

## ACADEMIC REALISTS

We continue with our theme, the Role of Academies throughout artistic movements...

The last painting we discussed was Neoclassic, and you have an understanding of the the revival of Classic images used to inspire patriotism and loyalty to a leader or government.

Now, moving into this gallery, I want to use a contemporary analogy, that is especially timely this month...

The Academy would control the standards, styles, and even subject matter - that became an artists 'ticket' to recognition and acceptance. In our world today we can compare this to our Motion Picture Academy Awards. The golden OSCAR lends credibility to a film or actor. There are certainly other films made, but even a nomination increases the commercial success of a movie, or the rates commanded by those involved...

With that comparison, please remember that most of our galleries at MIA are organized by time and place, so we really get to see what was going on. I love that art and history are such great reflections of each other and this gallery samples

Western Europe in the middle of the 1800s. There is so much going on at this time that we start to see artists **BENDING THE RULES** of current academies and art school conventions.

The academy at this time encouraged subject matter to reflect stability and morality, reflected images from the past, somewhat classical images... At the same time, Romanticism developed as a movement designed to reflect and inspire **EMOTION**. This taste for the exotic becomes a part of Academic art as well- evident as almost a fashion or trend we see throughout the century. In this gallery, as in some much of art, it is important to recognize that movements overlap. No clearly-defined threshold marks the end of one artistic style or trend the beginning of another.

This taste for the exotic, called Orientalism was a general term used to describe things that seemed foreign or from the Far East, called the Orient. People had lived thru chaotic times with much social upheaval and needed a bit of an escape. In art this meant scenes from afar: we see rugs, opium pipes, unfamiliar animals & architecture - a casual awareness or depiction of such scenery gave an artist a worldly quality.

We will begin with

the Carpet Merchant by Jean-Leon Gerome painted in 1887

to see that this trend is still represented even though the Academy was encouraging a more didactic subject matter.

Take a moment to look at this painting.

What do you see that may look exotic or appeal to the need for escape ?

This artist had traveled extensively throughout North Africa and the Middle East, and this scene is of the Court of the Rug Market in Cairo- although his combinations of culturally different hear gear is not thought to be accurate. This artist was schooled at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and honored by the French Salon. He was popular and a prolific artist even though the Academy preference was for more noble- classic or historical subject matter. This standard, in 1850, seemed somewhat of a “time warp” to the current population.

Religious texts, allegory or classical Greek and Roman figures were considered heroic subjects 'worthy' of reproduction-

Please turn and glance at a classic example of an artist producing work to Academy Standards:

KISS OF VICTORY 1880, Sir Alfred Gilbert

This marble sculpture is an example of subject matter approved by the Academy. Made as a memorial to the artist's brother, a Roman soldier has fallen in battle and is kissed by the spirit of victory.

HOWEVER, the artists at this time had been exposed to a healthy dose of rebellion and independent thinking ( this IS post-French Revolution ) and they were working in a time marked by widespread social change and empowerment... so not all of them followed conventions!

In this gallery we see the Neoclassic influencing the Academy Standards, we see traces of the exotic, and then development of some new Rule Benders, The Academic Realists.

They began to revolutionize painting by replacing idealized historical images with scenes from Real Life. They did not completely abandon the Academy or stylistic trends, but they branched out and responded to the demands of the growing middle classes. A new class of the population of people, not aristocrats- but successful merchants and business people suddenly had money to buy art. These artists emerged as a market response to commercial demand, something that might not have been economically

feasible in previous centuries where a royal patron or wealthy sponsor was needed to support art.

When artists became able to support themselves, they could become less concerned with the rules & standards of the Academy. The people wanted familiar scenes, images that lent credibility to their own existence.

We see beautifully-painted scenes of contemporary events, familial scenes, and pastoral settings. Artists painting Real Life for middle class money.

Let's move to see another painting depicting a idyllic family, evidence of this movement that began BENDING THE RULES.

This painting is called

Peace Concluded, and was painted in 1856 by Sir John Everett Millais.

What do you see in this scene that would place into this category of Real Life?

This appears to be a portrait of a middle class English family and yet it also celebrates a contemporary event, the end of the Crimean war. It can be appreciated today for its beauty and domestic tranquility and yet viewers in 1856 would have

appreciated the rich meaning of many political symbols... AND of course we still see evidence of artistic trends: the gorgeous and textural Oriental rug ( escapism ) as well as the attention to detail- brushstrokes are barely visible- that the Academy valued.

Again, there is SO MUCH going on in this gallery, and again the different trends and movements are hard to classify when they crossover so much and represent art produced in a fairly small geographic area: Western Europe.

With this in mind, Brenda will explain a fun gallery exercise to try and CLASSIFY some of the art from the mid to late 1800's. There are no right or wrong answers, we just want you to explore the myriad of directions that artists were taking in the mid 19th C.