

# VISUAL ARTS

## How do artists capture and hold the attention of an audience?

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Artists aim to capture and hold the attention of an audience through a variety of ways. In my study of the Romantic Art period, the artworks produced were all paintings, therefore the methods the artists used to engage their audience were limited to the canvas. The primary methods are the manipulation of the elements of art (line, shape, color, tone, texture etc) to evoke a particular reaction from their audience; these can range from delight to disgust. The subject matter can also capture and hold the attention of the audience, depending on the context. Historical paintings were the most popular form of Romantic art, since they were easily understood by the general public.

Francisco de Goya, in his artwork *The Third of May*, depicts the uprising by Spanish citizens against the French soldiers occupying Madrid. As a Spanish painter, he aims to tap into the emotional anguish the Spanish public felt about the event. He paints it in a harsh light, focusing on the executions of the citizens, showing them as helpless against the faceless soldiers about to execute them. Goya omits the soldier's faces to emphasise the senseless brutality of the murder, and to increase sympathy for the victims in the painting. The civilians are shown in warm colours, such as yellow and light green, while the soldiers are painted in cooler blues and browns. This use of colour brings the civilians to the forefront of the painting, and makes them the focal point. The gloomy backdrop of the grey castle emphasises the tragedy taking place in the forefront of the painting.

The wide range of colours used in this painting is typical of the Romantic style, as they let go of old traditions and began to paint more freely, using colour more liberally. Goya uses a wide ranging color scheme in this painting to the effect of heightening the realism, in order to generate an emotional reaction within his intended viewers, the Spanish people. Eugene Delacroix, in his painting *Liberty leading the people*, illustrates the triumph of the French people against tyranny in the Revolution. Like Goya, he paints an important historical event, and this is a prominent factor in capturing the attention of the audience. However, another important factor to consider is the eroticism present in the painting. "Liberty" is depicted as a robust, bare-breasted lady, who is patriotically holding the French flag. The allure of the female figure makes the images of death and destruction around her easier to confront.

Joseph Turner, as an English artist, delves into his own country's history for inspiration. His oil painting *The Fighting Temeraire* (1838) is a nostalgic reminiscence of a famous ship that did great service to Britain. This nostalgia was evidently shared by the public as well, since they voted it as the greatest British painting, in a BBC poll. It is well known that a historical painting immediately draws interest from the general public, as it explores a subject the public's mind has already been acquainted with. Apart from the reputation such works carry from their inception, their success at keeping the audience's attention relies on the technical skill used by the artist. For example, in the *The Fighting Temeraire*, he uses warm orange hues as a color scheme throughout the painting, making the viewer relaxed. His focal point, the sun setting on the horizon, gives a long, drawn out feel to the painting, and this also relaxes the viewer.

To conclude, it can be found that many Romantic artists have an affection for documenting important historical events, and this is part of the reason they so easily capture and hold the audience's imagination. Most events were widely known by the public, so it was easier for them to relate to and understand the nature of the Romantic works, unlike some others. Some, like Goya and Delacroix paint controversial events, and invest a bit of politics into their paintings while others, like Turner prefer a more objective approach.