

TIME

FINE ART

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The presentation of time is one that has been countless captured within artwork across the ages. After the invention of the camera, our depictions of the subject have divulged into a new world of technology, allowing a capture of real time through photography and film. That being said, we still strive to preserve the old means of our artistic predecessors, as can be seen through these different presentations of time through art.

The front runner of Time's portrayal is the physical form which artists have tried to capture. Salvador Dali's *Persistence of Memory* [1] creates the abstraction of time and pairs it with his surrealist style through the image of melting clocks. Externally, this physical representation of a commonly associated object appears to be a basic symbol of the human perception of time, as well as allowing Dali to show off the textural contrast seen in many of his works: the soft fluidity of the clocks against the harsh linearity of the desk. This abstract spin on normality has been discussed as a symbol of relativity of time and space, while Dali himself described his inspiration for the clocks to be camembert melting in the sun. In the centre of the composition it is argued that a figure can be seen, with the eyelid closed showing the eyelashes of a human. This creates the impression of a dreamlike state surrounding the piece, with the iconography potentially linking to a dream Dali had, and thus acting as an artistic representation for the irregular passing of time within the dreaming conscience. Equally the title and use of this closed eye could suggest the persistence of time in the eyes of the dreamer, all adding a second layer to Dali's physical portrayal of time. Finally, the common use of ants in Dali's pieces, found here on the clock's face, act as a symbol of decay and this physical portrayal suggests ideas of fatality and the consequences of time. Aside from the use of clocks as a representation, common personifications through Old Father Time can also be seen, for example in *A Dance to the Music of Time* [2] by Nicholas Poussin. This piece is hugely influential for showing mythological adaptations of time during the neoclassic movement of the 17th century. Time is overtly shown to the right of the composition playing a lyre, with wings as traditionally depicted. This human personification offers a vulnerability to his characterisation and a weakness with age, however it is the other elements of the piece which are particularly telling for the personified aspects of time.

In the upper half Aurora, the goddess of dawn precedes Apollo in his chariot while the Hours accompany him. This trio of elements, all in their personified human forms show a different aspect of time: a visual physicality which is not otherwise offered in other pieces, which focus on much more ideological themes. Most importantly, and potentially the most discussed aspect of the piece is the four dancers that the composition revolves around. Originally disputed to be the four seasons, trapped in an eternal dance lest the world comes to a stop, art critics have now decided that the group presents the cycle of life, the passing of time and the different stages of wealth on the wheel of fortune. The male at the back, barefoot in humility, represents Poverty, beside Labor with her muscular shoulders, while Wealth wears gold and holds herself haughtily towards the viewer. To the left is Pleasure, offering a smirk of delight, emphasising the luxury of the rich and highlighting the ideas of social mobility through time. That being said the notion of social mobility is uncommon even in today's age.

The contrast between these two images, both displaying time in a physical manner is interesting in order to comment on the effect of both. Clocks as an inanimate physicality of time's theoretical notion are particularly abstract and hard to emotionally engage with, while the personifications seem to add tones of vulnerability and emotional connection. Due to the use of expression and human interaction between figures, the characterisation adds to the narrative of time, whereas the much more surrealist depictions carry deeper meaning through their symbolism.

Another physical portrayal of time, although based on interpretation, is the creation of movement within a piece. A key example of this is *Head VI* [3] by Francis Bacon, featured in his "screaming head" series, and based around the *Portrait of Innocent X* [4]. Within the piece Bacon plays with the paradoxical

ideas of iconoclasm, the destruction of religious icons for political motives, as well as pastiche (a work of visual art based on the artwork of another). Not only is Bacon reflecting back on a different artistic time and using those techniques as inspiration, but he has also manipulated them in a way to capture an eternal moment of time. The deeply forceful and emotive brushstrokes from the mouth upwards emphasize the enormity of the mouth, contorted by the scream. The dark strokes seem to act as a representation of the sound escaping. It is with the use of these brushstrokes that Bacon has captured the movement of the scream, as well as his own hand in action on the canvas.

Interestingly, the use of the glass cage surrounding the body is one that Bacon often used, but is most effective here. Creating a sense of similarity with the original portrait of the Pope, its geometric lines mirror the linearity of the throne behind him. Aside from this, the claustrophobic tone created by the glass cage works to heighten the movement of the scream and stress a sense of eternity to the situation. Unlike any other artist attempting to portray movement through brush strokes, Bacon has achieved a truly haunting depiction of time, not only a snapshot of a scream but the scream itself. Finally, the contemplation of morality in Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* [5] demonstrates an interesting step away from the perceived abstractions of time. Painted during the Enlightenment in the art world, David sought to exemplify Marat's death in martyrdom for propagandist reasons. Similarly, to Dali's use of ants to show decay, David has eternalised Marat through the tombstone like table beside him, enforcing ideas of fatality and the effects of time. This emotional and moralistic presentation of time, particularly in death, is one which plays on capturing a figure for eternity. The use of David's idealisation of the body and lack of emphasis on the death, leaves Marat in a sleep like state, similar to Dali's perception of time within dreams. Marat is encapsulated in this piece through David's depiction and thus it is not our perception of time which is being played with, but instead the external use of artwork to preserve a moment throughout time.

Every aspect of time can be disputed within artwork. Internally, there are the physical depictions, the varying symbols, use of brushwork and personifications all encapsulating the concept of time. Externally to the viewer, time is shown through preservation of memory, the use of time by an artist when creating a piece and now the extent of media available to artists today within the age of technology. The old art forms may still be used for what they are: inspiration. Artists leading other artists into the unexplored world of the canvas, but what must be fully appreciated is the demand to capture theoretical ideas and suggest coherence to a viewer as each artist attempts for themselves.