

Renaissance Art - Notes

A. Patronage

1. Florence was the leader in Renaissance art especially in the **quattrocento** (1400s)

a. **Giorgio Vasari** (1511-1574): *The Lives of the Artists*

– Contemporary Renaissance art historian who left much valuable information about Renaissance artists and their works.

b. Massive patronage for the arts came from wealthy merchant-families (such as the Medicis) who commissioned countless works from the great artists.

– In essence, the wealth of Florence was mirrored by the superb artistic output of the Renaissance

– A good example is Donatello's *David* which stood in the Medici courtyard during the wedding of Lorenzo de Medici.

– In Milan, the Sforza's commissioned such works as Leonardo's *The Last Supper*

c. Patronage also came from local churches who increasingly saw Renaissance art as a means of glorifying God. Some notable examples include:

– Brunelleschi's *Il Duomo* built for the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral

– Ghiberti's two sets of doors for the baptistery opposite *Il Duomo*

– Michelangelo's *David* that was originally commissioned for the cathedral (but was too heavy and thus placed elsewhere).

2. Rome became the center of Renaissance art in the 1500s (**cinquecento**)

a. With the decline of Florence in the late-15th century, the center of the Renaissance shifted to Rome.

b. **Pope Alexander VI**: most notorious of the immoral Renaissance popes who spent a fortune on art patronage

c. A few of the notable works commissioned by the Church in this period include:

– Michelangelo's dome atop St. Peter's Cathedral, his paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and the sculpture *Pieta* that is located within the cathedral

– Raphael's *The School of Athens* (a fresco painting inside the papal apartments)

– Bramante's *Tempietto*, a small church that is a masterpiece in classical architecture; and his floor plan for a newly rebuilt St. Peter's cathedral. (Much of his plans were altered after his death)

B. New artistic techniques

1. Painting

a. **Perspective**: 3-D effects on a 2-dimensional surface

– Medieval works, in contrast, looked flat and two-dimensional

b. **chiaroscuro**: use of dark and light colors to create the illusion of depth

c. Faces of subjects expressed unique individual characteristics (embodied Renaissance ideal of "individualism")

– Also, more emotion was shown on human faces

– In contrast, medieval paintings tended to be more **stylized** in their portrayal of human faces (i.e. more generic)

d. **Sfumato** developed by Leonardo; a technique of blurring or softening sharp outlines

2. Sculpture

a. Renaissance sculpture was often free-standing, designed to be seen in the round

– Heavily influenced by ancient Greek and Roman sculpture

– Contrast with medieval sculpture that largely was done in relief

b. Many sculptures glorified the human body and many portrayed nude figures (like works in ancient

Greece and Rome)

c. Like Renaissance painting, many Renaissance sculptures glorified the individual

3. Architecture

a. Utilized ancient Greek and Roman forms such as **Greek temple architecture** (with triangular pediments), Greek columns, Roman arches and domes (e.g. the Pantheon in Rome)

b. Simplicity, symmetry and balance.

. Contrasted sharply with the highly-ornamented gothic style of the middle ages of pointed arches (as evidenced in numerous medieval cathedrals)

C. Florentine Renaissance Artists

1. **Giotto** (1266-1336) – considered perhaps the first Renaissance painter; use of chiaroscuro

2. **Filippo Brunelleschi** (1377-1446)

a. ***Il Duomo*** (1420-34) atop Santa Maria del Fiore is his masterpiece; it was the largest dome in Europe at

the time of its construction

b. Considered the “father” of perspective (although Alberti wrote the first treatise on the subject)

3. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), architect of several famous cathedrals.

4. **Lorenzo Ghiberti** (1378-1455) – sculptor

a. Won a contest in 1403 against Brunelleschi that earned him the commission to sculpt the bronze doors

for Florentine baptistery

b. His two sets of bronze doors (1424 and 1452) are a masterpiece of sculpture

– Michelangelo called his 2nd set of bronze doors the “**gates of paradise**”

5. **Donatello** (1386-1466) – sculptor

a. His bronze statue of *David* (1408-09) was the first since antiquity

b. First Renaissance artist to utilize a nude figure in sculpture

6. **Masaccio** (1401-1428) painter

a. Perhaps first Renaissance painter to portray real, nude human figures in 3-D

b. *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (1427) shows tremendous emotion; both figures are nude

– Fresco painting

7. **Sandro Botticelli** (1444-1510) – painter: *Birth of Venus* (c. 1485-86)

a. The painting is a good example of humanism as the subject is Venus, the Roman goddess of love.

b. Venus’ stands in ***contrapposto***, with more weight on one leg than the other. This is also humanistic

as

contrapposto was used frequently by ancient Greek and Roman sculptors

D. “High Renaissance”: centered in Rome (16th century)

1. The worldly “Renaissance Popes” – Alexander VI, Julius II and Leo X – provided tremendous patronage to the arts

2. Characteristics: classical balance, harmony, restraint

3. **Bramante** (1444-1514) – architect

a. His *Tempietto (San Pietro in Montorio)* marked the beginning of the High Renaissance in Rome (1502)

when Alexander VI appointed him to build a sanctuary that allegedly marked the spot where Peter was crucified

b. Principal architect of the rebuilt St. Peter's cathedral, although some of his plans were altered after his death (e.g. by Michelangelo)

4. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519)

a. The quintessential "Renaissance Man"

– Painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, writer, scientist

b. **Mona Lisa** (1503-1507)

– Considered one of the great masterpieces in all of art history

– Leonardo developed the technique of **sfumato**, a haze that softens the edges of objects in the painting.

c. *Last Supper* (1498) – fresco (paint on wet plaster)

4. **Raphael Santi** (1483-1520) – painter

a. Created numerous "Madonna and Child" paintings

b. **School of Athens** (1510-11) is a quintessential example of humanism

– Greco-Roman architecture is prominent

– Plato & Aristotle are in the center of the painting

– Sculptures are painted in contrapposto stance

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5. **Michelangelo Buonarroti** (1475-1564)

a. Painting: ceiling of the Sistine Chapel

b. Sculpture:

– David (1501-04): Humanistic marble sculpture—glorifies the human body; contrapposto stance; facial features are

individualistic and emotional (See following slides)

– Pieta (1499): Mary holding limp body of Christ considered perhaps the most perfect marble sculpture ever made

c. Architecture: Designed the enormous dome atop **St. Peter's Cathedral** in the Vatican (still the largest

dome in present-day Europe)

E. Venice: **Titian** (c. 1485-1576)

1. Greatest painter of the Venetian school

2. Use of vivid color and movement, in contrast to more subtle colors and static figures of the Florentine style

F. **Mannerism**

1. Characteristics:

a. Reaction against the Renaissance ideals of balance, symmetry, simplicity and realistic use of color

– High Renaissance had taken art to perfection; there was little that could be done to improve it; thus, mannerists

rebelled against it

b. Works often used unnatural colors while shapes were elongated or otherwise exaggerated

2. Tintoretto (1518-94)

a. Venetian painter

b. Used elongated figure proportions, twisted poses, and compression of space

3. **El Greco** (1541-1614)

a. Greek artist who did most of his greatest work in Spain

b. Perhaps the greatest of the Mannerists with his use of elongated figures and unnatural pigments

c. *Burial of Count Orgaz* (1586-88) and *Toledo* (1597) are two important examples of his work

The Northern Renaissance

A. Christian Humanism:

1. Emphasis on early Church writings that provided answers on how to improve society and reform the Church
 - Less emphasis on pagan works from ancient Greece and Rome (although these works were widely read and enjoyed by Christian Humanists)
 - Many historians today see more continuity between the Northern and Italian Renaissance than contrasts.
2. Drew on Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers.
- Emphasized education and power of human intellect to bring about institutional change and moral improvement.
4. Writings led to criticism of the church thus leading to the Reformation

B. Erasmus (1466-1536)

1. Most famous and celebrated of all northern humanists
- Master of the Greek language; one of Europe's foremost authorities
3. Made new translations of the Greek and Latin versions of the New Testament to create 'purer' editions.
- He was the first humanist to earn a living by writing—an extremely impressive achievement.
5. In Praise of Folly (1513)
 - Best-seller (only the Bible sold more by 1550)
 - Written in Latin; thus it was not intended for mass consumption
 - Erasmus was a devout Catholic who sought to reform the Church, not destroy it.
 - Satirized people's worldly ambitions, including the clergy.
 - Criticized immorality and hypocrisy of Church leaders and the clergy
 - The book inspired renewed calls for reform, and influenced Martin Luther.
 - Thus, some contemporaries claimed that "Erasmus lay the egg that Luther hatched" regarding the reformation

C. Thomas More (1478-1536)

- Prime example of a civic humanist; he rose to the highest government position of any humanist
 - Lord Chancellor to King Henry VIII in England
2. Utopia (1516): More's humanistic masterpiece
 - Mixes civic humanism with religious ideals to describe a perfect (utopian) society located on an imaginary island
 - More sees the accumulation of property as root cause for society's ills; a few have it – most don't
 - In order to achieve harmony and order people have to be willing to sacrifice their individual rights for the common good.
 - War, poverty, religious intolerance, and other problems of the early 16th century do not exist.

D. Jacques Lefevre d'Etapes (1454-1536)

- Leading French humanist and good example of how Northern Christian humanists focused on early Church writings.
2. Produced 5 versions of the Psalms that challenged a single authoritative version of the Bible.
 - A devout Catholic, he was later seen as an enemy of the Church and condemned for heresy

E. Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (1454-1536)

1. Spanish humanist who reformed the Spanish clergy and church so that many of the Church abuses that were highlighted during the Reformation did not necessarily apply to Spain

– Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition (serves as an example of how not all humanists were necessarily tolerant of heretical views).

2. Complutensian Polyglot Bible: Placed Hebrew, Greek, and Latin versions of the Bible in parallel columns.

– Yet another example of how Northern humanists focused on early Church writings and the accuracy of Biblical translations.

F. François Rabelais (1494-1553)

1. His secular writings portrayed his confidence in human nature and reflected Renaissance tastes

2. *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-1542)

a. A folk epic and comic masterpiece that satirized French society

b. Attacked clerical education and monastic orders; championed secular learning

G. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)

1. Developed the essay form

The essay became a vehicle for testing new ideas

2. Skepticism

a. Doubt that true knowledge could be obtained

b. Believed that the skeptic must be cautious, critical and suspend judgment.

c. Thus, one must be tolerant of others' views

H. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) – Elizabethan era

1. Greatest of the English Renaissance authors

2. His works reflected the Renaissance ideas of classical Greek and Roman culture, individualism and humanism

3. Wrote comedies, tragedies, histories and sonnets

I. Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616): *Don Quixote* (1605-15)

1. Among the greatest pieces of Spanish literature

2. Critical of excessive religious idealism and chivalric romance

Northern Renaissance Art

A. Flemish style: Low Countries produced especially important artists

1. Characteristics

a. Heavily influenced by the Italian Renaissance

b. More detail throughout paintings (especially the background) than the Italian

Renaissance

c. Use of oil paints (in contrast to Italian Renaissance that used tempera)

d. More emotional than the Italian style

e. Works often preoccupied with death

2. Jan Van Eyck – (c. 1339- c. 1441) Flemish painter

a. Most famous and innovative Flemish painter of the 15th century

b. Perfected oil painting

c. Naturalistic wood panel paintings used much religious symbolism

d. Employed incredible detail in his works

e. Masterpiece: *Ghent Altarpiece* (1432)

f. *Arnolfini and his Wife* (1434) is perhaps his most famous work.

3. Bosch (c. 1450-1516)

a. Master of symbolism and fantasy

b. His art often looks surrealistic (like Dali of the 20th century) and focused often on dead and the torments of hell.

c. Works reflect confusion and anguish that people felt in the Later Middle Ages (i.e. Black Death)

d. *Death and the Miser* (c. 1490) (*See following slides*): Depicts the dance of death theme (danse macabre) of the Black Plague era.

4. Peter Brueghel the Elder (1520-1569)

a. Not influenced much by the Italian Renaissance

b. Focused on lives of ordinary people, e.g. *Peasant Dance* (1568) (*see following slides*), *Peasant Wedding* (c. 1568), and *The Battle Between Carnival and Lent* (1559).

B. Germany

1. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

a. Foremost Northern Renaissance artist.

b. Master of the woodcut (*See "Knight, Death, and the Devil" in following slides*)

c. First northerner artist to master Italian Renaissance techniques of proportion, perspective, and modeling

d. Some notable works include *St. Jerome; Knight, Death, and the Devil; Four Apostles*

e. Painted numerous self-portraits

2. Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543)

a. Premier portrait artist of his era: painted Erasmus, More, numerous portraits of King Henry VIII and also

his family members

b. ***The Ambassadors* (1533)** encompasses some of the major themes of the era: exploration, religious

discord, preoccupation with death (the skull in the foreground) and the rising tide of international relations

in an age of expansion

3. Fugger family in Germany, especially Jacob Fugger (1459-1525) was significant in patronizing art of the Northern Renaissance

- Fortune was the result of international banking (much like the Medici family in Florence)

C. Spain: El Greco (1541-1614): painter: mannerism