

Process Paper

How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?

I chose Abstract Expressionism as Cold War propaganda as my topic because I've always been interested in the history of art and finding out that the CIA was using art during the Cold War to foster support for America was very surprising. It relates to the Revolution and Reaction part of the theme as Abstract Expressionism was a revolutionary art movement and the CIA used it as propaganda in reaction to Soviet claims of America being a cultural desert.

How did you conduct your research?

I started by just looking at the Abstract Expressionism movement, but as I was researching it I found out about the CIA connection and decided to look into that more to see if there was enough information about it to do my project on. As I worked on the project, finding sources was a challenge at first, but after I had acquired several sources, I was able to collect more primary sources from them. I think my most important source was "Modern Art Was CIA 'Weapon'", by Frances Stonor Saunders, because it was the first source I found about the CIA's involvement and it led me down the path that I took researching for this project.

How did you create your project?

After I had most of my research done, I made my website outline. As I was putting the text into the site, I found images to add to each page. I planned the design for the website so that it would have a good balance of text, images and quotes. I worked on each page one at a time, putting in all the information before working on other pages.

What is your historical argument?

During the Cold War, as US leaders were publicly rejecting all modern art and as the Soviet Union was expanding its cultural and ideological influence, the CIA reacted by covertly promoting Abstract Expressionism overseas through the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Museum of Modern Art. The movement's emphasis on individual artistic freedom directly contrasted the Socialist Realism of the Soviet Union, allowing the United States to present itself as a society built on creative independence rather than state control. This reshaped European intellectual opinion and hindered Soviet claims that America was a cultural desert.

In what ways is your topic significant in history?

Using Abstract Expressionism as propaganda against the Soviet Union was significant because it showed how deep the methods of 'fighting' during the Cold War went. The CIA transformed apolitical art into a tool of ideological influence, revealing how global conflicts were not only fought militarily, but with ideas, culture, and expression.