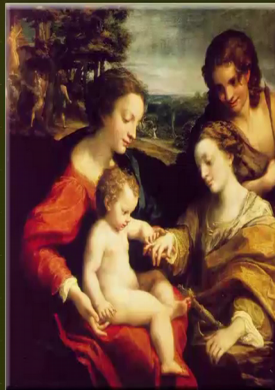


Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
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Lecture - 02
Pre-history of Modern Art

Hello viewers. Welcome to MOOCs online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art Movements and Artists. This is the second module of the 1st week introducing modern western art and in this module today. We will be looking at the pre history of modern art and it is important to look at the art traditions preceding modern art because of obvious reasons. One of the reasons being with the movement modern art emerged in the scene we witness or radical departure and in order to understand this movement of departure we need to look at briefly the art the tradition of art practice that preceded the modern art.

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Pre-history of modern art implies the art of the past that was integral to the ideas of religious art, mythological art and pleasant-looking art.

Pre-history of modern art generally implies the art of the past the immediate past or slightly removed past which was integral to the ideas of religious art, mythological art, and pleasant looking art; art that is comfortable to look at art that basically nurtures the pleasant and comfortable senses art that satisfies a visual perception that thrives on the classical idea of beauty. Modern art is going to challenge all these assumptions from mid 19th century.

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Since the Renaissance period, art developed a realistic style which enabled to create convincing landscapes, anatomically correct figures and effect of real light-and shadow.

Art of the past particularly since the renaissance period developed a realistic style, a style of painting and culture which is convincing, which is realistic, and tactile in quality that to us this entire tradition appears to be on whose like an replication like an imitation of reality.

We have a term for that we say it is mimetic art and the term mimetic art is derived from the concept of mimesis which refers to the act of imitating nature. Since Renaissance onwards the entire tradition of visual art is basically mimetic art, the style of representation is based on the theory of mimesis the idea of mimesis to the extent that a painting or a sculpture would look like a replication, or a copy, or an imitation of the reality of the nature of something that is tangible.

Modern artists going to once again challenge this assumption as well you know, as a part of this realistic style the characteristic features, which appear in this style where we see a very convincing landscape, which looks like an extension of this space that you the viewer is occupying. We see figures human figures, animal figures, or birds whatever anatomically correct there is no distortion, no disfiguration, anatomically accurate figures. And we also say fairly convincing and I would say illusionistic effect of light and shade in the painting.

So, realistic style that developed since renaissance onwards, before the advent of modern art this realistic style enable the artist to achieve these 3 aspects apart from others.

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For example, when you look at landscape like this and please remember this landscape was painted at least 100 and 50 year to 10 years before the invention of camera, but this kind of oil paintings can actually replicate nature represent nature so vividly, so realistically. That it could be considered and accepted as a convincing, appropriate, and absolutely reliable visual representation of nature so; obviously, this kind of art prospered to a great extent people love to have this kind of art works at their homes which people commissioned artists to do this kind of art works for them.

So, this was by enlarge the language of art that dominated the entire Europe for a long time Since late 15th and early 16th century.

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Along with the rendering of realistic light & shadow (known as *Chiaroscuro*), art of the past since Renaissance developed a highly skilled technique of perspective -- which made the paintings look realistic and illusionistic. The paintings and sculptures created an illusion of REAL life.

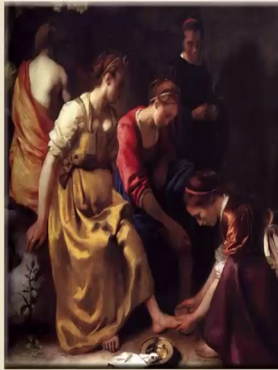
Along with the rendering of realistic light and shade which is known as technically speaking Chiaroscuro, art of the past since Renaissance developed a highly skilled technique of perspective.

Now, this application of perspective or theory of perspective is going to be upturned later by the modern artists say for example, somebody like picasso would reverse the whole idea of perspective and come up with a radical idea called cubism we will come to that later.

Now, this technique of perspective meet the paintings in the traditional western art look even more convincing. And the paintings become very realistic in it is appearance and also illusionistic continuously this kind of paintings created an illusion of real space, real surface, real figures, real forms, even real light, and shade the paintings is sculptures in the tradition created an illusion of the real.

In modern art nobody would ever try to create an illusion of the real they would rather try as I have mentioned in my earlier module they would rather try to interpret the real.

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Illusion of real space, perspective, chiaroscuro and narrative contents were the main characteristics of the pre-modern art. A strong tradition thus developed to preserve the techniques.

So, illusion of real space, perspective, chiaroscuro and narrative contents this is very important, a large chunk of what is known as pre modern art has as subject matter narrative elements they tell you stories and quite explicitly. In modern art they do not tell you stories there might be stories embedded in the subject matters, but modern artists have never used art as a story telling device. And there are many examples from modern western art where the whole idea of image is non narrative beyond storytelling and we would see that kind of paintings of sculptures we will be talk about abstract art later.

So, narrative contents perspective illusion of real space chiaroscuro these were the main characteristics of pre modern art an a strong tradition thus developed to preserve these techniques. So, you see modern art have to face an modern artists have to face naturally the presence of a very strong tradition, which kind of flourished over a period of 400-500 years.

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All these aesthetic foundations were severely questioned, challenged and upturned by the new aesthetic formulations in modern art.

Now, as I have told you these aesthetic foundations would be severely questioned challenged and upturned by the new aesthetic formulations in modern art by the modern artists.

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Since 16th century until the emergence of modern art in the mid-19th century, the Western art tradition was steeped in a realistic/illusionistic mode of representation.

Irrespective of the subject-matters, the main thrust was on --

- a) realistic rendering of forms**
- b) illusionistic effect of space**
- c) tactile sensation and**
- d) photographic impression of light & shade.**

Since 16th century until the emergence of modern art in the mid 19th century, the Western art tradition generally speaking was steeped in a realistic illusionistic mode of representation right. And if we try to identify the areas where they focused on the tradition in general irrespective of the subject matters the main thrust was thrust on a

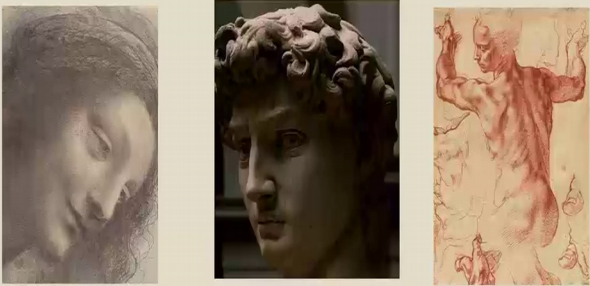
realistic rendering of forms, b illusionistic effect of space, c tactile sensation and, d photographic impression of light and shade. Well we are using the term photographic here, but in the context of 16th 17th 18th century it is completely anachronistic to use the term photography because the idea of photography d could not exist at all at that point of time.

When we say photographic impression of light and shade, today we are using this term from the experience that we have had at looking at the photographs or taking photographs, but for the tradition or for the artists who worked within the tradition for them it was not photographic they did not have the idea of photography to all. For them it was realistic, it was painting that is how a painting should look like it should be able to recaptured the reality in the language of art that should be the objective of any art for that matter painting or sculpture.

This was a very strong based foundation for the entire traditional art since the renaissance period in the west until the emergence of modern art.

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To put it simply, the visual representation was based on factual observation, scientific study and a realistic skill.



Preoccupation with realistic detailing was a major characteristic feature of the tradition.

So, to put it simply the visual representation was based on factual observation; factual observation is something that all visual artists do no matter what whether he is an abstract painter or realistic painter or conceptual artists no matter what everybody observes.

But it does not necessarily mean as for as a modern artist concerned that you have to replicate your observation into your art. Now this is what traditional modern art I mean traditional western artists would do they would observe to replicate their observations in their art.

So, factual observation along with scientific study and a realistic skill now realistic skill is something that is not given it needs to be achieved and all the traditional artists in the west they achieved this skill to an extent that there works even today this despite the presence of photography in our culture for last more than hundred and 50 years even today many of this fantastic realistic paintings from the western traditional art they will look incredibly convincing.

They can create illusion to the extent that you feel like touching the drapery or the cloth painted on the canvas almost forgetting that it is actually canvas not a cloth and we get equally amazed even today this is because of the skill that these artists achieved. So, Preoccupation with realistic detailing was a major characteristic feature of this tradition as you can see in these images and for that matter.

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Somebody like Leonardo da Vinci from the renaissance period would go to the extent of doing some drawings, studies, anatomical studies, not like an artists, but almost like a scientist I needed that. So, Leonardo da Vinci like many other renaissance artists was consider not only as an artists, but as an artists scientist because their approaches to art

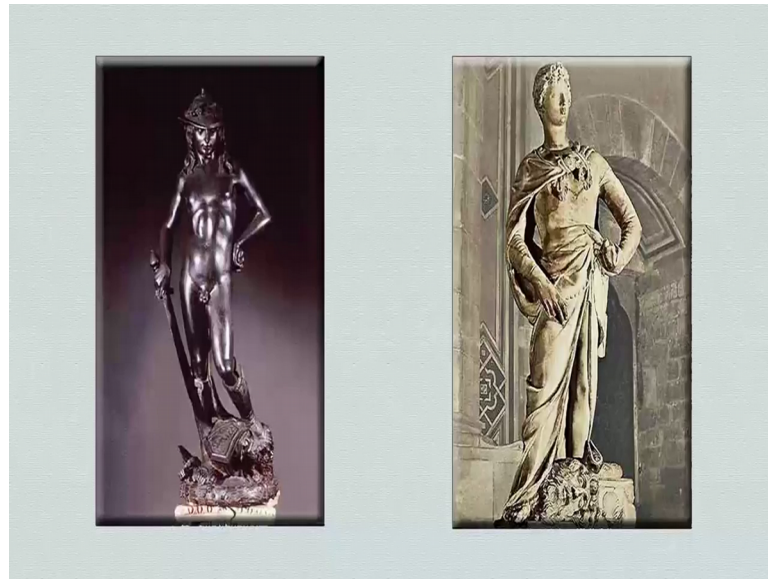
was tied up integrally tied up with their approaches to science and art was know of a science and art was not demarcated in a very strong way they overlapped and the exchange the ideas and in person likely not though both these characteristics both these person are could exist.

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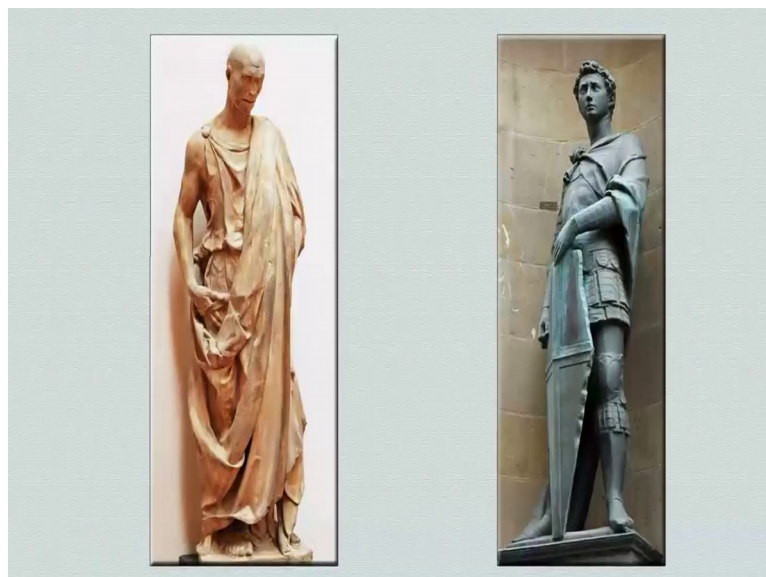
All look at this drawing of a Lion by the famous Dutch painter called Rembrandt. I mean it is a sketch not a detailed drawing, but even a quick sketch like this reveals that Rembrandt was a keen observed of the reality a and b he did have that skill he did have that ability to copy his observation to the extent that anatomically, in terms of proportion, in terms of appearance look, in terms of the surface quality, everything the lion looks very realistic very confusing though it is a drawing lot of photograph.

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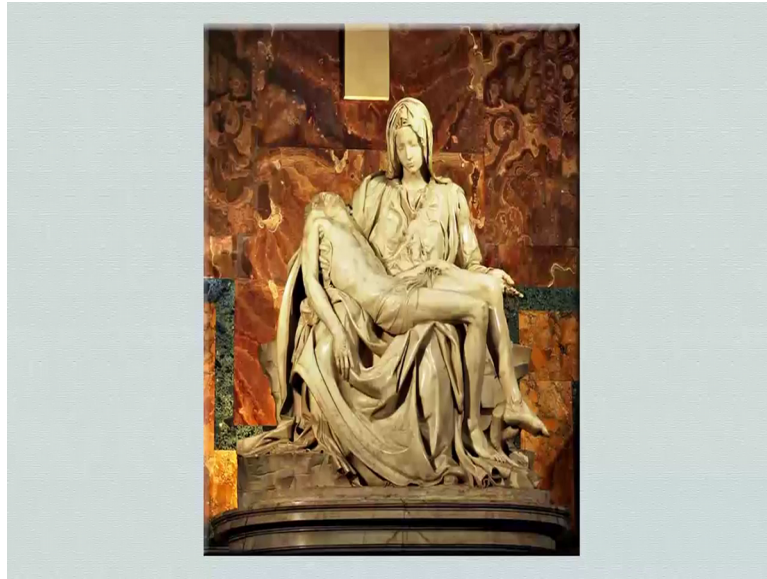


Scene applies to the sculptures in the traditional western art in terms of proportion, anatomical, accuracy in terms of the surface detailing surface treatment their entire approach to recreate reality hence realism was the dominant feature in the history of pre modern painting as well as pre modern sculpture.

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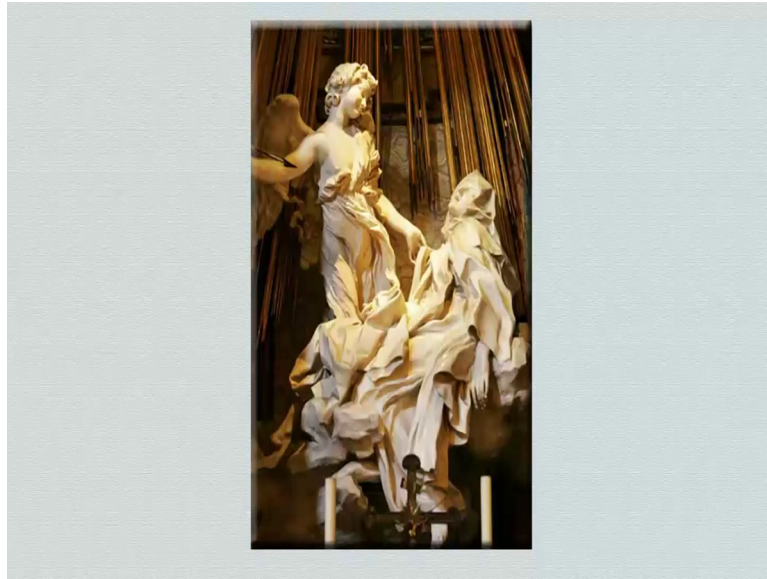
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As you keep looking at these examples; whether it is from renaissance or early renaissance or later once second irrespective of the subject matter the language of art the entire tradition choose to depict their subject matters was realistic was illusionistic to the extent as you can see in this work the medium here for example, marble loose it is or it tends to loose it is quality of stone and it becomes as it were like a cloth here this is the skill I am talking about the sculptures did have the skill to turn cloth, or stone into a cloth the stone now looks like a cloth, the stone looks like the skin of a body, the stone does not look like stone anymore.

So, transforming the medium of stone into a kind of surface that is going to evoke the solution, that is suppose to can you give you this sense of reality was the main objective for these artists and later of course, in the modern art we shall see just the opposite.

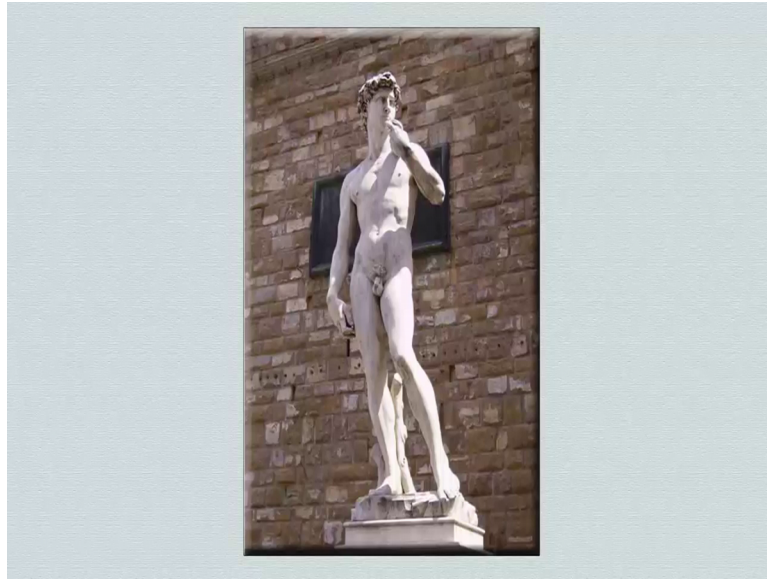
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Where the artist would love to retain the characteristic features of the stone would love to maintain the quality of the stone no matter what the subject matter is.

Similar kind of approach through the medium material can be seen in most of the traditional sculptures and the paintings where the medium whether it is stone or oil paint or water color or brush or ink is simply a tool to convert an image into a reality in appearance. Of course, in reality they could never be converted as stone ultimately remains a stone the oil ultimately remains an oil paint, but it should be painted it should be sculpted in a way that they appear to be very realistic they appear to be very real and this is what mimeses is all about and that is what exactly I was trying to say that mimetic art dominated the entire European tradition from late 15th and early 16th century onwards until the emergence of modern western art.

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We look at this sculpture called David very famous sculpture by Michelangelo, again in spite of the fact that it is made in stone to stone is very very different material though it is very soft, but the way you sculpt this sculpture can turn the stone into of all that comes very close to the field of the flesh, but the stone never become flesh the stone remains a stone it is an illusion of flesh that these artists are trying to produce.

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Subject-matters of the art works of pre-modern phase of course varied, but certain themes were more dominant than others.

- 1. Religious (Christian subject-matters) themes.**
- 2. Mythological themes**
- 3. Historical topics**
- 4. Legends from the past**
- 5. Life & portraits of the rich people who commissioned art.**
- 6. Interior or domestic scenes**
- 7. Scenic beauty of nature**
- 8. Still-life (Realistic representation of objects)**

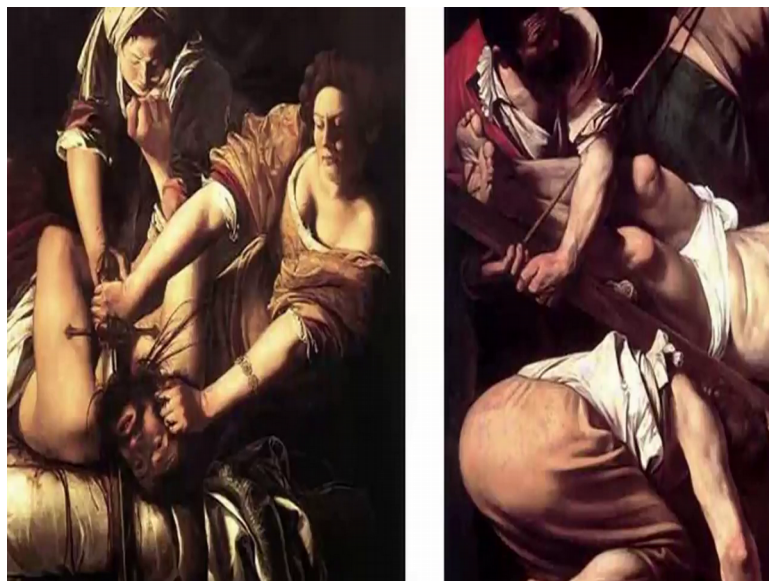
Subject-matters of the art works of pre-modern phase of course varied, there is a diversity and the certain themes there are certain themes which were more dominant than

others. Now let us identify those themes is subject matters which dominated the pre-modern traditional western art.

Number one of course, is a Religious subject matters, secondly Mythological themes, thirdly Historical topics which are also renaissance history paintings, 4 Legends from the past, 5 Life and portraits of the rich people who commissioned arts you get to see in all a number of paintings portraits of the entire figures seated on the chair things like that which are like commission paintings or sculptures commission by the rich people.

And hence you get this subject matter and a lot of art works based on the subject matter is available from the western traditional art, number 6 Interior scenes or domestic scenes. They are is I mean it is a very refer subject matter it seems partly commissioned partly a preference that comes from the artists, then of course landscape Scenic beauty of nature seems to be a very favorite subject for many artists and finally last, but not the least Still-life Realistic representation of objects; like fruits, glass, bottles, plates, table anything.

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Now, few examples from each of these categories Christian and religious themes and as you might be doing already this is a whole body of art works from the western traditional art which thrive on these themes Christian themes and religious themes.

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And there could be slight stylistic differences, but the main focus is on realism no matter of that the subject matter is the focus is on realism from late 15th and early 16th century onwards.

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Mythological themes of course, it is connected to Christianity, but then it has a mythological bearing because we talk about the creation of mankind, but done very realistically. So, that it appears very real though it is mythology which resides in our imagination, but it is portrayed or depicted very realistically as if it did happen in real life.

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Then of course, Historical paintings for example, this painting this image of Socrates having the person hemlock and each and every person has been depicted with the light and shade and look at the cloth, look at the perspectives space, with great detailing and that is by today I will people like us who are a costumed with the cultural photography we cannot, but it is very difficult to avoid the whole idea of photography when we know that the paintings like this.

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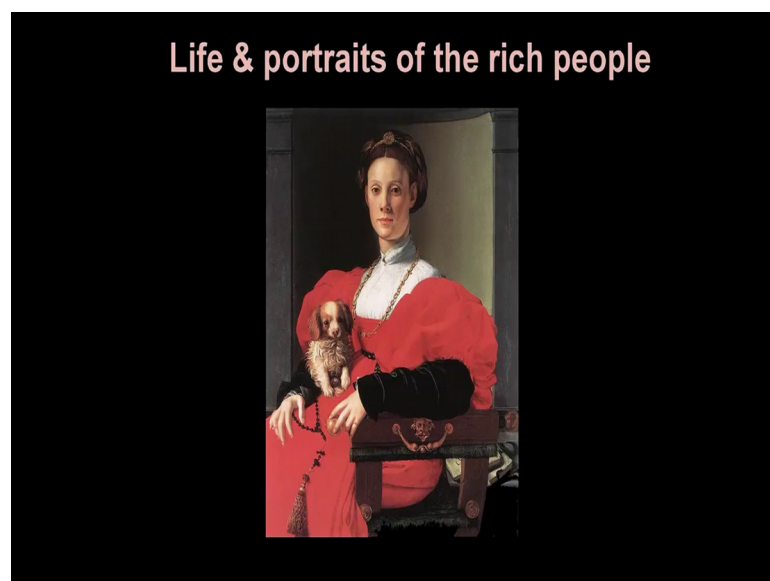
So, in spite of the anachronism I was talking about we get tempted to you use what a photographically correct and reliable painting this one is.

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So, there are a number of paintings in the western tradition, where history or historical event or historical movement has been reconstructed right; like this one the School of Athens by referral. Then almost similar to mythology there are paintings which deal with the legends from the past, but then again done in a very realistic manner.

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Yes this is one example of a painting that belongs to that category of life and portraits of to rich people plenty of such paintings are available.

It is an entire category of paintings and these are all with all probability commissioned art works; artists where commissioned to do these paintings for the rich aristocratic people of the society and the artist have to paint this people in a way this it is wanted to them to be painted. So, not only that the painting was commissioned the idea was commissioned even the subject matter the composition often can not dictated by the person who is commission in this painted.

Now, this is the way the artists actually earned their money this was a part of their living and this tradition, this culture, the kind of compel the artists to achieve this realistic skill. So, that they are use the realistic skills. So, that they could use this skill to earn their bread and butter, and we also have beautiful paintings for this category of interior and domestic scenes.

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But here this impeccable application of perspective, realistic details, light and shade, sense of volume, the tactile quality of cloth, wall and different objects.

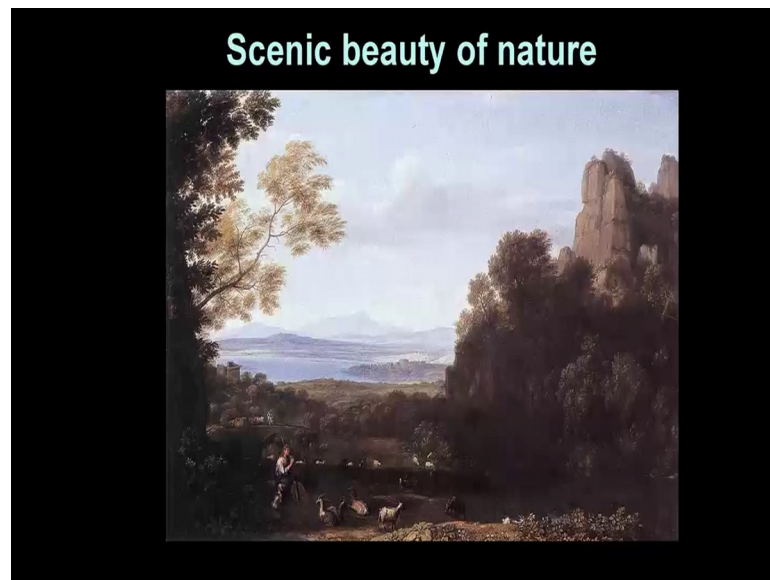
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Make these paintings look fairly not only realistic though so, with this paintings very relievable, very convincing, they do not look like that there is any imagination in this painting, but contrary to this idea even in a realist painting and it is possible for the artists to add his or her own imagination, but because the stylist so realistic, that it never becomes very conspicuous or appears.

Everything seems to be derived from what the artists has observed in the real life in his imaginary setting and of course, lastly and the second last category was scenic beauty of the nature.

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This is something that artists excellent to a great extent like this also and Still-life we have a very strong tradition of painting Still-life in the western art tradition.

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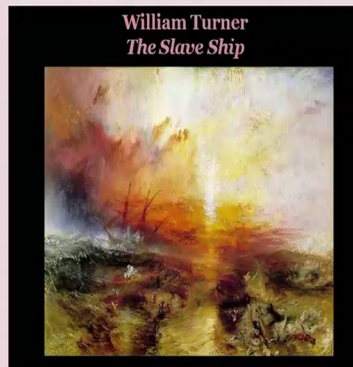


Once again it is a peculiar category where even though still life painting sometimes look like random composition that not so, random everything is pretty arranged, but the painters through their realistic skill could make the paintings look very random abrupt arbitrary though it is not, but all set in done the realistic skill involved in the depiction of the subject matters make the paintings looks so, real that one almost gets tempted to

touch the lobster or smell the fruits or pour the liquid from the vase yes it is that kind of realism we are talking about.

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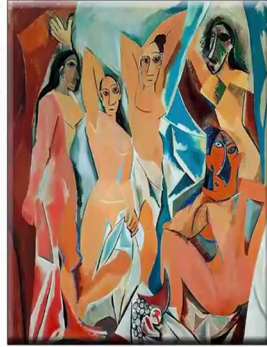
The pre-modern phase almost comes to an end when a mid-19th century British painter called Turner refused to follow the classical style of the tradition and invented his own technique and vision of landscape.



The pre-modern phase almost comes to an end when a mid 19th century British painter called Turner refused to follow the classical style of the tradition and invented his own technique and vision of landscape. As you can see here Turner paints a certain landscape in a way which was never painting before it is very un-classical very nontraditional in every sense of the world. In our 14th module in this week will be talking about turners paintings in great detail and then we shall discuss why this painting is a strong departure from the traditional landscape paintings.

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Later, in early 20th century one of the most famous artists called Pablo Picasso would put the last nail on the coffin of the classical art by doing a painting where figures seem to be distorted beyond recognition!



Pablo Picasso

Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)

1907

And later in early 20th century one of the most famous artists call Publo Picasso would put the last nail on the classical art by doing a painting where figure seem to be distorted beyond recognition yes. Even turners paintings where almost verging on the threshold from where recognition would get very difficult, but here in this painting by Picasso recognition may not be Extake, but what is Extake is realism because this is not how real women real figures, real human beings, look in real life and this is what exactly Picasso does and proposes a new idea called Cubism.

In the next module we will be looking at mode sequentially you know in an ordered manner the time line the chronology of modern art, which lives the traditional western art behind once in for all and in bugs on, and entirely new journey of art.

Thank you.