

Abstract Expressionism

Abstract expressionism was a term first heard of in the 20th century, and was originally used by artists as early as 1919, but is more often associated with the 1950s and 1960s. It's most basic definition is a piece of abstract artwork, which is non-geometric.

Abstract expressionism is generally regarded not as a specific style, but as an attitude taken towards art, and is more to do with the techniques used in the painting. What mattered were the qualities of the paint itself and the act of painting. Abstract expressionism is also usually considered to be mainly by American artists such as Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenburg. Other than these, the most famous British abstract expressionists are Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Alan Jones, and Peter Blake.

It emerged in New York after the 2nd world war as a radical departure from earlier impressionistic work by the likes of Claud Monét etc., who most famously "painted as a bird sings". This had been the sole style of artwork for hundreds of years. This earlier artwork had been about the image created by the painter, shown in the way impressionist paintings show no relation to life when close up, but are impeccably realistic at a distance. This new way was not only to do with the final image that the viewer would see, but about the way in which the paint was layered, coated and rendered on the canvas, as an expression of emotion.

Abstract expressionism's roots lay in cubism, and surrealism. It involved the paint being applied rapidly to a canvas, in order to show not only a vision, but an emotion. An even aggressive style was used, but in a controlled manner, so as to create an impressionistic image. It was not always easy to see this layering and careful construction, so was often underestimated. However, this was a new, clever, and instinctive way to create art, which had never been seen before.

Although this new form of art was all categorised together, there were very many different types of abstract expressionism around. Each of the aforementioned artists painted abstract expressionism in a very different way. These styles could frequently be confused with one another, but each artist had their own individual technique in which they painted abstract expressionism.

Willem de Kooning painted from pure colour and applied directly from the tube, and mixed tones on the actual canvas.

Jackson Pollock was most famous for dribbling and wiping paint over large canvases stretched out on the floor.

Jasper Johns often used images, his own and other artists', to use as a base for abstract expressionism frequently, and produced new works based on earlier paintings.

David Hockney often used words or figures in his early paintings to 'humanize' them more. He found abstract art a little desolate.

Peter Blake often used the fashionable and most famous celebrities of his time to create art around as well as religion in his art and altered the image in this way.

The abstract expressionists of the 20th century generally used very large canvases to work on in order to express themselves fully enough to satisfy them. They used vast quantities of paint in layers giving a full bodied and rich appearance, unlike the thin and dreary colours of centuries before. Huge brush strokes were used in order for the viewer to be able to noticeably detect the emotion and passion contained in the art. The artists always had an image at hand which they would base the painting around, and although in the final product this original image could seldom be seen, this art had an underlying meaning or implication in its depths.