**Response questions due 3.24.20 at 9:30 AM by email (**[**anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu**](mailto:anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu)**)**

Slide 1

What do you associate with the Renaissance? The term means “rebirth,” and refers to Europe in the 14th-17th centuries, when there was a resurgence of interest in the Classical Greco-Roman world. This happened for a variety of reasons, including the discovery of a number of Greco-Roman works of art and texts. We’re most interested in the art of the Renaissance, and in this period we see artists trying to mimic those Greco-Roman ideals that we saw earlier in the semester.

Slide 2

The terminology around the Renaissance can be a little confusing. Scholars use “Southern Renaissance” to refer to artistic production in Italy. “Northern Renaissance” refers to the rest of Europe, excluding Italy. The Renaissance lasted from the 14th-17th centuries, but artistic production reached a fervor in 1500-1525. This 25-year period is called the “High Renaissance,” and refers in particular to Rome. The High Renaissance is when a number of the most famous Renaissance artists, like Leonardo da Vinci, were working. We’ll study them in a later class. For now, we’re going to think about the early Renaissance.

Slide 3

Renaissance means “rebirth,” and we’ve established that this is a rebirth in Greco-Roman culture. This is a bit misleading, because Greco-Roman cultural didn’t entirely disappear during the Middle Ages; the Byzantines for example studied Roman and Greek texts in school. But, the discovery of many works of art brought Greco-Roman culture into the public eye and made those aesthetic (or visual) ideals popular again. So, we start to see art and architecture that looks like Greco-Roman art and architecture, and artists interested in the same things that Greco-Roman artists were. This begins with Giotto, who is considered the first Renaissance artist. His portrait is on the right in this slide.

Slide 4

Part of the reason that Greco-Roman became so popular rise is because of Humanism, which was a renewed interest in Greek philosophy. Humanism is the study of antiquity (the ancient world, particularly Greece and Rome), and it supports the study of what we today call the Humanities- subjects like grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and philosophy. It’s also at this time that we see a lot of schools being created so that these subjects can be studied in a formal way.

These schools did not replace the church, which had overseen most of the art production and education in the Middle Ages. The church remains extremely important and powerful, and continues to be a major patron of the art. So, we’re looking at predominantly Christian Europe that is now interested in Greco-Roman culture, including religion. Imagine you have a Christian society making images of Greco-Roman gods. Or, imagine Christian artists depicting Christian themes in Greco-Roman styles. There is a potential for conflict or tension here.

Slide 5

This is a work of art made by Giotto, the first Renaissance painter. What do you see? How is space depicted? Is this naturalistic or abstracted? In the Renaissance we see art becoming more naturalistic. There is a sense of depth, even though there is no background. The overlapping perspective suggests multiple rows of angels receding into space. The figures themselves look more realistically human than in Cimabue’s *Maesta*, which we saw last class. The anatomy looks more correct, which parallels the interest in anatomy that we talked about in the Greco-Roman world. Shadowing is used here to create realistic figures that have mass and volume- they seem to have weight and dimension like people do in real life. This is called **modeling**- the illusion of there-dimensionality on a flat surface, created using shadowing and highlighting.

Slide 6

**RESPONSE QUESTION: How do these two works of art compare? Write a paragraph comparing these two works of art.**

Hint: think about naturalism/abstraction, how the figures look, and how space is depicted.

Slide 7

This is a Northern Renaissance painting by Jan van Eyck. It was made in Flanders, not Italy, so it is considered Northern Renaissance. This is an incredibly complicated painting. The first thing we need to think about here is the materials. This is a painting done with oil paint. Paints can be made of a number of different materials, such as wax or even egg. Oil paint uses oil to bind the color, which is important because oil paint dries very very slowly and when it dries it is transparent. This is unique. Egg-based paints, for example, dry quickly and when they dry they are hard and matte. Because oil dries slowly and is transparent, it can be layered to get very subtle variations in color. This gives artists more freedom in how they depict different subjects; in the Renaissance, this allows for greater naturalism.

There are a couple of different theories about this painting. We have two people in the center, hand in hand. The woman looks downwards to the man, and the man looks outwards towards the viewer, with his hand raised. They are dressed in elaborate garments; the woman in a green dress with layers and layers of fabric, while the man is in a fur cloak. Clothing was expensive in the 15th century and so their dress in a sign of status; they are very wealthy. In fact, this is Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini and his wife. Giovanni was a textile merchant and so the clothing shows us the source of their wealth. The oranges on the table next to Giovanni also symbolize wealth, as oranges were extremely rare and expensive at this time.

Their positioning suggests that this is a wedding contract. They’re in their bedroom, so this is perhaps painted for their wedding. Their poses do seem like they are making some sort of oath or promise. Furthermore, the woman’s hand is on her belly. Is the pregnant? Maybe. More likely, her hand is placed there to convey the hope of becoming pregnant. Between them is a little dog, which was a symbol of fidelity. All together, this suggests marriage is a major theme of the painting. This is not, however, a depiction of the actual marriage ceremony.

Slide 8

Perhaps the most complicated part of this painting is the small mirror on the back wall. Above it is Jan van Eyck’s signature; in the Renaissance we see artists becoming increasingly important in society. What do you see in the mirror? Van Eyck depicted in the mirror the reverse of what we see in the painting- can you make out Giovanni and his wife from behind? There are also two other figures depicted in front of them in the mirror. Who are these figures? Perhaps one is van Eyck, who painted himself painting. Perhaps, those figures are meant to be us, the viewer, who Giovanni and his wife look out at. In the Renaissance, the role of the viewer starts to be of great importance. Most importantly though, we see Jan van Eyck experimenting with how to represent space accurately. The figures are slightly curved in the mirror, as they would be in an actual reflection. There is a great attention to accurate representation of space and naturalism, an interest in which did not exist in the Middle Ages.

Slide 9

The interest in space and how to depict space realistically is a major theme that we will see over and over again in Renaissance art. Here we see a new technique of depicting spatial recession. Spatial recession is the relationship between objects which appear to sit further or closer to the viewer to create the affect that one is further away in space. For example, Christ’s head seems further away from us, the viewer, than his feet. This is a Lamentation, which is a scene that shows the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and St. John crying over the crucified Christ. Here, Christ is **foreshortened*.* Foreshortening**is a technique used to create the illusion of an object receding strongly in the distance of background.

Slide 10

This is the north wall of the Sistine Chapel, which is the Pope’s private chapel. It’s most famous for its ceiling, which we will talk about when we discuss the High Renaissance. Today were looking at this wall which was painted in 1481 and has a number of different scenes arranged in a **narrative cycle** to tell the story of Christ’s life. A **narrative cycle** is a group of narrative images that tell a larger story; you can image that each image is like one scene from a movie (the narrative image) and when you line them all up you get the entire story (the narrative cycle).

We’re going to focus on one scene from this cycle, an image of Christ giving St. Peter the keys to heaven. This is a scene from the New Testament. Even in the Renaissance, when there is a strong interest in Greece and Rome, biblical themes remain very popular. In fact, we’ll see that the most common scenes are stories from the Old and New Testaments, and from Greco-Roman mythology. In this Bible, Christ hands Peter the keys to heaven and says “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven.” This has been interpreted as Christ making Peter the first pope. The keys became an **attribute** of St. Peter- remember, that an **attribute** is an object or animal associated with a particular person that can be used to identify them.

This story is important to the painting because it’s in the Pope’s private chapel. Looking at this painting, the current Pope would have seen an image of his lineage, and the source of his authority and power. The painting validates the current Pope’s position as leader of the church.

Slide 11

What about this looks like a Renaissance painting? We’re going to think about a couple things with this painting: how the figures are depicted, the landscape, and the perspective. Then we’ll combine that with historical context to think about the overall meaning of this painting.

Slide 12

Let’s start with who we see. In the center, we have Jesus handing the keys to St. Peter, who is kneeling on the ground. They are in the **foreground** of the painting, which is the part of the image that is closest to the viewer. Jesus and Peter do not look like the other holy figures we’ve seen in previous Christian art. They don’t have halos, which allows them to blend in more with the crowd. They are wearing biblical clothing. Some of the other figures wear similar garments, but others stand out. On the edges are men in caps and other styles of clothing. All the way to our left we even see men in tights. What does this different clothing mean? We have biblical figures, Christ and the apostles, in the clothing appropriate to their time. We also have Renaissance figures in Renaissance era clothing. Perugino has even inserted himself into the painting, in the attire that a Renaissance artist might have actually worn. Time is conflated here- the painting allows Renaissance people to mingle with Biblical figures and to observe Biblical events.

What does this do for the painting? It allows the viewer greater access into the scene. The viewer is supposed to feel like they are a part of this scene and are a witness to these events. But remember, this isn’t just any viewer- this is a painting for the Pope. This would not have been open to the public like it is today; only the Pope and the select few that he admitted could enter the private chapel.

In the **middle ground** (the space in between the foreground and background) are other biblical scenes. Christ is in all of these, but we are not meant to understand this as Christ appearing simultaneously in multiple different scenes. This technique is called **continuous narrative**. It illustrates multiple scenes from a story at once, with each scene distinguished by the appearance of the main character(s). Jesus appears 3 times, so there are 3 scenes.

Finally, in the **background** (the part of the image farthest from the viewer), are there buildings. We’ll come back to these shortly.

Slide 13

Our three new terms for the parts of the painting are shown here.

Slide 14

Let’s think more about what these figures look like. They are posed quite naturally, and this figure here is even in very clear contrapposto. This reveals the interest in Greco-Roman art. Perugino is depicting the movement of the human body like a Greco-Roman artist would. The drapery of the clothing is also very naturalistic. This is very unlike the stiff poses we saw in medieval art, like in Gislebertus’ Last Judgement.

Slide 15

Back to the building in the backgrounds. The building in the center is a Renaissance structure, but the two arches that flank it are not. We’ve seen these arches before- they are modeled on Roman triumphal arches like the Arch of Constantine. This is another element that indicates an influence of Greco-Roman art and architecture.

Slide 16

Now we’re going to think about how space is depicted in this painting. The painting looks three-dimensional. Renaissance artists were extremely interested in how to depict space and depth realistically on a two-dimensional surface. Perugino used two types of perspective to make his depiction of space so convincing. He used **atmospheric perspective** and **linear perspective**. The definitions of these two terms are below.

**Atmospheric Perspective-**  a technique of rendering depth or distance by modifying the color of objects that are further away.

In atmospheric perspective, objects that are further away are blurrier and smaller. Perugino uses this technique in the background landscape, particularly in the mountains, which get smaller and blurrier as you look further in the painting.

**Linear Perspective-** a type of perspective used by artists in which the relative size, shape, and position of objects are determined by drawn or imagine lines converging at a point on the horizon.

This type of perspective relies on mathematics and proportions. We’re going to break it down in the next slide.

Slide 17

Linear perspective uses a system of lines and vanishing points. **Orthogonal lines** recede into space and converge at a **vanishing point**. Here, the orthogonal lines are red and the vanishing point is the red dot. The orthogonals converge at a specific point in space, at the **horizon line**, which is where the horizon should be. Here, the horizon line is green. We are looking at this image straight on in the center. Perugino could have changed the view at which we see the painting and he would have adjusted the angle of the orthogonals to correspond to that. We’ll see perspective from angles in other paintings. What’s important here is that Perugino has used linear perspective to convincingly depict space and has combined that technique with atmospheric perspective. He has carefully lined up the composition with the orthogonal lines to depict space convincingly and realistically. If this is a little bit confusing right now, that’s ok; we’re going to see more examples. For now, refer back to your reading on linear perspective.

Slide 18

Do you recognize anyone here? This is Venus, the Greco-Roman goddess of love, in the same Venus Pudica (modest Venus) pose that we’ve seen before. Try to describe her. What does her body look like? How is it rendered?

In this painting, Sandro Botticelli uses modeling to make her body look extremely naturalistic. Look for the subtle changes in hue in her skin that give her body a sense of volume- this is modeling. Botticelli is depicting a story from Greek/Roman mythology- Venus emerged from the sea as a fully grown woman and floated to shore on a clam shell. Botticelli uses Greek mythology to experiment with how to depict the human body. In a Christian story, this nudity would not have been acceptable in Italy at this time. For example, if Botticelli wanted to depict the Virgin Mary, societal ideals would insist that she be clothed. A Greco-Roman goddess allows nudity.

Slide 19

On the left we have a Gothic sculpture of the Virgin Mary. In the center is a close up of Botticelli’s Venus. On the right is the Medici Venus.

**RESPONSE QUESTION: Write a paragraph comparing these three figures.**

Hint: how are they standing? Do they use contrapposto, and does the contrapposto look the same in each figure?

Slide 20

This is the Florence Baptistery. A baptistry is the part of a church used for baptism, or a separate building next to a church that is used for baptism. This building is shaped like an octagon, like the Church of San Vitale or the Palatine Chapel at Aachen. This building was built between 1059 and 1128, so it is a Romanesque structure. It would become the model for Renaissance architecture.

Slide 21

The Florence Baptistry is particularly famous for its bronze doors. It has two sets of doors decorated with bronze relief sculpture. You can see one door on this slide. The south doors were designed by Andrea Pisano and they depict the life of St. John the Baptist and the 8 virtues (hope, faith, charity, humility, fortitude, temperance, justice, and prudence).

The north doors, which are shown above, have an interesting story behind them. The city of Florence announced a competition to see who would design the doors. This competition came down to two finalists- Filippo Brunelleschi and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Because it was a tie, Brunelleschi and Ghiberti were supposed to work together but they couldn’t get along. Frustrated with Ghiberti, Brunelleschi left Florence and went to Rome to study architecture. Ghiberti designed the doors himself. This failed partnership would ignite one of art history’s great rivalries.

Slide 22

Let’s look closely at one of the relief panels on Ghiberti’s doors. These doors were extremely well received; people adored them and couldn’t believe the detail that Ghiberti was able to achieve in small bronze statues. Michelangelo, a famous painter and sculpture, was so taken with these doors that he called them the “Gates of Paradise,” and the name stuck. The reliefs have also been called “the most important event in the history of Florentine art in the first quarter of the 15th century.” Why?

**RESPONSE QUESTION: write a one paragraph formal analysis describing this panel.**

What was so remarkable about these doors was the level of detail achieved and how naturalistic they are. Ghiberti combines high and low relief with perspective to create an illusion of depth. The naturalistic poses of the figures make it looks like they’re actually speaking with each other. The wet drapery of the garments adds to this naturalism.

To create these doors Ghiberti used lost-wax casting, a Greco-Roman technique. If you don’t remember what lost-wax casting is, please go to the power point on Ancient Greece. There is a video on the technique that you can watch.

Slide 23

Finally today, we’re going to think about one more building, Florence Cathedral, designed by a number of architects. We are going to focus on the dome, which was designed by Filippo Brunelleschi. The building was started in 1296, so it’s in the Gothic style, but it wasn’t completed until 1436, when Brunelleschi designed the dome.

Just like the doors of the Florence Baptistry, a competition was announced to decide who would design the dome. Once again, there was a tie between Brunelleschi and Ghiberti. Since the incident at the Baptistry, these two artists hated each other. Brunelleschi was the only one of the two who had actually studied architecture, so he would pretend to be sick and not show up to the construction site, leaving Ghiberti to answer any questions that arose about how to build the dome. Eventually Ghiberti had to admit that he didn’t know how to build the dome and left the project, leaving Brunelleschi triumphant and in charge.

Slide 24

Let’s look at the dome. We’ve seen a number of domes so far this semester. Remember that Brunelleschi had studied architecture in Rome- this dome is likely influenced by the Pantheon, which Brunelleschi would have been able to see. This dome is the largest brick dome ever built, and we’re still not entirely sure how Brunelleschi was able to build this. What Brunelleschi did was build a double-shelled dome. There are essentially two layers of dome, each of which is extremely light. What is so astonishing about this dome, is that there are no buttresses supporting the building. The dome stands up on its own! Watch the video on the next slide for an explanation of how this dome works.

Slide 25

No notes- just watch the video.