow of drawing and colouring rather than perspective or anatomic description.

China: Early Chinese art began during the Neolithic Period (10,000 to 2000 BC) when people shifted away from a nomadic lifestyle and settled into communities, and stretched upto the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD). Most of it tended to reflect class structure as it evolved in China over the centuries.

India: The Indus Valley Civilization of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (c. 2400–1900 BC), recognized as extraordinarily advanced in living style with civic

planning with highly developed drainage system, grid-like patterned infrastructure facilities, has art of sculptures, seals, pottery, gold ornaments, and realistic terracotta figures of humans and animals that's comparable in culture.

Egypt: Ancient Egyptian art from 5000 BCE to 300 CE portrayed an idealized, unrealistic view of the world. This 2-dimensional art serving a wider and cosmic purpose of maintaining order hasn't changed much over time.

Greece: In the Classical period (5th and 4th centuries BC) of Greek art, realism and idealism were delicately balanced. Its focus was on human beings and the anthropomorphic gods were chief subjects.

France: When I first went to the Lascaux caves in Dordogne, France in 1978 and saw the early Magdalenian parietal wall paintings done 17,000 years ago, it revealed to me that this may be the root of Expressionism, now part of Modern Art since 1870.

Renaissance art: Western Latin society took art forward in 2-dimensional aspect, without details or perspective. It was visual representation of Christian religion, the monarch and society. In Western art, the 13th century is considered the early stage of Renaissance. You can see that Italian painter Giotto had already started perspective and 3-dimensional paintings.

Renaissance (meaning "rebirth") art emerged as a distinct style in Italy in about 1400, in parallel with developments which occurred in philosophy, literature, music, science and technology. Renaissance art marks the transition of Europe from the medieval period to the Early Modern age. At this time fine art painting used the modeling effect of a strong contrast between light and dark to give the illusion of depth or three-dimensionality.

Realism: In Latin Europe, the Renaissance period took paintings from darkness to light. This time saw the birth of draftsmanship in art with perfect perspective,

anatomical perfection, nuances of colour, and personification of the painting subject by the artist. Focus with zoom on the subject of art with lots of details. Religious, romantic and imaginative art, all 3 started to work.

Patronage by Monarchs became very powerful. France, Italy and Spain identified at an early stage that art is the most superior of collections made by Monarchs and noblemen. Art of this time was Realism. So from free flow cave art to 2-dimensional religious art to 3-dimensional religious to romantic art happened with the perfection of draftsmanship.

Baroque: Baroque art came in the 17th century during the Catholic-Protestant divide. The Catholic religious group was extremely in a hurry to overdose painting and sculpture with intricacy, drawing and colour to protect their art and culture from the breakaway Protestants to ensure they cannot invade Catholic values and tenets. This resulted in Baroque art, a form of painting and sculpture overloaded with the beauty of complexity.

Art in the Industrial Revolution 1754

The Industrial Revolution in the western world created a huge impact for the birth of Modern Art. Artistry took a different path after the camera got invented in 1816. There was big introspection in this artistic world about what would be the demand for portraiture by art patrons. Then in 1841, the paint tube was invented by portrait painter John Goffe Rand. Artists previously used to grind each colour pigment by hand, carefully mixing the binding oil in proper proportions. But having paint in a tube gave mobility to artists to paint in the outdoors.

Modern Art: From 1849 Realism was starting to fade out when artist Jean-Francois Millet initially transformed art with a new form. He left Paris for Barbizon and started painting landscapes and rural folks in the outdoors. He was instrumental in starting a new type of art movement called the Barbizon School of Art. Monet and Renoir among other artists were drawn to Barbizon to tutor under Millet. In 1872, Monet's new burst of outdoor art resulted in a painting called *Impression, Sunrise*.⁷

This was later baptised as Impressionism. Actually, the Impressionists initially faced very harsh opposition from the conventional art community. Art critic Louis Leroy in a satirical review coined the term Impressionism in the Parisian magazine *Le Charivari*.

It can be argued that from this period onwards, it was understood that Realism was no longer the need of the hour. So no more Realism from 1872, create modernity. Modern Art became the breakthrough period in the history of art after centuries of time, and Modern Art still continues.

Legacy of Modern Art: What is the meaning of modernity? Modernity is timeless. Modern Art was the dramatic shift since 1872 that gave an opening to artists to create art that is totally imaginative as per individual artist's imaginative dimension.

So from this period on, art became imaginative rather than painting the reality. Modern Art has created a huge legacy of milestone.

It is the anchor of Impressionism, Expressionism, Pointilism, Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, Neo-Realism, Nuovocento movement and American Pop Art, and at a later stage L'art Contemporin.

Movement-less British art: Historically, the British were never known to be great art connoisseurs, perhaps because their attention was solely on increasing Empire. British artists were not forward looking in art either. In 1911 the Camden group started Neo-Realism which criticized imitators of Post Impressionism, but this lasted just 2 years.

The exception was artist William Turner (1775 – 1851) who painted path-breaking scenes of natural phenomena such as sunlight, storm, rain, and fog. His new art style came before Claude Monet's Impressionism was recognized in France, but it can be argued that because of the lack of interest in artistic work by philosophers and writers in Britain, Turner's art was left out.

Turner's work was never taken forward as a movement. He was considered as just another English romantic painter who's not following or creating any art movement.

THERE ARE MOMENTS IN HISTORY WHEN ART WAS DESTROYED

Poisoning of Indian art: *The biggest destruction of Indian art was arguably from 1525 when the Mughals invaded the country and destroyed all art and culture, aside from plundering and conquering the land.*

Colonial period: *Then in 1757 the British colonized India upto 1947 when art got no fillip. It's possible that Latin art influence did not reach India on time, unlike the tramway (1903) or steam engine (1862) which the British brought to India at more or less the same time as they were invented in the West.*

Although the British started the first art college in Kolkata in 1851, its purpose was to establish an industrial art teaching institute based on scientific methods for their own interest. In addition, it was stretched to fine arts.

British artists of that time had their own British style that resembled the grey gloomy misty landscape of London and beyond.

A gallery in the Victoria Memorial in Kolkata has plenty of paintings by English artists. They had painted Indian subjects and landscapes, but these dark and pastel paintings never did reflect India's sunny weather or the bright colours that run across Indian social life.

South Indian artist Ravi Verma, although he did use bright colours, he was still doing Realism in 1890 with defective anatomical proportions, whereas since 1872 this painting style had become past history in the west.

Novecento movement: *Art that looks backwards or aligns to a political cause loses its purpose and meaning for society and so becomes unimportant at a later stage. This is what happened to the Novecento movement formed in Italy in 1922 to return to the great Italian representational art of the past.*

With dictator Benito Mussolini inaugurating the first Novecento exhibition in 1923, this movement came to be associated with fascism and soon lost coherence as an art movement.

“Degenerate Art”: *Art became totally unimportant, except to destroy it, during Hitler’s Nazi regime in Germany. Many works of internationally renowned artists were derided and banned as immoral and inappropriate “degenerate art”.*

Art history saw such a severe moment starting from 1920 when Nazis dubbed certain art and artists to be un-German, Jewish, or Communist in nature. The Nazi government “purged” German museums of about 15,550 works of modern art in 1937.

Some of the removed “degenerate art” was auctioned in Switzerland in 1939, some disposed through private dealers and about 5,000 items secretly burned in Berlin.

"Entartete Kunst" (Degenerate Art) was an exhibition held in Munich in 1937 to deride and ridicule about 650 paintings and artworks representing Impressionism, Dadaism, Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism and all "modern" movements that defined 20th-century art.

These artworks were deemed dangerous to the "Thousand-Year Reich" so they were chaotically hung and accompanied by negative text labels to inflame public opinion against modernism. This exhibition later traveled to many cities in Germany and Austria.

The Bengal School of Art: *This emerged in the beginning of the 20th century under colonial rule cannot be considered a new art movement because it was a replica of traditional Indian art styles, mixed with Mughal art, western Realism and figuratives.*

But no Indian artist had tried to modernise Indian traditional art or got any proper influence from the revolutionary movement of Modern Art from the west.

It is possible that because we were subjugated to the British Raj, there may not have been enough freedom of expression either for creating an evolution of Indian art or taking the influence of western Modern Art.

Aftermath: After Independence, the Progressive Artists Group was influenced by western Modern Art but they could not make any dent in India to create a new art movement, either Indian style or western style.

The artists literally copied from western art movements like Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism and Surrealism without examining the meaning of the philosophy, perspective and colour alchemy of these different breakthrough art movements.

The problem is there were no encouraging signs to promote Indian artists and Indian art. Nor had Indian artists put in the effort to understand the matter of philosophy and skill that go into an art movement. That is why no artist in India has created any new style of art that sustained, or any art movement which is recognized globally.

Influence can build up skill

Actually, getting influence from or copying the Master for learning is not a problem. The issue is of how to interpret influence in the artist's own style. Before coming to France in 1886, Vincent van Gogh previously did Dutch style dark colour paintings. But on meeting Millet in France, van Gogh literally copied 21 of Millet's paintings and also drew some inspiration from Japanese print. With these influences van Gogh created post Impressionism art between 1886 to 1890 which has posthumously made him world famous artist.

Art in India has been prolific for thousands of years upto the 16th century. Indian temple sculpture in particular boasts the expression of outstanding rhythm of daily life including sex, with decorative patterns and intrinsic styling.

Nothing was hidden. Anatomy or perspective was not present in Indian sculpting art, but its harmony of rhythm was quite unique in the world and there was tremendous consistency.

Reconciliation

In the 466 years of pause in artistic activity in the country due to invaders, colonizers and lack of support in the post colonial era, India has totally lost out to reinvent an India-centric evolution of artistry.

If we did not have this gap of subjugation, perhaps Indian art would have been radically different today. However, there is definitely hope. In today's open world when information is just fingertips away, I believe young artists in India have 2 avenues open for their future, either in western or Indian art.

Western art influence: Emerging Indian artists can study the meaning of philosophical perspective of colour structure of western art movements to translate their own art with an unique approach and consistency of a large range of artwork. They have to bring new ideas perpetually to get recognition across the world with their own art identity. Here the price of their paintings can shoot sky high.

Indian art: The own art identity of Indian artists can also happen with Indian art if they do not fall into traditional folklore or religious art. They can bring a new futuristic movement on a contemporary social path by transforming old Indian art into a harmony of life art movement in the global perspective.

Harmony was the key visual factor in ancient Indian art. Why not reinvent this harmony to revive ancient Indian art in a futuristic path?

*Art can take society forward to overcome all kinds of political and religious controversies that divide people.
Art is a monumental giant to change society with inclusiveness and harmony.*