

Expressive Critical Activity

The two paintings I have chosen to write about are “The Marchioness of Pontejos” painted by Goya and “La Goulue Entering the Moulin Rouge” by Toulouse Lautrec.

“The Marchioness of Pontejos” painted by Goya was painted in 1786. This painting was probably commissioned to celebrate her marriage to the brother of Count Floridablanca. Unlike the French and English the Spanish were prepared to pose at great length, this explains the paintings stiff, expressionless quality.

Goya was a Spanish painter and graphic artist (graphic arts is the collective term for the pictorial arts, outside paintings e.g. engraving, lithography, silk, screen etc.)

I love the way Goya gave the Marchioness a porcelain complexion, it makes the Marchioness look very attractive and healthy looking with her rosy cheeks.

The background in the painting is very interesting. The colours are soft and peaceful looking. The background makes the Marchioness seem as if she has no worries or problems. She is standing in a forest, this forest seems enchanted, mainly by the way Goya has used colour and detail in the trees. There is also a small dog in front of her. The collar on the dog makes it suit the picture as it has a bow and is pink – giving the dog a more feminine look.

The Marchioness is wearing an elegant looking dress. The dress is long and made up with an abundance of clear silk. The flowers seem to be attached to the dress with a pink/ red ribbon almost the same colour as her cheeks. The flowers are painted with so much detail that they almost look real. Her hat compliments her dress well. The Marchioness is holding a pink carnation, which signifies motherhood or denotes betrothal and love.

Goya’s working practice, like Velazquez’ was to cover the canvas in one session, adding detail later. This first – stage technique of “wet – in – wet” resulted in a softness of definition, created by the colours and tones overlapping and blending into each other.

The expression on the Marchioness’ face, I don’t think matches with the rest of the painting. She has a very serious look about her, but you would think her expression would be happy as it seems to me she is in a fantasy world – a sort of magical forest.

The second painting “La Goulue Entering the Moulin Rouge” was painted in 1891-92.

Toulouse – Lautrec was very interested in painting cabarets dancers and singers. He has done many paintings of La Goulue. La Goulue is standing in the Moulin Rouge with her close friend Mome Fromage and a young dancer. The three women are brilliantly characterised by the differences in their costumes. La Goulue is wearing a very low – cut, provocative dress showing her cleavage whereas the young dancer is wearing a dress, which covers her up to the neck.

The brush strokes are clearer in this painting especially on La Goulue’s dress. I don’t particularly like the way Toulouse – Lautrec has painted her dress, to me it makes La Goulue look very dirty like a tramp. In saying this, I think Toulouse – Lautrec meant this; he wanted to show that she is a dancer in the Moulin Rouge during the Parisian Demi – Monde.

La Goulue’s facial expression seems to give the impression that she is better than everyone else. She looks like she is sticking her nose up at everyone.

The fine, delicate hands of La Goulue contrast with the large, insensitive ones of Mome Fromage.

There is also a man in the background. He seems to be out of place, as if he appeared like fate.

I don't like the colour in this painting at all. I think it looks too gloomy and grubby. In fact the only bright colour is in La Goulue's dress and even that is made to look dull by the dark brush strokes Toulouse – Lautrec has used.

Of the two paintings I prefer Goya's "The Marchioness of Pontejos". I think it is a more exquisite painting. The two ladies in the paintings are completely different. The Marchioness is wearing a very stylish, elegant dress whereas La Goulue is wearing a very low cut revealing dress. The Toulouse – Lautrec painting is busier than Goya's. There are four people in Toulouse – Lautrec's painting and only one person plus a dog in Goya's.

Goya's painting is pre photography whereas Toulouse – Lautrec's is post photography. Goya's painting is romantic but Toulouse – Lautrec's is post impressionist. The colours used in both paintings are very different; Goya has used more soft, subtle romantic colours whereas Toulouse – Lautrec has used strong colours, which reflects La Goulue's facial expression. La Goulue looks a very strong, powerful character, maybe this is because this painting was done during the Parisian demi – monde. You needed to be strong to survive in this environment. The Marchioness' facial expression is very different to that of La Goulue's she seems a weak vulnerable character.

I really like the facial expression of La Goulue as I like the fact that she is a powerful woman able to be independent however "The Marchioness of Pontejos" is my favourite. The colours used are magnificent and the fine touches of detail in my opinion, are superior to those of Toulouse – Lautrec.¹

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