

Portraits Historiques in Education: Seeing Greek Mythology Through Renaissance Flemish Paintings

Nikolaos Ath. Stamos

Hellenic Open University, Greece

Abstract

In this research, we deal with the connective way in which art can meet history in terms of methodology and multiliteracies. The historical framework of this study is the Renaissance in Flanders, the Dutch Golden Age, humanism (16th & 17th centuries A.D.), and the influence of Greco-Roman antiquity. Our aim was to determine if students can use Flemish paintings as an educational medium in order to selectively expand their visual and historical knowledge as they interpret portraits historiques (portraits of noble persons in mythological disguise). We examined the students' observation-interpretation of these paintings and the way they could exhibit the development of visual-historical literacy. Within this study, we followed basic assumptions of Perkins (visual part) and Moniot (historical part). The case study method used here included 12-year-old students of a Greek primary school. Qualitative content analysis was performed on data from student interviews and student text production. Regarding the findings, students' reading and interpretation of the image seemed to strengthen their visual literacy development, which in turn helped their historical literacy acquisition through a method of observing and comparing information.

Keywords: visual literacy, *portraits historiques*, art in history education, Greek mythology, Renaissance.

Introduction

When human beings returned from peculiar stagnation to the ideological, social, and cultural environment, it redefined an entire era for Europeans who were trying to get rid of the dark veil of the Middle Ages. The Renaissance signaled the power of the artist, who illuminated the humanistic ideology of those times through the contagious quality of the paintbrush, highlighting the essential side of the human existence. The time period of the Flemish Renaissance emerged important artistic production during the 16th century A.D. and inspired artists of The Dutch Golden Age (Sluijter, 2001), which roughly spanned the 17th century A.D. According to E. H. Gombrich (2006), art does not exist in reality; the artists do exist. However, there is also the myth, which allegorically constructs the ideas and events of those illuminative times, through the faces of Zeus or Jupiter, Athena or Minerva, Aphrodite or Venus, Artemis or Diana, and others. Mythological figures often constitute mythological masks, as was the case of Dutch *portraits historiques*, portraits with mythological disguise originated during the Flemish Renaissance. The mythological masquerades are not related to any kind of carnival. People usually having either some authority or noble birth wanted to legitimize their relation with humanism.

In this way, acclaimed Dutch painters during the Renaissance period carried out this important task of relating noble persons with humanism. Rembrandt may not have dealt with this particular artistic expression on a large scale. However, a number of his students, as well as painters of that time, especially Ferdinand Bol, were involved in it. Consequently, the historical framework of this study is the Renaissance in Flanders, the Dutch Golden Age, humanism (16th & 17th centuries A.D.), and the artistic influence of Greco-Roman antiquity. Having our interest in Dutch painting and Greek mythology as a motivation, we are trying to find some innovative ways of using visual literacy skills in history education. This statement can be achieved by avoiding the usual memorization practice (Kasvikis, 2015) and taking into account the cooperative learning practice (Matsangouras, 2000), as well as the art teaching practices in primary education (Chapman, 1978). Nowadays, the inclusion of art, especially painting, in a modern educational environment is a necessity for a world full of visual information.

Aims and Research Questions

Our overall aim of this study was for the students to use Flemish paintings as an educational medium in order to expand selectively their visual and historical knowledge.

Our specific aims were growing students' familiarization with works of art as historical sources, the interpretation of *portraits historiques* (portraits that have mythological disguise), and the search for visual elements of ancient Greek art in the historical period of the Renaissance.

The research questions of the study were:

1. Can students observe and interpret the Renaissance paintings in connection with Greek antiquity?
2. Does the art of painting help students to acquire visual and historical literacy, and if yes, in what way?

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Regarding the research method, the case study is used and here it concerns 12-year-old students of a Greek primary school. This method, generally, concerns a social group, a school class, even a small group or a person that offers research interest and can be a research sample because it reflects the qualities of a wider group. Therefore, the small number of the sample is not prohibitive for this research study. Qualitative content analysis (Berelson, 1971) is performed on data derived not only from the student interviews, but also from their text production. The conclusions are not generalized because this data analysis offers some indication derived from qualitative elements but not any evidence derived from quantitative elements (Cohen et al., 2011).

Regarding the intervention method, we followed some basic assumptions of Perkins (1994), Chapman (1978), and Skarpelos (2019) in relation to the visual part, as well as some assumptions of Moniot (2011) and Cavvoura (2011) in relation to the historical part. During the recent decades, a rapid growth has been observed in education that utilizes the arts for learning purposes on the revealed interpretations and meanings (Kokkos, 2011) about works of art. Therefore, the multidimensional role of the arts (cognitive, symbolic, aesthetic, imaginative, interpretive) is highlighted, which contributes to the completed development of personality, according to the Perkins strategy. This strategy, when used in education, gives students the opportunity of expressing their personal view through their reflective intelligence about art (Mega, 2011).

Perkins, who has worked extensively in philosophy, educational sciences, mathematics and artificial intelligence, developed his theory in 1994 about approaching art by describing the phases of observation and analysis on a work of art. Specifically:

- Phase A (Time for observation), in which the conditions are created for the development of knowledge through experience (pp. 42-46).
- Phase B (Open and adventurous observation), in which a creative reconstruction of the data takes place by activating open thinking (pp. 54-56).
- Phase C (Clear and in-depth observation), in which the conclusions arise through analytical thinking (pp. 67-68).
- Phase D (Review of the process), in which the understanding of the work of art occurs through critical reflection and the work is totally presented with either a written text or relevant activities (pp. 73-74).

In our method, we included the phase of deeper observation and comparison. It was an insertion between the third and fourth phase related to both the deeper observation and comparison of the artistic work to some historical texts (Stamos, 2021). We also added an optional final phase of consolidation. History education is characterized by engaging students in a bidirectional procedure of focusing on theory and empirical research. The image can be utilized as a historical source by using it in the appropriate way. The knowledge of basic visual elements, according to Avgerinou (2001), is significant for the viewer to construct and use visual language. Besides, the teaching of history, according to Moniot (2011), has the following challenge: to help students understand how to approach historical discourse, sources, and concepts of time and truth. It also includes the ability to develop historical thinking through representations of the past.

The Renaissance in the North: Dutch Painting and Humanism

The cultural movement of Renaissance lasted from 1350 A.D. to 1550 A.D. and established a new era in Europe. The Renaissance moved gradually from Italy and reached the European North. It was identified

with the Italian Florence of the 15th century and the Medici family, cities of Venice and Rome, as well as the first humanist Pope Nicholas V. The Netherlands built on the Renaissance movement as they used both artistic and worldview standards radiating from the South, however, without slavishly copying them, but adding their own original ideas (Vallianos, 2001).

The spread of ideas was achieved through both image and discourse, which, especially in the Netherlands, was perceived through the philosophical views by Erasmus, Descartes, and Spinoza (Clark, 1987). The philological movement of humanism gained ground. The aim of the discovery and publication of the ancient Greek literature was for these philosophical insights to be direct and accessible. The Aristotelianism of the medieval universities was replaced by Platonism. The Renaissance human being called *uomo singolare* (unique human being) was turned into *uomo universal* (universal human being) (Vallianos, 2001).

In northern countries, such as the Netherlands, artists faced the problem of how to continue the art of painting. During the Reformation period, many painters in Protestant areas turned to creating book illustrations and to portraits for livelihood reasons. Thus, they proceeded towards the creation of mythological disguise portraits.¹ According to Sluijter (2001), the artistic production of the Flemish Renaissance (16th century A.D.) inspired artists of the Dutch Golden Age (ca. 17th century A.D.).

Portraits Historiques and Their Analysis

According to Sluijter (2001), the portraits with mythological disguise are portraits of members of the upper social classes, who play the role of mythological figures. This type of painting is internationally known as *portraits historiques* and belongs to a hybrid genre of portraiture and history painting. Depictions of Artemis or Diana, and Aphrodite or Venus were most in demand. Among the artists who dealt with these portraits were Rembrandt, and especially Bol, Flink, Maes, and Bishop.² For this research study we chose *Minerva in Her Study* by Rembrandt, *Allegory of Education* by Bol, and *Group Portrait of Four Unknown Children* by Maes. These paintings can give the observers the opportunity to perceive the importance of rare *portrait historiques* having a peculiar artistic value in cultural history. In addition, they include representations of education, wisdom, nature, life, soul, and child figures who are studying or playing. Consequently, they can be educational media of international use to attract the observers' interest in the connection between visual and historical literacy.

At this point, we present on a Table some elements of the three images, concerning *portraits historiques* (see Table 1).

Table 1
Identification of Three Portraits Historiques

Image Elements	Image 1	Image 2	Image 3
Objects	wreath, helmet, shield, book	armor, book, stylus, fingers	Bow, bird, trees, fruit
Depicted persons	Minerva/Athena	Minerva/Athena Tutor-Children	Diana/Artemis Children-Opora
Painters, year	Rembrandt, 1635	Bol, ca 1656	Maes, 1674
Connection	Flemish Renaissance to Greco-Roman antiquity	Flemish Renaissance to Greco-Roman antiquity	Flemish Renaissance to Greco-Roman antiquity

Figure 1*First image: Rembrandt*

Note: Rembrandt van Rijn. *Minerva in Her Study* (1635). Japan, Private collection.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) (Figure 1) reflected the Cartesian and Spinozian worldview through his works. He also possessed the mysterious knowledge of the function of the soul based on the Ancient Greek tradition (Gombrich, 2006).

In the painting titled *Minerva in Her Study* (1635), a woman with an unusual appearance is represented. The laurel wreath that reveals her divine origin is combined with symbols of the helmet and shield on her left. The woman stands near a book as she is presented in light through the chiaroscuro technique. Her costume could be related to the model's possibly noble origins.

The Medusa's head presented on the shield as well as the goddess's helmet can be related to wisdom and wise war. The existence of the book is more indicative of the wisdom dimension or even of the protection towards the sciences. Moreover, in this painting, the balanced and decisive use of light is characteristic, differing from the usual mysterious suggestiveness in the form.³

At this point, we present on a Table some elements concerning the first image (see Table 2).

Table 2*Presentation of the First Image Elements*

Image Elements	Analysis	Interpretation
Painter, origin	Rembrandt, Dutch	artist
Helmet, shield, wreath, book dress	goddess Minerva/Athena as noble lady	protection, honor, wisdom noble origin
Wooden table	red tablecloth	aesthetics, rest

Figure 2
Second image: Bol



Note; Ferdinand Bol. *Allegory of Education* (ca. 1656). London, Simon C. Dickinson Ltd.

Rembrandt's depiction of Minerva inspired his student's creation. Ferdinand Bol (1616-1684), a student of Rembrandt, represented the *Allegory of Education* (ca. 1656) a depiction of Minerva in the company of three children (Figure 2). In the picture, Minerva's attributes are familiar elements: her helmet, the armor, the spear, and the shield with the Medusa's head on it. Tamvaki (2000) advocated this point of view, mentioning that Minerva was not only the beloved daughter of Zeus, but also the goddess of wisdom, the patroness of art and science, or the goddess of wise war. Bol dealt with the depiction of the goddess from his youth. In this painting, a group portrait is presented in mythological disguise. The painting shows a mother of noble origin in nice clothes with her three children. Minerva-Tutor-Mother teaches the well-dressed children the courses of reading (at right), writing (lower left), and arithmetic (lower right). The pedagogical and teaching method of Athena-Tutor-Mother is inspired by the Erasmian ideals, according to Chamberlin (2022).⁴ At this point, we present on a Table some elements concerning the second image (see Table 3).

Table 3
Presentation of the Second Image Elements

Image Elements	Analysis	Interpretation
Painter, origin	Bol, Dutch	artist
Armor, book, stylus, fingers	goddess Minerva/Athena as Tutor -Mother	wise war, reading , writing, arithmetic
Children	family status	noble origin

Figure 3*Third image: Maes*

Note: Nicolaes Maes. *Group Portrait of four unknown children representing mythological figures* (1674). Dordrecht, Dordrechts Museum.

Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693) created another disguised group portrait like the previous one painted by Bol (Figure 3). In this case, there are no adults, but four children. They are not allegories, but representations of the gods or deities in their childhood. The children's characteristics on the hill are personalized. The naked little boy, who is riding an eagle, attracts the observer's attention. This is probably an indirect reference to Ganymede and his abduction by Zeus, who was transformed into an eagle. Maes used the context of religiosity as well as humanistic and neoplatonic thinking by accepting the view of a child's soul.⁵ Among the other children in this dark landscape, the archer Diana or Artemis (goddess of hunting and wildlife) in her young version (at left) stands out. Pomona/Opora, a minor goddess of fruit harvest during the season of autumn, is presented next to the fruit (at right). In the center there is a child-brother, who is possibly trying to keep the soul of the other child far away from extinction.

At this point, we present on a Table some elements concerning the third image (see Table 4).

Table 4*Presentation of the Third Image Elements*

Image Elements	Analysis	Interpretation
Painter, origin	Maes, Dutch	artist
Bow, bird,	goddess Diana/Artemis	hunting
trees, fruit	goddess Pomona/Opora	nature
children	protection	freedom, soul

Description of the Teaching Intervention

During the courses in the sixth-grade of a Greek primary school there was the problem finding that the children had difficulties on understanding visual and historical elements when interpreting pictures or events/incidents, despite the student interest in art and history. Therefore, we sought out eight students as a research sample to participate voluntarily in a teaching intervention during two hours out of the official

teaching program. We used three images of the Rembrandt van Rijn, Ferdinand Bol, and Nicolaes Maes paintings in order to perform visual semiotic analysis and to research the acquisition of visual and historical knowledge through our connective way of seeing Flemish paintings in a cooperative learning environment.

In the sixth-grade history schoolbook written by Koliopoulos et al. (2012), there is a relevant unit about the Renaissance period (First unit-Chapter 1. The Renaissance and the Religious Reformation). The responses of the students were correlated with the development of historical and visual knowledge. For the data collection we used a semi-structured interview and a text synthesis written by the team leaders. The student sample formed three sub-teams of two students per sub-team. Each sub-team was asked to observe one of the three images and answer the interview questions. The first sub-team dealt with *Minerva in Her Study*, the second sub-team dealt with *Allegory of Education*, and the third sub-team dealt with *Group Portrait of Four Unknown Children Representing Mythological Figures*. They were also asked to read historical texts and compare them to the Flemish paintings, interpret the work of art and communicate the views to the other team members. They produced a text on each representative painting, containing the students' total review. They also optionally participated in activities of consolidation. The other two students dealt with all three paintings.⁶

At this point, we concentrated on the implementation of the teaching aims in relation to the specific aims. The students were asked to (a) simply observe the three Flemish paintings we suggested, (b) openly observe and describe these works from the Renaissance, (c) interpret the works of mythological disguise (Minerva/Athena, Diana/Artemis, Pomona/Opora), (d) read relevant historical texts and examine whether the Renaissance was influenced by Greco-Roman antiquity, and (e) work harmoniously in sub-teams during the interview and text production process.

Results: Data Analysis-Interpretation

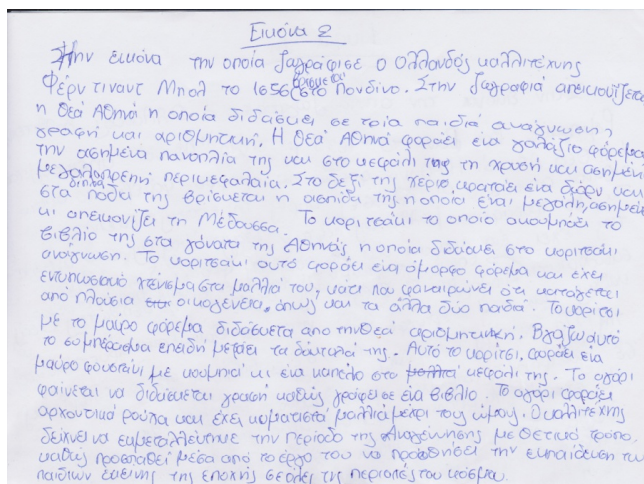
The researcher conducted the student interview according to the following questions. These questions were influenced by the Kokkos (2011) and Mega's (2011) assumptions on critical response:

1. What do you see? / What does interest you?
2. Look closely and describe the faces or things you see.
3. Are there any objects or situations that help you recognize some faces?
4. Who are the painters? Where are they from? Which historical period do they belong to? Have they been influenced by ancient Greece?

The sixth-grade students, who eagerly participated in the interview sub-teams, answered the questions orally. First, they successfully recognized the objects represented in the specific paintings because of the children's previous familiarization with some representative objects during their third-grade courses related with the transition from mythology to history. These objects (helmet, shield, spear, book, bow, fruit), as symbols, helped the interview participants to describe the paintings and recognize the faces of persons related with deities of Greco-Roman antiquity (Minerva/Athena, Diana/Artemis, but not Pomona/Opora). After the phases of observation (simple, open, and analytical), the students also successfully identified the name (Rembrandt, Bol, Maes) and origin (Dutch) of the painters as well as other pieces of information about the Renaissance period by reading not only the images, but also the relevant historical texts (phase of comparison). The researcher did not give any ready knowledge to these students. He gave them instructions of constructing their visual and historical knowledge. Finally, the students produced a text synthesis written by the team leader, including a total view on the specific three images through critical reflection and historical thinking, and searched for more relevant information (including the name of Pomona/Opora) in digital or traditional libraries (phases of review and consolidation). The author of this study has translated the student texts from Greek (see Figure 4) into English in order to quote some student comments as indications of the visual literacy development that in turn helped the historical literacy development.

Figure 4

A sample of the second image description by a 12-year-old student (in the Greek language)



First image: Rembrandt

In the text created by the sixth-grade students there was a general presentation (subjects, location, time) as well as a description of the goddess *Minerva/Athena in Her Study* with aesthetic content. After the familiarization with the art, what followed was a reasoned interpretation of the painting. The response included the characteristic interpretation of the crown as a symbol of glory:

In the picture painted by the Dutch artist Rembrandt in 1635, it is presented the goddess Minerva/Athena. She wears a beautiful dress that was probably worn by the noble ladies of that time [...]. She wears a wreath on her head [...]. Next to her knees I can see the shield of the goddess as well as the helmet, which is quite close to her. Her hand rests on a book, which is on a wooden table with a red tablecloth [...]. The wreath, which the goddess Athena wears on her head, manifests glory. In ancient Greece it was an honor for someone to be crowned with a wreath.

(student, 12 years old)

The connection of the Renaissance with ancient Greece is documented by the relevant excerpt from the text production where the existence of a connection between art and history was presented:

Greece shared its customs with Europe and other countries during the Renaissance. At that time people of different nations adopted customs and manners from other countries. The painter of the picture seems to have been pleased and he liked the Renaissance period as it helped his inspiration. It also seems that he had a special preference for the mentality of ancient Greece since he painted a great Greek goddess and not any other.

(student, 12 years old)⁷

Second image: Bol

In the *Allegory of Education*, an extensive description of the aesthetic part of the painting emerged once again (sample of critical reflection). The description was accompanied by reasoned judgments (sample of historical thinking), through which the relation of the depicted persons with educational content (reading, arithmetic, writing) was interpreted. In addition, their social status was interpreted through references to clothing and hairstyle. This could be combined with the fact that the upper class used to teach children, and especially girls, at home. The description of the shield, where Medusa is depicted, was characteristic. Therefore, visual knowledge (artist, exhibition of the work, colors) was connected to historical knowledge (subjects, space, time, and causal relations):

The picture was painted in 1656 by the Dutch artist Bol and there is in London. The painting presents the goddess Athena (Minerva), who teaches reading, writing and arithmetic to three children. The goddess Athena wears a blue dress and a silver armor. On her head she wears a majestic golden helmet. In her right hand she holds a spear and next to her feet there is her large silver shield that presents Medusa. The little girl that sets her book on the knees of Athena is taught how to read by her. This little girl wears a beautiful dress and has an impressive hairstyle, something that shows her noble

family origin, like the other children. The girl dressed in black is taught arithmetic by the goddess. I draw this conclusion because she counts her fingers [...]. The boy seems to be taught how to write as he writes on a book. He wears noble clothes [...].

(student, 12 years old)

The question of whether teaching Minerva/Athena could be the mother was answered positively. Specifically, it was related with the mother teaching ancient Greek history and Latin. In this way, the Renaissance was connected with Greco-Roman antiquity and given a universal meaning:

The artist shows that he took advantage of the Renaissance period in a positive way as he tries through his work to promote the education of children of that time in all regions of the world.

(student, 12 years old)⁸

Third image: Maes

In the produced text on *Group Portrait of Four Unknown Children Representing Mythological Figures*, there was an analytical description of not only people but also of nature. A reference was made to *trees, fruit, sky, and clouds*, which were related with the chaotic, heavy atmosphere of the painting. Beyond the connection of the Maes work with Greek mythology, as the goddess Diana/Artemis is recognized by her bow, there was also a connection with philosophy, which focuses on human values (humanism). The opposite meanings of life and death were presented in the multiple interpretations of the painting, dealing with the most characteristic reference to the black huge wings of the bird, which may also be the wings of an angel, who takes the child's soul to heaven:

The painting by the Dutch artist Maes has four children who are in the countryside. One little girl is sitting on the edge, wearing a white dress. The boy next to her seems to be trying to save a child from a black bird [...]. In this chaos another child on the left holds a bow (probably the goddess Diana/Artemis) and tries to hit the bird to free the child. Another explanation is that the little boy died. The wings belong to an angel who tries to take it away to heaven [...]. The sky is cloudy. Near the children there are trees and fruit too. This artist promotes the Renaissance through his work as he depicts themes from ancient Greece and humanism.

(student, 12 years old)⁹

It is worth noting that an unexpected justification was given to the presence of the goddess Diana/Artemis who comes to free the child from the bird by analogy with the struggles for freedom at times in history. In addition to visual knowledge, historical knowledge expanded, too, because in this phase, humanism was highlighted as an aspect of the Renaissance. The cross-reference of knowledge with the content of historical texts contributed to the cultivation of visual reflection and historical thinking. In this way students could selectively expand their knowledge through the multitude of information.

Conclusions

After conducting the research, in which there was participation of 12-year-old students in Greece, we derived conclusions from the students' responses to the Dutch *portraits historiques* by Rembrandt, Bol and Maes. Regarding our aim, the students succeeded in expanding their visual and historical knowledge by using Dutch paintings as an educational medium.

The teaching aims related to the specific aims were also achieved because, according to the data analysis:

- The students were familiarized with the works of art as historical sources.
- They interpreted and reasoned the portraits with mythological disguise of Minerva/Athena and Diana/Artemis but not of Pomona/Opora.
- They searched for elements of Greek mythology and humanism not only in portraits, but also in texts, and indicated the connection of the Renaissance historical period with Greco-Roman antiquity.
- There was some acquisition of visual and historical literacy through critical reflection and historical thinking.
- There was a cooperation of the children during both the interview and the text production.

Regarding our analysis related to the research questions:

1. Students can observe and interpret the Renaissance paintings in connection with the Greek antiquity on:
subjects, spatiotemporal framework, causal relations (historical part),
description, colors, symbolism, and aesthetic perception (visual part).
2. The art of painting can help students to strengthen the skills of visual literacy, which can help them also acquire historical literacy according to our method that included the five/six phases connected with the Perkins strategy.

This study is significant for the students of Greek primary schools because these students firstly approached the Greek mythology during their third-grade courses. Thus, during the sixth-grade courses, they get the opportunity to extend their visual and historical knowledge through paintings related to the Renaissance and Greco-Roman antiquity. In this case, future researchers and teachers can use the suggested method in the classroom by creating three teams of six persons per team, and three team leaders. Each team has to deal with one (not the same) of the selected paintings, and each team leader has to write a relevant text. The third-grade courses of mythology could not be considered as a limitation for teachers and students of other countries to adapt the method in their classroom, because during the phase of comparison they can find pieces of information in the historical texts and compare them to *portraits historiques*. A researcher could change *portraits historiques* with other pictures of historical content. This specific way of teaching history through the arts can be used from 11 to 14/15-year-old students, who belong in the same age category corresponding to middle school (Stamos, 2021). Teaching through Flemish paintings could offer a “window” into the field of visual and historical literacy in Europe and all over the world about the visual contribution to education by gaining bidirectional knowledge and entertainment.

Consequently, the Cartesian, Erasmian, and Spinozian ideals, by having a Platonic starting point, lead not only to the reputation of the artists, but also to the deification of their models through the mythological representations that draw their inspiration from Greco-Roman antiquity. The redefinition of standards of classical antiquity is transformed into the Renaissance humanism and, in this case, into portraits of mythological disguise. In this way, the Protagorean thought that a human being is the measure of all things (Plato, ca. 350 B.C.E./1995) is merged with concepts ideologically humanistic, artistically creative, and philosophically defined. Therefore, art through critical reflection can meet history, providing for the human eye to be properly trained in a connective way not only on observing, but also on comparing information.

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ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5723-3361>

List of images

Figure 1: Rembrandt van Rijn *Minerva in Her Study* (1635). Japan, Private collection.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/minerva-in-her-study/swFuWpGzPFI7g?hl=en>

Figure 2: Ferdinand Bol *Allegory of Education* (ca. 1656). London, Simon C. Dickinson Ltd.

<https://gallerix.org/storerroom/602737194/N/1448340127/>

Figure 3: Nicolaes Maes *Group Portrait of four unknown children representing mythological figures* (1674).

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Footnotes

¹ During the 17th century in the North, the institution of patronage was weak. During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the Netherlands was divided into the Protestant Netherlands, which resisted the Spanish Catholic rule, and the Catholic Flanders, having Antwerp as its capital, under the Spanish domination (Daskalothanasis, 2005; Fountoulaki, 2005).

² Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) did not paint any *portraits historiques* for his patrons but only for members of his family environment. Rembrandt dealt a little with Greek antiquity. However, he was enchanted by the beauty of divinities. His characteristic works are *The Rape of Europa*, *Minerva/Athena*, *Diana/Artemis and Actaeon*, *The Rape of Proserpina/Persephone*, *Ganymede*, and *Andromeda* (Tamvaki, 2000).

³ This particular portrait is similar to the portrait in Amalia Van Solms's gallery, at the Stadholder's apartments in the Binnenhof, and depicts a cousin of Elector Palatine Frederick (Tamvaki, 2000).

⁴ The classical ideal of morality and the virtuous life, as *virtu*, is identified with both wisdom and teaching by Minerva/Athena to children (Chamberlin, 2022).

⁵ *The Abduction of Ganymede* (ca. 1636-1638) by Rubens is a typical painting. According to Tamvaki (2000), in the myth related to Ganymede, the erotic dimension (Plato's view), the beauty of the soul (Xenophon's view), the transition of the child's soul to heaven (religious view), and the identification with the sign of Aquarius (constellation) were interpreted.

⁶ The same procedure was conducted by the researcher with a small team of third-grade students in order to observe the evolution of the learning process from myth to history through image.

⁷ In the text produced by the third-grade students, at the beginning, the representation of a woman wearing a crown probably as a queen or princess, was mentioned. Then, by focusing on the objects (shield, spear) the interpretation was redefined and the depicted person was connected to Greek mythology (Minerva/Athena, goddess of wisdom). In addition, the helmet was recognized full of light in the painting. In terms of historical thinking and knowledge, the painter of this work (Rembrandt) and the depiction of the goddess (Minerva/Athena) were recognized, as well as the location (Netherlands). Therefore, it seems there is a transition from imagination to visual and historical literacy:

I see a woman wearing a dress, earrings and a crown on her head. Behind her there is a shield and in front of the shield there is a helmet as well as a book in her left hand. This picture was painted by Rembrandt from the Netherlands. This woman is the goddess Athena (Minerva). At first I thought that she was a princess or a queen and that the helmet was some kind of light.

(student, 9 years old)

⁸ In the case of the third-grade students, three children were described and that they learned how to write, count, and read from the goddess Minerva/Athena. This time, the identification of Minerva/Athena was easy because the recognition of her was preceded through the connection with Rembrandt's painting, in which Rembrandt had depicted the same symbols (helmet, spear, shield). Thus, it seems that visual perception turns into knowledge in terms of both the visual and historical approaches:

I see three children who learn different things. The first child writes, the second child counts using the fingers and the other child reads. The goddess Athena (Minerva) teaches them all these. The goddess Athena (Minerva) wears a helmet. She holds a spear and next to her there is a shield. This painting was painted by Bol, Rembrandt's student.

(student, 9 years old)

⁹ In the case of the third-grade students, a simple and clear description of the image was made with the addition of emotional dimensions (fear, embrace, protection). There was a particular reference not only to the underworld (Hades), but also to death in a philosophical dimension, as well as to the goddess Diana/Artemis provoking death through her bow. Therefore, it seems that art gives to students the opportunity of reading pictures and understanding visual and historical elements, without the use of memorization:

I see four children each of whom has something. The first child holds a bow and is the goddess of hunting, the goddess Artemis (Diana). The second child is picking fruit. The third child embraces the fourth one who may belong to the same family. The fourth child is afraid of these because he might be taken by the wings to go to Hades. This picture was drawn by Maes.

(student, 9 years old)

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