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| Style | The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood |
| Country of origin | England, Formed in 1848 in London |
| Key artists | The founding members were John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt andDante Gabriel Rossetti |
| Key works studied in this style | ‘Work’ Ford Madox Brown (1865), ‘The Hireling Shepherd’ by William Holman Hunt’s (1851), Ophelia by Millais (1851), ‘The Shadow of Death’ by William Holman Hunt (1873), ‘The Lady of Shalott’ by John William Waterhouse (1888), ‘Our English Coasts (Strayed Sheep)’ by William Holman Hunt (1852) |
| **Aims**. What was this movement hoping to achieve? Did the style/movement have an agenda? Were they challenging or reacting against something? | They felt that art since Raphael had become superficial and was more concerned with merely appearing aesthetically pleasing. Holman Hunt, Millais and Rossetti therefore looked at art from before the time of Raphael (pre-Raphael) for inspiration, in particular Italian and Flemish art from the 15th century (1400s). The Pre-Raphaelites considered these works to be more honest, less contrived and with a genuine message. These works used clear outlines, pure colour and detail to help the viewer understand the meaning of the work. |
| **Characteristics**. What are the identifying traits for this style? Subject matter/themes/technique etc. | Because the Pre-Raphaelites were interested in art from the Gothic and medieval eras and the 1400s, the subjects of their paintings were frequently taken from literature and history of these periods. Popular sources included the works of Shakespeare, Dante, religious texts and later Romantic literature including Keats, Shelley and Tennyson.There was a focus on symbolic detail, realism and nature.Key Characteristics include bright clear colours, complex compositions and realism. Intense symbolic detail is typical of the Pre-Raphaelites and is included to aid the narrative of the painting.To achieve clear bright colours in their works, the Pre-Raphaelites applied paint to a wet white ground. This makes colours in their paintings appear jewel-like. |
| **Materials/Technique**. How did the artist in this style paint and/or sculpt? Quickly/spontaneously or methodically etc…Explain where/how/why. Application of paint etc. | They use bright clear colours that are realistic and use a wet white back-ground to achieve these brighter colours. They painted en plein air which was a break with tradition and made possible by the recent development of tubes of paint. They painted methodically to capture the great amount of detail often seen in the nature around them. |
| **Colour. How do the artists in this style use colour** | They use bright clear colours that are realistic and use a wet white background to achieve these brighter colours. Using a white ground, rather than a coloured one, gives luminosity to a painting. Building up colour through glazes, imitates the effect of light falling on a subject and gives a depth that cannot be obtained by using colours mixed on a palette. Hunt wrote: "For the sake of avoiding the contamination of hue resulting from the use of palettes only partially cleaned from earlier work, we used white porcelain tablets which would betray any remains of dried paint that would otherwise infallibly work up into tints that would need to be of pristine purity. We knew how impossible it was to give the purity and variety of nature's hues if we allowed our pigments to get sullied." |
| **Composition**. | Compositions were generally worked out directly on the canvas, drawn with graphite pencil. Form was built up meticulously using small brushes. Hunt said: "I tried to put aside the loose irresponsible handling to which I had been trained”. They usually have a vocal point of the most important subject seen in Ophelia, lady of shallot and shadow of death. |
| **Figure handling/Line** | The outlines are loose/subtle and are hardly visible, the figures are realistic and accurate usually with pale skin due to the style being English. |
| **Light**. | To achieve clear bright colours in their paintings they applied paint to a wet white ground. Using a white ground, rather than a colored one, gives luminosity to a painting. Building up color through glazes, imitates the effect of light falling on a subject and gives a depth that cannot be obtained by using colors mixed on a palette. |
| **Other**. | The Pre-Raphaelites were supported by the art critic and writer John Ruskin. Ruskin was deeply religious and conservative. He had a deep interest in art from the Gothic and Early Renaissance era and encouraged them to paint in a similar manner. John Ruskin advocated truth to nature in art and one of his most famous quotes recommended that artists go to nature in all singleness of heart . . . rejecting nothing, selecting nothing. This meant they studied nature accurately and their works are characterised by intense detail. |
| **Innovations. e.g. Technique, plein air etc.** | To achieve clear bright colours in their paintings they applied paint to a wet white ground. The Pre-Raphaelites rejected academic Victorian art and instead looked at art which they felt was more honest and unidealised from before Raphael for inspiration. They painted en plein air which was a break with tradition and made possible by the recent development of tubes of paint. The Pre-Raphaelite artists break with tradition for a more avant-garde technique. |
| **Critical quote(s)**. | “Go to nature in all singleness of heart . . . rejecting nothing, selecting nothing”- John Ruskin“Mean, repulsive and revolting…..”- Dickens (Christ in the House of His Parents)“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.”- John 10:11One critic commenting on the abundance of flowers and plants within the painting wrote: "I tell you, I am aware of none of these. I see only that face of poor drowning Ophelia. My eye goes to that, and rests on that, and sees nothing else til….the tears blind me, and I am fain to turn from the face of the mad girl to the natural loveliness that makes her dying beautiful”.The Shadow of Death “was painted in the conviction that Art, as one of its uses, may be employed to realise facts of importance in the history of human thought and faith"- Holman Hunt’s pamphlet  |