

Masaccio, donatello, and brunelleschi – renaissance pioneers essay sample

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The “ pioneer generation” of the Renaissance artists was generally considered to be the painter Masaccio, the sculptor Donatello, and the architect Brunelleschi. They applied Humanist thinking to art by using the styles of the classical world, instead of their immediate past, to depict the world around them in a naturalistic manner. The idealized statuary of classical antiquity served as their models, while in architecture the classical orders were applied to Renaissance buildings. They also extended their understanding of light and shadow, of perspective and anatomy.

Masaccio was a key Florentine painter of the early Renaissance whose great work, the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence, remained influential throughout the Renaissance.

He learned about mathematical proportion from his friend Brunelleschi, which was crucial to his revival of the principles of scientific perspective. From Donatello he gained knowledge of the classical styles of art that led him away from the prevailing Gothic style of painting. He inaugurated a new naturalistic approach to painting that was concerned less with flat surfaces and ornamentation than with simplicity and the illusion of three dimensions.

The fresco series he painted for the Brancacci Chapel in about 1427, illustrates one of his greatest innovations, the use of light to define the human body and its draperies. In these frescoes, rather than bathing his scenes in flat uniform light that was common to most current painting techniques, he painted them as if they were illuminated from a single source of light (in this case, the actual chapel window). This created a unique mix of light and shadow that gave them a natural, realistic quality that was

unknown in the art that was produced in his day. He put into practice Brunelleschi's theories about how to project depth beyond a flat painted surface, employing the lines of painted architecture to create a convincing illusion of space.

Donatello, one of the greatest of all Italian Renaissance artists, was a master of sculpture in both marble and bronze. He had a more detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of ancient sculpture than any other artist of his day. When he was 17 years old, he assisted the noted sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti in constructing and decorating the famous bronze doors of the baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence.

In his bronze David (c. 1430); Donatello created probably the first freestanding bronze nude since antiquity. The adolescent's slim, sinuous lines, and his nudity, which was emphasized by his hat, symbolized the Renaissance ideal of physical grace and beauty.

In the equestrian statue of Erasmo da Narni, called Il Gattamelata (c. 1445), Donatello, used the sole surviving ancient Roman equestrian statue, the Marcus Aurelius, as a model, and reinvented the mode of presenting a great general. He elevated the group on a high base, gave the rider an alert and commanding energy, and made the rider and horse convincingly proportionate to each other.

In a later period, Donatello broke away from classical influences and emphasized realism and the portrayal of character and dramatic action in his work. A notable example of his sculpture of this period is the wood sculpture

of Mary Magdalen (c. 1454). He used a powerful realism that gives his statues a distinct look.

Donatello had an immense impact on the art and the artists of the Renaissance. He invented the shallow relief technique in which the sculpture seems deep but is actually done on a very shallow plane. He seemed to be equally at home this type of sculpture as his freestanding statues. He also make much use wood as well as marble and bronze. Donatello characterized his figures as individuals and was also a major influence on the development of realism in Italian painting,

Brunelleschi's revival of classical forms and his championing of an architecture based on mathematics, proportion, and perspective make him a key artistic figure in the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era.

He was trained as a sculptor and goldsmith in a Florentine workshop. He spent several years in Rome studying sculpture and measuring ancient buildings in Rome to understand the harmony of classical proportions in architecture. In 1418 received the commission to execute the dome of the unfinished Gothic Cathedral of Florence—the Duomo. The dome, a great innovation both artistically and technically, consists of two octagonal vaults, one inside the other. Brunelleschi made a design feature of the necessary eight ribs of the vault, carrying them over to the exterior of the dome, where they provide the framework for the dome's decorative elements, which also include architectural reliefs, circular windows, and a beautifully proportioned

cupola. This was the first time that a dome created the same strong effect on the exterior as it did on the interior.

In other buildings: the Medici Church of San Lorenzo, and the Ospedale degli Innocenti; Brunelleschi devised an austere, geometric style that was inspired by the art of ancient Rome. It was completely different from the emotional, elaborate Gothic style that was still popular in his time.

Brunelleschi's style emphasized mathematical rigor in its use of straight lines, flat planes, and cubic spaces. This "wall architecture," with its flat facades, set the tone for many of the later buildings of the Florentine Renaissance.

Later in his career he moved away from this linear, geometric style to a somewhat more sculptural style. For example, the interior of one of his buildings was formed not by his usual flat walls, but by massive niches that opened from a central octagon. This style was the first step toward an architecture that led eventually to the baroque.

His influence on his contemporaries and immediate followers was very strong and has been felt even in the 20th century, when modern architects came to revere him as the first great exponent of rational architecture.