

Baroque:

A comparison of three paintings

What I would like you to do in this paper is to compare three paintings, all of which depict the same subject. The subject is the Supper at Emmaus, which is narrated in the Gospel of Luke 24:30-31. The paintings are by Caravaggio (painted in 1601), Veronese (painted c. 1559) and Rembrandt (painted in 1648).

I would like you to concentrate on the significant differences between these paintings, with the aim of showing how they interpret the story differently. You might want to begin by attempting to identify (or not) the figures represented in the paintings. Additional points to consider are the dress, attitude and placement of figures; gestures and expressions; architectural setting and accoutrements, such as food on the table; lighting and color. These are suggested points and you do not have to consider every one of them, only the ones you see as important. You may also want to make use of some of the categories that Wölfflin developed for the analysis of art. Here is the summary of the main points that we discussed in class. I have also put up a PowerPoint with the images and some details on Canvas, for use in this paper.

In *Principles of Art History*, Wölfflin formulated five pairs of opposed or contrary precepts in the form and style of art:

1. From **linear** (draughtsmanship, plastic, relating to contour in projected ideation of objects) to **painterly** (*malerisch*: tactile, observing patches or systems of relative light and of non-local colour within shade, making shadow and light integral, and allowing them to replace or supersede the dominance of contours as fixed boundaries.)
2. From **plane** to **recession**: (from the 'Will to the plane', which orders the picture in strata parallel to the picture plane, to planes made inapparent by emphasising the forward and backward relations and engaging the spectator in recessions.)
3. From **closed (tectonic) form** to **open (a-tectonic) form** (The closed or tectonic form is the composition which is a self-contained entity which everywhere points back to itself, the typical form of ceremonial style as the revelation of law, generally within predominantly vertical and horizontal oppositions; the open or atectonic form compresses energies and angles or lines of motion which everywhere reach out beyond the composition, and override the horizontal and vertical structure, though naturally bound together by hidden rules which allow the composition to be self-contained.)
4. From **multiplicity** to **unity**: ('Classic art achieves its unity by making the parts independent as free members, and the baroque abolishes the uniform independence of the

parts in favour of a more unified total motive. In the former case, co-ordination of the accents; in the latter, subordination.' The multiple details of the former are each uniquely contemplated: the multiplicity of the latter serves to diminish the dominance of line, and to enhance the unification of the multifarious whole.)

5. From **absolute clarity** to **relative clarity** of the subject: (i.e. from exhaustive revelation of the form of the subject, to a pictorial representation which deliberately evades objective clearness in order to deliver a perfect rendering of information or pictorial appearance obtained by other painterly means.



1. Caravaggio



2. Veronese



3. Rembrandt