

The Renaissance

Taking over from the 14th to 17th century, the Renaissance was about the rediscovery of the culture of the ancient Greece and Rome. The classical. The 14th century was still in a bit of transition from the Middle Ages so it was also a time of recovery from the effects of the political disorder, the Black Death, and the economic recession. The 15th century was a period of significant political, economic, intellectual, and artistic change. The Renaissance translates to “rebirth” because of the revival of the “neglected” arts and literature from the classical periods. Which explains the name the Dark Ages given to the time of the Middle Ages characterized by its lack of classical culture. The Renaissance compared to the Middle Ages was more secular and had individualistic ethos.

The Aristocracy was still the ruling class and Peasants were still the majority, though manorialism, system by which the peasants of medieval Europe were tied to their land and their lord through serfdom, and serfdom were decreasing in western Europe and more and more peasants were becoming legally free. Italy was dominated by five major states: Venice, Milan, Florence, Papal States, and the kingdom of Naples; they were the centers of culture. Donatello and Michelangelo made Florence a locus of the arts and both the Sforza and Visconti rulers worked to create a highly centralized territorial state. A revived emphasis on individual ability became a characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. Civic humanism posited that the ideal citizen would be well rounded and was not only an intellectual but a patriot also, humanist education was to produce individuals of virtue and wisdom.

Religious concerns ranked behind the pleasures of this life. The Holy Roman Empire had remained weak. The popes reflected their era and their secular involvements surpassed their spiritual responsibilities. Though some religious tones still showed up in art works, it less domineering. Sins, such as vanity, greed, or gluttony, were what commissioners did not want to

express or see in works of art. So the art still has that hold on religion and is evident when the theme of God is in the detail. Renaissance art had abundant small messages in its details.

Renaissance artists considered the imitation of nature their primary goal. Many maintained that Giotto was the one in the 14th century who began the imitation of nature, but his work was not continued until the work of Masaccio in Florence. Monumental figures, visual representation of the laws of perspective, realistic relationships between figures and landscapes, realistic relationship with the figures and the landscape formed the new style of painting. Masaccio's three dimensional figures provided a model for later generations of Florence artists. *Tribute Money* was one of the frescoes that Masaccio painted. It illustrates the biblical story of Jesus sending Peter to collect a coin from the mouth of a fish. Masaccio used a rational system of perspective to create a realistic relationship between the figures and background.

An important change was the time of the development of the experimental trend that ended up taking two different directions. One emphasized on the mathematical side of painting (law of perspective, light by geometry and perspective) like the work of Uccello. The other aspect involved the investigation of movement and anatomical structure. The revolutionary achievements of painters in the 15th century were equally matched by advances in sculpture and architecture. Donatello a popular sculptor had mastered the essence of what he saw. Donatello's *David* had an inscription praising Florentine heroism and virtue, meant to commemorate the victory of Florence over Milan. *David's* pose and appearance are similar to the nude statues of antiquity.

The new assertion of human individuality was evident and reflected also in the new emphasis on portraiture. Patrons appeared in the sacred or commerable paintings. The final stage of Renaissance art which flourished between 1480 and 1520 is called High Renaissance.

The shift was marked by the increasing importance of Rome as a new center of the Italian Renaissance. It was dominated by Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo. Leonardo carried out the experimental trend from the 15th century but also stressed the need to advance from realism into the attempt to generalize from realistic portrayal to an idealistic form. His Last Supper includes the major trends of the 15th century art with use of perspective, organized space, but he idealized the figure of Philip and the work embodies psychological dimensions. Leonardo hoped to reveal a person's inner life. Michelangelo, a painter, architect, and sculptor was influenced by Neoplatonism (Platonic philosophy beginning with the work of Plotinus and ending with the closing of the Platonic Academy by the Emperor Justinian in 529 C.E.) This was evident in his work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

Early Renaissance artists began their careers as apprentices to masters in craft guilds. The wealthy upper classes determined the content and the purpose of the paintings and works they commissioned. By the end of the 15th century, the position of the artist had transformed. They were not regarded as artisans anymore but as artistic geniuses and were praised more for their creativity. Same goes for architects, they were no longer seen as builders but as designers as architects, thinkers. Artists started to have more choice when creating something.