

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2011 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 5

Identify the period in which the ceiling was decorated. How did the artistic elements of the ceiling correspond to the historical context when it was decorated? (10 minutes)

Background

This question asks students to make a correct period identification of a ceiling decoration. They are then asked to address how the ceiling's artistic elements correspond to the historical context of the era when the ceiling was decorated.

The image shown is *The Triumph of the Name of Jesus* by Giovanni Battista Gaulli from the nave vault of Il Gesù in Rome, the mother church of the Jesuit Order. It is a fresco with additional figures in stucco, dating to 1676–1679. Illusionistic ceiling frescoes like this spectacular example by Gaulli decorated the vaults of many important Roman churches in the later 17th century, offering persuasive, if fictive, links to celestial space.

The design and decoration of this particular church exemplify Counter-Reformation ideology and the defense against Protestant attacks on Catholicism. The wide nave of Il Gesù was intended to provide an effective space for preaching, allow large theatrical processions, and enhance congregational participation in the mass per the precepts of St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. When the Jesuits renovated the church interior a century after the church's construction, they commissioned Gaulli to create a religious allegory on the barrel vault over the nave. Gian Paolo Oliva, the father-general of the Jesuit order and commissioner of the ceiling, had a clear awareness of the potential emotional impact of visual imagery.

The composition of the image employs vivid colors, dramatic foreshortening, deep perspectives, and a theatrical sense of immediacy suggested by circular, upward movement. The suggestion of limitless visions was meant to engage viewers, first optically and ultimately emotionally. By combining fresco, stucco sculpture and moldings, and panel cut outs, Gaulli offers a dazzling glimpse of heaven via the illusory depiction of light, clouds and bodies that appear to be either floating up into the heavens or spilling out into the church space. This type of theatrical display that unifies architecture, sculpture and painting is characteristic of Baroque Catholic imagery and stands in stark contrast to the austerity of Protestant church interiors. The visual features of this ceiling were designed to persuade and inspire through appeal to the emotions and the senses, thereby embracing the principles and propagandistic goals of the Counter-Reformation.

The content of the image also contains Counter-Reformation ideas. The figures drawn into heaven are the blessed, and those falling from the image are the damned. Among the damned are personifications including a figure of heresy. The meaning of the image, underscored by the line from Paul's letter to the Philippians at the top, stresses the spread of Catholicism across the known world, a reference to Jesuit missionary activity, itself a Counter-Reformation strategy.

Two Tasks for Students

1. Identify the period in which the ceiling was decorated.
2. Address how the ceiling's artistic elements correspond to the historical context when the ceiling was decorated.

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Question 5 (continued)

Points to Remember

For the period identification, several answers are possible. The most correct is Baroque or Italian Baroque. Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation is also correct. Seventeenth century is a period designation and should be accepted, as should 1600s. Note that the question does not ask students to provide the art-historical period or style, but simply the period.

If an incorrect period designation is given, attention should be paid to the plausibility of the wrong answer.

Students are not required to identify the work, though some students may do so. Some students may supply the artist's name and a title, perhaps even a location. However, without a correct period identification, such responses are incomplete.

Students were shown an image of the ceiling, but not of the church interior as a whole. Although students may discuss the interior in ways that are relevant to the question, this is not expected.

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

The period is correctly identified. The response discusses with a high degree of accuracy and specificity how the ceiling's artistic elements correspond to the historical context when it was decorated. Both artistic elements and historical context are discussed fully.

3 points

Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

The period is correctly identified. The response refers to both relevant artistic elements and the historical context; however, the connections between the two may be general, or the discussion may be unbalanced. The discussion may include minor errors.

OR

The response fails to correctly identify the period, but the discussion is otherwise at the level of a response that would earn a score of 4.

2 points

Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.

The period is correctly identified. The response refers to relevant artistic elements, the ceiling's historical context, or both. Links between the two, if present, are vague or tenuous. The discussion is mostly general or descriptive or may include significant errors.

OR

The response fails to correctly identify the period, but the discussion is otherwise at the level of a response that would earn a score of 3.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

The period is correctly identified, but there is no other discussion of merit.

OR

The response fails to correctly identify the period, but the discussion is otherwise at the level of a response that would earn a score of 2.

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Question 5 (continued)

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge or understanding of the question.

Although the student attempts to respond, the response fails to correctly identify the period and makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements about the ceiling.

— This is a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words or personal notes

5. Identify the period in which the ceiling was decorated. How did the artistic elements of the ceiling correspond to the historical context when it was decorated? (10 minutes)

The ceiling was decorated during the Baroque period. During this time, St. Ignatius put forth the idea that spirituality is enhanced by dramatic and sumptuous representations of Christian stories. By building upon the principles first experimented with by Correggio in the 'Room of the Newly Weds', illusionistic ceiling paintings employed the concept of *di sotto in sù*: the idea of looking upwards at a scene. By using *trompe l'oeil* to create the illusion that there is a three dimensional space opening up in the ceiling, the artist figuratively brings the heavens to the audience. This piece recalls "Triumph of the Barberini family" in that the drama and action is overwhelming. The twisting and writhing figures create a dynamic sense of movement and emotion. The sumptuous architecture further corresponds to the ideals of the Catholic counter Reformation, which rejected the Protestant Reformation's demands for art to be simple, pious, and symbolic. Through the use of luxurious and dramatic scenes, the illusionistic ceiling paintings impressed upon viewers the divine messages of the Catholic faith.

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5. Identify the period in which the ceiling was decorated. How did the artistic elements of the ceiling correspond to the historical context when it was decorated? (10 minutes)

Due to its artistic elements this ceiling painting is definitively a painting from the Southern Baroque, especially that of Italy. In this 17th Century CE time, a main influence on art was the Counter-Reformation. This ceiling fresco is turbulent, powerful, & immediate; all connotations of the Southern Baroque. It also includes swirling, dynamic figures in awe of the ~~event~~ event which they witness. Ignudi, or Nude Figures, cover the ceiling & ~~are~~ are inspired by the Classical ~~art~~. This piece also includes the blending of Art, Sculpture, & architecture, through the use of stucco figures & a blending of Architecture & paint. This ~~fresco~~ fresco also incorporates Tromp l'oeil, "deceives the eye," & di sotto in su, ~~open~~ to open the ceiling to the sky. This piece also incorporates all of the Renaissance innovations such as modeling, chiaroscuro, linear perspective, (drawing the eye to the central portion of light), & Individualism. This painting fulfills the Counter-Reformation value of the power of the Catholic Church.

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5. Identify the period in which the ceiling was decorated. How did the artistic elements of the ceiling correspond to the historical context when it was decorated? (10 minutes)

This ceiling was decorated in the Baroque period. The use of light illuminating and enveloping the figures is one characteristic of this period. It is heavily decorated in bright colors, making it lively and elegant. All of the figures are moving, creating a dynamism and a sense of ~~decorative~~ energy in this work. It is very theatrical, both in the movements of the figures and in the lighting. Sculptures adorn the edges, which is also a characteristic of this time period, which is the 17th century. Sfumato is also evident, as well as modeling and chiaroscuro. The excessive adornments distinguish this as Baroque, for it was meant to impress the viewer. It also displays both nude and clothed figures; the clothed ones are closer to the light, while the nudes are being condemned. Light plays a physical factor in this work as it bounces off certain places of the figures while other places are in the dark. The theatrical and decorative qualities of this work specify it as being Baroque.

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2011 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 5

Overview

This 10-minute essay question asked students to identify the period of the ceiling shown and to discuss the historical context when the ceiling was decorated. The question did not ask for the specific art-historical period or style, so Baroque, Italian Baroque, Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation were all correct identifications of the period.

Sample: 5A

Score: 4

The student correctly identifies the period as the Baroque. The response discusses the artistic elements of the ceiling with a high degree of accuracy and specificity. The student notes the use of *di sotto in sù* and *trompe l'oeil*, commenting that by using these “the artist figuratively bring[s] the heavens to the audience.” “[D]rama,” “action” and “twisting and writhing figures create a dynamic sense of movement and emotion.” Significantly these artistic elements are clearly and thoroughly connected to the historical context of the Counter-Reformation. The response names St. Ignatius and connects him to “the idea that spirituality is enhanced by dramatic and supuous [*sic*] representations of Christian stories.” The student explains that ceiling paintings such as this one “impressed upon viewer [*sic*] the divine messages of the Catholic faith.” The misidentification of Mantegna as Correggio is a minor error and does not affect the analysis.

Sample: 5B

Score: 3

The student correctly identifies the period as the Baroque. The response discusses the artistic elements of the ceiling with accuracy and specificity. It describes the ceiling as “turbulent, powerful, & immediate” with “swirling, dynamic figures.” The student correctly notes the multimedia nature of the ceiling and its use of characteristically Baroque visual devices such as *trompe l'oeil* and *di sotto in sù*. However, the connections between these artistic elements and the historical context could be strengthened. Although the response correctly places the ceiling within the historical context of the Counter-Reformation, the discussion is too brief and general, with little reference to how the artistic elements of the ceiling correspond to the historical context when it was decorated.

Sample: 5C

Score: 2

The student correctly identifies the period as the Baroque. The response discusses relevant artistic elements of the ceiling with some specificity, noting how the moving figures “creat[e] a dynamism and a sense of energy in this work” and commenting that the figures and the use of light create a sense of theatricality. Furthermore it is clear that the student understands that the ceiling is “meant to impress the viewer.” Although the response discusses several relevant visual aspects correctly, no attempt is made to explain how these artistic elements correspond to the ceiling’s historical context when it was decorated.