

# Cathedrals and the Last Supper

Expressive use of the Elements  
and Principals of Art in the  
**Renaissance** and other eras

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# The Middle Ages

- Occurred from approx. 500's – 1500's ce
- During the middle ages (that preceded the Renaissance) people in western Europe thought of the Church as the center of their existence, guiding them over the rough road of life to salvation.
- During the middle ages, they saw life as preparation for heaven (or hell)
- Human observations, were de-emphasized in favour of divine truths from the bible and the religious clergy.

## Gothic Cathedras from the middle ages



# The Renaissance

- French for “re-birth”
- By the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1400’s), people began to rediscover the world around them and realize that they were an important part of the world
- This led to an interest in the “here and now” as opposed to strictly the afterlife, hence a re-awakening
- The Renaissance is characterized by a philosophical movement called “Humanism” in which man was considered to be “a measure of all things” (taking the focus away from God)

## Renaissance Cathedral: St. Paul's



## Renaissance Cathedral: painting by De Lorme



## Renaissance Cathedral: Tuscany



# The Last Supper

- Has been interpreted and painted in many ways over the centuries
- Both the prevailing ideologies/moods of the times and the medium/media chosen (or available) to painters over the centuries has greatly influenced the paintings they have created
- “In the Christian Gospels, the **Last Supper** was the last meal Jesus shared with his Twelve Apostles and disciples before his death. The Last Supper has been the subject of many paintings, of which that by Leonardo da Vinci is perhaps best known.” - from Wikipedia



# Painting media and aesthetics

- Each artistic medium has its own characteristics
- The first paints were made of pigments (from plants, animals, and minerals) bound together with a binding medium or such as egg. They were known as tempera
- In the Renaissance, oil paints were first invented which used oil instead of tempera as a binding medium. This dramatically changed the aesthetic possibilities available to painters
- **Note: the exact same pigments are used in the making of oil and tempera paints – the difference between the two is the binding medium**
- Nowadays, more expensive paints will typically used higher quality pigments and binding agents (with better looking colour and better lasting colour)

# Tempera Paint

- “**tempera**, also known as **egg tempera**, is a permanent fast drying painting medium consisting of colored pigment mixed with a water-soluble binder medium (usually a glutinous material such as egg yolk or some other size).

Tempera also refers to the paintings done in this medium. Tempera paintings are very long lasting, and examples from the first centuries AD still exist. Egg tempera was a primary method of painting until after 1500 when it was superseded by the invention of oil painting.” – from Wikipedia

- **fresco** – mural wall painting done on plaster walls, often with tempera paints

**Last supper: Jaume 1370-1400 (gold and tempera)**



**Last supper: Bondome 1305 (egg tempera)**



Last supper: Theophanes: mid 1500's (egg tempera)



# Tempera Paint

- Tempera paint dries rapidly.
- It is normally applied in thin, semi-opaque or transparent layers.
- Tempera painting allows for great precision when used with traditional techniques that require the application of numerous small brush strokes applied in a cross-hatching technique.
- When dry, it produces a smooth matte finish.
- **Disadvantages:** Because it cannot be applied in thick layers as oil paints can, tempera paintings rarely have the deep color saturation that oil paintings can achieve. In this respect the colors of an unvarnished tempera painting resemble a pastel, although the color deepens if a varnish is applied.
- **Advantages,** tempera colors do not change over time, whereas oil paints darken, yellow, and become transparent with age

## Last supper: Da Vinci: 1498 (tempera on dry plaster)



The Last Supper is not a true fresco. The painter chose not to paint the piece on wet plaster, since that would severely limit the amount of time he could spend on the work. Instead he sealed the stone wall with a layer of resin (pitch and mastic) and chalk (gesso), and then painted over the sealing layer with tempera. Although this technique allowed him to depict the scene in exquisite detail, it did not prove very durable. The piece began deteriorating within only a few years after it was finished.

**Last supper: Tintoretto, 1594 (oil on canvas)**



**Chiaroscuro** is characterized by strong contrasts between light and dark, usually bold contrasts affecting a whole composition. It is also a technical term used by artists and art historians for using contrasts of light to achieve a sense of volume in modeling three-dimensional objects such as the human body. (from Wikipedia)



# The Reformation

- The Protestant Reformation began in 1517, led by Martin Luther as an attempt to reform the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church and effected by Western European Catholics.
- They opposed what they perceived as false doctrines and ecclesiastic malpractice such as:
  - the teaching and the sale of **indulgences** (absolution from sin for a fee)
  - **simony** (the ability to buy one's way into a position of power in the church)
- These and other issues were seen as evidence of the systemic corruption of the church's hierarchy, which included the Pope.

- Adapted from Wikipedia

# The Reformation

- Protestants (or Lutherans, followers of Martin Luther's reformation) also objected to the use of graven images in churches (which is explicitly forbidden in the bible, specifically in the ten commandments).
- This led to **iconoclasm**: the deliberate destruction of religious art portraying characters from the bible – in all media, including paintings, stained glass windows, and sculptures.

# The Counter - Reformation

- Began in 1545, ended in 1648
- Was the Catholic Church's response to the Reformation which began in 1517
- Although the Catholic Church worked to correct the corruption the Protestants accused it of, it refused to reform other aspects of the religion including the use of religious artworks
- Artworks began to be censored for nudity or explicitly sexual content
- Classical pagan elements (which were often used in Medieval art) were also prohibited.

# Modern Re-interpretations of Da Vinci's Last Supper

- The following are examples of how modern pop-cultural artists have created parodies or re-interpretations of Da Vinci's last supper.
- Why do you think they chose Da Vinci's version over all the others to re-interpret/parody?

**Last supper: Da Vinci: 1498**



**Last supper: Clown version “after Da Vinci”**



## Last supper: Star Wars version “after Da Vinci”



**Last supper: Dali, 1955 (oil on canvas)**

