

100. A Philosopher Giving a Lecture on the Orrery. Joseph Wright of Derby. c. 1763–1765 C.E. Oil on canvas.

Form:

Oil on canvas

Strong use of light and dark = CHIAROSCURO

Seeing the effects of the light but not the source adds to the dramatic effect

Function:

Showcase the scientific advancements of the ENLIGHTENMENT, such as the orrery that is central in this painting

Also meant to illustrate the general feeling of curiosity and thirst for rational knowledge of the Enlightenment

The work also shows that women and children were getting involved in the movement, as they are also surrounding the orrery



Compare with: Caravaggio's "Calling of St. Matthew



and Raphael's "School of Athens"



Content:

Scientists, note-taker, and kids surrounding a central orrery. An orrery is a mechanical model of the solar system, depicting the orbits and relative relationships of the planets and sun

Each person depicted is meant to be a specific, real person, but we do not know who they are. The philosopher in red that is giving the lecture is believed to be modeled after Isaac Newton, yet another theory states that it is in fact a member of the Lunar Society of Birmingham

Strong internal light source representing the sun, also symbolizing the Enlightenment and the new search for reason and rational thinking

Painting also features women and children gathered around the orrery. This likely is meant to suggest that these groups were also being given these opportunities for rational learning and higher education

Context:

During the Enlightenment, and meant to showcase a moment that captures the discoveries and vibrant learning atmosphere of the era

The Enlightenment was a philosophical shift into a more secular, scientific way of thought. It deviated from the traditional and religious models on life and the universe that had been practiced during the Middle Ages.

Of course, scientists and inventors were essential to the Enlightenment; however, artists and writers were also important to spread Enlightenment ideas and inspire rational thinking

Joseph Wright of Derby actually became the unofficial artist of the Enlightenment

Lived all his life in Derby, England, and spent much time discussing and learning about science. Part of the Lunar Society of Birmingham