

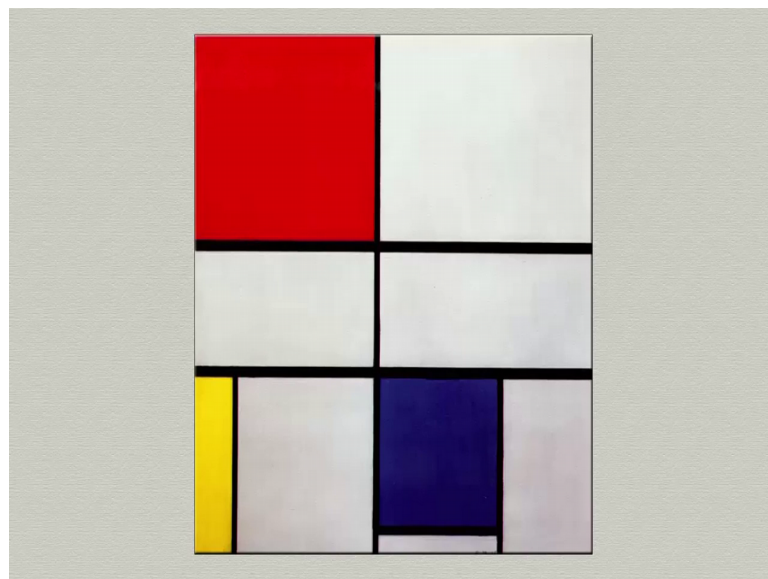
**Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists**  
**Prof. Soumik Nandy Majumdar**  
**Department of History of Art, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan Visva-Bharati**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Lecture - 01**  
**What is Modern Art**

Hello viewers. Welcome to MOOC's online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art, Movements and Artists. In this week the first week we shall be introducing you to the various aspects of modern western art. We will try to define; what is modern art we will try to see also what has gone before the modern art and also at the end of this week we will try to identify the movements which are suppose to be the beginnings the beginning movements of modern western art. The first module today we shall be basically looking at random examples of modern western art from the entire history, and see how they appear to us to our eyes and also to our senses.

The first few slides will be representations of these random samples of art works created by various artists, and at this point we are not actually concerned with the names of the artist or even a titles of the works. We are only concerned with a visual appearance the visual look and the visual impact these works might have on our sense and perception.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:59)



So, let us begin to look at some of these images. The first one for example, is a painting that appears to be completely illegible.

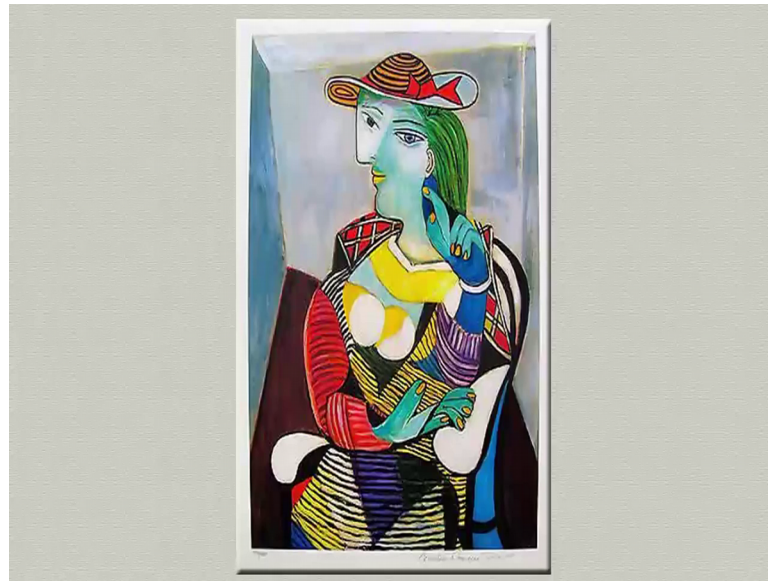
If we are to look for some motives at least some elements which are recognizable, apart from a few vertical lines few horizontal lines and the few square or rectangular color shapes or white spaces, there is not a single element which is recognizable from the visual world around. Now this is a very typical feature or one of the typical features of modern western art, where the motives at we see in the painting or in the sculpture may not be recognizable may not have any direct relationship with what we observe generally in our world around.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:02)



Now, the second example is modern sculpture. And once again a sculpture if a sculpture is suppose to represent life represent our experiences in terms of tangible, visible, recognizable forms then this particular sculpture fails due to so. But modern sculpture has something else to offer. Something beyond recognition that may move towards what we call abstraction or may not be completely abstract may be highly based on ideas or concepts, but may not be representational at all. And in this context let me clear that by the term representational we generally mean that form of visual art where the motives the shapes the colors all this things can be immediately related to our normal day to day visual experiences.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:36)



Now, in this case it is not possible, because the forms are quote unquote abstract. The forms are non representational. Now let us move to the third example the here at least the form is recognizable I mean everybody can make out this is the image of a lady a seated lady with a very colorful costume and a beautiful hat, but they what has gone wrong with her face, why? The face looks distorted is distortion a necessary feature of modern art, because a generally speaking a lot of people around due tell us that modern art usually deals with distortion, disfiguration, non recognisability and these are the features that make a modern art a modern.

Art partly true, but this is only the as a surficial story the super facial layer of the entire complex body of modern art. But this is true that this particular painting is a very good and a very meaningful representation of modern art, not just because this was painted during the face called modern art, but also the form the idiom of this art is very nontraditional very non academic and we shall come to these terms later on again.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:09)



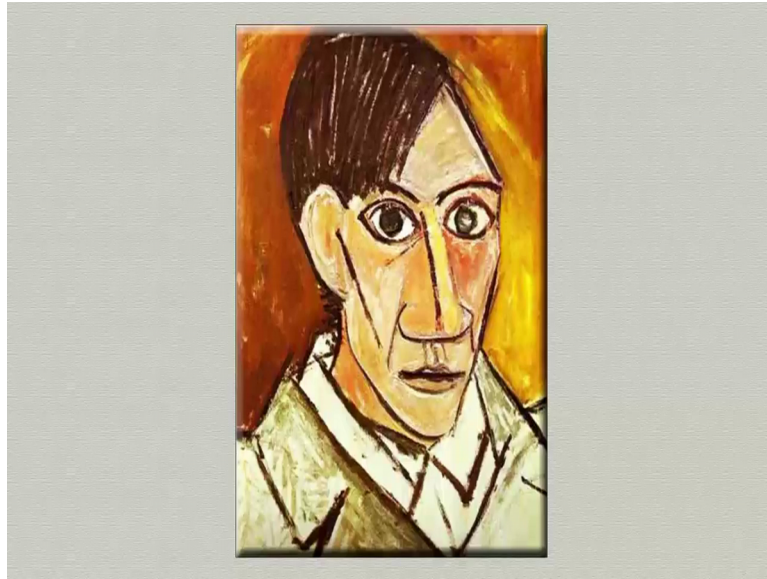
With the next example is again an example of a sculpture where recognisability is there. I mean you can not completely reject the whole idea of recognition, because you can not say that this particular sculpture looks completely abstract or this particular sculpture is beyond recognition, no. It is not at least faintly the form reminds us of a figure and if you look at the figure carefully the form reminds us of a female figure probably a reclining female figure, but this recognizing elements or the elements of recognition recognition points are very, very minimum.

By and large yes, your right this sculpture is abstract by and large the sculpture is not or the sculptor, here is not at all concerned with making the sculpture very recognizable this sculptor is more concerned with the play of forms. And if I resist myself from using the term distortion, then let me use for the want of a better term the idea of stylization.

This sculptor is more interested in stylizing the figure, to an extent when recognition is not at all important, what is important? Is for example, in this sculpture at least the rhythm the pattern and the overall balance of this sculpture.



(Refer Slide Time: 07:56)



Next, this is of course in terms of recognition I would say easy to identify this form is a face, face of a man, but then again it is hardly realistic I mean in the sense if you look at the proportion if you look at the scale if you look at the anatomical proportion and the details. This particular image does not conform to the reality. It conforms to an idea or let me say an interpretation of reality, and yes modern art to a great extent is an interpretation of reality rather than an imitation of reality.

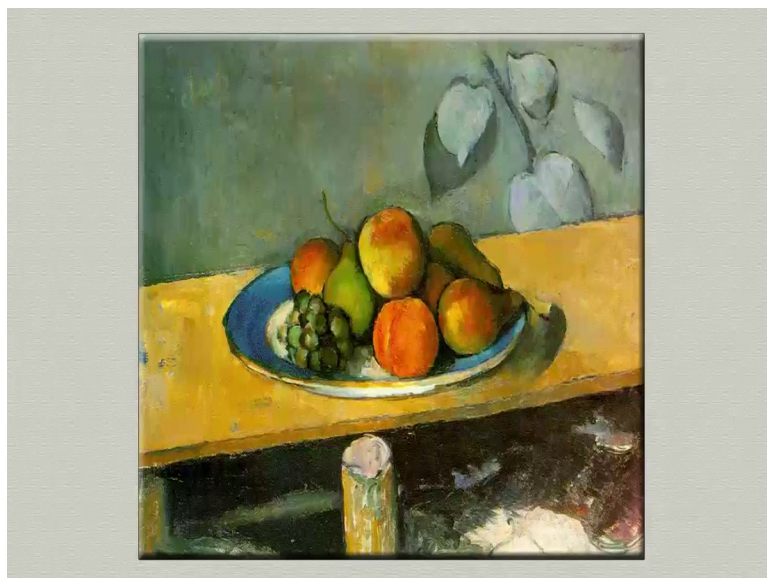
And when we discuss in our next module the pre history of modern art we are going to discuss this issue, that how in pre modern art the artist where more concerned with a kind of imitation of the reality whereas, in the modern art the artist is not at all concerned with the imitation of reality rather their more interested in interpreting reality in their own way.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:24)



For example, look at this sculpture. Again the scale is of course, we have seen huge scale sculptures also in the traditional western art, that is not the issue, but what about the form. Anybody can ask what does this sculpture mean. And when you ask this question it implies that you are not able to identify the form. You are not able to make out whether this particular form represents a human being on an insect or a tree or a plant or something that we do not know of. Anything is possible. See in other words modern western art has expanded the possibilities of subject matters.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:18)



Modern art has expanded the possibilities of interpreting the reality, but again you may also come across something like this, where the image is not very far from realism. It looks like a very ordinary simple painting of a platter full of fruits, kept on the table. All the fruits are recognizable, but then there is something which tells us that this is an example of modern art and this cannot certainly belong to the traditional western art, know why?

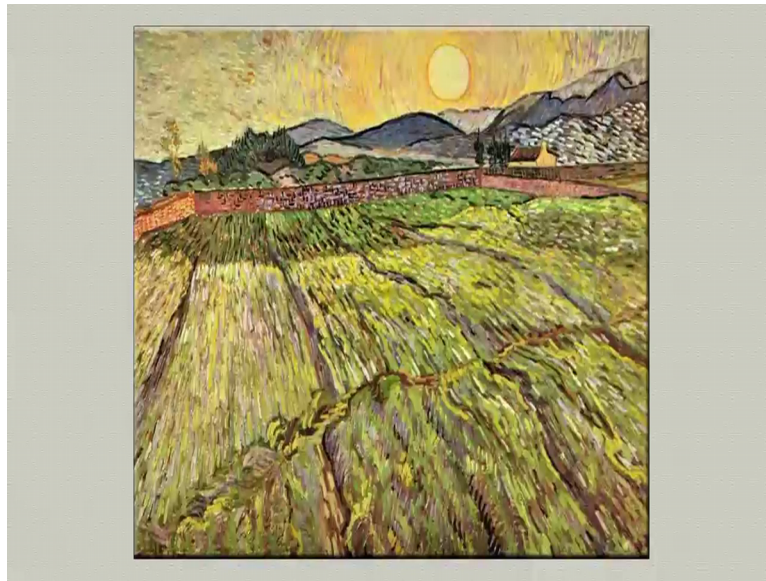
We shall look at this painting again later and discuss what makes this apparently simple and more realistic painting also a modern art.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:12)



Or for example this one there is hardly any distortion in worked in this painting, but a simple picture of a snowy of a wintry landscape, but then this is something that was not possible, by any artist from the pre modern era.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:21)



Again the same question can be asked in the context of this painting tool, what makes this painting also a modern art. Because the term modern art evokes whole lot of ideas as I have already told you. Ideas like distortion disfiguration abstraction, but this painting and the previous one in. These 2 paintings we do not say any distortion, we do not say any abstraction. We do not say any disfiguration, yet this paintings are also very strong examples of modern art.

In fact, at this point I would like to say that the range of modern art is pretty fast. On the one hand you may have examples of paintings and sculptures where the forms are more close to nature where the forms are more close to realism, and again you can also have examples of like the first one we saw at the beginning of a session today a painting which is completely beyond recognition, which is an abstract painting or look at this one. This is also fairly simple painting in the sense that we can make out, this is the landscape of field we can see the sun behind we can see some hill logs, but now we are not simply looking at the recognition or the realism we are also looking at the texture like the previous one also.

Here as well as here in this painting. So, subject matters may be fairly simple, but what is very, very nontraditional is the way you treat your subject matter. The way you handle your brush, the way you treat your surface. These particular aspect of treatment of rendering of application of color the way you hold you tools the way you apply your



pigment. These things can also make a piece of art a modern art. So, it is not necessarily subject not always the form, but could also be the application of paint the treatment of the surface.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:20)



But here it is a subject matter, because we have never seen something like this. And entire painting devoted to most common people. Very, very ordinary people like here we have these three women who are gliding crops from their fields.

So, in modern art we beside very visible shifts in the form very extremely radical shapes in the treatment. We also say very significant shapes in the subject matter. The way you look at you time the way you look at you society, because for a long time art has been mostly addressing the people on the top layer of the society the rich people the powerful people the religious authority.

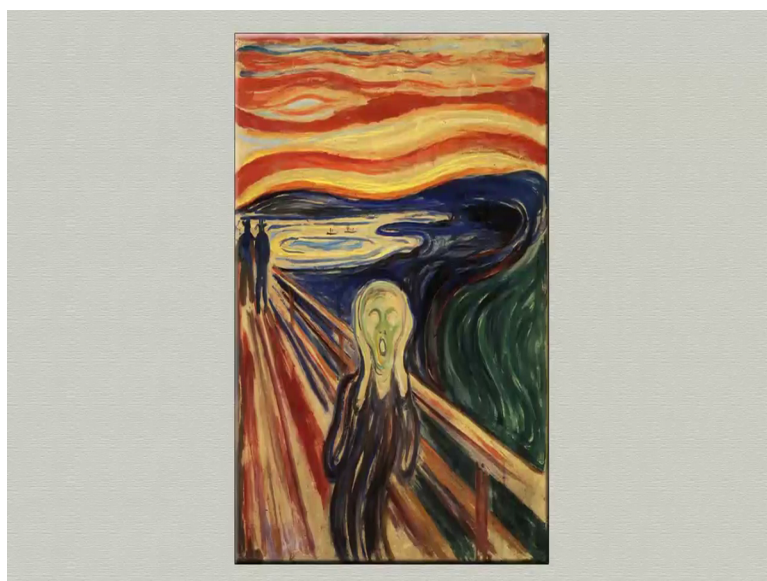
(Refer Slide Time: 15:27)



But now in modern art we have plenty of paintings and sculptures where the subject matter is the ordinary people, the common for example, this one. And a common person not in a state of necessarily pleasure or happiness.

Here as you can see this person is in a state of anguish, pain, and suffering. So, common man in the state of suffering is now occupying the subject matter of modern art beside other subjects of course, or for that matter this.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:56)





In this painting you can see the person the figure who is in the foreground is a state of anguish and agony to the extent that the entire painting is in the state of anguish. And in the treatment of the surface look at the phrase look at the colors look at the flow of the brush.

So, the anguish or the agony or the suffering is felt, not necessarily on the expression or on the body of the figure, but also in the environment also in the color pallet also in the organization of the elements in the painting which is called composition. So, in other words modern art is gradually moving towards redefining what is called the art language, where the subject matter or the feeling or the emotion can be felt not only in the form of the human being, but also in the environment, also in the entire composition. And this is what makes a modern art a modern art or for example, this one.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:09)



The subject could be fairly old in the sense this particular image is a or let us say and interpretation of an age old image or idea of Adam and eve. But here you do not get the traditional Christian iconography this painting. You see the couple Adam and eve in a very different context, in a black and white context where you can not even see their faces properly there is no such sensuousness that is expected from the body of the Adam and eve. So, this work of art is pretty modern in the way it has interpreted and old thing.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:11)



So, this is also possible there can be an interpretation of an old thing. Or for that matter this one nothing old nothing traditional there is not a single reference to our past.

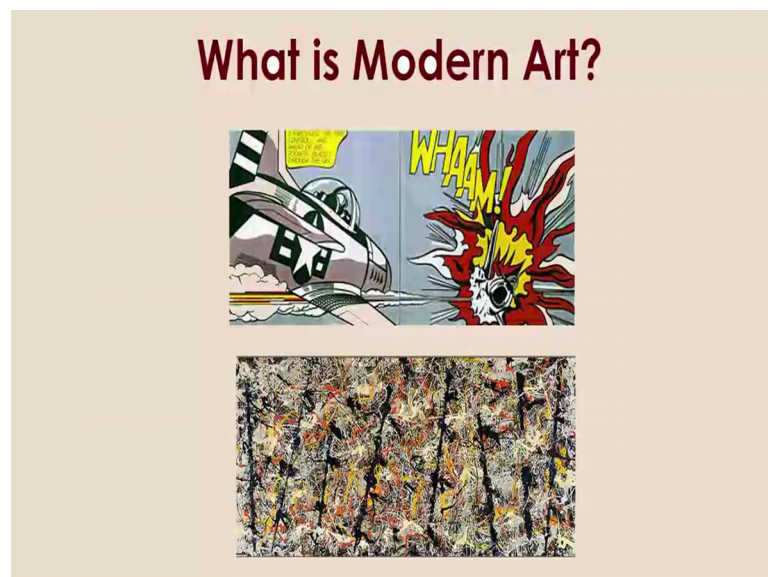
When you look at a painting like this any viewer for that matter would be able to relate very easily to our visual culture is surrounded with. It is in that sense it is highly contemporary in it is feel it is very modern in it is look because this is a kind of patterns and designs we come across in your costume in our furniture's, and in a entire design industry. So, modern art in examples like this could we also in extension of our visual culture. Not necessarily something very special something that is alienated from our visual culture, but very much a part of it.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:15)



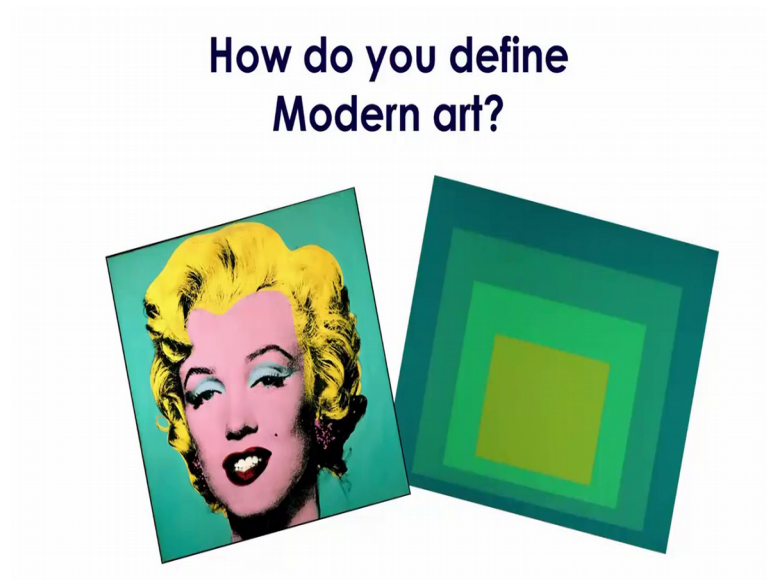
Modern art could also be as these examples shows, a form a work of art that is driven by the available technology. Very advanced technological facilities have given lot of ideas lot of possibilities to modern art. So, the relationship between technology and modern art, scientific developments and modern art is extremely crucial. This needs to be explode properly which we shall to in the later classes.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:56)



So, eventually we come back to this question then what is modern art. Now as I have already suggest it that it is very difficult to define modern art in a singular sentence, or in a single phrase.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:11)



If not for anything else, but at least for it is variety it is huge range of examples the way the various artists are explode modern art. There innovativeness all this things make it highly difficult for us to define modern art.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:37)



Even a quick browse through the history of modern Western art reveals that it consist of an immense variety -- variety of forms, variety of styles, variety of techniques and of course a huge variety of concepts.

This diversity makes it impossible to define modern art in one singular term.

In a singular way, even a quick browse through the history of modern western art reveals that it consist of an immense variety. Variety of forms variety of styles variety of techniques and of course, a huge variety of concepts; then this diversity makes it impossible to define modern art in one singular term it is impossible. So, how to approach? Still a definition is of an required to understand the conceptual frame work or the historical frame work or the ideological frame work of modern art.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:15)



Now, in general modern art posed itself as a serious challenge to the past, this is true to all forms of modern art, irrespective of their stylistic and conceptual differences. The posed itself as a serious challenge to the past to what is traditional. So, the traditional art forms were debunked, they may challenged, they were of in discarded the authority of religion age old social ordered was questioned. And creative freedom was upheld to pave way for innovations. So, modern art is highly innovative. The stylistic and technical diversity evident in modern art is amazing.

Beginning from the mid 19th century modern art evolved rapidly and fast really very, very fast, over a period of 100 and 150 years through a series of art movements and radical innovative ideas. Movements are important in modern art, movements organized by group of artists sphere heated by maybe one or 2 artists, but again along with art movements in modern art we also have individual artists somebody likes Pablo Picasso, Vincent van, Gogh Henry, Matisse Giacometti there are Henry Moore, then lot of artist



individual artists who beside participating in group movements have also contributed immensely to the development of modern art individually.

So, the rights of individual artists are also very important feature of modern western art.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:03)

In spite of this mind-boggling diversity all kinds of modern art -- individual or specific movements -- are linked with certain common factors:

1. Modern art or Modernism is integrally associated with the industrial revolution and technological advances from late 18th century and 19th century onwards. Technological and scientific developments opened up a whole range of possibilities for the modern artists.
2. Political and social uprising: A new social consciousness, political revolutions and a strong urge to relate art with the common society.

Now, in spite of this mind boggling diversity all kinds of modern art; individual or specific movements are linked with certain common factors. So, we are not trying to exactly define modern art in one sentence, but let us try to look at some common features shared by all forms of modern art. Number one, modern art or modernism is integrally associated with the industrial revolution and technological advances from the late 18th and 19th century onwards. Technological and scientific developments opened up a whole range of possibilities for the modern artists very important as I have already mentioned.

Political and social uprising a new social consciousness political revolutions and a strong urge to relate art with the common society; this has also been a commonly shared idea in the modern art.



(Refer Slide Time: 24:08)



Modern paintings like this are clear examples of such works where the rise of industrial societies, urban middle-class and a new modern life are the main subject matters. These subject-matters obviously bring whole lot of changes in the technique and form of art.

Now modern paintings like this for example; clear examples of such works where the rise of industrial society's urban middle class and a new modern life are the main subject matters. So, modern art is and; obviously, integrally related to modern society or modernism in general. And as we all know that industrial revolution technological advances, scientific developments have been the whole marks of modernity or modernism modern art also shared and took advantage of this new situation. And we have subject matters like this, where the new industrial terms occupy the new paintings they become the center of focus for many artists.

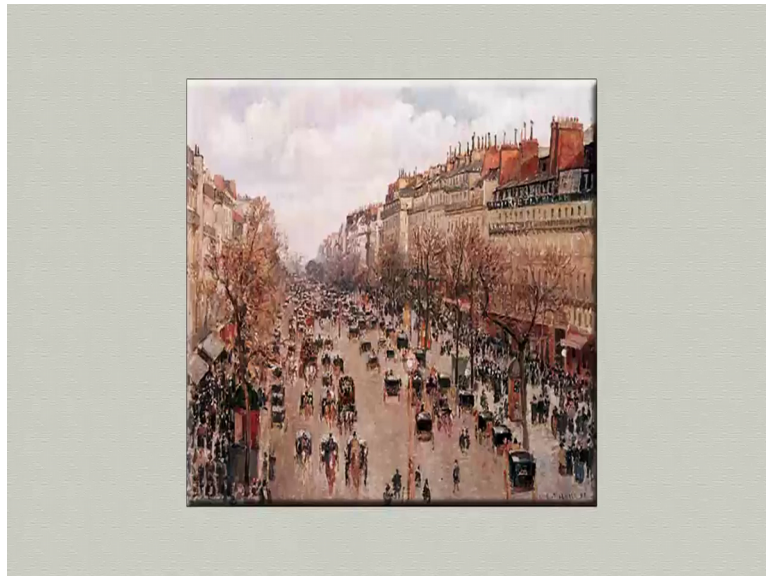
So, these subjects matters obviously bring whole lot of changes in the technique and also in the form of art.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:12)



For example this one also, we are never seen something like this before. For obvious reasons, we did not have chimneys we did not have this industrial term shape. We did not have migrant laborers and workers we did not have this working class people in numbers in take numbers visible around.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:40)



So, they now become the new subject matters for the new painters of modern life of for example, this one now these examples are from very early phase of modern art.

So, right from the beginning one can say, that artists are paying attention to depict the immergence of a new life situation of a new society driven by industrialization driven by the raising cities and modernity And new urban situations.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:06)



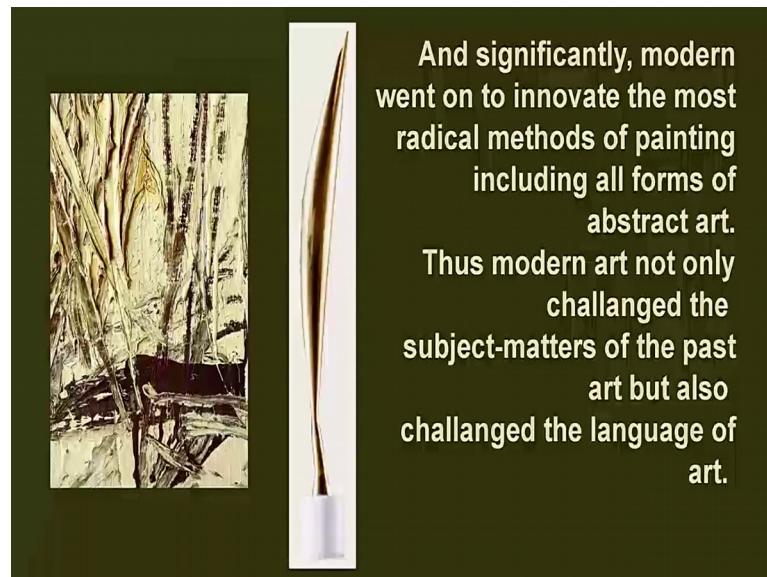
And obviously, new kind of people; these people like the working class middle class they when never featured they when never addressed in the pre modern art with the due importance.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:28)



They did appear, but only marginally or a peace full quite lucid image of a modern life. As you can see in this painting almost a direct and a very clear depiction of modern life, and this subject matter itself is enough to let us know that this painting is modern painting, there is no doubt about that.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:04)



And significantly modern or modern art went on to innovate the most radical methods of painting including all forms of abstract art. Thus modern art not only challenged the subject matters of the past the past art, but it also challenged the language of art. And this is again a common feature to most of the examples of modern art, that they were not only concerned with the new possibilities of technique new possibilities of subject matter.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:49)



Modern art therefore challenged the perception of the viewers as well.

How modern art is to be viewed and perceived?

This remains a vexed question.

Throughout this course the issue of visual perception

But they were also concerned with altering the language of painting itself or language of sculpture itself.

So, language of art changed to a great extent in the modern art. Modern art is about a multiple shapes, shapes happening in different layers in the subject matter in the technique in the method in the idea and definitely redefining the language what we understand as art. It clearly claims once and for all that art is no more about replicating the visible nature the visual reality it is about interpreting your experiences, it also could be about your in a layers of your mind. It could also be about ideas concepts, but not necessarily and certainly not a replication of the reality. In that sense modern art not only challenges the past art or the tradition, but it challenges the perception of the viewers us as well.

So, the question is no more about what is modern art or how do we define modern art. The question can also be asked like how modern art is to be viewed and perceived. The whole question turns towards us. How and this repeats of next question, and In fact, throughout this course as we keep exploring and following the different changes in the modern western art, continuous then repeatedly we shall be coming back to the problem of visual perception. Because all set in done at the end of the day modern art is a big problem to our visual perception. We need to change that as well.

Thank you.