Art History Learning Journal: Week 6 Reflection

The landscape of artistic influence and taste-making has undergone a profound transformation since the era of the Royal Academies. In the 17th through 19th centuries, institutions like the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture wielded immense power in shaping artistic standards and preferences. Today, the arbiters of artistic taste and style have become far more diverse and decentralized, reflecting broader societal changes and technological advancements.

The Royal Academies, established in France and Great Britain, once stood as the ultimate authorities in the art world. As Berman (n.d.) explains, the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, founded in 1648, played a crucial role in defining artistic excellence and dictating stylistic trends. These institutions controlled art education, organized exhibitions, and bestowed prestigious awards, effectively gatekeeping the art world and determining which artists and styles gained recognition and patronage.

However, the monopoly of these institutions began to erode in the 19th century. The emergence of movements like Realism and Impressionism challenged academic norms and opened new avenues for artistic expression. As Gersh-Nesic (n.d.) notes in her guide to Realism, artists like Gustave Courbet rejected idealized academic subjects in favor of depicting contemporary life and ordinary people. This shift marked the beginning of a more democratized art world, where alternative perspectives could gain traction.

The Impressionist movement further accelerated this democratization. As explained in "The Case for Impressionism" (The Art Assignment, 2019), these artists bypassed traditional exhibition spaces, organizing their own shows and appealing directly to the public. This DIY approach foreshadowed the diverse channels through which artists today can showcase and market their work.

In the contemporary art world, the sources of artistic influence have multiplied exponentially. While respected institutions like museums, galleries, and art schools still play significant roles, they no longer hold exclusive sway over artistic tastes. The internet and social media have dramatically altered the landscape, allowing artists to reach global audiences directly and enabling diverse voices to gain visibility.

Online platforms like Instagram, DeviantArt, and Behance have become virtual galleries where artists can showcase their work without traditional gatekeepers. These platforms have given rise to new forms of artistic expression, such as digital art and NFTs, which challenge conventional notions of artistic value and ownership.

Art critics and curators continue to exert influence, but their opinions now compete with those of bloggers, influencers, and everyday art enthusiasts who can share their views widely. This democratization has led to a more pluralistic art world where numerous styles and movements can coexist and find their respective audiences.

The global nature of contemporary art has also contributed to this diversity. As demonstrated by the influence of Japonisme on Western art in the late 19th century (Ives, 2004), cross-cultural exchange has long been a catalyst for artistic innovation. Today, this exchange occurs on an unprecedented scale, facilitated by digital connectivity and global travel, leading to a rich tapestry of artistic styles and influences.

However, it would be naive to suggest that the art world has become entirely democratic. Economic factors still play a significant role in determining which artists gain prominence. Major galleries, auction houses, and wealthy collectors wield considerable influence in the art market. Additionally, algorithms on social media platforms can create echo chambers, potentially limiting exposure to diverse artistic voices.

In conclusion, while the Royal Academies once reigned supreme in setting artistic standards, today's art world is characterized by a complex interplay of traditional institutions, digital platforms, market forces, and global cultural exchange. This shift has led to a more diverse and dynamic artistic landscape, where multiple tastes and styles can flourish simultaneously. As we move forward, it will be crucial to continue fostering this plurality while also addressing the new challenges and inequalities that have emerged in our increasingly connected world.

**References**

Berman, D. (n.d.). The Formation of a French School: The Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. Khan Academy. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/rococo-neoclassicism/rococo/a/the-formation-of-a-french-school-the-royal-academy-of-painting-and-sculpture

Gersh-Nesic, B. (n.d.). A beginner's guide to Realism. Khan Academy. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/becoming-modern/avant-garde-france/realism/a/a-beginners-guide-to-realism

Ives, C. (2004, October). Japonisme. Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/jpon/hd\_jpon.htm

The Art Assignment. (2019, October 17). The Case for Impressionism [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_tw51Eh9vcw