

Discuss the similarities and differences between two different art movements

Romanticism and realism are completely different movements in terms of their ideas, concepts, influences, techniques etc.

Romanticism is the term coined for the movement that had a significant impact on art and human creativity in the first half of the 19th century. It is known as the romantic movement of romantic revival. Its chief emphasis was upon freedom of individual and self expression, spontaneity and originality. The romantics focused on emotional impact of personal experience and individual imagination. This emotional impact used forms of nostalgia, horror, melancholy and sentimentality. It often showed interest in the realms of dream and folklore, superstition and legend. In a wider sense it questioned the great themes of our universe. Who are we? And why are we here?



The Raft of the Medusa
1819
Oil on canvas
Musee du Louvre, Paris

Theodore Gericault was the leading artist of this movement. “The raft of the medusa” took the ordeals of the survivors of the French ship medusa as the subject for the piece. The ship had foundered off the west coast of Africa in 1816, laden with Algerian immigrants. It is a

subjective interpretation of the event. Fifteen corpses and survivors are piled onto one another, posing in a melodramatic manner, giving the entire painting an implication of pain, suffering, despair and death. A man raised on the shoulders of his comrades waves a piece of white cloth towards the horizon. The composition is chaotic and dramatic yet the chaos is controlled by use of structure. The painting is highly characterized by use of sharp light and shade as well as the naturalistic element. The light descends from the dark hues in the stormy clouds and into the open sea. Gericault avoided showing the most horrific aspects of the event in choosing to depict the moment when the castaways attempted to attract the attention of a passing ship. The work was intended to shock and he did so by stunning the viewer’s sensibilities. The painting itself is far beyond realism and borders exaggeration. You might say he had a ‘biblical’ intention by use of the pale yellow light descending into the horizon, signifying the importance and tragedy of the event.

In contrast, realism was a movement that depicted contemporary people and events rather than grand, historical, or religious subjects. Artists of this movement painted their subjects as they appeared in reality rather than idealizing and glorifying. In opposition romanticism was often hyperbolic whereas realism was not. Realism exposed the truths and realities of people’s existence. It did not dabble in mythological subjects or the ‘false’.

However the movements themselves are similar in some ways. In terms of stylistic features both movements relied on individuality and originality. In addition, some paintings are spontaneous. They are also similar in their employment of shock tactics and confrontation of the viewer, taking them out of their comfort zone.

An example of a realist artist who uses these shock tactics as a main theme in his work is Francisco Goya. Goya is considered to be the “father of modern art”. In expressing his feelings as blunt as he did, he became the leader of new artistic tendencies. He rejected previous conceptions of art and desired a new form of expression. As an artist his genius was presented in the superb quality of his work and the fact that he was far beyond his time of the classicals.

In comparison to romanticism, his work was deeply linked to the ethical importance of the figures and opposed to flattering and heroic images, Goya depicted violence and death. He represented the very core of despair, destruction and brutality in every possible way. The war victims he portrayed in his etchings and paintings were anonymous common people, real war victims.



The Shootings of May Third 1808
1814
Museo del Prado, Madrid

This particular painting depicts a scene from the Spanish war of liberation when many innocent people were shot by Napoleons troops. The king ordered it to be painted to enable Madrid's people to stand together to fight against the forces of Napoleon. The drama of the painting is shocking Those being shot look ahead in fear, symbolizing

the merciless conformity of the rifled soldiers. There is almost a sense of a cliff hanger or semantic nuance because you know what will happen. The victims crumble pathetically and huddle together. One victim's shirt represents the innocence and purity of the 5000 Spanish civilians who were executed. In his last seconds of life he stands tall with his arms stretching outwards, open to the rifles, in a crucifixion fashion. The dead bodies and bloody corpses intensify the drama. Their warped, mangled and lifeless bodies suggest the courage of the other victims who knew they would join the corpses.

The painting uses a powerful and expressive amount of color, highlighting the scene. One similarity with Gericault's painting is the use of, again, the yellow biblical light. The war is depicted as disgraceful and futile. There are no heroes, like some paintings in the romanticism era, only those that died and those that were killed.

In conclusion, I have drawn both similarities and differences between both artists and art movements, having touched upon themes, subjects and stylistic features