



European Art: Baroque

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The Baroque style predominated in European art, beginning about 1590 and lasting through the first decades of the eighteenth century (surviving variously until 1710 or 1740 in different countries).

Although the art of this period encompasses significant national variations, certain common qualities can be noted in most Baroque works. Seeking to involve viewers both physically and emotionally with the illusory realms which they depicted, Baroque artists utilized diverse means to challenge the "decorum" and restraint of the Renaissance period.

Intensely dramatic expressions and gestures, that seem to demand a response from the viewer; strongly foreshortened objects, which appear to extend beyond the confines of the art work; and sudden shifts of light and dark are among the "hallmark" features of the Baroque.

Intolerance

Caravaggio, who created an extensive body of work with homoerotic implications, played a major role in formulating the Baroque style. However, because the Baroque era in Europe was a period of growing intolerance of any type of "deviance" (sexual or otherwise), most of the artists who were influenced by Caravaggio's stylistic innovations sought to avoid any overt indication of moral "impropriety" in their works or lifestyles.

The execution of Jérôme Duquesnoy, an internationally prominent Belgian sculptor accused of sodomy, exemplifies the brutality that political and religious leaders exhibited as they combated same-sex love and all other manifestations of "deviance."

Unfortunately, for most of the twentieth century, scholars effectively endorsed the goals of European leaders of the Baroque era by insisting that art of this period contained no indications of queer desire. Only recently have art historians begun to acknowledge the subtle, but effective, means that some artists and patrons utilized to articulate queer identities. Hopefully, future generations of scholars will continue to expand our understanding of this aspect of Baroque culture.

Although the terms gay, lesbian, and queer were not devised until a later period, I have employed them here to denote manifestations of love, desire, and identity that might be described by those terms today.

Caravaggio and the Baroque



Four Baroque paintings (top to bottom):
1) *Bacchus* by Caravaggio.
2) *The Rape of Ganymede* by Rembrandt van Rijn.
3) *Saint Sebastian* by Guido Reni.
4) *Mars and Venus* by Paolo Veronese, one of many paintings collected by Queen Christina of Sweden.