
Renaissance Art

Renaissance art refers to the paintings, sculptures, architecture, music, and literature produced during the 14th, 15th, and 16th centuries in Europe, a time of rebirth and awakening for the continent. Improvements in the quality of oil paint meant that paintings could really express movement on the canvas, and sculptures at the time embraced the softness of the human body. The images that emerged from the Renaissance continue to represent beauty and intellect for people around the world.

The Renaissance started in Italy in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. This was known as the “proto-Renaissance” period. Italian artists believed they were being reawakened to the ideals and achievements of Roman culture. The proto-Renaissance in the 14th century, was stifled by plague and war, and its influences didn’t emerge until the next century.

Artists of the 15th century include Lorenzo Ghiberti, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Donatello, who would later emerge as the master of Early Renaissance sculpture. Another major artist working during this period was the Masaccio. The intellectuality, monumentality, and naturalism in his works mark him as a pivotal figure in Renaissance painting. Early Renaissance art thrived because, in addition to the Catholic Church, most of the art produced during the early Renaissance was commissioned by the wealthy merchant families of Florence (especially the Medici), who supported the cost of construction and decoration of palaces, churches, and monasteries.

The most famous artists from the Renaissance come from the end of the 15th century, when Rome had displaced Florence as the principal center of Renaissance art. Three great masters – Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael – dominated this period, which was known as the High Renaissance. Leonardo was the ultimate “Renaissance man.” He was an inventor, a painter, a sculptor, a scientist, a musician, a mathematician, an engineer, a writer, a cartographer, and much more. He had an incredible breadth of intellect, interest, and talent.

Although in his time, Leonardo was regarded as a great artists, his restless researches into different branches of study left him little time to paint. His fame rests mainly on a few completed paintings: the “Mona Lisa,” “The Virgin of the Rocks,” and “The Last Supper.” Michelangelo Buonarroti was the dominant sculptor of the High Renaissance. His sculptures, such as Piet? in St. Peter’s Cathedral, and the David in his native Florence, Show a breathtaking technical ability, and an inclination to bend rules of anatomy and proportion. Although Michelangelo thought of himself first as a sculptor, his best known work is the giant ceiling fresco of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, Rome. Raphael Sanzio, the youngest of the three great High

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Renaissance masters, learned from both Da Vinci and Michelangelo.

His greatest work, School of Athens, was painted in the Vatican at the same time that Michelangelo was working on the Sistine Chapel. The creator of High Renaissance architecture was Donato Bramante. His first Roman masterpiece, the Tempietto at S. Pietro in Montorio, is a centralized dome structure that recalls classical temple architecture. Pope Julius II, who reigned at the time, choose Bramante to be papal architect, and together they devised a plan to replace the 4th-century Old St. Peter's with a new church of gigantic dimensions. The project was not completed until after after Bramante's death. The Catholic Church was a major patron of the Arts during the Renaissance. Because of this, many works of Renaissance art depicted religious images, attempting to illustrate, supplement and portray the teachings of the Catholic Church. Renaissance paintings and sculptures were usually encountered by contemporary audiences of the period in the context of religious rituals. Although today they are viewed as great works of art, at the time they were seen and used mostly as devotional objects. Renaissance art's impact on art history is tremendous. In addition to capturing classical traditions, Renaissance art captures the experience of the individual and the beauty of the natural world. It increases our appreciation for art and artistic ideas, and it adds a brilliant chapter to the history of classical tradition.

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