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El Greco

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In sixteenth century, it was known as the period of cultural movement or the Renaissance. It began in Florence, Italy in fourteenth century and ended in seventeenth century. Although this period had many revolutions due to upheavals, it was a literal, cultural, aesthetic and artistic flourish. ¹Art in the Renaissance was always represented by the religious image. There had many famous artists in high Renaissance such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and El Greco, the artist whose style was attracted by Mannerism. His Mannerist style as elongated figures and vivid color influenced on many renowned artists in the next generation such as Velasquez, Picasso and Jackson Pollock and it also became the root of modern art. How he became an outstanding artist? Why his style influenced our world?

El Greco or Domenico Theotocopoulos was a painter, sculptor and architect. He was born on Crete in 1541.² In Crete, he trained as a painter and used Byzantine style to create his work. Greco was a charismatic painter thus his works were admired by other people knowing him. Then, he moved to Venice and then to Rome in 1570. In Italy, he

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Renaissance." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 2 Sep. 2012. <
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance> >

² Lionell Fuppi. *El Greco The life and work of the artist illustrated with 80 colour plates*. 1967. p.1

became a famous artist because of his distinct style which was influenced by Mannerism, an unrealistic type of art.³

The Mannerist style was a unique combination of Renaissance art and Baroque style.⁴ Michelangelo was one of the greatest Mannerism artists who inspired El Greco's style in the sense that emotion was more important than judgment. This influence was found later in his work named "Allegory of the Holy League".⁵ Most of El Greco's painting was a religious scene which reflected the Mannerist style like elongated figures, bright colors and uncertain scales. He did not imitate any ideas from others but always developed them into his own styles. Although the Mannerist style was not popular at that time, it became more notable and influenced the modern art in twentieth century. Moreover, his painting also inspired other famous artists like Velasquez, Picasso and Jackson Pollock.⁶

El Greco moved again to Toledo in Spain where he spent his final period of life. He created most of his famed work here. One of his masterpieces which inspired Velasquez, the greatest European painter, was "Burial of the Count of Orgaz" which was finished in 1586 and was found in the church of Saint Thomas in Toledo.⁷ This

³ Wikipedia contributors. "El Greco." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 5 Sep. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Greco/>

⁴ visual-arts-cork.com contributors. "Mannerism Style of Art (c.1520-1600)." *visual-arts-cork.com*. 5 Sep 2012

<<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/history-of-art/mannerism.htm>>

⁵ Lionell Fuppi. *El Greco The life and work of the artist illustrated with 80 colour plates*. 1967. p.15

⁶ Wikipedia contributors. "El Greco." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 5 Sep. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Greco/>

⁷ Newadvent contributors. "Domenico Theotocopuli (El Greco)." *Newadvent*. 6 Sep 2012 <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14628a.htm>>

distinctive large image has two parts, the heaven above and burial scene of the Count Orgaz below. In the heaven part, we see the Christ dressed in white sitting on the top of painting with Virgin Mary beside him. Next to Virgin Mary is Saint Peter with the key of heaven on his hand. There also has King Phillip II who living at that time of painting. In the burial scene, we can see Saint Stephen on the left and Saint Augustine on the right holding the dead Count body. Moreover, at the side of two Saints there has Jorge Manuel who was El Greco's son. Greco put himself in this painting that can be seen above Saint Stephen as well. In the center between the heaven and the terrestrial, it has an appearance of angel which was an intermediate between the dead count and the Christ.⁸ In terms of style, Greco used his Mannerist style with elongated figures and gold color in the heaven part. On the other hand, he created burial scene with symmetrical proportion to make it harmonious.⁹ This painting was also considered as the first perfectly individual work done by painter. Velasquez learned many techniques from this El Greco's painting such as his style of coloring and his idealism art. Moreover, El Greco was the first who understand that one color can affect another color in term of tone. His discovery was the great contribution to Velasquez, to other artists in next generation and to the world.

One of the renowned artists in twentieth century who was inspired by El Greco was Pablo Picasso. Greco was a main role model of Picasso in his Blue Period, the period that he always painted his works with blue color.¹⁰ When Greco became an expressionist at that time, the Blue Period seemed to be declined. Most of Picasso's Gothic style like

⁸ Wikipedia contributors. "The Burial of the Count Orgaz." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.13 Sep.2012.< http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Burial_of_the_Count_of_Orgaz>

⁹ Artble contributors. "Burial of the Count of Orgaz." *Artble*.6 Sep 2012.< http://www.artble.com/artists/el_greco/paintings/the_burial_of_the_count_of_orgaz>

¹⁰ Wikipedia contributors. "Picasso's Blue Peroid." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.10 Sep.2012. < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picasso's_Blue_Period>

elongated figures and his focus on expression was developed from El Greco's art. When he saw Greco's famed painting in Toledo, he felt very impressive and then he hung El Greco's picture in his hall of fame. That painting named "Opening of the Fifth Seal" which was in the church of Saint John the Baptist in Toledo. This painting is about Saint John raising his hand and preying to the God of justice in the heaven. Behind Saint John, there have the souls acclaiming for their salvation. ¹¹

This image was El Greco's last painting before his death and has not completed yet. The style that he applied with this painting was the Mannerist style as well. Picasso's painting named "Les Femmes d'Alger" was directly inspired by this Greco's painting. This painting was drawn by unique technique. Each figure was painted by different tone of color. In the early 1980s, many professors compared "Opening of the Fifth Seal" of El Greco with "Les Femmes d'Alger" of Picasso. There had many similar points and relationship between them. ¹²

El Greco also influenced on Jackson Pollock, an American abstract expressionist, in terms of emotional expression style. Jackson demonstrated his emotional expression on his work by using 'drip and splash' to create a canvas on the floor. He dripped color instead of using traditional brush to paint and controlled it by emotion and body gesture. His style became unique and recognizable, known as Action painting or Gesture painting

¹¹ Khrisna. "El Greco:The Opening of the Fifth Seals." *DollarsTips, Free Stuff: free images*. 13 Sep 2012.<<http://dollarstips.com/freebies/el-greco-the-opening-of-the-fifth-seal/> >

¹² Wikipedia contributors. "Opening of the Fifth Seal." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 10 Aug. 2012.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opening_of_the_Fifth_Seal>

style.¹³ However, all of his works did not have their own names. There are more than sixty individual works of Pollock inspired by El Greco's style and in his library nowadays; there have three books that he wrote about El Greco.¹⁴

Even though El Greco died more than four centuries ago, his works still play an important role in the world of art nowadays. His unique Mannerist style influenced on many well-known artists and also resulted in an evolution of modern art. He was a prodigious artist who worked very hard during his life in order to create many fascinating art works contributed to mankind in next generation. For these reasons mentioned above, we can answer doubtlessly that why El Greco could change the world.

¹³ Wikipedia contributors. "Jackson Pollock." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 13 Aug. 2012. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackson_Pollock>

¹⁴ James T. Valliere. "The El Greco influence on Jackson Pollock's early works." *Art Journal* Autumn 1964:6