

# Comparison of renaissance works of art essay

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The renaissance period can be described as an era in which great works of art, especially paintings by great artists, were produced. This paper endeavors to compare and contrast two paintings from this period, one appearing on a website and the other from a study textbook.

The two paintings are *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* by Sandro Botticelli, and *The Adoration of the Magi* by Leonardo da Vinci. The comparison will look at the paintings' form, their subject matter, their content, and how they fit into the context of that particular time period.

*The Adoration of the Magi* is a two-dimensional painting that was painted using oil on a wood panel measuring 246 by 243 centimeters. The exact date of the painting is not known, but is estimated to have taken place sometime between 1481 and 1483. The technique that Leonardo da Vinci used in this painting, therefore, became a trendsetter in the art revolution of the time.

This is seen in the manner in which figures are given a presentation in the painting. In this painting, Mary and her son easily come out as the center piece, surrounded by many people at the scene. The colors used in the painting are yellow, ochre and brown (Delahunt, 2010).

In comparison, *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* is a three-dimensional painting that was painted on wood with gold and tempera, with dimensions of 34.3 by 25.4 centimeters. Its exact date of painting is also not known, with estimates placing it at sometime in the early 1490s. The suffused lights filtering through the hut's grayish green wicker frame highlight the sense of concentration and intimacy in the painting. In contrast, the furniture and fabrics are depicted by vibrant colors.

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The green-brown robes worn by acolytes put emphasis on the grey-freckled, dark brown tunics of the two young monks. The priest's red planet is repeated with a stronger shade in the cardinal's hat. In addition, the priest's gold and blue dalmatic echoes the blue cloth that the saint kneels on (Frank, 2010).

The Adoration of the Magi definitely has a strong subject matter. This painting shows Mary and her son Jesus surrounded by a crowd of men and women and the tree of life. One can also see knights in combat, an indication of the fall of paganism and the rise of Christian faith. The painting is an abstract work of art. This is because it has been taken out from elements that are found in the observed world, but no longer represent a particular person or object that can be found in this observed world (Delahunt, 2010).

On the other hand, in *The Last Communion of St. Jerome*, Botticelli depicts the last moments of the life of St Jerome attempting to capture a scene of serenity and peace. The scene includes a gabled hut in which the saint is confined in as a cell, with the only hint of severe suffering being seen in the elderly saint's face.

The painting is a representation of the moment in which Jerome is lying on a sheet made from linen. He has gathered around him his companions from the monastery and is asking for the body of Christ from one of his brothers (Frank, 2010).

The painting matches with the written text concerning the incident. This is seen in the way the epistle recalled that Jerome asked his companions to

assist him in getting to his feet when he saw the priest coming closer to him. He also testifies his faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood and body are present in the wafer.

Additionally, he speaks against Christians who take the Holy Communion despite their several instances of sinning. He also speaks passionately against unworthy priests. He concludes with a recital of several prayers, and a complete confession. The Last Communion of St. Jerome is a representation work of art since it represents something that is, or was, observable in the real world at the time (Frank, 2010).

In The Adoration of the Magi, Leonardo da Vinci sends a message to Christians everywhere that the king of heaven is Jesus Christ, who is to be worshiped by everyone on earth, including kings. Symbolism is used prominently in the painting. The rocky landscape indicated in the background, together with the combating knights seen on horsebacks, points to symbolism.

The rocky landscape is symbolism of the ruins of King David's palace. This is meant to symbolize the fall of King David as the king, to pave the way for Jesus Christ, who would be the new king to be worshipped by everyone, including King David himself. On the other hand, the combating knights symbolize the fall of paganism to pave the way for the rise of Christianity under Jesus Christ (Delahunt, 2010).

The message that artist Botticelli wishes to pass in the painting The Last Communion of St. Jerome is the meditation or reflection on St Jerome. The

painting encourages the viewer to reflect and mediate. However, Botticelli assumed that the viewers would have knowledge about the life and times of Saint Jerome. For a viewer to understand the message, he would have to know the details concerning Saint Jerome's life.

The painting also has elements of symbolism as seen in the precise symbols present. One of the symbols is that of Jesus Christ, which symbolizes the source of living water as well as the spiritual rock for Christians. It can also symbolize Christ as the good shepherd. There are also some symbols that remind the painting's viewer of certain moments in the life of Saint Jerome, such as the lion in the painting. The application of a lion in renaissance art is largely associated with Saint Jerome (Frank, 2010).

The painting Adoration of the Magi fits perfectly into the context of the time period in which it was painted. Leonardo da Vinci did the painting during the late 15th century, a time when Christianity was on the rise. At the time, Christianity was taking its root in Europe, with early Christians trying to recruit new followers, or convert pagans and nonbelievers into the religion. The painting contributed a lot to what Christianity is today, by depicting the birth of Jesus Christ as the future king (Delahunt, 2010).

On its part, The Last Communion of St. Jerome shares a similar time period context with of The Adoration the Magi. While the latter portrays the birth of Jesus Christ as the leader of Christianity, the former portrays a saint passing on the teachings of Christianity, such as the taking of the Holy Communion.

Delahunt, M. (2010). Examples of earlier Renaissance works of art - by artists born before 1470. ArtLex on the Earlier Renaissance Art. Web.

Frank, P. L. (2010). Prebles' Artforms: An Introduction to the Visual Arts. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.