Use of symbolism in Renaissance Art

Its humanist uses in early Renaissance Art spawned as a favour of spirituality and imagination incorporated into a variety of themes such as religion, though not prominent in the usage of portraiture. Its purpose originally was to react against pure naturalism and realism, anti-idealistic styles that thrived on the gritty but humble representation of reality; However, the use of symbolic elements in portraiture would later be embraced by realist artists, as the means to break away from photographic limitations pure realism offered as an Art form.

The use of symbolism initially derived from a book called the Golden Legend (1260) written by Jacobus de Voragine's. The book was a highly influential source material for Painters from both Italy and northern Europe, as well as the lives of Saints which already strongly influenced Medievil artists, and Thus begun the rebirth of Classical antiquity and Renaissance Humanism. These movements led into age of many Mythological and historical paintings.

Renaissance artists would express their private spiritual devotion through altarpieces and fresco cycles that were very popularly commissioned as a Decorative ornament in architectural design. Classical Roman Motifs especially influenced this form of Art.

Typical objects, animals, and colours used in Renaissance Art:

In Renaissance Art, Painters included the use of fruits, animals and colours as rich visual language rather just a decorative element (which would be the case to the average viewer). When artwork was exhibited in public, in churches and courthouses, they were intended as a stern proclamation that even the commoners could readily understand. These elements were effective as a vivid symbolic remainder of mortality and the harbouring of lustful thoughts or indulgence of carnal pleasures. In a culture of limited literacy, symbolic imagery was essential to “enlighten” the masses and keep their path on the way to heaven. Despite their propaganda, they were used as visual guides in
illuminating the divine mysteries of God's holy word.

**Symbolism in fruits:**

**Pomegranate** - Associated with Saint Catherine, the mystical bride of Christ:
Symbolizes eternal life; divine prosperity; unity of the Christian community. It also signifies fall from and man's sinful nature.

**Ripe apple** - Refers to a passage from the book of Genesis:
An incarnation of mankind's carnal pleasures and original sin; "forbidden Fruit"

**Fig** - Refers to Adam and eve, who wore fig leaves when they first recognized their own nakedness after consuming the forbidden fruit. Figs symbolize the loss of innocence and a fall from grace.

**Pear** - Associated with Saint Catherine:
Symbolizes martial faith.

**Grapes** - Symbolizes lewdness and lustful thoughts.

**Orange (fruit)** - Symbol of free will, usually from the mortal coil and into enlightenment.

**Lemon** - Symbolizes bitterness of the heart or a sour disposition; resentment; unresolved conflict.

**Strawberry** - Symbolizes harmony, nourishment of the soul.

**Peach** - Symbolizes virtue and honor; however a rotting or half-eaten peach symbolizes a person who has tarnished their reputation with immoral behavior.

**Symbolism in colours:**

**Blue** - Symbolizes purity; the virgin Mary; virgin and child; The
immaculate conception. Traditionally those who wear blue are of servitude to a city company, It can also represent importance and stability.

**Purple**-Used to portray royalty and antiquity, but the use of purple was very sparse due to near extinction of the snail used to make the imperial purple. It came to complete disuse in 1453.

**Red**-symbolizes someone of either a high social class, a cosmopolitan man with access to trade centres, or of authority to the church. It can also be used to portray martyrdom or eternal damnation to hellfire.

**Green**-Symbolizes resurrection, Ascension, and baptism. It can also be used to symbolize greediness.

**White**-Is a sign of innocence; birth, youth, betrothal and marriage. It can also represent chastity for men.

**Gray and brown**-used as a symbol modesty but also of poverty and low social class

**Black**-used to symbolize mourning, sinister characteristics, humiliation, humbleness, and scholarship. It also be used as a social distinction of the lower class.

**Yellow**-symbolizes remembrance of the spiritual world; miracles and sustenance of the soul.

**Orange**-symbolizes materialism and desire of worldly goods over spiritual health. It can also be used to portray self-indulgence or superficiality.

**Symbolism in animals:**

**Wolf**-Symbolizes compassion and mercy. The wolf was used as the emblem for many early saints including St. Francis of Assisi who is often shown with a wolf.
**Dogs**-symbolizes loyalty; however they represent observers of the human soul and was believed by common folk that they can tell whether a person was a heretic or a witch by growling.

**Ermine**-Symbolizes truth and fidelity as well as mischievous. Often associated with royalty or aristocracy.

**White horse**-Symbolizes victory, conquest, goodness and invincibility.

**The ape**-Symbolizes lustful and sinful thoughts.

**Cat**-Symbolizes shrewdness, treachery, trickery and watchfulness. Often associated with witchcraft.

**Ox**-Symbolizes strength, power, and humility.

**The Vulture**-Epitomized greed, corruption, and ruthlessness.

**The Robin**-A singing Robin symbolizes deliverance from evil and God's mercy. A caged Robin signifies removal from God's grace.

**Eagle**-symbolizes regeneration by baptism.

**Lion**-symbolizes power, majesty, wisdom, tyranny, viciousness, dignity, and leadership.

**Lamb**-symbolizes humility, peace, and innocence. It also represents Christ and also the Christians as the flock

**Goat**-A symbol of Satan, Mythical creature normally depicted as a horned and hoofed goat-like creature.

**Pig**-Symbolizes material desires and self-indulgence