

## The Impact of Era Features and Characteristics on Landscape Painting- A Critical Study of Joseph Turner and David Hockney

Ihab Mahmoud Hanafy<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

---

This study aims at shedding the light on the impact of the technological and cultural features associated with an era on landscape painting. A critical study is carried out analysing the artworks of two British painters lived in two different eras. These are "Joseph Turner" and "David Hockney". Painters' artistic features including the construction of their paintings are discussed. It was found that each era has a great impact on forming artists' colour palette, composition and media used. Therefore, cultural and technological features associated with an era should be taken into consideration in the process of criticising artworks including painting.

---

**Keywords:** Painting, landscape, romanticist, classic, abstract, fauvism, era.

### 1. Introduction

For centuries, artists have been long interested in and captivated by nature. For a long time ago, landscape was depicted in paintings as a secondary subject. By mid-18th century, artists adopted landscape as a primary subject exploiting its artistic values. This was significantly conducted by romantic landscape British painters such as Joseph Turner and John Constable. Landscape romantic painters were inspired by landscape in order to influence audience. Several artists have been influenced by this movement of art making landscape the focus of their artwork while the rest of the elements including human are just part of such massive artwork.

Generally, the art of painting has been highly influenced by science and technology. Impressionists' artworks were inspired by Isaac Newton's scientific research into colour theory. Impressionist artists moved outdoors in order to study the effect of sun light on visible objects.

---

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Decoration Department, Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt.

One of the impressionists is Claude Monet who studied the effect of changing daylight on the façade of Rouen cathedral - Paris 1892. In this regard, we must not forget the role of famous impressionists such as Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh concerned with depicting landscape employing their developed colour palettes and plastic solutions. This art style has been considered as a source of inspiration for many modern art movements such as Fauvism, Cubism and Abstraction. Impressionism has paved the way for new alternative artistic approaches of expression and composition.

Hereby, landscape painting has been conducted employing a variety of approaches and styles dependent on several factors. This study is concerned with the main factors affecting how painters express landscape. These factors are the living style and the characterizing science and technology of an era.

In this study the author focuses on the British landscape painting. This is because the landscape in Britain has inspired several artists. British landscape painting depicted variety of subjects including agricultural village life of Constable's scenes, dramatic seascapes of Turner's and Yorkshire's landscape and countryside (Trees, trees trunks and flowers) of Hockney. These painters have depicted nature in different times, seasons and places using a variety of art forms ("Britain's greatest living painter turns to landscape," 2012). This study focuses on two artists belong to the same spatial environment "Britain" but lived in different eras. These are Joseph Turner and David Hockney. These painters were chosen because the first artist "Turner" had a tour in Yorkshire and his work of art all his life was highly affected by its landscape to the extent that it is believed that his tour has contributed to his artistic personality the rest of his life. The second artist "Hockney" has lived in Yorkshire since his childhood till his undergraduate studies and went back to east Yorkshire by late 1990s. Another reason for choosing these artists is that both of them express the same subject "landscape". Each artist will be studied in terms of his personality, his life stages, and the features of his era including technological and cultural features. As all these factors formed their character which in turn contributed to forming their artistic character and personality and affected their approach in expressing landscape.

## **2. Overview**

### **2.1. Stages of Artistic Development in Turner's artworks**

Joseph Mallord William Turner 1775–1851 was a British painter. At home his father encouraged his talents and showed off his drawings in his shop. He studied at the Royal academy schools. In the mid of 1790s, he made his first engravings (Brown, 2012). His drawing was progressed as he drew from casts of ancient sculpture to the life class in 1792. He improved his studies with other work experience with architectural draughtsman.

He developed a novel and strong approach of painting landscape called "Romanticist landscape". Turner had a sketching tour in the north of England in 1797 which affected all his artistic creation for the rest of his life. He used pencil and water colour in his sketches. In his early days, he was successful in making topographical and architectural studies of the great buildings in Britain. While he was commissioned to create a group of paintings for Harewood house, he was attracted by the landscape in which the building exists. He went back to London making pictures with new density of colours depicting weather effects which became his hallmark. In these pictures, he moved from the conventional topographical studies focusing on the country house to include the landscape - trees and foliage- surrounds the house. Later, the landscape of Wharfedale changed his style depicting the changing Yorkshire weather.

In 1808, he was appointed as a Professor of Perspective in the Royal academy and retained the job until 1837. He then occupied the post "Professor of Landscape" proposed by him. In 1810, he painted "Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps" as he was affected by a strong storm witnessed by him in Farnley. This painting is one of the most distinguishing works made by him depicting soldiers fighting the storm for their lives painting the sky as vortex of orange and black. (Sellars, 2015)

In 1813, he sketched glorious summer weather in Devon using oil paint and created one of his significant pictures "Crossing the Brook ". In 1817, Turner visited Holland and Belgium, and painted the picture "The Field of Waterloo" as he was affected by the battlefield of Waterloo. In 1819 and 1828, Turner visited Italy and painted new artworks with bright colours and spontaneous style (Brown, 2012). The President of the Royal Academy Thomas Lawrence in January 1830 had judged Turner as the first landscape painter in Europe. In his first will made in 1829, Turner had endowed a chair and gold medal for landscape painting at the Academy.

It is evident from above that Turner had an accumulated experience and skills in the field of landscape painting. This had contributed to showing and forming his ability to paint landscape employing significant artistic language in his era.

## **2.2. Stages of Artistic Development in David Hockney's artworks**

David Hockney (1937- ) is one of the most famous British artists born in Bradford- Yorkshire. He is a multi-talented artist working in different art forms. These are painting, printmaking, photography, filmmaking, graphic and stage design. (David Hockney Biography, 2014) He believes that painting is "a process of seeing and thinking rather than imitation". (David Hockney, b.1937)

In late 1950's, he started studying in the Royal college of Art in London. He was interested in painting Yorkshires' landscape using dark greens and browns. In the early 60s, he led the establishment of Pop art in Britain and started making stage design. In 1964, he moved from England to Los Angeles where he found himself more comfortable painting huge bright blue skies and swimming pools. The swimming pool was one of his favourite subjects since he arrived to Los Anglos. The lifestyle and landscape in Los Angeles has had a great impact on his art style.(Sellars, 2015) He shifted from oil to acrylic medium in order to show brilliant, smooth, flat and colourful urban landscape in California. He has used photos as a memory aid for making his artworks.(David Hockney, b.1937)Since then, he became well known for his large iconic paintings.

By mid 70s, he became a proficient photographer and kept working on photography, theatre design and printmaking and abandoned painting. In 1973, he focused on using printing techniques.

In the 1980s, he created his first photomontage artwork while he was carrying out exterior and interior design for homes in California. He accidently found that this could be one of art forms he could use. He started to create more collage artworks using his Polaroid photos taken from different perspectives and slightly different times and called these "joiners"(Singh, 2002). Hockney returned to painting including seascapes, flowers and portraits. By mid1980s, he began employing technology in his artworks. In 1986, he made his first home made prints using an office-quality photocopier. In 1987, he employed a colour laser copier to create images and to replicate some of his artworks. He liked the vibrant colours of these printers producing semi-abstract landscapes' views(Hockney, 2016).

In the 90's, he returned to east Yorkshire to start painting Yorkshire landscape using bright colours. There were several reasons that attracted him to this area. East Yorkshire is the part of Britain he was fond of in his childhood and his beloved mother lived there in the last years of her life. Moreover, this part lacks a market for tourism.In 1997, he held his exhibition "Flowers, Faces and Spaces"at AnnelyJuda Fine Art in London. This show included new still lives and direct portrait heads painted in oil with a fauvist palette.

In 2004, he painted thirty six paintings depicting east Yorkshire landscape using water colour. Since 2005, he has produced unique and significant several artworks depicting Yorkshire using a variety of techniques. Large canvases of multiple sections were used to produce a panorama look.

In 2006, he had his first exhibition showcasing big paintings of multi canvases. In 2008, Apple gadget was used in making quick sections of his artworks. Later, it was used to make hundreds of digital paintings especially for flowers(Gayford, 2010).

In 2007, he held his exhibition "Bigger Trees Near Water" depicted Yorkshire's landscape with the aid of photography. Around 50 separate canvases were painted outdoors and formed one giant painting measuring 4.6 m by 12 m occupies a whole wall at the Royal Academy summer exhibition.

In 2008, he was invited by Tate to curate an exhibition entitled "Hockney on Turner Watercolours". This exhibition gave a comprehensive view of Turner's use of watercolour, his techniques and his influences (Royal Academy summer exhibition: Hockney on Turner Watercolours, 2008).

In 2009, he started using the Brushes app on iPad and iPhone to create paintings ("David Hockney Biography," 2014). In 2011, he held his exhibition "Fresh flowers" in Paris. He showcased more than 100 of his drawings on 25 iPads and 20 iPods. He used smart phones and tablets to present slideshows of vibrant flowers and pastoral landscapes to show emotional and thoughtful qualities. This way of presentation made a tangible difference in the audience engagement with the artworks ("David Hockney's Fresh Flowers," 2011).

One of his significant exhibitions is "A Bigger Picture" showcased in the Royal Academy - London 2012 (Sellars, 2015). The artworks in this exhibition presented landscapes of trees and tree tunnels inspired by Yorkshire's landscape, oil and watercolours were used. This exhibition showed Yorkshire's new vision of Hockney. 50 artworks were made on iPad and printed on paper (Cumming, 2012). This exhibition was highly visited and attracted by art audience. (Sellars, 2015).

It is evident from above that David Hockney's artworks have been highly influenced by his era's technology including photography, computer programs and colorants industry in terms of structure and colour palette.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1. Analysis of Turner's artworks**

J. M. W. Turner is considered- by analysts and critiques- the greatest romanticist landscape and seascape painter in the 19th century. He is undoubtedly one of the first painters made landscape of primary and key role in an artwork while making every other element including the man himself of a secondary role. Turner was impressed by the greatness and strength of quiet and destructive nature. He was keen on recording natural landscape scenes in moments chosen carefully in order to express its greatness romantically and emotionally. He was impressed and haunted by light, storm and wind movement at land and sea. He worked on depicting these scenes in his home country Britain and in other places he sailed to.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century- the era he lived in- the classical style was the dominant style in fine artworks. This was including chosen subjects and rigid structure. Meantime, Turner courageously developed a new style including chosen subjects and artistic features that outreached his peers. His artworks at that time showed unprecedented freely innovated paintings. Moreover, he employed variable brushstroke enabling him to depict vibrant expressive landscape which strongly affect audience("J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851) Technical Art Examination).

Turner formed a significant romanticist vision for representing landscape. In his landscape romanticist paintings, he depicted certain landscape at specified time in order to express and reflect specific landscape's impact at that certain time.

This study reviews a couple of examples for Turner's famous paintings. The first painting is "The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up" 1839 presenting quiet landscape (see

Figure 1). The second painting is "Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth" expressing the destructive nature.

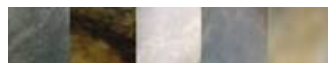
The painting "The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up" is considered one of the most important paintings for the British painter Turner. This painting depicts the Temeraire being pulled by the tugboat to break it into scraps. The Fighting Temeraire played a key role in Britain's wars. Turner had sympathy with this sad scene and wanted to romanticize it. He used a cold colour palette based on blue colour surrounding the ship. On the other hand, he dictated the composition using bright warm colour palette surrounding this blue colour and the ship body. Light brush strokes were employed in order to indicate the romantic scene of pulling this ship to her death. Figure 1 shows the warm and cold colour palettes used in this painting.

Generally, Turner was captivated by sea and experienced hard moments in it. The painting "Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth" (

Figure 2) depicts a boat by its crew struggling the destructive nature. Turner had experienced these moments and wanted to express them romantically. He used soft muted pale colour palette including pale blue and dark brown. In order to indicate the strength of nature used strong swirling brush strokes besides the distribution of the light. This produced repeated swirl of repeated rhythms which shows the violence and strength of storm. Turner emphasized the ship in the raging sea using white colour spot surrounding the sail making it the focus of the painting.



**Figure 1: "The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last Berth to be broken up" J.M.W. Turner, 1839, Oil on canvas, 91 cm × 122 cm, National Gallery, London.**



**Figure 2: "Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth" J.M.W. Turner, 1842. Oil on canvas, 91 cm × 122 cm, Tate, London, Great Britain**

It is evident from the previous paintings analysed that Turner used a significant painting style and different from that used by painters at that period of time. This is including the subject and the way it is expressed. All these artistic features made Turner's artworks unique and significant compared to classical and romanticist painters in his era.

### **3.2. Analysis of Hockney's artworks**

For better reading and understanding of David Hockney's landscape paintings, it is important to understand his artistic life stages and the time period in which these artworks were made. This is because David Hockney has long artistic life with prolific production. Therefore, this study will focus on one of his latest exhibitions "A bigger picture" held in the Royal academy –London in 2012. It included more than 50 artworks.

The artworks in this exhibition present Yorkshire's landscape. Hockney made landscape paintings using acrylic colours employing contemporary artistic features presented in the rhythmic line and the Fauvism colour palette.

Figures 3 and 4 present samples of "A Bigger picture" exhibition. The first painting is "Winter Timber and Totems" (see Figure 3) and the second is "The Arrival of Spring" (see Figure 4).

David Hockney has introduced a contemporary artistic vision for landscape painting.



**Figure 3** shows "Winter Timber" painting consists of 15 canvases painted with oil. In this painting, Hockney constructed the composition using two different perspectives which is unlike conventional perspective in classic art based on one view perspective. With regard to colour, he used colour palette similar to that of the Fauvism art. These are strident pure colours covers simple spaces including a variety of decorating texture. It is obvious from this painting, the impact of modern art movements (especially abstraction and fauvism) on Hockneys paintings. However, Hockney is a more contemporary painter as he freely constructed his designs and expressed his subject.





**Figure 3: Winter Timber, David Hockney 2009, oil on 15 canvases (90 x 120 cm each), 274 x 609.6 cm**

In the exhibition "A Bigger picture", Hockney used modern technology in painting and displaying his subject and artistic vision. He used more than 50 iPads to display his electronic paintings. Some of these paintings were displayed directly on iPads and others were printed on paper.



**Figure 4** shows the painting "The Arrival of spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011". It is an example of these paintings produced virtually. Hockney has exploited specialized computer program software in making this painting as it enabled him making variety of landscape paintings and design solutions shortly.



#### **Figure 4: David Hockney's "The Arrival of spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011"**

From previous paintings, it is obvious that Hockney used saturated pure colours in addition to colour touches of graphic software. Technology has its great impact on David Hockney painting's artistic features which is highly dependent on its capabilities and the ability of the artists to employ it.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Each era has its own cultural, social and technological features. These features contribute to forming artists' consciousness of the surroundings. These also assist in presenting artworks and enable artists to express their chosen subject using specific artistic language. In this study, samples of painting artworks for both J.W. M. Turner lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and David Hockney lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries were studied. There were significant differences found in their artworks. However, they were born and lived in the same spatial environment "Britain" and painted the same subject "landscape" in this environment, they have artworks of different artistic features.

Scientific and technological impacts are evident in Turners retention of classical and romanticist colour palettes. However, Hockney has used a palette of variable and vivid colours. The use of these colours owes to several reasons. The most important reason is the emergence of new technologies of producing paints -which were not available before- such as acrylic paints, in addition to extending the range of oil paints available for artists by making new alternative colour hues other than conventional hues of oil paints. This has an obvious technical impact in expressing some artistic subjects. On one hand, Turner used sketches as a memory aid to be used later in his studio to make his painting. On the other hand, David Hockney has been using new technological tools and devices (such as camera and computer software) to record landscape in the form of digital photos. These photos could be used to make virtual sketch edited later to produce his painting and /or design final version. These paintings could be produced in either virtual or physical forms.

In addition to the technological impact, it was found that Hockney was affected by a variety of cultural elements and visual experiences more than that affected Turner. David Hockney has been affected by several artistic styles and movements founded and appeared after Turner such as impressionism, Fauvism and abstraction. This has affected his vision of painting and his style of expressing landscape using a contemporary visual language including colours, textures, lights and shades.

Therefore, it was concluded that objective and fair criticism of an artist's artworks should be in the light of his era's cultural and technological features. This is

because of the unique features of each era forming an artist's experiences, skills and artistic production.

## References

- Bp summer exhibition: Hockney on turner watercolours. (2008). Tate. <http://www.tate.org.uk/>
- Britain's greatest living painter turns to landscape. (2012). The day. <http://theday.co.uk/>
- Brown, D. B. (2012). J.M.W. Turner: Sketchbooks, Drawings and Watercolours. Tate. <https://www.tate.org.uk/>
- Cumming, L. (2012). David Hockney: A Bigger Picture – review. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com>
- David Hockney (b.1937). ENCYCLOPEDIA OF VISUAL ARTISTS. <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com>
- David Hockney Biography. (2014). Biography.com, (26 November 2016). Retrieved from The Biography.com website website: <http://www.biography.com>
- David hockney's fresh flowers. (2011). Here and Elsewhere. Retrieved from <http://hereelsewhere.com/> website: <http://hereelsewhere.com/>
- Gayford, M. (2010). David Hockney's iPad art. The telegraph. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>
- Hockney, D. (2016). David Hockney. Hockneypictures.com. <http://www.hockneypictures.com>
- J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851). Technical Art Examination. Cultural Heritage Science Open Source. Retrieved from Cultural Heritage Science Open Source website: <http://chsopensource.org/>
- Sellars, J. (2015). Art and Yorkshire from Turner to Hockney. Bradford: Great Northern Books Limited.
- Singh, K. (2002, 27 - 29 May 2002). A fresh perspective. Paper presented at the Proceedings of Graphics Interface, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.