Description

What makes Venetian art stylistically or culturally significant? Venetian art sets itself apart from preceding Renaissance arts; although it undeniably shares similarities with them, important cultural and stylistic differences are discussed below.

  Culturally, Venice has been a wealthy City State from the onset of the Proto-Renaissance; as such, and because of its relative distance from Rome, it has remained politically independent throughout the renaissance. Venice’s privileged position on the Adriatic Sea made what was once a smart port a powerful hub for international treading with the Middle East and Far East, famously exemplified by Marco Polo’s travels. Therefore, Venice was exposed to many products and ideas from around the world earlier and more consistently than other cities. Venice not only amassed considerable wealth and power, but also developed a certain social sophistication and freethinking which first contributed to the rise of humanism in the 13th and 14th century, and subsequently in the 16th century led to a more liberal, indulgent, and festive mindset exemplified in secular sensual themes in sharp contrast with the sacred arts of the dogmatic Spanish-controlled Vatican.

  Stylistically, Venetian art shares similarities with other Italian arts such as volumetric figures, sense of perspective, well integrated compositions often reusing 3D pyramid structures, and always delivering monumental impact. At the same time, it also clearly exhibits oriental influence with the rich colors and textures, the use of light, colors, and warmth is typical of an insular culture somehow reminding us of an older insular culture: the 1500 BCE Minoans. Color is employed in a dominant manner as a compositional element, which has been referred to as “colorito”, to appeal to our senses: this is a major departure from Florence’s and Rome’s High Renaissance art focused on ‘line designo’ and grasping our intellect. So is the representation of outdoor Arcadian landscapes not so commonly found in High Renaissance art. Another departure from High Renaissance oil on wood panel is the emergence of oil-on-canvas technique pioneered by Giorgione which was going to become mainstream for the following centuries.   All of the above elements are encompassed in the painting “Feast of the Gods” from Bellini in 1529 delivering a typical product of Venetian Renaissance culture: A playful and erotic picnic in an Arcadian landscape in which figures are volumetric in classical poses under a soft glowing afternoon light with a mix of vibrant colors and reflective metals throughout the composition.

  Work cited:   Kleiner, Fred, “Art through the Ages. The Western perspective Volume 2”, Gardner’s 15th edition.   The author of Khan Academy, “Venetian art”, https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/early-renaissance1/venice-early-ren/a/venetian-art-an-introduction