

## Lesson 3: Modern Art

### **Introduction**

Most youth groan when you hear about “modern art” – but it is a serious communication of modern times.

**Premise about Art:** *Form communicates meaning apart from content.*

Examples:

- (1) Edger Allen Poe, “The Bell” – rhythm; leads to: bells!
- (2) E.e. cummings, “next to of course god america i” – satire on empty patriotic speeches

Nineteenth-century development to modern art:

From concrete images with realistic representation (e.g. Flemish paintings) to abstractions or expressions.

Illus. Edvard Munch, “The Scream”

*Write out what it communicates to you.*

**Premise about Modernity:** *The fact-value split defines modern culture.*

The Enlightenment Project fails – Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

Instead of turning back to revelation, the West questions rationality itself.

Two Movements: *Materialism vs. Romanticism*

Illus. C. S. Lewis finding what is real “thin” but what is beautiful imaginary

**Modern Art** – all art embodies an idea, but modern art may *only* be an idea (cf. “abstract art”)

**Expressionism** – to express the idea (or feeling, state-of-mind) inside me

Vincent Van Gogh, “The Starry Night” – the world is on fire! (tree is a flame, sky a molten, swirling mass)

**Impressionism** – to express the idea given to me through (or by) something external to me

Claude Monet, “Haystacks” – captures the objective light

Seurat, “Sunday in the Park” – only dots! An early experiment in digital technology!

**Cubism** – finding geometric shapes in landscapes or even people

Paul Cezanne – moved from impressionism to geometric shapes

Pablo Picasso – rearranged geometric shapes of objects and anatomy – often very immoral content

Primitivism – African culture idolized (or natives of the South Seas, as with Paul Gauguin)

Why? Modern thought has been a search to justify sexual immorality.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 – False teaching is driven by lust.

**Dada Movement** – a move to nonsense or (better) vulgarity

Instead of keeping bathroom and bedroom obscene (off-scene), it is now on display.

Ex. Marcel Duchamp, “The Fountain” (1917) – a urinal

New York Armory Show (1913) – the year of demarcation in America (Schaeffer)

Marcel Duchamp, “Nude Descending Staircase” – first public display of defilement

Schaeffer: The longer you look for something, the more your mind is defiled—a dirty trick indeed!

Igor Stravinsky, “The Rite of Spring” (1913)

Content: The self-sacrifice of a young girl in a pagan ritual (again, a return to paganism!).

Form: No melody—nearly caused a riot the opening night in Paris—revolutionary piece.

### ***What does all this mean?***

In modern times, the form communicates:

1. Brokenness – fragmentation of life; leads to: pain!
2. Loss of meaning to this world – abstract art
3. Isolation – no objective meaning, just subjective experiences (e.g. German Expressionists)
4. Hedonistic Nihilism – just living for the momentary act of meaningless pleasure

Comparison of a Century:

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” – traditional English ballad
2. T.S. Eliot (later became Anglican), “The Hollow Man” – things that do not fit are put together (irrational)

When man turns away from the revelation of God in His word, there is no light (Ps. 36:9; Isa. 8:20; Rom. 1:21).

Rebellious sin always leads to death—both the loss of Western civilization and the bloodiest century.

*How desperately do modern people need the Gospel of Jesus Christ!*