



VISUAL
CULTURE

“DEATH AND ALL HIS FRIENDS”

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In this essay I will attempt to understand and convey the formal elements and principles of design within Coldplay's album *Viva la Vida*. This Album was received by a worldwide audience and sold three hundred and sixteen thousand copies on its first day.

Firstly we need to take a look at the 1830's painting *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugène Delacroix. And assimilate the differences and similarities therein.



Having looked at both the album cover and the artwork, we can clearly conclude that the colours have all been enhanced in the reproduction, not to mention the gestural markings in white paint.

The major issue here is that Coldplay have made the reproduction more vibrant and colourful, turning a sombre blue toned scene into an almost cheerful victory march; which it actually is. This is why the second release was called *Prospekt's March*. Now, I am not stating that Eugène Delacroix got the colours wrong at all, they have just been modernised.

Now, forgetting the artwork for just a minute we can see the foundation of the album cover begins with the text representation. The letters seem to be painted onto the reproduction and form parallel, vertical and symmetrical lines. It almost seems like a mechanical form of writing and looking closer; the text covers parts of the artwork and strengthens the horizontal and vertical lines which emphasize the painting.

All the lines seem to be pointing upward forming an attraction – this is more apparent in the actual painting where an invisible triangular shape is seen starting at either bottom corner and working its way to the centre of the top where Lady Liberty's hand is holding the French flag.

This shape separates the foreground from the background, and the vanishing point is now seen to the right of Lady Liberty. It is also the divider between dark and light tonal value. The writing almost cancels the actual perspective of the album cover out, but it all sums up to an effective new form.

Our eyes are then forced around the piece as they are stimulated to see each and every splash of white paint, and this texture certainly ignites the desire to feel the work. This quality breaks up the colour as we know it. Instead of enjoying the harmony and symbolical support to the piece within colour, the white is thrown at us. The colour at the bottom of the piece is dull and as this is the foundation of the piece it creates a certain tension between life and death. I think the artist wanted to show this exact point – that death couldn't stop her, and this tone is also emulated in the lyrics and titles of the songs. "Life in Technicolor; Cemeteries of London; Lost! etc..."

The overall scale of the piece has also been cropped from its original size, however not much has been taken away. This has possibly been done to enhance the figures on either side of Lady Liberty. The proportion of Lady Liberty to her companions illustrates the importance of her role within the scene and what she did for the French. And we can conclude that this adds to her being the focal point and most definitely increases her size. But the almost negative proportion becomes positive as the perspective is enhanced adding an atmosphere of victory and camaraderie.

This stance adds to the unity of the piece where all of the figures are either holding up weapons or the figures themselves are aligned in a rhythmic pattern of line again pointing upward.

The repetition of the brilliant light coming from behind Lady Liberty which is also found in her dress tackles the theme of unity and balances the top right hand side, to the opposite corner. We are almost lost in the cloud/smoke and the building – but due to the figures our attention is gained.

We also find that the balance of the piece is perfect, both sides incorporating sufficient forms and line to equalize the visual weight. And this assists us in not only finding the piece visually pleasing but also meandering around it.

I find that this cover is very enjoyable, the writing definitely adds to what Coldplay are stating. A gutsy heart attitude to life and conquest through uncertainty.

Bibliography

cover – <http://behindthecamera.squarespace.com/storage/misc-images/vivalavida.png>

actual painting - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Eugène_Delacroix_-_La_liberté_guidant_le_peuple.jpg

source for essay - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldplay's_fourth_studio_album