

Short History of the Renaissance in Italy



The Renaissance spawned the use of the label Renaissance Man to describe a person who is extremely talented in multiple fields, and no discussion of the Renaissance is complete without the original Renaissance Man, Leonardo da Vinci. Indeed, if 100 people are asked to describe Leonardo in one word, they might give 100 answers. As the world's most famous polymath and genius, Leonardo found time to be a painter, sculptor, architect, musician, scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, geologist, cartographer, botanist, and writer. It's possible that Michelangelo is the most famous artist in history, but it's also possible that he's an underrated artist. The vast influence of his career is reflected by the fact that he is not only known for his own art but has also come to embody an entire epoch of Western art. Along with Leonardo da Vinci, there are no other artists who so fully capture the spirit of scientific and artistic discovery that characterized art during the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Moreover, Michelangelo's career is distinguished from that of his peers through his seamless ability to work within different art forms, receiving acclaim regardless of the medium. From the intro: The word Renaissance has of late years received a more extended significance than that which is implied in our English equivalent the Revival of Learning. We use it to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern World; and though it is possible to assign certain limits to the period during which this transition took place, we cannot fix on any dates so positively as to say-between this year and that the movement was accomplished. In like manner we cannot refer the whole phenomena of the Renaissance to any one cause or circumstance, or limit them within the field of anyone one department of human knowledge. If we ask the students

of art what they mean by the Renaissance, they will reply that it was the revolution effect in architecture, painting, and sculpture by the recovery of antique monuments. Students of literature, philosophy, and theology see in the Renaissance that discovery of manuscripts, that passion for antiquity, that progress in philology and criticism which led to a correct knowledge of the classics, to a fresh taste in poetry, to new systems of thought, to more accurate analysis, and, finally, to the Lutheran schism and the emancipation of the conscience. Men of science will discourse about the discovery of the solar system by Copernicus and Galileo, the anatomy of Vesalius, and Harveys theory of the circulation of the blood. The origination of a truly scientific method is the point which interests them most in the Renaissance. The political historian, again, has his own answer to the question. The extinction of feudalism, the development of the great nationalities of Europe, the growth of monarchy, the limitation of ecclesiastical authority and the erection of the Papacy into an Italian kingdom, and, in the last place, the gradual emergence of that sense of popular freedom which exploded in the Revolution: these are the aspects of the movement which engross his attention. Jurists will describe the dissolution of legal fictions based upon the false decrivals, the acquisition of a true text of the Roman Code, and the attempt to introduce a rational method into the theory of modern jurisprudence, as well as to commence the study of international law. Men whose attention has been turned to the history of discoveries and inventions will relate the exploration of America and the East, or will point to the benefits conferred upon the world by the arts of printing and engraving, by the compass and the telescope, by paper and by gunpowder ; and will insist that at the moment of the Renaissance all these instances of mechanical utility started into existence to aid the dissolution of what was rotten and must perish, to Strengthen and perpetuate the new and useful and life-giving.

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