

Exploring Paintings Related to Renaissance Religious Culture

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Abstract. This study focuses on the study and appreciation of religious paintings in the Renaissance, the main reason for studying this aspect is that it is more interested in the collision between art and society as well as the connection between art and religion in the history of art. This aspect is also a very important part of the Renaissance, which is related to that period of history and the creative process of the painters at that time; this study mainly focuses on the analysis of religion and famous paintings in the Renaissance period; the method of literature analysis was used to find and read the relevant information and literature, and the advantage of this method is that it can analyze the religious belief system and the influence and the existence of paintings in the society at that time. The system and the influence of religious culture in the paintings, that is, the use of literature analysis method to analyze the content of the paper, conducive to research; through the study found that religious culture is one of the important elements of the Renaissance, but also changed the style of the previous paintings and the form of creation. It has also become one of the most important components and changes in the history of humanities and society.

Keywords: Dramatic; Anatomy; Religious; Michelangelo; Leonardo da Vinci.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the study and appreciation of religious paintings in the Renaissance, mainly out of interest in the collision between art and society and the connection between art and religion in art history. This aspect is also a very important part of the Renaissance, and the study of this issue is also conducive to a better understanding of the major events of the Renaissance or the life of painters; this study is very meaningful to study the characteristics of the diversity and complexity of the social environment of the Renaissance, and the changes in the way of painting in the Renaissance; this study focuses on the specific development of Renaissance religions and paintings. The method of literature analysis is used to find and read relevant information and literature, and the advantage of this method is that it can analyze the influence of the social religious belief system and religious culture in painting at that time, which is conducive to the development of the study; the ultimate goal of this study is to thoroughly understand and analyze the religious culture, the author's thoughts, and the backgrounds of the following paintings, and to achieve this goal, one has conducted a lot of data access research and creates its ultimate understanding and appreciation of the painting. The ultimate goal of this study is to thoroughly understand and analyze the religious culture involved in the following paintings and to relate their appreciation to the context of their creation, the author's thoughts, and religious culture. Through the analysis of these two works, the artistic charm of Michelangelo's works is explored.

2. Background

The Renaissance was crucial to the development of human civilization in Europe. The Renaissance also demonstrated the value of talent and was associated with "renewal". During the Renaissance, there were many works that demonstrated the difference between old and new cultures, the transformation of thinking and the creation of the modern state, and the principle of balanced development. It was also the power of the Renaissance that made more people realize that culture was a powerful driving force in society.

The attitude towards religion was very strong in the society at that time. Many religious people defended the church, and other humanisms came out in favor of the church. The need for religion was



also very urgent. The Italian humanists of the Renaissance were known for opposing and attacking the church and the monks, but they did so, not out of a spirit of irreligious individualism but out of individualism towards religion and out of love for God [1].

3. Last Judgment

3.1. History

At the time of the creation of this painting was also formally the time when the military power in the European region gradually became stronger and stronger, and also Charles V was called the rise of a new power. In 1527 Pope Clermont VII was even forced to flee into Rome to take refuge in Castel d'Angelo, which had been occupied by a chaotic army and had become a state of anarchy. Florence is also in full preparation for the war, Michelangelo feverishly, participates in the defense of the garrison work and assumes the post of commander-in-chief of the entire city's defense. Michelangelo also took the position because his hands could create a more perfect design for the city's defense army. Although he had no idea how to face and create it. Under such pressure, he still absconded to Venice. Florence was besieged by the Spanish army and caught in the crossfire, which, together with famine and plague, killed about forty-four thousand people. It was not until 1530 that the war subsided, and Clement VII summoned Michelangelo to Rome again, telling her that one of the walls of the Sistine Chapel, near the altar, was still empty, waiting for her, waiting for him to work on his gigantic fresco, *The Last Judgment*, after the horrors of the war, the plague, and the flight.

The Last Judgment was begun in the spring of 1536 and became Michelangelo's most iconic work in his sixties. It was another of Michelangelo's major works in the Sistine Chapel, 25 years after he had completed his zenith in the same chapel. The artist was 61 years old at the time, and from the end of 1535 to the end of October 1541, he spent nearly six years painting hundreds of life-size nudes on the large wall behind the altar, which was nearly 200 square meters. The painting has traditionally been referred to by art historians as an encyclopedia of human anatomy. Michelangelo was extremely knowledgeable about human anatomy, and he personally dissected dozens of corpses to study the muscles and bones of the human body in detail, to the point of seriously affecting his appetite. The old man seated to the lower right of Jesus in the center of the painting is holding human skin in his hands, and the face on the skin is the author himself.

3.2. Theme

From time to time this picture gives the impression that both heaven and hell are before that the life of those who have gained favor and salvation rises upward, and that the life of those who have been cursed and punished falls into the abyss, and “looking at the blank wall behind the altar of the chapel he sees the flesh of many, joyful, painful, joyous, alarmed; calm, anxious; holy, wicked; beautiful, ugly; sublime, humble; and those who have died and, as it is recorded in the *Apocalypse*”, heard the angels blowing their long trumpets, and fire flashed out of the sky, and the earth was cracked open, and the flesh of those who have died wakened up one after another from a long nightmare to await the judgment of God [2].

3.3. Appreciate

Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* is a powerful and emotional masterpiece depicting the Christian apocalyptic judgment [3]. Located on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, this fresco was completed between 1536 and 1541. Its magnificence and complexity not only reflect Michelangelo's exceptional artistic skill, but also deeply reflect his understanding of religion and human nature.

First, the composition of *The Last Judgment* is dramatic [4]. In the center is the risen Christ with his right hand raised, symbolizing the authority of judgment. He is surrounded by the Virgin Mary and a multitude of saints, all of whom are in various poses and expressions of anticipation and awe at the outcome of the judgment. This centrally focused composition makes the viewer's gaze inevitably

focus on Christ, thus highlighting his supremacy. Structurally, the sun in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* has the metaphor of "overflowing light," which analyzes the circular structure of *The Last Judgment*. Michelangelo seems to have purposely set up this structure to highlight the Christ-centered painting. Michelangelo's art also illustrates the tension between the body and the soul through the experience of asceticism, and his art is a neo-Platonist interpretation of the "visual symbols of human life and destiny".

Secondly, Michelangelo demonstrates his remarkable knowledge of anatomy and sculptural skill in this painting. The muscular lines and postures of each figure are lifelike, showing the artist's deep understanding of the structure of the human body. These figures are not just static presences, but are full of dynamism and tension, as if they are about to explode with endless power at the moment of judgment. In particular, the dynamic contrast between the redeemed and the damned highlights the great contrast between heaven and hell, adding to the dramatic effect of the work.

Furthermore, Michelangelo's use of rich colors and light effects brings the whole picture to life. Bright blues, reds, and gold make the angels and saints appear holy and sublime, while darker hues are used to express the chaos and pain in hell. This color contrast not only enhances the visual impact but also conveys the theme of redemption and punishment on a spiritual level.

Finally, *The Last Judgment* is not only a religious painting but also a philosophical reflection on the fate of mankind. Michelangelo explores the profound themes of good and evil, redemption and punishment, faith and destiny through his depiction of the scene of the judgment of all beings. Each figure in the painting shows different emotions and destinies, reflecting the complex psychology of human beings when facing the ultimate judgment.

Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* is a great work of art, religion, and philosophy [5]. It not only demonstrates Michelangelo's extraordinary talent as a Renaissance master but also provokes the viewer to think deeply about life and faith through a profound exploration of human destiny. This work is not only visually stunning but also spiritually enlightening [6].

4. The Last Supper

Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, one of the most iconic religious paintings of the Renaissance, was created between 1495 and 1498 and is now housed in the Church of St. Mary of Thanksgiving in Milan, Italy. This work not only occupies an important position in art history but is also highly praised for its profound religious connotation and complex emotional expression.

4.1. History

Before creating *The Last Supper*, Da Vinci had already made a name for himself in Italy and Europe, known for his exceptional artistic talent and versatility. However, his time in Milan was not all smooth sailing. Milan was in a period of political turmoil and economic hardship, which had an impact on Da Vinci's creativity. However, Ludovico Sforza's support and funding of the arts provided Da Vinci with an invaluable opportunity to focus on creating this magnificent work.

Da Vinci chose an unusual technique when creating *The Last Supper*. Instead of using the traditional wet fresco method (fresco), he tried a new dry fresco technique (secco). This method allowed him to paint directly on the walls after they had dried, enabling him to work with more detail and color. However, this technique also resulted in paintings that were susceptible to environmental influences and eventually flaked and damaged over time.

The Last Supper depicts the New Testament scene of Jesus at the Last Supper with his twelve disciples, specifically the moment when Jesus predicts that one of the disciples will betray him. The depiction of this moment is full of drama and emotional tension, and the expressions and movements of each character are meticulously captured by Da Vinci, demonstrating his deep understanding of human emotion and psychology [7].

This work is not only a religious painting, but also a concentration of Da Vinci's artistic ideas. He incorporated an in-depth study of perspective, composition, and human anatomy, demonstrating the Renaissance quest to combine science and art. Despite the damage caused by technical problems and

historical changes, *The Last Supper* remains one of the most important and influential works of art of the Renaissance and still attracts countless viewers today.

4.2. Creative Opportunity

The opportunity to create Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* came primarily from a commission from Ludovico Sforza, the ruler of Milan at the time. The Sforza family was an important Milanese aristocracy with a strong interest in and support of art and culture. Ludovico Sforza not only wished to emphasize the power and status of his family through a work of art but also wanted to add a solemn and sacred atmosphere to a religious building.

The specific occasion for the creation of *The Last Supper* is closely related to the project of decorating the refectory of the Church of Santa Maria del Fiore. The walls of this church, whose refectory was a place for monks to eat and meditate, needed a fresco of religious and educational significance. For this work, Da Vinci chose one of the most dramatic and religiously significant scenes in the *New Testament*, the Last Supper of Jesus with the Twelve Apostles [8].

Leonardo da Vinci was inspired by the commission and his deep understanding of religion and human emotions. With this painting, he hoped to not only recreate the biblical story but also to capture the emotional turmoil and psychological conflicts within the characters. In *The Last Supper*, Leonardo da Vinci skillfully shows the shocking moments of Jesus' prophetic betrayal through the characters' expressions and body language, enabling the viewer to feel the tension and tragic atmosphere.

4.3. Appreciate

First of all, the composition of *The Last Supper* is extremely delicate, fully demonstrating da Vinci's excellent design ability. The scene is centered on a long table with Jesus and his twelve disciples seated around it. Jesus is located in the center of the picture, and his image presents a calmness and solemnity that contrasts with the agitation of the disciples around him. Through this centrally focused layout, Da Vinci draws the viewer's attention to Jesus, highlighting his central position in the scene. Secondly, Da Vinci used a single-point perspective in his work, in which all the perspective lines converge on the head of Jesus, further strengthening the visual effect of Jesus as the center of the picture. The perspective technique not only enhances the depth and three-dimensionality of the image but also gives the viewer an immersive feeling, as if the viewer is standing at the scene of the Supper, witnessing this historic moment with his own eyes.

In his use of color, Da Vinci demonstrated excellent color control. Although the colors of the original may have changed due to age and restoration, Da Vinci's careful arrangement of colors is still evident. He used the technique of contrasting light and dark to make the characters' facial expressions and clothing folds more vivid and three-dimensional. In addition, he introduced a sacred atmosphere through the natural light from the background window, making the whole picture full of religious solemnity and sanctity.

Furthermore, Da Vinci's depiction of the characters' expressions and gestures is extremely delicate, and the reaction of each disciple to Jesus' prophecy, "One of them will betray me," is captured to the fullest extent. Peter's surprise, John's contemplation, Judas' nervousness and defensiveness These rich emotional expressions not only demonstrate da Vinci's superior painting skills but also provide the viewer with an in-depth understanding of the inner world of the characters. Especially Judas, his figure shrinks back and he clutches the bag of silver coins in his hand, hinting at the impending betrayal, a detailing that makes the picture full of tension and drama.

Da Vinci also demonstrated his in-depth study of human anatomy and meticulous observation of nature in *The Last Supper*. The posture, gestures and facial expressions of each figure are extremely natural and full of life [9]. This not only reflects the Renaissance's pursuit of humanism and realism, but also demonstrates da Vinci's deep understanding of the psychological and physical states of his characters.

In addition, this work also contains rich symbolic meaning. For example, the three windows behind Jesus symbolize the Trinity, while his open hands and the bread and wine on the table symbolize the

Eucharist and Jesus' sacrifice. Through these symbolic techniques, Da Vinci not only tells a religious story but also conveys profound theological and philosophical ideas.

Overall, Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* is a masterpiece that combines artistic skill, emotional expression, and religious connotation. It not only demonstrates da Vinci's exceptional talent in composition, perspective, color, and detailing but also conveys a profound reflection on human nature, faith, and destiny through the profound depiction of the characters' psychology and rich symbolism [10]. This work has brought great shock and enlightenment to the viewer both visually and spiritually and has become an indelible classic in the history of art.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study are that religious culture was one of the important elements at the beginning of the Renaissance, as well as changing the style of painting and the form of creation in the past. It also became one of the most important components and changes in the history of the humanities and society, which further leads to the conclusion that the Renaissance used this and other factors to change the ideology of Europe as well as to lead the European anti-feudal thought into the future, and also reformed many of the church's practices and claims; this study provides a lot of valuable references to the future of research in this direction, which mainly affect the As for the analyses of paintings during the Renaissance and the correlation between the Renaissance and religious culture, future research should focus more on the beliefs of writers and the journey of writers' hearts in art history for in-depth investigation.

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