
Comparative analysis in art

This comparison will look at Henry Moore's, *Woman Seated in the Underground*, (Figure 1, 1941) and Pablo Picasso's, *Bullfight Scene* (Figure 2, 1960).

Picasso's drawing was completed in ink on paper (480 by 623 mm in size) and depicts the picador, on his horse, lancing a bull. The focus is not on fine detail, but rather on the motion and form of the figures; the image is a still frame capturing the energy of the moment. A variety of tones are achieved by watering down ink, which breaks up the figures into more descriptive forms, as opposed to a solid silhouette.

This drawing is the tenth of the fourteen produced that day (25/02/1960), which depict the different stages of the bullfight. Moore's drawing portrays a woman seated in the London underground during the events of the Blitz. A much wider variety of media was used including gouache, ink, watercolour, and crayon on paper (483 by 381 mm in size); however, it is also a completed work, part of a series of drawings produced under the commission of the War Artists Advisory Committee.

The figure itself holds no facial features or expression; the atmosphere is portrayed primarily through the media and line. Body language is another detail that exemplifies the tone of the drawing. In the background, we see a mass of people, ghosted in white crayon. The somber mood is enforced by Moore's use of pastel greys and dulled watercolors.

The drawings differ on many points. They express very different visual languages through their choice of media, which is also influenced by the type of drawing and more by the environment they were produced in and for what purpose. However, both artists avoid naturalistic detail in favor of media and composition to describe their respective scenes.

The artists have generated drawings with emotion and meaning without having to directly reproduce reality. I am arguing the necessity of true-to-life detail, achieved by a medium like photography, to successfully portray a scene. In addition, I will break down the interpretation of the works from outside the artists perspective and how successful the drawings translated their subjects.

Majority of Moore's shelter drawings depict groups of shelterers, however here a lone woman sits apart, "Anxiously clasping her hands" (Tate, 2004) sitting in an upright position, inferring alertness. The texture is a large part of Moore's drawing: "Network of nervous, scratchy lines that describe the figure" (Tate, 2004), "In texture and color the paper resembles a slab of

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weathered concrete,” (Ashford, 2007).

The texture and dulled color perfectly encapsulates the atmosphere of Moore’s Underground world - Moore used Pen, ink and predominantly the wax-resist technique with watercolor in both his sketchbook and finished drawings (Moore, 1988, pp.12). The tension is very much felt observing the drawing; you feel sympathy for the heavily swaddled shelterers.

Moore emphasized that he never made drawings in the Underground - “It would have been like making sketches in the hold of a slave ship” (Moore, 1988, pp.10) – not wanting to unnerve people in the circumstances. He would make notes and reproduce them later at home - “a note like two people sleeping under one blanket would be enough of a reminder to enable me to make a sketch the next day.” (Moore, 1988, pp.10) ‘A Shelter Sketchbook’ (Moore, 1988) contains a particular sketch identical in resemblance to ‘Woman Seated in the Underground’.

In this sketch the figure contains more recognizable facial features, a decision must have been made to remove these in the final drawing. “Moore’s interpretation was... somewhat removed from the average shelterer’s own experience... His featureless sleepers are all doomed and haunted... To him, it is the collective pattern and not the individual experience that is of importance.” (Newton, 1945, pp.9) Newton states that Moore’s Shelter drawings form a collective, not focused on individuals that can be recognized, but the collective suffering of a nation.

Moore found inspiration in the Underground mimicking his sculptural eye – “I had never seen so many rows of reclining figures (referring to his series of reclining nude sculptures) and even the holes, out of which the trains were coming seemed to me to be like them, holes in my sculpture.” (Moore, 1988, pp.9) Frances Carey goes further to say “The whole meaning and substance of his past work is implicit in his new work.” (Carey, 1988) exemplifying the influence of his sculptural work. Moore’s Underground figures have been compared to “the casts of victims of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius at Pompeii.”(Phaidon, 2013) Almost sculptures themselves and similarly a faceless community, facing a harrowing experience.

In 1960 Picasso would have been 79, yet he became more productive in his later years, producing a larger volume and variety of work (Penrose and Golding, 1981, pp.127) – The use of simply ink on paper in figure 2 supports this, the medium allows for a faster work rate. Picasso and Moore used their subjects, depicted in Figures 1 and 2, to continue producing work in times when the artists could be seen to be a transition to new stages in their lives. Although Moore’s works were commissioned they still are very much an extension of his sculptural work. Picasso’s, however, did not develop his drawings as Moore did; instead, we see a production of quantity.

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It is evident Picasso used a brush with ink – this motion, of the brush, mimics the direction of movement, particularly in the bull's tail. The ink was watered down to achieve a variety of tones, breaking apart the figures making the forms more distinguishable. The scaling of the bull and the receding matador in the background creates a sense of depth in a simplistic drawing.

The Tate summary of Picasso's drawing reads: 'Bullfight Scene' illustrates a dramatic moment in which the picador spears the bull as it charges, while the matador stands in the background, ready to step in for the final phase of the killing to begin." (Bottinelli, 2004) - Which gives adequate context to begin to decode the image.

However looking at the whole series, a narrative is evident; However "many of them having been drawn before going to the corrida and made up of memories of previous corridas - drawn, as Picasso has said, to earn his admission to the arena" (Sabart's, 1961. pp.54) Sabart's tells us the drawings do not strictly follow a specific narrative, yet still depict the sequential stages of the bullfight.

Picasso and Moore's visual Languages differ greatly. Both artists are recreating a scene, but the artist's processes are very different – this could be attributed to Moore's sculptural background and his new exploration of drawing as an end of its own; versus Picasso who "felt to be active is to be alive" (Penrose and Golding, 1981, pp.127). In addition, Moore was producing finished works for his War Artist Commission, as opposed to Picasso who practiced his drawing to fill his life, recording his days.

Artist Henri Matisse believed "there is an inherent truth which must be disengaged from the outward appearance of the object to be represented. This is the only truth that matters." (Flam, 1973. pp.117) A statement that is applicable to both Figures 1 and 2. Sabart's presents an excellent example: "No one has seen a bull exactly as Picasso sees him... His bulls are real bulls; bulls... wild creatures, vibrant with life and incalculable strength... the true image of a bull, translated from the artist's memories" (Sabart's, 1961. pp.52).

Looking solely at his ink drawing, it is hard to envisage the true image Picasso was portraying. The collection of which Figure 2 is part of demonstrates a narrative that embodies something much grander. Sabart's continues, "I do not think that it is at all possible to compare our vision to that of Picasso. Indeed, as he has said, no one can imagine what he sees as he has really seen it." (Sabart's, 1961. pp.58)

Moore's drawings were misinterpreted by the British public: Art critic Keith Vaughan believed "The decision to give Henry Moore, a sculptor with an exceedingly personal sense of form, the material of tube shelters... was surely one of great foresight and courage," (Lehmann, 1943) – however, Londoners felt "insulted" as they were excluded from the Underground world Moore

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was portraying (Lehmann, 1943). David Ashford described the drawings as “alienating imagery of immemorial long-suffering and passive endurance’ (that) subsequently became ‘the key image ... of a putative “people's war”,” (Ashford, 2007).

Vaughan believes knowledge of Moore’s previous sculptural work was essential to fully understand the Underground drawings (Lehmann, 1943), which could explain the adverse reaction from the public. Vaughan continues: “I have heard people call these drawings morbid and unreal. I do not think either criticism is justified. The qualities they stress are not less real because they lie deeper than the obvious and the apparent.” (Lehmann, 1943) further, exemplify the need to be familiar with Moore’s previous work to understand his intentions.

The forms he has evolved for the presentation of the human figure have grown out of... his materials of wood and stone.” (Lehmann, 1943) Moore’s style comes from the translation of his Sculptural background into the medium of drawing. Another critic wrote: “Moore has surrendered nothing... of his individual style” (Read, 1941) exemplifying that Moore was treating drawing as “an end in itself” (Hall, 1966, pp.103) - During World War Two Moore’s rented studio was damaged by the bombing. Moore was unable to complete his sculptural work, hence turned to the medium of drawing (Moore, 1988).

Matisse’s writing explores the idea of a deeper than the surface understanding: “it is thus evident that the anatomical, organic inexactitude in these drawings has not harmed the expression of the intimate character and the inherent truth of the personality, but on the contrary has helped clarify it.” (Flam, 1973. pp.117-119) Matisse maintains each drawing comes from the artists understanding of the subject, which becomes identifiable to the artist: “It is not changed by the different conditions under which the drawing is made; on the contrary the expression of his truth by the elasticity of its line and by its freedom lends itself to the demands of the composition;” (Flam, 1973. pp.117-119)

The ‘truth’ of the subject is not altered by the medium. A greater knowledge is required to fully develop the understanding of the drawing: Just as Knowledge of the bullfighting tradition supplements the simpler ink drawing; and that an understanding of Moore’s previous sculptural work has significantly influenced his Underground works.

Jean Sutherland Boggs reasons, “As an old man, Picasso could not help but be conscious of death... The bull-fight is surely a reminder of death,” (Penrose and Golding, 1981, pp.127) Ronald Penrose has a more developed understanding of the bullfight theme - “The man... the horse and the bull were all victims of an inextricable cycle of life and death... The Bull is everlasting, it is continually replaced and becomes in this way the symbol of the enduring force of life.” (Penrose and Golding, 1981, pp110-111)

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Boggs relates Picasso's fascination with bullfighting towards the end of his life is foreshadowing what is to come. While Penrose believes "The work of Picasso is above all an inquiry by visual means into the nature of that elusive thing reality" (Penrose and Golding, 1981, pp102) suggesting the bullfight theme is not driven by the concept of death – New characters are constantly reintroduced (bullfighters) but bull is "everlasting", A metaphor for his own life; Picasso transitions to produce new styles of work but He is the constant.

The theme of death is much more apparent in Moore's drawing, Erich Neumann's ideas particularly: "Increasingly "abstract" ghostly figures... the nearly recumbent sleepers are like the dead, and how the protection afforded by the swathing blanket is often barely distinguishable from the final security of death. Some of the shelter drawings are not just pictures of underground caves, but of the underworld" (Neumann, 1959, pp.80).

Many critics refer to the white wax creating the ghostly featureless figures: "spectral, skeletal, bereft of flesh and blood." (Phaidon, 2013) In addition many have noted, "The apparent absence of period detail led some... to interpret such figures as timeless symbols of fear, vulnerability, and endurance." (Tate, 2004) The idea of timelessness further adds to the concept of ghostly, haunting, figures. Furthermore, numerous comparisons have been made to "nightmarish slave ships" (Russell, 1968, pp.81) as if the figures are prisoners.

Moore's recollection of the Underground is quite the opposite: "there were intimate little touches. Children fast asleep... People who were obviously strangers... forming tight little intimate groups." (Moore, 1988, pp.9) What Moore described was that of a community coming together - "They were cut off from what was happening above, but they were aware of it." (Moore, 1988, pp.10) The removal of individuality only reinforces the idea of a collective, however, the public had misinterpreted the concept.

Picasso's drawing portrays the event of the bull's death as part of the circle of life, but it is constantly replaced; a romantic idealization. Moore's drawings have been compared to ghostly remnants, timeless reminders of the blitz and the obvious death associated with it.

Picasso's 'Bullfight Scene' and Moore's 'Woman Seated in the Underground' depict two very different scenes, yet both are only successful in portraying their subject to an extent. Moore's drawing is very visual, projects the atmosphere through the texture particularly. Moore's sculpture background heavily influences the outcomes, however, left the public feeling misrepresented, lost in the translation of his concepts.

Picasso's drawing is successful in capturing the scene in a simplistic vision, yet the drawing is best seen as part of its narrative where the tradition of the bullfight is more apparent. The drawings are a projection of the artists 'truth', however, they need decoding: There is a

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conflicting debate about the themes of Picasso's drawing, torn between the celebration of tradition or foreshadowing what is to come in his later years.

Moore was fascinated by the idea of the collective, removing individuality from his images; he upset the British public who felt excluded from the Underground world. In addition, many critics perceived Moore's Underground figures as timeless symbols of pain, comparing the scenes to be purgatory-like – quite the contrasting view of what Moore saw and intended to show of the Underground.

The Drawings show how 'truth' can be reimagined to depict the 'artist's truth', yet the translation may not always be so apparent, and is subjective to the viewers understanding.

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