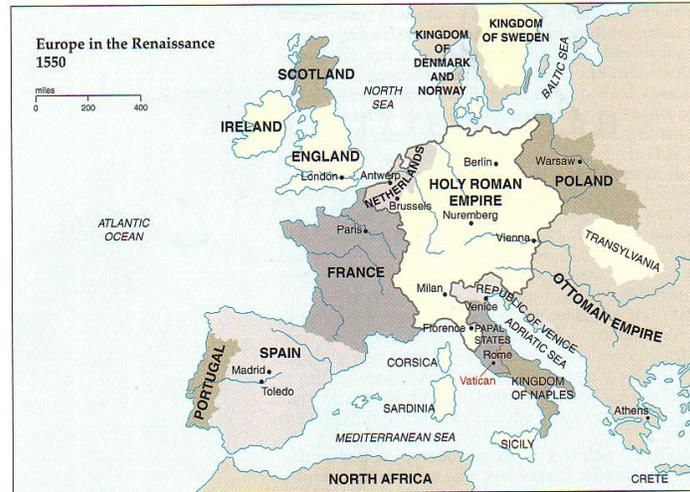


Renaissance-Revolutions (c. 1400 – 1850s)



Italian Renaissance (c.1400-1550)

The word “renaissance” refers to a “rebirth.” After the dark ages, there was a revival of classical Greek and Roman ideals. People began to take more of an interest in intellectual development and studies in science and philosophy. In the Medieval era people were instructed to overcome the sinful nature of the body by focusing on matters of eternal consequence. During the Renaissance, people placed more value in things of this world, such as the *potential* of the human mind and body.



Raphael *School of Athens* 1510-11

Typical art of the Italian Renaissance places emphasis on compositional unity. The works are very balanced. Things seem calm and organized. The people almost seem to be posing. Italian Renaissance artists also gave rebirth to techniques such as linear and atmospheric perspective. These techniques were invented and used by ancient Greek artists but were lost during the Middle Ages.

Raphael used one point perspective in this painting, and he also uses subject matter and styles from Ancient Greece. He and his friends are shown as philosophers, scholars, and artists of ancient Greece.

Northern Renaissance

The Northern Renaissance happened in Switzerland, Germany, Northern France, and the Netherlands.

The Northern Renaissance artists are not geographically close to the ancient Greece and Rome cultures so their work is less visually connected to those cultures. For example, you don't typically see the use of linear perspective or atmospheric perspective in northern Renaissance paintings. The body types do not resemble the idealized figures the Italian Renaissance artists were copying from ancient Greece and ancient Rome.



Robert Campin *Merode Altarpiece* 1426

Northern Renaissance paintings are characterized by emphasis on detail (microscopic/telescopic detail), vibrant colors, rich fabrics and garments, intuitive perspective and the use of symbolism.

Let's find these characteristics in this Northern Renaissance altarpiece.

DETAIL: I think the amount of detail in this painting is impressive.

You can see separate lines of text in the book. Looking out the window, the buildings in the distance have just as much detail.



COLOR: Look at the vibrant colors of clothes the people are wearing.

These Northern Renaissance artists invented oil paints and used them about 50 years before their Italian counterparts. (Leonardo DaVinci was a notable exception who experimented with oil paints.)

Oil paints produce the luminous, rich colors used in this painting. Joseph has a royal blue hat and scarlet red sleeves. Mary's gown is rich rose fabric that looks shiny and expensive. Both she and the angel's garments have so much cloth it lays piled at their feet.



INTUITIVE PERSPECTIVE: The use of intuitive perspective is most evident in the bench and table. The artists of the Northern Renaissance were farther away from Greece and Rome so they could not observe the formula the ancient artists used.

Even if they did not know about linear perspective techniques using vanishing points, but they could observe that parallel lines seemed to converge as they moved into the distance. So, they used their intuition to create a similar effect without using an exact formula.



The converging lines in this painting are done intuitively - without the use of a vanishing point.

This intuitive perspective creates the effect of an “uplifted landscape.”

That's why the bench and table look sharply tilted.

SYMBOLISM: This painting is packed with symbolism.

A few of the symbols include:

- A white prayer towel, representing the purity of the virgin Mary
- The water vessel, symbolizing Mary as the vessel for the incarnation
- Joseph's tools, foreshadow the crucifixion
- The three white lilies on the table represent the trinity - with the unopened lily for the yet unborn Jesus. The lilies are also another reference to the purity of the virgin.
- The least subtle symbol is the cross descending on a sunbeam. It is headed straight for Mary's abdomen. This is telling us directly that Mary is about to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Mary's position on the floor shows her humility.



This altarpiece by Robert Campin is also an example of a triptych.

Triptych = a picture or relief carving on three panels, typically hinged together side by side and used as an altarpiece.

Mannerism

To put it simply, Mannerism is *bizarre*. This style emerged at the end of the Renaissance. Mannerist works do not look odd at first glance because the artists were highly skilled. The work becomes stranger when you start looking at it more closely. Let me show what I mean. . .



Bronzino *Allegory with Venus and Cupid* 1545

Right away you see the naked woman in the center. Who is this woman? She is Venus, the goddess of love and beauty. We know it is her because she is holding the golden apple Paris gave to her when he judged her as most beautiful of all the goddesses. So, who is the little boy grabbing her and kissing her? Well, that's her son Cupid. Strange enough for you?

It gets worse! Look at Cupid more closely. There is a lot of space between his head and shoulder. He must have a really long neck! The position of his face and arm suggest that he is smashed right against his mother and yet it looks like there is another person in between their bodies. If we follow this other figure up toward where the head would be, we do not see a head or arms. So, maybe it the lower body of Cupid after all, but how weird is his spine if that's the case? If we follow the same lower body down to the feet, we see that whomever it is stands on a poor little bird! The other characters in this scene are equally disturbing with reptile legs and arms that don't seem connect to bodies. It becomes increasingly more confusing the longer you look at it.

Baroque (c.1600)

The Baroque style is characterized by drama and action. Before we look at the art of this time, we need to remember the historical context. This is the time of the protestant reformation. People are leaving the catholic church because they want to form a new church that allows more individual freedom and active involvement. The rituals and traditions of the catholic church did not seem relevant to their everyday lives. Catholic services were in Latin, not the commonly spoken language. The counter-reformation was the catholic church's attempt to demonstrate that it was relevant and approachable. The church leaders did want people to feel involved in a way that would encourage them to return. Art was one way to create a sense of emotional involvement with characters in the religious texts.

Although it is not exclusively religious in content, the Baroque style was used by the church to bring the characters and stories of the Bible to life and make them seem relatable. Since artists apprenticed under masters to learn “how to paint” they applied the same style and techniques even when they weren’t painting religious content.



Artemisia Gentileschi *Judith and Holofernes* c. 1620

If you were hearing the story of Judith and Holofernes by someone reading the Apocrypha in Latin, it might be a little boring, especially after the first couple times you had heard it.

This painting puts you right at the scene in the very moment that Judith cuts off the head of Holofernes! It is the most exciting part of the story and you can see what it would be like if you were there!

I would hope not many of us could relate to getting a guy drunk and then cutting off his head! But the artist had the goal of making the people in the story relatable. They are wearing the type of clothes people would have worn in the 1600s when it was painted. Their hairstyles are current to the times as well.

The characters' facial expressions also help you to see them as real people and they become more than just characters from a story that was written in the distant past. Even though we can't relate to this exact situation, we can relate to the look of determination on Judith's face and the pain in the expressed by Holofernes.

Notice how the diagonal lines and dramatic light and shadows add to the intensity of the scene. The bright figures emerging from the dark background demonstrate the technique of tenebrism. Using action poses, diagonal lines and tenebrism are typical Baroque techniques to make the scene more exciting.



Gianlorenzo Bernini *David* 1623 and Michelangelo's *David*, 1501-1504

Examine this Baroque version of David. Compare him to Michelangelo's David from the Italian Renaissance. The diagonals the body of "Baroque David" suggest motion.

The action pose and tense facial expression bring the most exciting part of the story to life. It seems like we are right there to witness him throwing the stone that kills Goliath. In contrast, Michelangelo's sculpture of David from the Renaissance stands still and contemplative

We can relate to his intense facial expression of Bernini's David. If you've ever really concentrated in a moment that really matters, you understand this expression. It might not have been taking out a giant, but it might have been on a test or getting sliver out of your finger!

People can also relate to the Baroque David because he is life size. He is about 5 foot 6 inches and is not on a high pedestal. Michelangelo's Italian Renaissance David is over 17 feet high. He towers high over of the heads of spectators.

The goal of Baroque artists and the counter reformation of the Catholic Church was to show Saints and Biblical heroes as relatable, regular people, instead of as larger than life heroes who possessed unattainable qualities and attributes.

Rococo (c. 1700)

In the years leading up to the French Revolution of 1789 over 90% of the country's wealth belonged to a small number of citizens. The art that was made during this time was made for the aristocracy because they were the only ones who could pay for it.

Naturally, these ridiculously wealthy people wanted art that reflected their lifestyle, values and concerns.

They were really quite shallow so most of the art centered around being young and beautiful, playful flirting, having fancy clothes, and lavish surroundings.

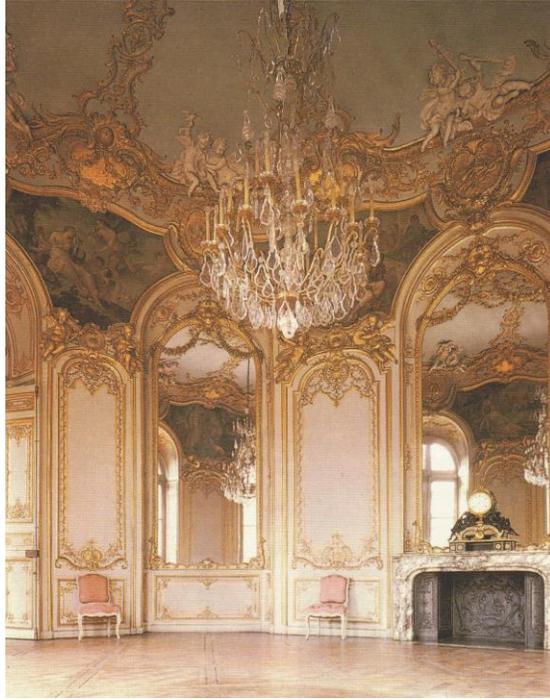


Jean-Honore Fragonard *The Swing* 1766-67

The Rococo style is usually very busy (gaudy if you ask me), with soft pastel colors and gently curving lines.

The subjects are fun, fanciful and flirtatious.

Notice the view the young man has as she kicks off her dainty shoe! I can imagine he will be sipping champagne out of it later that evening!



Germain Bouffrand *Salon de la Princesse* Paris, France 1737-40

The French aristocracy met for high society events in rooms like this one.

This is typical Rococo with fancy-schmancy crystal chandeliers, large mirrors, pastel color scheme, lacy, gold accents all over the place, and adorable cupids tucked in decorations overhead.

It's almost as if you've been sucked into a big Valentine's Day card!

All of that gold lacy crap climbing the walls is known as *rocaille*. There are plenty of mirrors so you can constantly check yourself out to make sure you still look as fabulous as always!

Neoclassicism

Now, you can imagine that the hard-working masses, with no upward mobility, were getting increasingly angry as they observed the carefree lives of the aristocracy.

It seemed very unfair that most people barely had enough for basic necessities while the wealthy few lived so extravagantly. The small middle class wanted a government that would provide more equality.

This is the time of the Enlightenment. Scholars looked back at classical antiquity and they really thought the ancient Greek and Roman cultures had things figured out in regards to moral and social codes, systems of government and legal rights.

When the poor masses were completely sick of being oppressed, they started the French Revolution and long periods of violence followed.



Jacques-Louis David *Death of Socrates* 1787

Neoclassical art was done by the people who wanted a return to the aesthetics and didactic ideals (i.e., the looks and lessons) of Ancient Rome and Greece.

A prominent art historian of the time, Johann Winckelmann, urged artists to create art that demonstrated a “noble simplicity and calm grandeur.” Neoclassical subjects lack all of the frivolity of Rococo artwork.

The goal of most Neoclassical works (such as David's *Death of Socrates*) was to encourage selflessness, moral heroism, and physical sacrifice for a noble cause. This art was propagandistic and tried to motivate people to put their personal concerns aside in order to fight for the greater good.

Romanticism (1750-1860)

Romanticists were responding to the increasing violence and chaos around them. While Neoclassical artists saw the political upheaval of the day as heroic and necessary to advance a noble cause,

Romanticists viewed the loss of life as tragic and senseless. Romanticism responded to the very acts of political violence Neoclassicism is attempting to inspire.



Antoine-Louis Barye *Lion and Serpent* 1832 (executed probably in 1847 or 1848)

The Romanticists found themselves overwhelmed by larger forces around them and felt powerless in the face of the unfolding terror. These artists questioned the meaning of life and the nature of humanity. These artists rejected the ideas of the Enlightenment and believed that, rather than becoming more civilized and evolved with time, human beings were just animals who were subject to the same violent tendencies.

They saw the violence around them and wondered how people could do this to one another. Often, when tragic things happen, the natural thing to do is to question “why?” It is tempting to think that if we can figure out why, then we can gain control over things and maybe prevent suffering.

Many people came to the conclusion that the reason people were acting so violently was because it was just human nature. They observed that nature is cruel and violent and so it made sense that people, as part of nature, will be cruel and violent too. It is a pretty pessimistic and apathetic conclusion but maybe it was comforting, in a way, to think that it was nothing personal.

As a result, common themes of Romanticism include:

- man against nature
- man versus beast
- people inflicting violence on other people
- animals attacking other animals

These artworks are dramatic depictions of out of control, violent forces and senseless tragedy.

None of this is very “Romantic” is it?