10 ARTISTS' GALLERY

Over the last several centuries, Europe has produced some talented artists whose works are still celebrated around the world today. Three of the most influential European artists ever to have lived are da Vinci, Rembrandt and Picasso – and each of them is also an icon of an artistic movement.

Leonardo da Vinci

Da Vinci is responsible for arguably the most famous piece of art in the world. His *Mona Lisa* takes pride of place in the Louvre museum in Paris, France – but this striking piece of art is not his only memorable work.

Da Vinci was born in 1452, near to the Tuscan town of Vinci, in Italy (the name 'da Vinci' simply translates to 'of Vinci'). He is renowned for his work as a painter and sculptor, but also as an architect, mathematician, musician, engineer and scientist.

The breadth of his talents makes him representative of Renaissance humanism, a movement in Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. The ideal of humanism was to take education out of dry scholarship and into contexts that involved and benefitted real people. It used a wide range of mediums such as da Vinci's, alongside poetry and philosophy, to drive the spiritual and social progress of humankind.

Da Vinci kept extensive notebooks containing details of his work and inventions, many of which were never physically made during his lifetime. Among them were designs for helicopters, tanks and bridges. Since his death, some of his designs have been created in his memory, including his flying machine, and can be found in the French city of Amboise, where da Vinci lived in the final years of his life.

Rembrandt van Rijn

Rembrandt lived during the 1600s in Leiden, in the Dutch Republic (an area now known as the Netherlands). He learned to paint in its capital, Amsterdam.

Rembrandt is most famous for paintings of key moments in history and from myths and religious stories – but with his subjects caught slightly off guard, in a moment of expression or action. These also often contain clues about their stories, for example open letters causing a reaction, or knowing looks between characters. They're often unflattering, making it clear that his subjects – no matter how powerful or holy they were – were human, and flawed. As a body of work, they're recognisable largely due to the way Rembrandt painted light: his figures seem to glow out from a dark, often mysterious background.

The same is true of his many portraits. These are remarkable due to their honesty: they capture his subjects (including Rembrandt himself, in his self-portraits) as they really are, without flattering revisions. They seem intimate, and as though they create biographical stories – very like those in his historical paintings.

Rembrandt never left his home country, and is the epitome of the 'Dutch Masters', painters that flourished in the Dutch Republic after a long period of war. They're characterised by many of the traits he exhibited perfectly: an engagement with their subjects' inner lives, and a lack of idealisation about their appearances.

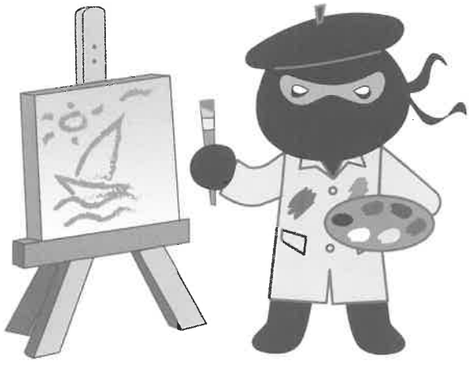
Pablo Picasso

Picasso was the pioneer of Cubism, an art movement that is considered to be the most influential of the 20th century.

He was born in Malaga, Spain, in 1881. He was an experimental artist even when he was young. His father was a painter and art teacher, and Picasso attended art schools in Spain. However, he soon became bored with their traditional teachings.

In 1904, Picasso moved to Paris, France, aged 23. The city's varied artistic atmosphere prompted Picasso to experiment constantly with his style. He focused on colour during what art historians call his 'blue period' and 'rose period'. Then he developed 'primitivism', in which he used the simple curves and lines of stylised tribal art as inspiration. This adapted and shaped itself into Cubism, for which Picasso is most famous. His style swept Paris, and then France, and then the whole of Europe.

Cubist artists study and then disassemble their subjects, before reassembling fragments into a portrait. This means that, rather than using a realistic single viewpoint, they show the subject from many angles, and also at many times, presenting it in a greater context. Cubism, and the several branches of style that resulted from it, form their perspectives by exaggerating geometric forms, such as the curve of a forehead, to examine both the shapes and the inner life of their subjects.



Like da Vinci and humanism, and Rembrandt and the Dutch Masters, Picasso and his Cubism were pursuing understanding of humans – what they really are, and what they could be.