

Baroque painting analysis

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



Baroque: Two Pieces, Two Styles: Procaccini versus Le Nain Art has changed immensely throughout its existence in recorded history. It has progressed from cave drawings to beautiful academically trained polished pieces of strongly cultured art. The transformations which “contemporary” (for the time) artists made are remarkable. Their extraordinarily trained artistic eyes give way to the magnificent brushwork their brains and hands skillfully construct. These ideas are seen quite evidently in the Museum of Fine Arts’ Koch Gallery. This massive space houses some of the most amazing artwork from some of the most famous artists.

The space is constructed much like in the Academic Salon in that the pieces are arranged at different levels dictating their importance. The more influential and well-crafted works are hung at eye level, while the pieces that are not as highly regarded by the salon are hung either high above view or below the better pieces. Two images which just happen to be aligned and positioned at eye level, stand out amongst the beautiful works surrounding them. The pieces are Giulio Cesare Procaccini’s “The Scourging of Christ” and Mathieu Le Nain’s “The Entombment of Christ”. The two works offer much to the viewer.

In both paintings the artist depicts a particular moment in the ultimate death of Jesus Christ. Alone each work can be deciphered and interpreted in many ways but together the two images open up a world of contrast and viewpoints of differing styles and influences. Giulio Cesare Procaccini was born in Bologna, Italy and about 10 years later moved to Milan where he flourished as a baroque sculptor and painter Procaccini’s work was also

influenced by the mannerist style, a style that his father worked in. Milan and Italy in general, in the early 17th century was a booming artist Mecca.

Artists like Caravaggio, Gentileschi, as well as Procaccini were making major advances in the baroque style. The depiction of religious and historical scenes was crucial in the early baroque paintings seen at the time of Procaccini's professional career. The works such as Caravaggio's "Entombment" as well as "The Conversion of Saint Paul" shed some light onto the influences of Procaccini. Much of Italy at the time had an eye for the theatrical and dramatic. This period saw intense motions, emotions and lighting. Giulio Cesare Procaccini's "The Scourging of Christ" can be seen as the definition of the lending of the baroque style with that of the mannerist. With its immense size the artist is able to fully articulate the space and fit in the necessary information. The forms in the composition are placed in a way that the image is symmetrical on all sides. The painting is only a small fraction of what is actually occurring in the scene. The frame of the piece works as a way for our brain to only see what is put before us, but we must look further and put ourselves in the actual event and feel the crowd around us. The crowd can't be seen but implied by the deep vignette surrounding the divinely lit Jesus.

The frame works as an isolation for the pain and loneliness that can be seen in the eyes of Jesus. Procaccini's decision to center Jesus in composition speaks volumes to what he is trying to evoke from the viewer. Jesus is seen bound to a small pillar sharing the center of the composition. With all the motion surrounding him, Jesus seems silent and alone in his pain. The painting composition can be considered complex as well as simple at the

same time. The mass of movement of the characters and tension seen in the dimly lit corners would classify the painting as complex.

In contrast to that categorization, Jesus with the use of strong light and shade is seen almost solely by himself. Jesus is centered in front of four other figures that are all arranged in a way that the image has equal weight on all sides and all the corners are articulated evenly. The use of exposed flesh in repetition is used starting with the soldier to the left, continuing to Jesus and finally to the older gentleman filling the bottom right of the composition. This use of this repetition is a nice touch and allows the viewer to read equally the surfaces of the piece.

The scale and proportion of the figures are all equal lending into the validity of the scene in the space. Procaccini's main objective in the painting is for the viewer to focus solely on the figures, negating to even hint at a background. The forms of the figures are so well constructed that they allow the forms to take a three dimensional shape. This helps create the idea of space on an otherwise flat canvas. The figures that aggressively lurk in the background are caught in a moment in time just before Jesus is repeatedly whipped.

Procaccini cleverly links this very Italianesque painting with its classical routes by covering the figure just about to whip Jesus with the scourge in a traditional turban, an obvious touch of the Middle East. This accurate depiction of garment is in contrast to the roman soldier that ultimately wouldn't have been present at this moment in history. The soldier does serve a purpose in establishing baroque classicism in the treatment of his drapery

as well as his beautifully articulated musculature, solidifying the presence of baroque classicism.

The older gentleman depicted to the right of Jesus is reminiscent of Bronzino's father time. The posture of both this gentleman and father time are somewhat similar and also the way both artists have treated his age relative to his younger strong build. This may be a subtle way of saying that Christ's time on earth may be drawing to a close. It may have also served as a way to motivate the citizens to make the most of their time on earth. Line is not a very vital part of the composition and overall makeup of the image.

In fact, few lines can be seen in the structural lines of the pillar that Jesus is bound to. However, one line of importance leads from the left foot of Jesus, up his thigh and through his torso, shooting our eye up from Jesus' body to the scourge wielding hand of the figure about to strike him. These implied lines add geometric quality as well as move the viewer's eye in the places the artist wishes. Jesus' body also hints at a mannerist influence in that the body has an organic flow and use of *serpentinata*. It is evident in the *contrapposto* or weight shift that causes the body to form a flowing "S" shape.

Playing a subtle role in the success of the piece, color is hinted in small areas but is overtaken with the dim lighting. Red is present in the upper right hand corner on the well-crafted garment of yet another scourge wielding citizen. Keeping with symmetry, Procaccini places a splash of red in the form of the soldier's drapery. With color impacting the overall image in a somewhat small way, it allows for the use of light to make more of an impact. The

lighting in “ The Scourging of Christ” is without saying, breathtaking. Much like Caravaggio, Procaccini has mastered the use of Tenebrism.

Christ is seen vibrantly lit in the center illuminated before a dark dismal scene unfolding behind him. In this situation, the image is depicting Christ so therefore the light can be considered divine. The divine light is cast down from god upon Jesus and works as a way to almost calm the situation and say to Jesus and the viewer that it is ok, that he’s suffering for the good of all mankind. This strong message can be classified as baroquepsychology, where the viewer is emotionally and spiritually connected. Procaccini’s understanding of how the human condition reacts to certain things aid his artwork in a way that he knows the right outlet to reach his audience through. In this case it is the divine hand or light of God. Without having a defined background and use of planes the artist uses the bright light and contrasting darkness around it to allow for space to be viewed. As said before, Jesus is the foremost figure due to Tenebrism and the subsequent figures are depicted in space behind. The smooth transition from the divine lit areas, to the darker more undefined corners of the composition are extremely successful.

For the divine light to hit Christ and not stray far from the small glow from his pale skin requires calm and deliberate style strokes. This transition only works well with this type of paint application. The exact strokes give it a photographic like quality that capture the scene precisely how it occurs without the abstraction of strokes like that of Rembrandt. This snapshot of a second in time and the skillful rendering of the scene all work together in

allowing the scene to become real and the viewer to become emotionally moved and involved.

None of this is by chance; Procaccini has skillfully laid out every aspect of the piece from the narrative, to the characters, as well as the emotions this piece would evoke. This take on a classic scene is timeless and his mastery of the baroque and mannerist styles are expertly crafted. In a rather stark contrast to Procaccini's rendering of Christ before his time of death, Mathieu Le Nain has created "The Entombment of Christ", a depiction of Christ after he was taken from the cross. Mathieu Le Nain was one of three brothers who were well known French baroque artists in the 17th century.

The French baroque style is quite different to that of the baroque styles practiced in Southern and Eastern Europe, in particular, those found in Italy by artists such as Caravaggio and Procaccini. This style adheres to more of an academic rule, in that it's very cold and geometrically placed. The paintings lack the emotion expressed by baroque artists with different cultural influences. The French style has a certain order and neatness of placement. Nain's piece is of a large scale allowing for many figures to be fully articulated in the space and also for the addition of a landscape filling up the background.

The eye of the viewer is carried from the right side of the piece inward to the left. Inward meaning, the eye is brought from the foreground on the figure scene and gets pulled into the composition towards the landscape scene unfolding in the back. Pictured far in the background in an oddly scaled cross, quite possibly the one Christ was crucified on. The skewing of the size, scale and proportion must be the artist's attempt at making Jesus' sacrifice

larger than life, larger than the common man's comprehension pain and sacrifice.

The soldiers pictured closer to the viewer are sized in a proper way in relation to their distance from the viewer. The cropping of the image is placed so that we register a lot of information yet we wonder what is beyond the visual plane Nain has allowed us. The composition, with respect to the figures, is heavily weighed to the right side of the piece. The use of an even number of figures with Christ centered allows for an eye, pleasing symmetry. The figures Nain depicts surrounding the dead body of Christ are created and placed in a way that the pale lifeless body of Christ is viewed first and with more importance.

The figural space is crowded with the bustle and movement of the preparation for entombment, yet the momentary connection between Mary and Jesus seems to be silent and with overwhelming emotion, the emotion for a mother's loss of a child. The two people depicted in the back right of the composition appear to be working on a burial garment for Jesus. The bearded male on the right looks on intently as the figure on the right lays out wonderfully articulated drapery. The figures importance is established with their placement in the background of the pictorial plane.

They are represented for historical integrity but are arranged behind the ultimate importance of Jesus and his mother, Mary. The garments worn by all pictured are more representative of actual ones worn at the time and place to which the crucifixion, and ultimately the entombment of Christ occurred. The turban is also another historically accurate head garment worn by men in the Middle East. The accuracy and attention to historical details are in <https://assignbuster.com/baroque-painting-analysis/>

contrast to the baroque styles practiced by eastern European baroque artists. The use of color is much more prevalent in Nain's piece.

High saturation and deep tones of blues and reds are placed throughout the composition as well as lower more soft tones. Although there are areas of deep color saturation and vibrant tones, the overall scene is depicted as a drab dark cave and gray landscape. The most vibrant royal blue cloth is draped over Mary as she braces herself in mourning. This traditional use of the color is an indicator of the holyfamily, with Mary in particular. Mary also wears a high saturation red garment. This color is repeated on the figure supporting Christ's lifeless body. This repetition helps link the two halves of the composition.

In this piece, light proves to be equally important as the use of color. The lighting in Nain's piece is skillfully rendered within the look and feel of the French baroque style. The warm fluid use of light across the entire composition allows for much more of the surface to be interpreted by the viewer. The painting, although well lit, still has the ability for a strong divine light to cast its glow on the deceased body of Jesus. The divine light also strikes Mary who is sitting in a most mournful way next to the body of her son. Atmospheric perspective is well captured in the cascading hills depicted in the background of the piece.

Space is clearly created by each crest and trough of the rolling landscape. An overall blue gray tone is cast upon the farthest distances from our eye. In contrast to the correct rendering of the farthest distance, Nain has created a proportionally incorrect crucifix. With that being said, the space is ordered well leaving ample room for the small landscape far past the cave. The

pictorial plane can be both shallow and deep. The viewer is placed in the small space surrounding the body of Christ and if chosen can peer past to a more deep and sprawling space.

There is a horizon line that begins in the landscape on the right and continues to divide the composition throughout the figural space. The horizon line ends on the worktable of the figures in the background. This continuous line keeps the composition equally weighted and well placed. The contrasting dark walls and spaces surrounding the figures against the divine light allow for space to be created also making the space more believable to the viewer. With the image falling into the French baroque era and style it can be seen that the stylizing of the image is very calm with no erroneous marks.

The fluid strokes and smooth transitions play well with the narrative of the story for it's the time after Christ's death and life seems to move in slow motion. Although texture can be seen in the strokes of the cave walls giving validity to the space and allowing the viewer to feel as though they are in the scene. Nain's skillful crafting of the piece and attention to emotional and historical details lend to the overall success of the piece. It is clear Nain wishes for the viewer to feel the somberness of the ultimate sacrifice endured by Christ.

Staying true to the French baroque styles of the time he was able to convey his message through a well thought out and cleanly placed composition. Both Procaccini's "The Scourging of Christ" and Nain's, "The Entombment of Christ," depict a particular moment in time of the crucifixion of Christ. Though each portrays particular scenes under their own vision in <https://assignbuster.com/baroque-painting-analysis/>

their particular style, Procaccini's Italian baroque influences are extremely evident in the painting with the strong use of light and the theatrical scene with strong movement and gut wrenching emotions.

In contrast to the busy chaotic scene pictured by Procaccini, Nain uses a more refined approach and paints a much more academic and calm scene. The dullness of the tones with vivid splashes of color add many historical as well as religious touches that add to the overall feel that Nain is trying to express. Overall the two pieces are some of the more breathtaking renditions of classic religious art that can be seen. Both artists are the definition of their style and exemplify what true artistry is.

----- [1]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giulio_Cesare_Procaccini [2]. http://www.wga.hu/tours/spain/p_17.html [3]. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Figura_serpentinata [4]. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrapposto> [5]. <http://webartacademy.com/painting-techniques-tenebrism> [6]. <http://www.artistdaily.com/blogs/artistdaily/archive/2013/01/30/no-one-could-beat-rembrandt.aspx> [7]. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1475261/Le-Nain-brothers> [8]. <http://www.essential-humanities.net/western-art/western-painting/baroque-painting/#.UV0HaaKG2So>