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Peter Paul Rubens

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In the seventeenth century or the age of Baroque art, one of the most famous artists is Peter Paul Rubens. He is a brilliant painter that sometimes might known as “Prince of Baroque” for he is an efficiency expert in making used of this new style of art. Being a distinctive artist with notable patterns appear in every painting, he emerges a new adjective, Rubenesque which is used to describe a certain thing containing Rubens’ characteristic especially with unique style of women.¹ Apart from his special artistic skills that make the paintings seem to be alive, there always exists hidden meaning behind. Most of the artwork in the first half of his lifetime involved with religion and diplomatic issue. Nonetheless, the social value and history are also reflected from his paintings. However, Rubens talent is far beyond these two subject matters. Rubens considered himself as a diplomatic artist in which his works of art help to maintain peace. This makes Rubens become outstanding because his artworks value more than its beauty. Rubens is a talented artist that created a unique way of painting which later becomes an inspiration to the next generation. With his strong belief in peace, he believed that his painting could be used as a negotiation tool. Specifically one of his masterpieces “The Horror of War” which Rubens could make a great benefit from his career that contributes to mankind.

¹ Website Contributors. “Rubenesque”. Merriam-webster. 31 Jan 2012.
< <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rubenesque> >

The Horrors of War or Consequences of War in other name was painted in the time during Thirty Years War². In order to get the concept of artistic form in this artwork, we must understand the historical matter in that period. The misery began with Pope Leo X. He started the sale of indulgence according to religious belief that sin can be expiated.³

Martin Luther was a priest who disputed the Catholic Church's idea that sin can be forgiven by money.⁴ It gave a motivation to Luther to initiate a new sect of Christian which is the Protestant-Reformation. On the other side, Catholic-Reformation had started as a reaction in order to bring Catholic back to the top position again. The Council of Trent decided that religion must be easily approached. They promote Catholic by art to make a spiritual movement. But such an art that can capture the audience's attention must be strongly sensuous painted which finally lead to the origin of Baroque style.⁵ The Baroque dramatically emphasizes on movement, impression, tension and emotion. The paintings in Baroque style are easy to interpret with obvious messages aiming to reach people faithfulness.⁶

Peter Paul Rubens has been in this confliction since he was born. Due to religious unrest, his family had to move to Germany since his father believes in Calvinist which is a branch of Protestant. Rubens was educated and brought up as a Catholic.⁷ His childhood had influenced on his career showed in artworks. He is deeply dedicated to Catholic, so most of his artworks contain religious matter

² Wikipedia Contributors. "Consequences of War". Wikipedia. 2 Feb 2012.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consequences_of_War>

³ Website Contributors. "The Characters, Pope Leo X". 2 Feb 2012.
<http://www.pbs.org/empires/martinluther/char_leo.html>

⁴ Green, Vivian Hubert Howard. "Luther and the Reformation". 1964. P 56-62.

⁵ Wikipedia Contributors. "The Reformation and Art" Wikipedia. 2 Feb. 2012.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Reformation_and_art>

⁶ Website Contributors. "Baroque" Huntfor. 4 Feb. 2012
<<http://www.huntfor.com/arthistory/c17th-mid19th/baroque.htm>>

⁷ Website Contributors. "Peter Paul Rubens" New Advent. 4 Feb 2012.
<<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13214c.htm>>

especially the altarpiece. At that time, Rubens was a representative of Catholic Church. Aside from being an expert painter he also has been recognized as a diplomat. Rubens as a court artist has to travel around Europe whether for studying or employment issue, thus it helped him to obtain more knowledge and diplomatic skills.

The Horrors of War is painted by oil on canvas for the grand duke of Tuscany. The painting reflects his position both as a successful painter that appear in the painting and a diplomat for which it speak out the significance of peace. The Baroque style is dominant with the movement of people in the painting, each represent their own motivation with significant meaning. The warrior at the center recognized as Mars, the god of wars with long red scarf to accentuate confliction. On his left hand side was pulled by a nude woman, Venus, the goddess of love where here Rubenesque women also take place. Venus tried to forbid Mars from engaging in the fight but her attempt failed to accomplish. This message can be interpret that even love cannot overcome wars.⁸ The leftmost woman in black putting her hands up in to the air with an unsteady standing position could be implied as a suffering European. The acting of Mars step on a book infers as education and art are ignored. A woman holding lute was push to the ground explaining the negligence of harmony.⁹ Each element defines the consequence of war in a particular aspect. All the artistic form such as line, dimension, and shadow cooperate to create unity. The mood and tone of arousing color and movement clearly reflect the Baroque style purposing that the audience would be stunning and taking time to think about it. Rubens' skill in painting is professional for which he knows how to use his talent as an artist to promote his ideas and stimulate the world.

⁸ Website Contributor. Late Mythological Painting by Rubens. Moodbook. 5 Feb 2012.
< <http://www.moodbook.com/history/baroque/rubens-late-mythological-paintings.html>>

⁹ Jenifer Fletcher. Peter Paul Rubens with fifty plates in full colour. 1968. P.14

The painting inspired by The Thirty Years War concentrated on the possible result that all war could occur. It could damage all civilizations of mankind including arts, languages and culture.¹⁰ The diplomatic painting must be good at catching attention and easily approached. Instead of showing the aftermath of war as it would happen in a real situation, Rubens decided to use god to symbolize feeling due to his religious knowledge. However, there is a reason more than just artistic aspect that aim to make impression. The message in painting must be clearly understood worldwide which in other words, both Catholic and Protestant must be able to perceive the concept that Rubens tries to transmit through his artwork.¹¹ Moreover, The Horrors of War has shown to Charles I. It was also used in political matter that the king will surely maintain peace.

Peter Paul Rubens the artistic diplomat shows the responsibility to the world by using both of his talent to generate many important works. The identical painting style seizes all glances. His artworks illuminate reality with dramatic pattern that become a wake-up call for everybody to be more considered about the effect that come after war especially the one who suffered and has been ignored. Therefore, The Horrors of War contributes us the beauty value showed by a well planned artistic form that has unity and capture attention, the social value showed by the religious believe, the diplomatic value that the painting intend to make peace between Catholic and Protestant. And finally, Rubens would want his painting to remind that once the war happens, both sides are lost whether humanity, education, religion or culture lost.

¹⁰ Jenifer Fletcher. Peter Paul Rubens with fifty plates in full colour. 1968. P.15

¹¹ Jenifer Fletcher. Peter Paul Rubens with fifty plates in full colour. 1968. P.14

