

Comparative Study

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In this study, I will analyze two works from an international artist, William Bouguereau, and one piece from a local artist I personally know: Ariana Vaeth. I will compare formal qualities such as use of color, line and artistic style, but also their depiction of human interactions. Both artists have influenced my artworks, both conceptually and visually, while sharing similar meanings. Although both artists created art during different time periods, William Bouguereau, Ariana Vaeth, and even myself create art with intense sentiments and display human interaction. This will be discussed among this comparative study, along with the supporting details that highlight the constant themes in the few artworks I will be analyzing.

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of William Bouguereau

William Bouguereau's style is nothing new for the time period he was painting in. He was apart of a movement called Neoclassicism. This is the name given to Western movements of visual arts (and other mediums) that drew inspiration from much more classical types of art and culture. Neoclassicism is who William Bouguereau was. During his young years he attended Ecole des Beaux-Arts in France where he learned to paint intricate and anatomically proportional people. However, his style was overplayed in Europe and was no longer favorable. Therefore to make a living, Bouguereau moved to the Americas hoping people there would appreciate his work. At first he sold portraits to American millionaires, since they thought he was one of the best French artists, however that followed with a downfall when impressionists started to gain recognition. Bouguereau sometimes was bold and painted unpopular subjects such as female intimacy and pleasure along with human interactions on a much deeper level. This had a huge impact on the prude culture of the west in the 19th century.



The Battle of the Centaurs and Lapithae (1852)
-William Bouguereau



Orestes Pursued by the Furies (1862)-
William Bouguereau

For the time, the topics taken into account were very heavy. Female sexuality was almost forbidden. A female showing her ankles was considered taboo, so painting a woman in full ecstasy was very controversial. Although Bouguereau was a devout Catholic, he also influenced the views of sexuality and human interaction. For the time he was painting, there weren't many that painted scenes where nymphs are taking advantage of a man, again empowering female sexuality. Naked scenes were popular and opened up a new modernized way of thinking.

Analysis of Formal Qualities of William Bouguereau



The Birth of Venus
(1879)- William
Bouguereau

Neoclassicism styles usually are romantic or renaissance imitating styles. Since Bouguereau kept his academic painting style, it resembles very much so of renaissance paintings. Lines are never apparent in his work, they are always smoothly blended to perfection. Often times, muted hues were used in his paintings, nothing shocking or harsh on the eyes. However, his color palette changes through his works. Often times with his religious pieces, he will use darker colors such as rich maroons and even black. This was due to the death of his son, he mourned through his work, resulting in depressing, dark colors. However, in his earlier works with mythological creatures he used lighter colors such as baby blues and sage greens. Many of his paintings use much more harmony among the subjects painted, however used simpler compositions. This didn't make his works simpler, but forced the viewer to focus on the meaning and metaphor, more than the formal qualities. The human form is something always present in his works. By using rich colors and deep tones he creates an illusion that makes his characters realistic.

Often times innocence is portrayed in Williams works. This is shown through value, often times the men are darker and women are porcelain white with rosy cheeks. This gives the illusion that these women are innocent, however their sexuality is often pronounced through underlying connotations. The woman's facial expressions will be one of pleasure and ecstasy. Even though oil is usually the medium he uses, there is no texture to his paintings. He creates the texture in the painting through shadows and darker hues.



Indigent Family (charity)
(1865) -William Bouguereau

Interpretation of Function and Purpose:

Annotation of *Nymphes et Satyre* (1853) by William Bouguereau

When first seen, the eye is drawn immediately to the movement in the piece. Bouguereau often used intense, almost overwhelming movement with his characters interacting. This was so the viewers took time to dissect and truly ponder on his work. Movement was also a modern break from most classical forms of art where it was just a simple, static portrait. This made his pieces dynamic and pleasing to look at.

Bouguereau often times used light, muted colors with occasional bright colors to highlight certain focal points of his pieces. These colors provide a certain innocence to the females. The Satyre has rich colors for his fur, making him the focal point of the piece. However the lightest nymph on the right provides direction to the piece. The Nymphs want the satyre to go in the water to take advantage of him, since they can't swim. Along with their excited facial expressions and grand gestures, it is clear that they are ecstatic.



The background is just as overwhelming as the foreground due to the foliage. However, hidden in the background are more Nymphs gawking over the satyre and his looks. This little scene in itself in the background provides a dynamic background and foreground for the viewer to see. Often times the composition Bouguereau uses one focal center point. However, this piece is different in there is an off center scene in the background and the foreground is off center too.

The depth of the field in the painting fades out the deeper it is. It becomes blurry, almost like a haze. This provides a dreamlike appearance to this scene. There is a purpose to that due to nymphs not coming in contact with men often, it is almost like a dream.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose:

Annotation of *Nymphes et Satyre* (1853) by William Bouguereau

Neoclassicism is Bouguereau's style and this painting is a perfect demonstration of it. The smooth blending and lack of harsh lines imitates the renaissance period. In addition the women are delicately painted and appear soft, which is another characteristic of renaissance or romantic styles.

Hand gestures are also huge in this painting. The females hands are pulling him into the water, where the satyre will be vulnerable. The nymph at the top is pushing on the satyr's head, forcing him to get in. When looking at the satyr's facial expressions, he is overwhelmed with confusion. He wants to go in with the girls, but he is scared. You can tell he is tempted by his hoof that is half in the water already and his gaze on the female's breasts. If further analyzed, the satyre is reaching out for the nymph's breast to the far right. He's tempted by their alluring beauty, but hesitant for his life due to the well known inability that these creatures can not swim.



Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *The Return of Spring* (1886) -William Bouguereau

The Return of Spring refers to Raphael's famous Galatea. However, this painting has become a symbol of pleasure for women, a scandalous subject for the time. Her facial expressions are sensual, an unusual, indulgent expression for the time. Of course controversy followed when this painting was put on display.

As many of his paintings, the colors are soft. Baby blues and pinks for their bodies. These are colors we associate with innocence. The cupids are also viewed as innocent, however they are enticing to the woman.

Usually, there is a piece of cloth that covers the genitals of the female in paintings, so it's not too scandalous. However, in this one the woman was left bare. The nudity caused so many controversies and wasn't favorable at the time. This was liberating for women and their sexuality.



The composition is rather plain in this piece. The woman, the focal point of the painting, is placed right in the middle. Then the cherubs are placed all around her, providing movement and dynamics to the piece.

There is a clear, foreground, middle ground and background. The foreground is the woman and the three cherubs surrounding her. The middle ground are the cherubs on the ground lying peacefully, almost like they are tired. Then the background is the subtle foliage and flowers.

Realism emphasizes the fact that women can be sensual through real depictions of women, rather than something fantastical or abstract. Of course there are the fantastical elements such as the cherubs, but that is the only thing fantastical about it. There is an abundant amount of cherubs repeatedly throughout the painting. It is clear that this piece is a critique on modern society and how women's sexuality wasn't able to be portrayed.

Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Ariana Vaeth

Ariana Vaeth grew up in Baltimore. Her family was always adopting and taking in foster kids, which led to Ariana making a lot of close relationships with people her age. She loved meeting new people and was always fascinated with how her new siblings interacted. She focuses on her personal narrative or her own stories in life. Her interest in visual arts mixed with the ever changing atmosphere in her house resulted in her inspiration to paint. Early on she painted baroque style paintings with oil and really refined her style so she could further push herself. In every painting she tries to bring in human interaction and incorporates human emotion.



Her work revolves around the moments she experienced as she travels into becoming a woman. Her personal narrative plays into who she paints, usually her adoptive siblings or her friends she's made in college. Painting the trusted exchanges among friendships are her forte and usually all she does.

Vaeth now resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and is now finishing up her Bachelors at Milwaukee Institute of Art and design. She is becoming well known and getting her name out in the city now that she is older and graduating. She does a lot of shows when she's not in her studios to receive her Bachelor in fine art.

Analysis of Formal Qualities of Ariana Vaeth

Ariana is always using human interaction as a form of expression. Often times, her art consists of two people or more on display in a intimate, often times not displayed interaction. Her work isn't blended and often is filled with colorful lines to emphasize the emotions that happen when interacting. The colors used are also quite shocking due to their bright, intense hues. It attracts the viewers. The audience then is strapped in due to the intense amount of detail in each piece.



Patterns are often times incorporated into Ariana's work. She likes to paint patterns off of sheets or clothes. This creates a an appealing image that is familiar to the audience and a comforting one. Movement is also a huge part of Ariana's work. She likes human interaction, especially female relationships. The movement and expressions among the people depicted in the art creates a sense of closeness among people and highlights intimate relationships. In Ariana's work there isn't a lot of negative space and often is taken up by a pattern or an object. Her paintings are always busy.



Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice* by Ariana Vaeth

On a bed, three girls are lying down. Immediately, the eye is drawn to the colors in the shirt of the young ladies. The use of tertiary colors in the shirts of the females attracts the eye due to the intense brightness of the paint. Upon further analysis the blanket they are laying on matches their attire, green going with green and so on. The paint strokes displayed in the painting create a sense of movement and line. That accentuates the interactions between the three girls.



Sleepover innocence was what is being portrayed in this piece. Ariana wanted innocent interactions rather than the over sexualized ones we have in the media at the time. Pure and sweet, she based it off of a popular shoes of the 90's, The Powerpuff Girls. This show was about female empowerment and how girls can be equally, or more stronger than men. This painting has a very feminist approach to it. Even if it's just something sweet and innocent, it speaks volumes about female sexuality. Sleepovers in older ages often translate into a sexual activity. This however debunks that. All the girls have disapproving looks on their faces to further the meaning how women don't want to be portrayed as sexual.

Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice* by Ariana Vaeth

The composition in this piece is different from other Ariana pieces. The main focus of the girls isn't directly centered like most of her work. There is off center composition with one of the girls being set to the left and two being off to the right. The break between the two three girls creates a dynamic composition to the piece. Then off in the background is the window which creates a little scene itself for the background.



Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Annotation of *Kat's out the Bag* by Ariana Vaeth

Again, this is an example of innocent interaction among best friends. There is plenty of movement going on, from the cat leaving the bag in the bottom left corner, or the two girls serving their drinks. This provides a dynamic visual for the viewers.

The colors are very rich to provide a cozy, at home feeling. Ariana wanted the viewers to feel the same as she felt when she's with friends.



Careful intricate details in the piece force the viewers to go in closer and really analyze the piece. The rug, the cat, facial expressions.

The facial expressions add to the piece. They unveil a certain vulnerability to the painting. The faces have serious looks and imply the serious, yet fun times that can be shared among girls in an enclosed area.

Comparing *Meaning* Between Artists

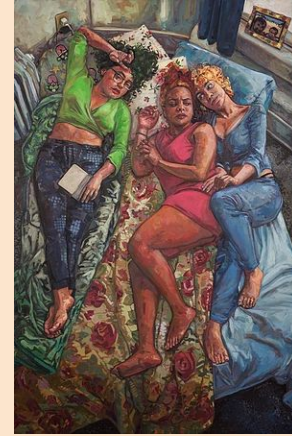
- Includes human interaction
- feminist commentary on female sexuality
- A sense of innocence

Both



William Bouguereau

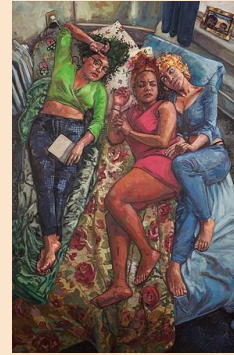
- Religious commentary
- Women are/can be sexual
- Underlying mythology
- Commentary on bourgeoisie
- Normalizing natural human tendencies ex: female pleasure



Ariana Vaeth

- Female interaction
- Sharing a moment of friendship intimacy
- Female empowerment

Comparing Bouguereau-Vaeth Artistic Styles



<u>William Bouguereau</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Ariana Vaeth</u>
Smooth blending accompanied with the academic style mimics realism	Intense detail to attract viewers	Big, unblended strokes for emphasized movement and texture
Resembles renaissance art. Old themes continued.	Similar composition. Almost always centered.	Fairly new concepts in work such as powerpuff girls
Soft, muted colors	Dramatic body expressions from face to the anatomy	Bold, rich colors
Symbolism is often times man vs. man	Uses background to aid audience to conclude meaning	Minimal symbolism. Straight forward.

Comparing Use of Composition Between Artists



William Bouguereau

- Always a balance or center to the piece
- Creates a sense of unity among the characters
- Proportion exaggerated
- Repetitive patterns

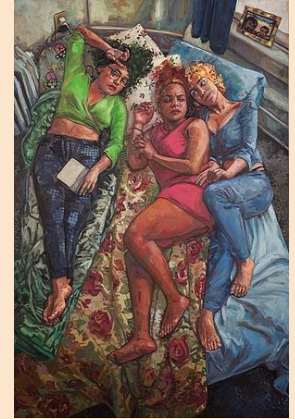


Ariana Vaeth

- Not always balanced to the center, can be two focal points in piece.
- Unity seems broken from lack of contact
- Proportion is normal and balanced
- Not repetitive

Both

- Uses center positioning to attract viewer to the main goal
- Makes focus clear
- Dramatic movement



Comparing use of Color Between Artists

William Bouguereau

- Soft, muted colors
- Complementary colors to create harmony
- Color choice depends on topic trying to be discussed

Ariana Vaeth

- Rich, dark colors
- Utilizes bright colors to highlight subjects

Both

- Soft hues imply innocence
- Dark and harsh colors such as black used to impose a certain lighting that sways the mood
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