Female Beauty in the Renaissance Example

Throughout millennia, the idea of female beauty has been changed and sculpted more times than one can count. To put things into perspective, blue eyeshadow, bee-hive hairstyles, and being overweight have all been part of the female beauty standards we followed in the past. To go back a few hundred years and examine the Renaissance era, we find rules and regulations of feminine beauty very different from our modern models.

The ideal woman of the Renaissance, as described by Petrarch, had blonde hair, a long, elegant neck, high forehead, and pale skin. Many people during this time believed that your external beauty was a reflection of the beauty you had on the inside. To achieve such looks, many women dyed their hair and plucked their hairlines with tweezers. Concoctions of lye and molted snake skin were common ingredients used in hair bleaching, used by many to achieve the golden tresses that were so highly prized. The lengthy forehead symbolized intelligence, some women going as far as halfway up their scalp. Queen Elizabeth 1 and Queen Mary Stuart are excellent examples of women with meticulously preened and exaggerated hairlines. It wasn't always just the hairline either. It was a popular practice to pluck eyebrows very thin or remove them all together to give better illusion to the forehead.
My cod-piece don't want none unless you've never seen the sun, hun! When you think of makeup and the complexions of the Renaissance, you'll likely think of translucent, milky white skin with a flush of applied to the lips and cheeks. Pale skin was prized because of the connotation of wealth and luxury of not having to work the fields. The way many women achieved this look was through cosmetics and "unique" beauty methods. To prime the face, raw eggs were used as a base, only to be slathered with lead and vinegar "foundation" upon the face and neck. To further emphasize the paleness of their complexion, some women would go as far as painting light blue veins on their forehead and breasts with a thin brush. Bonus fact of the day: Catherine De Medici used pigeon poop to create her youthful, dewy complexion. For a pop of color, lead and mercury-based rouge powders with a spot of pigment, usually pink or red, would then be sparingly painted on the cheeks. Beauty patches made of thin fabric fell into fashion and were used to decorate the face, create beauty marks, cover pimples, and even hide the holes in their faces caused by lead-based cosmetics, bellissimo! Last, but not least, (you really thought I was done, didn't you?) another common practice would be using leeches to give you the chalk-white appearance you've always dreamed of. The leeches were usually applied on the ears, draining the blood from your head quickly and effectively. Not to worry about the sores, the patches have you covered! Despite the fact that leeches are aquatic bloodsucking annelid parasites, this method was still healthier than the toxic cosmetics used during this era. This is a question directed at all the YouTube beauty gurus, makeup enthusiasts, stylists, and average women around the world...Do you think you have what it takes to be a Renaissance beauty? If you're into lead poisoning or just feeling nostalgic about ages past, this is the look for you!

So, you have your hair plucked and your face plastered on. Moving toward the final look, we look at clothing of the Renaissance that was beautiful and fashionable. During the Renaissance era, clothing was a crucial part of displaying status in the wealthier families and organizations. Amongst the upper-class women in society, silk, satin, velvet, and brocade were the fabrics of choice used in the production of their clothing. Lower class women unfortunately were bound by what they could afford, usually only owning one set of clothing per person. These fabrics would include linen, wool, or sheepskin. The idea was that clothing would be practical, cool, light, and cost effective. Gowns worn by women in Renaissance England changed over time, but basic styles remained. Tight-fitting bodices, a full skirt that came to the ankles, as well as low necklines were all the rage. Upper class clothing
in general was heavy and restrictive, due to the nature of their materials, amount of layers, and construction of the clothing. Lower class women opted for less restrictive clothing as they needed more freedom in movement. This was mainly due to the fact that they didn't have servants to help dress them. Same here, sis. Consistently across the board, women's outfits started with a shift—a loose smock to protect the gown, as their base clothing item. From there, knee-high stockings and petticoats were worn underneath the gowns. Petticoats not only added volume to the dress but kept your warm in the process. Bam, fashion and function. Petticoats for the win!

Look complete, or is it? We're forgetting something important about female beauty in the Renaissance. But what's missing? The physique. The form. The bod. In the Renaissance, the most beautiful, ideal, coveted bodies were soft and chubby. Where did this ideal come from? To put it simply, Greece. The Renaissance was heavily influenced by the classical approach ancient Greek art and literature had to offer. Bodies were drawn, sculpted, and painted as what was considered ideal, rather than what people actually looked like for the most part. One of the main reasons as to why the soft, chubby physique was so coveted and prized was the connotation between weight and wealth. Throughout the span of time, wealth has always been considered attractive. In the Renaissance, a good physical indicator if a woman was wealthy was her weight. She would have a soft belly or heavy in general. This is explained by the fact that poor women had to participate in hard, manual labor, where rich women could stay inside and not lift a finger. Because of the lack of labor, the expensive, luxuriant food they consumed would stay with them, contributing to a fuller figure. Women who were considered to be beautiful in the Renaissance typically had long hair, wide hips, and as stated before, on the heavy side. Aside from wealth, a fuller figure often was considered an indicator for signs of fertility. Now, you might ask how being fertile would be considered beautiful in the Renaissance. Here's why: Fertility was a defining trait of beauty during this time as much of the art was created by men. Men had their ideas on what was beautiful based on what they wanted from their romantic partners. Still with me? Men during the Renaissance wanted wealth and child-bearing hips. See where I'm going with this? The fuller figure that boasted wide, child-bearing hips indicated her health as well as her wealth, which were considered to be extremely attractive. So, there you have it. Being beautiful in the Renaissance was complex, but no more complex than it is in this day and age.
Bibliography


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