

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR LEGAL RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS



Open Access, Refereed Journal Multi Disciplinary
Peer Reviewed

www.ijlra.com

DISCLAIMER

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, transmitted, or distributed in any form or by any means, whether electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission of the Managing Editor of the *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis (IJLRA)*.

The views, opinions, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in the articles published in this journal are solely those of the respective authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board, Editors, Reviewers, Advisors, or the Publisher of IJLRA.

Although every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy, authenticity, and proper citation of the content published in this journal, neither the Editorial Board nor IJLRA shall be held liable or responsible, in any manner whatsoever, for any loss, damage, or consequence arising from the use, reliance upon, or interpretation of the information contained in this publication.

The content published herein is intended solely for academic and informational purposes and shall not be construed as legal advice or professional opinion.

**Copyright © International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis.
All rights reserved.**

ABOUT US

The *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis (IJLRA)* (ISSN: 2582-6433) is a peer-reviewed, academic, online journal published on a monthly basis. The journal aims to provide a comprehensive and interactive platform for the publication of original and high-quality legal research.

IJLRA publishes Short Articles, Long Articles, Research Papers, Case Comments, Book Reviews, Essays, and interdisciplinary studies in the field of law and allied disciplines. The journal seeks to promote critical analysis and informed discourse on contemporary legal, social, and policy issues.

The primary objective of IJLRA is to enhance academic engagement and scholarly dialogue among law students, researchers, academicians, legal professionals, and members of the Bar and Bench. The journal endeavours to establish itself as a credible and widely cited academic publication through the publication of original, well-researched, and analytically sound contributions.

IJLRA welcomes submissions from all branches of law, provided the work is original, unpublished, and submitted in accordance with the prescribed submission guidelines. All manuscripts are subject to a rigorous peer-review process to ensure academic quality, originality, and relevance.

Through its publications, the *International Journal for Legal Research & Analysis* aspires to contribute meaningfully to legal scholarship and the development of law as an instrument of justice and social progress.

PUBLICATION ETHICS, COPYRIGHT & AUTHOR RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

The *International Journal for Legal Research and Analysis (IJLRA)* is committed to upholding the highest standards of publication ethics and academic integrity. All manuscripts submitted to the journal must be original, unpublished, and free from plagiarism, data fabrication, falsification, or any form of unethical research or publication practice. Authors are solely responsible for the accuracy, originality, legality, and ethical compliance of their work and must ensure that all sources are properly cited and that necessary permissions for any third-party copyrighted material have been duly obtained prior to submission. Copyright in all published articles vests with IJLRA, unless otherwise expressly stated, and authors grant the journal the irrevocable right to publish, reproduce, distribute, and archive their work in print and electronic formats. The views and opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors alone and do not reflect the views of the Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, or Publisher. IJLRA shall not be liable for any loss, damage, claim, or legal consequence arising from the use, reliance upon, or interpretation of the content published. By submitting a manuscript, the author(s) agree to fully indemnify and hold harmless the journal, its Editor-in-Chief, Editors, Editorial Board, Reviewers, Advisors, Publisher, and Management against any claims, liabilities, or legal proceedings arising out of plagiarism, copyright infringement, defamation, breach of confidentiality, or violation of third-party rights. The journal reserves the absolute right to reject, withdraw, retract, or remove any manuscript or published article in case of ethical or legal violations, without incurring any liability.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ART AND POLITICS INFLUENCING EACH OTHER: A STUDY OF THE RENAISSANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT ERA

AUTHORED BY - MANAN

B.A. LL.B., The National Law Institute University, Bhopal

CO-AUTHOR - RUDRAKSH THOURWAL

B.A. LL.B., The National Law Institute University, Bhopal

CO-AUTHOR 2 - AVIK SAPAL

B.A. LL.B., The National Law Institute University, Bhopal

Introduction

The Oxford dictionary defines art as “The use of the imagination to express ideas or feelings, particularly in painting, drawing or sculpture.” However, to truly understand the meaning of art, a single definition is insufficient. Art has been described by various thinkers as “The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been concealed by the answers,”¹ “Art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it,”² “Art is the most effective mode of communication that exists,”³ “Art is essentially the affirmation, the blessing, the deification of existence,”⁴ “For art is a form of catharsis,”⁵ “What is art? Art grows out of grief and joy, but mainly grief. It is born of people’s lives,”⁶ “The conscious utterance of thought, by speech or action, to any end, is art,”⁷ and “Art allows you to imbue the truth with a sort of magic, so it can infiltrate the psyches of more people, including those who don’t believe the same things as you.”⁸

These definitions suggest that art is not merely a reflection of the world but an active force in shaping it whether as a means of expression, a tool for propaganda, or a catalyst for social and

¹James Baldwin, *The Creative Process* (1962).

²Attributed to Bertolt Brecht.

³John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (1934).

⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (1901).

⁵Dorothy Parker, *Coda* (1927).

⁶Edvard Munch, quoted in *Edvard Munch: The Man and His Art*, by Ragna Stang (1977).

⁷Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Society and Solitude* (1870).

⁸Wangechi Mutu, *33 Artists in 3 Acts* (2014).

political transformation.

Throughout history, art has embodied both power and resistance. It has legitimized rulers, reinforced ideologies, and provided a voice to those who sought change. The Renaissance and the Enlightenment two of the most influential cultural and intellectual movements exemplify the profound connection between art and politics.

The Renaissance (14th–17th century) was a period of artistic flourishing under the patronage of monarchs, the Church, and influential families like the Medici. Art was used to glorify power, convey religious themes, and assert political dominance. Yet, beneath the grandeur of Michelangelo's frescoes and Leonardo da Vinci's masterpieces lay a deeper transformation one that mirrored the shifting intellectual and political currents of the time. Humanism, with its emphasis on individual potential and reason, subtly challenged the absolute authority of the Church and state. Art was not merely decoration; it was a statement, an assertion of new ways of thinking, a way of laying bare, in Baldwin's phrase, "the questions that have been concealed by the answers."

The Enlightenment (17th–19th century) saw art take on a more direct political role, becoming a tool for revolution, critique, and ideological change. The era was marked by the decline of absolute monarchy, the rise of democracy, and the questioning of traditional power structures. Art reflected these upheavals, moving away from religious themes toward depictions of civic duty, nationalism, and resistance. The works of Jacques-Louis David, for example, glorified revolutionary ideals, while Francisco Goya's paintings exposed the horrors of war and oppression. As Wangechi Mutu suggests, art lets truth "infiltrate the psyches of more people."

In this era, art became a weapon one that shaped public consciousness and inspired action.

Yet art does more than record political shifts; it conveys the emotions, struggles, and hopes of the people who lived through them. It lets us feel the weight of history and sense the anxieties of a society on the brink of change, and so grasp not only what happened but what it meant. We may know rationally that earlier generations lived, worked, and suffered, but visual culture lets us experience it. The grand frescoes of the Renaissance, the revolutionary paintings of the Enlightenment, and even the satirical prints of the age show how people perceived their world and responded to power, injustice, and hope.

Art is often treated as a mirror of political events, but its part in shaping public perception and political thought receives less attention. Renaissance art reinforced power through patronage, while Enlightenment art turned to critique and revolution, yet how art helped people interpret and react to political change remains under-explored. This paper examines art both as a historical record and as an agent of political transformation.

The paper proceeds on the hypothesis that the relationship between art and politics in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment was shaped by societal values, political ideologies, and patronage, and that state sponsorship, ideological change, and artistic movements determined whether art served as an instrument of power or of resistance.

The Renaissance – Art as a Reflection and Instrument of Politics

The Renaissance, roughly the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, was an age of remarkable artistic and intellectual energy that reshaped European society. It revived classical learning, promoted humanism, and placed new weight on the individual and on reason. Politically, power concentrated in city-states such as Florence, Venice, and Milan and in emerging monarchies like France, Spain, and England, and rulers, popes, and wealthy families used art to establish legitimacy, display wealth, and secure influence.

Florence, often considered the cradle of the Renaissance, exemplifies the intersection of politics and art. The Medici family, wealthy bankers who ruled Florence for generations, played a crucial role in fostering artistic talent by commissioning works that not only beautified the city but also reinforced their political dominance. Lorenzo de' Medici, known as "Il Magnifico," was one of the most notable patrons, supporting artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Botticelli. His patronage was not merely an act of cultural generosity but a strategic effort to associate his family's rule with intellectual and artistic excellence. Art in this period became a visual language of power, reinforcing the authority of rulers through grandeur and symbolism.

Religious institutions were also key patrons of Renaissance art, particularly the Catholic Church, which sought to maintain its influence amidst rising secularism. The Vatican commissioned monumental works to affirm its spiritual and political supremacy, as seen in Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. The Renaissance thus illustrates how art was not merely a reflection of political realities but an active instrument in shaping and reinforcing power structures.

Art as a Political Tool

Religious and Political Patronage

Renaissance rulers and religious institutions recognized the power of art as a political tool, using it to project authority, inspire devotion, and communicate ideological messages. One of the most striking examples of this is Michelangelo's work on the Sistine Chapel Ceiling (1508–

1512), commissioned by Pope Julius II. The frescoes, depicting scenes from the Book of Genesis, were not just religious in nature; they also asserted the Pope's divine authority and the grandeur of the Church. Julius II's commissioning of such an ambitious project was a direct assertion of his political strength, reinforcing his role as both a spiritual and temporal leader. Scholars argue that the Chapel's scale and artistic mastery were intended to surpass previous artistic achievements, symbolizing the Pope's supremacy over both the religious and political landscape of Europe.⁹

Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* (1495–1498), commissioned by Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, similarly served a political function. The painting, located in the refectory of the Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, was not just a devotional work but also a demonstration of Sforza's patronage of the arts, reinforcing his status as a ruler who embraced both religion and Renaissance ideals.¹⁰

Raphael's *School of Athens* (1509–1511), part of the Vatican's Stanza della Segnatura, further illustrates the political use of art. Commissioned by Pope Julius II, the fresco presents an idealized vision of intellectual history, featuring figures like Plato and Aristotle in a grand architectural setting. The inclusion of Renaissance thinkers among classical philosophers subtly aligned the Pope with the wisdom of antiquity, portraying the Church as the inheritor of both religious and intellectual authority.¹¹

Art and Civic Identity

Beyond individual rulers and the Church, Renaissance art played a significant role in shaping civic identity. The Republic of Florence, despite being ruled informally by the Medici, used public art to emphasize its ideals of civic virtue and republicanism. One of the most famous examples is Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504), a colossal marble statue commissioned by the city's government. Originally intended for the Florence Cathedral, it was instead placed outside the Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of government, symbolizing the city's strength and defiance against external threats, particularly the Medici and foreign invaders.¹²

Similarly, Donatello's *David* (1440s), commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici, also carried political symbolism. Unlike Michelangelo's heroic, muscular figure, Donatello's David is a more delicate and youthful representation, reflecting Florence's reliance on intellect and

⁹John T Paoletti and Gary M Radke, *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Laurence King 2005).

¹⁰Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (OUP 2006).

¹¹Ingrid D Rowland, *The Culture of the High Renaissance* (CUP 1998).

¹²Paul Barolsky, *Michelangelo's Nose: A Myth and Its Maker* (Penn State UP 2007).

strategy rather than brute force. The Medici's commissioning of this work reinforced their narrative as enlightened rulers, champions of the arts, and protectors of Florence's civic ideals.¹³

Art as Political Dissent and Reform

While much of Renaissance art served the interests of rulers and religious authorities, it also provided a means for subtle political dissent and reformist thought. One striking example is Botticelli's *The Mystical Nativity* (1500–1501), painted during the turbulent rule of Girolamo Savonarola in Florence. Savonarola, a Dominican friar, led a theocratic regime after the expulsion of the Medici, advocating for religious purity and condemning secular art. Botticelli, once a favored artist of the Medici, became influenced by Savonarola's sermons, and his later works reflect a shift from classical themes to deeply religious and apocalyptic imagery, suggesting a critique of both Medici rule and the corruption of the Church.¹⁴

Another example of subtle artistic resistance is Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings. While not overtly political, his dissections and scientific studies challenged Church doctrine, which traditionally maintained authority over medical knowledge. By portraying the human body with unprecedented accuracy, Leonardo's work indirectly questioned the Church's monopoly on truth and knowledge, aligning with broader humanist ideals that emphasized empirical observation and reason.¹⁵

Understanding Political Changes Through Art

Renaissance art provides valuable insight into the political transformations of the era, offering a visual record of both authority and resistance. It captures the growing tension between religious and secular power, the transition from feudalism to centralized states, and the rise of individualism and intellectual inquiry. For instance, the transition from Gothic religious iconography to Renaissance humanism reflects shifting power dynamics, as the focus moved from divine authority to human potential and political agency.¹⁶

Moreover, public reception of these artworks sheds light on how people responded to political changes. Michelangelo's *David* was embraced by the Florentine public as a symbol of civic pride, while works like Goya's political prints in the later Enlightenment period show how

¹³Alison Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome* (Yale UP 2005).

¹⁴Ronald Lightbown, *Botticelli: Life and Work* (Thames & Hudson 1989).

¹⁵Charles Nicholl, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Flights of the Mind* (Penguin 2005).

¹⁶Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance: Culture and Society in Italy* (Polity 2014).

artistic messages could provoke dissent. The Renaissance laid the groundwork for future artistic movements that would challenge authority more explicitly.¹⁷

Case Study: Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo da Vinci's artistic and scientific works are deeply embedded in the political and intellectual currents of the Italian Renaissance, a period marked by humanism, patronage, and intense political rivalries among city-states. His art, while often focused on religious and scientific themes, subtly reflects the political ambitions of his patrons and the broader ideological shifts of his time. Through his paintings, Leonardo captures the tension between religious authority, emerging secular power, and the Renaissance ideals of human potential and rationality.

Late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy was a patchwork of rival city-states such as Florence, Milan, and Venice, each governed by powerful families that relied on art to legitimize their rule. One of Leonardo's first major commissions, *The Adoration of the Magi* (1481), remained unfinished amid political instability in Florence, including the rising influence of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola.¹⁸ Its restless composition, with figures caught in expressive and turbulent motion, mirrors the intellectual and social ferment of the period,¹⁹ and although the subject is religious, its attention to individual figures and their naturalistic expressions points to the humanist shift toward personal experience and away from rigid doctrine.²⁰ Leonardo left Florence with the work incomplete and moved to Milan in search of steadier patronage under Ludovico Sforza.

Leonardo's years at the Sforza court in Milan (1482–1499) turned him from a Florentine painter into an engineer, architect, and military adviser serving an authoritarian ruler. Ludovico Sforza wanted Milan to rival the great cultural and political centres, and Leonardo's art served that ambition.²¹ *The Last Supper* (1495–1498), painted for the refectory of the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie, is devotional but also carries political meaning.²² Its linear perspective and emotional depth express Renaissance ideals of order and reason, while some scholars read the placement of Judas, set apart yet not isolated, as an image of the treachery and shifting loyalties of court life. Soon after the mural was finished, the French invasion of Milan in 1499 toppled

¹⁷EH Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (Phaidon 2006).

¹⁸Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (Oxford University Press 2006).

¹⁹Frank Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Paintings and Drawings* (Taschen 2019).

²⁰Daniel Arasse, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Rhythm of the World* (Konecky & Konecky 1998).

²¹Claire Farago, *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas* (Brill 1992).

²²Carmen Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered* (Yale University Press 2019).

Leonardo's patron and forced him to look for work elsewhere.

After the fall of Milan, Leonardo returned to Florence, where political tensions between republicans and monarchists were at their peak. His painting *Mona Lisa* (c. 1503–1506) is often viewed as an enigmatic portrait, but it also reflects Renaissance political ideals. Unlike traditional aristocratic portraits, which emphasized wealth and status, the *Mona Lisa* presents a subtle yet confident individual, symbolizing the rise of the educated and influential merchant class. Some scholars argue that the landscape in the background a blend of natural beauty and engineered structures mirrors the Renaissance vision of human mastery over nature. The painting's refined sfumato technique and psychological depth suggest an era in which art was not merely decorative but an exploration of human intellect and identity.

Leonardo's later years were shaped by the increasing dominance of centralized monarchies. By 1516, he had moved to France under the patronage of King Francis I, reflecting a broader shift in political power from the fragmented Italian city-states to more unified European kingdoms. His unfinished works from this period, such as *Saint John the Baptist* (c. 1513–1516), exhibit a darker, more introspective tone, perhaps reflecting the uncertainties of a world moving away from the idealistic humanism of the early Renaissance.

The Enlightenment – Art as a Medium of Political Expression

The Enlightenment, from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, transformed European intellectual, political, and cultural life. Its engines were reason, scientific inquiry, and a growing insistence on individual rights and freedoms. It challenged absolute monarchy, the authority of the Church, and inherited hierarchies, and helped bring about upheavals such as the American and French Revolutions. Thinkers like John Locke, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant advanced ideals of liberty, democracy, and secular government that shaped both political thought and artistic expression.²³

Art in the Enlightenment era reflected these shifts, becoming a medium for political expression rather than mere decoration or religious devotion. Unlike the Renaissance, where art often reinforced the power of monarchs and religious institutions, Enlightenment art frequently served as a tool for critique, propaganda, and the articulation of revolutionary ideas. It was used to question authority, advocate for new political ideals, and document the social and economic struggles of the time. Artists moved away from the ornate excesses of the Baroque period and embraced Neoclassicism and Romanticism, styles that emphasized simplicity, moral virtue,

²³Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (CUP 2019).

and emotional depth, aligning with the political currents of the age.²⁴

Art as a Political Tool

Neoclassicism and Revolutionary Ideals

One of the dominant movements of the Enlightenment was Neoclassicism, which looked back to the art and architecture of classical antiquity. Its order, symmetry, and rational composition matched Enlightenment ideals of democracy, civic duty, and moral virtue, and in revolutionary settings it gave artists a visual vocabulary for liberty and republicanism.

Jacques-Louis David did more than any other artist to turn Neoclassicism into political expression. His *Oath of the Horatii* (1784) shows three brothers from early Roman history swearing to defend their city, a scene of sacrifice and patriotism. Although painted before the Revolution, it became a rallying image for those who wanted to end the monarchy and found a republic.²⁵

David's later works became direct propaganda for the Revolution. *The Death of Marat* (1793) presents the murdered revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat as a martyr to the cause. Its stark composition and a light reminiscent of religious imagery lift his death into an act of political sanctification. The painting was a deliberate effort to shape public perception, glorifying revolutionary sacrifice and condemning the monarchy and its supporters.²⁶

Another key example is David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801–1805), which presents Napoleon Bonaparte in a heroic and idealized light. Commissioned as propaganda, the painting depicts Napoleon as a leader of immense power and determination, reinforcing his political image as the embodiment of Enlightenment ideals of leadership, rationality, and progress.

Art as Social Commentary

Beyond overt political propaganda, Enlightenment art also served as a means of critiquing societal structures and injustices. One of the most powerful examples is Francisco Goya's works, which captured the horrors of war and tyranny. Unlike David, who often glorified political leaders, Goya's paintings and prints exposed the brutality of power and the suffering of the common people.

His series *Los Caprichos* (1797–1798), a collection of satirical etchings, criticized the corruption of the Spanish aristocracy, the ignorance fostered by religious institutions, and the

²⁴Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Yale UP 1985).

²⁵Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, *Neoclassicism and the French Revolution* (CUP 1999).

²⁶Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David and Jean-Louis Prieur, Revolutionary Artists* (SUNY Press 2000).

superstitions that plagued society. The famous print *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* warns against the dangers of abandoning rational thought, a central concern of the Enlightenment.

Goya's later series, *The Disasters of War* (1810–1820), documented the atrocities of the Peninsular War between Spain and Napoleonic France. Unlike traditional depictions of war, which often glorified heroism, Goya's prints reveal the raw horror of violence, depicting massacres, suffering civilians, and the senseless brutality of conflict. Works such as *The Third of May 1808* (1814), which shows the execution of Spanish rebels by French soldiers, serve as stark condemnations of tyranny and oppression. These artworks transcend their immediate historical context, becoming timeless critiques of the abuse of power.

Satire and Political Caricature

The Enlightenment also saw the rise of political satire and caricature, as print culture flourished due to advances in printing technology and increasing literacy rates. Satirical art became a powerful tool for political critique, especially in Britain and France.

One of the leading figures in this movement was William Hogarth, an English painter and printmaker whose works provided sharp social commentary. His series *A Rake's Progress* (1733–1735) and *Marriage à-la-Mode* (1743–1745) satirized the decadence and corruption of the British aristocracy, exposing the moral decay underlying wealth and privilege.

Similarly, James Gillray, often called the “father of the political cartoon,” produced biting caricatures of British and French politicians. In *The Plumb-pudding in Danger* (1805), Napoleon and the British Prime Minister William Pitt slice up the globe like a meal, a humorous but sharp comment on the geopolitics of the day.

In France, satirical prints played a significant role in fueling revolutionary sentiment. The caricatures of King Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, often portraying them as gluttonous and detached from reality, helped turn public opinion against the monarchy in the years leading up to the French Revolution. This shift in visual culture demonstrates how art was not only a reaction to political change but also an active force in shaping it.

Understanding Political Change Through Art

The art of the Enlightenment provides crucial insights into the political transformations of the era. It reflects the shift from monarchy to republicanism, the rise of nationalism, and the struggle between old power structures and emerging democratic ideals. Unlike the

Renaissance, where art often upheld existing hierarchies, Enlightenment art frequently challenged authority and advocated for change.

Public reactions to these artworks also reveal much about contemporary political sentiments. Paintings like David's *The Death of Marat* became revolutionary symbols, while Goya's dark depictions of war resonated with those who suffered under imperial ambitions. Political caricatures, widely distributed in print form, played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing political movements.

Case Study: Francisco Goya

Francisco Goya's paintings serve as a visual chronicle of Spain's shifting political landscape, reflecting the transition from Enlightenment ideals to war and the horrors of absolute rule. His early career was shaped by the Enlightenment, during which he served as a court painter for King Charles IV. Works like *The Family of Charles IV* (1800) demonstrate Goya's subtle critique of the monarchy. While officially a royal portrait, the painting presents the Spanish royal family in an unflattering manner, with dull expressions and awkward postures, possibly indicating their incompetence. Some scholars argue that this painting, though commissioned to glorify the monarchy, exposes the weaknesses of the ruling class and foreshadows the impending political crisis in Spain.²⁷

Goya's outlook changed sharply with the Peninsular War (1808–1814), which followed Napoleon's invasion of Spain, and the brutality of the conflict left a deep mark on his work. His paintings *The Second of May 1808* and *The Third of May 1808* (both completed in 1814) depict Spanish resistance against French troops and the subsequent mass execution of Spanish civilians. Unlike traditional war paintings that glorified heroism, Goya's works emphasize horror and suffering. *The Third of May 1808* is particularly striking, as it portrays a helpless Spanish prisoner illuminated against a dark background, his arms raised in a Christ-like pose, while French soldiers execute him with mechanical indifference.²⁸ The stark contrast between light and shadow, along with the raw emotional expressions, underscores Goya's growing disillusionment with war and political violence.

During this period, Goya also created *The Disasters of War* (1810–1820), a series of etchings that graphically depict the horrors inflicted upon civilians during the conflict. These etchings move beyond traditional artistic representations of battle by showing the brutal realities of war

²⁷Robert Hughes, *Goya* (Knopf 2003).

²⁸Fred Licht, *Goya: The Origins of the Modern Temper in Art* (Harper & Row 1979).

executions, famine, and mutilation. Unlike earlier works that might have conveyed a sense of patriotic resistance, these images present war as a meaningless cycle of suffering, condemning both the French occupiers and Spanish forces alike. The captions accompanying these etchings, such as *Yo lo vi* (I saw this) and *Esto es peor* (This is worse), suggest that Goya perceived these events firsthand, further emphasizing the documentary-like nature of his work.²⁹

Following the war, Spain's political atmosphere became even more repressive under the rule of King Ferdinand VII, who abolished the liberal Constitution of 1812 and reinstated absolute monarchy. Goya, deeply disillusioned, withdrew from public life and produced a series of paintings known as *The Black Paintings* (1819–1823), which were painted directly onto the walls of his home. These works are characterized by dark color palettes, distorted figures, and themes of madness and violence, reflecting Goya's despair over Spain's political decline. Among them, *Saturn Devouring His Son* stands out as a disturbing representation of tyranny and power. The subject is the Roman god Saturn, who in myth ate his own children out of fear that they would depose him. Unlike earlier artistic depictions, such as Peter Paul Rubens' version, Goya's Saturn is monstrous and consumed by madness, his wide eyes and grotesque features symbolizing uncontrolled paranoia. Many art historians interpret this work as a political allegory for Spain's rulers, particularly Ferdinand VII, who, in his quest to maintain absolute power, "devoured" his own people through repression and political purges. The violent brushstrokes and nightmarish composition reinforce the idea that absolute power ultimately leads to self-destruction.

Through his paintings, Goya captures Spain's transformation from a hopeful period of Enlightenment to a state of chaos and repression. His works evolve from subtle political critiques in royal portraits to explicit depictions of war atrocities and finally to deeply personal expressions of fear and despair. Goya's artistic journey mirrors his political disillusionment, making his work one of the most powerful visual narratives of political change in European history.

Art, Power and Law: A Socio-Legal Reading

The relationship between art and political power was never only symbolic; it was also regulated. In the Renaissance, the Church treated sacred imagery as a matter of doctrinal discipline. The Council of Trent's decree on sacred images (1563) called for religious art to avoid false doctrine and lasciviousness and barred new or unusual images without the bishop's

²⁹Nigel Glendinning, *Goya and His Critics* (Yale University Press 1977).

approval.³⁰ Whoever commissioned art could also police it.

Enlightenment art met similar limits. Goya's *Los Caprichos* went on sale in 1799 but were withdrawn within days, reportedly for fear of the Inquisition, and the plates later passed to the Crown.³¹ Yet the same period produced the first constitutional statements protecting expression. Article 11 of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789) called the free communication of ideas one of the most precious rights while making citizens answerable for abuses defined by law.³² That formula, freedom of expression with legal limits, remains the framework within which artists work today.

Indian law follows the same pattern. Artistic expression falls within Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, subject to the reasonable restrictions in Article 19(2), which include decency and morality.³³ For decades obscenity was judged by the Hicklin test, applied in *Ranjit D Udeshi v State of Maharashtra*, which asked whether material could deprave those open to such influences.³⁴ In *Aveek Sarkar v State of West Bengal*, the Supreme Court replaced it with a contemporary community-standards approach that reads a work in its context.³⁵ Even before that shift, the Delhi High Court had refused to treat M F Husain's *Bharat Mata* as obscene, recognizing art as a legitimate means of expression.³⁶

These examples show that the tension between patronage, power, and dissent traced in this paper has not disappeared. It has been translated into the language of rights and restrictions: the question once answered by a pope, a king, or an inquisitor is now answered by courts weighing artistic freedom against public morality.

Conclusion

The relationship between art and politics during the Renaissance and Enlightenment demonstrates the profound influence of visual culture on shaping political ideologies, reinforcing authority, and fostering revolutionary thought. Art was not merely a reflection of societal and political changes but an active participant in the discourse of power, governance, and resistance. Through patronage, artistic expression served as a means to legitimize rulers, propagate ideologies, and construct national or religious narratives. At the same time, art also

³⁰Council of Trent, Twenty-Fifth Session (1563), Decree on the Invocation, Veneration and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images.

³¹'The Caprichos' (Goya website, Universidad de Zaragoza) <<https://goya.unizar.es/InfoGoya/Work/Caprichos.html>> accessed 29 September 2026.

³²Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen 1789, art 11.

³³Constitution of India 1950, arts 19(1)(a) and 19(2).

³⁴*Ranjit D Udeshi v State of Maharashtra* AIR 1965 SC 881.

³⁵*Aveek Sarkar v State of West Bengal* (2014) 4 SCC 257.

³⁶*Maqbool Fida Husain v Raj Kumar Pandey* 2008 CrLJ 4107 (Del).

became a medium for dissent, enabling critiques of political structures, social hierarchies, and oppressive regimes.

During the Renaissance, art was closely intertwined with the ambitions of ruling elites, particularly in Italy, where the Medici family, the papacy, and other patrons used artistic commissions to reinforce their political authority. Works such as Michelangelo's *David*, Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and Raphael's Vatican frescoes were masterpieces of artistic genius but also powerful political symbols conveying strength, divine right, and cultural supremacy. In contrast, the Enlightenment saw art become a vehicle for political critique and ideological debate. Neoclassicism, with its emphasis on democracy and civic virtue, aligned with the revolutionary spirit of the time, and artists such as Jacques-Louis David used their work to inspire political action, while the satirical prints of William Hogarth and James Gillray challenged corruption and social injustice.

Art not only chronicled political change but also shaped how people perceived and responded to it. The Renaissance and Enlightenment show that art is never politically neutral: it reflects the values, anxieties, and aspirations of its time, and whether it reinforces the status quo or challenges it, it has been central to the political and intellectual evolution of societies. Law has mediated that relationship throughout, from Tridentine controls on sacred images to modern constitutional protection of artistic expression. Together, these periods reveal that art is not merely an aesthetic pursuit but a dynamic medium that continues to shape political thought and cultural identity.

Despite the extensive scholarship on art history and political theory, there remain gaps in fully understanding the impact of art on public sentiment and political action during these periods. Further research is needed to explore the nuanced ways in which artistic expression shaped and was shaped by political discourse. Additionally, the study of art's political role in contemporary times can benefit from insights gained from Renaissance and Enlightenment art, as the power of imagery remains an essential force in shaping modern political narratives.