

An Analysis of the Multiple Meanings of Art during the Renaissance

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Abstract. During the Renaissance, the revival of ancient Roman culture was of great practical significance. The Renaissance was a cultural movement that emphasized humanism, the revival of classical culture, and artistic innovation, seeking to transcend the Dark Ages of the Middle Ages and restore the glory of ancient culture and art. By re-learning and borrowing from ancient Roman culture, Renaissance artists attempted to re-explore the natural, religious, political, and social issues of mankind through the aesthetic expression and social function of art. This paper analyses the practical significance of reviving ancient Roman culture through the study of the background of the Renaissance era. Taking Leonardo da Vinci's work "Mona Lisa" as an example, starting from the painting technique of "Mona Lisa", explores the artist's understanding and expression of art, as well as the meaning behind the artwork. The purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic expression as well as the social function of "art" during the Renaissance, using "art" as a clue. And finally, conclude that Renaissance art had a profound influence on the development of later generations and became an important milestone in the history of Western art.

Keywords: Renaissance; Art; Mona Lisa.

1. Introduction

The Renaissance was a major cultural movement in European history that influenced the fields of art, literature, science, and thought. Renaissance artists pursued the perfection of technique and expression of creativity. They advocated realistic observation and accurate depiction of the natural world, emphasizing perspective, light and shadow, and realistic figures. Art forms such as painting, sculpture, and architecture enjoyed unprecedented development and prosperity during this period. At the same time, the Renaissance movement emphasized the rediscovery and study of ancient Greek and Roman culture [1]. Classical culture was considered the noblest form of human expression, and artists sought to recreate classical elegance and refined taste, using ancient sculpture and literature as models [2]. Renaissance art sought to reveal the nature and emotions of human beings and emphasized their dignity and worth. Humanist ideas influenced the artistic creations of the time, depicting people's lives, thoughts, and emotions [3]. In addition, during the Renaissance, many works of art were sponsored by the church or noble courts. These patrons wanted to demonstrate their power, status, and support of culture through art. As a result, paintings and sculptures with religious themes were prevalent during this period. There was a close connection between Renaissance artists and scientists.

Currently, in the field of Renaissance studies, Chinese scholar Liu Deqing argues that Renaissance history was an era of "carrying on from the past to the future," with scientific, religious, and artistic ideas on the rise. According to scholar Yang Yuling, the classical era was a huge treasure trove of wisdom, and humanists of the time were keen to acquire knowledge from classical texts, which brought a great deal of knowledge to the Renaissance. This paper concentrates on the diverse values and ideological tendencies of society at that time. It is not only a manifestation of art forms, but also a concentrated reflection of the society and culture of the time, conveying the significance of humanism, classical culture, religious spirit, science, and technology as well as political and social symbols on many levels. The purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic and social functions of art in the context of the Renaissance by analyzing artworks and the multiple meanings behind them.

2. Renaissance Background

2.1. Humanism

The Renaissance refers to an intellectual, cultural, and artistic movement that emerged in Europe between the 15th and 16th centuries. Renaissance as a basis for redefining human status, values, and aesthetics. It marked the end of feudalism at the end of the Middle Ages and a renewed appreciation and pursuit of ancient Greco-Roman culture.

During the Renaissance, humanism became an important trend of thought, emphasizing human free will, rationality, and the dignity of the individual. Humanists pursued the all-around development of human beings, valued human thought, culture, and education, studied and learned from ancient cultures, and honored human values and individual achievements. During this period, classical culture existed a unique charm for people and was considered a treasure trove of wisdom in perfect style. The humanists of the time were keen on digging up classical literature, hoping to revive ancient culture by "recreating" ancient Greek and Roman culture. This "resurrection" and "reinterpretation" of classical culture in itself brought a great deal of knowledge to the people and gradually developed a good tradition of learning from those who had gone before.

2.2. Social Environment

Science and thought also underwent important transformations during this period. People began to question the traditional ideas of the Middle Ages and pursued the study and understanding of the natural world. This led to the development of the scientific method and an emphasis on the importance of experimental observation. The contributions of scientists such as Galileo and Copernicus advances in fields such as astronomy and physics. The Renaissance had a profound impact on social structures and values.

The gradual decline of the feudal system in the Middle Ages and the rise of the capitalist economy led to changes in the social structure. Individuals became more motivated to pursue success and wealth, and the concepts of freedom, individual rights, and equality were promoted. The instinctive desires of human nature gradually broke free from the constraints of religious norms and the morality and ethics of the Middle Ages, and modern rationalist thought was nurtured and scientific research flourished.

Many outstanding artists emerged during this period, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael. Inspired by ancient art and literature, artists have devoted themselves to restoring and developing the styles and techniques of classical art, in pursuit of excellence in artistic expression and aesthetics. The development of Italian Renaissance art could not be separated from the patronage of the rulers. Therefore, the development of the rulers' personalities and their attitudes towards art were also important reasons for the flourishing of art. In Burckhardt's view, the changes in the internal structure of the Italian state and church were the political conditions that led to the awakening of the individual consciousness of the humanists [4]. At this time, the Papacy was at the height of its power and needed to Christianity and use the Humanists and their art to gain more supporters to consolidate the Papacy. Under the impetus of the humanist movement, people were more concerned with man himself than with God, and with worldly pleasures than with the afterlife. It signaled a reawakening and retracing of ancient cultures, as well as promoting changes in science, art, and social attitudes that laid the foundations for what would become the modern world.

3. The Aesthetic Characteristics and Functional Value of the Work

3.1. Application of Light and Shadow

The Mona Lisa is an oil painting by Italian Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci, now in the Louvre Museum in France. As shown in Figure 1. The young woman in the painting is Lisa

Gherardini, the wife of Florentine cloth merchant Francesco Dell'Giocondo, who was jokingly called "Gioconda" by Da Vinci, meaning "happiness" [5].

During the Renaissance, when humanism was prevalent and artists received commissions from commissioners to create their works, artists created works with a greater sense of joie de vivre. In the Mona Lisa, the figure is more gentle and kind, contrary to the stereotypical and serious style of religious paintings.

Leonardo da Vinci's original capture of the moment when the Mona Lisa turns to the viewer, a natural gesture, gives the painting a sense of life and movement. Leonardo da Vinci excelled in the study of light, and he used light and shadow flexibly in his paintings, especially in the highlights on the face to create a natural contour and shadow effect [3]. The clever use of these shadows makes the facial features more three-dimensional. In addition, the clothing also shows three-dimensionality through the use of highlights and shadows. The Mona Lisa is wearing a black dress and a black turban, and the highlights and shadows on these garments give them more detail and texture. The highlights make the raised parts of the dress stand out, while the shadows emphasize the folds and fluidity of the dress [6].



Fig 1. Da Vinci, L. (1506). Mona Lisa [5]

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3.2. Painting Method

As a result of anatomical developments, Leonardo da Vinci also investigated the mechanisms of vision and concluded that the objects in nature that eyes see do not have boundaries and that even when seeing outlines, the lines are invisible. So he used the "halo painting method", which is a painting technique that uses a finger dipped in paint to apply layers and layers of paint to form a blurred boundary. It is this softening of the shadowy outlines that adds mystery to the Mona Lisa's smile and makes her seem to blend into the beautiful natural landscape behind her [6]. In addition, Leonardo da Vinci used perspective in the creation of the Mona Lisa. The depth-of-field effect in the painting makes the elements in the background, such as the mountains, the river, and the sky, appear to be far away from the viewer, creating a sense of space that is different from that of the near and far. This relationship between near and far, expressed through perspective, gives the viewer a profound depth-of-field effect that enhances the three-dimensionality of the entire painting.

In addition, Leonardo da Vinci was also an outstanding mathematician who applied the golden ratio in mathematics to his works. A visual sense of aesthetic proportion and harmony is emphasized. In the Mona Lisa, some researchers believe that the compositional elements of the painting conform to the golden ratio. The relationship between the face of the Mona Lisa and the edges of the frame in the painting, as well as the ratio between the head and the body, etc., are considered to be in line with the guidelines of the golden ratio. The use of these proportions makes the picture present a sense of visual harmony, making the viewer feel a natural sense of balance and beauty [7].

4. The Social Functions of the Renaissance Art

During the Renaissance, there was a close relationship between works of art and religious propaganda. Religion played an important role in European society and art was used as an important tool to spread religious teachings, promote faith and enhance religious experience. Religious themes were one of the most common and important themes in Renaissance artworks [8].

Due to the strong influence of the Church in European society, artists were often employed by churches or religious groups to create works on religious themes such as Bible stories, Jesus Christ, and saints. These works, which include paintings, sculptures, and architecture, convey religious teachings through art, inspire viewers to be passionate about their faith, and reinforce their understanding and identification with religion [9].

Secondly, works of art play an important role in religious ceremonies and worship. Religious buildings such as churches and cathedrals are regarded as symbols of faith, and the interiors of these buildings are decorated with works of art such as murals, sculptures, and glass windows. These works are intended to create an atmosphere of solemnity that helps believers to focus their attention and deepen their experience of religious rituals and sacred things. Through their aesthetic value and the use of religious symbols, the artworks integrate faith into daily life and intertwine it with religious rituals.

In addition, artists expressed their thoughts and interpretations of religious themes through artwork. During the Renaissance, many artists began to explore humanist ideas, valuing individual freedom and human dignity. Through their artworks, they conveyed their understanding and critique of religious teachings, presenting their personal and independent views on religion and faith. These works reflected the tension between religion and personal beliefs and contributed to the development of religious reform and religious freedom in European societies.

Overall, Renaissance artworks were closely related to religious propaganda. As a tool for spreading religious teachings, promoting faith, and enhancing religious experience, art formed a close interaction with religion through the creation of religious themes, ritual decoration, and the expression of personal reflections, shaping the religious culture and ideological landscape of the time.

5. The Meaning and Influence of the Renaissance

The Renaissance was a dynamic and innovative period in European history, with wide-ranging and far-reaching significance and impact, encompassing a variety of cultural, artistic, scientific, political, and social fields.

5.1. Meaning

One of the effects of the Renaissance was the rise of humanism. Humanism is a system of thought that values human beings and human values, emphasizing human potential and free will. Its study of and reference to ancient Greco-Roman culture promoted a revival of classical culture and emphasized human education and self-improvement. This humanistic ideology had a profound impact on the culture and education of later generations. The Renaissance was a period of fusion between art and science.

5.2. Influence

Artists, scientists, and scholars influenced, exchanged, and co-operated with each other, promoting the rapid development of human knowledge and creativity. Leonardo da Vinci is a typical example of a man who was an outstanding artist as well as an outstanding scientist and inventor. This fusion promoted progress in the fields of art and science [10]. The Renaissance was also an important period for the Reformation. Religious reformers such as Martin Luther criticized the corruption and doctrines of the church and put forward new religious beliefs and doctrines, leading to the split of Christianity in Europe and the rise of Protestantism, thus affecting the political and social landscape of Europe [11].

The Renaissance saw the emergence of many outstanding artists, such as Da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael, who created numerous outstanding works of art and promoted the innovation of artistic style. Innovations in perspective, light and shadow effects, and figure expression techniques in painting and sculpture laid the foundation for the development of art in later generations.

To sum up, the Renaissance had a far-reaching impact on Europe as well as the whole world. It promoted the transmission and innovation of human knowledge, the development of art, science, culture, and politics, as well as the transformation and change of European society [7]. The achievements and ideas of this period continued to ferment and be passed on to later generations, making an important contribution to the progress and development of human civilization [12].

6. Conclusion

Taken together, Renaissance art was significant on many levels, not only for the development and innovation of art forms but also for the expression of cultural thinking and the revival of classical culture. During this period, the instinctive desires of human nature gradually broke free from religious norms and the moral and ethical constraints that had existed since the Middle Ages, modern rationalist thought was nurtured and scientific research flourished. This period had a profound impact on the art and culture of later generations.

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