

East Tennessee State University

## Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University

---

Art Appreciation Open Educational Resource

Open Ancillary Materials

---

2020

### Lesson 13: Mirrors in Renaissance and Baroque Art

Marie Porterfield

East Tennessee State University, marieporterfield@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#), and the [History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#)

Editable versions are available for this document and other Art Appreciation lessons at <https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer>.

---

#### Recommended Citation

Porterfield, Marie. 2020. "Lesson 13: Mirrors in Renaissance and Baroque Art." *Art Appreciation Open Educational Resource*. Johnson City: East Tennessee State University.  
<https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/14>

This Book Contribution is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Ancillary Materials at Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Art Appreciation Open Educational Resource by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ East Tennessee State University. For more information, please contact [digilib@etsu.edu](mailto:digilib@etsu.edu).

“Mirrors in Renaissance and Baroque Art” is part of the

## **ART APPRECIATION**

Open Educational Resource

by Marie Porterfield Barry  
East Tennessee State University, 2020

### Introduction

This course explores the world’s visual arts, focusing on the development of visual awareness, assessment, and appreciation by examining a variety of styles from various periods and cultures while emphasizing the development of a common visual language. The materials are meant to foster a broader understanding of the role of visual art in human culture and experience from the prehistoric through the contemporary.

This is an Open Educational Resource (OER), an openly licensed educational material designed to replace a traditional textbook.

### Course Materials

#### Presentations

The course materials consist of 24 presentations examining art across the globe from prehistory through the contemporary art world. These introduce key vocabulary, explore the way that culture and art are linked, describe the varying methods and techniques of the featured artists, and encourage classroom discourse.

#### Reading Lists

Each of the 24 presentations has an accompanying reading list which provides links to articles, videos, and other resources. The reading list is meant to reinforce and clarify information covered in each of the presentations.

#### Sample Assignments

A list of sample assignments is also included. Ranging from brief essays to simple art projects, these are designed to be completed in a sketchbook to more deeply explore course concepts. Intended to encourage learners to think like artists, art critics, and art historians, assignments emphasize practices of creative thinking and artistic method, while reinforcing concepts addressed in classroom lectures and required readings.

# Copyright Information

## Creative Commons License

This OER is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/); it is intended for non-commercial, educational purposes. Whenever available, images used within this OER are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons. Each image includes the individual licensing or copyright information.

## Educational Fair Use

Due to the nature of the course materials, some of the works of art covered are protected by copyright. Images of these works of art are included with a tag stating that they are [Educational Fair Use](#). These copyrighted materials should not be printed or reproduced as this may qualify as copyright infringement. Images designated as Educational Fair Use are provided in low resolution which is suitable for display on the screen but is not high quality enough for printing or reproducing. Whenever possible, a link is included to access a higher quality version of the image on museum or educational websites. If available, copyright information is also listed on these images.

Some of the images presented in this OER are marked with a Creative Commons license and include a tag for Educational Fair Use, especially works of art that have been photographed while installed in museums. The photographs of these works of art are licensed by the photographer but the two-dimensional works of art are protected under copyright. The images are therefore meant only for the purpose of education and contemplation and are included in a low resolution.

## Adopting, Adapting, or Expanding the Resource

The goal for this OER is to build an educational resource that is flexible enough to address concepts relevant to the contemporary discourse and scholarship in the visual arts. For those interested in utilizing these course materials, I am providing below some additional information that may be useful in expanding, adapting, or reinterpreting the materials. Editable versions are available in Microsoft PowerPoint and Word at <https://dc.etsu.edu/art-appreciation-oer/>

The font used to create the presentations and written documents for this OER is Calibri.

## Finding Additional Readings, Lessons, and Articles

**Smarthistory:** <https://smarthistory.org/>

Smarthistory is an extensive open educational resource which publishes outstanding essays and video lectures about art. The Creating + Conserving section of Smarthistory includes wonderful informational articles and videos about materials and processes: <https://smarthistory.org/tag/conservation/>

**MoMA Learning:** [https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/)

MoMA Learning provides a wonderful selection of essays on works of modern art and also has assignment suggestions at the bottom of each section.

**KhanAcademy:** <https://www.khanacademy.org/>.

Khan Academy is an outstanding platform of open educational resources covering a variety of academic and scholarly topics.

**Trivium Art History:** <https://arthistoryproject.com/>

Trivium Art History is a free, online art history book with clean design and approachable descriptions of works of art, periods of art history, and fun artist biographies. The [Themes of Art](#) section is a nice tool to helping students explore works that match their interests. The [World of Art](#) section is a useful tool for an exploratory World Art sketchbook prompt. The [Timeline](#) section is useful, as it separates works of art into galleries based on period.

**Introduction to Art: Design, Context, and Meaning:** <https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/arts-textbooks/3/>

For a more traditional, textbook approach, there is an Introduction to Art open educational resource textbook available.

## Locating Images

If you are utilizing the course materials and would like to add new images that are public domain or licensed under Creative Commons, there are several useful tips provided below for finding images.

**The Met Museum:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/>

The Met has an option to search for Open Access images within the collection [here](#). Make sure that the “Open Access” box is checked. The image license is [CC0 1.0](#), and will be marked OA Public Domain at the lower left of the image.

**Google Images:** <https://www.google.com/imghp?hl=en&tab=wi&ogbl>

[Google Images](#) has an option under “Settings” > “Advanced Search” to search by “Usage Rights”. Choosing “Free to use share or modify” will allow a search for images suitable for expanding our OER.

**Wikimedia Commons:** <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

[Wikimedia Commons](#) is an outstanding resource for finding open source images, with a strong collection of works of art.

**Flickr:** <https://www.flickr.com>

[Flickr](#) allows users to specify image licenses on uploaded photographs. Click “Some rights reserved” at the lower right of the image to check the licensing. Some images will say “Public Domain” or will be licensed under a [Creative Commons](#) (CC) license, allowing for the use in an OER.

**Smarthistory Flickr:** <https://www.flickr.com/groups/smarthistory/pool/>

The [Smarthistory Flickr](#) is expansive with images licensed for educational purposes.

## Acknowledgements

This Art Appreciation OER was adapted from existing resources by Marie Porterfield Barry as part of East Tennessee State University’s Open Educational Resources (OERs) Initiatives, which are a collaboration of the Charles C. Sherrod Library and the Center for Teaching Excellence. Deepest gratitude for the support from Ashley Sergiadis of Sherrod Library and Phil Smith of the Center for Teaching Excellence during the building of this resource. Thanks as well to my students at East Tennessee State University whose feedback and participation during our Art Appreciation classes was immensely valuable in compiling and evaluating this OER.



## Mirrors in Renaissance & Baroque Art





*Baroque art*, a style of European art of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is characterized by rich details, dramatic lighting, & theatricality.



We have spoken extensively of the significance of the mirror in the *Arnolfini Double Portrait*...

Jan van Eyck  
*Arnolfini Double Portrait*  
Oil on wood panel, 1434

Above: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: Public Domain

Right: Author: [National Gallery, London](#), Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain





Jan van Eyck  
*Arnolfini Double Portrait*  
Oil on wood panel, 1434

Above: [Wikimedia Commons](#), License: Public Domain

Right: Author: [National Gallery, London](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



Johannes Vermeer  
*Dutch Baroque*  
"Dutch Golden Age"



Describe the painting.

What is the mood?

What is happening in the image?

Describe the details of the scene.



Johannes Vermeer

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: [Public Domain](#)

Johannes Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* on its surface is a scene of everyday life, known as a *genre painting*.

The woman, dressed in fine clothing, is likely a member of the wealthy merchant class. She stands before a table on which she has spread out jewelry and coins. She holds a balance in her hand, appearing ready to weigh her riches.

Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain



*Woman Holding a Balance* is characteristic of Vermeer's style. The soft light gives a sense of the time of day. The painting has a carefully planned composition and a still, calm mood. We are given a glimpse into a peaceful, contemplative 17<sup>th</sup> century interior.



Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: [Public Domain](#)



Upon further inspection, we see that the woman stands before a painting of the *Last Judgment*.



Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain

Her placement visually divides the  
blessed from the damned in the  
painting that hangs behind her.



Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: [Public Domain](#)

In fact, she occupies the Archangel St. Michael's place in the scene. St. Michael is typically depicted with a balance as he weighs the souls of the dead at the Last Judgement.



Hans Memling, *Last Judgment*,  
Center panel, 1467–1471. Source:  
[Wikimedia Commons](#), License:  
Public Domain

Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain





Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain



Author: [Google Art Project](#), Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#),  
License: Public Domain



At first glance, the woman seems to be weighing her riches; jewelry and coins are visible on the table before her.



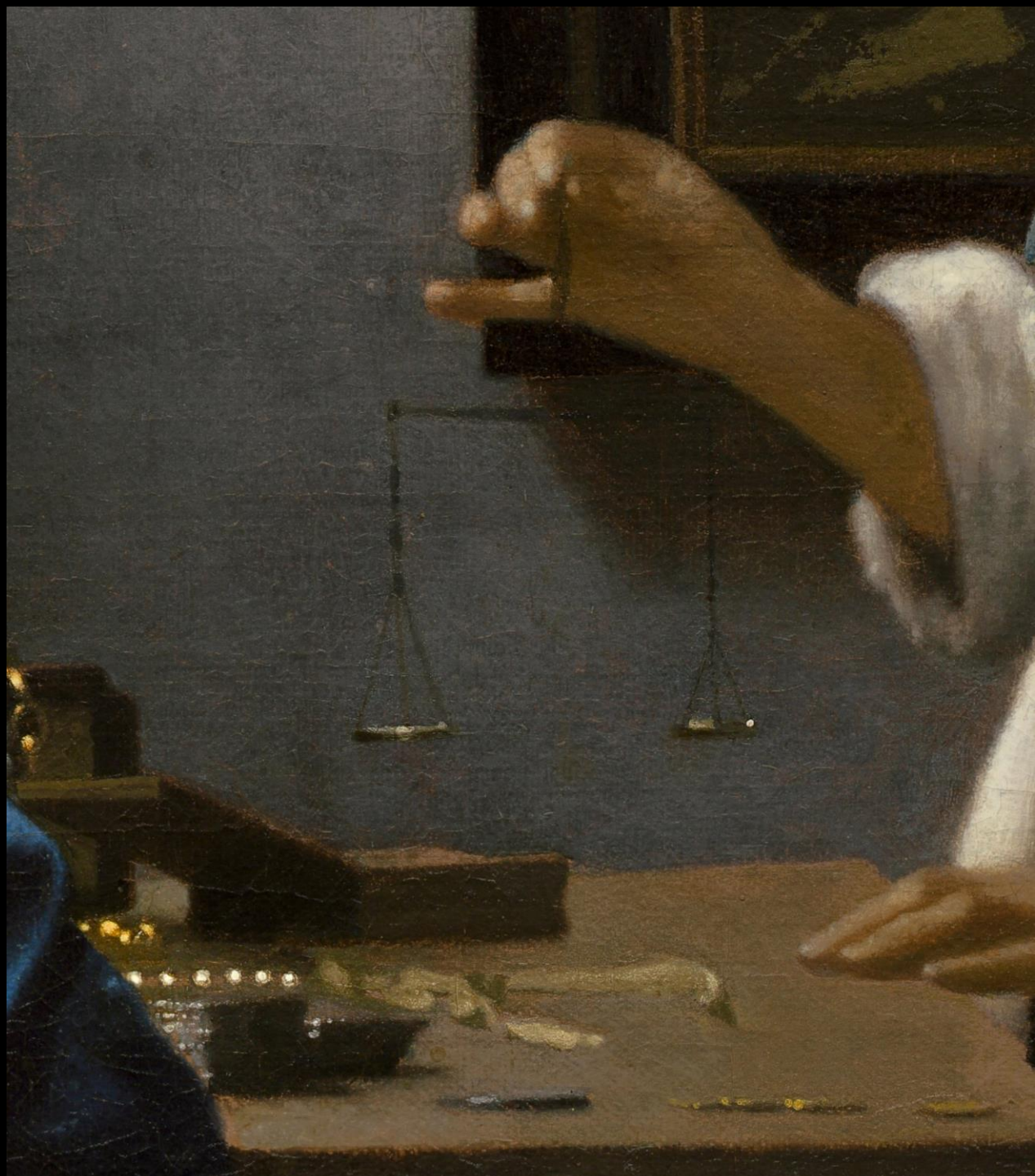
Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: [Public Domain](#)

However, her scale is empty as she stands motionless in contemplation.

Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain



The riches on the table and the painting on the wall create a sense of contrast between spiritual and earthly values.



Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain

A mirror hangs on wall in front of the female. Sometimes mirrors can be interpreted as symbols of vanity in paintings, especially when ladies gaze into them. However, notice how Vermeer's subject averts her eyes and focuses instead on the empty scales.



Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain

The mirror, however, could instead reference self-awareness and reflection upon one's own deeds.

Since she takes the place of St. Michael, perhaps we are meant to see her as one who reflects upon her own deeds and is here weighing her own sins.

Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain



*Woman Holding A Balance* has been interpreted with a *vanitas* theme, emphasizing the fleeting nature of life and worldly riches in comparison to the eternal (as seen in the *Last Judgement*).

Johannes Vermeer  
*Woman Holding A Balance*  
Oil on canvas, c. 1664

Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain



Diego Velázquez  
*Spanish Baroque*



What does this painting represent?

Who or what is being depicted?



Diego Velázquez

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: Public Domain



Diego Velázquez was the court painter for Philip IV of Spain. He was remarkably skilled at portraiture. The figures within this painting are identifiable representations of actual people in the royal court.



Diego Velázquez  
*Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)*  
Oil on Canvas, 1656  
Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: [Public Domain](#)

The central group of figures includes the Princess Margarita, age 5 or 6, with her entourage.

On either side of Princess Margarita are her young ladies in waiting. Further right, a dwarf that was a member of the Spanish royal court stands alongside the court jester, who taps the dog with his foot. Behind the group are Margarita's governess and a servant.



Diego Velázquez

*Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)*

Oil on Canvas, 1656

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: Public Domain



On the left, we see Velázquez himself, in a self-portrait of the artist painting...  
But it remains a mystery as to which scene is on his canvas, visible only from behind.

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



The subject of the painting is unclear. Is it meant as a portrait of the artist painting?

Or is it a portrait of the central figure of Princess Margarita including all the people with which she shares her life?



Diego Velázquez

*Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)*

Oil on Canvas, 1656

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: Public Domain

And what is the artist painting on the large canvas seen only from behind?



Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain

Has the little princess visited the artist's studio with her entourage to interrupt the painting of a portrait of the king and queen (seen only as reflections in the mirror)?

Or have the royal couple dropped by to observe the artist rendering a portrait of their daughter and her entourage?



Diego Velázquez

*Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)*

Oil on Canvas, 1656

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: Public Domain

The space of the painting is ambiguous, especially the back wall. Upon the wall, are various framed paintings, a reflection of the king and queen in a mirror, and a man who is framed in a staircase.

Peculiarly, the king and queen in the mirror as well as the man standing in the staircase seem to occupy space on the wall as if they are already paintings...



Diego Velázquez

*Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)*

Oil on Canvas, 1656

Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)

Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

License: Public Domain

Furthermore, the reflection of the king and queen in the mirror seems to reflect the space in which the viewer stands, creating a deeper sense of ambiguity.



Author: [Galería online, Museo del Prado](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: Public Domain





Parmigianino

*Italian Mannerism*

Parmigianino was just 21 years old when he painted this self-portrait.



Parmigianino  
*Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*  
Oil on wood, 1523-24  
Author: [Gallerix.ru](http://Gallerix.ru)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

In this early Mannerist painting, we can see the shift from Renaissance idealism to a Mannerist interest in distortion and exaggeration.



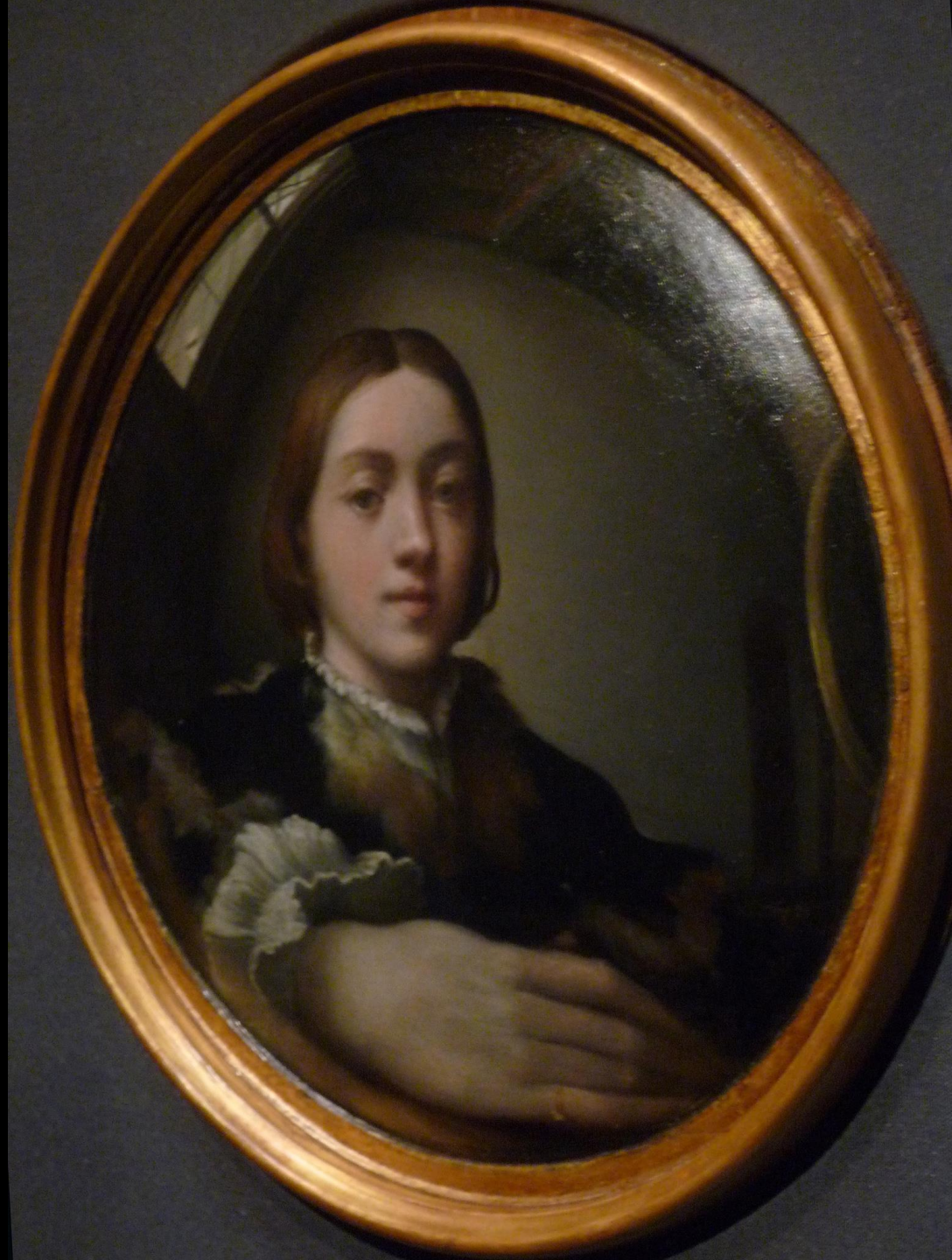
Parmigianino  
*Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*  
Oil on wood, 1523-24  
Author: [Gallerix.ru](http://Gallerix.ru)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

By painting himself in a domed mirror, the artist distorts space while creating a believable representation...  
Highlighting his own skills at rendering.



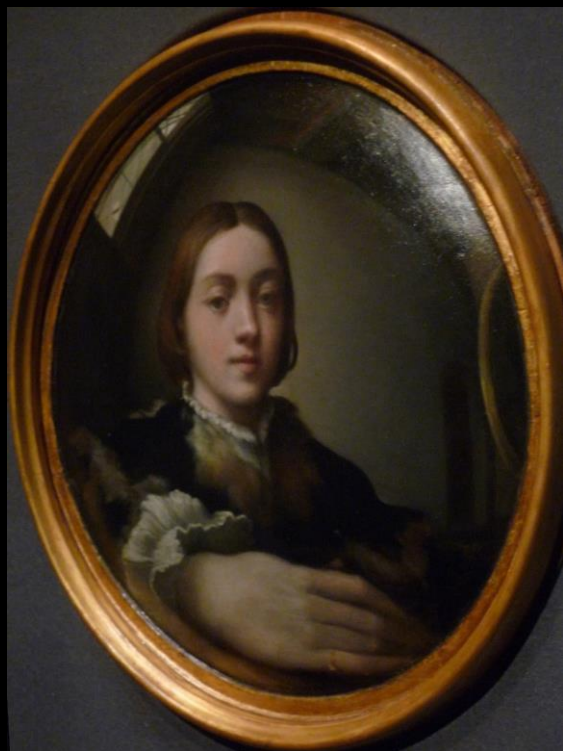
Parmigianino  
*Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*  
Oil on wood, 1523-24  
Author: [Gallerix.ru](http://Gallerix.ru)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain

A deeper sense of illusion is created by the domed wooden surface on which the painting is rendered, mimicking the domed mirror from which it was painted.



Parmigianino  
*Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*  
Oil on wood, 1523-24  
Author: [Steven Zucker](#)  
Source: Flickr  
License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

The golden frame of the painting is visible on the easel within the painting as well, creating a deeper sense of complexity.



Author: [Steven Zucker](#), Source: Flickr  
License: [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)



Parmigianino  
*Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror*  
Oil on wood, 1523-24  
Author: [Gallerix.ru](#)  
Source: Wikimedia Commons  
License: Public Domain



Rembrandt van Rijn

*Dutch Baroque*  
*"Dutch Golden Age"*

Rembrandt's paintings are known for the dramatic use of lights and darks, called *chiaroscuro*, as well as thick painterly brushstrokes. Throughout his life, he painted numerous self-portraits.

Rembrandt  
*Self-Portrait*

Oil on canvas, 1659

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain





Rembrandt's self-portraits are revered for the sense of honesty and directness in which the artist depicts himself.

The brightness of the face, seen here, surrounded by dimmer space centers the viewer's focus on his facial expression.

Rembrandt  
*Self-Portrait*  
Oil on canvas, 1659  
Author: [Google Art Project](#)  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
License: [Public Domain](#)





Thick, painterly brushstrokes enhance the sense of age and weariness in his face. The saturated color used in the skin tones appears naturalistic.

Author: [Google Art Project](#), Source: Wikimedia Commons, License: Public Domain

Rembrandt painted, drew, and etched dozens of self-portraits during his lifetime. The role of the mirror, as the object of reflection and contemplation of one's own aging face, is evident in his numerous honest and direct self-portraits.



c. 1628

Approximate age = 22

Source: [The Getty](#)

License: Public Domain

*Digital image courtesy of the  
Getty's Open Content Program.*



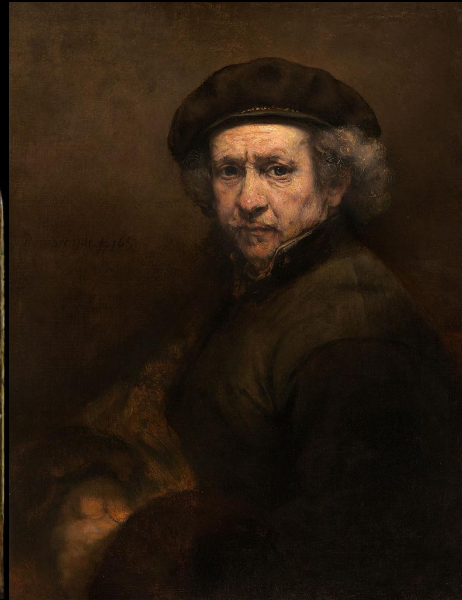
c. 1640

Approximate age = 34

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



c. 1659

Approximate age = 53

Author: [Google Art Project](#)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



c. 1669

Approximate age = 63

Author: [National Gallery, London](#)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

License: Public Domain



## Reading List: 13\_Mirrors in Renaissance and Baroque Art

Article about mirrors in art:

<http://www.dailyartmagazine.com/reflecting-the-invisible-or-visible-mirrors-in-art/>

Video lecture about Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/reformation-counter-reformation/v/vermeer-woman-with-balance>

Theme of self-reflection in Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*:

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.1236.html>

Video lecture about Velazquez's *Las Meninas*:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-art-history/early-europe-and-colonial-americas/reformation-counter-reformation/v/vel-zquez-las-meninas-c-1656>

Detailed article about Velazquez's *Las Meninas*:

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-centuries-people-las-meninas>

Video lecture about Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*:

<https://smarthistory.org/parmigianino-self-portrait-in-a-convex-mirror/>

Video lecture on Rembrandt's 1659 *Self-Portrait*:

<https://smarthistory.org/rembrandt-van-rijn-self-portrait-1659/>

### **Sketchbook Assignment: 13\_Mirrors in Renaissance and Baroque Art**

Take a photograph which includes a figure and a mirror. It can be a self-portrait, a portrait of a friend or family member, or a portrait of a pet. Think about the mirror's function when choosing how to set up the photograph. Does it reveal you, the artist? Does it provide extra information about the scene? Or does it symbolize something deeper?

Print the photograph in color (unless black and white is significant and intentional). It can be printed on campus on computer paper but make sure to print the photo so it is large, taking up the whole piece of paper. Title the photograph in your sketchbook in such a way as to suggest the subject. (You may choose to print it on 4x6 photo paper if you prefer, but this is not required.)