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**Composition 2**

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The painting I chose to write about was something I consider to be quite interesting as it depicts two things that I have a great deal of interest in; History and Cavalry Charges. The painting in question is Elizabeth Butler's 1881 Scotland Forever. Simply put, the painting details the charge of the Royal Scots Greys alongside the English Heavy Cavalry at the Battle of Waterloo. It's an oil painting that can be comfortably placed into the genre of Military Art. Without any foreknowledge of the event, one would just simply see some red uniformed soldiers charging on horseback. However, what I'd argue largely about this piece is not so much the innate facts of it, but what it conveys. This piece of artwork not only depicts a historical event but a feeling of heroism.

So the first point to establish when trying to convey an idea of heroism, is what exactly is heroic? Moreover what is exactly heroic about a cavalry charge? To some degree the answers to these questions are somewhat subjective, but then again so is most art critique to some degree. Heroism is often the idea of a person embodying ideal traits usually through a brave or selfless action. This usually evokes some feeling of pride or admiration in someone who views a heroic act, and capturing that feeling is what this painting does the best. Despite the history of the event in question, where the

Scots Greys charged and were ultimately routed, there is something inherent in this depiction that captures that feeling of bravery that is to be admired.

So the main thing to note about the entirety of the piece is in particular the framing of the image. The frame is looking directly into the pose of the Scots Greys as they charge. There is a distinct feeling of motion and oncoming force. You aren't shown what they're charging into, the scale of the fight ahead or why, because the image is not framed out why they are going forward by that they are doing. The mere act of charging swords drawn into whatever enemy or challenge lies ahead is what makes the image all the more impactful. It doesn't matter who or what they are charging into, it matters that these men bravely did so regardless of the outcome. Knowing the historical outcome of this charge only really informs things further. The Scots Greys charged the French artillery lines but were overtaken by a counter attack by French Cavalry, incurring heavy casualties in the retreat. Despite the dire outcome and the likelihood of such an event these men still charged headlong into enemy lines. Just in depicting these scenes the artist was able to capture an idea and feeling that transcended the moment in history it was meant to convey.

Another major aspect of the painting that needs to be drawn attention to, is the explicit attention to realism. Realism being the genre of art that specifically aims to make as realistic a depiction of a scene as possible. A major aspect of capturing that distinct feeling of heroism, you have to give the impression of things being real or at the very least immerse someone enough in the world to get them to feel that way. In a

painting you have very little time functionally to convey an idea, so going the most direct route is often the best. This is why having an image that goes as far as it does to convey a realistic picture of the men, the horses and the field they were on is so important. It immediately draws you into the scene with little dissonance as possible to suck you into that feeling. Every detail down to the anatomy of a horse while it is at a full gallop is expertly painted, to the point where you'd almost imagine this could have been done as a photograph. This all more effectively brings you into the feeling and scene the painting is trying to convey.

All in all, Scotland Forever is a very simple painting with a very simple idea that it tries to convey. Its a product of its time, and we often don't get much like it these days. Many artists are more interested in 'deconstructing' traditional notions of heroism and story telling while ignoring the very potent emotions that are evoked in such powerful images. Looking at this picture it is almost impossible to not see the sheer admiration for these men and the actions they took on the field that day. No cynicism, no irony, just an honest depiction of a heroic moment in history.

