

Baroque period examples

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Rich in deep colour and intense contrast of shadows, 17th century Baroque paintings tended to show the most dramatic and culminating moments of a scene, whose simplicity and clarity was supposed to appeal to the viewer's senses rather than mind. Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ* (1602) represents Judas' treacherous kiss and the capture of Jesus Christ by soldiers. A contrast between defenseless Christ's humility and the guards' formidable armour and determination is intensified by the use of light and dark shadows, known as *chiaroscuro* and typical of Baroque painting.

The scene's emotional intensity is emphasized by the horrified expression of St Mark fleeing out of the painting (Lubbock, 2007). Both Rubens' *Deposition* (Lille's version) and Rembrandt's *The Descent from the Cross* (1633) represent Jesus' dead body, the central figure, being lowered from the cross and surrounded by His lamenting followers. A similar contrast between light and dark, although to a different extent, is used to intensify the dramatic moment (Jones, 2004; Lussier).

Caravaggio, Rubens, and Rembrandt produced their masterpieces at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was fighting against the spreading Protestant Reformation in Europe. Trying to strengthen its position and authority, the Church encouraged painting representing religious scenes which, along with preaching, could help inspire devotion and promote its official doctrine. Although various biblical scenes proliferated in art at that time, most artists also introduced their own features to the new artistic style.

Caravaggio used models when depicting Christ and other biblical figures often introducing dirty reality in his works (Lubbock, 2007). Rubens was preoccupied in his paintings with the description of life as it was realistically

depicting flesh of both living and dead naked human beings. The subject of death is one of his favourite themes (Jones, 2004). Rembrandt was interested in capturing the psychological aspect of human actions and expressions and showing it in his paintings. His subjects are dynamic and his works fill the viewer with sadness and compassion (Lussier).

All three works of art helped promote the ideals taught by the Roman Catholic Church and enhance the authority of biblical figures. Caravaggio's Christ does not resist His fate, and by showing humility and faith He emphasizes the importance of spiritual strength rather than physical fight and encourages His followers to do the same (Caravaggio's The Taking of Christ). Rembrandt's figures are dressed in contemporary clothes emphasizing that the Saviour's death has been the central event of human existence at all ages.

The beaten dead body of Christ is realistic and not different from an ordinary human being arousing compassion and inspiring devotion (Lussier). A realistic depiction of Christ's dead body by Rubens is similarly compulsive, and the sorrowful faces and desperate gestures of the surrounding women are supposed to fill the viewers with compassion and make them bow their heads in worship (Campbell, 2004). These masterpieces are simple in terms of subject matter, produce immediate emotional impact on viewers, and make them emotionally participate in the sacred scenes.

All three paintings represent scenes from Jesus Christ's life and death. The composition in Rubens' Deposition and Rembrandt's The Descent from the Cross gives us the impression of a movement from the upper part of the paintings to their lower part, as if to enhance the idea of the Saviour's death

and His descent into the tomb. In Caravaggio's *The Taking of Christ* the figures are moving from right to left as though through Jesus who is not moving. Caravaggio's composition seems to emphasize the spiritual difference which exists between Him and the rest of us.

The way the figures are represented in all three works is also different to some extent. Caravaggio did not depict the whole bodies of his figures, but only parts of them, the rest of the space being filled with fragments of clothes, armour, and dark shadows (Lubbock, 2007). Rembrandt and Rubens realistically and with great detail depict Christ's dead body and those of other figures. Rubens also depicts the ideal human bodies of the men lowering Christ in the same way classical painters did (Lussier).

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