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The Early Renaissance

The Early Renaissance—or we could say the early years of rebirth after the dark era that followed the greatness of the ancient civilizations—led to the rediscovery of the classics and also led to a humanistic approach to the arts, which placed the man at the center of the Universe.

The Early Renaissance represents an important period for innovation and exact sciences, and also a period where humans were recognized as individuals, with personal aspirations, dreams and beliefs. Therefore, the Early Renaissance spread quickly all over Europe.

In the Italy of the 14th Century, Giotto di Bondone will revolutionize the art of painting by creating impressive figures of humans who are “idealized, monumentalized, yet comprehensible mirrors of humanity, and in so doing, he transformed the direction of Western painting” (Stewart et. al., 57).

Although timid steps toward the Early Renaissance period were made in Sienna, they were abruptly stopped by the Black Plague of 1348. Florence is the city where the Renaissance art would develop in all its glory. Artists like Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, or Donatello would emerge from this period to create the great masterpieces that, even today, enchant and amaze the eye.

Brunelleschi's cupola, Old Sacristy (1421-1428), and Church of San Lorenzo (c. 1425-1479), **Masaccio's** "Tribute Money" (c. 1425), "Trinity," and "Saint Peter Healing with His Shadow" (c.1425), **Donatello's** David (1440), and Gattanelata (1445-1453), **Botticelli's** famous "Birth of Venus (after 1482), and "Young Man with a Medal (c. 1470) are only a few of the great Early Renaissance masterpieces.

Another representative city of the Early Renaissance is Venice.

The great painter, Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516) was an innovator for the Venetian school. His "Saint Francis in Ecstasy (c 1485) is a wonderful painting, which connects the "spectator" with the spiritual world beyond his reach.

"If Florentine artists developed religious imagery more secular than before, and if Siena presented a vision more dreamlike and mystical, then Venice, with Bellini, offered one of the most poetic, elegiac paesans to nature ever painted" (Wood, 110).

In Northern Europe, the Early Renaissance years are marked by a strong, critical analysis.

"One feels, in Northern painting, that there was not the overriding search to unlock intellectual keys to the universe, but the irresistible impulse to describe it. One could also argue that the culture had two conflicting goals—to make the mysteries of faith more visible and at the same time to make them more mystical" (Stewart et. al.,72). Great artists such as Jan Van Eyck—with his famous "Giovanni Arnolfini and His Bride" (1434), and "Man in a Red Turban (1433),

Rogier van der Weyden—with “Descent from the Cross (c. 1435), and “Entombment” and so many more, are only a few examples of the Early Renaissance period in the Northern Europe.

In France, Claus Sluster would create Philip’s tomb. He changed the “static, frozen, and passive nature of the tomb into an animate, active, and perpetual reenactment of the very funeral procession which carried Philip to his final resting place” (Stewart et. al., 73).

Among all of these great Northern European artists, Albrecht Dürer occupies an unique place, because of his modern sense, personality, and “special curiosity about the world around him” (Stewart et. al, 78). “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (1498), “Adam and Eve” (1504), “Melancholia I” (1514) are only a few of his masterpieces.

We cannot forget to mention Grünewald Insenheim with his “startling and horrifying altarpiece” (Stewart et. al., 81) in three stages, which exemplifies how “diversely humanity was interpreted during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century” (Stewart et. al., 83).

The standards developed during the Early Renaissance period represent, even today, the blueprint used to interpret, critique, integrate and analyze art.

Works Cited

Stewart, Andrew et. al. *Art of the Western World: Study Guide*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1989.

Wood, Michael, Bruce Cole and Adelheid Gealt. *Art of the Western World: From Ancient Greece to Post-Modernism*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989.