

4 The Secret of the Modernity of the Baroque Paintings

-The common denominator of the 3 paintings that are painted by Caravaggio, Domenichino and Velazquez.

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The Baroque paintings configure the theatrical Baroque Space as the one piece with the sculptures and the architectures.

Almost all paintings played a part as Religious painting to support the Baroque's environmental space at that time.

This time, I wish to reveal the secret behind the modernity of Baroque paintings. The 3 sample paintings are "Calling of Saint Matthew" by Caravaggio, "Hunting of Diana" by Domenichino and "Las Meninas" by Velazquez.

At last, I found the common denominator to the modernity of the Baroque paintings through comparative analysis.

Let's start the journey to find the secret of Baroque paintings!

1

Do you know the Baroque's painter Caravaggio? He is one of the famous painter in Italy, because his portrait was selected in the bill of the maximum amount. In Japan, a big exhibition about his works was held at The National Museum of Western Art in 2016.

But, his name "Caravaggio" is not so familiar in Japan.

Because, Rembrandt and Vermeer are more popular than Caravaggio in Japan.

I believe he must be commonly known as the person who started the Baroque painting through his outstanding and innovative ability way of painting.

Let's see "The Calling of Saint Matthew" which has won the

author distinction. (fig.1)



fig.1

The Calling of Saint Matthew 1600

Caravaggio

Now I have a question. Who is Jesus calling in the picture? Is your answer, “the beard man sitting at the center of the table”? or “the young man at the left corner of the table counting the tax coins”?

These are both the wrong answer.

I’ll tell you the correct answer.

Jesus is calling the man who is leaning on the table with his glasses on.

He is not in a sitting pose nor in standing pose. He is only leaning on the table, so his situation is not inconsistent to the New Testament. The New Testament said that Matthew got up when he was called by Jesus. But, the New Testament did not describe that Matthew stood up when he was called by Jesus.

Caravaggio faithfully painted it in accordance with the New Testament, so the painting was not ejected from Vatican on those

days.

But you nevertheless won't believe it, right?

You may think Jesus's right hand is pointing at the young man.

You may think the disciple is younger than the master.

You may think the man being called by Jesus must be the person who is sitting on the chair or stool.

You may think the star actor (=Matthew) in the painting must be painted to stand out.

You may think to establish that the man is always pointing at someone.

You may think Caravaggio paint one still image of the story.

You may think the answer is either A or B, either white or black. (But it exists middle C answer or grey answer.)

These before mentioned ideas are all wrong.

You should not see Caravaggio's painting with your prejudices.

You must see his paintings with open mind to see what Caravaggio is painting.

The most important attitude to see Caravaggio's painting is, to find the story Caravaggio painted on the canvas.

The true story on the canvas is:

- 1) Jesus finds Matthew through the window of the tax collection room.
- 2) Jesus and his disciple turn to the door of the tax collection room.
- 3) At that time, when Jesus entered the room, Matthew is leaning on the table with his right hand to hold his upper body, and concentrated on the business of the young tax collector while holding the glasses with his left hand.

- 4) The beard man in the center asks Jesus, “Who are you looking for, me or the neighbor?” - with his left hand’s two-step hand pose.
- 5) Jesus who was asked by the beard man answers him with his three–step pose. As first, Jesus show the open hand to the beard man meaning the reception of the question.
Next, Jesus steps left forward to see the face of Matthew, because Matthew’s face is behind the face of the beard man.
Last, Jesus turns over his right hand and stops it on the line of sight that Jesus catch the face of the man with glasses on.
- 6) Jesus called Matthew (=the man with glasses on) to follow his group.

This painting has a continuous, realistic and telling scene, and Caravaggio painted it in chronological order. We need to understand the story that Caravaggio constructed.

His painting is not a still image but a movie!

In other words, Caravaggio imaged a movie-like continuous scene on his painting.

His concrete expression to a clear realistic, continuous and telling scene in a religious painting is very modern to us-about 400 years after his death.

So, Caravaggio’s painting style to make a realistic and concrete depiction by using a real model innovated a new styled narrative painting.

At the same time, Caravaggio showed Roman a fun way to solve a riddle in 1600.

I can deeply understand why Roman on those days crazily

wanted to see “The Calling of Saint Matthew” at San Luise dei Francese church. Romans desired to solve the riddle.

2

Next painting I will introduce to you is “The Hunting Diana” on the 17th century by Domenichino.

This work is unique with its Ownership history.

One cardinal had ordered this work, but Cardinal Scipione intercepted this work by the hard technique. You can see now this work at The Borghese Museum in Rome.

But why Cardinal Scipione desired to obtain it?

The reason is found by observing this painting deeply.

The servants of Diana are shooting bows to a chase game.

Diana is ecstatically cheering for hitting the marked bird.

At the same time, the hound is barking at the man peeping through the shrubbery. While, the bathing nymph is directing the line of sight here. (=out of the frame)

You, the viewer, is automatically engaged to the story in this painting.

If the peeping Tom in the shrubbery would be found by the servants of Diana, you would also be found by them next!

Because you are also looking at them.

This painting has a movie-like story (=a Baroque’s new narrative painting) and it has the visual guidance’s technique of the eye-line of viewer.

This Baroque’s painting is more dynamic than the usual Renaissance paintings. And also, the Baroque’s new narrative painting has modern sensibility like us.



fig.2

“The Hunting Diana” 1616-17

Domenichino

The technique to guide the line of sight of a viewer into the painting is marvelous.

The common point between “The Calling of Saint Matthew” and “The Hunting Diana” is that they are painted as a Baroque’s new narrative image.

3

The third painting is “Las Meninas” painted in 1656 by Velazquez.



fig.3

“Las Meninas” 1656

Velazquez

This painting is a scene from the point of view of the royal couple who is painted by Velazquez. The space configuration using the mirror is very unique and attractive work. The reason why the painter Velazquez is standing in front of the canvas but far from it is that Velazquez is checking the volume of the painting.

Now, we must notice the scene of the relaxing big dog and a girl (boy?) just kicking the dog's back.

The next moment this scene will be changed to a confused scene. Maybe the achievement of Velazquez after traveling to Rome twice during Baroque period was in this expression.

He learned the movie-like continuous expression in Baroque period's Roman painters especially known as the caravaggeschi.

His painting “Las Meninas” has a premonition to the next scene, and this premonition to the next scene is the most charming point of this picture!

You may notice that the common point in the three Baroque period's painting is a new narrative art that is concretely and continuously expressed, so when people from Baroque's time saw the new narrative paintings, they imaged it as movie-like continuous story.

Of course, the narrative art existed even before Baroque's period, but the technique to express the realistic, concretely and continuously story was improved by these Baroque's artists.

In conclusion, the energy to express realistic, concretely and continuously story of a Baroque's new narrative art painters are the most important initial factor to accelerate the invention of a movie in the 19th century.