Art As Activism Across Cultures And Time

First Experiences in Research - Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences, University of Pittsburgh
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Research Questions

- How are art exhibits curated?
  - *Cohesive themes, styles, etc.*
- What is activism in art?
  - *Use of artistic expression to invoke individual or widespread change*
- How has art been used as a means of activism across cultures and time periods?

Methods

- Visit art galleries to learn about curation
  - *The Frick Pittsburgh Museums & Gardens - The Scandinavian Home: Landscape and Lore*
- Identify common subject matters/themes
- Arrange pieces from each subject into mock gallery for public viewing

Takeaways

Art plays a vital role in the sphere of activism as it provides an accessible outlet for the expression and reception of ideas that challenge dominant social paradigms.

Subjects

Anti-War Sentiment

Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) was painted in response to Nazi bombing during the Spanish Civil War.

The Hiroshima Panels (1950-82) are a collaborative work by Toshi and Iri Makuri that depict the violence that ensued following the dropping of atomic bombs in Japan during World War II.

Environmentalism

Like much of Emily Kame Kngwarreye's other artwork, *Earth's Creation* (1994) highlights the Aboriginal Australian relationship with and celebration of land.

When Ice Stretched On For Miles (2017) is a woven sculpture crafted by Native American artist Gail Tremblay. She used celluloid film footage from a documentary reenacting the lifestyle of Netsilik Inuits that is no longer a viable pursuit due to the changing climate.

Feminism

Mary Cassatt's *Le Figaro* (1878) features her mother partaking in the act of reading a newspaper. This depiction promotes the feminist ideal of the New Woman, an ideology that went against traditional values by emphasizing the importance of education and independence amidst the male-dominated societal landscape.

Shirin Neshet's *Women of Allah* series (1994) combines traditional calligraphic text with charged photographic imagery to challenge stereotypes and the suppression of female voices, particularly those of Muslim women.

Racial Equality

Joseph Mallord William Turner's *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)* (1840) employs an abstract style characteristic of the Romantic period which acts as a visual representation to the horrors of the slave trade.

In *Darkytown Rebellion* (2001), Kara Walker uses paper silhouettes and colored light projections to depict a scene of racial violence, slavery, and rebellion. The installation's immersive nature forces viewers to confront their own forms amidst the anonymous figures.