

Light and dark shading in 17th century art



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The use of light and dark shading during the Baroque artistic movement during the seventeenth century was how the artist caught the eye of the observer and brought emphasis to certain areas of the painting. The technique was used by many of the artists of the day and their influence can even be seen in modern times. Rembrandt van Rijn and Johannes Vermeer are two examples of artist that used the elements of light and dark shading.

Rembrandt's famous Self Portrait is a perfect example of how he used the technique. In the portrait, the aged Rembrandt seriously looks out with a far away look. Most of the picture is dark and the clothing and upper torso of the body is so dark that only a muted outline can be seen of his clothing. There is a burst of light on his hands. The eye is drawn upward to the dark red behind the artist's head. Even though it is dark, the red brings color to the portrait. The only true light is centered on Rembrandt's face. That is where the emphasis of the whole painting lies. He does this so that only the actual parts of the real man draw the attention.

Vermeer, on the other hand, uses shading differently. There is a dark tapestry on the wall behind the subject in Woman Holding Balance. The area to the bottom left is also dark. An extremely dark blue cloth is draped on the table in front of her and hangs off the side. The underneath portion of the table is too dark to discern anything. There is a beam of light that flows from a high window and it illuminates the woman's face and upper torso so that it is obvious that she is holding a balance.

Her skirt and cape are dark, but the edging of her cape and headdress is white, thus outlining her face and hands as she stares intently at her

balance. The light in the portrait bring the focus the woman's expression, and brings her to the center of the painting.

Both Rembrandt and Vermeer did an excellent job of creating emphasis by using light and dark shading. They were examples of an artistic period that is still admired today.

References

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