

Deborah Tomkies
Student number: 508112

History of Western Art
Part Three – Renaissance to Rococo

Assignment Three – Exercise 1

Chapter 11 – The Sixteenth Century in Europe

Era of the artists, Italian except Durer. Leonardo embodied Alberti's idea of 'universal man'.

Protestant reformation; upheaval in Christian thinking. Brethren of the Common Life (Netherlands, E Germany); ascetic group but not monastic, text 'Imitation of Christ' widely followed. Led to Counter-reformation of Roman church. Lutheran thought right and wrong determined by individual. Move away from ostentatious, grand art in general. (p457-58)

Reform and early sixteenth-century art in the north

Renaissance art spread slowly to N Europe. Much still Gothic. Henry VII tomb both Renaissance (sarcophagus) and Gothic (surrounding screen).

Perpendicular style England only. Flamboyant style France, more restrained Low Countries. N Gothic, S preferred Renaissance.

Hieronymus Bosch

Highly individual style uninfluenced by Renaissance. Beauty and pleasure = sin and punishment. Music sinful. Garden of Earthly Delights obscure (purpose and subject) but probably represents mortal damnation for wickednesses of the flesh. Originally called Lust or Strawberry Painting. Almost hallucinatory, imaginings accurately depicted, realism in figures; copied in tapestry so valued. (p460-61)

Grunewald

Crucifixion traumatic depiction of Christ on exterior of polyptych; on Sundays and feast days, interior revealed. Christ's torment dramatic and brutal, background dark and foreboding, misery v evident. Siting in hospital reflects physical suffering cleansing soul and restoring health. Saints depicted bringers of healing. Limewood used for German pieces, gesso'd or just varnished. Reliefs on interior, painted outside. Wood-carvers middle class independent artists, moved sculpture from architecture to movable pieces, bought for civic and private use. (p461-63)

Protestant art

Decline in arts patronage. Artists emigrating (eg Holbein younger to England). Portraits of reformers popular. Conflict between OT (Catholic, sin and punishment) and NT (Lutheran, forgiveness, grace). Durer adopts Lutheranism, Four Apostles alludes to Protestant four humours; sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, melancholic. Eschewed extreme Protestantism in favour of balance, moderation; Altdorfer early true landscapes c1530 (p463-66)

The high renaissance in Italy

1st ¼ 16th C political conflict. Medici now have autocratic rule. However, gave rise to great artists (Leonardo, Raphael).

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Leonardo da Vinci

Completed relatively few works, some long-since lost; broad-ranging, exceptional skill in art, sculpture but also intensely inquisitive. Nature, anatomy, invention borne of experiential testing and exploration. Questioned existence of God as contrary to senses being 'undetectable' by core senses. Last Supper experimental but not durable technique; decayed quickly. Last Supper follows Florentine style but figures grouped in threes, using personal reactions as identifiers distinguishes work. Invented chiaroscuro, sfumato, aerial perspective; landscapes soft and receding, figures real yet soft; haunting, expressive features. (p466-69)

Harmony, unity and Raphael

High Renaissance artists attempted to accomplish both poise/balance and naturalism. Done well by Raphael in Madonna and Child pieces. Raphael imagery idyllic, warm, expressions loving and unambiguous unlike Leonardo's mysterious half-smiles. Brief spell of wealthy patronage in which Pope Julius II in 1508 commissions 26 yo Raphael to decorate Vatican's papal apartments. Ceiling roundels (prob not of Raphael's original design) perfect balance of Christian humanist ideals: Theology, philosophy, poetry, jurisprudence. Raphael's designs feature real people 'enacting' humanist ideals. Complex design; 52 figures, use of vibrant colour to add animation, nonetheless balanced, innovative relationship between figures and architectural setting. (p469-74)

Michelangelo

V different from Raphael; Raphael son of painter, artist-craftsman, later wealthy and comfortable with wealth and lifestyle.

Michelangelo moody, aloof, held himself above others artistically. From poor background, trained with Medicis' support. David, first over lifesize sculpture since antiquity; unclassical, energetic, inner tension, body as prison of soul. 1508/9 and 1510 Sistine chapel; part already frescoed by other great artists; great feat of genuine fresco, challenging space/structure well-handled. Vibrant palette. Raphael designs tapestries beneath Michelangelo paintings (more costly). Raphael (Transfiguration) more painterly; contrast between serene holy figures and traumatised humans well executed. (p474-80)

Initially made small-scale 'samples' from wax or clay, then onto marble. Latterly worked full-size (to be adopted throughout Europe) assistants roughing out shape before artist finishing. c 1512 returns to Florence with Medici, 1534 following Medici being deposed by Florence, back to Rome. Last Judgement epitomises return to piety, zealous religious reform. Christ raises up the blessed, casts down the damned. Nudity eschewed. Michelangelo denounced, figures posthumously clothed. 1539 ceased painting in favour of architecture, St Peter's key work, albeit much varied and completed well after death. (p475-85)

The Venetian High Renaissance

Venice v wealthy, patronage private and civic.

Giorgione

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V few paintings remain, all easel paintings, first to use canvas with oil and flexible resin. Great softness, subtlety of depiction. Subject matter vague, Three Philosophers; assymetrical, first realistic sunset, 'visual poems' (poesie). Small pieces for rich collectors. (p488-89)

Titian

Influenced by style of Giorgione, mastered art of oil on canvas. One of greatest, most influential artists. Vigorous brush-strokes, thick layers, glazes. Unlike Michelangelo, Raphael independent, free to choose work. Pose of Venus of Urbino 'borrowed and adapted' from Giorgione's Venus in a Landscape. Not goddess-like, poss just a self-assured naked woman. Mastery of oils, use of fingers to add shape, tone and texture; captured passion, strong use of colour. (p489-92)

Tintoretto and Veronese

Worked during period of pious Counter-Reformation; quite different to Titian, devout, volatile; possibly studied under Titian. Irrational perspective, strong muscle structures, intense drama.

Sansovino, Palladio and the Laws of Harmony

Sansovino, Titian, Aretino – artistic triumvirate. Sansovino used Classical Doric and Ionic forms (1st time in Venice) used language of Classical architecture to reflect social hierarchy.

Palladio – trained mason/bricklayer, not artist/sculptor, worked mainly on villas and local building – villas for families on estates gaining wealth from farming; evolved to feed people. Villas with Roman facades, cheap to build with local workers, placed carefully in landscapes. Musical and building proportions used extensively to create harmony. (p493-96)

Mannerism and Mannerisms

Used both positively and negatively; combination of style, attitude, traits. Could be affectation or stylistic.

Corregio and Mannerist 'Licence'

Corregio, graceful/suave. Skilled in sotto in su, drawing figures to be seen from below. Highly skilled drawing human form, gentle skin tones. Danae thought subject over-sexual but largely sensual not sexual. Figures idealised, stylish but natural. Parmigianino 'literary' interpretation; women with long, sensual necks, elongated limbs. Distortion extended into architecture, Romano playing with 'rules'.

France introduced contrapposto to England. Miniature portraits v popular. Castiglione sees women artists gaining approval. Contrapposto used to create spiralling movement. (p497-501)

Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Early engravings bore disturbing characteristics of Bosch. Later works often misunderstood/mockered. Subjects were landscapes; depictions of realistic, individualised peasants but where people were secondary to beautifully captured settings. People not elevated but represent just part of circle of life and death in universe. Shortly before death, had wife destroy many engravings as potentially generating 'disagreeable consequences' (p502-3)

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El Greco

Cretan painter studied in Greece. Initially painted icons in Byzantine style later adopted styles of Titian, Tintoretto. Europe at height of Counter-Reformation – wanted to paint with grandeur of Michelangelo but pure and non-sensual. Painting style free with rich colour, violent foreshortening; supplicants v expressive. Work brings transcendental idealist Christian art to close. (p503-6)