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History of Western Art
Part Three – Renaissance to Rococo

Assignment Three – Exercise 2

Annotation of two paintings – Painting two

The Allegory of Good and Bad Government

Ambrogio Lorenzetti

1338-1339

Fresco

Series of 3 frescos over 3 walls approx. 6 feet x 45 feet each

Sala dei Nove in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, Italy

Sources

History of Painters. 2017. *Understanding the Allegory of Good and Bad Government*. [ONLINE] Available at: http://www.historyofpainters.com/good_government.htm. [Accessed 12 August 2017].

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Codex Martialis. 2016. *Ambrogio Lorenzetti*. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.codexmartialis.com/viewtopic.php?f=7&t=1249>. [Accessed 9 August 2017].

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Personification of Justice who sits below Wisdom dispensing pleasure/punishment to the good and bad.

Peace languishes on a couch, casually observing proceedings

Chief of Council governs over city, surrounded and guided by Peace, Fortitude, Prudence (left); Magnanimity, Temperance, Justice (right); essential qualities for good governance.



Justice appears to have a severed head on her lap?

Civic dignitaries shown smaller in lower part of painting. 'Virtues' (and leader) larger, sitting (metaphorically/literally) above populace

Painting appears v detailed but is large in real life so no doubt looks less 'congested' at actual size.

Strong, vibrant colours, clothing detailed

Extensive use of different poses, expressions for realism. Eg. man in queue turns to speak to man behind him.

Wording below fresco extols virtues of civic responsibility, paying taxes, being a good citizen. Fitting with location and civic nature of commission.

Perspective is odd. Eg. Horse heads v small. Putti over-large. City leader dominates.

First large-scale panorama. Commissioned by the Nove (the nine) leaders of Siena, drawn from the rich bankers and merchants of the city and changed every two month. A secular, civic series, not a religious commission; emphasis is more on 'being a good citizen will ensure a happy city and happy citizens'. Clear message from city leaders promoting obedience. Other frescos in series depict good government in the country, good government in the city; happy scenes, healthy countryside, harmony. In bad government in the city and bad government in the country clear contrast with destruction, sickness, punishment for bad citizenship and poor governance. Crops have failed, women being robbed/raped; disrepair and misery.

Strong contrast in subject matter but both this and Duccio's Maesta have didactic message. Both commissioned by civic dignitaries but Maesta intended for cathedral and considered appropriate to display wealth in elaborate church décor. Nove however, commission for a public space so secular subject appropriate. Figures in Maesta show greater realism and more accurate depiction of figures, perspective and expression. Lorenzetti's figures are individual but less realistic, in part due to complexity of imagery and need to fit into space. Did not allow for accurate use of perspective (although other frescos do this more successfully). Maesta is more lively with much greater sense of animation, passion, emotion and movement. Allegory of Good Government quite static and flat by comparison, less painterly. Both have strong use of colour.