

The History of Western European Art

This summary is intended to give you an overview of the major movements in Western European Art. It is by no means a complete guide. Bear in mind that artists are not easily pigeonholed into well-defined categories, and definitions vary from artist to artist and from critic to critic.

The Renaissance 15th - 16th century

The Renaissance was a period of great creativity including art, science, literature and architecture centred Italy. Artists turned towards the ancient Greeks for inspiration and studied the natural world, perfecting their understanding of such subjects as anatomy and perspective.

Major artists: Sandro Botticelli, Piero della Francesca, Leonarda da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti.

The Baroque 17th century

The Baroque period was a reaction against the style of the previous Late Renaissance. The movement was encouraged by the Catholic Church, who wanted a return to tradition and spirituality.

Major artists: Caravaggio, Rubens, Rembrandt, Velazquez and Vermeer.

The Rococo 18th century

The Rococo style succeeded Baroque art and is usually associated with the French King Louis XV (1715 - 1774). Rococo is a light, very elaborate and decorative style of art.

Major artists: Watteau, Fragonard and Francois Boucher.

Neoclassicism mid 18th - early 19th century

Neoclassicism was a movement that looked back to the style of ancient Greece and Rome and opposed the exaggerated Rococo and the emotional Baroque style. The rise of neoclassical art was part of a general revival of classical thoughts, which contributed to the American and French revolutions.

Major artists: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Jacques-Louis David.