

Middle Ages and Renaissance Sources

Artwork is one way that people can express their thoughts and feelings about the world around them. By studying historical paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and other artwork, art historians can learn a lot about life in the past.



Near the end of the Middle Ages, art started to change. In the early Middle Ages and before, artists mostly focused on painting people and objects related to religion. Paintings also tended to be very flat and simple. Towards the end of the Middle Ages, artists began using more color, shadows, and light in their work. This new style of art was called Gothic art. The painting on the left was created by an Italian painter named Giotto de Bondone. Notice how he used shading and shadows in the clothing to make the women look more realistic. Gothic artists still made art inspired by religion, but they also started to show more human emotion and everyday situations.



Many Gothic artists also painted mythical scenes. “Mythical” means fairy tale or imaginary. The images to the left are two sections of a tapestry, which is artistic cloths woven together. This tapestry told the story of a unicorn hunt. Unicorns were popular in Gothic artwork. Art historians believe that the unicorn stood for innocence.

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After the Middle Ages, came the Renaissance time period. Renaissance sculptors wanted their works to look like real people. They studied the human body and how it moved in order to make their artwork more lifelike. Pictured above (on the left) is a statue of Saint George by the famous Italian sculptor, Donatello. Notice how the statue is standing and holding the shield in a natural way. Donatello included details, like folds in the cape, and metal borders on the armor, to make his statue realistic. Artists became famous for their sculptures of characters from Greek and Roman mythology and the Bible, such as the Virgin Mary with Jesus (middle picture) and David preparing to fight Goliath (right picture).



Renaissance art soon spread from Italy to other European countries, such as France, Germany, and England. Here is a 1592 portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, painted by an artist who was famous for portraiture. Portraiture is the art of painting people. During most of history, only royalty and the very rich were able to afford having their portraits painted. Although, this portrait was given to the Queen as a gift. How impressed would you be if someone painted a Renaissance portrait of you?

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<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/f5/e2/1e/f5e2fec538a70ae55acdb28c61418d85.jpg>

The Middle Ages, also known as the Medieval Period, was an age in history lasting from 460 to 1400. Most artists were not famous for their creations. Instead, they sold their art to make a living. To the left is an illustration of a medieval goldsmith. A goldsmith is someone who created objects such as candlesticks and church decorations using gold. Artists living during the Middle Ages, like this goldsmith, thought of themselves more as skilled craftsmen. Most artists during the Middle Ages were not considered to be innovators, or people who thought of new ideas or used different materials. This goldsmith would have learned his trade from another goldsmith. In time, he would teach another person how to work with gold.



The image above is of a stained-glass window of four saints that was created for a church in France in the 1300's. A lot of medieval artwork was about Catholicism. During this period, the Catholic Church was the only religion in western Europe. As a result, the Catholic Church was very powerful. It controlled religion, politics, education, and art. The Catholic Church was the center of daily life during the Middle Ages. People celebrated births, marriages, and honored the dead with funerals in the church. Much of the art that was created during this period, like these stained glass windows, reflected Catholic teachings. These windows shows an event from each of the saints' lives. Stained glass windows, paintings, objects of gold, and tapestries were all created to decorate the churches and show the power of the Catholic Church.

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Art from the Middle Ages focused on story telling. Artists wanted to make their audience think about their lives, their society, and their religion. Look at the sculpture of Jonah and the whale on the left and the painting of an angel and a saint on the right. These pieces of art tell stories from the Bible. Catholicism was a part of art because most art was created for the church. It helped to tell stories and pass down information because most people at this time were not able to read.



In the early 1500's, a new age of artwork appeared in Florence, Italy. This age was called the Renaissance. "Renaissance" means re-born or revived. In Renaissance artwork, people had more facial expressions and realistic gestures. Objects also appeared close up or far away. This is called perspective, when the image has a 3D appearance. Artists learned to show perspective for the first time during the Renaissance. The top painting is a painting of the city of Florence. The buildings are painted to look near or far. The painting below is a portrait of Queen Tomryis, a famous warrior queen who lived in the 400's. Notice how naturally she holds her dress and spear. During this time, art was created for non-religious people, as well as the church. This meant that there were paintings and sculptures created that were not based on stories from the Bible.