

French art during the nineteenth century experienced a dramatic change due to the considerable changes brought by new technology developed during the Industrial Revolution. Romanticism propelled a myriad of artistic and cultural movements in France during the late eighteenth century, and throughout the nineteenth century. Opposition to the state and strictness of Classicism sparked Romanticism, which focused on creativity, emotion, and the senses over formal rules (Neal, 141). Realism soon developed after Romanticism, and mainly focused on portraying common people (Neal, 146). These movements sparked Impressionism, which first emerged in Paris during the late nineteenth century. Impressionism portrayed “realistic scenes of modern life” (Wikipedia). These artistic movements were a far cry from Humanism developed during the Renaissance, and Classicism developed during the reign of King Louis XIV.

The Industrial Revolution brought with it both positives, and negatives for the French people. Technological advancements such as the rotary printing press, railroads, trains, and better roads made France more connected to itself and to the rest of the world. Through manufacturing products that had been considered luxurious became more readily available to the masses. Unfortunately the French that worked in these factories that made these products more accessible, experienced terrible working conditions. The French business owners benefitted at the expense of their workers, who would be forced to work long and tiresome hours. Furthermore, these workers were paid meager wages despite their long work days. Workers could not protest these working conditions as the business owners could easily hire another desperate man in need of a job.

The painting *The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning* by Camille Pissarro portrays some of the dreary aspects that accompanied the Industrial Revolution in France. The painting is an example of Impressionism, as it shows a realistic scene of a crowded boulevard in

Paris, France during a cold winter morning. The streets and sidewalks are crowded with people and carriages possibly making their way to work. The individuals are just blurs, and nothing unique stands out from the large mass. The French people might have felt as just another person in a world becoming increasingly more connected as a result of technology. This contrasts with Humanism, as individuality and indications of human potential are absent from the painting. In a time in which both the population and cities were booming, an ordinary person might have felt overshadowed living in such a large city such as Paris. The fact that workers were expendable to their superiors would make commoners feel even more undistinguished.

The painting gives off an aura of dreariness, as it lacks both color and intricacy. The dull grayish colors of the painting, the cloudy overcast, and the leafless trees all combine together to give off a dull mood. The city's large buildings dwarf the tiny faceless Parisians, emphasizing the importance of industry and technology over individuals. The painting's focal point is a tall streetlight that towers over the human crowd. Electricity was a recent technological advancement, making this represent yet another reference to technology overshadowing individuals.

The Industrial Revolution was bittersweet for the French people. The advances in technology allowed the French in the nineteenth century to enjoy more luxurious products. But at the same time the countless French citizens who worked in factories to manufacture these products were just viewed as a piece of capital by their superiors. The world was becoming more globalized and connected due to these advances in technology, causing people to lose individuality. Pissarro echoes these sentiments held by the French public in his painting by placing no emphasis on individual human features. Human potential is also downplayed by the painting's large streetlight and buildings, which overshadow the tiny people. From Pissarro's

painting we can learn that the Industrial Revolution, and the various advances in technology caused the French public to feel both undervalued, and overlooked during the nineteenth century.



Retrieved from:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Camille_Pissarro_Boulevard_Montmartre.JPG

References

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