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Art History: Sistine Chapel, Ghent Altarpiece and Madonna Enthroned

The Sistine Chapel The Sistine Chapel is arguably the most famous building in the Vatican. Only St. Peter's Basilica is more famous. It is part of the Apostolic Palace, Popes official residence. Paintings of famous Italian painters like Raphael, Botticelli and Bernini, adorn the building. On the ceiling, is one the greatest paintings in the history of art: Michelangelo's portrayal of the Garden of Eden and the book of Genesis. This magnificent work of the 16th century covers 12, 000 square feet. A walking tour of the cathedral would never accord a visitor enough opportunity to view all the scenes. A virtual tour, however, allows one to see all the details. In addition, there is the capability of zooming to get the finer details.

Ghent Altarpiece and Madonna Enthroned: A comparison

Two religious paintings, the Ghent Altarpiece, commonly referred to as the Adoration of the Mystic Lamb from Ghent (Northern Europe) and Cimabue's Madonna Enthroned from Italy, were created during the Renaissance for the same religion - Christianity . For this reason, the two have many similarities in spite of the differences in Renaissance settings of the two regions - Northern Europe and Italy. The two paintings have a span of more than a century apart, with the latter being the older.

Both of these paintings were made at the helm of the Catholic Church in a Catholic and have Catholic background. The Ghent Altarpiece features Jesus as the main figure in the art piece while the Madonna Enthroned features Mary, the mother of Jesus; both of them prominent figures in the Catholic Church. In the Ghent Altarpiece, Jesus is seated on a throne and holding a scepter- a symbol of His royal power; conversely, Mary is also sitting on a throne and holding baby Jesus. Both of them are surrounded by numerous

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figures; Jesus is surrounded by Apostles while Mary is surrounded by angels wearing halos. In both, these figures help Christians to reach heaven. In addition, both Mary and Jesus are wearing long robes, also a symbol of royalty. A further analysis of the two pieces of art reveals little space around the two figures. There is even less space around Jesus. In both, there is symbolic gesturing with the hand; with Mary gesturing toward her son, symbolizing hope for the world. Jesus also gestures with His hand; symbolic of the calling of all peoples of the world to come to Him.

The striking difference is the use of color in the paintings. While the Ghent Altarpiece has much darker colors, the Madonna Enthroned has more bright colors. Further, there is a difference in time in the two paintings. While the Madonna Enthroned is a 13th-century painting, the Ghent Altarpiece is much younger, being commissioned more than a century later. Additionally, the Ghent Altarpiece is a set of several paintings while the Madonna Enthroned is only a single painting.

There is no doubt the two paintings have some differences. However, there are more similarities in them than differences. These two are a good example of the Renaissance paintings.

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