

Contextualizing 'Market at Minho'

Cultural Context:

During the WW1 period, Sonia and Robert Delaunay travelled to Madrid and the village of Vila do Condo in Portugal, and Valença da Minho, where Sonia began drawing inspiration from her surroundings as she painted still-lives and market scenes. (jwa.org) She became inspired by the rapid changes of busy modern life.

Market at Minho: Real Life



Busy
market
place



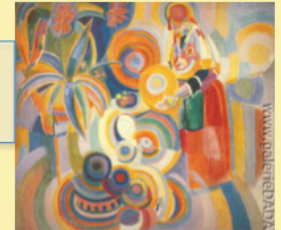
Bridge over
the Minho
River



Other works inspired by Sonia's travels:



Sonia Delaunay
Flamenco singer, 1916
Oil on canvas



Sonia Delaunay
Tall Portuguese
Woman, 1916
70.5 x 80 cm

Function and Purpose:

'It was tradition to represent a dancer in a chosen position, like a snapshot. I broke away from this tradition by superimposing postures, blending light and motion and scrambling from the planes.'- Sonia Delaunay (Art quotes)

interplay between the objects and atmosphere is Delaunay's perception of the environment she was in while she travelled. Rather than looking at the world in a static way, she looked at it more artificially, representing pure excitement in her work. Delaunay expressed this new form of seeing, to encourage a connection between color and an objective scene.

Cultural Context and its influence on Escher's Work



Political influence – post World War 1 (as well as later on WW2)

❖ Political influence – Lead MC Escher to see what death was like and what consequences it can have on peoples lives. Due to the political instability, Escher himself had to experience losses, later on leading him to create one of his most famous art works as it is an indirect representation of the result of WW1 and 2 on the artist, as well as many civilians at that time.

Dada movement (1916-24)

❖ The Dada movement enabled Escher to work with other artists who were opposing war and had faced war issues. The Artworks showed people and scenes 'representationally' in order to have the form and movement analyzed. The Dada movement showed Escher, in what ways death can be portrayed. He later implemented this idea in his work, through the reflection of the skull in the pupil, which is open for interpretation as well as directing the audience onto a certain path: the idea of death.

Surrealist Movement 1924

❖ The Surrealist Movement was the first stage to Escher's famous art works. Just like the Dada movement, the surrealist movement contributed to Escher's art work, in the sense of how it is portrayed: using imagination to create the reflection in the eye, as well as understanding it as an imaginary reflection. Together with the Dada movement, it enables the audience an own interpretation, leaving room for imagination, with links however to reality. This can once again be seen through the use of the skull reflected in the pupil: the actual function and purpose of it is open, leaving room for imagination.

World War Two

Art Work 1946

❖ Finally, the movements and the political influence lead Escher to create his own art piece, based on the history of Europe and his personal experience of death and destruction.

Eugene Atget – “Prostitute”



***Prostitute* (1920's)**
18 x 24cm
Dry Plate Negative

Born in 1852, Eugene Atget is one of the preliminary fathers of Street Photography, largely (Lenman) due to him living parallel to the evolution of the camera: Atget used 'glass plates', meaning "he did not have to develop his negatives immediately and could spend all day photographing". Not only did these enable the immediate capture of street scenes, but also stimulated the stop of the use of tripods, since the new cameras did not require stands and could be hand-held. (Hacking)

At the time, "Old Paris" (pre-industrial Paris) was experiencing mass development and modernization due to the industrial revolution of the Western world. This development included destruction of heritage and monumental sites, which were frequently replaced with more pragmatic buildings such as factories and innovation-schemes, such as the *Metro*. Residents of "Old Paris" considered a movement away from tradition as negative, and thought it was imperative to preserve an archive of the city. Serving as a documentation of the pre-industrial period, the archive would permit future generations to understand the beauty and charm of *Old Paris*. (Hacking)

Being a member of the French community, Atget agreed with the Parisians' opinions and, in 1888, decided to pursue a project that would last him the next 30 years: a large record of "Old Paris" made with the help of the instantaneous cameras available (National Gallery of Art, Washington). "Atget was photographing the rapidly disappearing architecture of Old Paris along with street scenes" (Hacking). Henceforth, the economic (the industrialization) and social (the camera) elements at the end of the 19th century had a great influence on Atget's work.

Street Photography

When the camera was first invented, people condemned the idea that photography was an art form. Despite being a revolutionary invention, photography was seen as a threat to the traditional art forms, such as painting and drawing. However, as people became aware of photography's technical aspects (eg. lighting and exposure), they noticed that the camera was far more complex than it seemed and also demanded skill in order to be handled with. By the 19th Century, photography had been accepted into the artistic world.

Defined as “a style of documentary photography that features subjects in public places”, street photography only became popular once hand-held cameras were introduced in the 1890s. Prior to this invention, photography was largely studio-based and focused on the portraiture of the wealthy, reinforcing the social-class hierarchy present at the time. However, the introduction of hand-held cameras sparked an interest in artists to experiment with the medium; they were able to use photography outside a studio environment. Thus, many artists began working on streets, capturing working-class communities. While the long exposure time of the camera's lens forced the subjects to re-enact their movements, amateurs, such as French photographer Charles Nègre, were the first to practice the concept of “external photography”. However, it was only in the 1930s that the term *street photography* was coined.

Street photography is frequently associated with both of *photojournalism* and *documentary photography*. While photojournalism includes the reportage of events in a journalistic and photographic way, documentary photography is a “depiction of the real world...[recording] the human condition within a wider context”. These sub-genres show that street photography has a very important social aspect, as it is based on documenting humans.

Charles Nègre:
Pifférari Assis, 1853
20.5 x 15.7 cm



Observation and celebration of death in other cultures

The celebration of the dead:

- ❖ Skulls are an important symbol of death and sacrifice in most cultures, especially in Mexico.
- ❖ The Mexican culture celebrates the arrival of the dead spirits, ancestors, with the use of flowers and decorations.
 - ❖ Especially through the decoration of skull.
- ❖ This culture celebrates the "Day Of The Dead" or "El Día de Los Muertos".
- ❖ Skeletons and skulls were important symbols of death and sacrifice in the pre-Columbian period.
 - ❖ *Sugar skulls* are candies, made from sugar cane, sold to kids on the festival.
 - ❖ *Clay skulls* also resemble the shape of a skull and are often used for decorative purposes; for example the decoration of the 'ofrendas' – the family altars.
- ❖ There is an overall idea of the embellishment of the skull.

For the Love of God

"[...] with inspiration drawn from Aztec skulls and the Mexican love for decoration and attitude towards death." (Hirst, "For the Love of God")

The connection to Damien Hirst:

- ❖ Damien Hirst has reflected the idea of the Mexican portrayal of death in his work.
- It "Acts as a reminder that our existence on earth is transient"
(Hirst, "For the Love of God")
- ❖ Through his artwork, Damien Hirst is trying to show, that just like the skull, no one's life is permanent. This idea however, is somewhat preserved through the embellishment of the skull.
 - ❖ The decorations on the skull, the diamonds, seem to make death more bearable and even beautiful.
 - ❖ A correlation can therefore be found between the decorations of sugar skulls in Mexico, and the decoration used by Damien Hirst.
 - ❖ Both are used to make death seem less sad and dull, but rather attractive.

Examples of sugar cane skulls used in the Mexican culture

Source: Mexican Sugar Skulls. Digital Image. *Intimate Weddings*. Intimate Weddings, 29 October 2009. Web. 1 October 2015.



Aztec art:

- ❖ Hirst has furthermore taken inspiration from the Aztec arts.
- ❖ The Mosaic was believed to represent the creator god Tezcatlipoca, also referred to as 'Smoking mirror' ("Mosaic Mask of Tezcatlipoca.")
- ❖ The mask itself is supposed to represent Quetzalcoatl, also referred to as 'the feathered serpent' or the rain god Tlaloc ("Aztec Mosaic Masks & Turquoise Double Headed Serpent Mosaic - The British Museum - London.")
- ❖ The Aztec skull from the British museum is similar to Hirst's 'For the Love of God':
 - ❖ The used mosaic pallets on the Aztec skull are similar to the diamonds used by Damien Hirst.
 - ❖ Just like the mosaic on the Aztec mask, the diamonds on Hirst's piece are set onto the skull individually.

Source: The British Museum. *The Turquoise Mosaics*. 1400-1521. The British Museum, London. *The British Museum*. Web. 1 October 2015.



Aztec/Mixtec
15th-16th century AD From Mexico
Height: 17.3 cm Width: 16.7 cm