

Elements of Visual Representation
Prof. Shatarupa Thakurta Roy
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Lecture - 02

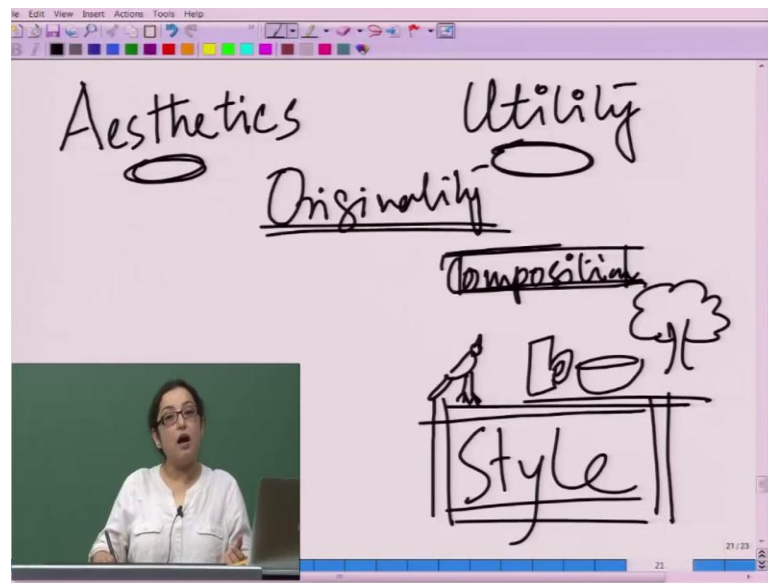
I am going to discuss a very important aspect, where we need to discuss what art is. There is no one answer for this question, because why is art? Is another very important question that sometimes overpowered this whole topic of, what is art. Why is art needed in our life? Whether it is at all needed or when we talk about visual expression, how artistic that should be, whether we are gifted with talent to make something artistic, whether we can train ourselves to become more artistic. How do we know, what is art and how do we differentiate art from non art. These are the confusions the questions that we have in our mind. So, I am not the right person to answer all of them, but I will try to answer them from different references and let us get into a dialogue. Let us come face to face to the factor, which is a three letter word called a r t, art.

So, this three letter word the art with a capital A has two different aspects. When we say something is art, we consider two different things, one is the utility and the aesthetics. So, the aesthetic part becomes art and we try to remove the utility factor as much as possible. To simplify it, I may take reference from K. G. Subramanyan where he says that, this is a very recent phenomenon that we are separating this two aspects.

Utility and aesthetics used to be combined in an older time. It is only very recently that we have got into mass production and that made us, look at utility and aesthetics differently. There are other considerations also, that to know there are articles like the article titled what is art by Rabindranath Tagore, where he said that art is like a creative surplus. It is surplus, it is something extra, because you know, to him it was more like a art is not something that is our common or essential physical need, it is rather a mental need.

So, if we are like put forward with a factor of art in our life, we may say that we need to eat, we need to get clothes and shelter to lead our life's. But, we can survive without art, but that is also a very big question. Can we really survive without art? So, that is the question that we have certain extra things that is part of our mental need, our mind needs art. So, that is maybe the answer for, why is art, why is art there.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:39)



Let us take a simple example to understand all this utility, aesthetics, arts and all the questions, queries, controversies are related to that. Aesthetics and utility can easily be merged, when we take references from daily life things. There are people, who walk miles to fetch a bucket of water, but still they bother to decorate the pots, you know the pots where they carry their water. So, why is that? Is it really needed, that has got nothing to do with the utility purpose, but still there are things that we do.

We use certain utensils, we use many other things, we use our cars, we have many other things, where we consider the outer look of it. So, aesthetics and utility are not actually separated, they can very well go hand in hand, that is how like we consider the form and function of each and everything. But, that is a question of further query, further understanding, now let us also talk about originality in the same aspect.

So, as a creative individual one has to be original, then the question is how much originality is possible by a human being. Because, the most original creative human being will also carry a lot of preconceived notion, a lot of understanding, a lot of things in their genes. So, there is nothing that is totally original. So, originality, utility, aesthetics these are the aspects that are intrinsically connected to the quality of art that makes art different from non art.

But, we need to be in a constant dialogue in a constant query to understand, how art function and how art works. So, I will go back to the reference of K. G. Subramanyan

and also to Tagore again, that you know when K. G. Subramanyan said that you like, the most creative individual cannot be original, because he carries a lot of thing in his gene. At the same time to know, like we also read another very interesting quote from Tagore, where he says that in art, man reveals himself and not the object.

So, it is not what we are making, but how we are making and how we are expressing ourselves through just one object. So, the object is almost like a medium that we are trying to objectify certain things, we make something materially that is something what appears and we express ourselves through that. But, the most important thing is a urge of expression, unless we feel that urge of expressing ourselves, we do not go and create art or create anything.

However, the art is all about a good visual arrangement, whatever form that may take, it can be highly ephemeral that, it does not even remain for too long. It can be a permanent thing, it can be just a performance on many other things. So, right now we are talking about visual representation and visual examples. So, let us say that you know when we are expressing our ideas through visual images, we discuss that earlier also that, it has to have a good organization, good image organization.

So, the composition is very important. So, how we are composing the ideas, how we are composing the multiple images, we may have one object, another object, another different object. It can have, you know many other objects, it has to be combined and arranged properly and that is the rule of art. So, not every good visual arrangements can be art, but the art has to be mandatorily the good example of good visual arrangement.

So, if we at all go wrong in the visual arrangement in the visual organization, how we compose things, we cannot call it art at all, that much understanding we all have. So, let us proceed from that style. When we say that, you know every art form has to be compulsorily a good example of a good visual arrangement, we need to see what makes it good. So, there has to be some consistencies in style to get that how many, there has to be some consistency in the form, the content, the other aspects.

So, let us see what style is, because style is very big consideration as far as art is concerned. So, work of art may be described in basic terms as having two primary components in it, one is the form and the other one is a content and if they are matching with each other, well then we get a good visual style. So, style is basically a combination

of form and content, art is distinguished by many other aspects like style, medium and period.

So, when we are talking about a particular visual style, we should also consider the time it is executed in and also the medium. Whether it is done in like, whether it is a stone carving or a oil painting or it is a wood carving or it is an installation art, those are the considerations. Now, we get to see art from different time period, the art that was created centuries back may not be significant in today's context. We may like that art, we may appreciate that particular art, we may still feel that has a lot of things to contribute in today's context, but every time we need to see it with its context.

So, this contextualization and also seeing things without its context. So, contextualization, decontextualization these are the part of consideration, that is part of art appreciation and that is how we look at it. So, when we see an artwork and also know which time it belongs, it gives us a different notion, we see it from a different perspective. We see the same work with no mentioning, no clue of the time period of it, it will give us a different sense of understanding and there are different aspects of looking at art.

We have different considerations; we see visual arrangements from purely semiotic point of view, where all its elements and principles are the basic factor. We have no clue about its background, who has made it, in what condition it was made, what does it mean and other thing. So, everything is revealed through the elements and the elementary use of it. So, that is a semiotic approach towards art, there are also the thematic connection, where we know.

We have basic clue about the background, who has made it from where it has come from. So, that is another consideration and then, the iconic factor in the iconic plane we talk about the symbolism that is more culture specific. We need to know the meaning of the specific symbols. So, there different ways of looking and appreciating art, we see art from different time period as we mentioned earlier.

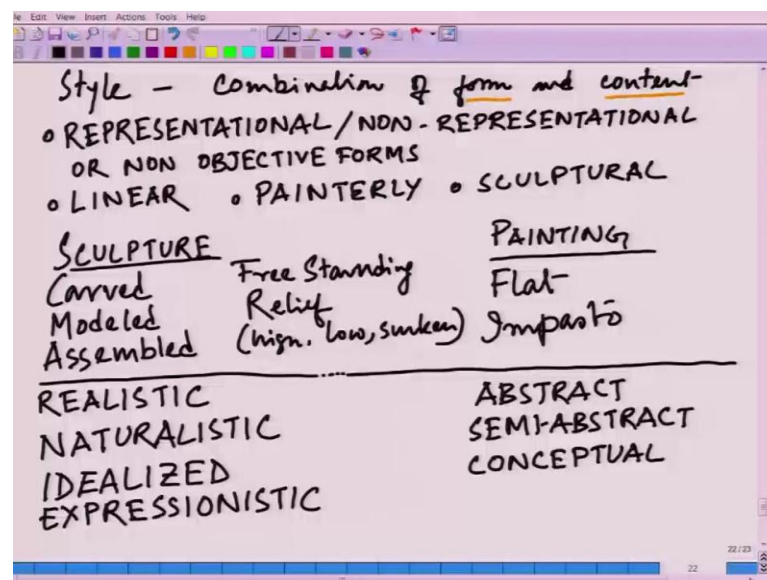
So, an art done in 19th century will be different from an art done in 16th century or maybe, they may look similar with similar unlike, may be a particular understanding. So, from when we talk about from, we consider many different things like the elementary part of it, the line color, the texture, the special qualities composition that we are slowly

discussing in this context. The quality of line is very interesting, some paintings are linear, some are painterly there are many other things.

Also for color, we consider at the, you the basic pigment the value, the value is like, how dark or how light the color is. So, we look at a color in terms of it is value, it is gradience. So, value is also connected to intensity, then we have the surface, the texture and many others aspects to look at it, so those are the elementary part of art. And then, there are special qualities we consider the mass, volume, space, then the negative space which is unfilled, the positive space which is solid, the negative positive relationship and many other things.

So, in the composition the pictorial depth, the pictorial plane, the pictorial arrangement, overlapping dimension, perspective, those are most of our considerations and at the content part the subject matter, the idle or the ideology behind it, the social political economic context in which the work was created, the intention of the artist that is important, the meaning of the art work that can also come into the scene. The reception, the reaction, the audience to the work that all takes place.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:28)



Style is a combination of form and content, characteristic features that makes a painting distinctive, has specialized terminologies, like representational, it can be non representational or non objective, whether the subject matter is recognizable or not, becomes the primary factor. So, if we get some association with some other object with

that object we cannot call it totally non objective. So, a non objective form cannot be associated with any other objects that are otherwise found in nature, that are found around us.

Linear painting or linear art is where line works as a primary means of definition. The painterly style include in it is like what it includes, our shadows, shading, modeling, highlights, they are the thing that dominate in a painterly style. The sculptural paintings or the sculptural style has three dimensional qualities, so that can also be added into painting. So, the sculptural paintings look three dimensional, they have a three dimensional field.

Now, style in sculpture is like the ways of distinguishing basic techniques of a sculpture or whether it is carved out, that is like when you take out a block and go by reducing the thing, you go by the deduction process. The model things are addition, you add surface to it, you add lump of clay or you know it can also happen that you can assemble multiple objects. So, the assemble sculptures are where we can create objects which are taken from different sources and we put them together like installation art.

Ways of distinguishing physical characteristics of sculpture can be like, whether it is a free standing sculpture or it is a high, low or sunken relief sculpture which is not totally free standing. In painting, similarly we have either flat surfaces or some of the artists they use impasto technique, where they apply thick paints to get some natural shadows in it. So, it gives you a different sensation of the surface, we see that in many of the artist works.

The most popular example may be in the paintings of Bangkok. Now, realistic art works depicts objects as they are in actual or visible reality. Similarly, naturalistic artworks are physical like it is all about the physical appearance or of the rented image in nature is a primary inspiration. So, simplified objects here resembles with less exactitude, idealized things are different from the naturalistic things, because naturalistic things are how they are and idealistic art works are how they should be.

So, it is an attempt for perfection grounded in prevailing values of a culture. Expressionistic artworks appeals to subjective responses of the beholder, often through exaggeration of form for the sake of better expressions. Abstract art forms is a stylistic

opposition of the other naturalistic forms, forms do not depict difficult observable objects, images represented often with the intent of extracting essence of object or idea.

So, abstraction can be idealized, it can be highly idealized that we idealize certain idea and make a form that does not resemble any other form that are seen in nature. Conceptual art forms are based on concepts and sensation impact, etcetera, etcetera and the semi abstract art forms is something which is not totally with no connection and no association, it has some visual reference, it can be geometric, it can also be something which is not totally realistic which is neither totally naturalistic nor totally abstract. So, there are different styles and that is how art is distinguished.

We discussed styles and also, what art is, why art is and all those dilemmas. So, in the next lecture we are going to talk about the basic principles of visual communication, because we communicate with a style. The style of representation has to be consistent. So, these two lectures are connected, we will go to the more deeper and practical aspects of how to decide or how to stick to the principle and then, slowly we will get into the right tool to be chosen and picked up to support the principle, so those are the elements.