

Visual and Literary Works as a Unified Experience

Jasber Singh
New York University
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Each artist, whether they are a painter, writer, filmmaker, photographer, or illustrator, has the right to create their own aesthetic approach for their visionary projects. It is up to the viewer to interpret what the artist's initial idea does for their individual perspectives. As we explore and learn more about non-westernized cultures through literature, we can see how different parts of the world is represented through artists from their regions. In addition, artists from opposing cultures and time periods can also present relatable connections based on the formalities of their work. In my opinion, although American culture is still undergoing identity development, we can see how American literature can stand alongside international writers to produce the same aesthetic notions. A natural sense of cultural identity and emotional connections can be seen throughout different mediums of art such as literature, painting, and photography.

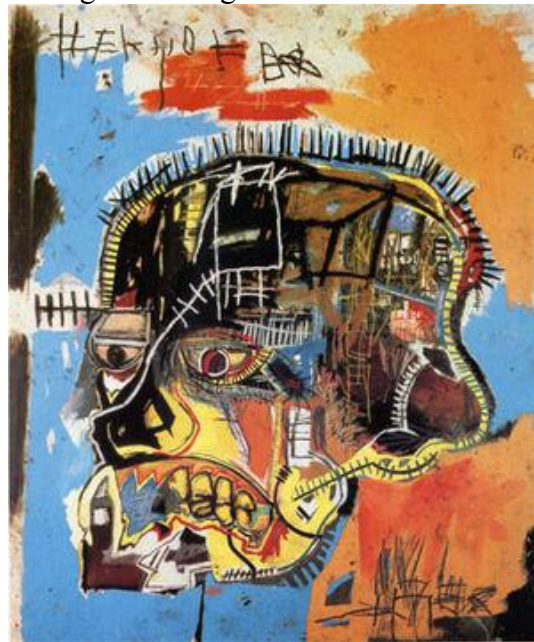
If we start of with American postmodern and contemporary literature and painting, we can see a similar connections in aesthetic approaches that Dave Eggers and Jean-Michel Basquiat may have in common. Both artists use portions of details to complete an overall expressionistic experience. By doing so, we can examine how a complete visionary or literary piece is transformed. Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is filled with multiple examples of how manipulating language can benefit the author's point of view. Eggers use much exaggeration in his choice of words in order to get his point across. By asking himself many questions, one after the other, we are experiencing the fast pace of his thought process, which can either be hard to dissect, or captivating to read through. He uses repetition and dynamic range to gain a smooth yet rapid flow of thoughts down as we can view in the following text:

So. Okay. At this rate, with the blood coming out so slowly but continuously, how long would it actually take? A day? No, no, less – *Jesus, how much blood? A gallon? Less? We could find out. We would call the nurse again. No, no, we can't. If we ask someone they'll make us bring her in. And if they knew we needed to bring her in, and we didn't bring her in, we'd be murderers. We could call the emergency room, ask hypothetically: "Hi, I'm doing a report for school about slow blood leakage and... Fuck. Would we have enough towels? God no. We could use sheets, we have plenty of sheets – It might be only a few hours. Would that be enough time? What's enough time? We would talk a lot. Yes. We would sum up. Would we be serious, sober, or funny? We would be serious for a few minutes – Okay okay okay okay. Fuck, what if we ran out of things to say and – We've already made the necessary arrangements. Yes, yes, we wouldn't need to talk details. We'd have Toph come up. Would we have Toph come up? Of course, but... oh e shouldn't be there, should he? Who wants to be there at the very end? No one, no one. But for her to be alone... of course she won't be alone, you'll be there, Beth'll be there, dumb-ass. Fuck.*
(Eggers, 24-25)

While reading this piece from Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* that continues well onto page 27, I couldn't help but consider how the human brain works. We all conceive thoughts that run after another and another and another, but sometimes I like to just sit and actually consider one thought at a time. However, it is interesting to read a text that allows me to understand the exact emotions of what

someone is going through, through their thoughts. Thoughts are an interesting thing. With each thought, comes an action, or no action. It really depends on how deep we consider our thoughts. The saying “Think before you act” is exactly what is demonstrated in Eggers’ text. But do some people actually think before they act? Do I even think before I act? Did I consider what the weather would be like today instead of just assuming it was cold and grabbed a slightly heavy jacket for the road? Did I? Or are these thoughts just stuck in the back of our brains somewhere that we unconsciously know about? Do we think the same thoughts in our dreams? Do the dreams we have even compare to our day-to-day thinking? Can thinking and thoughts be two different things? Or are they the same? You see, I am trying to understand how Eggers can simply express every single thought in his writing. Just now, writing that for myself, took a lot of thinking before even completing a few sentences. Can there ever be a moment where we don’t think about each detail and what will happen next? Forget about tomorrow, or next year, but what about the next minute. Will a spider appear out of nowhere and bite me? Do spiders even bite? Why does that matter? Why am I even thinking about spiders? I wonder if it’s true that humans consume approximately eight spiders while sleeping throughout our lifetime. How did we even come to that conclusion? I need to stop. I am starting to mimic the exact stylistic writing taste of Eggers. Not that this writing style is bad, but now my brain can’t communicate to my fingers to stop typing. Or can it?

If we analyze Jean-Michel Basquiat’s painting *Skull* 1981 (Fig.1), at first glance we can see that the image represents human facial qualities. However if we take a closer look, we are able to identify segments of random and abstract forms that come together to create this completed image. I think that Basquiat is a good comparison to Eggers simply for the reason that the creative side of their brains seems to work in similar ways. I am sure that Eggers carefully chooses each word wisely when he writes. However, the way he writes in this rapid non-stop approach comes off as rushed, like Basquiat’s style in painting. He paints forms fast without stopping to analyze what he’s produced. But in the end, we can see the complete image come together in a cohesive manner.



(Fig. 1)

We can continue to compare Basquiat's painting approach of pieced segments by reviewing another interesting style of writing shown in Egger's work:

It is okay for me to have sex with the sexologist while Shalini is in a coma. *How could we say no?* Our being together means that something is happening, and the happening of things equals a moral good, which equals an irreducible good, which = existing = defiance = pulling = pushing = proof = faith = connection + hand – holding = affirmation = swimming to the rock and back + holding breath under water all the way from one side to the other = the fighting of fights, tiny fights, big fights, any fights = the proving of points, all the time = denial of tide = flouting of decay = force – restraint – moderation – nail-biting – no-saying + wall-punching + volume-turning-upping + quick-lane-changing + car passing + light-making + yelling + demanding, insisting, staying, getting = defiance = handprints, footprints, proof = tree-shaking, fence-cutting + taking + grabbing + stealing + running = engorging = no regretting = insomnia = blood = soaking in blood and what Shalini needs is the connection, the pumping of blood, the use of lattice! Side, but she needs us being close as possible, not only to her but to each other, creating friction, noise, and if possible, she needs us having sex, having sex with each other and projecting that energy to her, the bursting and love – it all connects, aha! *Shalini would want us having sex!*
(Eggers 338-339)

In this piece, we can see how Eggers uses a dynamic range of individualized words that creates a heavy density of description. I wouldn't suggest that this style is exaggeration since each word represents an act or emotion. This never-ending style of which he is demonstrating also reads fast and nonstop. He is adding and subtracting words that hold meaning in order for us, the reader, to understand what the conclusion of several situations might be. With his choice of words I can see how one step in a romantic affair can lead to another step and how each emotion gets carried throughout the affair. Eggers not only show us the reality of such events, but how such events also unfold. A step-by-step process of all the negative and positive elements. This entire piece of text I have shown has increased my interest in words and how letters form words that are then placed onto an object or emotion to conclude a meaning. Yes, this is all about semiotics and how forms become larger ideas. Individualized words, when formed together, create a bigger picture. This way, I can see how art relates to literature. Eggers is a genius in that sense. At least for me. The way he positions his thoughts with words, create a new perspective for when reading literature. I have become more interested in the writer's thought process than the actual story being told. But Eggers has found a way to manipulate words so we can see the story be unfolded along with the thought process of reaching a conclusion. Now aside from my personal interest in psychoanalytic theories, I am curious how other readers view his words. Do they understand his motive, or are they confused and prefer a straightforward story recited in a classical way? Everyone's mind work differently, so I can understand why some might not like the way Eggers has organized his words. But this is what makes literature an art form... Words are not only used to describe a story, but they are also used to convey alternative ways of thinking. How very postmodern of him.

With Basquiat, we can compare his aesthetic approach of painting to Eggers' style of writing. Each individualized element of the completed piece serves its own purpose and holds its own importance. As readers and viewers, we tend to demand a fast conclusion rather than unfolding the information slowly. It is a part of our current needs for fast media and our unfortunate lack of attention. So with such mindsets, how can we truly understand what the artist is trying to convey in their work if we're so quick to pass judgment? The issue here is that our current social culture is moving at a rapid pace. In a sense, it is the same pace that America has been on in order to transform this land and the new culture. But with doing so we lose the magical essence of unveiling the truth behind the intricate details of writers and their words, and painters and their brush strokes. There is a lot more to discover behind the perfect picture. With the rapid speed of completion for the final piece, the artists are working faster to produce work for our American superficial needs but are still presenting intellectual and detailed work that fit their needs.

As we move away from American literature and painting, we can move forward into the French approach. France's culture has been known to hold a romantic notion for all creatives alike. History shows how successful and admired artists of today ventured off to France to work on several projects inspired by the high creative energy and cultural history in that region. Jean-Dominique Bauby was a previous fashion editor for the successful and well-recognized magazine *Elle*, until he unfortunately got hit by a nearly fatal stroke. During recovery, the only part of his body that was functioning was one of his eyelids that allowed him to communicate through blinking. In doing so, Bauby was able to complete his romantic piece, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* with the help of his assistant. A long process for sure, but rewarding in the end. As we can see in his texts, his choice of free flowing words represents the well-known romantic notions of the French language:

I am fading away. Slowly but surely. Like the sailor who watches the home shore gradually disappear, I watch my past recede.

My old life still burns within me, but more and more of it is reduced to the ashes of memory.

(Bauby, 77)

My present life is divided between those who knew me before and all the others. What kind of person will those who know me now think I was? I do not even have a photo to show them.

(Bauby, 108)

On a table cluttered with empty cups stands a small typewriter with a sheet of pink paper stuck in the roller. Although at the moment the page is utterly blank, I am convinced that someday there will be a message for me there. I am waiting.

(Bauby, 86-87)

Bauby uses metaphors and symbolism to add character to his choice of words, which helps create a visual experience in addition to a literary experience. His choice of personifying the photograph of his younger days can be viewed as an understatement of what life truly is. His detailed descriptions allow his readers to fully immerse themselves in the scene he has created, which adds another depth of symbolism to the typewriter by reflecting on the notion of time. Bauby discussing elements of time and memory in his text. These are both intriguing yet complicated matters to analyze. What Bauby brings to

the table is the dreamlike flashbacks that is represented in his writing. Because of this, he is able to create poetic notions of words in French that does not translate into English as smoothly and sensually. Death plays a big part in his conversation that allows him to see the world in a different way. It is not until we are close to death that we begin to analyze our past life in a way we have not done before.

While reading Bauby's texts and thinking about his tragic life, I couldn't help but consider Henri Matisse and his masterpieces *Blue Nudes* 1952 (Fig. 2) during his blue period. Many modern artists and painters residing within France during a certain time have created a vast amount of work in hues of blue. Blue has a mellow dramatic feeling that sets off a specific aura of sadness when represented in its entirety beside no other color. What's interesting about Matisse's story is that he also went through a rough time in the latter part of his life. After undergoing surgery for his hip, he was unable to walk and therefore confined to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. Although this might come off as a burden for some, Matisse continued to work in the alternate medium of paper collage. As a painter myself, I am impressed by Matisse's hand skill to manipulate a scissor as a paintbrush. His curvilinear lines are still executed with a romantic movement throughout the figures' bodies. The words closely chosen with patience from Bauby, can easily be compared to the intricate pieces of cut paper by Matisse. The blue hues resemble somber and serenity, yet can produce the emotion of pain.



(Fig. 2)

Bauby discusses spirituality in a more humanistic way for his readers. We can envision ourselves in his situation when reading his words. Although translated from French to English, we the readers can still gain a sense of poetic beauty through his flashbacks. The dream world he takes us on is still set within a realistic realm. Maybe Bauby had escaped his physical body when he was in a coma to enjoy the dream worlds of his choice. Either way, Bauby has allowed his readers to see the world in a different way, to further understand that life has a deeper meaning than what we are led to believe. Our time, energy, and memories make up a big portion of how we perceive our life and the world before us.

As we move away from American and French literature and painting, we can head towards Germany and analyze how surrealism has had a major effect on the visionaries

there. Surrealism was a big movement in Germany with many followers within literature and art. The idea of surrealism comes from the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and his ideas of the human mind and dreams. It is within our dreams that we see who we truly are, or better yet the realities of our subconscious desires. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* was one of the first surrealist works of literature that has changed the way we form words into ideas. The story is told from a first person point of view where a normal everyday workingman wakes up as insect. Sounds like a nightmare rather than a subconscious thought that could be reality. As we review Kafka's text, we can see how he has manipulated the human mind so well that we actually believe in the science fiction story:

Could the alarm have failed to ring? From the bed he could see that it was correctly set for four; surely, it had also rung. Yes, but was it possible to sleep peacefully through that furniture-shaking ring? Well, he hadn't slept peacefully, but probably all the more soundly for that. Yet, what should he do now? The next train left at seven; to catch it he would have to make a mad dash, his sample case wasn't packed yet, and he himself didn't feel particularly fresh and lively. And even if he caught the train, he couldn't escape a bawling out from his boss, because the office messenger had waited at the five-o'-clock train and had long since made a report about his negligence. He was a creature of the boss's, spineless and stupid. Now, what if he reported in sick? But that would be extremely distressing and suspicious, because during his five years' employment Gregor had not been ill even once. The boss would surely arrive with the health insurance doctor, would complain to his parents about their lazy son and would cut short all objections by referring them to the health-insurance doctor, in whose eyes the only people that exist at all are perfectly healthy specimens who are work-shy. And besides, would he be so wrong in this case? Actually, aside from a truly excessive drowsiness after all that sleep, Gregor felt quite well and in fact was particularly hungry.
(Kafka, 12-13)

Kafka uses personification of material objects while self-questioning himself by using repetition to arrive to a conclusion that will not happen. Throughout his story, the intrigue of self-worth, discovery, and fantasy are apparent with flashback narratives that help complete the storytelling aspect of this piece. Reading this paragraph in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* reminded me of how my brain functions on a day-to-day basis. I am continuously asking myself questions regarding several aspects of my life, but only to answer them immediately after. Gregor goes through several stages of self-questioning regarding his alarm clock and if it is necessary for him to go to work so late. And if he chooses not to go to work, what will his excuse be. It's as if Gregor's mind works nonstop. Even when he is trying to rest, his brain continues to develop thoughts that can easily stress him out. It's like that syndrome that some people have regarding their obsessions of diseases. Reading information on WebMD for any minute symptom can lead to a few clicks away from the idea of fatality due to a single cough. It's quite interesting actually, how one thought can lead to another in anyone's brain. It's not that those people contain hyperactive brain cells, it's just that each individual's brain cells function differently. Or do they? You see, Psychoanalysis has always interested me from

my younger days. Initially, I thought about being a psychiatrist to further understand how the “insane” functioned. But who are those people to label another “insane”? Those letters have been formed together to create a word to define a person that we don’t have any other definition to use. But why is it so important to even define a person’s mental state? Do we all not become a little “insane” after a while? What intrigues me the most, is to understand the person’s background life and what situations have occurred that lead them to become “insane”. I can go on and on about what and how the mind is supposed to work, but who am I to even discuss such topics? Do we really need fancy doctorate degrees to see that each individual brain functions differently than others? And that such actions make us unique? I’ve had this conversation with my friends many times and in the end they’ve all looked at me like I was insane. But once again, what does that word even mean? It means something we cannot understand, and that we’ve become too lazy to investigate these ideas deeper.

Kafka writes a story where a normal man wakes up in an unknown creature’s body. One reading this text can look at Gregor as insane or even look to Kafka as the original insane person for creating such a story. But what is so insane about this? I’m sure many of us have been in mental states where we question our existence, only because we are taught to be normal. But perhaps being normal is waking up and envisioning yourself as another creature. Perhaps that is what you should have been created as instead of occupying a human form. Whatever the reason may be, Kafka’s repetition of self-questioning is a reminder that we all function differently, yet the same.

The darkness of Kafka’s science fiction surrealism piece reminds me of Max Ernst’s *Europe After the Rain* 1942 (Fig. 3) which holds the same eerie feeling of uneasiness to me as did Kafka. This dramatic yet simplistic piece conveys the darkness in Europe after World War 2. The neutral tones represents the earth in its natural form after all the technological warfare has been used. This image could be interpreted as the apocalypse in many ways, which can be similar to Kafka’s character of the humanized insect. Such emotions and thoughts present the feeling of the end of the world approaching. The surrealist notions of what the brain considers emotional or not can be reflected in both the painter and writer.



(Fig. 3)

As we look back, we can see how each writer and artist has represented their cultural historical societies. Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* is a much longer text than the other pieces we’ve read in class thus far. I must say that Eggers is an easy read that runs fast. It has to do with the way he writes. I enjoy his style

which is one thought after the next. When he is not expressing his detailed thoughts, the story is easy to follow. It's a straightforward story and reads that way. Bauby's dream world, and Kafka's imaginary world all taste differently than Eggers. I wonder if it has to do with the writer's nationality, but I think there is definitely more than style based on which country you're from. It really depends on how the writer wanted their text to come across to the reader. Their motives are all different which allow me to see that a similar emotional connection can be displayed in various ways. The way Eggers writes, introduces me into his thoughts immediately. Unlike with Kafka, I am more interested into why he has chosen to write about morphing into a bug instead of another creature. There is a psychological intrigue there that is also apparent in Eggers, but in a different way. With Eggers I want to know what he will think next, and he will say it in his text. However with Kafka, I'm curious about other characters he has written about and what those underlying issues are. Although Kafka plays with the notion of psychoanalytic themes, which I tend to enjoy, I can't help but enjoy the honest truth that comes forward in Eggers' text. Yes, we enter the fantastical mind of Kafka and see the world from an alternate perspective of another creature. But Eggers shows us the human mind, which I always found the most fascinating in several occasions. I enjoy the way he expresses his thoughts with each detailed emotion being stated. Not many writers can do this. While reading his words, I can't help but think about Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*, and how he goes from one thought the next in such a rapid pace. Of course Eggers' text is much more organized than Burroughs, but there is a similar sense of imagery in both writers. In comparison to Bauby, Eggers' text can relate in terms of organization. Since Bauby had a limited way of expressing his thoughts by having his story be translated from physical motions to words, Eggers' takes the time to explain each thought clearly. It might come off as rapid and nonsensical, but it is very well thought out. His aim was to give his readers an internal view of the human mind and thoughts that take place. Whereas Bauby, just wants his story to be told, of course in a romanticized way. We are not only told a story, but we are also welcomed to view the human mind and thought process in an alternative way as well.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* can easily be viewed as a science fiction story. However, this doesn't seem to be the case. The fact that Kafka starts off his story in a realistic realm, allows his readers to enter the mind frame of the Gregor Samsa. We can envision ourselves in Gregor's bed having flashbacks of his family and younger life. It was important for Kafka to introduce these flashbacks in his story not for entertainment purposes, but to setup background information on Gregor and his family in order to understand the deeper emotional issues that are being confronted. While listening to Kafka's words being read out loud in German compared to Bauby's words in French, you can feel a different vibration coming through the words entirely. Bauby's words spoken in French hold a romantic notion of emotional distress and the beauty that can become after tragedy. On the other hand, Kafka's words hold a strong yet minimal sound of continuity. Although I do not understand neither language, I was able to hear the different emotions being spoken through the words. In each of these stories, we are being placed, as readers, in a different yet similar notion of loss; the loss of a physical space, the loss of memories, and the loss of your body along with its mind. Losing parts of who you are, and what you once knew is a common thread in each of these stories.

Now, let's move away from western cultures such as American and European into North Africa. North Africa has been an escape destination for artists as writers to places like Tangier, Morocco. However, when we discuss North African traditions, Egypt comes to mind with its rich and long historical culture. Being of a major Islamic state, Egyptian women are mostly oppressed of rights and values like any other third world nation state. Women are lead to believe that they should eventually be married to please and support their husbands and children. In western regions, women have a lot more say and rights to their lives. Nawal El Saadawi is an influential women doctor, writer, and feminist that has helped changed the way women are viewed in Islamic nations. Her book *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor* expressed strong feminist beliefs while eventually arriving to much self-discovery. As we can see in her two passages, her choice of words create a sense of formal disclosure as she personifies different aspects of her life:

I gathered together my few belongings and boarded the train, which was to carry me out into the world away from myself. I'd become acquainted with my self: I no longer needed to cling so strongly to it that I was cut off from life. Life, the essence of which I'd gathered from the earth like a pigeon picking up grain in its beak; life, which I'd begun to love with every cell of my being, body and soul, and which I felt an overwhelming desire to hold on to.

(Saadawi, 48)

How can a woman live alone without a man? Why is she going out? Why is she coming in? Why is she smiling? Why is she breathing? Why is she taking gulps of fresh air? Why is she looking at the moon? Why does she hold her head up and open her eyes wide? Why does she tread with confidence and pride? Isn't she embarrassed? Doesn't she want a man to protect her?

(Saadawi, 78)

The reason I have chosen to discuss two passages from Saadawi's texts are simply due to the fact that I have become a fan of her writing and storytelling. Each of these passages tell a different part of a woman's life and what stages she goes through towards self-discovery. In many cultures, women are lead to believe that her sole existence depends on the man she will marry. And that marriage is one of the most, if not *the* most important decision in her life. But why must this be the case? Have we forgotten that without a woman, man cannot be? That women bear children that become men that later decide the important factors of a woman's life? What gives him that right? How did society come up with such decisions? How have different cultures throughout the world adapt the same mentality? It's quite confusing to me, and I believe the reason for such actions are based on education. Without education, women are not able to see beyond their environments. If we are born and raised in a certain part of the world, that will be our destiny, unless we have the opportunity to educate ourselves to become independent. Women are always looked at and judged in society. Our actions are constantly watched for a chance of error. But when it comes to men, no error is too big. Reading Saadawi's work reminds me of another African feminist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Reading her work earlier in my college career, I admire her independent voice for guiding women into a state of self-respect and awareness. Our sexuality, education, race, and culture all define our female status in life. But we should not be embarrassed by our racial features or our

shapely bodies, but embrace ourselves fully into the life we have and the life we hope to have.

With Egyptian art mostly known for its historical contexts and achievements, modern day artists are exploring their cultural heritage away from the ancient Egyptian artworks we have come to know and admire. As Saadawi writes about her strong independency, I am drawn towards Ragheb Ayad's *Café in Aswan* 1933 (Fig. 4) due to the strong facial features of the main female figure. All of the surrounding figures are executed in a wash away effect and not as detailed, leading me to believe that the central figure is the main focal point. Saadawi is a fierce woman who has had to undergo serious cultural battles in order to become successful. This image can be relatable to her personal story of standing out from the cultural norm that society has created.



(Fig. 4)

I must be honest and say that it wasn't until Saadawi's book *Memoirs of a Woman Doctor*, that I have become truly interested in the texts we've read. Of course each writer we have read have their individual voices and stories, but perhaps it was the emotional connection that I have gained from reading her words. We are both from different parts of the world but the way she was raised to believe that a man can take away all of her problems and be the sole reason for her existence, is all too familiar. With each writer we've read so far, we gained a sense of who they are and what their personal lives may be like. Bauby has introduced me to his romanticized flashbacks of his personal life before his tragic accident. Kafka takes us into his a psycho-dramatic realm of science fiction and how it is possible to experience an illusion like fantasy. Eggers can quite possibly be my second favorite writer from class thus far. His willingness to open up via text to express his every detailed emotion and thought is admirable. These are the same thoughts we each think about every day, but are too self-conscious to fully express them in such a state as Eggers. However, Saadawi, shows us a different perspective, and intimate one. Similar to Eggers, they both share personal thoughts and question societal views and reasons. For this reason alone, the connections I share with both of them are

more closely related to my own life. Each writer has their own style of execution, but the motives for writing their stories are completely opposite.

I've read a few other works by Albert Camus in the past such as *Exile and the Kingdom* and *The Plague*, so understanding his aesthetic approach to writing is not unfamiliar. With Camus also coming from Algeria in North Africa we may see some similarities between him and El Saadawi. I enjoy his choice of explaining daily life with an arrangement of scenes, one after the other. We can envision these scenes while reading his clear detailed words. However, while reading in English, I'm curious what the original French version must be like. Although I don't read French, but I would very much like to, I wonder how the flow of words would create a different musicality to it. Camus' *The Stranger* is another piece of literary achievement. With this story, death is introduced as soon as we begin. Automatically, a sense of romanticism is felt throughout these emotions. With death there is uncertainty, which brings the notions of the unknown journey ahead. With not being sure what is next, there has always been some energy of romanticism with the unknown, especially when there is tragedy involved. Camus' narrator discusses the memory he has from the night before with his lover and his reflection of his mother's death:

When I woke up, Marie had gone. She'd told me her aunt expected her first thing in the morning. I remembered it was a Sunday, and that put me off, I've never cared for Sundays. So I turned my head and lazily sniffed the smell of brine that Marie's head left on the pillow. I slept until ten.
(Camus, 15)

As I was coming back, after shutting the window, I glanced at the mirror and saw reflected in it a corner of my table with my spirit lamp and some bits of bread beside it. It occurred to me that somehow I'd got through another Sunday, that Mother was now buried, and tomorrow I'd be going back to work as usual. Really, nothing in my life had changed.
(Camus, 17)

We can see how memories from a short or long period of our lives interact with our daily emotions. Love can be felt within different relationships in our lives. Not each love connection is the same, whether it is family related or not. Camus uses strong density of concepts to allow his readers to linger off into their own distant memories regarding their current or past lovers, while also referencing flashback scenes within his text to summarize the importance of losing a parent, which can be engaging to a wide audience.

While our main character, who is also the narrator writes about his night with Marie, I am reminded of my own lover and the scent I must leave behind on his pillows. Just this one line can trigger so many different endings to the story. Romance, sex, and love brings a different element into literature, only because it is far too familiar for most readers. Our lovers, past a present still haunt us to this day. One night with someone can be just that, one night, or it can turn into a whirlwind of events that stretch out for months or even years. The thing is, while Camus brings in this notion of feeling alone once our lover has left, we begin to feel the emotional tragedies of sadness and loneliness. The human need for another human attachment has been a part of our human history from the beginning of time. To look at the way the narrator explains his death of his mother, and the way Marie has left him, can be seen as one person might be more important than the other. And in saying so, I don't mean his mother. Perhaps Marie, or even another woman,

any other woman could hold a tighter hold on his emotional needs than his mother. These are two different loves. The narrator explains that it appears that nothing has happened or changed since his mother died, but the lingering scent of a new and unknown woman stays embedded in his brain. Quite interesting if you ask me, and far too familiar.

Reading Camus' words that unfold his emotional story brings to mind James McNeil Whistler's painting *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*, 1871. This is a painting of Whistler's mother, who he loved very much. Whistler and his mother were extremely close even throughout his several love affairs during his lifetime. He cared for his mother deeply and we can see this represented in his painting. What is intriguing about this work alongside Camus' text is that both artists provide their audiences with work that can be appreciated by multiple viewers. Although there is a storyline in Camus' work, and there is a centralized figure in Whistler's painting, both of these pieces can be translated from one emotionally meaning to the next. Yes, Whistler has painted his mother as the subject matter for this piece, but he has chosen to title it based on the forms and colors of the work. This was a turning point for Whistler's career as he has chosen to name several pieces of his work with titles relating to the formalities rather than the subject matter. By doing this, he has allowed his viewers to create their own interpretations while reflecting on this piece. Camus does the same thing with his choice of words for his book. We can relate the narrator's emotional connections and flashbacks to our own experiences. Relatable connections are what both artists have created with their work.



(Fig. 5)

So far we've read two books that have been translated from French to English. Bauby's *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* and Camus' *The Stranger*. After hearing Kamel speak so eloquently in French at the French Embassy on Thursday, his translated words were beautifully selected. In comparison to the American writer there, her words were straight to the point and held no poetic feeling to it. It was dry and unemotional, similar to Eggers' words. Although I have become a fan of Eggers' writing style of detailed intricate thoughts, I can't help but appreciate the romantic notions felt from

Kamel's spoken words on Thursday. It is hard to feel the same romantic sense from Camus' translation of *The Stranger*. I wish I could hear it being read in French, since Camus' work holds a lot of metaphors that can be used in various types of situations in life. Now this doesn't mean that I prefer the French over American at all, it's just an interesting contrast in cultures that we have seen in two situations. There is no hiding that both cultures have a different way of expressing their emotions while using words to explain their reasons. Americans appear to give the answers straight and fast, whereas the French can do the same thing, but add a poetic meaning to their chosen words, which leaves the reader or listener to consider nostalgic thoughts.

The sense of loneliness is what one might think of when considering the emotional and mental reactions of a blind person. But loneliness is not only meant for the blind. Perhaps the blind doesn't feel lonely at all. However, how are we supposed to know these feelings if we are not blind ourselves? All of these thoughts are just assumptions that cannot be validated for sure, until we are in that position. Jose Saramago's novel *Blindness* is a story that has the feel of a post-apocalyptic world. An unfortunate set of events occur that causes confusion internationally; one by one, people started to lose their eyesight and have become blind. Race, wealth, social class no longer matters in this world. We learn how humanity survives or does not survive in this text. Such situations cause chaos and fear amongst everyone. No one knows who is next and what will happen next either. Saramago is careful to not add a name to any main character in his book. He does this so that his reader cannot be connected to a particular character, but rather identify the good versus evil, and to witness the change of humanity in such a fearful state. Saramago also brings into play the notion of previous memories and what part of our lives they would play in a blind world. Saramago writes:

Say to a blind man, you're free, open the door that was separating him from the world, Go, you are free, we tell him once more, and he does not go, he has remained motionless there in the middle of the road, he and the others, they are terrified, they do not know where to go, the fact is that there is no comparison between living in a rational labyrinth, which is, by definition, a mental asylum, and venturing forth, without a guiding hand or a dog-leash, into the demented labyrinth of the city, where memory will serve no purpose, for it will merely be able to recall the images of places but not the paths whereby we might get there. Standing in front of the building which is already ablaze from end to end, the blind inmates can feel the living waves of heat from the fire on their faces, they receive them as something which in a way protects them, just as the walls did before, prison and refuge at once. They stay together, pressed up against each other, like a flock, no one there wants to be the lost sheep, for they know that no shepherd will come looking for them. The fire gradually begins to die down, the moon casts its light once more, the blind inmates begin to feel uneasy, they cannot remain there, for all eternity, as one of them said. Someone asked if it was day or night, the reason for this incongruous curiosity soon became apparent...

(Saramago, 217)

Saramago uses an ongoing pace with his words by inserting metaphors and similes to understand the fear of this time. This particular text and section of Saramago's story is a

powerful one. With understanding the troubles of these prisoners who've recently went through traumatic events within the mental asylum, we question - how does being "free" even matter anymore? What does freedom really mean? With the chaos and destruction inside the mental asylum, the recently blind must also be nervous about the open world ahead. How can they be sure that the "freedom" before them is truly free or not? Perhaps it is more dangerous than the organized crime they've experienced indoors. Either way, how would they know if they didn't venture off to experience this for themselves? While reading this scene and trying to understand what the recently blind must be thinking the "free" world looks like, I am reminded of the contemporary Portuguese photographer Juno Doran, and a photograph from the *Sounds Like Falling* series, 2015. This black and white image was captured with a blurry lens, which captivates the viewer's attention. The road ahead is unclear and empty, similar to what the road must've been like for the blind. The fuzziness of the image holds the quality of blindness but not as apparent as complete darkness or light. There is a sense of place for sure, but we are still unsure of where we are. This can be viewed as a metaphorical piece in order to understand the unknown within Saramago's text or any situation in life. Whether we are blind or not, we are always unsure of what the road ahead may be like.



(Fig. 6)

By watching *Blindness* in class I was able to gain a deeper sense of what the written text is trying to portray. Jose Saramago reminds me of several writers we have read so far in class. This book lines up pretty well on the syllabus because we can see how Saramago has used several techniques used by other writers in an alternate way. For example, Kafka's imaginary world takes us inside an insect's brain, which can be compared to the brain of a blind person. I make this comment because I am neither blind nor an insect, but with both of these texts I may be able to understand how each of them would function. Saramago's writing style also reminds me of Eggers with an ongoing sense of imagery. With one thought or action after the other, we are able to view a complete idea in a short amount of time. If we would compare Saramago to Bauby, I would say that this could be the closest comparison in terms of cultural similarities. Saramago and Bauby both have several lines throughout their texts that hold a sense of

poetic wisdom and nostalgia. Perhaps it could be that the languages of Portuguese and French both originate from historic romantic regions. Either way, after reading certain lines we are left wondering about our own situations and lives. In Saramago's novel we can see how a day in the life of a recently blind person is being lived. By looking at Camus' and McEwan's text, we are also welcomed to view either single or multiple day routines of their main characters. It is important for the reader to understand the main character in each of these books to have a deeper understanding of what the underlying latent issues are. The doctor's wife in Saramago's novel is a strong woman without a doubt. We can easily compare her to Saadawi and the strong independent woman represented in her novel. However, with each text we are welcomed to not only embrace the strong female character, but we also view the weakness that comes along with being so strong all the time. Showing any sign of weakness also shows strength, especially when it comes from a woman. Saramago's fictional story might not be based on realistic events, but it definitely demonstrates real emotional tragedy and beauty within all humanity.

The Middle East has always been a place of oriental fascination when it came down to westerners observing this culture for inspiration. Whether it be painters looking at the warm tones found in textile, or writers looking for an unfamiliar place in order to open up their mind for creativity, the Middle East is still a foreign place for westerners, simply because of the cultural differences. However when it comes to the medieval period, Islamic culture alongside Christianized culture was and still is a continuous conflict. Not only the cultural differences cause this conflict, but also in my opinion, the lack of wanting to learn about the opposing culture always plays a major part in this never-ending battle. Islamic art is known to represent non-personified images as decorations in their textiles, prints, and manuscripts. Orhan Pamuk tells the tale of a disapproving act of commissioning a manuscript with human representations. This is against Islamic tradition and law. However, what Pamuk does in his intriguing multi-layered text is to showcase alternative perspectives of the same ongoing story. He writes about color and emotion in a direct way that allows his readers to think outside of the norm. Pamuk writes:

What is it to be a color? Color is the touch of the eye, music to the deaf, a word out of the darkness. Because I have listened to souls whispering – like the susurrus of the wind - from book to book and object of object for tens of thousands of years, allow me to say that my touch resembles the touch of angels. Part of me, the serious half, calls out to your vision while mirthful half soars through the air with your glances.

(Pamuk, 186)

Because we've spent our entire lives ardently and faithfully working as painters, naturally, we, who have now gone blind, know red and remember what kind of color and feeling it is... But, what if we'd been born blind? How would we have been truly able to comprehend this red that our handsome apprentice is using?... But do not forget that colors are not known, but felt... My dear master, explain red to somebody who has never known red.

(Pamuk, 187)

If we touched it with the tip of a finger, it would feel like something between iron and copper. If we took it into our palm, it would burn. If we tasted it, it would be full-bodied, like salted meat. If we took it between our lips, it would fill our mouths. If we smelled it, it'd have the scent of a horse. If it were a flower, it would smell like a daisy, not a red rose.
(Pamuk, 188)

By using personification to color and relating his text to a fictional time, we can begin to see how society has labeled a color to a meaning. Pamuk's repetition used for his dynamic range of explanations alongside the metaphors and similes attached to color and scent brings life to his text.

These particular text excerpts chosen drew me in for several reasons. First off although this is a murder mystery novel, Pamuk is brilliant in the sense that he includes intellectual and thought provoking questions throughout his entire book. In doing so, many different people will find this text intriguing. Artists, historians, writers, psychologists, socialists, investigators, etc. will be able to dissect Pamuk's words for their beneficial use. There is much symbolism regarding the color red and also for many other colors. However why is that with red, we are known to associate love, danger, the devil, Indian marriage, sex, and power as just a few things we can relate red to? Love and danger come hand in hand. Because with love, there are dangerous emotions running throughout our veins. The thought of opening up our true selves, whether it is within a romantic, professional, or creative realm, brings upon a sense of fear. Two things that seem on the opposite ends of the spectrum relate back to each other. When Pamuk describes what red is in his text that can only be relatable to his senses not as a universal statement. Reading this segment by Pamuk reminds me of Mark Rothko's painting *No. 14, 1960*, 1960. Rothko was one of the abstract expressionists that based his color series on the emotional reactions that any hue can give the viewer. With this piece, the vibrant red is located on the upper portion of the painting, leading the viewer's eyes directly to this point. Rothko's painting always held a vibrating sense when staring at them for a while. In the same way, we can relate Pamuk's intricate layering text to Rothko. Although Rothko's work comes off as a simple painting, the layers of hues shown in his work are mysterious the same way Pamuk's story unfolds. The dark blue shown at the bottom of Rothko's painting can be represented as the underlying fearful thoughts each character goes through in Pamuk's book. Although both of these artists have created their work in a different time period, it's quite fascinating that two separate individuals can create a similar idea in two alternative mediums.



(Fig. 7)

However, what's interesting here is that at the end, Pamuk writes that a red would smell like a daisy rather than the commercial flower we know red to be, a rose. This is an intriguing and thought provoking idea because it is within the symbolism of red where we characterize red with certain smells. Here again, we are presented with the similar conflict between the senses. By Rothko choosing to not represent any visual image we may know, and only present the color itself, the viewer is left to envision their own thoughts. Abstract expressionism played with psychoanalysis and how the human brain reacts to certain imagery and color palettes. However, I can't help but wonder if this could all be an illusion. Perhaps for a blind person, red may be what a daisy smells like. For a blind person red might be associated with many alternative things we have come to know in the visual world. This leads me to question what else our eyesight had allowed us to believe by seeing. Maybe red would not be the color of an apple, but instead it may be blue. While reading Pamuk's book, Saramago's text comes into play with his notions of vision and scent. Since the blind cannot see, they rely on their alternate senses to give them vision. However, could Pamuk be suggesting that vision and scent, along with our other senses have nothing to do with the other? This is an intriguing thought to consider when evaluating all of these books.

By now, we have read several texts from various cultures. In doing so we are able to begin to understand how a French writer versus an American writer may convey their thoughts through words. With Pamuk, we are left with an imaginative and thought provoking text that has been built upon layers and layers of ideas. His use of multiple narrators to tell one story was a brilliant choice. We are able to see the story in many different perspectives. Pamuk personifies non-human beings such as dogs and trees, but he also goes into the mind of the dead person and the murderer. It would be a smart choice for investigators and lawyers dealing with a case to read this book. Not only will they learn to analyze each perspective and moment of the murder, but they will also see

how and why murderers have committed their kill. This is important because it is not such an easy thing to identify as black and white. There are many parts to a story like this. Pamuk gives his readers as many stories as he can to help them understand the reasons of such actions during this medieval Islamic period. Like with Eggers' text, he uses layers and layers of word choices to explain his thoughts and emotions. Both Pamuk and Eggers uses layers in their work but in different ways. Similar to Lightman, Bauby, and Kafka, there are one-liners in each of their texts that evoke thought provoking ideas.

Now, let's head to the mesmerizing country of India. India has always and still is a place where fascination of the culture can be seen throughout art, literature, architecture, and film. However, what the western world does not see, is the strong sense of political uncertainty that causes a state of confusion throughout the entire nation, cities and villages altogether. It is important to note this because when India received its freedom as an independent country in 1947, the need for self-identity was in demand. However, I feel that Indian does not need to find self-identity as it has and will always be a place that holds a magical aura. Although the country is deeply divided by social class, caste, and religious beliefs, a foreigner and native can still feel the same intense emotional energy of what this singular culture represents. Salman Rushdie writes about several changes happening in India after they have gained their independence up until the chaotic and detained state of emergency in 1977.

Rushdie's book is filled with magical realism in the sense that the entire story is filled with characters that hold special powers. Certain characters hold these powers because they were born on the hour when Indian received its independence from the British. The date was August 15, 1947. All the babies who were born from 12:00 to 1:00AM on that night was blessed or cursed with the gift of supernatural powers. What Salman has done in his book was brilliantly interplay magic and reality during post-colonial India. India's case was different than many other countries that have gained their independence from foreign rule, you see India has always and is still a place that holds a magical aura to foreigners. There are so many different parts of India, all similar yet different than the other. The book takes place in several regions in India, from Kashmir to Agra, and then from Bombay to Lahore. These are all big cities in India with different issues. While reading Rushdie's book I am reminded by another Indian author who has written an Indian tale based on recent issues concerning the growth of technological companies along with the demolishing of farmlands due to gentrification or the need to sell for survival. Akash Kapur's *India Becoming: A Portrait of Life in Modern India* does a similar job in its storytelling like Rushdie, but instead it based in a different time period. Still surrounded by a set of changes occurring in India, but based in a more recent time. Rushdie's words move in such a way that you can hear smell the environment around you. Scent usually leaves a lingering memory behind when we think about the past, or when we smell a familiar scent elsewhere. Rushdie's main character, Salman discusses his emotional departure from Bombay into Pakistan:

So, from the earliest days of my Pakistani adolescence, I began to learn the secret of aromas of the world, the heady but quick-fading perfume of new love, and also the deeper, longer lasting pungency of hate. (It was not long after my arrival in the "Land of the Pure" that I discovered within myself the ultimate impurity of sister-love; and the slow burning fires of my aunt filled my nostrils from the start.) A nose will give you

knowledge, but not the power-over-events; my invasion of Pakistan, armed (is that's the right word) only with new manifestation of my nasal inheritance, gave me the powers of sniffing-out-the-truth, of smelling-what-was-in-the-air, of following trails; but not only the power an invader needs – the strength to conquer my foes. I won't deny it: I never forgave Karachi for not being Bombay. Set between the desert and bleakly saline creeks whose shores were littered with stunted mangroves, my new city seemed to possess an ugliness which eclipsed even my own...

(Rushdie, 352)

Capable of smelling sadness and joy, of sniffing out intelligence and stupidity with my eyes closed, I arrived at Karachi, and adolescence – understanding, of course, that the subcontinent's new nations and I had all left childhood behind; that growing pains and strange awkward alterations of voice were in store for us all. Drainage censored my inner life; my sense of connection remained undrained.

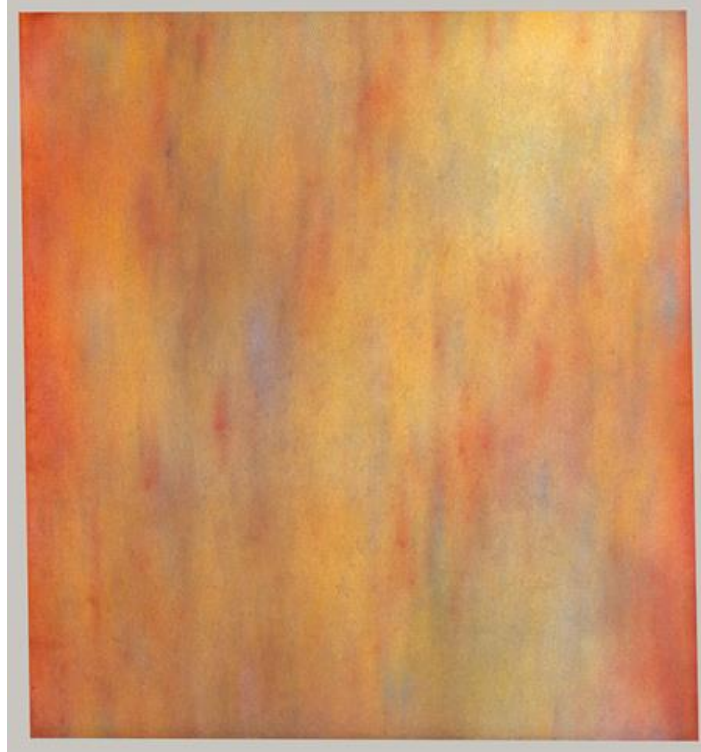
(Rushdie, 354)

We must all become new people...

(Rushdie, 355)

At this point in the story, Saleem has lost his telepathic superpowers but has gained a strong sense through his scent. He is able to not only smell his surroundings but also to feel the emotions surrounding him. Rushdie uses analogies and personifications to countries and cities in order for his reader to understand Saleem's situation. Similar to Camus and Saramago we are left to engage ourselves within these words and relate them to our own memories and experiences. Saramago plays with the sense of sight, whereas Rushdie uses scent. These are important notes to make since both of these writers rely on these particular senses to heighten the reading the experience.

As Saleem writes about his transition into Pakistan, he is also reminded by his aunt's burning ashes. With death, there is always a new beginning ahead, only because we do not have any other choice but to move on. These selected texts along with the overall feeling I get from reading Rushdie's book brings me to Natvar Bhavsar's painting *Dhruva 1*, 1976. Not only was this painting completed by a fellow Indian native, but it was also completed one year before India's twenty-one month long state of emergency ended in 1977. This is an important note to make because the color palette used by Bhavsar expresses the end of the emotional turmoil in this time by including an optimistic light for the future. The hues of red demonstrate all of the bloodshed and pain that was caused during India's states of emergency, whereas warmer yellow tones appear to shed light into a better future. India's emergency period coincides with several chapters in Rushdie's book. Not only can this painting reflect the emotional aspects the reader gained from Rushdie's words, but with Salman's newly acquired strong scented powers, we as viewers of this piece can look at how these colors can also relate to a small. Warmer tones are left with a scent of comfort like the summer air, whereas red tones are usually associated with the smell of blood. Now of course, all of this can be determined by each viewer's opinion, but it would be hard to deny these points.



(Fig. 8)

Being that Rushdie's book was his final book of the semester, at least for my paper, I can't deny the emotional journey put me through. I am reminded by a familiar journey I went through during my second semester at NYU. I was writing about my recent trip to India as an adult and how I was unable to relate to the culture there as an American, yet I still felt at home. With Rushdie showing us different parts of India during this time of discovery for the entire nation, I can understand what this book must mean for him, on a personal matter. If we compare Rushdie's text with other books we've read all semester, I can honestly say that this book by far represents a culture more closely than any other we have read thus far. Now, I am not being biased about this statement due to my Indian heritage, but perhaps my relationship and understanding of the culture has made this connection so strong. Pamuk's book is also dense and layered with diverse characters and storylines similar to Rushdie. Saadawi's words allow any female from any country to relate to her strong feminine voice, which will probably be my second choice for most comparable texts with represented cultures. However, how can we continue to only view writers and their work based on where they come from? Of course their cultural environment plays a big part in their craft, but with everything going on in the world today in regards to technology and communication, how can writers not be influenced by each other? How can it be that a French writer like Balzac can describe memories in such a poetic way, whereas an American like Eggers just rapidly discusses each thought without a doubt? These questions have lingered in my mind all semester, and it was not until reading Rushdie where I am finally beginning to understand how your cultural background can influence you.

As we've analyzed literature alongside coinciding paintings or photography from a similar time period and cultural region along with work from opposing cultures and time periods, we can see how words chosen by writers are constructed in a similar way as

a painter's hand. I've chosen to demonstrate these similarities to explain how any type of creative medium can be relatable towards each other in that context. We are used to analyzing one form of art whether it be painting, literature, music, or film in different ways. However, what we fail to understand is that without one, the other doesn't exist. All forms of artistic content rely on the other for inspiration. The musicality in words spoken in different languages can be transferred over in the visual aesthetic approach of painting. One interesting thought that is presented in all of the books I have discussed so far is the similar notion of emotional connections through loneliness and the human senses. We see this idea embedded between the words and plot summary in some way in each book. This does not strike me as a surprise since the feeling of loneliness and the dependency on our human senses is a natural everyday occurrence. However what is striking, is that audiences from any of these authors can pick up either of these books and feel a connection to their own personal stories. It is that particular connection that writers can build with their audiences the same way a visual artist can display their work to their viewers. Creativity through words, painting, or photography can leave us feeling the same way through an emotional experience. If that experience is felt, then we can consider that artist, of any medium, a true success. In a way, we can look at all of the cultures I have discussed in comparison to the iconic New York City skyline. Buildings from all different stylistic periods from Greek revival to postmodern architecture, they all represent their era of design. All of the authors and artists I have discussed present their cultural identities through emotional connections of visual and literary works. One artist does not stand alone, but rather they can all coexist together, just like the great representation of architectural style in New York City.

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Images

Fig. 1:

Skull, 1981

Jean-Michel Basquiat

Neo-Expressionism

Fig. 2:

Blue Nudes, 1952

Henri Matisse

Fauvism

Fig. 3:

Europe After the Rain, 1942

Max Ernst

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Fig. 4:

Café in Aswan, 1933

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Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1, 1871

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Untitled Sounds Like Falling Series, 2015

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Fig. 7:

No. 14, 1960, 1960

Mark Rothko

Abstract Expressionism

Fig. 8:

Dhruva I, 1976

Natvar Bhavsar

Modern Indian Abstraction