

Art final



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September 7, ical, Medieval and Renaissance Art: The Development of Depth

As man adopted a culture, he also adopted an approach to art that reflected that culture. As time developed, so did different cultures understanding of themselves and of the role art could play in the larger society. Three cultures represent a wonderful evolution of the role art played within the larger society, and as societies understanding of itself, religion, and its role in nature increased and changed, so did the associated artistic representations from those societies. Beginning with the ancient Greeks and the development of what is now referred to as Classical art, then a thousand years later to the influence of the Catholic Church and religious figures in what is now called Medieval art, to the more humanistic and mathematical dimensions of Renaissance Art, these three cultures have greatly impacted modern art today in the 21st century, and our understanding of beauty, balance, iconography, religious-themed works, and the mathematical beauty of depth and dimension.

In ancient Greece, there was a cultural bend towards striving for perfection. Perfection in a social system, philosophy, governance, and, of course, art. The Greeks had a fascination with the human form and perfection. In Greek sculpture, there was almost no recognition of the individualism of personality in a work of art (Kallendorf 42). The facial expression and facial features in Classical Greek sculptures is irrelevant. What is most important is a balance of the positioning of the body, with perfect physical features. There is no room for imperfection in Classical Greek sculptures of the human form, noted by the " S-curve" of the spine (Stewart 21) and one forward leg of the upright pose, weight shifted back a bit on the back leg. The goal was to give the subject a timeless and confident pose. Most sculptures were positioned

upright, with one foot forward, and the weight mostly on the back foot, called, later, contrapposto position (Stewart 23), rejuvenated in Renaissance art. This pose suggested a confident, forward-looking air about the subject. With the eyes and face blank, with the head upright, and chin out, shoulders square, the focus is all given to the human body-- a combination of physical perfection and balance. Poses of Classical statues were important to convey a continuum of the society's art with its larger goals of human perfection in government and philosophy. There were very few religious-themed sculptures in Classical Greek art, as nature and common daily life was portrayed in a way which gave the subject a larger-than-life quality. A thousand years after the ancient Greeks sculpted the perfection of the human form, around 500 A. D., in Medieval Europe, the focus had changed from a humanistic one to a religious one (Calkins 12). Although as in Classical art, there was no focus on the detail of facial expression, there was an extreme focus on the content and the setting of the pieces. The Catholic Church controlled all aspects of life in Medieval Europe, and the art of that period reflected that religious nature. Unlike Classical art, with little religious themes, but a devotion to the perfection and balance of the human form, Medieval art focused on conveying a religious message to its largely illiterate audience. (For example, stained glass windows in churches were made to tell stories of the Bible to worshippers, most of whom could not read. The colored windows brought biblical verses and messages to life for worshippers). It was important to Medieval art to convey a religious message, and to reflect its surroundings. Pieces were made to be seen in situ, on the altars and in the naves of medieval Gothic churches and cathedrals of Europe (Calkins 15). They are noted for their total absence of depth and

relationships of the figures, and focused totally on the message-- of the story of Christ and the Saints, and particularly Madonna and child, and the role of religion in the lives of those who saw the pieces. Where Classical Greek sculptures focused on the human form, Medieval art, focused on the spiritual form. The pieces were meant to inspire and tell a story, and facial features, the use of color, background, art for artistic value, and proportions and depth of placement of characters were never the focus. Many works showed angels who looked like they were piggy-backed, on top of each other, framing a Madonna and Child, the baby Jesus. There was no ability to create the illusion of foreground or background in Medieval paintings, and depth and scale were still in their infancies (Calkins 103). Even the Madonna and Childs expressions and form were subject to the emotion and spirituality conveyed in the pieces. Art for arts sake was not important at all. The goal was to inspire the word of God in the paintings, not to make beautiful art, per se. As Medieval Europe changed, and the Renaissance began in Italy, there was a " rebirth" of an appreciation of classical art, a study of the human form, combined with an increasing knowledge of the influence depth and math could have on artistic pieces (Hartt 25). No longer were the paintings two-dimensional and drab colored, as in Medieval works. The Renaissance subjects now had facial expressions and an attention to detail in the backgrounds and clothing of their subjects that gave the viewer an appreciation of the subject through the beauty of the medium. Artists began to infuse their works with depth, background, color, expression and a renewed appreciation for classical poses and the human form. As in Medieval times, works had a mostly religious theme, but the use of triangular positioning, distance of physical relationships of subjects, attention to detail

and depth of background, all worked together to give the works a timeless air, and gave the viewer an inspiration from the pure beauty of the subjects, rather than just the topic of the subjects drawn. (Hartt 33). As artists learned more about the mathematical possibilities in art, they became more adept at creating the great works that people still go to see today in museums around the world. Commissioned by wealthy families of Europe, the goal was to create works of beauty, and timelessness. The masterpieces made by Michelangelo and da Vinci are household words today, noted for their beauty and technical heights, and much less for their message. That was the goal of Renaissance art, to create a lasting work of beauty, using religious themes as the vehicle for the work (Hartt 13).

It is interesting to go to a Modern Art museum today and see traces of Classical, Medieval or Renaissance art. The human form, balance, religious icons, and mathematical beauty all have their place in modern art, but the progression of art would not have taken place without these three important genres paving the way. As modern art reflects the values and artistic focus of the modern world, so did these three areas of art reflect their worlds. One can go to any modern art museum and see examples of balance, a celebration of the human form, religious iconography, and the use of depth, visual colors, and the pure beauty of artistic expression. The preserved pieces of Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance art allow the modern art enthusiast to look back in time and reflect on the development of art as reflected in these pieces, as well as see what those ancient societies held as important to how they viewed themselves and the larger human race.

Works Cited

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