

Jacques-Louis David (1748-1835)

Oil on canvas – The Death of Marat



1 Marat, a leader of the French Revolution of 1789, is depicted just after being murdered in his bath by French revolutionist, Charlotte Corday. Painted in the months after Marat's murder, it has been described by T J Clark as the first modernist painting. This portrait is a mark of respect to and testimony of the artist's grief over a personal friend; implications of sacrifice and spirituality are achieved by the effortlessness and austerity of the composition.

### COMPOSITION

2 The painting is in a rectangular format that can be easily divided horizontally into two, faces which create a very obvious contrast between the crowded bottom part from the empty and plain top of the overall picture. The painting does not convincingly present death as his body is positioned in a fashion that pain, helplessness and suffering are concealed; even his right arm descends with grace. The whole idea of this painting is to show David's admiration for Marat. Although the background is not clearly specified, we can still recognize a sense of depth shown by the creases of the green and white fabric as well as those in his turban.

### COLOUR & TECHNIQUE

3 The colour range is mainly discrete to earth shades with warm yellow lighting further decreasing the horror of the scene. Both dagger on the floor and the laceration on his chest are barely visible in the shadow. David visited his friend the day before the murder, the green rug, few papers and a pen are merely details he has drawn from that trip. This particular composition of his, has often been weighed against Michelangelo's "Pietà" and Caravaggio's "Entombment of Christ". Qualities of David's painting give Marat a religious sympathy by making him look similar to a saint martyr. (In the Catholic society, saints are perceived as higher figures that the community is meant to revere and emulate).

### MEANING

Every single object in the overall picture is arranged in order to hide the unkind and brutal reality regarding the manner of Marat's death, starting from the green fabric. It is reasonable to assume that this should have been damaged or at least show certain signs of his struggle, nevertheless, it appears to be in perfectly ironed condition. The exclusion of the dagger and the wound that caused his passing gives the impression that the painting's foremost message is more than an expose about his murderer, the artist wants us to focus on Marat's martyrdom.

### LIGHTNING

The ray of light coming from the right hand side enables the lifeless body to be highlighted accordingly, necessary to create a fairly somber and dramatic atmosphere. Marat's left arm catches the most light; therefore, this point is considered the focus. Interestingly enough, it directs the viewer's eye towards the faked letter of introduction with which Charlotte illicitly entered his home.

## COMPOSITION

The painting is in a rectangular format and has been divided vertically into numerous narrow pieces, which astoundingly create an effect similar to that of mirrors. The young woman's face was portrayed into three different personas, divided in a fashion at which her facial features remain evident. Her eyes were deliberately made wider to emanate a sense of innocence and affection as she looks directly to the viewer, making them connect with the image reinforced with curiosity. The depiction in the middle is split and assembled to appear the most disorganized compare to those beside it, allowing the viewer's eye to wander, further, around the composition. It is the one on the left hand side that is ordered accordingly, enough to recognize the woman's contemplated profile. Dark-jagged borderlines found on both the bottom and top section of the overall picture, provides margin and keeps the observers attention merely, within eye-level.

## COLOUR & TECHNIQUE

The colour range is mainly discrete to blue, white, dark brown and salmon. Some areas are decorated with whitish tones, creating an effective glow that once again, adds to the mirror-like impression. Oil paint allows the painter to achieve delicate details and textures, which is necessary in order to maintain her features identifiable on top having it been divided relentlessly. Another reason why it was kept into a limited colour-selection is to uphold harmony right through. Both Clyne's "Twisted" and Carvaggio's "Narcissus" present a reflecting connection, although, this is a very contemporary approach on his art.

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## MEANING

This statement given by the famous art critic and historian Michael Peppiatt "...our sense of ourselves - that shadowy and ubiquitous private identity that we rarely confront head on, and which under examination turns out to be disturbingly malleable and imprecise." She considers as the most fitting description of "Twisted", each partition represents the phases in our lives that when combined together reveals our true self. We are professed differently according to fusions of perception and opinion. The vertical lines are also a direct reference to the linear passage of time and how it captures a part of us that will remain independent of consciousness.

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## LIGHTING

The light source is impossible to identify due to the reason of work being unclear. However, some strips are significantly brighter allowing the flow of interest to be translated from one side of the picture to the other.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

I chose this particular painting of Amanda Clyne because she has an innovative and distinct approach towards portraits. My subject for painting this year is "Forever Young", which profoundly relate to people, ageing and the prime of life. In order to capture and render that message, I should be able to maneuver my work in a non-repeating manner to eliminate monotony while still maintaining that same thought throughout. Her techniques would provide me with a range of possibilities that I would be able to incorporate in my own work making it more exciting and reminiscent for both the viewers and myself.

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"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak." Is a statement given by Hans Hoffman; best used to describe this particular work, or in other words "simplicity is beauty." The sophisticated behaviour displayed by her paintings tread a fine line between radiance and ugliness. Disorientation never looked so good.

## Amanda Clyne (1975-present)

### Oil on canvas – Twisted



According to the artist, her work was inspired by a simple error she made once, on a printer. The ink failed to adhere to the foreign surface she put in, causing the image to remain damp and volatile. The ink bled and spread gradually across the image while fighting to retain its integrity. Gerhard Richter once confirmed, "I use painting to make a photograph", Clyne on the other hand, found an innovative way through photography to make a painting. The colour range is similar to that of "Twisted", she has chosen a fair-faced woman to effectively manifest the idea of youth and freshness also established on most *Vanitas* paintings. The splitting up method plays the most critical role in this arrangement because it is the ground interest and abnormality, causing someone to stop and spend time to admire the work with enthralment, fulfilling any artists' foremost intention.