

Italian Renaissance and the Northern Renaissance

Differences Between The Two

The Renaissance was a period of great cultural and technological changes that swept Europe from the end of the 13th century. It was integral in developing Europe into a powerhouse. Although, each part of Europe was subjected to different changes, there were two primary renaissances, which were most notable. They were the Italian and the Northern renaissance. Both of these renaissances had a profound impact on Europe. But they also had some typical differences among them and each was unique in its own way.

Italian Renaissance

The Italian Renaissance was a period of great cultural changes and achievement throughout Europe. It spanned from the end of the 13th century up to about the 1600's. It marked the transition of Europe from the medieval period to the Early Modern Europe. The term renaissance is a modern term that was coined by historians many years after the Renaissance had already ended.

Although the origins of the Italian Renaissance can be traced to many different locations, it is important to note that different aspects of Italian culture and society remained largely medieval during the time of the Renaissance; the Renaissance did not come into full swing until the end of the century. The word Renaissance means "rebirth", and the era is best known for the renewed interest in the culture of classical antiquity (Greece and Rome) after the period that Renaissance humanists labeled the Dark Ages. These changes, while significant, were concentrated in the elite, and for the vast majority of the population life was little changed from the Middle Ages.

The Italian Renaissance is best known for its cultural achievements credited to writers, poets, artists, sculptors, and "Renaissance Men" (or women!). Figures such as Petrarch (The "Father of Humanism"), Leonardo da Vinci (The ideal Renaissance Man known for the Mona Lisa, the Vitruvian Man, and many more creations!), Raphael (known for his painting, The School of Athens.), Dante Alighieri (known for his work, The Divine Comedy.), and

many more are significant characters of this era and movement that contribute significantly.

Northern Renaissance

The Northern Renaissance is the term used to describe the Renaissance in northern Europe, or anywhere in Europe outside of Italy. Before 1450, Italian Renaissance humanism had little influence outside Italy. From the late 15th century (1400s) the ideas spread around Europe. The resulting German Renaissance, French Renaissance, English Renaissance, Renaissance in the Netherlands, Polish Renaissance and other national and localized movements moved forward with different characteristics and strengths.

In France, King Francis I imported Italian art, commissioned Italian artists (including Leonardo da Vinci), and built grand palaces at great expense, beginning the French Renaissance. Trade and commerce in cities like Bruges (Belgium) in the 15th century and Antwerp (Belgium) in the 16th increased cultural exchange between Italy and the Low Countries (defined, geographically, as the Netherlands and Belgium), however in art, and especially architecture, late Gothic influences remained present for a while to come.

Universities and the printed book (made possible by the Movable Type Printing Press by Johannes Gutenberg) helped spread the spirit of the age through France, the Low Countries and the Holy Roman Empire (Most of Germany), and then to Scandinavia (Norway, Finland, Sweden) and finally Britain by the late 16th century. Writers and humanists of the Northern Renaissance were greatly influenced by the Italian Renaissance model and were part of the same intellectual movement. During the English Renaissance writers such as William Shakespeare composed works of lasting influence.

Differences Between the Italian and the Northern Renaissance

Italian Renaissance

Took place in Italy.

More secular (non-religious).

Anatomy, attention to human detail (humanism)

Fresco (paint on wet plaster).

Focus on Greece & Rome (domes, pillars, arches.).

Enjoyment of, and indulging on, worldly goods.

Northern Renaissance

Outside of Italy, but within Europe.

Without a direct link to Rome and Greece, it was more religious.

Focus on color and detail, but not humanism (think strands of hair, but not definition of muscle.)

Oil painting on wood.

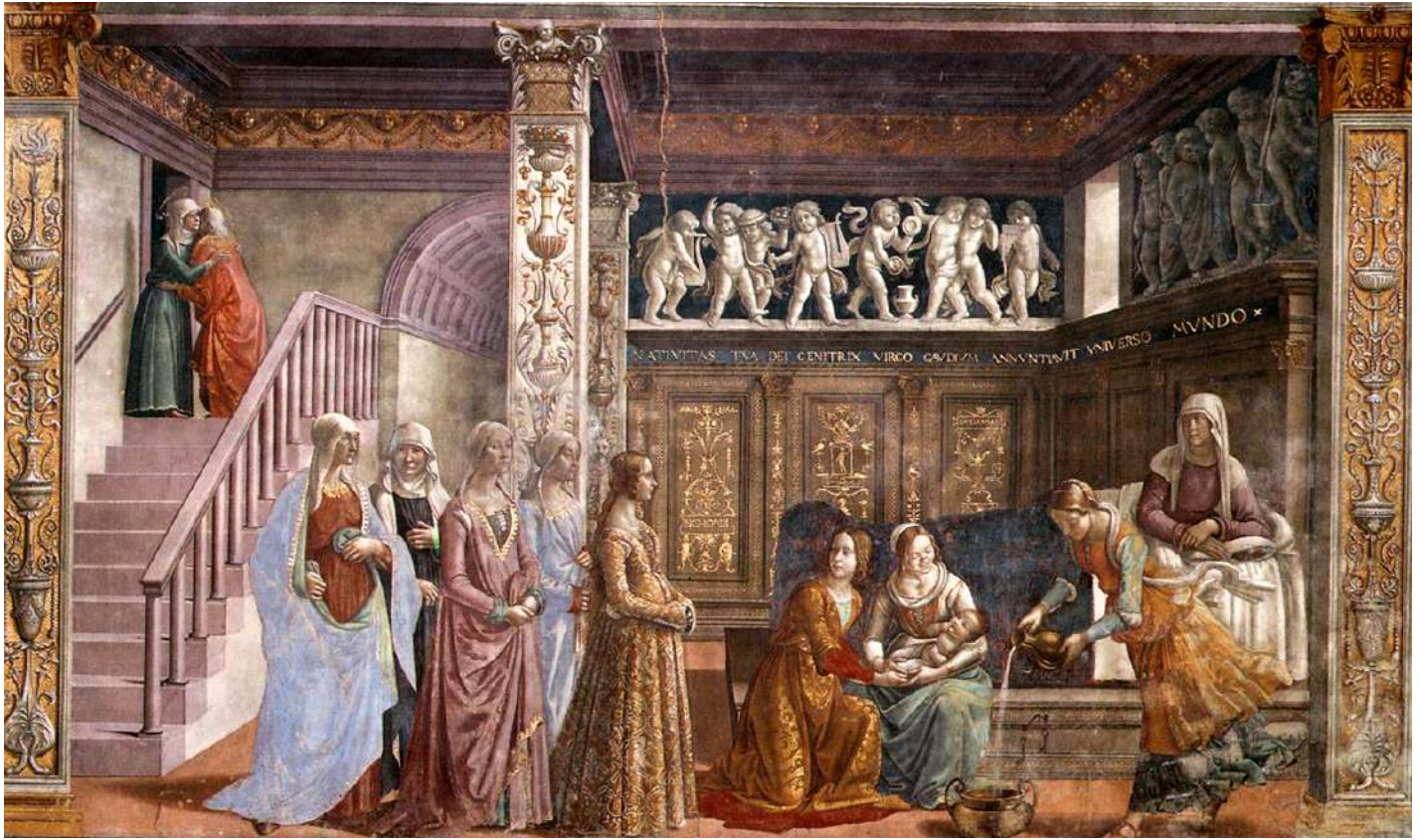
Gradual change from the Medieval Era into the Renaissance.

Focus on the sciences and mathematics.



Arnolfini Portrait by Jan van Eyck (1434)

Widely considered one of the most impressive paintings of the Northern Renaissance for many reasons, the Arnolfini Portrait captures a private scene of a merchant and his wife. Note the detail in the hair on the dog, the material of the clogs in the bottom left corner, but most importantly, the reflection of van Eyck and his subjects in the mirror located directly above the subjects hands. The proportions of the woman's body, and the lack of exact detail to the bend of the fingers on her left hand, but the vibrancy of the colors in his cloak (deep purples) and her gown (a vibrant and lively green and blue) offer simple differences between the Northern Renaissance art and the Italian Renaissance art.



Nativity of Mary by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1485-1490)

Found in the Tornabuoni Chapel in Florence, Italy, the Nativity of Mary portrays the newborn baby Mary as she is about to be bathed. Detail in the human form can be seen in the bending of the maid on the right and the swirling of her scarf as she moves rapidly from one place to another to keep the bath water warm. We can also see a focus on the human form as St. Anne reclines in the bed as she looks on. Detail in movement can be seen in the sculptures of the babies that line the top of the piece. There is also a focus on shadows and lighting. Although colorful, more detail is paid to the human beings and figures in the photo. Most colors visible in the painting were very common in Renaissance art. Oranges, burgundy and merlots, and earthly colors such as wood and brown were frequent.