

When Cultures Meet

Introduction

The Renaissance is a period in the history of Western Europe that began around 1400 -- after the Middle Ages.

"Renaissance" means "rebirth" and refers to how artists and thinkers of the time went back to the art and philosophy of classical Greece and Rome for inspiration.

It was during the Renaissance when Europeans travelled to the Americas to exploit the ancient cultures already established there.

Judith with the Head of Holofernes

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by Mary Erickson



Andrea Mantegna was a Renaissance artist who made this print toward the end of the 1400s.

Unlike Medieval art that preceded it, Renaissance art created a strong illusion of form on a flat surface through the careful use of light, gray, and black tones (or values).

The Risen Christ between Saints Andrew and Longinus



In this print, Mantegna uses contrasting values to carve out a space in which the three figures seem to stand. The darker areas in the background seem more distant than the figures. Although, of course, they are all just lines on a flat piece of paper.



Portrait of a Cardinal in his Study

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Lorenze Costa was an Italian Renaissance painter who made this portrait in the early 1500s.

Costa has created an illusion of great distance out the window. See how he has made gradual changes in the lightness and darkness (value) of the cardinal's clothing. This "modelling" not only makes the fabric appear to drape and fold, but also gives the impression of a solid body under the clothing.



Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple

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Later in the 1500s, El Greco painted this work. Like the Renaissance painters before him, he created an illusion of space and solid form by carefully manipulating light, dark, and gray tones.



Rich civilizations existed for thousands of years in what was later called "The Americas."

Each culture and era had its own artistic style and used light and dark in distinctive ways.

Figure



The Olmec culture grew up in what is now southern Mexico for thousands of years. This small, carved jade figure was made nearly three thousand years ago. It shows a were-Jaguar, a supernatural being with both human and jaguar aspects. The were-jaguar was a powerful spirit who controlled rain and storms, as well as the growth of maize, the staple crop of the Olmec.

The shading on this sculpture is created by light reflecting from the subtly carved surfaces of its three-dimensional form.

Vessel



Also centuries before the arrival of Europeans, a Nazca artist of South America painted a puma on this piece of pottery.

The dark shape of the puma contrasts with its plain light background. The animal has facial features, claws, and spots, shown with flat (not shaded) lines and shapes.

Plate



The Mayan culture of Central America and parts of what is now Mexico thrived centuries before the arrival of the Europeans. A Mayan artist decorated this plate with the image of powerful ruler or god.

Globular vessel



A Moche artist made this vessel decorated with an animal in a style similar to that of the earlier Nasco vessel.

The darker deer shows up against the lighter background,. The animal shape is higher because the background has been carved down.



Bowl



An Anasazi artist made this bowl in what is now the southwestern United States 500-600 years before the arrival of the Europeans.

The black shapes and complex line patterns that decorate this bowl contrast with the white clay.



Aryballos



This is an Inca jar from South America made in the 1400s a century or so before the arrival of Europeans.

It is decorated with both light and dark colored lines and shapes.



How did the patters use light and dark to decorate these two vessels?

Review the Preconquest artowrks you've just seen.

In what culture do you think each of these vessels was made? How do you reach your conclusion?