

Quentin Metsys
The Money Changer and His Wife
(1514)
Oil on Panel 71 x 68cm
Louvre Museum, Paris

The term Renaissance is a very general term describing two different painting styles that evolved during the 15th and 16th centuries. The Italian Renaissance deals with a rebirth of interest in the classical studies in art, literature, and architecture. The Northern Renaissance, dealt not with interest to the Classics, but to what was going on artistically in Florence.

The painting technique of both renaissances differed as well. The Italian Renaissance painting technique gave the image a soft, graceful, poised appearance. The technique accustomed to the Northern Renaissance was that of angular lines, and much attention to detail. The uniting of these two techniques would produce an elegant style with great attention to detail, color, and a quality of gracefulness to it. One such painter did so.

Quentin Metsys, a Flemish painter, brought these two techniques together in "The Money Changer and his Wife." Metsys shows wonderful attention to detail. This is evident when looking at the couple.

Most influenced by [Leonardo da Vinci](#), the detail to their facial expressions is incredible. Looking at the moneychanger, one is able to see the cleft in his chin, and the lines surrounding his mouth. His eyes are cast downward as he studies the coin he holds in his hand with much seriousness. A shadow crosses over half of his face, and his dress and headpiece are dark. Looking at his mate, her clothes are much more vibrant, in a brilliant red coat with a deep forest green velvet collar. Her scarlet coat is ribbed. She wears a headpiece in which a white veil falls down the sides of her face. The fabric for both of their garments appears heavy, as there are many folds. Both of the two are intently gazing at the coin he holds in his left hand. The moneychanger leans to his wife while hunching over to examine the coin. Leaning over to inspect the coin, his wife looks up from the book she is reading, her hand still turning a page. Metsys subtly portrays the conflict between the riches of this life and the riches of heaven. The coins perhaps symbolize the scales of justice as well as the Last Judgment. The coins are greatly detailed. A small container is given depth from the amount of highlighting Metsys uses.

Using the style of the old masters as stability in his painting rather than a stimulating force, Metsys was able to go beyond his contemporaries. Metsys could move past emulation of other paintings, and reconstruct. Reconstruction meant for a painter to take certain aspects of different paintings, and incorporate those aspects into their own paintings. Metsys developed this reconstruction technique in the painting, "The Money Changer and his Wife."

Metsys' early style reflected a heavy Flemish influence, largely that of [Jan van Eyck](#), by using deep colors, and extreme attention to detail. In his later works, Metsys endeavored to show emotions of the subjects he painted. This painting takes many different aspects from different paintings. The most noticeable influence within "The Money Changer and his Wife" is that of Jan van Eyck. The shelves displaying a still life like arrangement of books and writing utensils as well as the table covered with coins is taken from van Eyck's "St. Jerome." Again van Eyck's paintings are considered as the dress coat of the moneychanger's wife resembles that of one worn by Margaret van Eyck in a portrait done of her. The convex mirror, turned towards the window, is seen again in van Eyck's, "[The Arnolfini Wedding](#)". In both paintings, the usage of the mirror reflects light as well as show a person in the mirror, the artist.

Quentin Metsys is one of the few artists capable to take the techniques of the Italian Renaissance, the Northern Renaissance, and the influential traditions of Flemish painting and mold them into an entirely innovative mode of painting. This new mode is demonstrated by his use of vibrant color, attention to detail, and the elegant poise of his subjects. Quentin Metsys can be considered a true Renaissance man as he took the best of the art techniques available, and molded them