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CULTURE

Ten paintings that changed the world

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Art may have the ability to cheer us up, to entertain us, but it also has the power to effect real change in the world.

Pablo Picasso once even went so far as to declare, “Painting is not made to decorate apartments; it is an offensive and defensive instrument of war against the enemy.”

Some artworks throughout history have revolutionised the way we think about politics, social issues and even art itself.



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From cave paintings to soup cans, princesses to soviet leaders, these are the paintings that have had an undeniable, impact on the art world and beyond.

Lascaux caves, 17,000 Before Present

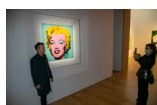
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The oldest painting made quite the global kerfuffle - but not until 17,000 years after it was painted. In 1940, a group of young men came across a cave in the French countryside, inside of which they discovered some one of the world's most extraordinary examples of prehistoric art. Whilst not the oldest example of human painting, the caves are one of the earliest examples of sophisticated painting, demonstrating a key moment in the human drive to make art.



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Studies of the foetus in the womb, c.1510, Leonardo da Vinci



Leonardo counts more than a few household names among his artworks - but this might not be one of them. This study of a foetus curled up in a womb, however, arguably made more impact on the world than the Mona Lisa or The Last Supper. In making his anatomical drawings - taken from real life dissections, an illegal practice for non-physicians - Leonardo challenged moral and artistic convention. Leonardo's discoveries and methods went on to change the way that both artists and scientists studied the human body.



SKIP



Las Meninas, 1656, Diego Velazquez



Museo del Prado

This is no standard courtly painting. In this portrait of the Princess Margarita and her



of viewpoint and viewer involvement in painting. Is the pictured Velazquez painting us? Are we the king and queen reflected in the mirror on the back wall? Its impact on art history has been profound: these are the kinds of questions raised by cubism 250 years later, and Picasso was so fascinated with Las Meninas, he painted 58 versions of it.

The Death of Marat, 1793, Jacques-Louis David



(Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns - Ro scan - or RMFAB, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns) / Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns - Ro scan - or RMFAB, Brussels / photo: J. Geleyns

This painting by French artist Jacques Louis David, could be considered the first truly political artwork. It depicts the aftermath of revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat's murder, who was stabbed in his bathtub. David took a poignant political moment and painted it with near-photographic simplicity; his painting of his dead friend went on to become a pertinent piece of political propaganda, seeing it turned into an engraving which was widely circulated among the public.

Olympia, 1863, Edouard Manet



This radical nude is frequently hailed as a rejection of the patriarchal gaze in art. When Edouard Manet sat down to paint Olympia on her bed, artists had been painting reclining nudes for hundreds of years - but Olympia was going to be different. The pose is directly based on Venus of Urbino by Renaissance painter Titian, a painting famed for its shocking sexuality. But rather than a come hither look in the eyes of the subject, Olympia is confrontational, her stare hard. Her hand is a barrier to her genitals, not a gesture of invitation.

Black Square, 1915, Kazimir Malevich



This painting may just look like a black square - but that's because it is. The work by Kazimir Malevich is considered the first painting to not actually be of anything. Malevich wanted to completely reject the idea that art should depict reality, or even try to. This painting and Malevich's ideas went on to inspire countless artists in the twentieth century, and was the basis on which abstract and conceptual art movements were widely built - not necessarily changing the world, but changing art forever.

Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962, Andy Warhol



AFP/Getty Images

In contrast, this work by Andy Warhol definitely is of something - but it's not exactly something you would expect. Andy Warhol took a piece of design that the American people saw every day, and turned it into gallery-worthy art. In doing so, he questioned ideas of value attached to art - is this Campbell's soup tin really less worthy of attention than a Leonardo? To emphasise his point, Warhol first displayed the works lined up on shelves in a gallery space, mimicking how they would be stacked in a grocery store.

Guernica, 1937, Pablo Picasso



Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia/Sucesion Pablo Picasso. VEGAP. 2017

No artwork has become as important a symbol of anti-war movements as this heartbreaking painting by Pablo Picasso. The work depicts the overnight bombing of the Spanish city of Guernica in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. Picasso had been commissioned by the Spanish Republican government to create an artwork, and was so disgusted by the atrocity that he chose it as his subject. The painting was made into a full size replica tapestry which hangs in the United Nations headquarters in New York.



The Problem We All Live With, 1964, Norman Rockwell



Norman Rockwell Museum

Illustrator Norman Rockwell made his career depicting the normalities of American mid-century life - both the good and the bad. Painted in 1964, the work shows a young black girl named Ruby Bridges walking down the road, on her way to attend an all-white school. She is flanked by security due to the racial hatred this incited - she walks past racial slurs written on the walls. It became an iconic image of the Civil Rights Movement, and Barack Obama had it put on display when he invited Bridges to meet him at The White House in 2011.

Guerilla Girls, 1989, Do women have to be naked to get into the Met Museum?

Tate

The Guerilla Girls are an anonymous group of artists with an important message. This art



sexism in the art world. They do this by simply stating the facts - in this case that “less than 5% of the artists in the Modern art section [of the Metropolitan Museum in New York] are women, but 85% of the nudes are female”. This poster has become a symbol of furthering female representation in art institutions.

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My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love, 1990, Dmitri Vrubel



In 1979, a famous photo of Soviet Union leader Leonid Brezhnev and German Democratic Republic leader Erich Honecker was taken. The two were depicted in a socialist fraternal kiss - a kiss which is made on the mouth if two leaders consider themselves particularly close. Artist Dmitri Vrubel chose to paint this image onto the Berlin Wall, accompanied by the controversial epithet. As the most famous part of the East Side Gallery, where murals are displayed on the remaining parts of the Berlin Wall, the painting is a symbol of how art can be an expression of people power - a power that can change the direction of politics.

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