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## **European Art History: A Primer**

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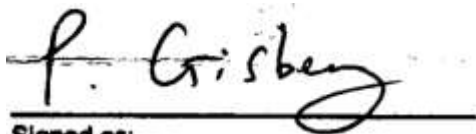
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Signed as:  
Peter Jacob Clare Koben Gisbey

Date: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2017

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### Dedication

To God, my Heavenly Father, for inspiring me to write this scholarly discourse, once again using my modest talents. Thank you and bless you! Amen!!

\*

To Jesus, my Saviour and Lord, for giving me the heart, soul, strength, health and companionship needed along the way. Thank you and bless you! Amen!!

\*

To the Holy Spirit, my Comforter, for being with me always, through good times and bad times, and for reminding me that you love me. Thank you and bless you! Amen!!

\*

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such, there is no law.” – Holy Bible, Galatians 5:22

\*\*

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” – Holy Bible, Philippians

4:6-7

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### Foreword

This work is inspired by my longstanding interest in European Art History. Regarding England, where one was born and raised, visiting the National Portrait Gallery, or indeed the National Galleries, in central London is a wonderful privilege. This is because of the wonderful breadth and depth of artistic excellence on display. Incidentally, the work of Whitehead (2011) is especially useful in terms of its tracing out of how the National Galleries have developed over time. However, there are so many more wonderful paintings and/or sculptures on display elsewhere in Europe. For example, the Mona Lisa, undoubtedly the world's most famous painting, is housed in the Louvre in Paris.

But what of the provenance of such works? And what of the cultures and histories within which such masterpieces were created? Do such considerations matter for an appreciation of such artifacts? If they do, to what extent?

Such questions lie at the heart of this relatively short research paper, which substantively takes the form of an extended literature review, along with relevant critical commentary, feeding through to further discussions and conclusions.

Bless you, my Heavenly Father. Bless you, my brother and Lord Jesus. Bless you, my Holy Spirit. Amen.

- Peter J. C. K. Gisbey MA (Cantab) MSc (Salford) CFA SIAff QTS PGCE FCMI FCIEA  
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\* = *Final thesis already submitted – defence currently pending*

### Synopsis

The aim of this work is to briefly explore and shed light on European Art History between 1400 and 1899 inclusive. For brevity's sake, it restricts itself to a selection of masterly paintings and sculptures over the same period.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the relevant arena. It recognises the breadth, brilliance and depth of the field of art history over the period in question.

Chapter 2 goes into cursory detail regarding a number of the relevant themes and art genres. Amongst a number of luminaries, it pays some attention to the work of Leonardo Da Vinci, Titian, Michelangelo and Vincent Van Gogh.

Chapter 3 develops suitable conclusions, after a brief discussion of the issues felt to be most pertinent, arising from the work done in the preceding chapters. It suggests a connection between European art history over the period in question and contemporary discourses within European societies. It also emphasises the importance of the 'High Renaissance' (1495-1520) period and the Post-Impressionist period (1880-1899).

This work is likely to be relevant to people who are interested in gaining a basic understanding of the key issues involved in making sense of European Art over the period 1400 to 1899 inclusive. It is stressed that the research paper seeks to make preliminary suggestions, rather than to merely provide answers.

*Keywords: European, Art, History, Painting, Sculpture*

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## Chapter 1: Overview

*“I who e're while the happy Garden sung,  
By one mans disobedience lost, now sing  
Recover'd Paradise to all mankind,  
By one mans firm obedience fully tri'd  
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foil'd  
In all his wiles, defeated and repuls't,  
And Eden rais'd in the wast Wilderness.”*

– *Paradise Regained (Book 1), Milton (1992)*

### Introduction

In beginning to cursorily explore modern European Art, between the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century inclusive, and in order to stay within the scope of this research paper primer on the issue, it is useful to begin with a definition of what art is.

As Gombrich (1984) notes: “There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists” (p. 4). Such a definition clearly points to the ambiguity of what can be called art. So a further restriction one wishes to place on this relatively short scholarly piece is that works of art mentioned will relate to only paintings and sculptures generally understood to be masterpieces, whether by trained experts or by the general public or both.

Also with regard to the definition of what art is, Pooke & Newall (2008) points out that: “...all definitions of art are mediated through culture, history and language” (p. 5). As such, in

order to understand European works of art, one needs to also understand the social and cultural origins of the same. And this is the starting point for further exploration in this section, followed by a short exposition of other relevant opening topics.

Why do artists make art? To celebrate God, glorify the state, overthrow governments, make people think, or to win fame and fortune? Or do they make art because, for them, creating is much the same as breathing — they have to do it? (Wilder, 2011)

Artists create for all these reasons and more. Above all, great artists want to express something deeper than ordinary forms of communication — like talking or writing — can convey. They go out of their way to suggest meanings that are beyond the reach of everyday vocabularies. So they invent visual vocabularies for people to interpret. Each person then ‘reads’ this picture language differently. As the relevant literature suggests, this is because: “...artists are contemporary critics or they are nothing and taste is a personal matter” (Evans, 2014).

This difference in the way each person ‘reads’ a piece of art is especially true of art made in the past 500 years or so. By way of contrast, ancient as well as medieval art (art made before 1400) often had a communal purpose and a common language of symbols that was widely understood; often that communal purpose was linked to religion, ritual, or mythology (Wilder, 2011).

Regarding works of art in general, the work of Smith (2006) is especially useful in drawing links between scientific and cultural developments and how these serve to both inform and indeed be informed by the changes in the world of art itself.

### **Social and cultural origins**

In part, the Renaissance (c. 1400 to 1600) was a rebirth of interest in ancient Greek and Roman culture. It was also a period of economic prosperity in Europe—particularly in Italy and in Northern Europe. In art history, both the Italian Renaissance and the Northern Renaissance are typically studied. Art historians talk about a way of looking at the world called Humanism, which—at its most basic—placed renewed value on human knowledge, and the experience of this world (as opposed to focusing largely on the heavenly realm), using ancient Greek and Roman literature and art as a model (Khan, 2017).

There are only a handful of moments in history that most people in the world would generally accept changed everything. The life and death of Jesus is the most important event in world history, and is certainly of these moments. The invention and adoption of the printing press is certainly another of these moments. As a result of the wider availability of books, literacy rates in Europe dramatically increased. Readers were empowered and in many ways one can trace the origin of our own information revolution to 15th-century Germany and Gutenberg's first printing press.

In 1517, a German theologian and monk, Martin Luther, challenged the authority of the Pope and sparked the Protestant Reformation. His ideas spread quickly, thanks in part to the printing press. Dr. Luther challenged the power of the Church, and asserted the authority of individual conscience. It should be noted that at the time it was increasingly possible for people to read the bible in the language that they spoke. The ensuing Reformation laid the foundation for the value that modern culture places on the individual (Khan, 2017).

It is also during this period that the Scientific Revolution began and observation replaced religious doctrine as the source of our understanding of the universe and our place in it.

Copernicus up-ended the ancient Greek model of the heavens by suggesting that the sun was at the center of the solar system and that the planets orbited in circles (considered to be examples of 'ideal geometries' by the Ancient Greeks) around it. However, there were still problems with getting this theory to match observation. At the beginning of the 17th century, however, there was a breakthrough: Kepler correctly theorised that the planets moved in elliptical orbits and that the speed of the orbits varied according to the planets' distance from the sun.

It might seem strange to date the beginning of the "modern era" (c. 1600-1800) to so long ago, but in many ways it was the scientific, political and economic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries that have most shaped our own 21<sup>st</sup> century society.

In the context of the study of interest, it is also instructive to study the Baroque style of the 17th century. This was a time of prolonged and often violent conflict between Catholics and Protestants made all the more complex because of the growing power of Europe's great monarchies. It was also a time when nations grew in size, wealth and autonomy and when national boundaries were hardened, prefiguring the countries we know today (France, Spain and England for example). This was additionally a period of colonisation, when European powers divided and exploited the world's natural resources and people for their own benefit. In this present regard, one only needs to think in particular of the African slave trade, or alternatively the subjugation and forced conversion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

The 1700s is often called the Enlightenment. In many ways, it furthers the interest in the individual seen in the Italian Renaissance and more widely during the Protestant Reformation. Thinkers such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Diderot asserted our ability to reason for ourselves instead of relying on the teachings of established institutions, such as the Church. From an art history perspective, the Rococo and Neoclassical styles are most relevant to this time period.

The American and French Revolutions date to this period. The emerging middle classes (and later the working-classes) began a centuries-long campaign to gain political power, challenging the control of the aristocracy and monarchy. Successive reform movements (in this period and the 19th century) and revolutions gradually extended the franchise (the right to vote). Previously suffrage had been limited to males who owned land or who paid a certain amount in taxes. It was only in the second half of the 19th and the 20th centuries that universal suffrage became the norm in Europe and North America (Khan, 2017).

During the late modern era (1801-1899), capitalism became the dominant economic system during this period, although it had its roots in the Renaissance. Individuals risked capital to produce goods in a currency-based market which depended on inexpensive, paid, labour. Labour eventually organised itself into unions (formerly called guilds) and, in this way, asserted considerable influence over pay and working conditions. More broadly, shared political power was strengthened by overall increases in the standard of living and the gradually rolling out of public education systems.

Steam-powered machines and unskilled labourers in factories began to replace skilled artisans. London, Paris, and New York led the unprecedented population growth of cities during this period, as people moved from the countryside or emigrated to find a higher standard of living (Khan, 2017).

As a further and now synoptic point, regarding historical and cultural contexts, the work of Csikszentmihalyi (2014) and Smith (1992) is especially important in hinting at the close nexus between history, culture, personal identity, national identity and indeed creativity itself.

**Religion, ritual and mythology**

On the one hand, the earliest works of art — prehistoric cave paintings from 30,000 B.C. to 10,000 B.C. were likely to have been a key part of a shamanistic ritual (a priest acting as a medium enters the spirit world during a trance). In many prehistoric cultures, people thought religion and ritual helped them to control their environment (for example, fertility rituals were linked to a god or goddess of crops, and were designed to guarantee a successful harvest) or prepare for an afterlife. Art, and often dance and music as well, frequently had a role in these religious rituals.

On the other hand, during the Roman period (476 B.C.–A.D. 500), religious art was less common than secular art, which is art about man's life on earth. But religious art dominated the Middle Ages (500–1400), lost some ground during the humanistic Renaissance (1400–1520) and Mannerist period (1520–1600), and made a comeback in the Baroque period (1600–1700) during the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants (Wilder, 2011).

**Political and propaganda**

The U.S. Constitution guarantees separation of church and state. But in many earlier civilizations, religion and politics were two sides of the same coin. Egyptian pharaohs, for example, viewed themselves as God's divine representatives on earth. Egyptian art was both religious and political. The notion of the divine right of kings, in which kings were supposedly appointed by God to rule on earth (and which continued up to the French and American revolutions in the late 1700s), is rooted in these ancient Egyptian practices.

In Ancient Greece, Pericles (the leader of Athens at its cultural and political peak) ordered and paid for the building of the Parthenon and other monuments (using money

permanently borrowed from Athens's allies) to memorialize Athenian power and prestige.

“These works will live forever as a testament to our greatness,” he said. Art was meant to glorify the state.

Similarly the Romans erected columns, such as Trajan's Column, and triumphal arches, like the Arch of Constantine, to celebrate Roman victories and assert Roman power.

In the early 19th century, the French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix fired up people to fight for democracy with his painting *Liberty Leading the People* (Wilder, 2011).

### **Patronage**

A lot of art was commissioned by rich and powerful patrons to serve the patrons' purposes. Some of them commissioned religious works showing themselves kneeling beside a saint, perhaps to demonstrate their religious devotion and earn brownie points from God. Others commissioned works to celebrate themselves or their families — for example, Phillip II of Spain paid Spanish painter Diego Velázquez to immortalize Phil's family during the Baroque period.

Some patrons merely wanted to fatten their art collections and enhance their prestige — like Pieter van Ruijven who commissioned works from Johannes Vermeer in 17th-century Holland. Van Ruijven (1624–1674) was one of the richest men in Delt and was Vermeer's primary patron (Wilder, 2011).

### **Personal vision**

No one paid Vincent van Gogh to paint. In fact, he only sold one painting during his lifetime. Van Gogh was the classic starving artist — but he kept painting, driven by a personal vision that his public didn't share or understand.

Many modern artists are also driven by a personal vision, a vision that offers the public a new way of looking at life. Typically, these artists have to struggle to communicate their vision and find an accepting public. Until they find that acceptance, many of them must eat and sleep in Van Gogh's shoes (Wilder, 2011).

### **Design**

Design may be understood as the arrangement of visual elements in a work of art (Wilder, 2011).

### **Pattern**

Pattern is as important in visual art as it is in music or dance. A song is a pattern of notes; a dance is a pattern of movement; and a painting is a pattern of colors, lines, shapes, lights, and shadows. Patterns give consistency and unity to works of art.

Mixing a pretty floral pattern with a checkerboard design would be as inconsistent as pasting two types of wallpaper together. The key to pattern is consistency. That said, an artist may choose to intermingle several patterns to create contrast (Wilder, 2011).

Sometimes patterns in art are as easy to recognize as the designs in wallpaper — but more often, the patterns are complex, like musical motifs in a Beethoven symphony or the intricate design in a Persian carpet or a rose window.

Patterns may also be subtle, like the distribution of colors in Jacopo Pontormo's *The Entombment* (Wilder, 2011).



**Rhythm**

Visual art also has rhythm, like music. Although you can't tap your feet to it, a visual beat does make your eyes dance from hot color to cool color, from light to shadow, or from a wide wavy line to a straight one. Without varied visual rhythms, the artwork would be static (or monotone, like wallpaper with the same visual rhythm repeated over and over), and your eyes would lock on one thing or fail to notice anything at all. (Wilder, 2011)

**Balance**

Each part of a painting or relief has visual weight. The artist carefully distributes this weight to balance the work of art.

Usually, the more symmetrical and balanced a work of art (sometimes to the point of stiffness), the more likely it is that the piece of art depicts something godlike, important, or ideal, as in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (Wilder, 2011).

**Contrast**

The stiffness that balance can bring with it can be balance's biggest problem. One of the roles of contrast is therefore to help modify the impact of balance in the impression a work of art makes on viewers. Contrast has other roles in art beyond disrupting and preserving balance. It creates interest and excitement (Wilder, 2011).

**Emphasis**

Emphasis — something that stands out from the rest of the artwork — is important, too. Artists can achieve emphasis with striking colors, contrast, or placement of a figure. Emphasis

draws the viewer's attention to what's unique and most important — to the treasure in the artwork.

Sometimes artists achieve emphasis by sticking something odd or striking in the middle of a painting (Wilder, 2011).

### **Composition**

This concerns, inter alia, horizontals and verticals, harmony and balance, curves and diagonals, colour, asymmetry, seemingly random composition and collage (Brown, 2017).

### **Space**

This concerns, inter alia, linear perspective, geometrical space, imaginative space and illusionism, aerial perspective, spatial distortion, multiple viewpoint perspective and possibly spatial disorientation as well (Schmidt, 2017).

### **Form**

This concerns, inter alia, sculptural form in the human figure, form achieved by chiaroscuro and sfumato, form made tangible, the disintegration and rebuilding of form, form created with colour, the closing of the gap between painting and sculpture in the twentieth century (Whitehead, 2017).

**Tone**

This concerns, inter alia, the use of tone for imaginative expression, the creation of drama, the expression of emotion, the realisation of form and space, the creation of atmosphere and reconstruction of form (Mannathoko & Mamvuto, 2017).

**Colour**

This concerns, inter alia, primary and complementary contrast and the afterimage, the vocabulary of colour, using the vocabulary of colour, the use of colour to express emotion, the power of colour to express emotion without a figurative subject and the effect of colour and scale, colour and the expression of texture, the use of coloured light for expression (Matthen, 2017).

**Subject-matter**

This concerns, inter alia, religious subjects, historical subjects, scenes of everyday life with a moral, subject matter and image making: clarity and ambiguity in communicating a message, the idea of ambiguity in a visual image, subject matter and the idea of abstraction, poetical subjects and the idea of painting as poetry (Brown, 2017).

**Drawing and its purposes**

This concerns, inter alia, drawing used to try out ideas, drawing and sculptural expression, landscape drawings and watercolours, line drawing, individual drawing techniques in the twentieth century (Wilson, 2017).

### **Looking at print**

This concerns, inter alia, the exploitation of detail: line engraving, woodcut and wood engraving, the etching: the creation of mystery and ambivalence by means of tone, the development of a print from its original drawing: etching and aquatint, lithography, the coloured lithograph and the silk screen print (Prince, 2017).

### **Application of art creation ideas**

Ideas and issues such as those outlined earlier in this section can be used to shed light on all works of art, not just those concerning the period in question.

Regarding 'The Mona Lisa' (see Fig. 1 below), the composition of the painting in particular is of course famously beguiling and mysterious, yet technically remarkable. It creates an instantly memorable and profound panoramic context for the beautiful woman in question to gaze somewhat quizzically, yet knowingly, at the viewer. The viewer in turn gazes back, both known and knowing. The literature has of course much to say concerning the mathematical and scientific precepts of this most extraordinary work of art (for example, Atalay, 2011; Sassoon & Da Vinci, 2001).

Regarding 'The Last Supper' (see Fig. 2 below), the space aspects of the painting in particular are of course especially outstanding with regard to linear perspective and multiple viewpoint perspective. Indeed, there is a sense of dreaminess and illusionism about the painting, very much in keeping with the dramatic nature of the event and luminous personage of Jesus Himself. As with the 'Mona Lisa', Jesus' expression is somewhat enigmatic.

Regarding 'Bacchus and Ariadne' (see Fig. 3 below), the tone aspects of the painting in particular are rather striking. They are used to achieve a wonderful sense of drama and sublime

expression of emotion. One is particularly aware, from the way in which Bacchus and Ariadne look at one another, that there is an intimate connection between them, seemingly of the moment, but actually of eternity past and eternity future.



Figure 1: Mona Lisa (c. 1503-1519) – Leonardo Da Vinci

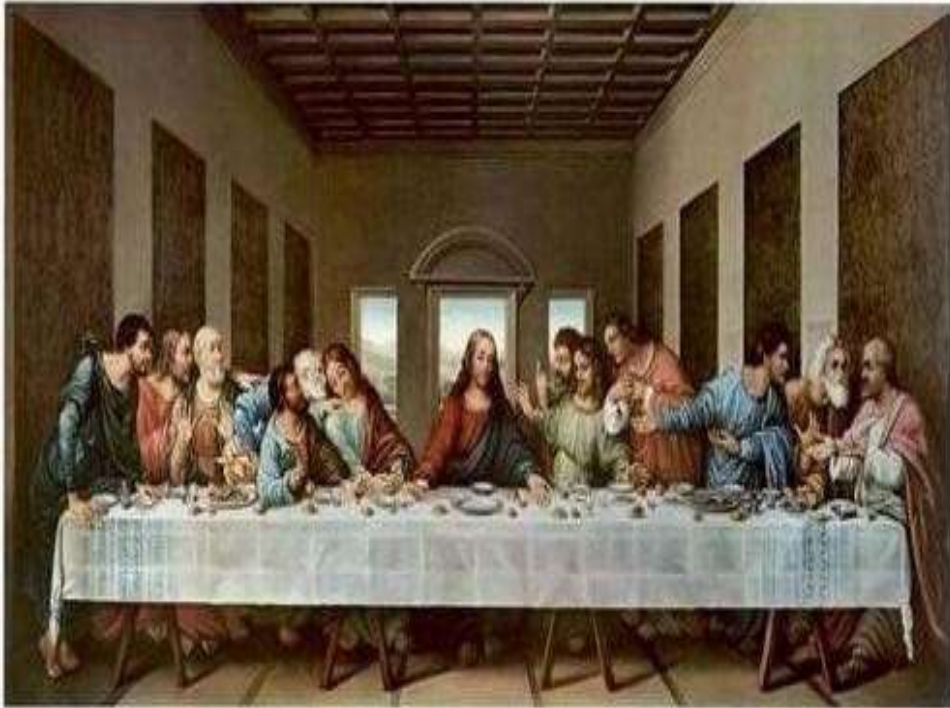


Figure 2: Last Supper (c. 1520) – Leonardo Da Vinci



Figure 3: Bacchus and Ariadne (c. 1522-1523) – Titian

**Conclusion.**

We have seen in this introductory section something of the breadth, brilliance and depth of the field of art history, with a particular focus on modern European history between 1400 and 1899 inclusive. For one thing, the work of Leonardo Da Vinci stands out as very, very, special and admirable. For another thing, the work of Titian was also seen to be exquisitely masterful, as with that of Leonardo Da Vinci, but rather different at the same time, in so many ways.

The next chapter further expands on the themes/art styles that are at the centre of this work.

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

**Brief overview of position of work.** To briefly recapitulate, one of the two key foci of this work concerns understanding more deeply the environment which gave rise to masterly European art over the period 1400 to 1900. The other of the two key foci concerns critically reviewing a selection of paintings and sculptures in light of the relevant technical and other issues.

**Related themes.** In no particular order, the themes relevant to this work, and commented upon in suitable detail later on in the chapter, are as follows:

- (i) Modern Classicism (c. 1400-1799);
- (ii) Renaissance period (c. 1400-1600);
- (iii) Baroque period (c. 1600-1750);
- (iv) Rococo period (c. 1700-1789);
- (v) Neoclassicism (c. 1750-1789);
- (vi) Romanticism (c. 1780-1850);
- (vii) Realism (c. 1840-1890s);
- (viii) Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (c. 1848–1890s);
- (ix) Arts and Crafts movement (c. 1850s–1930s);



- (x) Impressionism (c. 1850-1880s) ;
- (xi) Neo-Impressionism (c. 1880-1890s).

### **Exploration of relevant themes**

#### **Modern Classicism.**

Although it varies from genre to genre, classical art is renowned for its harmony, balance and sense of proportion (see Fig. 4 below). In its painting and sculpture, it employs idealized figures and shapes, and treats its subjects in a non-anecdotal and emotionally neutral manner. Colour is always subordinated to line and composition. It is typically understated - handling is impersonal to the point of anonymity - and it seeks to achieve a harmonious and contemplative effect. Classical architecture is closely regulated by mathematical proportions. Greek designers, for instance, used exact mathematical calculations to fix the height, width and other characteristics of architectural elements. Moreover, these proportions would be altered slightly - certain elements (columns, capitals, base platform), would be tapered for example - to create the optimum visual effect, rather as if the building was a piece of sculpture. The greatest exponents of classicism include Raphael, Jacques-Louis David and J.A.D. Ingres, for painting, and Michelangelo and Antonio Canova, for sculpture (Visual Arts, 2017).



Figure 4: The Pieta (c. 1498-1499) – Michelangelo

### **Renaissance period.**

Renaissance means “rebirth.” In the Renaissance period, artists returned to classical models in painting and sculpture (see Figs. 5-6 below). Christian religious art still dominated the market, but the stories and images in the art tended to celebrate man and things of this world. The rising value of the individual led to many portrait commissions, a genre (class of art) that had become all but extinct in medieval art. With such a here-and-now focus, realism became as important as symbolism. To make paintings and sculptural reliefs look three-dimensional (like

windows opening onto the real world), Renaissance artists worked out the mathematical laws of perspective (Wilder, 2011).

The Renaissance period immediately followed the period in Europe known as the Medieval period (500-1400). The Renaissance began in Italy during the 14th century and reached its height in the 15th. In the 16th and 17th centuries it spread to the rest of Europe (Britannica, 2017).

Not surprisingly, Italy - heart of the Roman Empire, and host to many Greek colonies with their traditions of Hellenistic art - witnessed the greatest of all classical revivals in Europe, a process which first took hold in Florence during the early quattrocento (15th century). Known as the Italian Renaissance - or perhaps more accurately as the Florentine Renaissance - it was led initially by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), the art theorist Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), the sculptor Donatello (1386–1466) and the painter Masaccio (1401–1428).

Brunelleschi was particularly interested in the mathematical proportions of ancient Roman buildings, which he revered. Alberti, who thought classicism was synonymous with beauty, was famous for his treatises *De Statua* and *Della Pittura* (1435) and *De Re Aedificatoria* (1452), and sought to make the principles of perspective accessible to a wide circle of artists who wanted to learn this new technique. Donatello used the same principles to imitate Greek statues, while Masaccio included classical elements in the content of his paintings, including his own technique of perspective.

Classicism continued to dominate Renaissance art in Rome - known as the High Renaissance - epitomized by the classically proportioned *Sistine Madonna* (1513-14) by Raphael (1483–1520); and *The Vitruvian Man* (1492), a study by Leonardo da Vinci of the

proportions of the (male) human body as described by the Roman architect Vitruvius (c.78-10 BCE).

Renaissance art in Venice was also greatly influenced by classical antiquity, due to the city's close links with Constantinople (Byzantium), the former seat of the Eastern Roman Emperors, and still a centre of ancient Greek culture. Byzantine-style mosaic art was a particular speciality. Venetian Renaissance architecture was also inspired by classical examples - see, in particular, the classicist architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80), whose designs were based on the values of classical architecture, as outlined by Vitruvius and others.

The classical founding principles of the Italian Renaissance spread westwards into France and Spain, and northwards into Germany and the Low Countries. And with the appearance of relatively cheap printed books, the study of classical literature became more widespread until, by the late 16th century it was the norm in most university curricula (Visual Arts, 2017).



Figure 5: The Birth of Venus (c. 1482-1485) – Botticelli

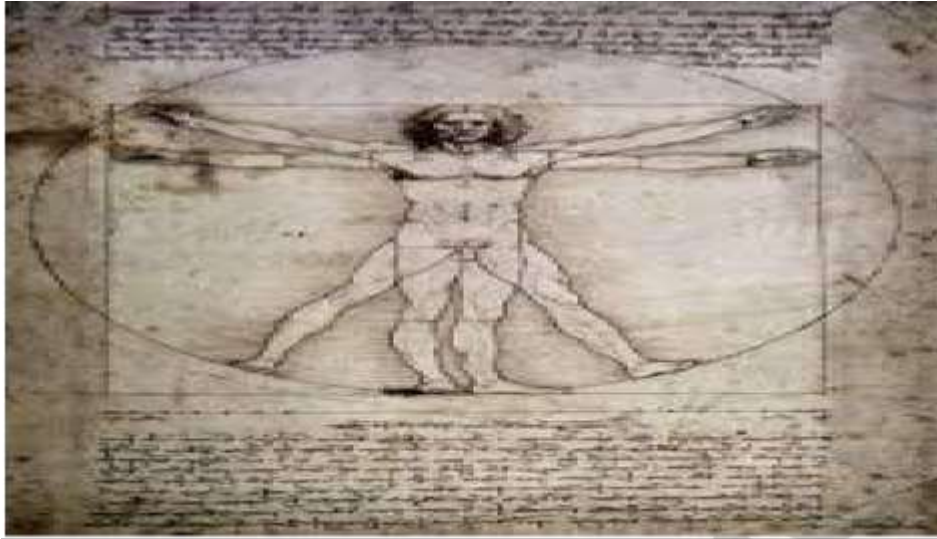


Figure 6: Vitruvian Man (c. 1490) – Leonardo Da Vinci

Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael defined the movement known as the High Renaissance (1495–1520), even though their artwork sometimes looks very different from each other's (see Figs. 7-11 below). All three strove for perfection and often found it in stable, geometrically shaped compositions.

The High Renaissance ideal is “high” because these three artists portrayed idealized subjects, even if the subject was a restless and youthful warrior like Michelangelo's immortal David. An aura of beauty and calm is the hallmark of High Renaissance art (Wilder, 2011).



Figure 7: David (c. 1501-1504) – Michelangelo



Figure 8: The Sleeping Venus (1510) – Giorgione



Figure 9: Sacred and Profane Love (c. 1514) – Titian



Figure 10: Flora (1515) – Titian



Figure 11: Moses (1515) – Titian

After mastering nature, with the technically brilliant classicism of the ‘High Renaissance’, artists began to intentionally distort it. Mannerist artists, exponents of Mannerism (1530–1580), elongated human figures, created contorted postures, and distorted landscapes, which were often charged with symbolism and erotic or spiritual energy (see Fig. 12 below). Art was no longer a window into an idealized version of the real world, but a window into the fruitful and fanciful imaginations of artists (Wilder, 2011).





Figure 12: Perseus With The Head Of Medusa (1554) – Cellini

### **Baroque period.**

Baroque artists traded the geometrical composure of the Renaissance for drama that involved the viewer (see Figs. 13-15 below).

Baroque developed during the Counter-Reformation (the 16th-century Catholic Church reform effort) and became a propaganda weapon in the religious wars between Catholicism and Protestantism in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The Catholic Church wanted art to have a direct and powerful emotional appeal that would grab the attention of ordinary people and bind them to the Catholic faith. Baroque cathedrals stuffed with dramatic sculptures and paintings filled the bill (Wilder, 2011).

In Protestant lands, Baroque artists went out of their way to downplay the importance of saints, preferring more symbolic subjects for moral painting like landscapes charged with

meaning, genre scenes (pictures of everyday events that read like fables), and paintings of fruit that suggest the temporariness of life on earth. Kings and princes also enlisted Baroque artists to celebrate their wealth and power (Wilder, 2011).

Regarding baroque art, the visual arts produced during the era in the history of Western art that roughly coincides with the 17th century. The earliest manifestations, which occurred in Italy, date from the latter decades of the 16th century, while in some regions, notably Germany and colonial South America, certain culminating achievements of Baroque did not occur until the 18th century.

The work that distinguishes the Baroque period is stylistically complex, even contradictory. In general, however, the desire to evoke emotional states by appealing to the senses, often in dramatic ways, underlies its manifestations. Some of the qualities most frequently associated with the Baroque are grandeur, sensuous richness, drama, vitality, movement, tension, emotional exuberance, and a tendency to blur distinctions between the various arts (Britannica, 2017).

The Baroque style is characterized by exaggerated motion and clear detail used to produce drama, exuberance, and grandeur in sculpture, painting, architecture, literature, dance, and music.

The chiaroscuro technique refers to the interplay between light and dark that was often used in Baroque paintings of dimly lit scenes to produce a very high-contrast, dramatic atmosphere.

Famous painters of the Baroque era include Rubens, Caravaggio, and Rembrandt. In music, the Baroque style makes up a large part of the classical canon, such as Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi (Boundless, 2017).

The harmony and balanced proportions of classicist Renaissance art eventually proved insufficient for the creative impulses of the early 17th century, and it was replaced by Baroque art, a far more complex and dramatic idiom, whose greatest masters included Caravaggio (1573-1610) and Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709). But one or two strands of classicism remained. Such strands are generally referred to as Baroque Classicism (1600-1700)

Annibale Carracci and his Bolognese School, for example, was especially influential - as too were Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Lorraine(1600-82). Indeed, it was during the late 17th century that the Classical traditions were made a permanent feature of Western art, through the opening of a series of official "academies", with curricula designed to educate students in the classical principles promoted by the Italian Renaissance (Visual Arts, 2017).



Figure 13: Apollo and Daphne (c. 1622-1625) – Bernini



Figure 14: Ecstasy of Saint Theresa (c. 1647-1652) – Bernini



Figure 15: Girl With A Pearl Earring (c. 1665-1667) – Vermeer

**Rococo period.**

During the early/mid 18th century, Baroque art gave way to the decadent, whimsical art style known as Rococo (see Fig. 16 below). Essentially, Rococo art dropped the drama of Baroque art while taking its ornamental side to extremes.

Rococo is therefore Baroque art on a binge. This was an art favored by kings, princes, and prelates who had too much money to spend. Indeed, the ornamental quality of Rococo painting, relief, sculpture, and architecture is often more important than the subject matter. (Wilder, 2011).



Figure 16: L'Embarquement\_pour\_Cythere (1717) – Antoine Watteau

**Neoclassicism.**

Around 1780, the frivolous style of Rococo gave way to the next great revival of classical art, known as Neoclassicism (c.1780-1850). Neoclassicism (neo means “new”) is yet another return to Greco-Roman classicism. It is a dignified art that depicts men and women of the period as if they were Greek gods and heroes (see Fig. 17 below). Their poses and often grandiose gestures are larger than life (Wilder, 2011).

Championed by the scholar Johann Winckelmann (1717-68), this new style is exemplified by the neoclassical painting of Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825); the pictures of his follower J.A.D. Ingres (1780-1867); the neoclassical sculpture of Antonio Canova (1757-1822); and the architecture of designers like Jacques Soufflot (1713-80), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and others (Visual Arts, 2017).



Figure 17: The Bronze Horseman (1782) – Falconet

**Romanticism.**

Romantic artists shunned the Industrial Revolution, attacked the excesses of kings, and championed the rights of the individual (see Fig. 18 below). Some took refuge in nature; others sought an invigorating mixture of fear and awe in sublime landscapes and seascapes (see Fig. 19 below). Imagination with a capital I and Nature with a capital N were the wellsprings of their unbridled creativity (Wilder, 2011).

Romanticism was a European art movement which placed a premium on imagination and aesthetics, rather than reason and conventional order. It was a broad movement encompassing many different styles of art, across most of the painting genres. If there was any unifying factor, it was an attitude of mind that valued "individual experience" in an increasingly mechanized, ordered and rational world. Drawing was used to convey emotion, and colour assumed a major role. Oil paintings had a tactile quality from vigorous brushwork and impasto layering (Visual Arts, 2017).



Figure 18: The Hay Wain (1821) – Constable



Figure 19: The Fighting Temeraire (1838) – Turner

### **Realism.**

Realists reasserted the integrity of the physical world by stripping it of what they viewed as Romantic dreaminess or fuzziness (see Figs. 20 and 21 below). They painted life with a rugged honesty — or at least they claimed to (Wilder, 2011).





Figure 20: The Desperate Man (c. 1844-1845) – Courbet



Figure 21: The Kiss (1889) – Rodin

### **Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.**

In the mid-19th century, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in England created an art designed to counter the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution: gritty cities, poverty, and so on. They rejected the materialistic society fed by the Industrial Revolution and backedpedaled to

the mysticism of the Middle Ages, often depicting Arthurian romances and other medieval legends in their paintings and stained-glass windows (see Fig. 22 below).



Figure 22: Ophelia (1889) – Waterhouse

### **Arts and Crafts Movement.**

The Arts and Crafts movement, founded by William Morris, one of the Pre-Raphaelites, preferred the hands-on medieval workshop to the sweatshops of capitalism (see Fig. 23 below). They favored handmade furniture and decorative arts produced in small workshops and artist colonies (Wilder, 2011).



Figure 23: Season Ticket Detail (1889) – Arts and Crafts Movement

### **Impressionism.**

The Impressionists painted slices of everyday life in natural light: people on a picnic, a walk in the park, an outdoor summer dance. But Impressionist art doesn't freeze life the way a classical painting does (see Fig. 24 below). Instead, by capturing the subtle changes of atmosphere and shifting light, Impressionist paintings convey the fleeting quality of life. (Wilder, 2011)

Impressionism is generally understood as a distinctly French 19th century art movement which marked a momentous break from tradition in European painting. The Impressionists incorporated new scientific research into the physics of colour to achieve a more exact representation of colour and tone.

The sudden change in the look of these paintings was brought about by a change in methodology: applying paint in small touches of pure colour rather than broader strokes, and painting out of doors to catch a particular fleeting impression of colour and light. The result was to emphasise the artist's perception of the subject matter as much as the subject itself.

Impressionist art is a style in which the artist captures the image of an object as someone would see it if they just caught a glimpse of it. They paint the pictures with a lot of color and most of their pictures are outdoor scenes. Their pictures are very bright and vibrant. The artists like to capture their images without detail but with bold colors. Some of the greatest impressionist artists were Edouard Manet, Camille Pissaro, Edgar Degas, Alfred Sisley, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot and Pierre Auguste Renoir.

Manet influenced the development of impressionism. He painted everyday objects. Pissaro and Sisley painted the French countryside and river scenes. Degas enjoyed painting ballet dancers and horse races. Morisot painted women doing everyday things. Renoir loved to show

the effect of sunlight on flowers and figures. Monet was interested in subtle changes in the atmosphere.

While the term Impressionist covers much of the art of this time, there were smaller movements within it, such as Pointillism, Art Nouveau and Fauvism.

Pointillism was developed from Impressionism and involved the use of many small dots of colour to give a painting a greater sense of vibrancy when seen from a distance (see Fig. 25). The equal size dots never quite merge in the viewer's perception resulting in a shimmering effect like one experiences on a hot and sunny day. One of the leading exponents was Seurat to whom the term was first applied in regard to his 1886 painting 'La Grand Jette' (Art Movements, 2017).



Figure 24: The Starry Night (1889) – Vincent Van Gogh



Figure 25: Bathers at Asnières (1884) – Georges Seurat

### Neo-Impressionism.

Post-Impressionism (or Neo-Impression, as it is sometimes termed) is not a movement, per se, but a classification of a group of diverse artists like Vincent van Gogh and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec who painted in the wake of Impressionism (Wilder, 2011). Fig. 26 below is a particularly excellent, indeed seminal, example of this particular art genre.

Seurat was part of the Neo-Impressionist movement which included Camille Pissarro, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Paul Signac. The word Divisionism describes the theory they followed while the actual process was known as pointillism. The effects of this technique, if used well, were often far more striking than the conventional approach of mixing colours together. (Art Movements, 2017)



Figure 26: The Evening Air (1894) – Henri-Edmond Cross

### Chapter 3: Further Discussions and Conclusions

#### Introduction.

It should be clear or indeed clearer to the reader from the preceding chapters that European art history is both grand and expansive on the one hand, yet readily discernible into distinct themes, issues and art genres on the other hand.

In particular, the ever-broadening swing of the pendulum from formal modes of artistic expression, especially driven by the state and religion, to more person-conscious modes of artistic expression, particularly driven by the Enlightenment and nascent forces of capitalism, is readily evident.

#### Further Development.

It is quite striking how so much of European art history over the period in question is especially indebted to Christendom (especially pertaining to the Papacy) and to ancient Greco-Roman thinking.

This is particularly so with regard to the period known as the 'High Renaissance'. However, it is also quite apparent by the end of the 1890's, with the advent of Post-Impressionism that such certainties and modes of thinking were waning greatly in terms of their importance and indeed vitality vis-à-vis creative expressionism.

**Conclusions.**

In both explicating, and expanding upon, the essential points of this research paper, the first conclusion that one wishes to make is that European art history over the period in question provides a wonderful context for exploring contemporary discourses within European societies.

One only needs to think of the impact the meltdown of the Greek economy during the height of the credit crunch in 2008-9 (Lapavitsas, 2012), coupled with the ongoing uncertainty stemming from the recent Brexit vote in the UK (Turner & Stedman, 2017).

From these pivotal events in very recent European history, one can see how a better understanding of European art history may serve to shed light on factors that served to encourage greater fraternity between European nations in years gone by, or at the very least, led to rivalry but in the context of commonality.

Such was of course the case when forces of religion had the upper hand on social discourses or, if they did not, the countries in question, such as France post-1789, were in hock to the wonders of capitalism, within an internationalist context, as opposed to a protectionist context.

*One only needs to witness the current, increasingly disturbing, situation of the UK post-Brexit in this regard as an example of a country clearly at a turning point of some sort in its history on this issue (Khalili, 2017).*

The second conclusion to make is that arguably the two high points of European art history over the period in question are the 'High Renaissance' period and the 'Post-Impressionist' period.

On the one hand, one would suggest that this is so because of the sheer technical and/or geometric brilliance, combined with wondrous tone and expression of emotion achieved with masterpieces such as Da Vinci's 'The Mona Lisa' and Titian's 'Bacchus and Ariadne'.

On the other hand, one would suggest that this is additionally the case because of the extremely personal yet assured modes of creative thinking and execution so palpable in masterpieces such as Van Gogh's 'The Starry Night' and Cross's 'The Evening Air'.

Both of these works of art suggest a turning point in creative expressionism vis-à-vis European art, a twilight of sorts if one will.

*Crucially, in such works, one sees the beckoning of a new era in the world of European art, and the coming of the profoundly turbulent and technologically sophisticated 20<sup>th</sup> century (Stone, 1999).*

*"Thus they the Son of God our Saviour meek  
Sung Victor, and, from Heavenly Feast refresh't  
Brought on his way with joy; hee unobserv'd  
Home to his Mother's house private return'd."*

– *Paradise Regained (Book 4), Milton (1992)*



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