

ARTS 2D Midterm

Due Feb 13, 2023 Monday

Cover Sheet

Name: Frank Yungfong TANG

I understand that I am expected to use my own words in this midterm. If I use any words from a source, I must put those words in quotes and then I must give credit to the source by using parenthetical notes (in-text citations), footnotes, or endnotes. This applies to any use of ChatGPT or any other AI source, and if I use any AI bot source, I must put the words from that AI source in quotes and give credit to the AI source using one of the above citation methods.

My name: Frank Yungfong TANG Date: Feb 12, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Yungfong TANG', written on a light gray background.

ARTS 2D “History of Art: Europe & the US from Post-Impressionism to the Present”

Midterm Exam, Winter 2023, De Anza College

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Industrialism, rapid growth of urbanization, air pollution, struggling division between different social classes, the increasing number of imported Japanese arts, New Imperialism, and the advancement of transportation for overseas travel, all contributed to the overall atmosphere in Paris and the rest of Western Europe in the last two decades of the 19th century. We clearly see those impacts reflected on the works of many Impressionism and Post-Impressionism artists. In this paper, we will discuss the impacts reflected on the works of Georges Seurat, Vincent van Gogh, and Paul Gauguin.

During the last two decades of the 19th century, the society shifted greatly in Paris and West European countries. The French's defeat during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-1871 not only overthrew Napoleon III, but also ended the Second French Empire. Politically, the French started the French Third Republic. The Second Industrial Revolution, started around the same time as the French Third Republic, quickly expanded in the making of chemicals, steel, and electricity assisted production of fuel. This shift led to the mass-production of weapons as well as consumer goods. This new wave of industrialization caused rapid urbanization. The growing factory businesses established many more opportunities within cities. Many people flock from rural areas to large urban locations. The population of Paris grew 19.6% from less than 2.3 million people in 1881 to more than 2.7 million in 1901 within 20 years. While this is not the most rapid growth in population of Paris history, it made the already-crowded Paris less preferable to live for those who do not make their living in the industrial business, such as the

painters will be discussed in this paper later. Air pollution worsened in Paris during those two decades although cannot compare to the devastating smog in London which was the worst. This period is also known for the expansion of New Imperialism, which the nations of European powers, the United States, and even Japan, focused on colonial expansion leading to the early 20th century. The unmatched pursuit of territorial acquisitions overseas led these governments to focus on building up their empires with newer technological advancement and developments. They enlarged their territory through conquest and benefited from the resources of the overmastered nations. Such expansion also made intercontinental travel to Asia more accessible to the general public than before. Commoners, not limited to the nobles, started to enjoy the imported Japanese consumer goods and affordable arts, such as Ukiyo-e prints. Asian arts started to greatly influence European artists in this period and the clash sparked a new generation of artistic style in the West.

In the *Bathers at Asnieres* (1884), Georges Seurat depicts a scene of a group of ordinary men on the riverbank with an industrial background. The rendering of nature and figures were not idealized. The advancement of science in the 19th century influenced his style of utilizing color theory. Impressionism greatly influenced his subject matter choices, his unconventional brushstroke, and his usage of brighter color tone. In contrast, his planning with various studies and his meticulous application of contemporary color theory are his own- Pointillism. He shifted the subject matter focus toward ordinary people just as many other Impressionist and other new schools of artists. The bathers in his painting are wearing casual, working class clothes and appear to appreciate their leisure time, lazing, swimming, and joyfully throwing themselves into their ambience. A small dog rests with her owner and looks consciously there. However, he depicted a factory in the distance which acts as a mnemonic of the bathers' social status as well

as reminding us of the negative impact of air pollution in the dim city life. Some argue this work disclosed Seurat's beliefs about the division of social classes. The lower classes were constantly impacted by the consequence of the Second Industrial Revolution and the constraints therein. On the other hand, the middle and upper classes were deeply impacted by the suffusing social condition. Furthermore, this work adheres the use of his Pointillist technique and more efficaciously demonstrated the technique of using complementary colors to highlight. Overall, *Bathers at Asnieres* (1884) by Georges Seurat illustrated the industrialist and social division atmosphere, with a pleasant and beautiful scene, in Paris during the last two decades of the 19th century.

Orientalism started to gain its popularity in Europe as early as the late 18th century and is not a new thing in this period. However, with the rapid expansion of New Imperialism starting 1870 and the increase of trade with Japan after 1853, more affordable low cost Japanese arts were imported to Europe during this period and made it accessible to many artists who previously wouldn't be able to possess one. These changes nurtured Japonisme, the influence and popularity of Japanese design and art among some Western European artists. James Abbot McNeill Whistler, Edgar Degas, Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, Gustav Klimt, and Paul Gauguin were all known as Japonisme, just to name a few. In *Portrait of Père Tanguy*, painted Autumn 1887, Van Gogh illustrated Mr. Tanguy sitting with many Japanese woodblock prints, known as *ukiyo-e*, in the background. Van Gogh had separately mimicked several of these *ukiyo-e* in oil on canvas. In this work, the Japanese use of bold color tone and flat rendering of figures reflect not only in the background posters, but also on the rendering of the Frenchman Père Tanguy. It reflected the overall desire of longing to learn about Asian culture for inspiration after their disappointment of many political corruption and endless rounds of revolution in

France that repeatedly failed due to regional wars and the personal interest of political leaders after their gaining of power. The Japanese work also influenced these artists to depict people in different occupations, and some in the lower classes, whom Van Gogh deeply dedicated his life to before his artistic practice. In short, *Portrait of Père Tanguy* both reflected Van Gogh's Japonisme in the background, and also his artistic color style and flatten depiction on the figure.

While Vincent van Gogh never had the opportunity to visit Japan, some artists in this period had the opportunity to escape Europe into an Oriental paradise they dream of. Vincent van Gogh's friend Paul Gauguin was one of such. In *Parau Api. What News (1892)*, Gauguin illustrated two Tahiti females sitting on the ground. The work is almost identical, in composition, to one of his other works painted one year earlier, *Femmes de Tahiti, dit aussi "Sur la plage"*. The only two differences between these two works are the female on the left were changed from wearing a long sleeve pinkish western attire to a more exotic no sleeve yellow-and-black striped Tahitian pareu and her both hands changed from holding a dry plant to spreading open to support her body weight on the ground. This work reflects Gauguin's desire to depart from the European reality toward a new place and attract favor due to the same reason from his viewers. It created a fantasy world which reflects the European desire for a relaxed and lazy life on the sunshine beach with warm weather, fresh air and beautiful (and multiple) consorts, instead of their dark, wet, dim life trapped in industrialized Paris.

Bathers at Asnieres (1884) by Georges Seurat, *Portrait of Père Tanguy* (Autumn 1887) by Vincent van Gogh, and *Parau Api. What News (1892)* by Paul Gauguin demonstrated to us the social issue of Industrialism, rapid urbanization, and the social division these artists were facing or their desire to escape from. The increase of imported Japanese arts inspired Van Gogh's artistic style and Gauguin's heavy use of outline in his Tahiti works. The accessibility of

intercontinental transportation brought Gauguin to a new world and brought back a new set of subject matter to European culture. The overall atmosphere in Paris and the rest of Western Europe in the last two decades of the 19th century are outward looking, disappointed by their internal troubles, and seeking resolution from other cultures, either from rural France, far away from the city, or from a foreign nation. Seurat, Van Gogh, and Gauguin told us their experiences aesthetically with their vivid paintings of revolutionary artistic styles.

Extra Credit:

Both Vincent van Gogh and Edvard Munch suffered mental disorders for a very long period of time. We observe vivid expressions of their artistic talent from their works. Their work shifted the focus of viewers from appreciating the realistic depiction toward the rendering of the inner state of humanity.

Much evidence suggests that Vincent van Gogh had manic depression, the mental illness thought to have impacted many creative individuals. He committed suicide in 1890 after burdened by psychiatric disease throughout his life. He cast his emotion into his painting and he expressively used line and color to paint normal objects and figures. His famous *Starry Night* (1889) depicted what he saw from the windows at the Saint-Paul asylum in Saint-Rémy in the southern region of France. He illustrated this work while he was obtaining respite from plaguing depression there. In this work, he rendered his view of the landscape from his window with all his memories and emotions this sight colluded in him. The dim stars in reality became circular balls shining on the sky in his work. The slow moving Milky Way became the curly rounding swifts, with mystical color lines to express the movement. The far away clouds on top of mountains reflect the moonlight as snowy white. Everything in the painting is in motion, and yet everything is still. Nothing changes and yet everything is changing at the same time. Van Gogh

converted his insane struggle to a form of art transparent to everyone. All of this was painted in the darkest and lowest valley of his life, inside the asylum.

When Munch was five years old, Edvard Munch's mother died of tuberculosis. During his childhood, he was frequently sick and had to remain at home from school for long periods. To recover from his illness, he rested on bed for a very long period of time during winters, often not well enough to attend school. The homeschool time permitted him to practice and explore drawing. The medicine bottle became one of his childhood images because he was constantly taking medicine for many years. These experiences lead him to suffer an unusual amount of vulnerability and early trauma. He experienced anxiety, depression, and maybe also schizophrenia. However, he rejected medical therapy for a while. Once he stated: "My sufferings are part of myself and my art. They are indistinguishable from me, and their destruction would destroy my art." Munch never got tuberculosis, but lived with the anxiety of getting the disease all his life. Eventually, a more ordinary lung illness killed him. Due to his constant struggle with inner emotion, he focuses the subject matter in his painting the emotion itself, rather than a figure with certain emotional expression. He employed an expressive use of color, rather than a descriptive choice, as well as radically simplified the form to concentrate the inner state he intended to render. Such an approach went beyond naturalism and Impressionism. *The Scream*, painted in 1893 by Munch, is a key work for the Symbolist movement and later greatly inspired many Expressionism artists in the early twentieth century. This Symbolist work used diverse color curly backgrounds to confront questions about the nature of subjectivity and its visual depiction. Munch's struggle with his internal well being directed his energy toward the expression of emotional state and brought his works into a new reign of emotional artistry.

Both Van Gogh and Munch live tragic lives and they channeled their miserable experiences to inspire their art, leading them to create powerful paintings such as *Starry Night* (1889) and *The Scream* (1893). The impact of their mental diseases treated the end of their life differently, however. Van Gogh committed suicide while he was 37 years old. On the other hand, Munch lived a long life till 70 years old. He was not killed by mental illness, nor by tuberculosis. Both Van Gogh and Munch remind us to care for our love one who may suffer mental illness like them, encourage us to learn to turn our suffering to something beautiful, and demonstrate to us that it is possible to utilize our vulnerability to benefit others, even though ourselves may not have the chance to taste the joyful fruit of them in our lifetime.