

Chapter 15

Drama and Light: Mannerism, the,
Baroque, and
Rococo

Mannerism



- The new generation of artists in Rome attempted to go beyond nature
- Parmigianino creates a distorted space where naturalistic proportions are discarded at will – logic is abandoned as well, as in the column supporting nothing
- Mary looks like an aristocratic figure, holding the infant Jesus at a cool distance
- Mannerists felt that the human body was most elegant when posed to form the letter S (called the *serpentinata*)

The Counter-Reformation and Tintoretto



- During the Counter-Reformation artists are instructed by the church to create works that will entertain and electrify viewers
- Tintoretto's *Last Supper* plunges us into a deep, distorted space - he emphasizes the supernatural aspect of the subject with his mysterious lighting and ghostly angels
- The everyday elements, like the servants and animals further accentuate the miraculous aspect of the scene

The Baroque Period

- Everything was being reconsidered in the *Baroque Period* (c.1575-1750) – from the position of the earth in the universe, to the position of the individual in society
- People questioned authority in religion, in government, in science, in thought
- Descartes started his philosophical inquiry by doubting that anything existed
- Galileo using a telescope, declared that the earth was not at the center of the universe
- Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity

The Baroque Period

El Greco



- Like Tintoretto, El Greco is sometimes classified as a Mannerist
- He visited Rome and was influenced by its Mannerists, especially their elongated, distorted figures
- But, his work is intensely emotional, and committed to the ideals of the Counter-Reformation
- El Greco often ignores reality, in favor of the creation of a spiritual world

The Baroque Period

Caravaggio and Naturalism

- In *The Supper at Emmaus* Caravaggio shows Christ and his disciples as real working-class people
- The architecture is eliminated – we focus on the figures – they make dramatic gestures that almost seem to leap out of the picture and into real space
- He chooses to illustrate the very moment of illumination – when his followers realize they are with the risen Christ
- The stark lighting illuminates the face of Jesus and focuses our attention on the most important gestures and details



Artemisia Gentileschi: The Spread of Tenebroso



- Artemisia Gentileschi (a female painter) depicts Judith, who after decapitating the tyrant Holofernes is leaving his tent
- The drama is accentuated by the lighting – the source is the candle which casts a dramatic shadow on her face
- The mood is suspenseful, as they appear to hear someone approaching
- This is a painting in the *tenebroso*, or dark manner
- Followers of Caravaggio who specialized in such night scenes were known as *Caravaggisti*

The Baroque Period

Bernini

- Gianlorenzo Bernini's *David* shows the hero at a specific moment – just before he releases the slingshot
- There is great dynamic energy, and an intense grimace of concentration on his less than ideal face
- The gaze is so intense, that the unseen Goliath becomes part of the work
- Bernini breaks down the barrier between art and the real world



Baroque Naturalism in Spain: Velazquez



- In *Las Meninas* by Diego Velazquez we see a moment in the life of the Spanish court
- The King and Queen are reflected in the back mirror – we are honored by actually occupying their position
- We see the artist as an important member of the court
- Unlike the northern painters Velazquez's realism does not come from copying minute details – he captures the *impression* of realism through suggestive brushstrokes

The Baroque Period in the North - Rubens

- The *Elevation of the Cross* was painted when Peter Paul Rubens returned to Flanders from a long stay in Italy
- Using the rich color of the *Venetians*, the active, muscular figures of *Michelangelo*, and the dramatic lighting of *Caravaggio* – he creates a potent combination
- The strong diagonal of the cross and the many directions of activity are brought to a dynamic equilibrium



The Baroque Period in the North - Vermeer

- Protestant values and the patronage of middle-class merchants produced an art reflective of middle-class life in the Dutch Republic
- In Jan Vermeer's *Woman with a Water Jug* we see an everyday scene raised to a high artistic plane - he combines vivid realism (carefully observed textures) with idealism (simplification)
- The simple, geometric volumes of her head, the repetition of the curves, the cool blue light, all serve to create a quiet, harmonious, even spiritual image



The Baroque Period in the North

Rembrandt



- Rembrandt van Rijn was commissioned to paint a company of officers – he surprised the 18 men, who had anticipated a traditional portrait (and had each paid equally)
- Instead, he creates an imaginative composition – some figures are featured, but others are hidden
- Even lighting is abandoned – he uses a dramatic *chiaroscuro*
- The result was impressive – but many were disappointed – his commissions decreased – but he will continue to insist on following his own vision

The Baroque in France

Poussin



- Nicolas Poussin was the leader of *Classicism* – though French, he lived in Rome and studied the art of the Renaissance along with ancient works
- Poussin's paintings were based on ideals, not naturalism
- His figures are based on ancient sculptures and they are set in an idealized world

The Baroque in France

Versailles



- The palace at Versailles combines *classical* and *Baroque* elements – the design expresses the king's domination, even over nature
- The Hall of Mirrors filled with gold and silver furniture and jeweled trees, reflected the gardens and impressed visitors with the king's majesty

The Rococo Fragonard

- The visual idea of love in a garden was especially popular in the France of Louis XV, where the court was dominated by the king's mistresses, and intellectual life flourished in the salons of female hostesses
- Romantic love was a dominant theme in art
- Jean-Honoré Fragonard paints a scene of young aristocrats playing at love in an overgrown garden – the young girl is playing along with the game as she playfully kick off her slipper

