

Painting

By Donna Russell



Humans have felt the need to communicate visually since nearly the very beginnings of human cognition. The act of painting began at least 40,000 years ago when our ancient ancestors were culturally motivated to communicate their observations with the materials available to them, whether it was for spiritual, hunting, warning or bragging purposes.

As time progressed, so did the knowledge of materials and people in far off lands, with varying and differing developments in depicting observations. With the exchange of philosophies, art and materials, the mores of one culture were adopted by others. Painting continued to communicate each culture's ideals, growing into a tool used by rulers and religions to teach and manipulate the majority of people who were illiterate and uneducated.

With the advent of the Guttenberg printing press in the 15th century came greater knowledge in the Western Hemisphere and the spread of literacy, with people no longer relying on visual images alone to communicate. In the 19th century, the development of photography displaced painting altogether as a means of documenting history. While no longer needed to impart important cultural observations, painting continued to be used as a means of political and religious propaganda, both reflecting and creating cultural mores.

Artists were now free to experiment in their techniques and materials and be inventive in their visual communication. Impressionism, expressionism and abstraction were the first of many new artistic styles to be spurred by these cultural advancements. Artists now began to experiment with various means of expression to communicate history, observations, mores, philosophies and people.

Paintings have documented this exchange and evolution of cultures globally throughout the past and present. Paintings have not only reflected the history of cultures, but have also helped to form them and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

Further investigation into painting and its cultural influence can be found in a great numbers of books and videos. Here are a few suggestions:

<https://www.pbs.org/howartmadetheworld/episodes/>

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/cultures-religions-ap-arthistory/a/a-brief-history-of-western-culture>

<http://char.txa.cornell.edu/art/fineart/change/change.htm>

<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/page/art-in-the-21st-century>