Artworks As A Direct Response To The Values And Belief Of Their Respective Worlds

Throughout art history, it is evident that artworks are a direct response to the values and beliefs of their respective worlds. The conceptual framework provides a model for understanding the various connected agencies of the art world – including artwork, world, audience and artist. The question at hand “Analyse how artworks are a response to the beliefs of their time and place” requires us to take a closer examination of artworks through their conceptual framework. I propose that by examining the. beliefs and values of Ancient Greece, the Renaissance and Baroque periods, we will be able to understand how three well-known artworks: “The Parthenon” (447-438 B.C), “The School of Athens” (1509-1511 AD) and “Judith and Holofernes” (b. 1593-1653 AD) are all a direct response to the time and place within which they were created.

The Classical Period (approx. 480 - 323 BC) in Ancient Greece is widely regarded as one of the most accomplished and brilliant eras of intellectual inquiry and artistic achievement in the Western world. Ancient Greek artists celebrated intellectual inquiry. It was when the great gains were made in the fields of philosophy, science, mathematics, geometry and the arts. These gains were part of Greece’s ideals allowing for all artworks to display these fields in their artist's own unique forms. The Ancient Greeks believed in Polytheism, the belief in or worship of more than one god. The Greek gods were intellectual, athletic, competitive, and they were essentially fallible. As much of Greek art was meant to thank the gods fortune and to hopefully gain favour in their eyes for good times to come. The Greeks were essentially anthropocentric, focused entirely on humanity. With mankind being the most important element of existence, they derived their norms from the observation of nature and humanity, accessible to intellectuals, writers and artists through their unprecedented powers of observation, inquiry and analysis. Perfection is what Greek artists strived for in their artworks, through balance, harmony and mathematical proportion. No one achieved this perfection better than Phidias, the artist and sculptor of “The Parthenon”. Alongside with the help of the architects Iktinos and Kallikrates. The temple was built on the top of the Acropolis of Athens during 447 and 438 BC. It was dedicated to the goddess of war and wisdom, Athena Parthenos. The temple’s Doric columns, simple yet refined, perfectly embody the classical Greek ideals of order, harmony and balance. The pediment sculptures in “The Parthenon” were displayed as religious sanctuaries and exhibited “the birth of Athena and a battle between Athena and Poseidon” . These reflect a direct adherence to the ideas of Polytheism. Beautiful proportions were a result to harmonious numerical ratios driven from geometry and mathematics. Although the naked eye cannot detect it, there is scarcely a straight line in the building. For instance, Phidias adopted the principles of “Entasis” to the sides of the Doric column. This resulted in the columns very faintly swelling outwards about halfway up and all the horizontals curves to move slightly upwards to the middle of the column. These refinements improved the appearance of the structure when it is viewed from a distance. In summary, the values and the beliefs of Ancient Greece, in particular the religious disciplines of Polytheism and Perfectionism, were encapsulated in the artworks of their time, as evident in the structure, placement and refinement of the Parthenon.

Renaissance emerged as a Cultural Revolution in Europe as it was still to a large extent heavily governed by the religious practices of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. There was a renewed

interest in intellectual inquiry, academic study and reason. Humanism was the philosophical backbone of the Renaissance, “emphasising the potential for individual achievement and stipulating that humans were rational beings capable of truth and goodness” . Renaissance scholars celebrated the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans for their own sake, rather than for their relevance to Church principles. The Study of Anatomy and Physiology as a renewed interest in science gained pace during the study of livings things, particularly the human anatomy. Scientists and artists alike were inspired to better understand the form of living matter and this was revealed in their portrayal of the human form. “The School of Athens” (1508) is a fresco painted by Raphael onto Pope Julius II apartment wall in Rome. In “The School of Athens”, we see numerous groups of figures in a great area of a classical building. The painting is basically symmetrically balanced with the central arches and the figures fairly evenly divided on each side of the painting together, creating a feeling of balance. Harmony is reflected through the placement of the figures and use of harmonious colours. Even though there are 53 figures in the painting in various positions, there is still a sense of order and naturalness. The School of Athens depicts a congregation of the great philosophers and scientists of the ancient world. Raphael depicted these luminaries, through conversing and explaining each other theories and ideas. The contrast in colour employed in the artwork, “The School of Athens” creates an animating. Through the use of clear blues, sharp greens and essences of reds and yellows further relieve the formality and solemnity of the harmonious scene. The painting displays calmness and serenity representing the ideal world without imperfections. In summary, it is clear that the artworks of the Italian Renaissance period, such as “The School of Athens” was heavily influenced through the beliefs and ideals of the time, mainly Humanism, Academic Study and religious practices.

The Baroque World of Art a period from late 16th to 17th century, initiated by the Catholic church. As the Catholic faith attempted to win back the gains of the Protestants as a result of the Reformation. This had occurred because the Catholic Church had become extremely powerful. But internally lead to the corruption and collapse of the catholic church. As a response to this, artist began to revive renaissance ideals of beauty and new exuberant extravagance in their artworks and architecture. Baroque art was coined by this highly embellished style and was known for its innovative techniques and details. Baroque art was further disseminated by powerful religious orders through their extensive network of monasteries and convents. The Baroque era saw was charged with religious propaganda as artworks were used as a medium for promoting the idea of his regal glory. Which was installed by Louis XIV realised the importance of the arts as propaganda as these artworks were biased pieces used to promote political points of view about the Catholic Church. Even though the Baroque adapted some features of the Renaissance, it is by comparison, its characteristics are much more flamboyant and opulent. Its artists sought to convey emotion, movement, and variety in their works. Works are designed to appeal to the senses of the audience and human subjects are typically presented with a degree of humble nobility. Baroque artists continued the Renaissance fascination with perspective and the creation of space; however, they introduced their own exaggerated, theatrical sense of space and mood into their artworks. The painting “Judith and Holofernes” by Artemisia Gentileschi in 1620 – 1621 is a Baroque artwork that depicts the response to the culture’s ideas and beliefs. The brutal depiction is often interpreted as painted revenge for the rape. As art critic Jonathan Jones wrote, 'she communicated a powerful personal vision ,' that 'fought back against the male violence that dominated the world she lived in.' Gentileschi chose to paint the biblical story’s horrific climax, producing a scene that is nothing short of horrifying. As the protagonist decapitates Holofernes, to save the Jewish people, her forearms are tensed, her brow is furrowed in concentration and blood spurts out

from her victim’s neck. Caravaggio influenced the startling naturalism of the scene. As Artemisia imitated his painting technique. Where she painted directly from life and employed sharp contrasts of Chiaroscuro and tenebrism. The Baroque artwork is a direct response to the strict power of the catholic church and its disputes with the Protestants.

The art in history are influenced by the relevant world they were created in. The Parthenon embraces polytheism as idea-with the structure being dedicated to the goddess Athena. The use of entasis reflects the values of harmony, order and perfection. Th School of Athens emphasizes calmness and serenity, the sense of order and naturalness in the way the figures are positioned. Judith and Holofernes focuses on an emotional response reflecting humanism of the Renaissance, through terrifying scene details depicted on the victim’s body. This reflects the drawer of art released as propaganda decreasing the baroque coaction reputation. These ideas and beliefs vary depending on time and place and art is used as a response to these thoughts and theories.