



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.

Comparative Study

Elliesa Vang

In this study, I will be comparing the works of artists JMW Turner and Rembrandt. Turner is regarded as a Romantic artist, while Rembrandt is one of the most well-known Dutch Golden Age painters. I will analyze the formal qualities of their art and mines, along with the function, purpose, and the cultural significance. Each piece features nature in some form and shows how it affects the people in the work. Additionally, I also will look at the contrasts and similarities of these aspects between the pieces, and how they utilize the power of nature to convey an emotion or idea.

Cultural Significance



Self-Portrait with Gorget. (1629)
- Rembrandt.

The use of dramatic lighting with the darkest **value** being almost black was common in Dutch Golden Age art.

The Dutch Golden Age was an era of pride and independence for the Dutch, and art began to move away from religious focus to daily life. Landscapes were popular during the time. Art was in demand and commissioned often, leading to Rembrandt's success and reputation. Rembrandt was well-known for his portraits, and focused not on an idealized version of the person, but who they really were. The art of the Dutch Golden Age also placed emphasis on light, which the artist was well known for. He used light and shadow to convey emotion and bring importance to the scene.

With the idea of realism that the Dutch Golden Age strived for, Rembrandt prioritized conveying emotion in his paintings and to emphasize on it. In *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, the men are visibly panicked, bringing that sense of terror to the viewer. Jesus, however, is calm despite the danger, bewildering the men around him. Rembrandt's use of light and shadow is prominent in this work as well, with clear **contrast** to the right and left sides of the painting. The strong **contrast** gives a dramatic feel to the piece as well.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.

Function and Purpose

The Dutch Golden Age moving away from religious subjects and events makes the piece stand out for its time period. Rembrandt is theorized to have placed himself in the painting, as a way of attempting to experience the event himself. The choice to paint a largely experimental piece with a subject that wasn't as popular at the time reveals his intent to prove himself as a young artist, through faith and a newer depiction of the Bible.

While the focus of the piece is mainly the sheer chaos of the storm and the desperation of those onboard, there is also something else. The **contrast** of the soft yellow **hues** of light against the desaturated grays and dark blues reveals the eventual passing of the calamity and provides a ray of hope to both the viewer and those onboard the ship.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.

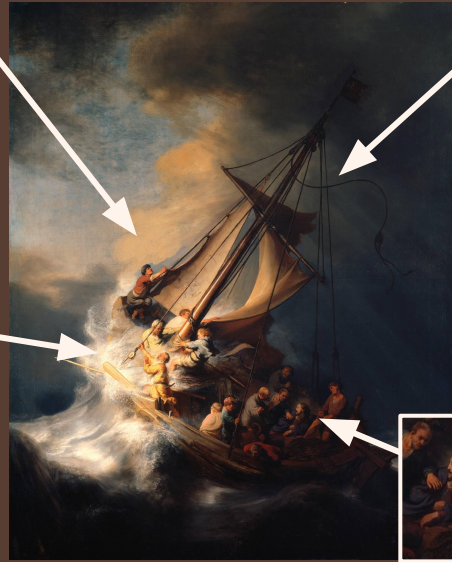
Rembrandt wanted to not only show the power of the sea, he also desired to show Christ's power and the faith he inspired.

Rembrandt created the painting as a depiction of Christ crossing the turbulent waters of the Sea of Galilee. When he made the piece in 1633, Rembrandt had just moved to Amsterdam, and was growing his reputation as a portrait painter. He made a few historical paintings, focusing on careful detail and the emphasis of strong emotion and action. The Storm on the Sea of Galilee was noted as the largest **history** painting from Rembrandt, and was **experimental** due to him having never painted a seascape before. He would have taken inspiration from the seascapes of older artists such as Hendrik Vroom and Claes van Wieringen and learned from their stylistic choices and portrayals of incidents at sea.

Analysis of Formal Qualities

The use of warm yellow **tones** provides **contrast** to the dark blue **colors**. The sky is opening up, and the light blue showing through **emphasizes** hope in this situation, the gray storm clouds clearing up. Rembrandt uses lighting to convey emotion and immerse the viewer in the story of these men.

The waves crashing against the direction of the boat gives a sense of **movement**, of forces clashing against one another. The light **values** of the waves also contrast against the dark brown **tones** of the boat. There is **texture** in how the waves are painted, soft and scattering against the men.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.

Rembrandt uses **composition** to tilt the boat upwards. He utilizes it to **emphasize** the precariousness of the situation the men are in – the boat nearly tipping over and conveying a sense of **movement** in the piece. This choice of **composition** also leads the viewer's eyes from the bottom towards the tip of the boat, where one of the men is holding on.

A soft halo of light surrounds Jesus, contrasting against the dark **values** and providing **contrast**. Here, the halo **emphasizes** Jesus' holiness and provides the viewer a clue on who exactly the figure is. Rembrandt deliberately chooses to make him stand out from the rest of them through the use of lighter **values**.

Cultural Significance

As a Romantic artist, JMW Turner focused on landscapes and a sense of the sublime, the power of nature. Nature is a major theme, as well as expressing emotion through the use of color. Romanticism overall emphasizes individuality, straying away from the strictness of order and rationality that was important to the Enlightenment. Romantic artists also made paintings that spoke out against injustice and cruelty on issues that were relevant at the time, inspired by the French Revolution. *The Slave Ship* is a piece speaking out against slavery, Turner desiring to bring attention to the abolition of the slave trade. In the work, the force of nature is clearly defined, the main view a seascape with the sea crashing against a ship.

The Fifth Plague of Egypt also conveys more of Turner's focus on nature. The colors used are dull, bleak to represent the drama of the situation. There's a sense of foreboding with the gray clouds in the sky, bringing into play that sublime feeling, and to show the wrath of the incoming storm. The dead figure in the front is overshadowed by the landscape, Turner choosing to zoom out and instead portray the effects of the plague on Egypt. His works are representative of the main ideas of Romanticism, not focusing on the figures but instead the world around them and how it impacts them, and using color to better convey the chaotic emotion of the paintings.



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Function and Purpose



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner

In *The Slave Ship*, the painting is a depiction based on the Zong, a ship where the captain threw overboard diseased slaves to gain profit off of them. Although slavery had been abolished in Britain by 1833, Turner wished to expand the idea of abolishing slavery worldwide. He thus presented the painting at the Royal Academy in 1840, where an Anti-Slavery League meeting was also happening. Turner hoped to impress Crown Prince Albert and influence him to put more effort into removing slavery entirely. To him, the events of the Zong massacre were an injustice that needed to be brought attention to, in order to remember the victims and the corruption within society. The artist also wanted to express the might of the sea and the chaos that comes with it, with the use of vibrant hues and sea monsters devouring the victims in the water.

While the slaves lie in the water, the ship itself in the background is teetering as it crashes against the waves. The sun, warm orange-yellows, and blood reds contrast against the faded blue of the waves, giving an almost fiery look to the background. Overall, the piece is largely political and expressive, a wish from Turner to inspire those in power to make a change, and for the viewer to understand his thoughts on the matter. He places the slaves in the front, to show the cruelty of their predicament and how callous the slave owners were as they live their final moments.



Analysis of Formal Qualities

The faded blue **colors** heavily **contrast** with the more saturated reds, catching the viewer's eye and to give **emphasis** on the waves. This choice of **contrast** also separates the sky from the sea and **balances** the warm and cool tones. The viewer can also see the dark red of the boat against the waves, showing where the slave ship is and its struggle against nature. Turner communicates how the ocean has come to take some form of retribution against the slave owners.

The **composition** in this piece has the dead bodies at the forefront, to **emphasize** the devastation of the event. The artist uses muted yellows and grays with spots of red to convey blood in the water. The separation of the sky and sea **balances** the work, and the **texture** of the waves adds **movement**, shifting to the side.



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner



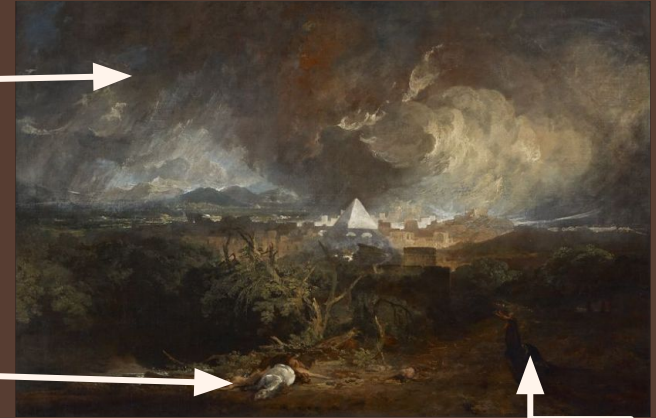
Turner applies mostly warm **colors** to the background, giving the impression of the sun through the use of a light pale yellow. The vibrant and intense orange and red hues express an almost violent feeling, as if the sky itself is on fire. The **unity** of these colors turns the sky into a focal point for the viewer.



Turner's choice to add animals eating away at the slaves brings focus to the **composition** and **proportions**. The details are small, tiny, giving a sense of just how vast the sea is in comparison.

Function and Purpose

This work was a depiction of a religious event, when Moses lets hail rain upon Egypt. The dark clouds looming at the top of the piece brings a sense of foreboding to the fates of the people of Egypt. This work was at the time Turner's largest painting yet, and his first in historical pieces. Despite the title, the image itself depicts the seventh plague instead of the fifth, which was all of the livestock dying from disease. JMW Turner desired to show off his skill to the Royal Academy, and to prove himself to critics with a serious piece. The **composition** is consistent with Turner's style, with a vast, spanning landscape and tiny figures showing his utilization of **proportion** in the work.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Moses himself is barely visible in the painting, the dark **values** and low **contrast** hiding him from the viewer. Turner doesn't make him the main focus or emphasize his presence in the piece, instead focusing on what Moses has wrought upon Egypt. The clouds symbolize the divine retribution, and effectively conveys the terror of the wrath of God. He also **emphasizes** the massive scale of the event, with the entirety of the buildings and pyramid under the storm clouds. The use of muddled brown and light gray colors in the storm shows the development of the disaster. The pyramid's light **values contrast** against the rest of the buildings to serve as a focal point.

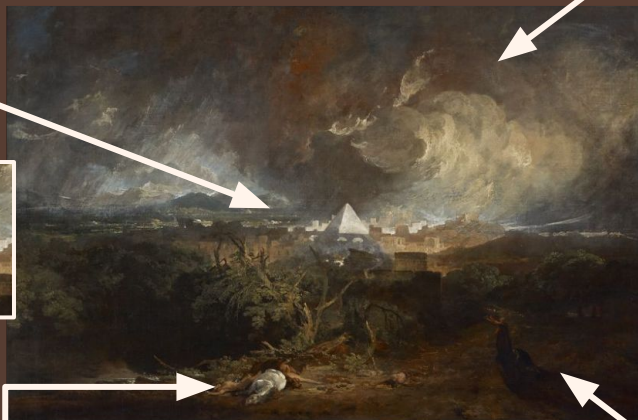


Analysis of Formal Qualities

The choice of **contrast** makes the pyramid stand out and act as the focal point. It's pure white and gray compared to the sandy **colors** of the other buildings, **emphasizing** its importance in the piece as some sort of major building. The light **values** of the pyramid contrast against the dark **values** of the clouds.



The livestock lying dead is **emphasized** by light, a testament to God's wrath. Turner chooses to place them at the front of the **composition** to portray that in an effective way. The white **color** of one of them stands out, catching the viewer's eye as to what happened previously.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Turner utilizes the **composition** and positions the clouds in a way that resembles an eye, the dark clouds in the middle the iris. This adds to the idea of God's presence in the work.



The clouds here are building on themselves, and Turner uses shading, as well as the **contrast** of light and dark **values** to portray **movement** in the clouds, like a brewing storm. There is also implied **form** in them as well. The warm grays and the mixture of copper brown contribute to the uneasy mood of the scene. The way Turner paints his clouds implies a soft **texture**, appearing puffy and faint. He deliberately uses **composition** to split the painting in half, to show the sky being enveloped by clouds and to further **emphasize** the awe of nature common in Romanticism.

Moses, being an important figure in the Bible, is obscured by low **contrast**. He's only differentiated from the rest of the background by subtle yellow lighting, with no other **emphasis** otherwise.

Comparing & Contrasting



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee. (1633) - Rembrandt.



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner

Culture

Both the movements of Dutch Golden Age art and Romanticism placed an importance on light and color. The two painters were inspired by the individualism in their respective art movement to make something personal to them.

Formal Qualities

Both works have their setting take place on the sea. Turner and Rembrandt use **composition** to convey the danger the ship is in, tilting it precariously to the side. It's one of the main focuses of the piece. They also utilize **contrast** through **texture** and **color** for the waves, crashing against the ship directly as an opposing force of nature. People struggle in the painting, trying to hold on to their lives. Both of the pieces have the sky take up most of the background, with the sun peeking through conveyed through yellow tones and contrasting **values**. The idea of man's struggle against the sea is clearly conveyed through the artists' choices.

Function & Purpose

The purpose of these pieces were to show the turbulent power of the ocean. They also were made going against some values common in their time period. Rembrandt made a religious painting when it was going out of style, and the Dutch Golden Age began to forgo Catholicism. Turner wanted to speak out against slavery and abolish the slave trade. Both works are expressive of the artist's beliefs.

Comparing & Contrasting



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee. (1633) - Rembrandt.



The Slave Ship. (1840) - J.M.W. Turner

Culture

The ideas of progressiveness in Romanticism gave Turner the basis of *The Slave Ship*. Dutch Golden Age art frequented around domestic scenes and realism, which is evident in the darker lighting Rembrandt uses instead of saturated colors.

Formal Qualities

In *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, Rembrandt uses darker **values**, with harsher **contrast** than the softer ones Turner uses. The ship and sky in Rembrandt's piece are halfway obscured by almost black shadows, barely visible. Turner has more vibrant **hues** in his work, rather than the muted colors Rembrandt uses. Turner's use of color includes blood red along with orange-yellows, warm **hues** mostly. The muted **tones** in Rembrandt's piece contribute to the precarious mood of the situation, using less of a noticeably warm color palette. The **scale** of the ship in Turner's piece is notably smaller than the larger **scale** ship Rembrandt paints, which is in the center of the piece and acts as the focus. Turner's ship is on the horizon, far away from the subjects in the work.

Function & Purpose

The Storm on the Sea of Galilee functions as a religious piece, while *The Slave Ship* acts more as a political one. Turner intended for the piece to reach a specific audience and not just the general public to inspire change. Rembrandt wanted to demonstrate his skill to all.

Comparing & Contrasting

Culture

Both paintings were made when the painter was young, developing their style and themes. They focus on lighting to make a stormy piece encased in mostly shadow, with minimal light to bring importance to a part of the painting.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee. (1633) - Rembrandt.

Formal Qualities

There are mainly dark **values** and muted navy blues, grays, and soft yellows in each piece. The clouds take up around half of the **composition** at the top, and they have **texture** to show **movement** in the sky. White is used to add stark **contrast**, and it draws the viewer's eye towards that part. Rembrandt uses white to show the waves crashing against the ship, and Turner uses white to let the viewer know that the pyramid is important in the piece. Both artists also use **proportion** to deliberately make the men small in the work, to **emphasize** nature as it dwarfs the men in turmoil.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - J.M.W. Turner

Function & Purpose

The pieces function as religious paintings, showing a critical moment in the Bible. They were experimental, doing something the artist wasn't familiar with to grow in their skill. For Rembrandt this was a seascape, and for Turner it was a historical painting.

Comparing & Contrasting

Culture

Romanticism focuses more so on nature, which can be seen in how Turner's scale focuses on the city and background, while Rembrandt has the men on the ship being the main focus. In *The Fifth Plague of Egypt*, Moses can barely be seen.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee. (1633) - Rembrandt.

Formal Qualities

The horizon line can be seen in Turner's piece, separated by **contrast** and placed in the middle. Rembrandt's horizon is much lower. The **perspective** and **scale** in both pieces are different, *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* a view of the entirety of Egypt, focused on the scenery. *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* has a smaller **scale**, and the ocean and sky are visible, but you can also still see the men on the boat. The lighter **values** for Rembrandt's painting is on the left, Turner's lighter **values** steering towards the middle of his painting. Rembrandt uses saturated **colors** in his work, warmer yellows and vibrant light blues a contrast against Turner's desaturated colors.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - J.M.W. Turner

Function & Purpose

Rembrandt is theorized to have placed himself into his painting as a way of experiencing the event himself, and wanted to explore his faith. Turner made his work for less personal reasons and mainly to prove his skill to others.

Comparing & Contrasting

Formal Qualities

The **proportions** of the pieces focus on the background being the largest part, with man and animal being small. Turner uses **light values** in the middle of the horizon to draw the eye towards it. There's a clear split between the horizon and the sky, differentiated by **color** and noticeably darker **values** at the bottom. The artist **emphasizes** the sky in both works, and the **composition** features dead beings at the bottom.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Function & Purpose

Both paintings function as expressive and symbolic works, *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* symbolic of God's wrath and *The Slave Ship* symbolic of Turner's desire to end slavery. The purpose of the works is to show the viewer the power of nature's destruction.



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner

Culture

The pieces are similarly expressive of the values of Romanticism: the focus on nature and the sublime, of man being enveloped by it. Nature's ability to overwhelm is demonstrated by the **scale** of the background.

Comparing & Contrasting

Formal Qualities

The Slave Ship uses lighter **values** and a far more saturated **color** palette than *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* does. Turner uses bright **hues** of yellows and oranges for the sky, along with a light cream **color** for the clouds. His clouds in *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* have more defined **form** and **texture**, and the ones from *The Slave Ship* are more seamless. There's no clearly defined **form**, rather a blend of **color**.



The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Function & Purpose

The purpose of *The Slave Ship* was to advocate for the abolition of slavery worldwide, while *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* was a historical and religious painting. He wanted to prove his painting skills as a young artist to the Royal Academy.

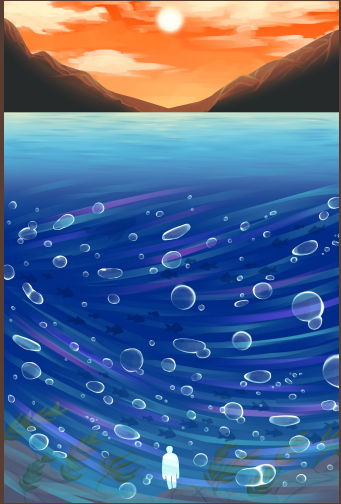


The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner

Culture

As the paintings are from different periods in Turner's life, *The Slave Ship* shows a more developed style and his signature style of not focusing so much on detail, but rather the colors and feeling of the piece. His earlier piece is more carefully detailed than his 1840 work.

Comparing & Contrasting - Personal Work & Turner



Retreat. (2022) - Elliesa Vang



The Slave Ship. (1840) - J.M.W. Turner

Comparing

The similarities between my work and Turner's is the meaning, which is based in a social issue. Turner's is about the abolition of slavery, while mine is about societal norms and the fronts people put on to hide their "undesirable" qualities. They both **function** as a **political** and **expressive** piece, dealing with discrimination and expressing a desire for acceptance and change. Our works are both seascapes with a warm sunset, movement shown with the waves. The human figures in the pieces are dwarfed by the sea, **emphasized** by **scale** to show the grandeur, and images of fish are included. The warm colors of the sunset are contrasted by the cooler hues of the ocean. There's a sort of chaotic feeling to both works emphasized by **movement** and **scale**.

Contrasting

Turner made his work with oil paint on canvas, while I chose a digital medium. The reason for so was to use glow effects and gradient maps. The human figures are detailed differently, with mine being more vague and Turner's being rendered realistically. My figure is meant to be more **symbolic** in nature, representative of multiple people. The colors in Turner's work are less saturated than the vivid **hues** in my work, giving it a softer look. The **perspectives** of the works are different, *Retreat* showing an underwater **perspective**. *The Slave Ship* instead shows the surface of the ocean, with more of the sky shown to present a wider **perspective** above.

Comparing & Contrasting - Personal Work & Turner



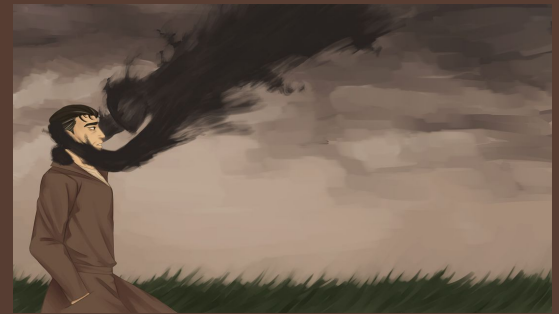
The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Comparing

The similarities between Turner's piece and mine is the setting, both having a stormy sky. The sky is dark and features desaturated **tones**, which are mostly gray. The clouds have a soft **texture** to them, wispy and alternating in **value** to add **contrast**. Both pieces have a desaturated palette, contributing to the unsettling atmosphere and the purpose of the pieces being to foreshadow a terrible event. The land portion contains a portion of greenery which is a dark faded green. Man feels overwhelmed in the face of nature, the focus on scenery **emphasizing** that feeling. The two pieces **function** as **symbolic** and **expressive** works, the sky symbolizing the foreboding feeling of the event about to occur to man. In general, there's a focus on the power of nature which acts as symbolism and **emphasizes** mood.

Contrasting

The **mediums** of the pieces are different, *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* being an oil painting while *A Premonition* is a digital work. The **scale** of the men and objects in Turner's work are small in comparison to the man in my work, and Turner more so **emphasizes** on the large **scale** of nature. Turner utilizes the **composition** differently and splits the land and sky more evenly. The white triangle in the middle contrasts strongly compared to the dark **values** of the piece, and acts to draw the viewer's eye to the center. In *A Premonition* I wanted the viewer to look primarily to the left, where the two figures are. While both pieces are symbolic, *The Fifth Plague of Egypt* is a religious painting, and my piece doesn't include any connections to religion.



A Premonition. (2022) - Elliesia Vang

Cultural Context - Personal Work & Turner



The Slave Ship. (1840) - JMW Turner

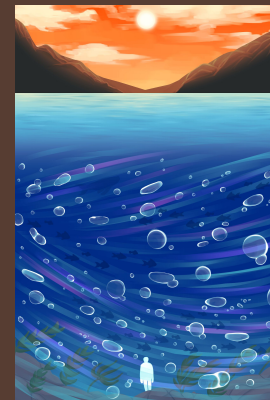


The Fifth Plague of Egypt. (1800) - JMW Turner

Our works focus on expressing emotion through the use of color, moving away from realistic portrayals. Turner seeks to show the force of nature, its significant size in contrast to man. Turner also lived in an era where speaking out against injustice was prevalent at the time, and that influenced the theme of my piece.

The ideas of Romanticism and the sense of the sublime mostly apply to my pieces, but I also put importance on the humans within the works. They're not as overshadowed by nature.

Turner and I both consider addressing social problems as important in *The Slave Ship* and *Retreat*. Our works have been influenced by our views on society and the way they choose to do things. Turner addresses the issue of slavery, and I depict the idea of societal norms. However none of my works have a religious aspect as shown in *The Fifth Plague of Egypt*, as they're more focused on expressing an emotion and conveying the human condition.



Retreat. (2022) - Elliesia Vang



A Premonition. (2022) - Elliesia Vang

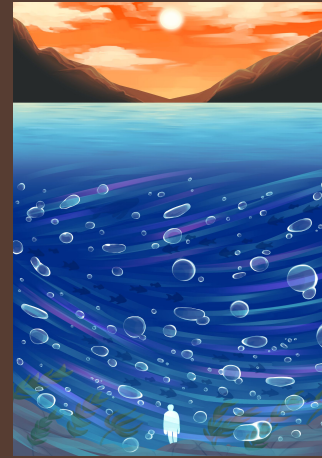
Comparing & Contrasting - Personal Work & Rembrandt

Comparing

The works both have a depiction of a seascape, the **movement** of the ocean giving the pieces a **dynamic** element. With the chaotic nature of the sea, it effectively conveys the emotions of the people in the pieces, emphasizing them as important. Likewise with Jesus being calm in spite of the danger in Rembrandt's work, the figure in my work feels a sense of calm in the ocean's turbulent movement. There's also a stark **contrast** between the light and dark **values**, with the darkest being almost black. The lighting of the two pieces is a warm, yellow **hue**, which contrasts against the darker blue **hues**.



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.



Retreat. (2022) - Elliesa Vang

Contrasting

The Storm on the Sea of Galilee functions as a **religious** and **historical** piece. *Retreat* is a **political** and **expressive** work. The tones of the pieces differ, with Rembrandt's **tones** of blue and yellow being softer and more dull. In contrast, mine are vivid and don't necessarily reflect a realistic portrayal of color. The **compositions** of the pieces are done differently, with the ship and lighter **values** in Rembrandt's work drawing the viewer's eye to the left. My **composition** is more centered, the focus being drawn to the figure below due to **contrasting** against the darker blues.

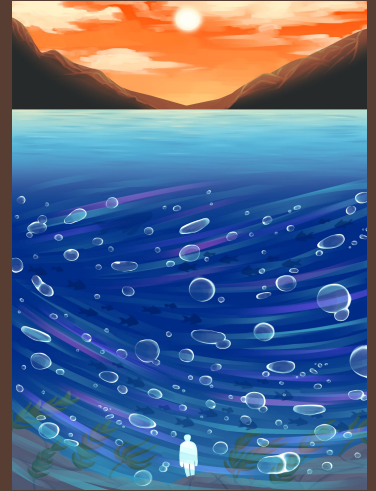
Cultural Context - Personal Work & Rembrandt



The Storm on the Sea of Galilee.
(1633) - Rembrandt.

Rembrandt and I use landscapes in our work, and we see emotion as important in our respective pieces. We also both experiment with the piece in regards to the seascape. Our artwork is an attempt to reach a wider audience, whether it be to prove himself in Rembrandt's case or to address a social issue for me. The prevalence of freedom and independence in our lives is important to the pieces in the topic we choose and its portrayal.

Religion had an impact on Rembrandt's life, him wanting to portray it in a new way even despite the more popular choice of portraying daily life. For me, religion hasn't had much of an impact on my work, more so focusing on what makes us human. Rembrandt's art also strives for the idea of realism that was common in the Dutch Golden Age. My art follows ideas more associated with Romanticism, with the portrayal of emotion more important than realism.



Retreat. (2022) - Elliesa Vang