

Baroque Art

When? 1600 – 1750.

Where? Italy, Spain, Flanders

Baroque period is stylistically complex, even contradictory. In general, however, the desire to evoke emotional states by appealing to the senses, often in dramatic ways, underlies its manifestations. Some of the qualities most frequently associated with the **Baroque** are: grandeur, sensuous richness, drama, vitality, movement, tension, emotional exuberance and a tendency to blur distinctions between the various arts.

The **Baroque** style of painting that evolved from this program was paradoxically both **sensuous and spiritual**; while naturalistic treatment rendered the painted religious image more readily comprehensible to the average churchgoer, dramatic and illusory effects were used to stimulate piety and devotion. The painting of Roman Catholic countries such as Italy or Spain differed both in its intent and in its sources of patronage from that of Protestant countries such as Holland or Britain where the attention was focused on a realistic rendering of the people and their roles in the every day life experience.

Most of baroque paintings are based on complex compositions surging along **diagonal lines**, replacing the Renaissance pyramidal and central composition. Perspective is used to create an illusory space where figures act almost like actors on stage. Often some dark props frame a variety of dramatic effects of light and shade with a lavish use of highlights (see for example Rubens' portrait of Gio. Carlo Doria at Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, Genoa).

Ceilings of **Baroque** churches, dissolved in painted scenes, presented vivid views of the infinite to the worshiper and directed him through his senses toward heavenly concerns.

Painting, sculpture and architecture were integrated into decorative ensembles like Bernini's Cornaro Chapel in the Church of Santa Maria Vittoria, Rome. Architecture and sculpture became pictorial by using hidden light sources, luxurious materials and elaborate, contrasting surface textures to heighten immediacy and sensual delight.

*The term **Baroque** probably ultimately derived from the Italian word barocco, which was a term used by philosophers during the Middle Ages to describe an obstacle in schematic logic. Another possible source is the Portuguese word barroco (Spanish barrueco), used to describe an irregular or imperfectly shaped pearl. **In art criticism the word Baroque came to be used to describe anything irregular, bizarre, or otherwise departing from established rules and proportions.***