

David saw Marat's death as an opportunity for political propaganda and a way to demand political action. He portrayed Marat as a martyr and tried to show ideas of sacrificing for the greater good. However his portrayal contrasts with the reality of Marat who was a violent man who sentenced thousands of people to death in order to maintain the new state.

1

*The Raft of the Medusa* was painted by Theodore Gericault in 1818. This style of painting was the beginning of the Romanticism movement which was a reaction against Neoclassicism which ended around 1813 with the defeat of Napoleon. Gericault portrays an important event around that time showing a French ship, *Medusa*, which had been sent to Senegal to re-establish that country as a French colony. This ship was wrecked off the west coast of Africa due to the captain's incompetence and the ship's carpenter was ordered to make a raft as there were not enough lifeboats. This dramatic scene that Gericault displays is the sighting of a rescue ship and the survivors are desperately trying to wave it down.

4



The subjects in this work are placed strategically from bottom left to the top right hand corner. This diagonal composition is counter balanced by the lines of the mast and ropes that dominate the top left hand corner. Gericault was quite clever with this diagonal composition because it almost resembles an apex of hope. From the bottom left, he displays dying figures showing despair and desperation and this moves to the top right where a man is shown waving a piece of material in the air to wave down the rescue ship in the distance. This shows the gradual shift of optimism and hope increasing from left to right. This shift could also be seen as a gradual change from the French Revolution and Neoclassicism art to the freedom from restrictions of Romanticism.

3

The colours in the work are limited to quite a murky, dark palette. The tones shown are mainly browns, blacks, greens and a golden colour that reflects the setting sun. These dark colours help to portray this dramatic scene in an emotional way and could suggest death and terror. The use of light helps to unify the forms in this work and cast powerful shadows. There is a sharp contrast of light and dark and this creates the effect of chiaroscuro. The lighting comes from the top left hand side and is a golden colour which suggests the sun is setting.

In *The Raft of the Medusa*, Gericault wanted to present ideas of the battles between man and nature which was a main concern of Romanticism. Gericault made comparisons between art movements, for example Neoclassicism showed ideas of the sacrifice for the greater good, heroism, equality and other virtues. While in this Romanticism painting there is no heroism – just victims, no cause and no patriotism. This demonstrates the shift from Neoclassicism to romanticism. Gericault could also have a hidden message beneath the painting showing integration between different races and this is shown by the black man at the top of the raft waving a piece of material who is surrounded by the rest of the French Settlers.

2

Gericault showed the change from the heroism of Neoclassical art to Romanticism which depicts the lives of unfortunate victims. It was important to convey these ideas during this time period because people who opposed the monarchy or the new state saw this as a metaphor of their government becoming just as incompetent as the captain of the ship.

Overall, both the works of David and Gericault have underlying political themes and these were made clear by the use of formal elements such as composition, light and colour. Over the 4 works, I feel that the composition was a way of dividing the emotional differences in the two painting between the optimistic and heroic opposing the gloomy and saddened. The colour palettes also helped to show

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