National Gallery of Ireland - The Renaissance

What is the Renaissance?

- The word renaissance means 'rebirth'. It means the return of something that went before
 and refers to a renewal of interest in Ancient Greece and Rome the classical 'Golden Age'
- It describes an important period in art history which spanned over 2 centuries
- Between the late 1300s and 1600 AD Europe witnessed an astonishing revival of drawing, fine art painting, sculpture and architecture centred on Italy
- It is divided into distinctive periods: Early Renaissance, High Renaissance & Mannerism
- The Northern Renaissance refers to artistic developments in the same time period in Belgium, Holland & Germany

Features of the Renaissance:

 Patronage and prosperity; Humanism; Political function of art; Experimentation with new techniques; Perspective; Naturalism; Mythological subjects and stories; Intellectual focus away from church doctrine; Practice of multiple disciplines of art; Rise in Portraiture

The Early Renaissance (c.1350-c.1470)

A period of change and experimentation. New techniques such as linear perspective were explored, scholars became increasingly interested in the classical tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome, and the growth of humanism meant that there was an increasing awareness of man's intellectual potential.

Giotto (1267-1337) Borderline artist between Medieval Gothic & early Renaissance

One of the first artists to struggle with perspective and endeavour to create naturalistic works.

He went beyond the traditional flatness of Byzantine / Gothic art, moving away from the iconographic style. Attempted to create depth in his composition & solid heavy figures that displayed emotion.

Key work: the Arena chapel in Padua

Masaccio (1401-1429) Regarded as the founder of Renaissance painting. Took up where Giotto left off. Applied mathematical architectural rules of perspective to create scientifically correct three dimensional space. Uses a specific and even light source (where light comes from one direction and casts shadows in a consistent manner).

Key work: The Tribute Money Branacci Chapel c.1425

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Uccello (1397-1475) Influenced by Masaccio & Alberti. Obsessed with perspective. Known for colourful dramatic figures in geometrically constructed space.

Key works: Madonna & Child c. 1435 The Battle of San Romano c. 1456

Piero della Francesca (1415-1492) Painter, mathematician & theorist. Drama and emotion are portrayed in calm way and show more restraint. Balance and clarity are of utmost importance. Shows great knowledge of antiquity - seen in the architectural features in the works. Applied rules of geometry to compositions.

Key work: The Baptism of Christ c. 1412

Donatello (1386-1466) Sculptor. Combined realism with emotion & narrative. Worked in shallow-relief as well as stone, wood & bronze.

Key work: David c.1435 was one of the first nude statues of the Renaissance

Other Early Renaissance artists:

Ghiberti (1378-1455) – Sculptor, best known for the doors of the Baptistry in Florence

Alberti (1404-72) – Architect & Theorist, wrote highly influential books on artistic practice

Brunelleschi (1377-1446) – Architect, best known for dome of Florence Cathedral

The Northern Renaissance

After 1500 Renaissance ideas and influence spread around Europe, but Late Gothic influences remained present until the Baroque period. As Renaissance art techniques moved to northern Europe, they changed and were adapted to local circumstances.

- Less concerned with classical influences
- Influenced by Protestant Reformation, rise of humanism, secular institutions and development of printing press
- Wider subject matter including portraiture & still life less focused on religious topics

Jan van Eyck (c.1395-1441) Early Renaissance painter. Innovative development of oil painting. Brought realism to portraiture & religious subjects.

Key works: Altarpiece at Ghent Cathderal 1432 Arnolfini Portrait 1434

Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) early pioneer of many fine arts media, including drawing, painting, engraving, and other forms of printmaking.

Key works: Four Riders of the Apocalypse (Apocalypse series) 1498 Young Hare 1508

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High Renaissance (c.1470-c.1530)

Marks the culmination of all the explorations of the Early Renaissance. Hugely ambitious and technically brilliant art works were created in this relatively short period. Focus moves from Florence to Rome.

Key Words:

Unity, clarity, simplicity, harmony, sobriety, restraint, calm, idealism, order, and balance.

Common Features in High Renaissance Art

- Calm expressions and sober gestures
- Figures grouped in harmonious relationships
- Ideal nature often used to express the divine
- Pyramidal rather than triangular compositions
- Technical brilliance

- Carefully balanced compositions
- Richness of colour
- Idealised landscape backgrounds
- Soft modelling and light
- Timeless dress

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Painter, scientist, engineer, inventor. Small number of surviving paintings, many sketchbooks.

- · detailed knowledge of anatomy, light, botany and geology
- innovative techniques used in laying on the paint & subtle gradation of tone sfumato
- depiction of emotion in expression and gesture
- innovative use of the human form in figurative composition

Key works: The Last Supper c.1498 Mona Lisa c.1505 Virgin of the Rocks 1486 & 1508

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Painter, sculptor, architect. Contrast with da Vinci – many surviving sculptures & frescos.

- integration of classical forms and deeply religious themes
- believed job of sculptor was to free the forms inside the stone
- expressive use of the idealized human form influenced contemporaries & future generations
- promoted the idea that sculptor & painting should have the same status as architecture
- his key patrons were the Medici family & Pope Julius II

Key works: Pietà 1499, David 1501-2, The Sistine Chapel Ceiling 1508-1512

His late works, especially Rondanini Pieta 1564 are in a Mannerist style

Raphael (1483-1520)

Painter, architect. Huge output of work considering he didn't live as long as his contemporaries.

Best known for his portraits and many commissions for the Vatican – including large frescoes.

His images are known for their serene and harmonious qualities.

Key Work: The School of Athens, 1509

Titian (c.1490–1576)

Painter. Generally regarded as the leading artist in Venice (also known as the Venetian school of

painters) In Venice, the use of colour was deemed more important than line in creating images

and this led to a different style of art. Titian's early works are known as High Renaissance -

characterized by a luminosity of colour. His later style can be classed as Mannerist.

Key Works: Venus of Urbino 1538 Ecce Homo c.1558

Mannerism (c.1530-1600)

Characterised by a move away from the rational order and harmony of High Renaissance art. It

features more decorative, complex and difficult forms. Mannerist art works often wilfully break

the laws of perspective and distort the human figure. Notable for emphasising artificiality over

naturalism. Key features include elongated proportions, affected poses, and unclear perspective.

Key artists: Parmagianino (1503-1540)

Tintoretto (1518-1594)

Try out these sample exam questions from recent Leaving Cert papers:

'The Tribute Money' by Masaccio (1401-1428) is illustrated on the accompanying sheet.

Answer (a) and (b). Use sketches to illustrate your answer.

(a) Describe and discuss this work using the following headings:

• subject matter • composition and perspective • medium

(b) Name another work by Masaccio or a work by another Early Renaissance artist of

your choice.

Name, describe and discuss the sculpture [Michelangelo's Pieta] which is illustrated on

the accompanying sheet, making reference to the artist, subject matter, composition,

depiction of space and treatment of the human figure and Name and briefly discuss one

other work by this artist. Use sketches to illustrate your answer.

Useful websites: http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/renaissance-art.htm & http://www.wga.hu/

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