

History of art

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



Discuss the evolution of the idea of beauty through the history of art. The idea of beauty, the perfect human body, is a result of culture: religious functions, advertisements, economy, and other factors. The definition of beauty is not an inherent concept, since every age, place and social class formed its own ideal of it. This evolution of beauty is shown explicitly through the history of art. Art, in different periods, was influenced mainly by history and religion. I will discuss this transition from the Middle Ages to Renaissance, from Impressionism to Expressionism and later Cubism. I will discuss artworks by various artists such as Giotto, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Degas and Picasso. I will analyze the way they depicted their ideas of beauty, compare and contrast the concepts the artists used to transmit their ideas. Giotto Di Bondone (1266/7 — 1337) was an Italian painter and architect from Florence in the late Middle Ages. In the transitional period between International Gothic and Renaissance, Giotto was among the first to make use of proportions to represent human figures. He worked on perspective and rounded sculptural forms that appear to have been based on living models rather than on idealized conventional human figure. Giotto rejected the long, elegant lines of the Byzantine style and went for a more realistic representation. He based his works on the real rather than the divine and idealistic. Painted in 1300 for the Church of San Francesco in Pisa, The Stigmatization of St. Francis illustrates stories from the life of the saint, who was a particular inspiration to Giotto. In this signed panel, Giotto uses the realistic human form, space, colour, gesture and placement of figures to tell the story in a new, human-like way. It remained for Masaccio (1401 — 1428), a century later, to expand upon Giotto's monumental style. Masaccio

applied mathematical laws in his paintings and created an illusion of space and distance. Masaccio was and still is considered a genius and is best known for the fresco of The Holy Trinity with the Virgin and St. John (1425 — Santa Maria Novella, Florence), the first successful depiction in painting of the new concept of Renaissance space. When he joined atmospheric perspective with linear perspective later that century, a greater illusion of reality was achieved. Also, his figures show weight mainly by use of drapery folds. In the peak of Renaissance, Botticelli (1445 — 1510) was one of the most prominent artists of the time, with Birth of Venus (1486 — Uffizi Gallery), being arguably one of his most famous works. It is also one of the most treasured works of the Renaissance period. In it, Venus (the Roman goddess of love, beauty, sex, fertility, prosperity and victory — Known as Aphrodite in Greek mythology), one can see the graceful way Botticelli composed the goddess. Venus is illustrated as an immaculate, pure being. Also, her nude depiction is significant in itself. At that time, were almost all paintings were based on Christianity, Botticelli was almost considered as revolutionary, as nude women were hardly ever portrayed. Furthermore, Botticelli portrayed figures having steep shoulders and long hands as he wanted to idealise the human figure. In 1492, Michelangelo undertook the study of anatomy based on the dissection of corpses. In the time of high Renaissance, Michelangelo used different methods to portray figures. As a result of his intense study of the human body, he depicted figures with extreme details, and enlargement of the muscles and tissues. This technique can be noticed through his works such as David (1500-1504), found in Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence. In the 19th century, art took a different

course. This was the way towards what we call Modern art. In the 1870s, Impressionism was at its peak. Impressionists no longer focused mainly on beauty but rather preferred to focus on the nature of light. Impressionism is a style that seeks to capture a feeling or experience rather than to achieve accurate depiction. Edgar Degas (1834 — 1917) was an Impressionist who's known for his artworks involving nudity. It is interesting that in his artworks he never seeks to make the subject identifiable. Instead he often portrays them from their backside and as they engaged in daily tasks, such as *The Bathers*. Later in history, a new art movement arose — Expressionism. After the horror of the First World War only practicability is important. The difference between the sexes vanishes for the first time in art history. Curves are no longer an ideal. Expressionists focused mainly on getting their message across by means of colour and distortions. This is why artworks from this period are misshaped and altered, rather than focusing on realism and beauty. Expressionism is a very explicit example of art being used as means of communication. Many consider art from the 20th century to be revolutionary, with Cubism being the result of this. Cubism was an innovative movement and was very influential to the art produced later. Being a pioneer of cubism, Pablo Picasso was criticized and his works led to controversy. Cubism involved the use of geometric shapes and this can be seen from one of Picasso's works, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*. Picasso was very influenced by the social situation at that time, where prostitution, sickness and instability were amongst the flaws of society. That is why he chose to portray the women with deformed figures, some of them even with African-like masks. Through this brief analysis of the story of art, one can see how each period

portrayed beauty in different ways. It all, mainly, depended on the social situation, economy and religion at that point in time. It is clear how the conventional idea of beauty lost its control over art as we approach the present. Also, the realism and detail used in earlier stages, was almost irrelevant in more modern times. One should appreciate how art evolves according to the time and the people producing it, and how powerful it really is for the observer. -----