

## Book Review

*Gardner's Art Through the Ages: The Western Perspective, 14<sup>th</sup> Edition, Volume II.* By Fred S. Kleiner. Cengage Learning, Boston. 2014. ISBN-13: 978-1-133-95480-4. 601 pp. Hardcover, \$ 139.24.

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In contemporary times, there is a virtual invasion of visuals and images. In order to understand the obvious and subliminal connotations behind any image or visual which is available for television screens, webpages, magazines, cinema, art galleries, art exhibitions and even mobile phone applications one cannot ignore the importance of a thorough understanding of the discipline of Art History. This discipline deals with the paintings, sculpture and architecture created by individuals in the past to the art and visual culture of contemporary times. Besides offering historical contexts of the artworks, it also offers a great deal of technical knowledge necessary for the critical awareness of different art forms. It offers careers not only in areas like art curation, art law, art conservation and restoration, visual resources management, archaeology, architecture, historical preservation but it also provides an understanding in various areas of Media Sciences, like cinematography, art direction, advertising and film criticism.

There are a few books available on Art History that not only provide a fair understanding to a general reader but also offer a thorough academic survey of different movements of art and architecture, photography and new media for professional artists, art and media students. One of such books is *Art through the Ages*, published by Helen Gardner in 1926. The current edition, that is under review is written by Fred Leiner, which boasts roughly 1,400 photographs, plans, and drawings, including hundreds of new images. This particular volume deals with history of evolution of Western Art after 1300 AD.

This volume starts with Late Medieval Period in Europe (1200-1400 AD) and refers to the approaching Renaissance and discusses why painting lagged behind sculpture and architecture. In Northern Europe, painters popularized the use of oil paints on wood panels and their artworks are loaded with symbolism. While discussing 15<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance Humanism (1400-1500 AD) in Italy the book offers great insights about Florence Cathedral, the discovery of perspective by Brunelleschi and its effective use by Masaccio in paintings. How the classical style in architecture was revived by Italian architects is explained very clearly with the help of many examples.

During High Renaissance (1490-1520 AD), Italian Artists, especially from Venice remained focused on color and application of paint whereas drawing remained the most important virtue for the artists of Florence and Rome. It was the time when artists achieved perfection in linear and atmospheric perspective. Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael appeared as the masters of drawing, figure and composition respectively. The Classical Humanism of Renaissance was followed by Mannerism (1520-1600 AD) and Mannerists broke rules of Renaissance. Ambiguous space, distorted figures, size and perspective were the hallmarks of Mannerism. Michelangelo worked in Mannerist mode in the Laurentian Library vestibule, disposed willfully of almost all the rules of classical architecture. Baroque Art (1600-1730

AD) was a return to basic colors, figural proportions, classical scale and extreme contraction or expansion of space. Illusionistic ceiling paintings were very popular in Baroque Italy. Bernini's colonnade framing the piazza in front of Saint Peter's is not a traditional rectangular atrium but two curving arms welcoming worshippers. In Netherland, the Dutch Baroque Art was under the influence of Protestantism. There, the still life, portrait, landscape, genre paintings and etchings reached ultimate heights.

The revival of interest in Greek and Roman Art in 18<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to the artistic movement known as Neoclassicism (1700-1800 AD). Works of this period appeared as more-drawn-than-painted and compositions had closed canvasses and were highly organized. In late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the trend of Romanticism developed gradually yet steadily. It followed a more-painted-than-drawn approach, laid emphasis on open compositions, motion and spirituality. Romantic painters often chose landscapes as an ideal subject to express the theme of the soul unified with the natural world. Realism developed in mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century France. Its leading proponent was Gustave Courbet, whose paintings of working class and ordinary people exemplify his belief that painters should paint contemporary events. He gave place to ordinary people on his huge canvasses. In 1839, Daguerre in Paris and Talbot in London invented the first practical photographic processes. Muybridge's sequential photos of human and animal motion like Horse Galloping, 1878, were the forerunners of the modern cinema.

The first exhibition of a group of friends, later to be called Impressionists, led by Claude Monet was held in 1874. They were the painters of light and wanted to capture fleeting moments and that is why they used to work outdoors. They also focused on recording the contemporary urban scene in Paris. Van Gogh was an important Post-Impressionist painter who explored the capabilities of colors and distorted forms to express emotions. In the early 1900s, avant-garde artists searched for new definitions of art in a changed world and conveyed the importance of empathy and feeling in artworks. The abstract style was developed to express pure feeling through geometrical shapes. The Bauhaus in Germany promoted the integration of all the arts in constructing modern living environments. The leading American architect was Frank Lloyd Wright in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who promoted the "architecture of democracy," in which free individuals move in a "free" space. The Surrealists investigated ways to express the world of dreams and the unconscious in art and they were concerned with internal reality and importance of unconscious mind.

The art of the decades following World War II focuses on the viewer and make multiple interpretations possible. The art of this Postmodernist period reflects cultural upheaval, rejection of traditional values, the civil rights and feminist movements, and the new consumer society. Pop artists, such as Warhol, turned away from abstraction to the representation of subjects from popular media and marketing and from contemporary life.

In Contemporary times the Social and Political Art is addressing social and political issues and dealing with abstraction to brutal realism. Gender and sexuality are the central themes in the work of artists like Barbara Kruger, the Guerrilla Girls, and in the works of Pakistani artist Shahzia Sikander. Postmodern architecture is as diverse as contemporary painting and sculpture. The monuments designed by Maya Lin, Rachel Whiteread, and Richard Serra bridge the gap between architecture and sculpture.

In all, this book offers great insight on history and other and equally valuable for painters, directors, arts and media studies students. The author has attempted to explain with the style of the art of later centuries. On the artists of Asia, particularly South Asia, is mentioned in the last chapter but she is practicing in Europe and America for the

In all, this book offers great insight on how different art movements are connected with each other and equally valuable for painters, sculptors, architects, filmmakers, cinematographers, directors, arts and media studies students and for people associated with advertising. The author has attempted to explain with many examples how art of one century triggered the style of the art of later centuries. On the other hand, this book does not offer any insights on the artists of Asia, particularly South Asia. Only one Pakistani Artist Shazia Sikandar's work is mentioned in the last chapter but she is the one who is not practicing art in Pakistan but practicing in Europe and America for the last ten years.