



Art History

The Mannerist Style

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the following article about mannerism and answer the thought questions below.

The Mannerist Style and the Lamentation

PREMISE

This section provides essential information for two large-scale paintings, Tintoretto's *The Raising of Lazarus*, 1558-59, and El Greco's *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*, about 1570. Both were painted in mid-16th century Italy, when the Mannerist style predominated the visual arts. Both were produced in the years surrounding the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which decreed in absolute terms the role of the arts in the promulgation of Counter-Reformation doctrines.

However, neither painting is an archetypal example of Italian Mannerism, although they incorporate many of that style's most salient characteristics. In each case the artist (Tintoretto and El Greco) forged a highly individual and expressive method of painting that defies generalized categorization. Further, while these paintings were produced during the initial decades of the Counter-Reformation, and indeed illustrate biblical themes that affirm religious tenets espoused by the Catholic church, in terms of style and composition they do not comply with the rigid requisites stipulated as a result of the deliberations of the Council of Trent, resulting in the establishment of the Baroque style. These two works, therefore, should be examined with the broader context of Mannerism, and against the historical and emotional background of the Counter-Reformation, but not as archetypal exponents of either the style or the religious movement.

Let us begin by describing the origins and salient characteristics of Mannerism, and specifically of the Venetian version of Mannerism, and then examine the paintings individually.

MANNERISM AS A STYLE

Mannerism is the name given to the stylistic phase of European art covering the period from ca.1520 to ca.1590, the transitional phase between the High Renaissance and the Baroque.

The origin of the expression "mannerism" lies in the Italian word *maniera*, which can be translated in all cases into the English word "style." The word *maniera* was borrowed from the literature of social manners, in which the term referred to a quality of human deportment very desirable in the 16th century: a courtly grace characterized by effortless accomplishment, sophistication and *savoir-faire*.



Tintoretto's *The Raising of Lazarus*



El Greco's *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*

Maniera, as applied to an artistic movement, implies overt stylization and an obsession with artificial conventions. In the 16th century virtuosity, then equated with great facility of execution, and the overcoming of complex and difficult problems, was highly prized in the arts, in literature, as well as in human decorum. An obsession with virtuosity and elegance, then, was the guiding force of mannerism, essentially an artificial, anti-naturalistic style. To repeat a much-quoted phrase, Mannerism is a 'stylish' style. Because it transgressed moderation, Mannerism appealed to an elite class of connoisseurs, not to the general populace.

Mannerism as a distinct and distinguishable style first appeared in Rome in about 1520; it was transported to Florence in about 1522-23 and to other Italian cities in that same decade. Mannerism, by now an international fashion, was transplanted to Fontainebleau in 1530, where it was put to service in the creation of French court art. Mannerism ran its erratic course until about 1590, by which time it had been substantially supplanted by the clearer and more uniform ideals of the early Baroque. And while we are primarily concerned with painting here, we should bear in mind that for a good part of the 16th century Mannerism was also the prevailing trend in architecture, sculpture, literature, and music.

The notion of mannerism as a separate style sandwiched in between the dying High Renaissance and the dynamic Baroque era is a relatively recent phenomenon. Certainly a 16th century artist was not aware that he was living in a designated time period or working in a designated style, in the same way that 20th century artists are aware. Most art criticism from the 17th to the 19th centuries perceived such a divergence, however, and generally discounted this interim period as decadent and perverse. Only around 1920 was such a sweeping condemnation reversed, and the merits and complexities of this neglected period studied and appreciated. The name Mannerism is really an umbrella term that attempts to consolidate its many facets, since so many different centers of artistic production, conflicting trends, varieties of patrons, and individual idioms are involved.

Various and contradictory definitions and interpretations have been proposed for Mannerism. It has been construed as a reaction against the ideals of the High Renaissance, as an expression of the spiritual crisis of the time, or as a sophisticated art created solely for art's sake, exemplifying the aesthetic theories of the 16th century. In fact, all of these theories are valid, presenting parallel, rather than incompatible, explanations of the many manifestations of this consciously ambiguous means of expression.

"The Mannerist Style and the Lamentation." Artsconnected. Minneapolis Institute of Art, 1998. Web. 07 Dec. 2014.

Thought Questions:

1. Generally during what time period was mannerism an artistic movement? Between what two artistic movements is it between?
2. What types of characteristics did mannerism style art have?
3. Who did mannerism appeal to?
4. How was mannerism a reaction to the general movement of society in the 16th century?