

The Baroque and the Renaissance Eras: Two of the few portals of open thought.

Baroque and Renaissance art were different and similar in many ways. Art, during these specific time periods had been affected by the reformed Christian faith and the upper class. The Renaissance eras were seen as a revival or a rebirth of cultural awareness, religious reawakening and discovery that took place in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly in Italy. This artistic revolution was seen in Spain, the many German areas and other European countries. Theologian Martin Luther brought forth the Protestant Reformation in 1517, igniting religious passion across Europe and the birth of Protestantism. The Church remained a formidable political, social and economic force during the era, and also became the primary patron of the arts. The period blossomed with the artistic, literary and scientific achievements of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo Buonarroti, William Shakespeare, and Galileo Galilei. An emerging middle class began questioning the ideas and assumptions of the past, as the invention of the printing press made literature and other writings widely available. Individual achievement, scientific inquiry and new wealth set the stage for the European Renaissance to rival the triumphs of classical Greece and Rome. This era was unique due to its resurrected interest in ancient Greek and Roman art and design. This era also brought forth the deep interest of the intricacies of the human body, their respective environments, science and philosophy. The Renaissance eras were well influenced by religion, in terms of art and were strongly influenced by the architectural concepts of the ancient Holy Roman Empire. The work that distinguishes the Baroque period is that it is stylistically complex and sometimes even more contradictory than that of the

Renaissance era. The Baroque era that encompassed the years of 1600-1750 was an age of great wealth and abundance, as inspired by the court of Louis XIV of France and driven by the new wealth of the middle classes. The desire to evoke emotional states by appealing to the senses, often in dramatic ways was frequently seen. Some of the qualities most frequently associated with Baroque art are grandeur, sensuous richness, drama, vitality, movement, tension, emotional exuberance, and a tendency to blur distinctions between the various arts. Baroque art, when emerged in around 1600 in Europe had a more milder and realistic approach and in some ways, more emotionally striking than Renaissance art. This art form was connected to the Catholic counter-formation in response to the Protestant reformation, as it was seen as the main promoter of the new, vibrant spirit of the reorganized Catholic Church. Religious fervor reached a climax during this period, as the Protestant-Catholic conflict in Europe erupted in war.

Unlike the Baroque art era, the Renaissance art era was divided into two – The Early renaissance and the later Renaissance. The Early Renaissance was first seen in Florence, Italy, which faced an acute threat of independence from the Duke of Milan, who is trying to bring about all of Italy under his control. The city put up vigorous and successful attempts in military, diplomatic and intellectual fronts. The visual arts were considered an essential element of resurgence of the Florentine spirit. During these times, the outlook of many artists in that area underwent changes. The social status of artists changed as well in these times. The artists were developed into two contrasting personality types – the person of the world and the solitary genius. When compared to the later Renaissance period, the artists felt bound by their belief of universally valid rules

i.e. the numerical ratios of musical harmony and the laws of scientific perspective unlike the situation in the later Renaissance period where they were less concerned with rational order than the visual effectiveness of the artwork.

Many painters in the Renaissance eras have played a great deal in paving smoother roads for Baroque painters. One of these Renaissance artists were Sandro Botticelli. Botticelli was born in Florence, Italy, in 1445. He spent his whole life in Florence except for a visit to Rome. Botticelli was a member of the Medici family. His real name was Alessandro Filipepi. He was nicknamed Botticelli when he went to live with his brother. There he worked as a goldsmith. When Botticelli was 14 or 15 he was sent to the great painter, Fra Filippo. There he learned how to mix colors and clean brushes. Botticelli was greatly influenced by his teacher. By 1465, Botticelli had his own studio. After the age of 56 no paintings were found that were painted by him. Botticelli died alone and infirm. He lived to be about 65 and died around 1510. Botticelli became Florence's favorite artist. His paintings were very popular. He made of lots of money. In fact, he could make 50 -100 florins per picture. Botticelli painted religious paintings for churches. He painted three frescos in the Sistine Chapel in 1484. Botticelli was famous for many paintings. One of these was *The Adoration of the Magi*. Another one was *The Birth of Venus* which was done in 1484. Then he painted *The Judith*. In 1477 he painted *Primavera*. Botticelli was the artist of *Madonna the Magnificent* and the masterly group of the *Virgin Enthroned*. He painted the beautiful *Mars and Venus* as well. Realism was ignored in Botticelli's paintings. He loved to allegorize (has an underlying meaning). He favored the nude. Botticelli used delicate color and poetic lines. Botticelli used strong,

rhythmic and graceful lines as well. When compared to Baroque painter Annibale Carracci, his painting seems to be more focused on the mannerism style of painting, which is a style that rejected the calm balance of the High Renaissance artworks, but instead equally blends emotion and distortion, since this art form symbolically represented the condition of Europe at this time period. Annibale Carracci was an Italian early baroque artist whose use of Mannerist art forms foreshadowed the emergence of high baroque art in Europe. Annibale, born in Bologna on November 3, 1560, was the most important member of an influential family of painters that included his elder brother Agostino and their cousin Lodovico. Some of his famous oil paintings are *The Butcher's Shop* (1583, Christ Church, Oxford, England) and *The Assumption* (1587, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, Germany). Annibale was summoned to Rome in 1595 to decorate the state apartments of the Palazzo Farnese, the city's most splendid new private palace. He began his masterpiece, the magnificent illusionistic ceiling frescoes (painting form in which fresh moist plaster is used to be painted on with pigments dissolved in water) in the Galleria (a gallery) in 1597. Against a painted architectural background representing stucco heroic nudes, bronze plaques, and carved marble decorations are set what appear to be 11 huge easel paintings in ornate frames. They depict, in idealized human form, love scenes of the pagan gods, derived from the Roman poet Ovid's fables.

Sculpting played an important part in the uplifting of the arts in both eras. Two sculptors- Donatello and Bernini stand out within their respective eras. Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, universally known as Donatello, was born in Florence around 1386 and died there in 1466. The powerful expressive nature of his art made him the greatest

sculptor of the early Renaissance. Masterpieces from the first phases of his career include the vigilant marble *Saint George*, made for the guildhall of Orsanmichele (1417, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence); the gilt-bronze *Saint Louis of Toulouse* at the Church of Santa Croce, Florence (1422–25); and his bronze piece of wonder as the *Feast of Herod* and statuettes of angels on the baptismal font in the Baptistery of Siena (1425–29). Two of his characteristic formal contributions are encountered in the work for Siena. The relief is organized by a rigorous application of the rules of perspective that makes each figure emerge clearly and logically, even though the scene was modeled at a shallow depth; this is called *rilievo schiacciato*, or flattened relief. Each of these angels, of which the best known is now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, is arranged in a graceful spiraling pose, known as the *figura serpentinata*, so that the eye is encouraged to move around the figure and take in the whole. Donatello influenced Italian sculptors, notably Michelangelo, well into the sixteenth century. Now Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini on the other hand would arguably be called the greatest sculptor-architect of the 17th century. Although most significant as a sculptor, he was also highly gifted as an architect, painter, draftsman, stage set designer, and playwright. His art is the quintessence of high baroque energy and robustness. He began his career as a student of his father Pietro Bernini (1582-1629), who was a fellow sculptor himself. Later he attracted the patronage of Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, for whom he designed a palace. Barberini was subsequently installed as Pope Urban VIII in 1623 and gradually Bernini got to spend his entire career in Rome where he gained his architectural fame under Alexander VII (1655-67). Bernini was put in charge of building operations at St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, where one of his early works was the canopy [baldachin] over the high altar (1624-33). He also

created, 1657-66, the soaring marble, gilded bronze and stucco Chair of St. Peter [Cathedra Petri] for the Basilica. The canopy of Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, is a masterful feat of engineering, architecture, and sculpture. Bernini laid out a huge oval piazza (a roofed passageway) in front of the cathedral, flanked by colossal colonnades (series of columns placed in regular distances) with double columns on each side. The aim, brilliantly realized, was to embrace pilgrims within the two arms of the great mother church, which lay at the center. Bernini's Cathedra Petri (Chair of Saint Peter, 1657-1666) uses marble, gilt bronze, and stucco in a splendid crescendo of motion, dramatized by the golden oval window in its center that becomes the focal point of the entire structure. Bernini was the first sculptor to realize the dramatic potential of light in sculpture. This is fully realized in his famous masterpiece Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1645-1652, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome), in which the sun's rays, coming from an unseen source, illuminate the saint and the smiling angel. Bernini designed several churches, including the great Sant' Andrea al Quirinale (1658-1670) in Rome. He created the Scala Regia (Royal Staircase, 1663-1666), connecting the papal apartments in the Vatican Palace to Saint Peter's, and the Piazza San Pietro (Saint Peter's Square, designed 1667), the large plaza in front of Saint Peter's Basilica. Bernini's most famous fountain group is in the Fountain of the Four Rivers (1648-1651) in the Piazza Navona in Rome. He was still extremely active in his old age: he produced the Altieri Chapel in San Francesco a Ripa, which is up to his best standards, at the age of 75 - but by then, he had seen styles of design begin to change again. He died in 1680, aged 81.

Music was an essential part of civic, religious, and courtly life in the Renaissance. The rich interchange of ideas in Europe, as well as political, economic, and religious events in the period 1400–1600 led to major changes in styles of composing, methods of disseminating music, new musical genres, and the development of musical instruments. The most important music of the early Renaissance was composed for use by the church—polyphonic (made up of several simultaneous melodies) masses and motets (polyphonic music based on sacred texts) in Latin for important churches and court chapels. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, patronage was split among many areas: the Catholic Church, Protestant churches and courts, wealthy amateurs, and music printing—all were sources of income for composers. The early fifteenth century was dominated initially by English and then Northern European composers. The most important of these composers were Guillaume Du Fay (1397–1474), whose varied musical offerings included motets and masses for church and chapel services, many of whose large musical structures were based on existing Gregorian chants. His many small settings of French poetry display a sweet melodic lyricism unknown until his era. With his command of large-scale musical form, as well as his attention to secular text-setting, Du Fay set the stage for the next generations of Renaissance composers. Although music played a great role in the Renaissance era, it played an even greater role within the Baroque era. Perhaps the most celebrated aspect of the Baroque era was the grandiose style of music first introduced in Italy in the early seventeenth century and popularized by composers such as George Frideric Handel (pictured at left), Johann Sebastian Bach and Antonio Vivaldi. While the church continued to support the musical arts, the Baroque age also produced a proliferation of secular music. In addition, the period brought the

introduction of such vocal forms as opera, oratorio, and cantata, as well as orchestral forms as the sonata, concerto, and overture. As opera, in particular, became widespread in its popularity, the divas, virtuosos, and castrata of the age gained epic adoration from the masses.

On a concluding note, it is necessary to convey that these two eras had a lot to offer to Europe, and in a wider context – to the world. It's glorious reawakening of the ancient architectural concepts of the Greeks and the Romans, the creative use of sound and it's intricacies in making newer musical art forms such as operas and oratorios, unlike many great treasures of history, have been clearly implemented in order to achieve more good than bad. The newer and more creative techniques of painting paved way to newer, brighter and more creative artists in both eras to make further change in techniques and artistic concepts. The sculptors of that time, by using bronze to a good use, have finally scraped the cusp of newer architectural concepts. People such as Donatello, Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Bach have made great changes in their respective fields that people today can see as well. It still continues to this very day.