

Exploring and Creating Modernist Literary Texts: a student work ebook



Lessons and exercises based on analysing how modernist ideas, values and styles are represented through Australian and global literature and artworks and developing skills in writing a creative piece that stylistically represents modernists ideas and values

SHELLEY MCNAMARA

Qwiller
www.qwiller.com.au

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Shelley McNamara

Quiller

www.qwiller.com.au

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Part One: The City – memory, place and politics

Modernism and Creativity

This work ebook focuses on one of the most important movements in the post-Industrial World. Modernism is hard to define because artists, writers, architects, dancers, photographers, film-makers, academics, students and political thinkers have all had their own ideas about what it means to be modern. From the end of the nineteenth century and even today the debates and discussions are continuing.



Here are three definitions to read and think about. What thoughts, ideas, feelings come to mind when you read these definitions?

‘Modernity of yesterday is the tradition of today and the modernity of today will be the tradition of tomorrow.’ Jose Andres Puerla

‘Modernity is a qualitative, not chronological category.’ Theodore Adrono

‘The characteristic feature of modernity is criticism.’ Octovio Paz

As you can see, the way we inherit tradition, the importance of memories, people and places are central concepts of modernism.

In the third quote the author places importance on criticism. Our ability to critique and to evaluate the worth of something rests with how informed we are.

Read the final quote below and write your own understanding of what it means.

‘Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent which make up one half of art; the other being the eternal and the immutable. The transitory (though) ... must not be neglected.’ Charles Baudelaire

The city: culture + place in layers

We will begin our study of modernism through the lens of postmodernism. Put simply postmodernism is the modern reflecting on itself. The modern world is all about us. To understand the elements that make it up we need to be critical thinkers.

Below is a contemporary digital artwork by Syrian artist Tammam Azzam. ‘Freedom Graffiti’ is part of a body of work called ‘Syrian Museum’. It represents how the city a mixture of culture plus place in layers. Azzam has appropriated Austrian artist Gustav Klimt’s iconic work ‘The Kiss’ painted over a century ago in 1908. According to Azzam: “‘The Syrian Museum’ series incorporates iconic subjects from the greatest European masters, paralleling the greatest achievements of humanity with the destruction it is also capable of inflicting.’ He further comments that the use of masterpieces serves to demonstrate that ‘Syria has world-class museums, and the regime is presently killing its own cultural heritage’.

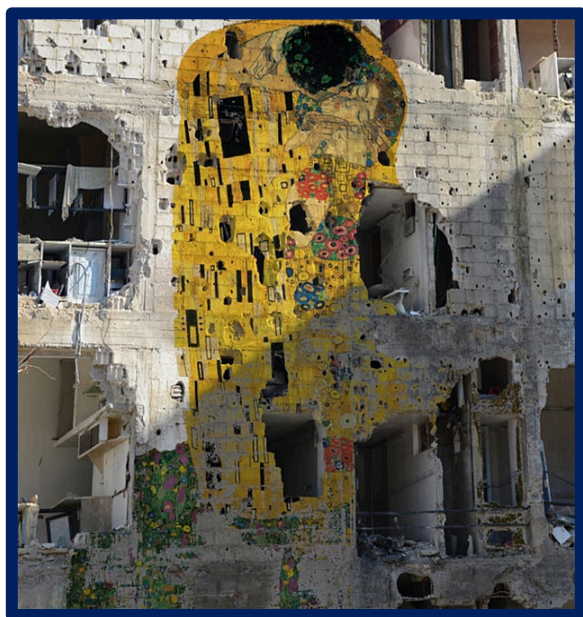


The deconstruction of the city is a key subject of Azzam’s work. What does the city represent? Think about how people interact in a city, the physical aspects of the city, such as buildings, and culture. Brainstorm ideas.

Azzam’s work layers the painting over a war-ravaged apartment block that has already been resurfaced by the bombardment of artillery to make it a shell; a ruin. This idea of layers of experience and memory brought together in a place is both symbolic and literal: just as the quote from Baudelaire says: the transitory and the eternal are each one half of the art.



Look at Azzam's 'Freedom Graffiti' below. What does it make you think of? What feelings is it meant to evoke? How is this artwork paradoxical (suggesting a message by placing opposites together)?



<https://i.guim.co.uk/img/static/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2013/2/4/1359995839230/Tammam-Azzams-version-of--001.jpg?w=620&q=85&auto=format&sharp=10&s=03799f6418b4e8130bd426bb67209f00>

'The Kiss' takes its name from a line in the choral performance of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' in Beethoven's 'Ninth Symphony': 'This kiss is for the whole world!' Klimt's erotic vision of embracing lovers perpetuates the notion of a global, unlimited human love. It was already famous. But in Azzam's artwork it is transformed. Images of 'Graffiti Freedom' also went viral and global, bringing light to the issues of the Syrian people.

Task 1.1: Understanding 'Freedom Graffiti'



Time: 5 mins

- a Explain the importance of the title of the artwork 'Freedom Graffiti'. Refer to the textual elements of the image in your response. You might like to undertake some research.

Interconnecting Cultures

Azzam's work has been described as a 'golden ghost on a ruinous façade,' partly because of his use of photographic processes and also because of his message about the losses the Syrian people have suffered.

Many of Azzam's 'borrowings' are artworks of famous European artists who were modernists. Like Klimt, these artists were heavily influenced by their encounters with the subjects and styles of art made in 'the Orient'. Azzam chose these artworks because of their fame. Maybe it was a personal or arbitrary decision, but whatever the reason, Azzam has perhaps accidentally reclaimed the East from the West and reminded us that the modern world is global.

From the Orient

The Orient is a term Europeans came up with in the 19th century. Literally it included everywhere east of Europe – the Middle East (like Syria and Egypt), India, Indonesia, China and Japan. Figuratively, it referred to 'the other': cultural beliefs, styles that Europeans felt to be exotic, exciting, even dangerous and daring.

Gustav Klimt painted his famous 'The Golden Age' series in the early 1900s. The word 'Golden' refers to the style he had borrowed from Japanese art of covering large spaces in artworks with gold leaf (thin sheets of gold). There are other elements of Japanese art Klimt has adopted in his own work too. We will now study some of his work and some examples of the kind of Japanese art he was inspired by.

Task 1.2: Exploring interconnecting cultures



Time: 20 mins

a Study the images from the triptych below and write brief notes about what you have learned so far about this artwork.



Wasserschlangen II 1904

<http://www.klimt.com/en/gallery/early-works/klimt-wasserschlangen2-1904.ihtml>



Der Kuss 1908

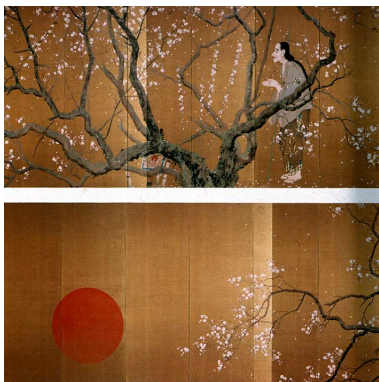
<http://www.klimt.com/en/gallery/women/klimt-der-kuss-1908.ihtml>



Judith II (Salome) 1909

<http://www.klimt.com/en/gallery/women/klimt-judith2--salome-1909.ihtml>

b What similarities and differences between Klimt's paintings from the Golden series and the Japanese screens below can you identify? Consider the following: style and subject.



<http://www2.oberlin.edu/images/Art251/beggart.JPG>



<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/6c/f2/50/6cf25067483c5a6a3ae1c948181cda4d--folding-screens-chinese-antiques.jpg>