

Memorial Art Gallery Essay

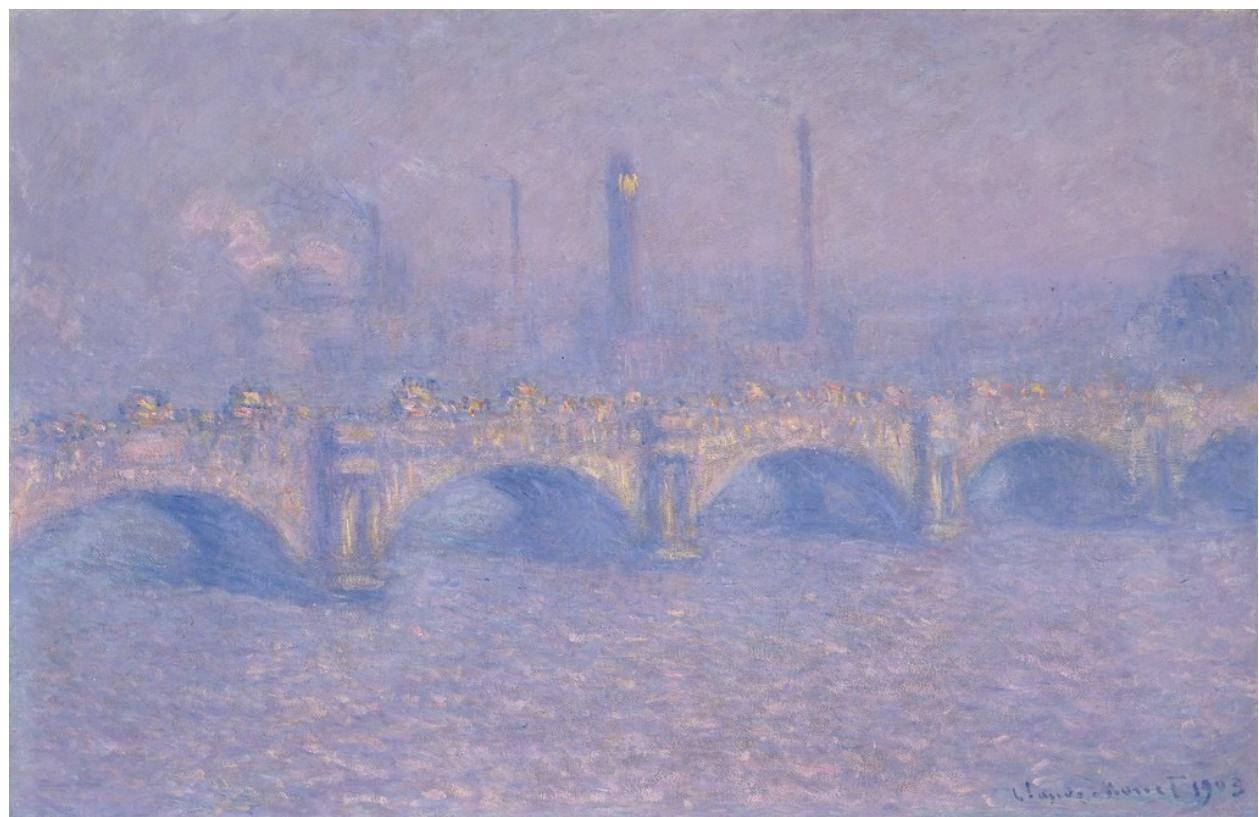
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Monet - Waterloo Bridge, Veiled Sun



AppendixTitle Page

<u>Title Page</u>	1
<u>Appendix</u>	2
<u>Essay</u>	3
<u>Works Cited</u>	8
<u>Notes</u>	9
<u>Full Sketch</u>	10
<u>Close Sketch</u>	11

Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun is a 1903 oil painting by the famous impressionist Monet.

The picture, at first glance, seems like a muddle of grey and lavender, with a bland grayish-yellow brick bridge highlighted in the center of the image. Behind the mist of grey and lavender, in the painting's backdrop, the viewer can make out a city scape lined with vague buildings such as smoke stacks and one large clock tower. The forefront of the picture displays the waves of the river.

Impressionist painters worked mainly with two goals; capturing how lighting changed a scene, and capturing a scene's atmosphere (Cothren, 987). Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun accomplished both of these goal. Monet chose a pallet of peaceful colors with his soft grays, lavenders, yellows, and pinks. While so much of the piece is enveloped in a soft mist, the image does not feel peaceful to the viewer. In fact, there is something unsettling about it. The artist has practically suffocated the scene in mist and that feeling of suffocation translate to the viewer.

Peering to make out the city in the backdrop only reveals dark and indistinguishable buildings, aside from the one large clock tower. While it is obvious that this picture was painted of the Waterloo Bridge, the vagueness of the shoreline gives the viewer the impression that the city before them could be any city with a river, anywhere. Without the title of the piece, odds are the viewer would certainly be geographically clueless as to where Monet has taken them.

The face of the clock on the tower is painted in a pale yellow, and stands out sharply against the muddled, misty colors of the painting. The bright hue used to paint the clock face is the same yellowish-grey color that appears in the main subject of the painting, the Waterloo Bridge. Since this yellowish-grey color stands out against the misty nature of the picture, the viewer's eyes continuously flits back and forth between the clock and the bridge. In fact, the

longer one stares at the piece, the brighter and more defined the clock's face and bridge facade become. The viewer gets the feeling that Monet may be saying something about time and "bridges."

Beneath the Waterloo Bridge, Monet has painted a river. The hue of the water is a mix of dark purples and deep blues. The water appears very dark beneath the bridge arches. Towards the bottom right of the painting, the water takes on a lighter, pinkish-magenta tone. This change in color gives the impression that the lightening in the image is coming from behind, and to the right of the viewer. The waves are painted as though they are crashing against each other, but on a very small scale. The viewer can not tell which way the water is moving, however, the water certainly does not seem calm. Once more, the viewer is left feeling lost as the water portrays no sense of direction. Whether Monet painted with this intention or not, Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun is an extremely powerful piece for this very reason.

Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun is piece that embodies the anxiety that accompanies stagnation. The cityscape, while probably London, has no clearly identifiable features without the painting's title. The scene is shaded in misty grey and lavender tones; peaceful colors that are associated with comfort. Often stagnation enters our lives when we are too comfortable; when there is no drive or need for change. The water is not peaceful but seems somewhat violent, even though the waves appear minuscule on the surface. This is equivalent to how one's mind may feel when trapped in a stagnant environment; restless... like the waves of the probable Thames Monet has painted.

Despite the scene's dreary tones, the painting does relay a message of hope. The brightest two figures in the piece are the face of the clock on the tower, and the facade of the

Waterloo Bridge. The angle by which the lightening hits the picture, in conjunction with how the water lightens in the lower right corner, reinforce the notion that the sun must be behind the viewer. The sun is a universal symbol for hope and the future. The sun starts a new morning and thus it brings new beginnings. The sun ends a bad day and thus can also represent the end of a bad time. After a storm, the clouds break to reveal the sun, and convey feelings that good times are once more on the way. The very muddled and suffocating qualities of this piece can all be forgotten, if the viewer just turns around and looks for the sun.

If I had to relate this picture another artistic masterpiece, it would not be another Monet, but rather Van Gogh's Starry Night. Starry Night is certainly one of Van Gogh's most famous pieces, if not one of the most famous art works of all times. Seen as one of Van Gogh's most exemplary works, Starry Night exists as a relic of immense feelings, relaying immense loneliness to the viewer through thick paint, bright and melancholy colors, and most telling of all, his brush strokes. Monet's technique's with the mist and the water are quite similar in this aspect. While Van Gogh wanted to portray emotion in his piece, it is unclear whether or not that was the primary motivation of Monet, however both artist created very emotional pieces. These emotions are translated not through technical prowess nor facsimile to real life. These feelings emote through color and brush strokes. Both Van Gogh's Starry Night and Monet's Waterloo Bridge, Veiled Sun demonstrate there is art in process.

Since the assignment called for us to write from our own perspectives and not that of scholars or researchers , I did not read the painting's plaque until my initial sketch and notes were done. It was there that I learned, like many of Monet's painting, this 1903 rendition of Waterloo Bridge - Sun Veiled was one of many renditions of the same scene, done by Monet.

The plaque went on to talk about the bright bursts of color representing people going about their business as they crossed the Waterloo Bridge. I was taken aback. ‘*What bright dots of color?*’ It wasn’t until this moment that I took a very close look at the picture, and discovered a Monet is an entirely different experience depending on how close or far away you are from it. Sure enough, atop the bridge, bright strokes of yellows, reds and even some greens were present. When I stepped back and observed the painting again, they now seemed glaringly obvious to me, whereas before they were lost in the mist. Again, this may not have been Monet’s intention. He very well may have had no goal but to capture this bridge when the sun was veiled, but I took these tiny dots, much like the clock and bridge facades, as symbols of hope. Whereas the picture is so dreary, Monet used bright strokes of color to represent the people moving across the bridge. The bridge, along with the clock face representing time, convey the message that in time you will move out of this mist. The sun is lighting the bridge. The sun is lighting the way out of the mist.

Whatever Monet’s intentions, Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun is a powerful piece that evokes feelings of being lost and relying on hope and patience to find your way out. In capturing the lighting changes and atmospheres of his subjects, Monet did more than just capture pictures, he captured moments. It is for this reason pieces like Waterloo Bridge , Veiled Sun evoke such strong reactions in viewers, and reaction in my opinion, is the metric of to scale art.

Works Cited

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