

Annibale carracci



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Annibale Carracci was born in Italy in 1560 and died in 1609. He is generally regarded as the most stylistic painter in Italy during the Baroque period and the most gifted member of the Carracci family. According to press, Annibale was first recognized in his native hometown of Bologna and later in Rome (73) in the movement against Mannerism. Mannerism was a post-Renaissance period that emerged in early 1520s in the town of Florence and later flourished internationally till late 17th century. In 1590s, Annibale advocated for artistic reforms in Italy by drawing from life. The drawings were made from live models and meant raw upon life as a viable subject for art. It was during this time that the Carracci's were painting innovative and the most radical pictures in Italy and, indeed, the whole of Europe. Annibale's pictures were especially drawn from nature and the effects of light. Carl says that Annibale later founded an influential school of painters towards the end of the 16th century (32).

In most of his paintings, some of which are held in museums and other private collections all over the world, Annibale had a preference for facial features usually exaggerating them to create humor (Press 74). Bolton affirms this by saying that some of the baroque techniques involved show concern between the image and the viewer (32). An example here is in The Age of Correggio and the Carracci with such paintings called the Woman of Samaria and Christ. In Rome, the paintings by Annibale were transformed through first-hand encounter while individual frameworks of ancient mythology were shown surrounded by elaborate illusion statues which are seen with muscular nude figures.

Annibale's Famous Paintings of the Baroque Era

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During the Baroque period, Annibale is credited with creating such paintings like *Domine, Quo Vadis?*, *Pieta*, *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, *Lamentation*, and *The Flight into Egypt* as well as some self portraits that indicate some sense of humor.

The *Lamentation of Christ* (figure 1) is a painting in which God's mother is mourning the death of her son. The painting is a classic example of the Baroque period and, according to Zamora and Kaup, "the mourning figures seem already to revel in their own sorrow, a new decisive factor in the Baroque psychology" (459). It seems that Annibale realized his full potential and identity in horror and grief experiences. The Baroque era involved experiences of distress and agony. The painting is a religious type that was created in 1606. Its technique is that of oil on canvas measuring 92.8 by 103.2 cm.

Combat of Perseus and Phineas was another painting done in 1604 (Carrier 221 - 222). The photo shows Perseus holding off his attackers using Gorgon's head transforming them into stone figures. This picture affirms the Baroque verticality involves a change in the "physic address of the image" (225). The change in orientation came as a result of the Baroque plan that organized extensions in relation to foci representing a termination of the horizontal movement. This painting is shown in Figure 2 below.

Loves of the Gods is another of Annibale Carracci's most notable art works and it decorates Rome's Palazzo Farnese gallery; It was done from 1597-1601. The painting was commissioned by Cardinal Ordorodo Farnese who was a descendant of Pope Paul the third and was celebrating his brother's

wedding. The painting has an iconographic title, Loves of the Gods and is a classical mythology of the interpretation of divine and earthly love. The scenes were arranged in a format that appeared like framed easel paintings that were found on a wall. However, in this case, Annibale painted the scenes on the surface of a shallow vault that was also curved. The simulation of easel painting specifically for ceiling design is referred to as *quadro riportato* which translates to transfer framed painting (Carrier 221 - 229).

Carrier claims that, Annibale adopted the use of Northern European and Venetian tradition of oil painting to the central Italian fresco tradition, Annibale then reoriented the direction of painting associated to that in Florence and in Rome. He further argues that Annibale made *quadri riportati* to be a famous style for over a century. Polychrome seated youths in the nude who turn their heads in a bid to gaze at the scenes that surround them coupled with the figures of the Atlas appear like marble statues. Though Annibale got inspiration from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he did not in any way copy the figures painted by Michelangelo. The Frescoes on the Farnese gallery differ from the figures and pictures that surround them. The figures found in the *quadri* were modeled by Annibale in an even light. Light from the outside illuminates the figures on the outside figures to appear as if they were three-dimensional. The painting is shown in fig 3 below (Carrier 221 - 222 and Bolton).

Another of the most famous works of Annibale Carracci is *Two Boys, Head and Shoulders Smiling*. It is oil on canvas painting and was done in 1580-82 and it measures 14-1/8 by 18-7/8 inches (Heritage 73). It is a lively painting that portrays a pair of grinning boys, one shown in profile while the other

nearly frontally. Annibale chose to infuse dissonance, exaggeration and irregularity so as to enliven the somewhat static nature that was characteristic of the old style. By drawing from life, Annibale was able to give his work freshness and immediacy.

The Flight into Egypt, which is based on a biblical landscape, Annibale Carracci was able to create a classical landscape whereby nature appears ordered by human reason and most importantly divine law. Unlike a majority of the renaissance artists, Annibale did not portray a deep sense of space by using linear perspective; instead, he did it by varying shadow and light so as to suggest expansive atmosphere. In the painting, Annibale was able to construct environments that captured the idyllic life and idealized antiquity (Press 115). It was done in 1603 and the painting is shown on figure 5 below.

The Aspect of Caricatura

In paintings and corpus of drawings that were quite extensive, Annibale Carracci made an effort to explore the extremes in as far as facial expressions are concerned especially in the visages of the people that were around him. He was so influential in this aspect so much that caricatura, the term used to refer to the exaggeration of characteristic features in the face of a human being either for moral criticism or amusement is more often than not credited to him (Heritage 73). This word has its origins in the Italian word caricare which means to “change or load” and is believed to have first appeared in 1647 in print. Even though none of Annibale’s caricatures actually be traced to an individual who is identifiable, the paintings of one of

his former students can- Domenichino, who worked on the Theologian of the Aldobrandini Household in 1634 (Carrier and Poussin, 222).

In the 1580's, which was around the period when the Accademia degli Incamminati was founded, Annibale produced many heads in red chalk and also in paint; at times he came up with several to a canvas or sheet. These heads appeared as pure facial studies while others had important aspects of broader genre scenes. In both instances, the faces are vaguely heart shaped; by looking at them, one can easily notice that he seemed to have used the shape of his own shape as the basis of the paintings. This is especially so when the quasi self-portraits or youthful self-portraits that are still in existence. The foreheads are high and they appear to be "toothy". The teeth are irregularly spaced and protrude; they also appear to be very squared off as a consequence of poor occlusion and excessive wear. These are clear factors that indicate poor hygiene and coarse food (Heritage 73). A good example of a painting that illustrates this is the Buffone che ride, which was done in 1583-4 and the Smiling Youth.

The smiles in Annibale Carracci's paintings seem to be consistently jerked somewhat a little too widely. This results in an expression of forced hilarity as opposed to sincere happiness (Heritage 74). The sentiment as a result, seems inauthentic, uneasy and in fact it ends up being the exact opposite of what the painting projects as a first impression. This aspect has led a number of scholars to propose a whole subtext for these works.

Annibale had an interesting personality. According to his first biographer, Caesare Malvasia, he took very little heed with regard to his outward

appearance; he dressed in a casual manner, just like an artisan and unlike his brother Agostino, set very little store in as far as social accomplishments are concerned. C. van Tuyll van Serooskerken noted, “ Anibale saw himself first and foremost as a painter and preferred the company of craftsmen to that of persons of more elevated rank; the status of courtier, forced on him during his years in the service of Cardinal Farnese did not suit him and ultimately contributed to his breakdown.” (Heritage 74). It is quite possible that the faces of people of the lower classes depicted in Carracci’s works are a reflection of his very own discomfort in trying to reconcile his common background and the art of painting which is quite noble.

Annibale’s early caricatured faces and his other genre scenes were mostly painted on woven canvases that were coarse and the paint application was fairly rough. In his works, he did not make an attempt to hide the fact that physically, pigment adhered to fabric. The brush marks are quite visible and the paint has a richly impasto characteristic. The cheeks of the fingers in most cases appeared flushed; almost rough and had liberal applications of red. They appeared as though they had been stung cold or too much wine (Heritage 74).

Just as is the case in present works, Annibale Carracci’s early heads appear to have a somewhat idiosyncratic look especially to the eyes. They seem to be just a little awkwardly set, both in the sockets and skull. The tissues around the eyes, the lids included, more often than not appear red and puffy. In the present work, the profiled head features all these qualities. It can also be compared to a painting of an adolescent boy’s head that was once done by Annibale (Heritage 74).

In the Farnese gallery Frescoes, the torches located in the gallery below illuminate the figures outside the quadri so that they appear tangible. This style of painting illustrates an interest that was manifest especially in the renaissance period and in fact it continued in 17th century grand ceiling compositions. In the vault's crown, a long panel that represents the Triumph of Bacchus is in itself an ingenious blend of Raphael's style of drawing and lighting as well as Titan's animated and more sensuous figures. This illustrates Annibale's ability to adjust their styles which are quite authoritative in a bid to come up with something of his own .

Annibale Carracci's work was a true depiction of the art work of his time. Artwork during this period was characterized by a fanciful mode of painting, sculptures and architecture. Baroque art came into being as a consequence of the ' counter reformation' that occurred in 1545 to about 1563. During this time, the Catholic Church was rapidly losing members to the protestant movement. To counter this, the Catholic Church set up the Council of Trent whose aim was to renovate the Catholic Church. The society at this point in time was characterized by high levels of illiteracy; being aware of this fact, the church decided to use art in a bid to win back the Catholics that had gone astray. Baroque artists on the other hand, more often than not capitalized on the emotional reactions that were prevalent at that particular time. This therefore meant that ' spiritual art' came to be an art of sensation. Instead of elevating the spirit, the art staggered and overpowered the senses of the faithful. Baroque art escaped boundaries and it was successful in escaping boundaries; it empowered the viewer (Carl & Charles, 16 and

Zamora and Kaup, 187 & 271). The same could be said of Annibale Carracci's art.

Work by the Baroque artists, Annibale included, gave the impression of a people who were making an attempt to comprehend the ever changing world around them. Their style could be equated to that of a moody renegade of some kind who was on the run from the authorities and who turns his anguish into spiritual and passionate works of art; passionate. The baroque style was that of close confidants of popes and kings that work in the shadow of absolute power. The style was characterized by intensity and grandeur that were a reaction to the drastic transformations that took place in Europe in the 17th century in science, politics, society and more importantly religion (Carrier and Poussin, 225). Baroque art turns out to be a message that resonates across all generations throughout history.

Annibale has been described by art critics as one of the most influential reformer in as far as Italian paintings are concerned. Though there are many changes in the evolution of the style of painting introduced by Annibale, a number of basic characteristics persist. These are the emphasis that he placed on naturalism, appeal to the emotions and rich color. This is what came to be described as heroic idealism. He was obsessed with life study and this is evident in his paintings as well as drawings. Annibale, during the 1580's and 90', painted a subject that was new in Italian art. The genre scenes were able to capture the immediacy that characterized these transient moments. He did away with the smooth and imperceptible brushstroke that had been used at the time to depict spiritual objects and

came up with a loose and broken brushwork so as to communicate his new subject in a better manner.

Annibale Carracci's style was described as being mature. This style was influenced by the trip that he took to the northern part of his native Italy in the 1580's. During this trip, he had the opportunity to have an encounter with Correggio, who is one of the masters of the renaissance period; he also met Tintoretto and Titian. The three of them had a significant influence on Carracci's style of painting and especially when it came to the depiction of light. Annibale's move to Rome in 1595 exposed him to classical antiquity masterpieces. He also got the chance to sample the work of Rafael, his artistic idol and also (Strachan & Bolton 110 and 249).

Annibale was able to combine early naturalism, which he pioneered, together with the study of nature with the idealism that was characteristic of the renaissance and classical art. This move ensured that he set the trend that would be emulated the entire Baroque period. In addition to being convincing, the figures in his paintings are idealized as though he was trying to depict reality as it is so as to inspire piety and also virtue in the person viewing the art work. Thanks to the influence of other renaissance masters, Carracci did away with earthy palette that was characteristic of his earlier works and took up working with rich colors just like Michelangelo. Annibale Carracci's works of art had a direct appeal to the emotions of the viewers. His mature works saw him embrace the ideals of the Counter Reformation just as the members of the Council of Trent had envisaged. According to the Council of Trent, art had to be easily understood, decorous and most importantly, it had to inspire religious sentiment because of its appeal to

emotions. Annibale's interaction with other great artists of the renaissance period together with his encounters with the works of Rafael among others played a crucial role in one of Italy and the world's greatest painters (Zamora & Kaup, 78-79 and Strachan & Bolton, 82 and 242).

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Conclusion

Annibale Carracci is without a doubt one of the most influential of all painters of the Baroque period. Some of his best art works are in fresco, which is

regarded by many as the ultimate test in as far as a painter's mettle is concerned. Among early contemporaries of his, Annibale is more of an innovator. He was able to re-enliven the visual fresco vocabulary of Michelangelo. He was also able to make the quadro riportato a fashionable style for close to a century. His style also illustrated the trend in the baroque period and coupled with the fact that he played an important role in caricature goes to show the influence that his style had. The only person who challenged Annibale in Rome was Caravaggio; instead of being assimilative, Caravaggio's style was combative. His work was however not suited for fresco styles and large compositions. By 1630, Caravaggio's style of painting witnessed a decline whereas Annibale's style was the subject of study for an upcoming generation of painters. Artists such as Poussin, Bernini and Rubens were greatly influenced by Annibale Carracci.