

Art history and visual culture critical thinking examples

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



Question 1

The Renaissance is the period of the emergence of the individual artist and of art becoming more and more realistic. This was the result of intellectual achievement in other cultural fields which led to the creation of a new philosophy surrounding the arts (Getlein, 378).

Renaissance blossomed in both Italy and the North of Europe. There are however significant differences between the art produced in those two areas. Robert Campin's Merode Altarpiece (figure 16. 17 in Getlein) from 1426 is typical of the extensive attention to detail the Northern artists paid. The picture is full of details, some of which have symbolic character, like for example the lilies that symbolize the purity of the Virgin Mary (Getlein, 380). The vivid colors of the painting and the treatment of light and shadow emphasize the surface and texture of the different objects and individuals, a traditional skill of the Northern artists (Getlein, 381).

Masaccio's Trinity with the Virgin, St John and the donors from 1425 (figure 16. 3 in Getlein) presents a very different scene. The setting is very simple and classical, as opposed to the modern setting Campin chose for his painting. Masaccio was interested in using the linear perspective in depicting an architectural landscape. He used a triangular and far less crowded organization that was typical for Italian Renaissance artists (Getlein, 369). Detail is minimum and the colors used more sober.

Question 2

The Reliquary statue of Sainte Foy (figure 15. 6 in Getlein) is a French work from the 10th or 11th century. The Saint is depicted seated and fully clothed,

the individual characteristics of the body are concealed to the extent that it is impossible to tell if this is a man or a woman, a young or an old individual. This contrasts sharply with Michelangelo's David, a statue created in 1501-1504 (figure 16. 8 in Getlein). Inspired by Classical Greek sculpture, which was the ideal of the Renaissance, Michelangelo depicted David completely naked. His body is that of a young man in his prime with strong muscles that can be seen protruding in the statue (Murray, 1991, 28). Similarly inspired by classical statues is the pose which seems relaxed in sharp contrast with the expression of the face which shows determination and strength (Murray, 1991, 28).

The two statues exemplify the difference between these two areas in the history of art. Renaissance artists developed a renewed interest in the human body and were interested in depicting it accurately, if not idealized, based on classical prototypes. The nude is no longer a taboo subject, but is considered an appropriate subject as "the noblest of God's creations" (Getlein, 366).

Question 3

Rococo and Neoclassicism both flourished during the 18th century. Radically different in philosophy and style, they represented two very different schools of art. Rococo favored extravagance, a sense of frivolity and happiness; it used pastel colors and excessive decorative elements. On the contrary, neoclassicism favored to seriousness, basic colors and a return to classical ideals.

A quick examination of two works of art from the two styles - The Pursuit of

Fragonard and *The Oath of the Horatii* by David illustrates these differences. Fragonard (figure 17. 16 in Getlein) chose a light subject for his painting, presenting his playful subjects in an extravagant garden full of color. On the contrary, David's work (17. 17) deals with a serious, historical subject from the classical past. The colors used are more sober, some even dark, while the background is dominated by an austere, classically inspired architectural setting.

Neoclassicism was a reaction to Rococo. It was a conscious return to the classical period which resulted partly from new and impressive archaeological findings in Italy (Tansey and Kleiner, 915). Artists also believed that art should have a moral dimension and a didactic focus, something that was inspired by the philosophical movement of the enlightenment, the ideas of which led eventually to the French Revolution (Tansey and Kleiner, 917).

WORKS CITED

Getlein, M. *Living with Art*, 10th edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2013.

Murray, L. *The High Renaissance and Mannerism*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1991.

Tansey, Richard G. and Fred S. Kleiner. *Gardner's Art Through the Ages*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996.