

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 4

Left: Rosso Fiorentino, *Descent from the Cross*, 1521

Right: Blank

4. Attribute the painting to an art-historical style. Justify your stylistic attribution by discussing specific characteristics in the painting that are commonly associated with that art-historical style. (10 minutes)

Background:

This question asks students to make a stylistic attribution for the painting and to provide specific visual evidence found within the painting to explain that attribution. It requires students to connect the formal aspects of an artist's individual expression to a larger stylistic trend in the history of art.

The artist Giovanni Battista di Jacopo, known as Rosso Fiorentino, was commissioned by a religious confraternity in 1521 to paint this large altarpiece for the cathedral of Volterra. The confraternity, called the Company of the Cross of the Day, was a flagellant group that whipped their bodies as part of the performance of penitence. Rosso's altarpiece of the *Descent from the Cross* depicts the narrative moment of the Passion after the dead Christ was brought down from the cross. The painting's function as an altarpiece is reflected in its large size (11 ft. by 6 ft. 5 in.) and in its iconography of Christ's body above the sacrificial altar of the church. Rosso emphasized the cross in the painting in order to connect the scene to his patrons' confraternal identity.

The correct stylistic attribution for this painting is "Mannerism," a term that refers to a number of artistic developments in the first half of the sixteenth century in Italy. What unites Mannerist artistic works, generally, is experimentation that goes beyond the artistic ideals of the High Renaissance style (epitomized in the works of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael). Mannerist artworks use the painterly techniques developed by High Renaissance artists but move away from High Renaissance ideals in form, composition, formal and iconographic clarity, and organization. These works experiment with new ways of composing the subject, organizing the composition and creating an expressive effect.

The term "Mannerism" derives from the Italian word *maniera*, meaning manner or style. There is a pronounced sense of self-conscious style, concentrating attention on the artistry as much as (or more than) the subject portrayed. As such, Mannerism is essentially focused on artifice. Works of Mannerist art often proclaim the artistry and manner of their creation. Instead of concealing the contrivances of artistic creation, Mannerist works accentuate, even celebrate, this aspect of the creative process.

Connected to the emergence of a new court culture that developed in Florence under the Medici family in the sixteenth century, *maniera* sometimes is used to refer to the adoption of courtly manners, or etiquette, that was part of fashionable behavior in the court. Certain artists, such as Agnolo Bronzino, promoted a "stylish style" through their paintings and created highly idealized portraits of members of the Medici court that emphasize social class and material wealth. In this usage of the term, *maniera* is considered positively as a visualization of grace, refinement and beauty, ultimately reflecting the artistic mastery of the painter.

Another meaning of the term *maniera*, however, refers to the artistic rejection of High Renaissance standards of art-making. Florentine artists such as Rosso Fiorentino and Jacopo da Pontormo epitomize this aspect of Mannerism and are noted for their formal experimentation and renewed attention to more expressive forms of communication. Whereas High Renaissance artworks are noted for their clarity and stability of composition, often using triangular or pyramidal compositional arrangements, Mannerist works

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 4 (continued)

often present their subjects in a less-balanced manner, including spatially compressed environments and often confusing figural organization. This experimentation away from the High Renaissance style has sometimes been termed “anti-Classicism” (that is to say, a rebellion against the Classical style), but in reality, these artists and their artworks are building up from the premises of the Classically derived Renaissance style. Therefore, Mannerism can also be seen as connected to the High Renaissance in that it continues certain explorations of self-aware artistry. This is particularly evident in regard to Michelangelo’s development of dynamic composition and the twisting figure (*figura serpentinata*), as well as his use of intense, saturated color (as revealed in the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel ceiling frescoes).

To explain this stylistic deviation from the idealized forms of the High Renaissance, art historians have emphasized a number of historical events and social phenomena that may have had an effect on artistic production at the time. Martin Luther’s attack on the Roman Catholic Church and papal authority, beginning in 1517, led to new challenges and unrest as the Protestant movement gained momentum in northern Europe. In response, the Church sought to standardize its visual message and promote doctrinal correctness, as outlined by the Council of Trent (1545-47, 1551-52 and 1559-63). This was also a period of many challenges to the security of governments as multiple wars of varying sizes were waged throughout the European territories, resulting in a subsequent major alteration of the economy. Artists sought professional refuge in the economically stable courts, where they helped to promote the new trend for *maniera*. The Sack of Rome in May 1527 overturned papal control of the city and subsequently caused a diaspora of artists, often to the courts of Northern and Central Italy. Each of these factors may have worked to counter the cultural ties to renewed Classicism that High Renaissance artists previously drew on and described. However, even before the Sack of Rome, works by several artists in Central and Northern Italy reveal characteristics of experimentation that invert the accepted sense of Classical form. Thus, while Mannerism might initially appear to have developed in response to an era of turmoil, it can be more firmly linked to explorations of conscious artistry and artifice — ideas that would eventually help drive the formulations of academies in the later sixteenth century.

Several specific elements of the *Descent from the Cross* contribute to its stylistic characterization as “Mannerist.” The center is void, and the composition hugs the frame in a shifting ovoid form. This represents an antithesis of the High Renaissance compositional ideal that tends toward centrally anchored and balanced arrangements. The cross is pressed against the surface of the painting, with two ladders on either side and a third ladder placed diagonal to the central axis. While the ladders help establish the subject of the painting, they are not placed “in space,” as seen in Italian Renaissance predecessors. The compression of space renders the spatial relation of figures ambiguous. For example, it is difficult to discern who is actually supporting the weight of Christ’s body as well as how the yellow-clad figure to the left is actually situated on the ladder.

Rosso manipulates light to cast his figures in sharp relief from one another, as opposed to the High Renaissance use of diffused light to create a unification of the scene. The low side lighting differs from previous “Renaissance” uses of light to describe the figures; the light defines each form sharply and then fragments its surface into planes instead of being used as a unifying element. Rosso further articulates shapes with hard edges, emphasizing *disegno*, or drawing, as opposed to the blending of edges, as seen in Leonardo da Vinci’s *sfumato*. Figures are composed of hard muscles with sharp contrasts of light and dark. The draperies are stiff, as if carved from wood, and do not reveal the body, as was a key goal of High Renaissance artists, but rather conceal the body. For example, the drapery of the kneeling figure of the Magdalene has a sharp crease that splits the figure from elbow to knee, effectively splitting the figure into light and dark halves; her belt conforms to the crease, which is a clear sign that Rosso privileged geometric, as opposed to natural, representation. Likewise, St. John the Evangelist (in the lower right foreground) covers his eyes while his body is engulfed in a sharply folded bundle of cloth; the raking light

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 4 (continued)

serves to emphasize the stiff shell of the drapery, which is unlike Renaissance artists' use of drapery to emphasize the form of the body. Other Mannerist works intentionally obscure the distinction between body and drapery, as seen in the extended arm of the figure in the upper left of Rosso's work. This sense of ambiguity and visual play further illustrates the notion of artifice that characterizes Mannerist works.

Characteristics of Mannerism that students might discuss include:

- Highly stylized features moving away from direct observation of nature to an emphasis on contrived artifice and/or unnatural features.
- Jarring, acidic colors, frequently juxtaposed to create inharmonious contrasts and chromatic ambiguity.
- Departure from the balance and harmonious compositions of earlier Renaissance art, sometimes achieved by a central void, centrifugal and/or asymmetrical groupings.
- Ambiguity and/or compression of space to create a sense of instability or tension.
- Rejection of the Classical tradition's pursuit of calm and equilibrium.
- Elongation, exaggeration and/or contortion of the figure (sometimes referred to as the *figura serpentinata*).
- Ambiguous and occasionally multiple lighting sources that fragment rather than unify the composition.

Students have two tasks:

- (1) They must attribute the painting to Mannerism.
- (2) They must justify their stylistic attribution, discussing specific characteristics in the painting that are commonly associated with Mannerism.

Better essays will correctly attribute the painting to Mannerism and fully justify the attribution by discussing specific characteristics of Mannerism seen in the painting. Rather than simply listing a number of these characteristics, they will discuss how the painting fits into a larger trajectory of art-making in sixteenth-century Italy.

Weaker essays will merely describe the painting without distinguishing those characteristics that are commonly associated with Mannerism.

Points to remember:

- This is an attribution question. Students should be able to recognize and discuss specific characteristics in the painting based on their familiarity with and knowledge of sixteenth-century Mannerist art.
- In a lower-level response, when the student makes a misattribution, more credible Renaissance attributions should be distinguished from indefensible misattributions such as Romanticism or Gothic.
- The painting is not depicted in any of the major textbooks. Therefore, students are not expected to identify the artist, title or location of the painting.
- This is a 10-minute question.

AP[®] ART HISTORY
2010 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 4 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Correctly attributes the painting to Mannerism. Justifies the attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism seen in the painting. Discussion is full and contains no significant errors.
- 3** Correctly attributes the painting to Mannerism. Justifies the attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism seen in the painting. Discussion is not as full and may contain minor errors.
- OR**
Attributes the painting to the Renaissance or High Renaissance but is otherwise a 4.
- 2** Attributes the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance. Attempts to justify the attribution by only vaguely identifying characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism seen in the painting. Discussion is limited or unfocused and may contain significant errors.
- OR**
Fails to attribute the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance. Attempts to justify the attribution by identifying and discussing specific characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism but with less specificity.
- Note: Responses cannot earn more than a 2 unless they attribute the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or the High Renaissance.**
- 1** Attributes the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance but includes no other discussion of merit.
- OR**
Fails to attribute the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance but attempts to justify the attribution by only vaguely identifying one or more characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism.
- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit because it fails to identify the art-historical style as Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance, or it makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.
- This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes.

4. Attribute the painting to an art-historical style. Justify your stylistic attribution by discussing specific characteristics in the painting that are commonly associated with that art-historical style. (10 minutes) 4A

This is mannerism. Mannerism arrived in the ~~late~~ High Renaissance in Italy. Techniques such as perspective, modeling, and anatomy were already developed.

The mannerist style was art for arts sake. They filled their work with artifice and though ~~something~~ the 3D modeling follows the illusionism and ~~tradition~~ of accurate representation, something is amiss. Mannerist figures tend to have ~~drastic~~ over dramatic poses and contortions that are unnatural. Though the figures on each side balance each other and the ones in the middle unify the composition, the painting still rings false. Mannerists employ high drama, strange choices of vibrant color, and disproportions to ~~at~~ consciously create artifice in their work. All the mannerist conventions are present.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

4. Attribute the painting to an art-historical style. Justify your stylistic attribution by discussing specific characteristics in the painting that are commonly associated with that art-historical style. (10 minutes)

~~Renaissance~~ This painting is a mannerist
Renaissance

4 B

This painting is a mannerist painting and embodies many of Mannerism's key characteristics. The image is dominated by sweeping diagonals of the figures who lunge dramatically at each other. The frames also ~~do not~~ are not perfectly placed and balanced, instead, they do not seem confined to the frames. The forms are painted in a stylized way, a key component of Mannerism. The drapery appears linear, the colors are more contrasted and their faces, especially their noses are elongated. The overall effect is one of ~~drama~~ exaggerated drama and style, a reaction to the preceding ~~period~~ idyllic sense of Renaissance art.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

4. Attribute the painting to an art-historical style. Justify your stylistic attribution by discussing specific characteristics in the painting that are commonly associated with that art-historical style. (10 minutes) 4C

This painting is Baroque. It is baroque because of the new found emotion that is being illustrated and the elongated bodies. Its very non realistic, because christ is green. The painting is very crowded with overlapping figures and it is difficult to identify them. There is no organization in the painting but alot of emotion. The figures bodies and faces are very stylistic and linear as well. The colors give a big clue because they seem very alive and classical, so the time period must be after the Renaissance.

GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE.

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2010 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 4

Overview

This question asked students to make a stylistic attribution for the painting shown and to provide specific visual evidence found within the painting to explain why the attribution was made. It was intended to make students connect the formal aspects of an artist's individual expression to a larger stylistic trend in the history of art. Students had to identify the art-historical style as Mannerism and then discuss the work's Mannerist characteristics.

Sample: 4A

Score: 4

The essay correctly attributes the painting to Mannerism and provides a full discussion of stylistic characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism. The student recognizes that the work shares a Mannerist interest in artifice, as evidenced by the “overdramatic poses and contortions” of the figures. The essay also makes note of how the “strange choices of vibrant color” and the “disproportions” were used to “consciously [*sic*] create artifice” in this painting. The essay earned a score of 4.

Sample: 4B

Score: 3

This essay correctly attributes the painting to Mannerism, but the discussion is less cogent. The student does note that the figures are “not perfectly placed and balanced,” that “[t]he forms are painted in a stylized way,” and concludes by attributing the overall effect of “exaggerated drama” to “a reaction to the preceding idyllic [*sic*] scenes of [Renaissance] art.” Nevertheless, the essay tends to simply describe the painting rather than discussing with clarity specific characteristics commonly associated with Mannerism, earning it a score of 3.

Sample: 4C

Score: 2

Although the essay fails to attribute the painting to Mannerism, it does discuss specific characteristics associated with Mannerism. The student arrives at the conclusion that the work was done after the Renaissance, so the misattribution of Baroque is not completely amiss. The essay notes the presence of “elongated bodies,” a lack of organization, and heavily stylized features, all of which are qualities found in sixteenth-century Mannerist works. Unfortunately, if an essay did not attribute the painting to Mannerism, Renaissance or High Renaissance, the highest score it could earn was a 2.