

Renaissance patronage

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This paper explores different motivations for art patronage throughout the Renaissance. Art in the renaissance was often commissioned by a patron who wanted to use it as a way to communicate something to the intended viewer. Art was usually commissioned for religious and political reasons or used as proof of wealth or power. The corruption of the church allowed for wealthy patrons to make a donation in order to buy his or her way into heaven. This is called a sale of indulgence, and it is the motivation behind countless works of renaissance art.

The entire Arena Chapel painted by the artist Giotto was commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni to atone for his sin of usury. The Chapel was completed 1305 and is located in Padua, Italy. As was a common practice at the time, Enrico himself is depicted in on the wall of the chapel. “ On the wall of The Last Judgment, Enrico kneels to offer a model of his church to three figures. It is commonly accepted that Enrico saw his church and its paintings as a votive gift made as a partial atonement for his father’s mortal sin of usury and to strengthen his own hope of salvation. By having his image painted into the scene, Enrico assures that his intended audience knows it was his money that paid for the art. This is both politically and religiously motivated. Masaccio’s Pisa Altarpiece commissioned in 1426 Pisa is another example of religiously motivated art patronage. This altarpiece was commissioned by “ Ser Giuliano di Colino di Pietro degli Scarsi and the Carmelite church of S. Maria del Carmine” The intention behind this altarpiece was simply to give churchgoers a piece of relevant art to view during church and to attract more members.

An example of politically motivated art can be found in Sienna's Palazzo Pubblico. Allegory of Good and Bad Government by Ambrogio Lorenzetti was commissioned by the Sienese government. The frescos of Allegory p the walls of the building depicting life in the city under good government versus bad government. The intended audience for this commission was the citizens of Siena. The paintings were propaganda meant to show the viewers how successful and prosperous the city was under the current leadership of the Council of the Nine. Another politically motivated piece is the well known portrait by Jan Van Eyck, Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife.

This portrait was commissioned in 1434 by Giovanni Arnolfini and is meant to be a physical documentation or witness to him giving his wife leave to conduct household affairs in his absence. This portrait would have been displayed in the Arnolfini household to be seen by visitors and servants and served as proof that Giovanna was in charge of Giovanni's affairs while he was traveling. Tres Riches Heures by the Limbourg Brothers was commissioned by the Duke of Berry in 1412 France. This book is an example of royal patronage. It is meant to depict and glorify daily life in the court while simultaneously belittling those of the lower class.

Tres Riches Heures is personalized for the Duke and includes his likeness and some scholars believe that because the faces in the book are so diverse, that they must be portraits of individual members of the court. This fact and the use of the rare pigment lapis lazuli, the intricacy of the book, and the heavy use of hidden symbolism are all meant to illustrate the wealth of the duke. The court was the intended audience of this commission. Patronage

was a defining element of renaissance art. There were many motivations to purchase art such as religion, proof of power or wealth, or political reasons.

Commissions varied depending on the motivation and the intended audience.

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