

# Baroque assignment

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The period of art known as Baroque began in the late 16th century. The period introduced art that was complex, rich, and extravagant. This was a time when optimism was the law of the land and a more confident and self-assured attitude made itself known. This is reflected in most of the artwork in this period.

Paintings in the Baroque period were more complex than sculpture, and it showed in almost every painting. (Gardner, 397, 402) The painting, “The Geographer” by Jan Vermeer, is an example of Baroque art in the 17th century.

Encompassing the theme of cartography, the sea chart, globe, and the like, (Harden) the painting shows a man, interrupted from his work, looked out the window. It is interesting to note that the man in the painting might be Anthony van Leeuwenhoek. It has been said that the man in this painting fits the mold of an intelligent man, knowledgeable from literature and observation. (Gowing) This would certainly fit van Leeuwenhoek. In regards to the rest of the painting, there is an abundance of objects on the left, leading the viewer's eye to that area.

It seems that the few objects on the right of the painting are unimportant. This painting embodies the four main characteristics of Baroque paintings: the use of diagonals, suspense, tenebrism, and snapshot quality. Diagonals play a major role in “The Geographer”. In fact, almost every line is at an angle to imply perspective. This gives the painting depth. Everything is on a diagonal, to the point where it almost looks as if the picture is slanted to one side.

Other details to note are the compass in his hand moving at the same angle as his arm, creating movement in the direction of his other hand, creating a circle. Most of the movement of the piece leans to the left. Even the shadows seem to be at a diagonal. It seems as if the man in the painting is looking out the window at something. It looks as if he is disturbed, or shocked, with what he sees. Perhaps he was interrupted from his work to witness something awful. This is the most exciting moment. The viewer can imagine what he is looking at, none of the possibilities pleasant.

This is how the painting is suspenseful. One can only imagine what happened before, or what will happen after, this picture was painted, but one can be sure that this moment is the beginning of something exciting. Tenebrism is defined as a style of painting that uses violent contrasts of light and dark. In “The Geographer”, this is apparent. The strongest light source in the picture is on the left, adding even more emphasis to this side of the painting. The man's face is lit quite well, the viewer must be able to see his face for the viewer to understand his anguish.

What he is working on is also well-lit. The wall, where nothing seems to be happening, also where there are no diagonals, is cast in shadow, making this wall unimportant. There seems to be stark lines of shadow, and then of light. (Harden) This contrast adds to the painting's shocked and disturbed feel. Looking at the painting reminds the viewer of looking at a photograph. The colors are rich, the strokes barely noticeable. However, more importantly, the painting resembles a photograph because of the emotion that is caught by the artist.

It seems as though the artist painted this at top speed, just to catch the shocked look on the subject's face. Of course, it is impossible to paint that fast, and this is why it resembles a photograph. The characteristics of Baroque art in the 17th century show themselves in “ The Geographer”. In an age of complexity, Vermeer took a subject and animated him with the use of shadow and light. The subject was captured in a state of shock, which leaves the viewer curious as to what he was looking at. Also, one cannot help but to notice the quality of the painting.

In an age when optimism was the rule, this painting lends itself to a darker corner of the world, and Vermeer makes it work beautifully. ? Gardner, Helen. Art Through the Ages. Chicago: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc. 1959. ? Gowing, Lawrence. “ Vermeer”. Essential Vermeer. 1950. 2001. 28 Jan 2009. [http://www.essentialvermeer.com/cat\\_about/geographer.html](http://www.essentialvermeer.com/cat_about/geographer.html) ? Harden, Mark. “ Jan Vermeer: The Geographer”. WebMuseum, Paris. 14 Oct 2002. 29 Jan 2009. <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/vermeer/geographer.html>