

# Artistic Movement

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the attributes art historians use to place works of art into specific movements, and how art historians can use comparison and contrast to evaluate works of art:

## 1. Identifying Artistic Movements

An **artistic movement** is a category of art in which the works of art share similar stylistic, conceptual, and/or philosophical concerns, and are influenced by the context the artists experienced. **Context** is the historical, social, political, religious, or geographical situation that informs the creation of works of art.

The movements help to separate the history of art into cultural and artistic trends, which, if nothing else, aids historians in organizing historical data. This is also important in associating artwork with social and cultural movements outside of art, because similar artistic expressions may suggest similar cultural experiences.

It is a consensus, or widely accepted idea, among scholars that artistic movements are identified based on similar influences the artists experienced, as well as broader social context, such as:

- National or regional style
- The ethnicity of the artist producing the work
- The language of the artist producing the work
- Important historical events

This is where new art history blends with traditional art history, which emphasized formal analysis and connoisseurship, as well as comparison and contrast. The result is a very complete method of categorizing and evaluating works of art.



## TERMS TO KNOW

### Artistic Movement

A tendency or style in art involving the pursuit of a shared philosophy or goal, for a finite period of time

### Context

The historical, social, political, religious, or geographical situation that informs the creation of works of art

## 2. Comparison and Contrast

**Comparison and contrast** is a frequently used method when evaluating works of art. To get a better appreciation of what makes a piece of artwork special, it helps to place it relative to another work of art. This ultimately allows you to more clearly illustrate aspects of both pieces of artwork by comparing their similarities and contrasting their differences.

**Formal analysis**, or understanding works of art by consideration of their physical or formal qualities, often involves comparison and contrast.

### IN CONTEXT

Consider the following two works of art. The first one is *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, started in 1495 and finished in 1498. The second painting is *The Last Supper* by Tintoretto, which was finished in 1594. Both works are from the Italian Renaissance and share the same subject matter; however, they were produced almost exactly 100 years apart. The methods by which the artists convey that subject matter are very different.



**The Last Supper by Leonardo da Vinci**



The Last Supper by Tintoretto

The first work of art, by da Vinci, is a great example from the middle of the Renaissance. The first thing you may notice is that all the figures are facing the viewer. The mural is evenly divided down the center with six disciples on one side and six on the other, which provides visual symmetry and helps to support the central figure of Christ. The user's eye is also drawn to the central figure of Christ by a clever use of linear perspective. Notice how the vanishing points of the arrows converge on his head.



The figures are placed within a classical piece of architecture, which was a common theme at the time, regardless of the fact that the actual Jesus would have had his last supper in a much humbler setting. A few classical examples of architecture stand out, but the most noticeable is the coffered



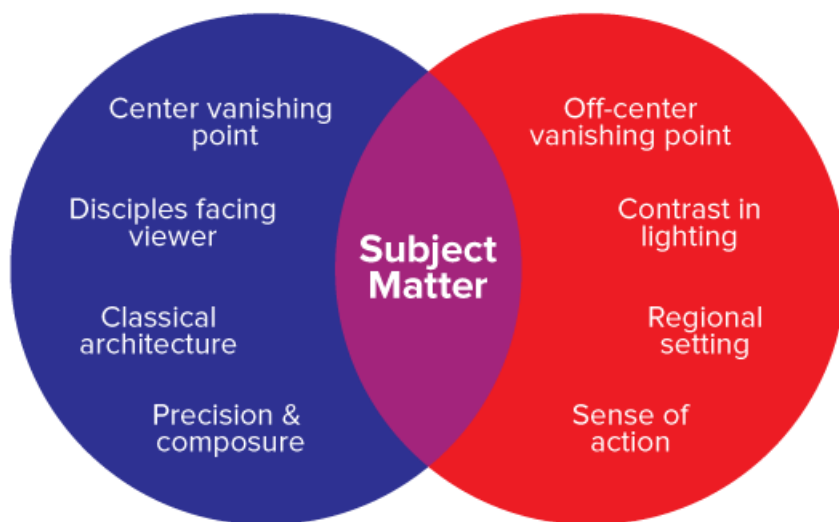
ceiling, similar to what you would see in ancient Roman architecture such as the Pantheon.

In contrast, Tintoretto's painting shows the same subject matter, but portrays it in a vastly different way. Notice that the setting is not in a classically designed building, but in what looks like an Italian inn, similar to the way genre artists in Northern Europe used local settings in their paintings. He also uses a different type of linear perspective with a vanishing point, rather than dead center. Additionally, instead of using linear perspective to draw the user's eye to Christ, Tintoretto uses sharp contrast and light and dark to highlight it.



The scene is also much more active, versus the composure of da Vinci's mural. This type of dynamic painting became more and more common in the Baroque period, which followed the Renaissance in Italy.

A Venn diagram, or a chart where two or more circles overlap, is a useful tool when doing a comparison and contrast with two works of art. Each circle represents a work of art; areas of overlap are where the artwork share characteristics.



In da Vinci's mural, the center vanishing point, the disciples facing the viewer, the classical architecture, and the precision in composure are very evident aspects.

In Tintoretto's painting, you have an off-center vanishing point, a contrast in lighting, a regional setting—the Italian inn where it looks like the Last Supper is taking place—and more of a sense of action.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### Comparison and Contrast

Looking at two works of art at the same time and thinking about how they are different and how they are similar

##### Formal Analysis

Understanding works of art by consideration of their physical, or formal qualities; formal analysis often involves comparison and contrast.



#### SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned that an artistic movement is a category of art in which works share similar stylistic, conceptual, and/or philosophical concerns. When **identifying artistic movements**, scholars look at any similar influences the artists experienced, as well as the broader social context.

You also learned that **comparison and contrast** is a frequently used method when evaluating works of art, as it allows for a better appreciation of what makes a piece of artwork special by placing it relative to another work of art. When comparing and contrasting works of art, Venn diagrams are very helpful tools that provide a visual layout of the similarities and differences between the works.

Good luck!

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**Comparison and Contrast**

Looking at two works of art at the same time and thinking about how they are different and how they are similar.

**Context**

The historical, social, political, religious, or geographical situation that informs the creation of works of art.

**Formal Analysis**

Understanding works of art by consideration of their physical, or formal qualities. Formal analysis often involves comparison and contrast.