



The Last History Painter William Adolphe Bouguereau

The name William Adolphe Bouguereau is known to almost everyone. Even if someone has a mild association with art or is into a casual conversation with an art enthusiast, Bouguereau's name will undoubtedly come up.

Bouguereau was a pioneer of figurative art and had a unique talent to portray human anatomy with precision. This French artist and academician was very close to the Realist Movement and has helped shape the movement to what we read today.

One of the best things about Bouguereau's paintings was the extent of smoothness, his choice of the subject matter, and the portrayal of women. He brought to life the divided opinions of the modernists while giving an apt expression of Western Art.

In this excerpt, we are going to talk about Bouguereau and what made him a deserving artist to receive the Legion of Honor.

Early Years



Dante & Virgil in Hell

Bouguereau started to learn art when he was in college but soon came back to find himself enrolling in the Municipal School of Drawing in Bordeaux. After gaining success in making lithographs and reaching at the apex in his class, Bouguereau moved to Paris to explore his potential and artistic zeal.

Bouguereau's first major painting that started to get him recognition was Dante and Virgil in Hell. The

painting was bold; it was a bit dramatic; his knowledge of human anatomy, especially after taking up academic painting, exalted this attempt to new heights.

But this was also the beginning of the criticism of Bouguereau from various corners of the artistic world. No matter the criticism, Bouguereau did not stop to show his skill and knowledge of the human anatomy painted skill. It was all his labor of love, and he explored his potential to the highest possible stage.

In the Footsteps of Raphael to Rising to Fame



*Zenobia found by shepherds on the banks of
the Araxes*

Bouguereau was given a place to stay at the Villa Medici when he won the Prix de Rome for one of his other great artworks, Zenobia Found by Shepherds on the Banks of the Araxes. While staying in the Villa, Bouguereau was able to analyze the Roman and Greek antiques. Plus, his acquaintance with the works of Renaissance artists glorified here.

More importantly, Bouguereau's identification of the classical literature started here, and later we would see the references of this literature in his paintings. Bouguereau was also a voracious reader. He has mentioned in his journal how he was really impressed by the religious works and Homer, Seneca, among others.

Bouguereau's identification with Raphael was noticeable in some of his early works. It was not long after he came home in 1854 that Bouguereau became one of the most influential artists of his time. He was commissioned to decorate public buildings and private houses. This switch to private commissions led Bouguereau to expand his artwork while moving away from history towards individualized artworks.

Attention to Detail

One thing that we cannot miss about Bouguereau's gusto style of painting is his attention to detail of the human body. Looking at his nude artworks, the spectators are often left awestruck with the contours of the body and his color palette.

Bouguereau used an amazing style of color scheme for his paintings. Especially the flesh colors are muted to the extent that the real color is harmoniously synced with the other shades.

Bouguereau and the World

Bouguereau did not accept the invitation to take part in the Grand Triennale, which was nothing but an attempt to inspire the French art community and divert the existing trend of producing artworks that depicted a decline of the empire. This was the time when Bismarck's German Unification bore fruit Paris was also brought under the Prussian rule.

Even though he didn't participate, the organizers used some of his previous artworks to show in the

Triennale. After the event, the majority of the art community took to impressionism, but Bouguereau continued to produce religious and anatomical masterpieces.

Setting Himself Apart



Birth of Venus

Bouguereau got his true identity after the age of 60. Pieta was a tribute to his son, who succumbed to a health condition and after this, he brought to the world another marvelous piece of artwork, *Birth of Venus*.

With such artworks, Bouguereau showed that he is the true master of glazing and helped the critics realize how beautiful a historical and religious painting can be. Not only the technical aspects of his paintings were downright fantastic, but Bouguereau was also an expert at creating a narrative out of the entire painting while maintaining the perfect abstraction of the subjects.

Towards the End



The Nut Gatherers

Every artist has his fair share of criticism and slander. Well, Bouguereau was not saved from this phase. Bouguereau was a master of depicting daily rural life in a life-like manner that most of his paintings idealized the rural events and did not present them in a realistic manner. His works like *The Nut Gatherers* got him a lot of plaudits and criticism too.

Over the years, it was said that Bouguereau was not able to come out of history and is an artist of the past. From getting tagged as 'Bouguereaute' (Bouguereau's style of depicting smooth surfaces), which was derogatory to his style of painting to getting zeroes in reviews, Bouguereau never stopped painting what he believed in.

The Bottom Line

One thing that makes him stand apart is the assiduous routine of painting every day, six days a week. Lastly, Bouguereau has left some great legacy behind, not in terms of artwork or a niche style, but his teachings and students have been able to take his lessons forward and spread the message across the globe.

Even today, Bouguereau's recreated artworks are seen hanging inside several buildings and houses as nothing could match the smoothness and beauty of his paintings. His artworks are very much impressive and highly recommended in the modern-day art world too.