




## 5-4 Renaissance

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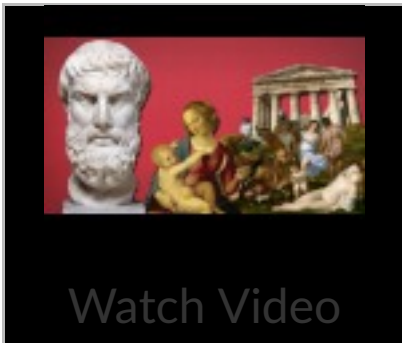
### Overview: Renaissance

When we hear about the European Renaissance, we usually think of Italy, and especially the city of Florence, as the hotbed of achievements at the time, largely due to the power and patronage of the Medici family, especially Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492). As bankers, the Medici dynasty in Florence achieved tremendous wealth and were motivated to spend their money cultivating art and philosophy in their city. They recovered manuscripts from the ancient world, many of which had previously been unknown in the Middle Ages, and had them studied and translated in order to promote the knowledge they contained. This marked the creation of the humanities as a formal field of inquiry. Studying these classic works led to the rediscovery of principles from mathematics and science that would contribute to major developments in the visual arts, such as the creation of realistic lighting and depth perspective in painting and perfected proportion in sculpture.

[The Medici](#) hired and nurtured a who's who of the most recognizable artists in the world today, including da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, and Botticelli, to execute their ideas on art and architecture both for themselves and for public spaces. The result, which can still be seen by visitors to Florence, is masterpieces, such as its Duomo (cathedral) and Michelangelo's larger-than-life sculpture of David, that rivaled or

surpassed the works of the ancient world.

A key difference in the visual arts created during the Renaissance compared to those of the Middle Ages, besides their greater realism, is that their subjects, even when Christian, reflected the primary goal of presenting and celebrating humanity. This idea, called “humanism,” expanded throughout Italy and to the rest of Europe. We can see it in the beauty and perfection of the human form represented in painting and sculpture at the time, particularly in the prevalence of nudes, even on Michelangelo’s painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, which is the seat of the Catholic Church. We can also identify humanism in the renewed interest in emotion in art; the apostles’ shock in da Vinci’s *Last Supper* and the cryptic smile on the face of his *Mona Lisa* are examples, as is the vividly human characterization of Shakespeare’s plays further afield in England. Looking at these characters, in art and in literature, we are fascinated precisely because their humanity comes through in their depiction.



**Video: History of Ideas: The Renaissance (17:44)**

**User: The School of Life - Added: 11/6/15**

View this video on the Medici family of Florence and the ideas that inspired the Renaissance, and think about what they mean for us today.

Caption Video: ["History of Ideas- The Renaissance" \(17:44\)](#)











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If the Middle Ages were a time primarily centered on God and the Christian religion, the Renaissance was a time centered on human beings, whom we can see represented not only in artifacts created during the period but in the formal invention of the humanities as a field of study. To use a contemporary analogy from Hollywood, if the Middle Ages adapted the artifacts of Greece and Rome for Christianity, what the Renaissance did was a reboot of the franchise, as the creators of the time sought to recover and reproduce the best of the ancient world. Although the Church was still powerful, particularly in Italy where the Pope held sway, the questioning of Church authority that began at the end of the Middle Ages would lead to the creation of Protestantism—a new form of Christianity—and the ideas it presented spread like wildfire through the late medieval invention of the printing press. After participating in this learning block, you will be able to:

- Discuss the ideals of the Renaissance compared to human creative expression today

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