

Art Theories and Influence on Artists

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Essay Question: Discuss how theories about art influence the practice of artists and/or art critics or historians

Practice in art refers to the decisions and actions that affect choices, perceptions, ways of working and views of an artist or art historian. Tim Storrier sums up the practice of an artist by saying that "A painting is really a graphic illustration of where a particular artist is at that point in his life and the art encompasses what the artist has gone through in their life." On art historians and critics he says "Other people come along and interpret the painting with their own life experiences" The subjectivity involved in a critic or art historian's views are extremely high.

The practice of Tim Storrier is informed by the theories of painting an idea with a poetic edge. This idea then goes searching for "totems" to portray itself upon. Storrier speaks about this theory: "My paintings don't start with visual stimulation, it's usually an intellectual idea with a poetic edge, then the idea goes searching for different totems to portray itself upon." Storrier elaborates further that "The bottom line of my paintings is that they are trying to come up with totemic images about Australia. We don't have many, for me the true totemic image of Australia is the horizon." A totem is a natural object that is usually the emblem of a clan in a tribal group. Storrier's totems are a natural object that he can apply his poetic idea to.

We see from these quotes that the theory of Tim Storrier's art is concerned with the idea of painting "totemic images" and that the paintings are trying to come up with totemic images about Australia. Storrier believes that the totemic image of Australia is the horizon. Storrier is using both the Subjective and Cultural frames in his artwork. Storrier uses the cultural frame to emphasise the point that his belief is that the horizon is the totemic icon of Australia. The horizon is included in most Australian paintings and has become an integral feature of Australian artworks. Storrier was influenced by Australian artists Russel Drysdale and Sydney Nolan. Both these artists use the horizon as a key feature of their paintings. Storrier incorporates the horizon in almost every painting and the main idea of his paintings are the horizon, not the actual objects he portrays in them. Storrier's theory on the horizon being the totemic image of Australia stems from his love of the horizon, even as a child "I was always gazing at what lay beyond the horizon... The beauty of distance." This shows that Storrier is working from the subjective frame as well as the cultural frame. An important quote from Storrier is this: "My burning rope pictures, the series called Point to Point, are totemic images of a journey from one point to another in the landscape of life, but they are really about the horizons beyond the burning rope."

This quote shows us that Storrier's personal theories on the totemic image of Australia being the horizon is incorporated into his artworks. We can see from this that the personal theories of art influence the practice of artists.

Another proof of how Storrier's theory of art is painting a totem to portray an idea with a poetic edge was when he divorced his wife in 1984. "Storrier, raging with pain and anger, painted a totem for his traumatic state" He thought of a totem and gave the totem an idea with a poetic edge to show his feelings and traumatised state. The painting was called "The Burn". The totem in the painting that reflected his raging view and traumatised state was a carcass of meat with a burning rope following the contour of the spine as a symbol of a flayed body. The ribs are showing, the penis is blood red, the testicles droop. This shows further evidence of Storrier working in the subjective frame. It is interesting to note how Storrier communicates his feelings so effectively. A human's ribs, spine and testicles are the most painful part of a body to hurt, and Storrier uses these 3 body parts to communicate his area of pain. In this instance it was all the hurt and anguish of breaking up with his wife.

Critics and art historians also have theories about art and these theories influence what the critics and historians have to say about the artist. A critic's view includes his or hers personal experiences and this is how critics and art historians work under the subjective framework. Tim Storrier comments on this by saying, "Other (critics and art historians) people come along and interpret the painting with their own life experiences." Critics and art historians' views include the cultural frame as the idea's and theories of critics and art historians change around the world. We can see this by juxtaposing two views of critics – one from Australia and one from America:

"Australian critics mutter that the local audience and market has been saturated by Storrier's burning ropes/horses/fists/fruit, and that the artist should apply his skills to another theme." Unfortunately some Australian critics have been under the influence of what is called the "Tall Poppy Syndrome" where they attack the artists of their choice, they cut them down to size, and unusually with no justification. In Storrier's case they attack his work as being repetitive and irrelevant. Storrier believes that the critics have a go at him because he is rich. "The Hollywood myth perpetuates that artists are meant to live in ripped jeans and stained t-shirts, and never earn a buck."

The Americans however interpret Storrier's burning paintings "in a way Australians hadn't." Storrier's artworks were seen as "Highly political, ecological statements about the landscape and its vulnerability; the burning rope, fists, fruits, became symbols of civilisation consuming itself, leaving only the charred ruins on the horizon.". The American critics were influenced by the cultural frame as the war's

around the world (Kuwait war, Gulf War) were occurring at the same time that Storrier released his paintings to America. The Americans could identify with Storrier's work as the pictures on the news and tabloids showed burning objects from the war and they understood Storrier's work to be political statements about the wars that were being fought around the world – they understood the burning fruits to be "Symbols of civilisation consuming itself."

Relating back to the practice of Storrier and the frames that he worked out of, we can see that Storrier's practice worked from the subjective frame as Storrier included a lot of personal and psychological experiences in his artworks. He did this by using the Structural frame to add symbols in his artworks such as the horizon, objects in isolation and evoking a feeling in his audience of stillness, silence, loneliness and being isolated or trapped in a vast world. Storrier was sent to a boarding school and his sense of isolation there is still reflected in his artworks today "The sense of isolation was very strong, a lot of my anger came from being sent away from home to the school." Storrier loved taking photo's of objects in isolation "Things in isolation seemed to intrigue him." Storrier's practice was influenced by these psychological changes in his life and he reflected these changes in his artworks. To get the affect of loneliness and isolation and an illusion of space in his artworks, Storrier uses shadows, receding horizon lines, long perspective, distant vanishing points, and works done from an arial view. "The space creates a sense of solitude, emptiness and vastness in his work" objects such as debris have been incorporated into his earlier works to indicate distance. All of this shows us that Storriers practice is compromised from the subjective and structural framework and depicts stages from his life.

Another theory of Storrier's is that an artwork must be beautiful and not grotesque. Storrier believes the main challenge is to paint a picture in a beautiful manner. The tonality normally used may be different for such an angry subject such as "The Burn", where an animal's carcass is displayed bleeding, but in a gentle, toned down way compared to how grotesque he could of made it. "The establishment of beauty is an essential role for an artist. The bottom line of a painting is that it is a profound decoration, I'm aware of horror and the detestable but I don't paint it. I revert back to what is acceptable, to beauty and human grace, because that is what lasts." Storrier shows another theory that affects his art making – he say that "An artist's pictures are his calling cards on the way through his life, and mine, I hope, are done with generosity and affection." Storrier may paint a not so nice picture, but he does it with beauty and human grace. These are his personal thoughts towards beauty in art. These are his personal theories that affect his decision making, or art practice.

In 1980 however, Storrier became frustrated with painting realistically, since the same can be achieved through photography. Storrier was inspired by the work of Dutch artist Theo Kuyjpers who created mixed media works, combining realistic, tangible form with illusionism. We can see this effect in Storrier's mixed media construction – 'The hungry surveyor', where he paints a picture and layers real objects, such as a horse saddle, whips and cans, on top of the canvas. Painting with real objects is a post-modern practice and Storrier uses appropriation in a way as he follows Theo Kuyjpers Work. Storrier once again uses the cultural frame to show his affinity with the Australian outback lifestyle, by using real objects that are all Australian. Storrier is also using the subjective frame by putting symbols of his childhood into his art works.

The practices of artists is informed by the critical theories on arts that the artist may have. With Storrier we can see how he takes all of personal theories and applies them one by one to each of his artworks. Storrier is a unique artist as he is self taught and rarely follows any actual genre in art (minimalism, conceptualism, dadaism etc). The horizon is emphasised as his theory is that the horizon is the central and integral totem of Australia. We can see how he comes up with totems and applies varied ideas to them, this is another one of Storrier's theories. Another theory is that painting should be beautiful and we can see that even though Storrier may have a grotesque painting to paint, he does so with the utmost beauty, respect and tolerance that a painting of that nature deserves. Theories are an integral part of an artists decision making, or practice, that goes with each and every artwork that an artist produces.

Bibliography:

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