

International Foundation Programme. The Glasgow School of Art

Essay FOCI Term 1

INDUSTRIALISATION: Supermarine Spitfire

Why are Engine and Engineering Classicism(Baroque) based on logic?

Assessment Brief

Interpretation of a specific site or object using basic art historical terms of analysis

Yong Won Choi

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In the FOCI Industrialization lecture, I was impressed by one sentence, “Engine and Engineering is one of Classicism based on logic”, said by B. Peter who was a speaker of the lecture. And after visiting Kelvingrove Art gallery & Museum, I was also inspired by Spitfire mk.21, so I have chosen Spitfire mk.21 as my subject of this essay. In the following main body, I will introduce Spitfire and describe why I think engine and engineering are Baroque based on logic.

Firstly, I am going to introduce ‘Spitfire’. Great Britain has built a new air plane, Spitfire, following the development of fighter planes of surrounding nations. The Supermarine Spitfire was a British single-seat fighter aircraft which was used by the Royal Air Force and many other allied countries before, during and after the Second World War.

The Spitfire was designed by R. J. Mitchell, chief designer at Supermarine Aviation Works. Spitfire had a distinctive elliptical wing (designed by B. Shenstone) to have a higher top speed than several contemporary fighters. After its first flight on 5 March 1936, the Air Ministry placed order for 310 Spitfires on 3 June 1936. Though R.J. Mitchell's death in 1937, his colleague Joseph Smith took over as chief designer and designed many variants.

Spitfires were used to defend mainland Great Britain as interceptor, reconnaissance plane, fighter and trainer. In air battle Spitfire got on terms with German Messerschmitt Bf109, the contemporary newest fighter, and it successfully conducted many missions. Accordingly, Spitfire had various modifiers, “Fighter that Saved Britain” and “Sword of Flying Knight”.

Spitfire mk.21 was improved from Spitfire mk.14 and named in early 1942, because it needed much stronger airframe and wings than the former model which has two-stage supercharged Griffon 61 engine. The wings were completely redesigned with a new structure and using thicker-gauge light alloy skinning, so the wings stiffness was increased by 47%, allowing the theoretical aileron reversal speed to 825mph (1,328km/h).

Jack Forrest was flying Spitfire mk.21 LA 198, the one of Royal Air Force 602 Squadron. LA 198 was built at Vickers Armstrong's South Marston factory in

September 1944. After the Second World War, LA198 was in the film 'Battle of Britain' and then, it was displayed at the RAF Leuchars Airport, and later, it has been moved to Glasgow Museums and the National Museums of Scotland. The plane was restored in a collaboration between Glasgow Museums and the National Museums of Scotland. It was originally on display in Glasgow's Museum of Transport, then following Kelvingrove's refurbishment, it has been became a part of an innovative new display

In the following main body, I will describe why I think engine and engineering are Baroque based on logic.

'Baroque' is a term of Portugal derivation. Originally, Baroque was a word to mean an ill-shaped (look poor) pearls by Iberian Peninsula jewelers in the Middle Ages. Baroque was firstly used for music and then, derived several meanings. In the middle of 18th century, It was negatively used as a word to mean excessively artificial music, out of natural music. Representing a form of music, Baroque became established by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the late of 18th century, Pruche and Rousseau described Baroque as strange, excessive and unnatural including music and architecture.

In the middle of 19th century, a German aesthetician Jacob Burckhardt describe Baroque positively, however he still understood it as a subordinate concept of the Renaissance, so it still had limits. Following him, his disciple Heinrich Wolfflin had a crucial role to establish Baroque style. In his book "Renaissance and Baroque", he suggested four main effects; vitality, richness, grandiosity and movement.

In 1915, through his book "Principles of Art History", he cleared the way for future generations to find again Baroque art. He considered Baroque and the Renaissance on equal concept, not a subordinate concept. In 1950, Jean Rousset said that the works we can call Baroque style, usually has four characteristics, destabilization, liquidity, transformation and domination.

Eugenio D'Ors, Spanish writer, considered Baroque as a 'general tendency of culture' transcending time and space, and he claimed that Baroque can appear in different time and in different space, over the 'Baroque period'. I can say Engine and Engineering as an example of Baroque which was representing the strange blamed as Baroque

thing, the creativity subverting standard and tradition, and the genre diversity, when Baroque was used at first in the field of art.

Passing industrialize since James Watt invented engine, engineering has been naturally developed and then the world became changed and flexible. The development of power brought the development of transportation, finally, we can move faster even in a long distance.

Attaching the lecture to the mention of Wolfflin, I think the development of transportation would be a Baroque because they have vitality, richness, grandiosity and movement. We can see vitality and movement from the object being provided a power from engine, richness from rich life by invention of engine, and grandiosity from the world changed by engine.

Engine and engineering have changed the existing standards and created new things such as airplane, armored battleship, and nonexistent things in the old world. On the other hand, getting the world closer, instability is also growing. The nations developed through the Industrial Revolution, started wars to have huge and stable market.

Spitfire is a fruit of unstable engineering of the 20th century, and at the same time it was a cultural icon of the middle of 20th century that D'Ors said. It was a spontaneous culture tendency following Increasing military of each nations to extend territory. Eventually, New fruits brought from wars were strange, unnatural.

Wars have changed the standard, tradition, and history of humankind and, ironically, in diverse fields new cultures has been created. Many kinds of studies has been developed through wars, and consequently, Baroque was born in the process to create and elaborate.

As mentioned above, Baroque was being used in various ways, so it is difficult to realize the boundary of Baroque. In the French literature dictionary, it says "Since a half century, the unchanged characteristic of Baroque is that it is difficult to define Baroque including all its meanings."

In the book "The Story of Art", E. H. Gombrich said "There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists. There is no harm in calling all these activities art as long as we keep in mind that such a word may mean very different things in different times and places, and as long as we realize that Art with a capital A no existence". I could understand more about Baroque with this passage.

If we can't define what is Baroque, I think we can meet the new Baroque which we are going to face in the future.

I think that writing essay, with choosing an object, after an art history lecture, would be a good opportunity to think about meanings of the object, to learn new knowledge, and to extend personal thinking.

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