

Treasures of European Art

Tour Description

View masterful works of art that trace Europe's rich history, from the Medieval world through the Renaissance and Baroque ages up to the 18th century.

Tour Objective This tour introduces visitors to treasures from the museum's European collection, from the Medieval world (beginning about the 12th century) up to the Baroque age (ending about 1700).

Means Select important art works from both Northern and Southern Europe, from each period, and in a variety of media. This tour includes examples from the Romanesque or Gothic, Renaissance (Proto-, Southern, Northern, and High), Mannerist, and Baroque periods. Integrate all your information with close looking and interactive discussions about the works of art. Be sure to compare and contrast objects from different periods.

Themes Your theme will guide the selection of objects. Here are a few examples:

Art and its Patrons explores who commissioned the work and for what purpose. This includes a discussion of how patronage changed during this period of time.

Art Made in the Service of Religion demonstrates the power of the Church and the resulting reactions for or against its manifestations of power.

What Makes a Work of Art a Treasure? addresses how these works of art have stood the test of time in terms of subject matter, artistic virtuosity, and/or popular appeal.

Middle Ages: Romanesque and Gothic Styles

During the Middle Ages, European art focused on the Christian Church. It influenced nearly every sphere of life—politics, economics, agriculture, education and the arts, as well as religion. Discuss the importance of the Catholic church in Europe and the use of devotional images and Christian symbolism.

The Romanesque style of the mid-11th to 12th centuries reflected Byzantine, Islamic, and early Medieval influences. Spectacular works of art and architecture were created that attracted pilgrims to places where they venerated relics of saints and contemplated their own death and afterlife.

The Gothic style first appeared around 1150 in France and spread throughout Europe by 1300. Although art remained highly stylized, there was a trend towards naturalism and realistic perspective. The development of courtly style brought a gracefulness and elegance to the art created for the proliferation of soaring cathedrals filled with light and Biblical imagery.

Renaissance

During the Renaissance (Proto-, Southern, Northern, and High periods), religious themes continued to predominate, but with a new emphasis on naturalism. In addition to the Church, the new merchant class was commissioning works of art. There was renewed interest in Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in the natural world, resulting in a more realistic depiction of the human figure. Distinct portraiture styles characterized art in the North and the South. Artists began to be recognized by name and the concept of artist as “genius” emerged.

Mannerism

The Protestant Reformation and the resulting Catholic Reformation brought widespread religious turmoil and political unrest as well as new types of art. Artists searching for new means of expression—in the wake of High Renaissance “perfection”—took bold liberties with color, composition, figural representation, and space.

Baroque

Shortly before 1600 the Baroque style developed in Italy and soon spread throughout Europe. Baroque art is dynamic, dramatic, and appeals to the emotions and passions of the soul. With the growth of an affluent middle class, an interest in secular subjects such as genre, landscape, and portraiture emerged. Important cultural events included the development of the French Royal Academy and Holland’s independence from the Spanish Empire.