

Symbolism

by Sophia

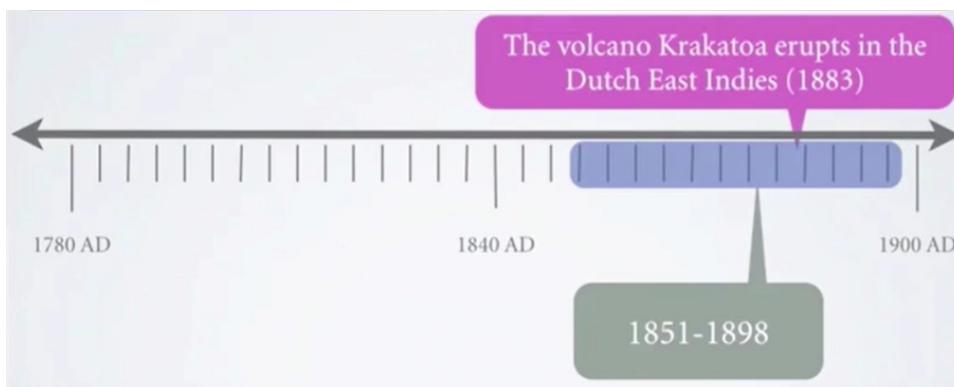


WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers Symbolism. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms and identify examples of Symbolist painting. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

1. Period and Location: Symbolism

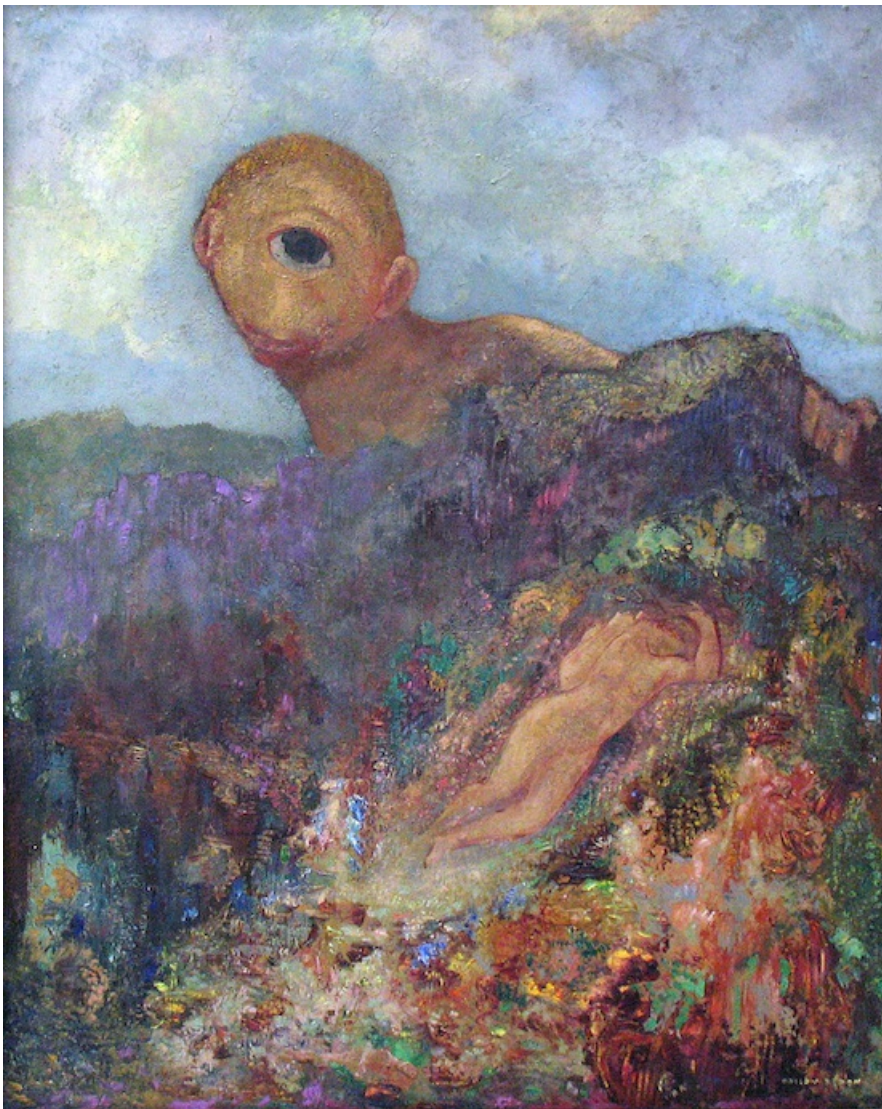
The artwork that you will be looking at today covers the period from 1851 to 1898, and focuses geographically on three locations: London, England; Paris, France; and Oslo, Norway.



2. Symbolism

The Symbolist movement was anti-rationalist in philosophy and sought to depict the world of spirituality, imagination, and dreams. Heavily influenced by Dark Romanticism and an eventual influence on the development of Surrealism, **Symbolists** felt that painting should depict more than just what can be seen, as in Realism. Instead, art should express emotions in visual form.

Odilon Redon was one of the Symbolist movement's most important figures. Like Surrealist paintings to come, the Symbolist paintings such as "The Cyclops," shown below, are open to quite a bit of interpretation.



The Cyclops by Odilon Redon

1898

Oil on cardboard



THINK ABOUT IT

Cyclops were known in mythology to be fearsome giant monsters. Despite this, the painting can be interpreted in one of two ways: Is it depicting someone vulnerable facing impending danger, as in the nude woman being eaten by the cyclops? Or is it a depiction of unrequited love, as in the cyclops, resigned to a fate devoid of love? You decide. The wonderful thing about art like this is that everyone sees something different.

Edvard Munch was a Norwegian painter whose style is often cited as one of the most important in terms of its influence on Expressionism. His painting “Madonna,” shown below, while open to interpretation, is almost always agreed upon by critics as *not* depicting the holy Madonna, but rather a beautiful woman.



DID YOU KNOW

“Madonna” means “my lady.”



Madonna by Edvard Munch

1894

Oil on canvas

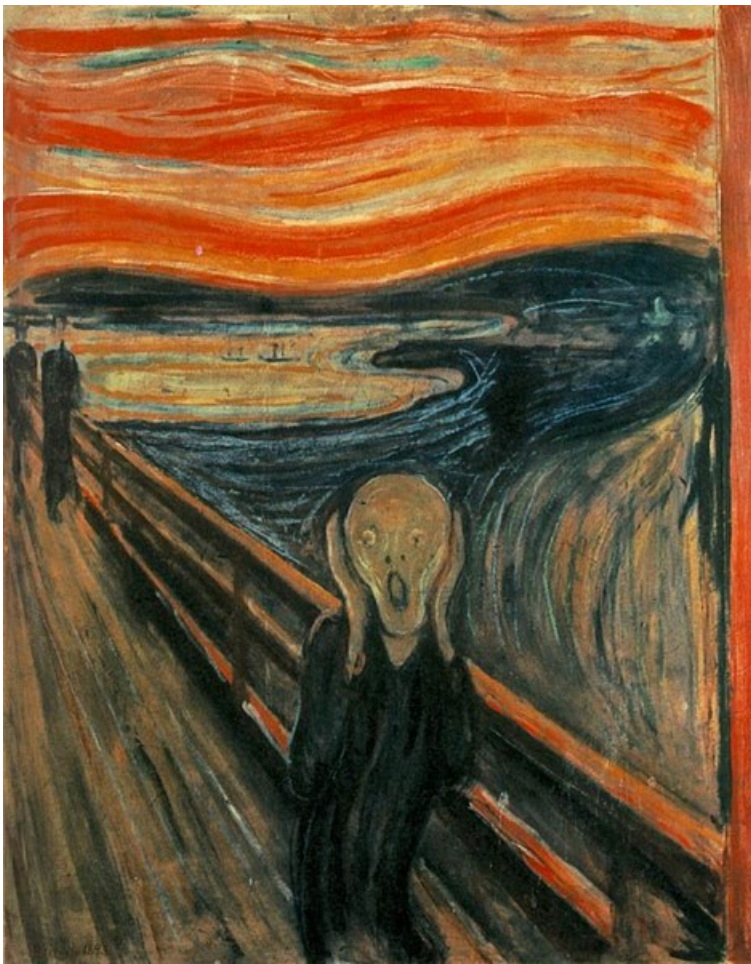
It's hard to say whether this was someone specific, or was symbolic of all women. Some have described it as representative of a femme-fatale, suggestive of the power of women. Others, however, feel that this was a depiction of a woman in the throes of passion. Munch often used an aura of color such as you see here to heighten a certain implied sensation, such as pleasure.



DID YOU KNOW

Munch's name is pronounced "Moon-k."

This next example, Edvard Munch's "The Scream," is one of the most famous paintings in history. It's a form of early Expressionism depicting the now-iconic image of a man in a fit of intense anguish or fear. Supposedly, it isn't the man screaming, but rather his awareness of a primal scream or shriek passing through nature, which would explain why his ears are covered by his hands.



The Scream by Edvard Munch

1893

Oil on canvas

Munch apparently based the painting on a similar experience he had had while walking along a pier with friends, who are seen in the background. Munch uses swirling lines that repeatedly return you to the main figure of the painting, while the brush strokes of the deck of the pier almost feel as if the friends are accelerating away from him, or he's accelerating away from them.



DID YOU KNOW

The blood-red clouds have been suggested by some critics to be more than just symbolic—that they could be the actual effect from the eruption of Krakatoa in the Dutch East Indies in 1883. Depending upon the time period that this painting refers to, this is a possibility, at least in terms of time. It may help explain Munch's decision to use this particular color as the background for this remarkable painting, a pastel version of which set a record that may still hold for the most expensive work of art sold at a public auction, around \$111 million.



TERM TO KNOW

Symbolism

A 19th-century art movement that rejected Realism, using the convention of representing things through symbols or signs.



SUMMARY

In today's lesson about **Symbolism**, you learned how to identify and define today's key terms and learned how to identify examples of Symbolist painting.



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