

Baroque in the Netherlands and Flanders

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers the Baroque in the Netherlands and Flanders. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe Peter Paul Rubens' style and how it differs from the Renaissance style, and identify examples of Rubens' work. This will be accomplished through the exploration of:

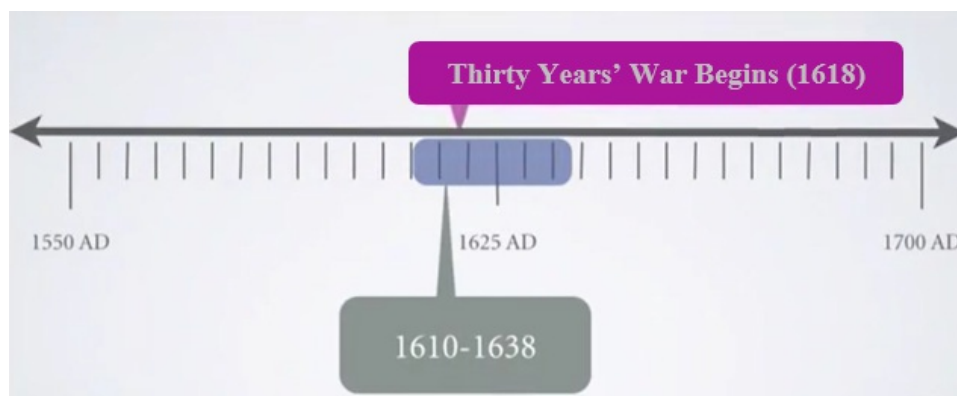


BIG IDEA

Peter Paul Rubens' work differs from that of the Renaissance in its dynamism, drama, and lack of linear perspective.

1. Period and Location: Baroque in the Netherlands and Flanders

The artwork that you will be looking at today dates from between 1610 and 1638, and focuses geographically on the Netherlands and Flanders—specifically Antwerp—in Northern Europe.



2. Peter Paul Rubens: Historical Context and Stylistic Characteristics

It's important to remember that the low countries of the Netherlands and Flanders were under Spanish control for some time during this period. Eventually, the Netherlands broke free and established the Protestant Dutch Republic, while Flanders remained Catholic and under Spanish control. The artist Peter Paul Rubens, while

Catholic, would definitely have felt the Protestant influence that existed at that time.

Rubens was born 1577 in what is now modern-day Germany, but worked predominantly in Antwerp, in what is now modern-day Belgium, or Flanders. He was a successful artist, art collector, and diplomat, as well as an instructor in his own art studio.



DID YOU KNOW

Rubens trained many artists, including the famous Anthony van Dyck.



Self-portrait by Peter Paul Rubens

1623

Oil on panel

His style is defined by his dramatic use of form, construction along a diagonal, foreshortening, and his interest in classical sculpture, which was influenced by a trip to Italy—a trip that many northern artists made in their lifetimes. The use of **allegory**, as well as a particular depiction of the female body, are also hallmarks of his style.



TERM TO KNOW

Allegory

A symbolic narrative; a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through material forms.

3. Peter Paul Rubens: Examples of His Artwork

This first example, “Elevation of the Cross,” is the central panel of a triptych from Antwerp Cathedral. It’s a depiction of Christ in physical anguish being lifted upwards, already attached to the cross.



Elevation of the Cross by Peter Paul Rubens

1610-1611

Oil on canvas

The influence of Italian sculpture and understanding of anatomy is apparent in the muscular figure straining to pull the heavy cross upwards. The feeling of effort is wonderfully portrayed—it’s almost palpable. Two figures in the lower right are pulling on ropes attached to the cross and struggle with the weight, as another muscular figure—the bald man in the center—pulls the cross upwards from underneath. They are next to an image of an armored man pushing the cross forward and across from a man in red who pulls on the actual body of Christ in an effort to raise him up.



The entire composition takes place along a diagonal, which creates the sensation of movement and adds to the visual dynamism of the painting.

The next example, depicting the arrival of Marie de Medici, is an interesting contrast between the composure of the widowed queen of France and the excited **dynamism** of the mythical sea figures, who rejoice at her safe arrival. The spectacular nature of the Baroque was favored by the aristocracy, and Marie commissioned this painting as a tribute to her life and career.



Arrival of Marie de Medici at Marseilles by Peter Paul Rubens

1621-1625

Oil on canvas

Marie is shown debarking her ship in France from Italy amidst the pomp and circumstance of her arrival. She is betrothed to Henry IV.



Three nude women are notable at the bottom, in particular, for their full-figured and fleshy appearance, which is a trademark feature of Rubens and a physical trait coined as **Rubenesque**, because of its close association with the painter. You may have actually used that term before without knowing where it came from.



TRY IT

This last example, Rubens' painting "The Allegory of the Outbreak of War," provides an excellent example of Baroque painting, which you can compare and contrast with one of the quintessential examples of Renaissance paintings, that of "The School of Athens" by Raphael.

First, start with Raphael's painting, shown below. It is clearly organized. It's parallel to the picture plane, within a rational space, created with linear perspective. It's considered one of the best examples of the Renaissance style. The figures aren't moving very much; although Aristotle and Plato are moving forward, and there's some implied movement or motion within the individual groups, it doesn't really appear that much is going to change in the next few moments.



The School of Athens by Raphael

1509-1511

Fresco

Now, contrast this with Rubens' "Allegory of the Outbreak of War," shown below, which depicts rapid movement and change. You are seeing a snapshot of activity as it's happening—a rush of people along a diagonal, out of the painting and into the viewer's space. If this was actually happening, the viewer would need to stand clear, as it's implied that they are coming out of the **picture plane** itself. The lack of linear perspective and clearly defined space, and the use of **foreshortening** to define the space, help to enhance the sensation of movement, chaos, and panic.



Allegory of the Outbreak of War by Peter Paul Rubens

1637-1638

Oil on canvas

Whereas Renaissance artists worked to hide the signs of their painting, Rubens makes them a part of the painting, in a **painterly** style that features less distinct edges and more visible brush strokes. It's an example of Rubens' defining style, featuring dynamism, drama, and lack of linear perspective, contrasting with the Renaissance style of composure, stability, and application of rational scientific principles, such as linear perspective.



TERMS TO KNOW

Dynamism

The illusion of movement in a composition.

Rubenesque

Referring to the figures portrayed by painter Rubens, usually depicting plump or full-figured women.

Picture Plane

The invisible plane that corresponds to the surface of the painting, the picture plane is like a window opening out onto another world.

Foreshortening

The method in drawing where represented objects are reduced in size, and are not parallel to the picture plane in order to convey an illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface.

Painterly

A style of painting (such as impressionism) that emphasizes the brushstroke and action of applying paint to the surface.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **the Baroque in the Netherlands and Flanders**, focusing on the artist **Peter Paul Rubens**. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms and how to describe the **historical context during the period of Rubens**. You also learned how to describe the **stylistic characteristics of Rubens' artwork**, particularly his paintings' dynamism, drama, and lack of linear perspective. Lastly, you learned how to identify **examples of Rubens' artwork** by examining his paintings and contrasting his style with that of the Renaissance.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell.



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