

## 1. Setting the Stage

The Middle Ages (a period of European history from the third through 13th centuries), art and learning were centered on the church and religion. But at the start of the 14th century, people became less interested in thinking about God, heaven and the saints, and more interested in thinking about themselves, their surroundings and their everyday lives. The values and ideals popular during the European Renaissance can be described by the term **secular humanism**: secular, meaning not religious and humanism, meaning placing the study and progress of human nature at the center of interests.

The rise of Humanism during the Renaissance can be seen in paintings created by Renaissance artists. Works of art created in the Renaissance are primary sources of information about how people lived in Renaissance Europe.



Jacopa di Cione

*Madonna and Child in Glory*

1360/65

Tempera and gold on panel

[Enlarge](#)

## 2. The Renaissance Connection

Reproduction or projection of *Madonna and Child in Glory*(Jacopo di Cione). This is a very early example of Renaissance painting, containing many of the characteristics of paintings from the **Middle Ages**. The halos around the heads of the figures in the paintings, a signal that they are residents of heaven. The pairs of saints and angels around the upper border of the painting are smaller than the Madonna and child in the center. This is called **hieratic scale**, which means making the most important figures in a work of art larger than less important figures. How can you remember a term like hieratic (think of the root of the word)?



Franconian School

*Miraculous Mass of St. Martin of Tours*

about 1440

Tempera and gold on canvas on panel

**Enlarge**

Reproduction or projection of *Miraculous Mass of St. Martin of Tours* (Franconian School). Compare the background in this painting to the background in the painting you just saw. It was common during the Middle Ages for artists to use gold backgrounds to symbolize the holy atmosphere of heaven but artists in the Renaissance were less interested in heaven and much more interested in what the world around them looked like. Does St. Martin of Tours wear a halo? There are other saints in the background panel in this painting. Did this artist use Hieratic scale. Where? Why? Where are the figures in this painting? Do their surroundings look true to life? Why or why not? Answer these questions in Cornell Notes.



Giuliano Bugiardini

*Madonna and Child with St.  
John*

1523/1525

Oil on panel

**Enlarge**

Reproduction or projection of *Madonna and Child with St. John* (Giuliano Bugiardini). Do these figures wear halos? How do they differ from the halos the students saw in the first painting? Describe the **landscape** surrounding these figures. Is the landscape heavenly or earthly? As Renaissance interests changed from studying religion to studying natural sciences and human nature, the paintings created during the Renaissance changed too. In this painting, the holy family of the Madonna and baby Jesus with St. John live in the same world as ordinary people. This painting is made with oil paint, invented during the Renaissance. Oil paint allowed artists to build up layers of paint that light could shine through, and allowed artists to represent light in a more believable way. Compare this painting with the first painting you saw, made of tempera paint, and list the differences in faces, folds of cloth and hair. The new technique of **oil** painting was first used in Flanders (the Netherlands) by Jan van Eyck (1380-1440).



Giovanni Agostino da Lodi  
*Adoration of the Shepherds*

1510

Oil on panel

[Enlarge](#)

Reproduction or projection of *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Giovanni Agostino da Lodi). This painting, made a little later than the others, shows the holy family of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus, with shepherds on each side of the painting and an angel playing a lute at the center. Does this artist use hieratic scale. Why or why not? Can you see any halos? Is this painting made with tempera paint or oil paint?



[Enlarge](#)

Examine the buildings in the background very carefully. Do they look true to life? Why or why not. Mathematical formulas allowed artists to represent space in paintings in a very believable way were invented during the Renaissance. We call this **accurate perspective**. Compare the perspective in this painting with the perspective you saw in the earlier painting *Miraculous Mass of St. Martin of Tours*(Franconian School). Which looks more true to life? Why? Is there any hieratic scale at work? Where is there landscape in this painting? Did the artist use oil paint or tempera? Renaissance artists represented the interests in the culture they worked in and that the saints, heaven and the church began to be a part of everyday life, quite literally as this painting shows.



Annibale Carracci

*The Bean Eater*

1582/83

Oil on canvas

**Enlarge**

Reproduction or projection of the *Bean Eater* (Annibale Carracci). This painting was made later in the Renaissance than any of the others the students have seen. While religious subjects remained popular during the Renaissance, for the first time in art history ordinary people also became worthy subjects for works of art. Is the man in the painting a saint? Is this painting an oil painting? How can you tell?

The Renaissance spirit and the renewed interest in ancient Greece and Rome were the inspiration for a brilliant creative period in literature and art. With great **realism** and **individuality**, writers and artists brought to life the ideals of the Renaissance.

Like the writers of the Renaissance, the artists of the time looked back to the ancient Greeks and Romans for their themes and ideas. They used ancient works of art as their models in painting a variety of subjects--subjects from Greek Mythology, scenes from Roman history, incidents in the Bible and Church history. They also captures on canvas Renaissance politicians patrons of art, and ordinary people busy with their daily activities. Medieval artists had used their creativity mainly to serve the Church and express their religious feelings. Their paintings general showed people who were stiffly posed and whose faces had little individuality. Renaissance art, like classical art, emphasized the uniqueness of each human face and figure. In portraits, Renaissance artists tried to show each individual's character and personality in a lifelike way.

**Balance and proportion.** Renaissance artists and architects saw nature as the standard for balance and proportion. they hoped to achieve these same qualities in their own work so that it would look more realistic. While medieval painters had often drawn people larger than building, renaissance artists tried to show people, trees, buildings, and mountains in their proper sizes.

Use of perspective. another step toward realism was the discovery of how to achieve perspective--the impression of depth and distance on the flat surface of painting. The Florentine painter Giotto had first used this technique about 1300. Giotto's realistic style seemed odd to medieval eyes, however, and his advances were ignored till the renaissance.

Perry, Marvin. *History of the World: The Modern Era.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994. *Print.*