Chapter 4

THE SPIRITUAL AND NATURAL REALM PERTAINING TO RENAISSANCE ART

"Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age,[a] against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.
Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

Ephesians 6:11-13(NKJV)

1 INTRODUCTION

A revolution in Art began when Giotto abandoned the mystical precision of Byzantine mosaics to study men and women in the actual flow and natural grace of their lives. In Italy all roads were leading to the Renaissance.

In Italy in the I5th-century, a civilization were established that was in more than one way different from that of medieval Europe. People were not only interested in uplifting the past, but their interest in classical culture spread more widely, over the whole arena that men experienced. There was a spirit of investigation, it was always there, but more in the back of the mind during the Middle Ages. That the men from Europe went out to discover the world during the Renaissance at exactly the same time cannot be seen as a coincident.

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The present social and political changes that took place were just as meaningful and rulers became more powerful and many countries broke their loyalty with the Roman Catholic Church, in the interests of national independence. The progress in trade created a richer and more powerful merchant class. The invention of printing also speeded up the increase of ideas. Towns grew larger, and city life became the norm for an increasing proportion of the population. In Italy, city life was more advanced than anywhere else in Europe, and Italian society was largely organized in 'city states'. It was there, most notably in Florence, that the Renaissance began. Human history has no sharp breaks, only more or less gradual evolvement, and there is no sharp line to be drawn between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The Renaissance is associated with classical revival, forms of Art that do not conform to the model of the Renaissance, tended to be disregarded. Florence was artistically worth more than the rest of Europe put together during the 15th and early 16th centuries. The International Gothic style at the beginning of the 15th century, with comparatively minor exceptions, was found in most of Europe. Its main basis were France and Bohemia, but it was also found in Northern Italy, where the Florentine Lorenzo Ghiberti (c.1378-1455) submitted his *Sacrfice of Isaac* as his entry for a competition to design the bronze doors of the baptistry in Florence in 1401.

The elegant refinement of this work, which won the competition, shows its connection with the decorative Late Gothic style of Northern Europe.

Fig. 572: One of Ghiberti's bronze panels for the doors of the Florence Baptistry – the Sacrifice of Isaac.

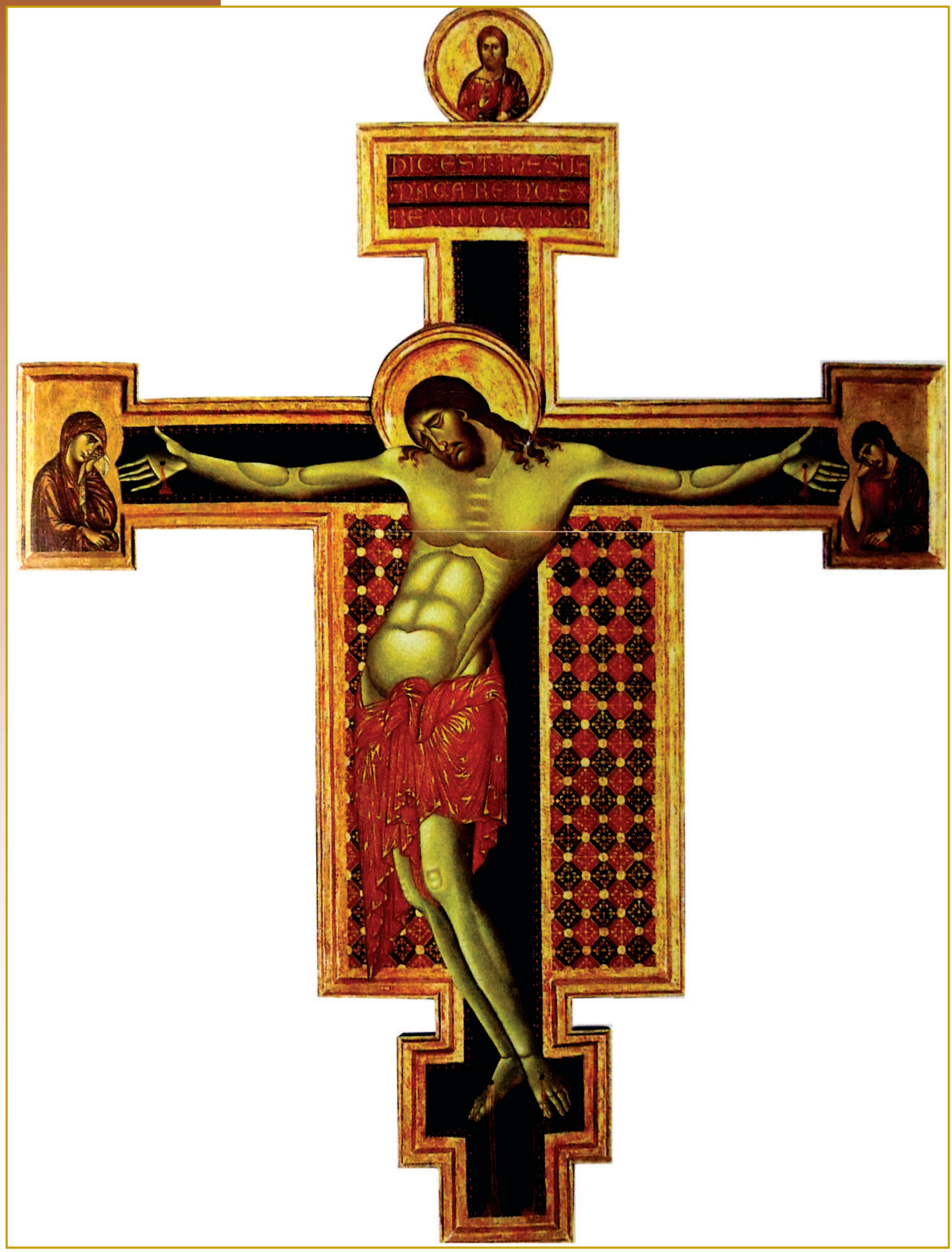
2. THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

2.1 EARLY RENAISSANCE SCULPTURE

The thirteenth century Italian sculptors draw inspiration from medieval prototypes and from ancient works that was always visible but largely ignored. In Pisa, the Camposanto cemetery preserved a wealth of Roman tombs with scenes that tells a story and these tombs were later reused as medieval tombs. The tombs became a kind of Art school for the Italian sculptors over many generations. Nicola Pisano studied the carvings on the tombs with great care and incorporated the lessons he learned into the pulpits he created for Pisa end Sienna. Most of the ancient bronze sculptures had been melted down over the centuries but the first century portraits of Marcus Aurelius in Rome and Septimus Severus in Pavia, survived and provide models for depictions of fourteenth-century rulers. The Italian sculptors of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were on the edge between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and the sculptures shows elements of both traditions. Many works still had a medieval character and their choice of how they portray the figures, their composition and the subject matter was limited to Christian themes. The Artists began to strive for more realistic forms and logical three-dimensional constructions using ancient examples as models and in the process formulating a fresh approach in their Art.

Fig. 573: Giovanni di Balduccio's tomb of St Peter Martyr in Pisa.

Fig. 574: Cimabue – Crucifix, c. 1285



Giovanni di Balduccio worked at the Pisa Cathedral with the sculptor Giovanni Pisano, the son of Nicola. The tomb of *St Peter Martyr* is one of only four works that was signed by him.

2.2 EARLY RENAISSANCE PAINTING IN TUSCANY

During the Middle Ages, Italy had strong political and cultural links with the Byzantine Empire, and the influence could be seen in Italian Art: the holy figures were placed tightly against a golden background, stiff bodies, their draperies a series of lines, the picture space relentlessly flat. At the end of the thirteenth century a number of masters began to transform Italian painting, their figures had more volume and were more mobile, not so stiff and flat as before. They achieved this by adding depth to their compositions and introducing emotion and human interaction into the scenes. Among these innovative artists, were Cimabue and his pupil Giotto di Bondone, both from Florence, and Duccio di Buoninsegna from Sienna.

Cimabue stood on the edge between the medieval Byzantine tradition and the new Italian one. He moved away from a flat and stylized manner of painting to one in which more true-to-life elements were presented into his works. He disclosed some of these lessons to his pupil, Giotto, who soon outshined his master.

Fig. 575: Enthroned Madonna and Child, c 1310; tempera on panel – Giotto

Giotto directed a true revolution in painting. They occupy real space, even in traditional pictures in which the Virgin and Child are posed against a gold ground. Giotto's contemporaries were awed by his achievements. His fame continued in such a way that two centuries later the High Renaissance Art historian Giorgio Vasari could write:

Fig. 576: Maestà Altarpiece, 1308-11; tempera on panel – Duccio
Front side:

Back side:

Fig. 576: Maestà Altarpiece, 1308-11; tempera on panel (details) – Duccio

This double-sided altarpiece, created by Duccio for Suenna Cathedral, shows the Madonna and Child enthroned with saints and angels on the front (a), on the reverse facing the choir where the clergy sat during services, more than fifty scenes from the life of Christ unfold in a series of landscapes, cities and interior settings (b).

'*he made a decisive break with the crude traditional Byzantine style, and brought to life the great Art of painting as we know it today, introducing the technique of drawing accurately from life, which had been neglected for more than two hundred years*.'

Fig. 577 Last Judgement – Giotto

2.3 GIOTTO

See also Chapter Three – **3.1.3 BLUE.**

2.4 PAINTING IN SIENA

Siena was a major economic, political and cultural centre of Tuscany, and for a long time a rival city of Florence, politically and artistically. Siena was founded by the Etruscans, and then it became a Roman city under Augustus and emerged as an independent republic in the twelfth century, blossoming under an unprofessional Community that controlled with sufficient wisdom to turn it into a commanding and prosperous city-state.

Siena reached the height of its prosperity in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when it witnessed a great blooming in their Art and the construction of major monuments such as the Campo - the scallop-shaped central square before the Palazzo Pubblico, the town hall- and the magnificent cathedral, with its striped green and white marble walls and columns, as well as a university that is well-known to this day. At the same time Sienese painting experienced its creative and aesthetic peak.

The city's painters enjoyed widespread admiration. Duccio di Buoninsegna, who was a tremendously influential painter, was the master of many pupils, among them Simone Martini, who won commissions in Assisi, Naples and at the papal court in Avignon. Martini was an artist of great elegance and imaginative gifts.

Martini's paintings had the visual richness of his surfaces in combination with the elegant naturalism of his details, which made his paintings replicas suitable for courtly Art from Paris to Prague.

The brothers Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti developed their own distinct style, creating complex three-dimensional settings – Ambrogio's pictures may have been the first in Europe to use a single-point perspective – and conveying the three-dimensionality of figures. The Lorenzetti brothers also included lively genre details in their works, features that bring them further to life. Outstanding fresco painters, the brothers decorate ecclesiastic and civic buildings, most famously at the church of St Francis at Assisi and the Palazzo Pubblico of Siena. In the latter,Ambrogio decorated three walls of the Council Room (Sala dei Novi) with a series of allegorical frescos depicting Good and Bad Government, and the effects of each on the city and countryside. These form the first large-scale city/country scape since antiquity.

Even in the fifteenth century, when Siena's power declined and the artistic influence of Florence increased across Tuscany, Sienese painters such as Giovanni di Paolo retained their individual styles and created a range of unique and appealing masterpieces.

Fig. 578: The Creation of the World and the Expulsion of Adam and Eve, 1445; tempera and gold on panel – Giovanni di Paolo

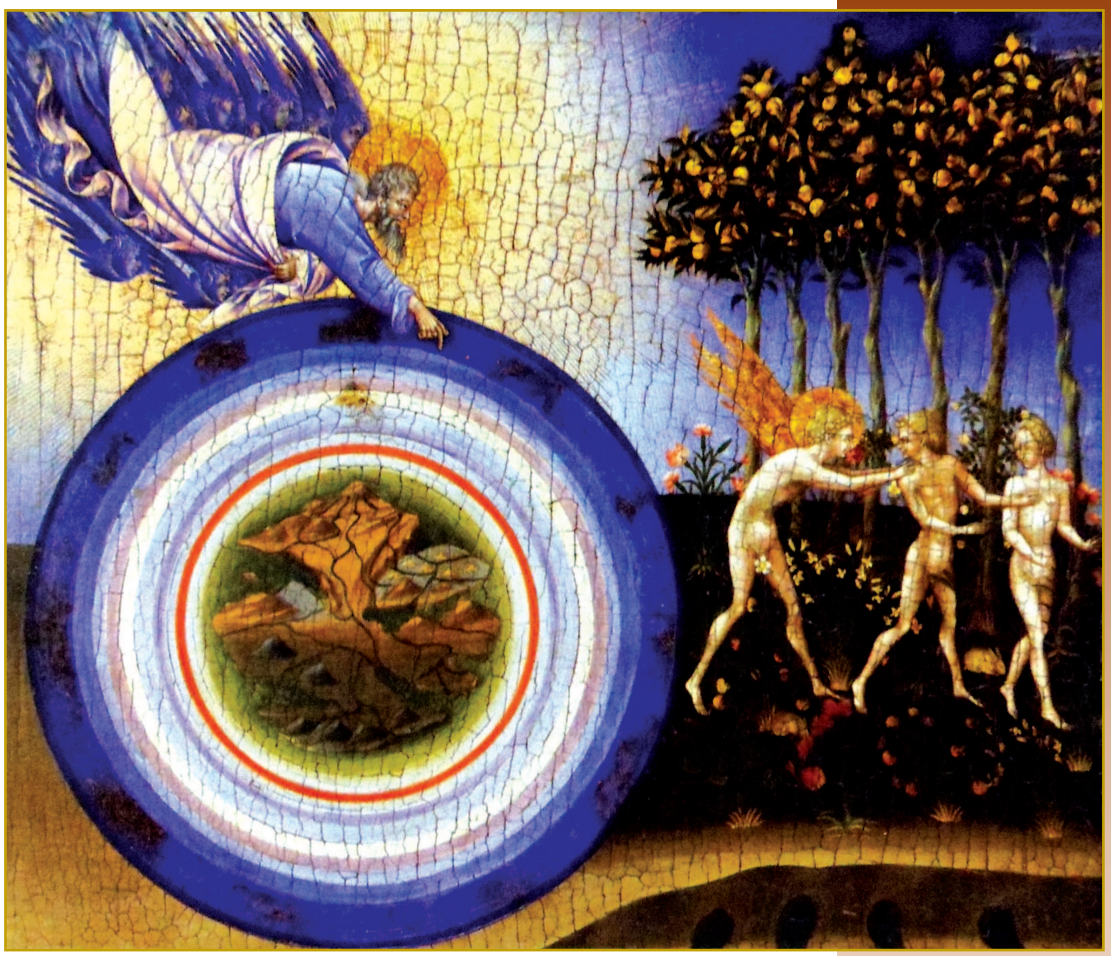


Fig. 579: Effects of Good Government, 1338-39; fresco – Ambrogio Lorenzetti

2.5 LORENZO GHIBERTI AT THE FLORENCE BAPTISTERY

The Baptistery was the heart of medieval and Renaissance Florence and constructed between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. The Florentines believed that it was originally a Roman temple that was dedicated to Mars, the god of war, and therefore a testimony to their noble Roman heritage. Every child that was born in the city was baptized here, as a Christian and a Florentine.

Of the magnificent decorations of the building, the most famous are its three sets of bronze doors, two of them was created by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455). An intense competition was held in the city in 1401, to find an artist to do the first set, the north doors of the baptistry. As was customary then, and also today, a number of masters would bid on large public projects, and seven artists submitted designs for these doors. Ghiberti and Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) was the two leading contenders. Ghiberti could sell himself very well and when the judges came together, they were prepared to vote for him but when they saw Brunelleschi's model they were so impressed that they wanted both artists to be hired to complete the doors together.

Fig. 580: Baptistry North Doors, 1403-24; gilded bronze – Lorenzo Ghiberti

Fig. 581: Baptistry East Doors, 1425-52; gilded bronze – Lorenzo Ghiberti

Brunelleschi refused to share the project, so Ghiberti became the sole master, though with a number of assistants: Masolino, Donatello, Michelozzo, Uccello and other prominent artists of Florence laboured on the doors. The commission was too large and technically demanding for one man, for each panel had to be designed, modelled in wax, cast in bronze, chased, gilded and burnished to a radiant finish. It took two decades to complete the project.

Ghilberti's first set of doors proved such a success that upon their completion he was asked to produce another pair, for the Baptistery's east entrance. This time there was no competition. As Ghiberti later wrote that he '*was encouraged to proceed in the way that would make it' most perfect and most splendid and most rich'*. The result was so magnificent that the doors were called the Gates of Paradise - partly because they faced the area between the baptistery and the cathedral called Paradiso, and partly because Michelangelo believed to say that they were worthy to be the Gates of Heaven itself.

Ghiberti was very proud of his achievement, he even inserting his portrait bust into the eastern portal and the central right bust is that of his father, Bartolomeo Ghiberti. He wrote that there were few things in the city that was worthy of note that he had not either made or inspired. He was not a modest man, but it cannot be denied that he executed some of the most important commissions in Florence, as well as training the next generation of leading artists in his workshop.

Fig. 582: Lamentation over the Dead Christ c.1460-90; painted terracotta

2.6 NICCOLÒ DELL' ARCA IN BOLOGNA

Niccolò's masterpiece portrays six figures that appear in varying states of visible grief while they gather around the body of Christ. According to tradition, Niccolo included a self-portrait in the guise of the donor Nicodemus (far left). The other figures (left to right) are two unidentified females, St John, supporting his quivering head with his right hand, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdelene.

Their faces are distorted in suffering, their gestures conveying their sorrow dramatically and their flowing drapery accentuating their talkative emotions. Niccolò's figures move through space in a way that is entirely advanced for this time, rushing to the scene, then stopping in their tracks at the sight of the dead Christ.

The searing pain they appear to experience as they gaze on the corpse evokes a nearly physical response in the viewer. Terracotta is a highly flexible medium, and it allowed Niccolò to achieve amazing richness of characterization. The naturalistic plasticity of his sculpture is very obvious Burgundian. Obviously proud of his accomplishment, Niccolò signed his name on a banner across the pillow under Christ's head.

2.7 DONATELLO

Dontello (c.1386/87-1466) was the most versatile sculptor of the early Renaissance, and he had a extraordinary technical and emotional range. His outstanding creativity, along with his ability to give his figures intense psychological depth, kept his Art always original. He inspired artists of his own and he succeeded generations, even Michelangelo. In studying Donatello, it is quite unbelievable to think that he could cast the sensual bronze David with a smooth adolescent body and a large stylish hat, standing nonchalantly on the head of the defeated Goliath, and then also carve a gruesome wooden remorseful Magdalene, skeletal and disfigured after decades in the desert. He could initiate deep relief impressions in both marble and bronze. In his Feast of Herod the space recedes seemingly infinitely into Herod's palace, as room after room is layered into little more than 2.5 centimeters of relief.

Fig. 583: David, c 1460; bronze – Donatello

Then there is Donatello's monumental equestrian portrait of the condottiere Erasmo da Narni, inspired by the ancient bronze statue of the emperor Marcus Aurelius in Rome, in which the sculptor conveyed Narni's authority and determination with astonishing realism by showing his lips pressed together, his jaw tense, his body erect, the massive horse underneath him a perfect match for the rider. Donatello's St George at Orsanmichele, captured the fearless youth at a moment of postponed action and threatening emotion. He stands at rest, his legs wide apart and his arm rests on the shield, but his face with its wrinkled brow is observant. He looks into the distance, ready to take on any enemy that might come his or his city's, way.

Fig. 584: Condottiere Erasmo da Narni, – Donatello

Donatello spent most of his life in Florence, apart from a stay in Rome in the 1430s and another in Padua from 1443 to 1453, during which he executed Narni's portrait. At the beginning of his career, sometime between 1404 and 1407, he was a member of the workshop of Lorenzo Ghiberti, the city's pre-eminent sculptor, who was then creating the bronze north doors for the Florence Baptistery.

Fig. 585: Annunciation, 1428-33; limesone and terracotta with gilding – Donatello

Fig. 586: Penitent Magdalene, 1456-60; wood with polychromy and gold – Donatello

Ghiberti's elegant, courtly style influenced Donatello's early pieces, such as his marble David, but before long the student was developing his own visual language, inspired in part by antiquity and in part by his own vigorous re-thinking of the Classical models; he never imitated ancient prototypes just like that. From 1430 to 1433 he studied Roman sculpture and architecture in the Eternal City and he understood the arts of ancient Rome better than any of his contemporary colleagues. He was also a collector of antiquities himself and advised the Medici family and others on worthwhile purchases of such works.

2.8 THE BRANCACCI CHAPEL

Masaccio was in many ways a fifteenth century Giotto, by breaking new ground in the creation of the real world on the flat surface of a wall and filling his stories with a psychological depth and complexity unknown in painting before his time. This can be best seen in the frescos he completed with his contemporary Masolino, in the Brancacci Chapel in the Florentine church of Santa Maria del Carmine.

The commission was assigned to both painters: Masaccio and the slightly older Masolino The two artists' nicknames came from their distinct styles of painting. Masaccio denotes harshness and Masolino gentleness.

Fig. 587: The Tribute Money, c 1427; fresco – Masaccio

Fig. 588: St Peter Curing a Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha, c 1425; fresco – Masaccio

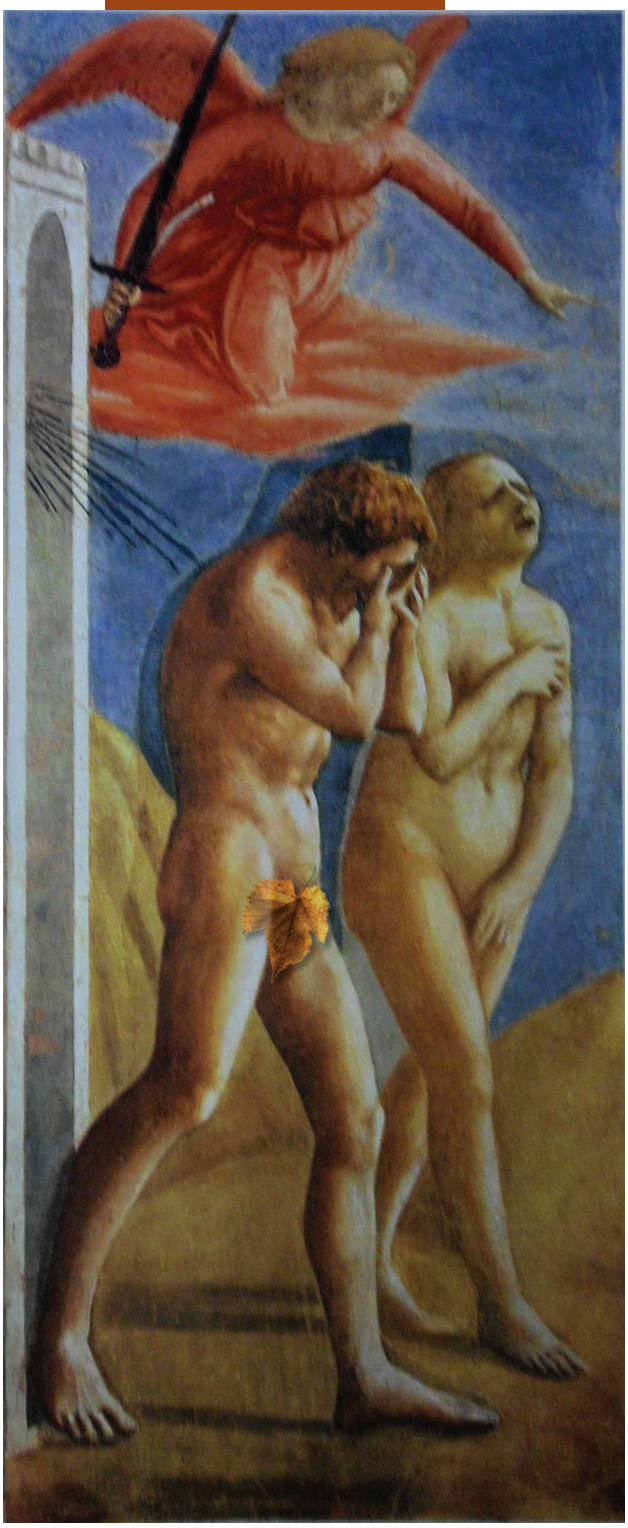


Fig. 589: The Expulsion from Paradise. c 1425; fresco – Masaccio

Masolino's work was closely linked to the courtly style of painting fashionable across Europe, whereas Massaccio's was more inspired by ancient statues and works of contemporary sculptors such as Donatello. Masaccio took lessons from these models in the construction of space and the lighting and shading of masses in order to bring them to life, and his muscular and volumetric depiction of the human body was utterly new in the Florentine Art of his day. His figures seemed to displace air, to generate space around them, to express emotions uncommonly profound and intense. Masaccio's work was also revolutionary in its original approach to landscape, for he created naturalistic settings of mountains, trees and shorelines that receded far into space and seemed to be surrounded by atmosphere.

Masaccio and Masolino used the same perspective technique in the construction of their compositions, and although the ways in which they located their stories in genuine settings were different, they would have seemed equally valid to the beholder. Masolino made his paintings real to contemporary viewers by placing biblical events in Florence, with distinct buildings and recognizable public squares.

The Brancacci family was exiled from Florence in 1435 for their opposition to the Medici, the city's ruling clan, and the chapel was left unfinished. Only in the early 1480s were the remaining scenes painted by Filippino Lippe. Over a period of time, Masaccio's frescos became tremendously influential. Michelangelo sketched his figures and studied his handling of the Art of chiaroscuro, the use of light and shade to construct volume and space.

2.9 FRA ANGELICO

Fra Angelico was a monk with sincere religious habits, and therefore he earned his nickname, Il Beato ('the Blessed'), for the way he mastered with delicacy, his religious paintings. He was blessed in 1982 by Pope John Paul II, who declared him patron of Catholic artists '*because of the perfect integrity of his life and the almost divine beauty of the images he painted*'.

Nothing is recorded of Fra Angelico's (his real name was Guido di Piero) family or his training. He spent his life in a series of Dominican monasteries in Cortona, Fiesole and Florence, caring for the poor. In each monastery he executed deep spiritual altarpieces and frescos. Key to the appreciation of the frescos in particular is the realization that they decorated the private quarters of secluded monks, as aids to devotion and meditation, with no expectation that they would ever be publicly exhibited.

Fig. 590: Annunciation, 1442-43; fresco – Fra Angelico

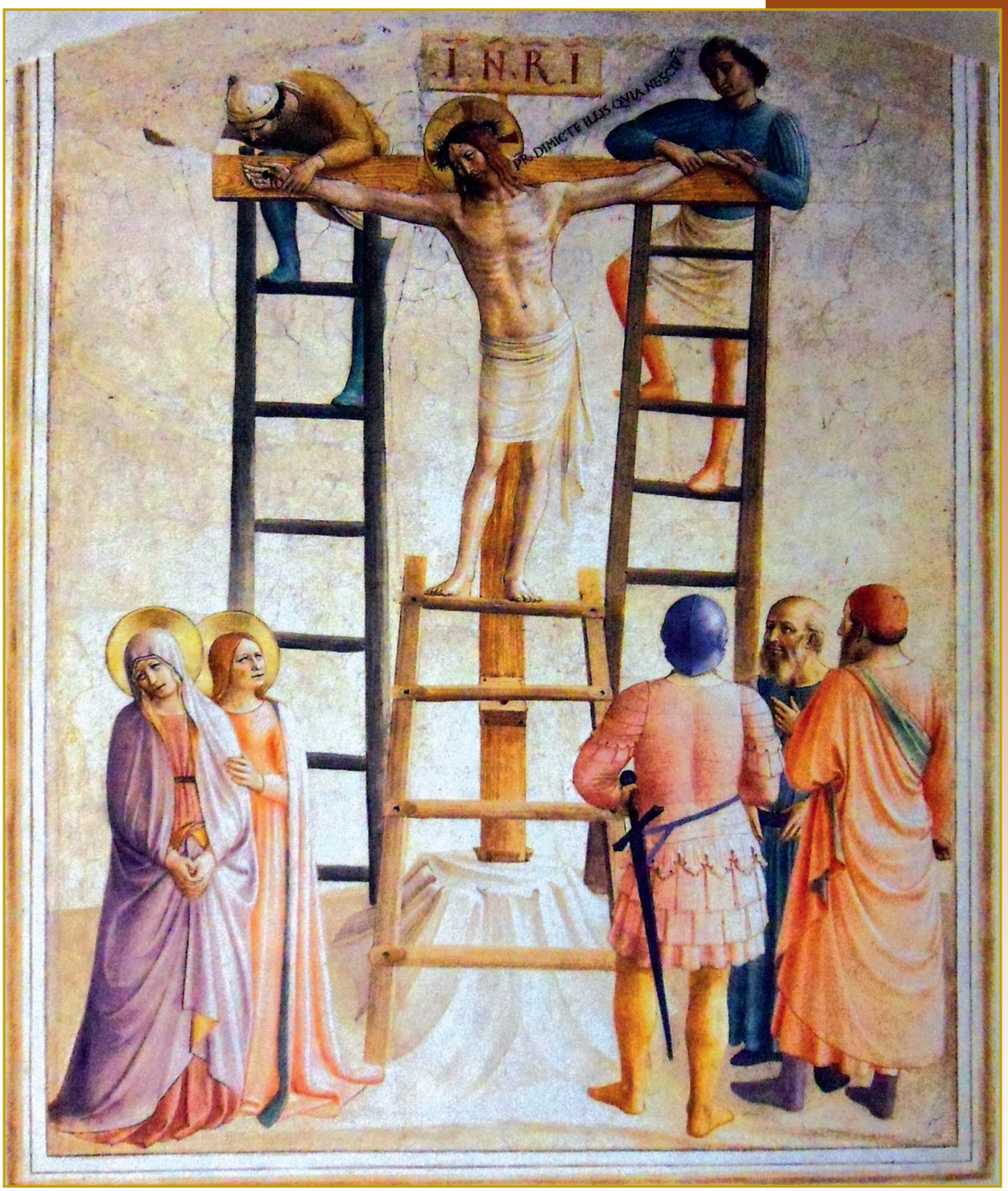


Fig. 591: Crucifixion, 1441-42; fresco – Fra Angelico

Fig. 592: The Cortona Triptych, c1434-35; tempera and gold on panel – Fra Angelico

Fra Angelico's paintings were done in the medieval artistic tradition and at the same time they also showed a dialogue with the new Art developing in Florence. Some of his altarpieces have old-fashioned gold backgrounds with stylized saints – ideas of holiness rather than human beings. The frescos in the monastery of San Marco in Florence, Angelico created convincing architectural or exterior spaces using linear perspective to organize and give depth to his compositions.

Fra Angelico's break at the monastery of San Marco from c.1440-45 formed his Art and tossed him to fame. The major patron of this institution was Cosimo I de' Medici, the unofficial ruler of Florence. Cosimo himself urged Fra Angelico to decorate the monastery with frescos. The resulting paintings brought the monk great renown and the opportunity to incorporate new modes of painting developed by contemporary masters into his own works.

The San Marco frescos decorated individual cells and their style reflects both their location and their function. The colours – mostly subdued pastels and occasional greens – create an atmosphere of calmness and meditation. The settings in which the modestly dressed figures are ready are thin and empty of distracting details, each episode from the life of Christ related simply, in order to invite the quiet thought and prayer of the cell's occupant.

In 1445 Fra Angelico was summoned to Rome by Pope Eugenius IV, to paint frescos for the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at St Peter's (demolished). Eugenius IV's successor, Nicholas V, also employed Fra Angelico at the Vatican, to decorate the Niccoline Chapel with scenes from the lives of St Stephen and St Lawrence. These frescos, with their richness of lapis lazuli and gold leaf, reflected the importance of their patron and turned the small chapel into something like a jewel box.

2.10 RELIGIOUS PAINTING

With Christianity invading every aspect of life in Renaissance Italy, religious Art was ever-present. Artists had a wide variety of subjects to choose from, for the Bible, the lives of saints and apocryphal legends offered countless stories and endless opportunities to present well known stories in extravagant settings with vivid details.

Fifteenth-century Florentine churches were miniature museums, their walls frescoed with holy story-telling, their altars decorated with panels that portray sacred figures. Wealthy families competed with each other in building, outfitting and decorating their private chapels in churches across the city. To obtain the best results, they negotiated detailed contracts with painters they employed for this.

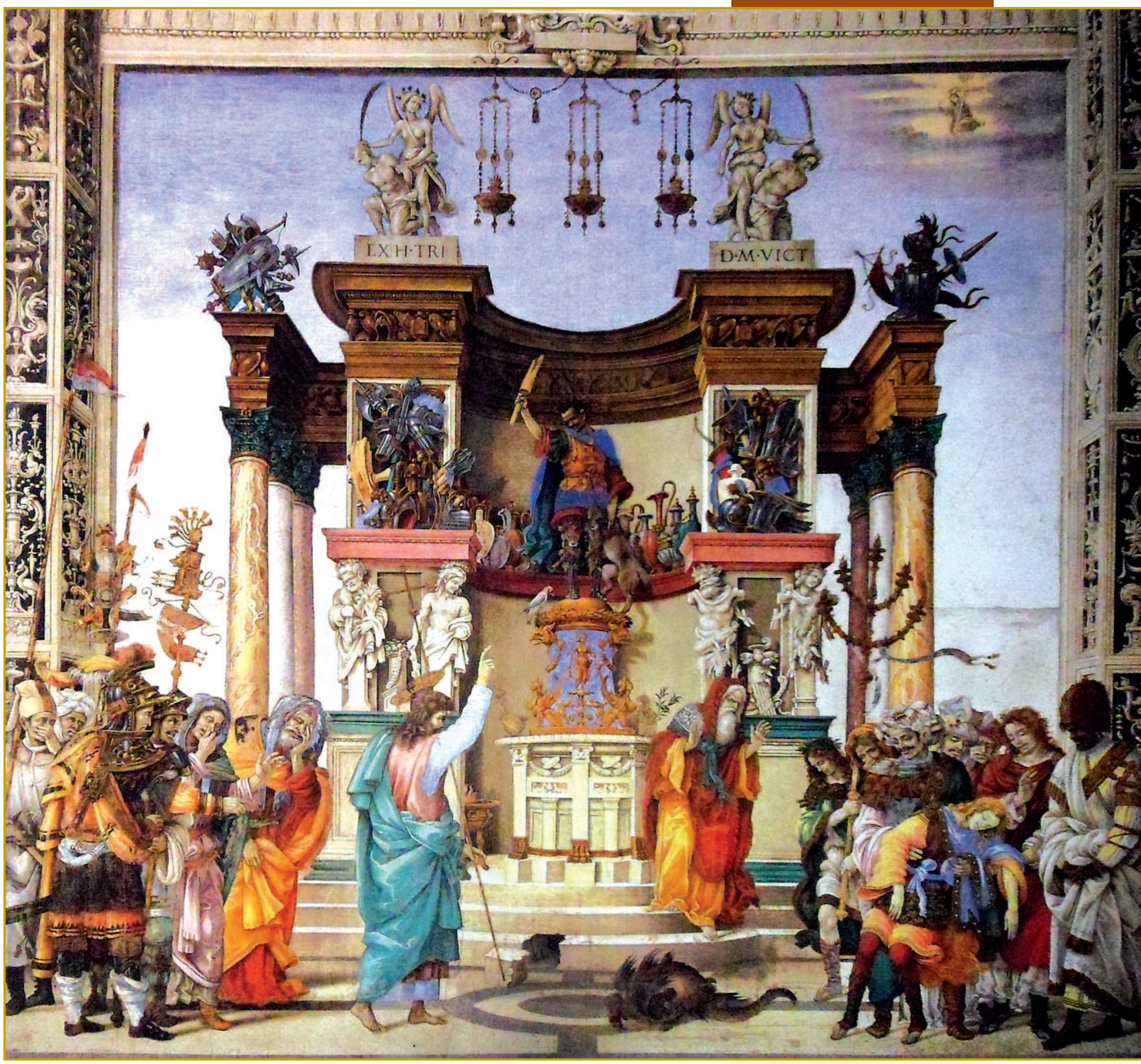


Fig. 593: Expulsion of the Devil by St Philip, 1487-1502; fresco – Filippino Lippi

Filippo Strozzi, for example, commissioning the fresco cycle for his chapel from Filippino Lippi, he specified both the technique and the pigments, including the highest-quality ultramarine blue. In monastic complexes, in addition to church buildings and cells, the monks lunchrooms provided opportunities for paintings, the Last Supper being the subject most appropriate for such settings.

Fig. 594: Last Supper, 1480; fresco – Domenico Ghirlandaio

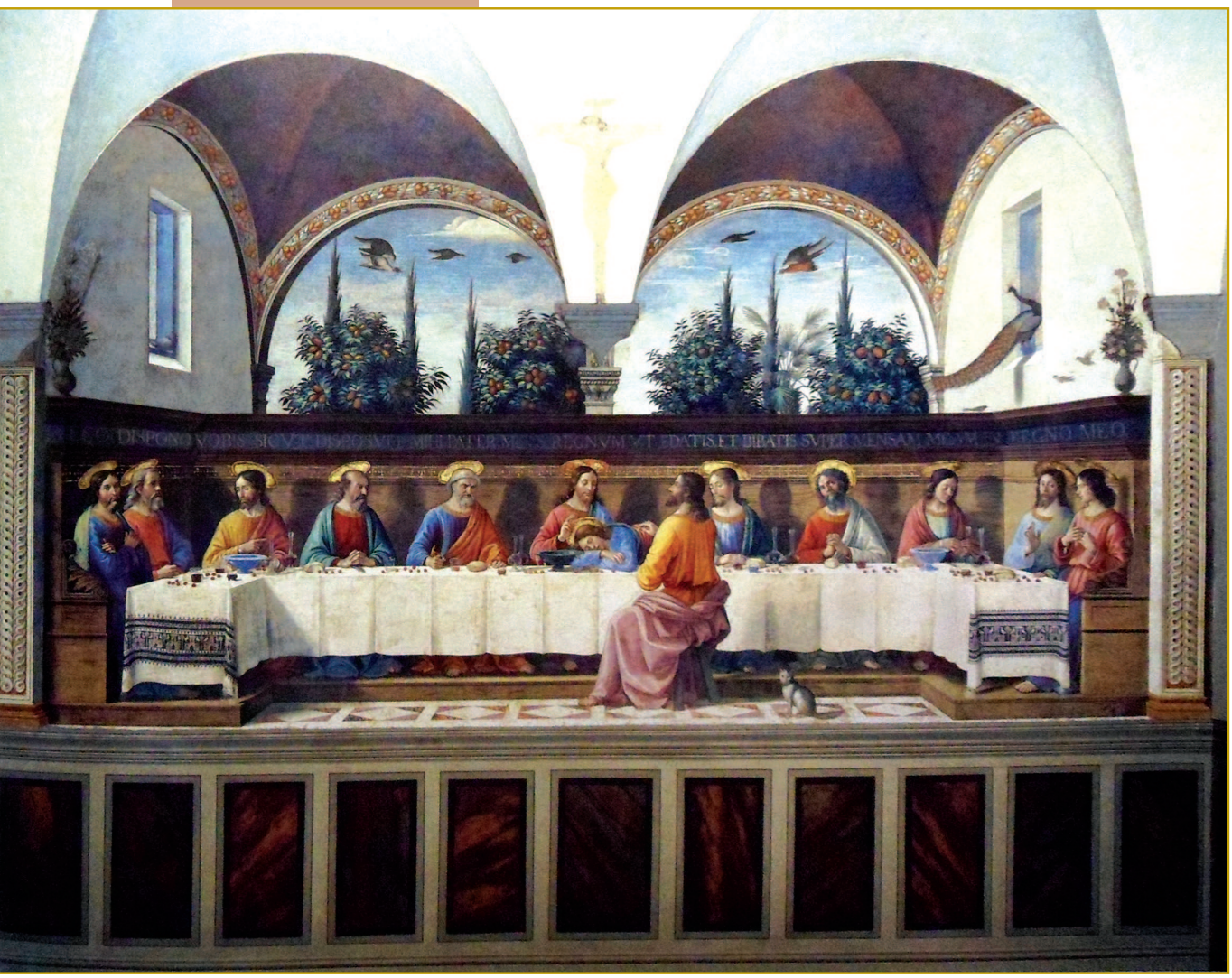


Fig. 595: Feast of Herod: Dance of Salome, c. 1460-64; fresco – Filippo Lippi

Taking into consideration the variety of artists working in the city and their different styles, religious painting in Florence had many faces. Some artists preferred more hierarchical and stylized pictures, others went more for images rooted more in contemporary reality; some painted more poetic visions, others more courtly ones. As each master gave his own interpretation to the scene he was portraying, viewers were able to see each portrayal of a holy story in a new way, and in that the religious experience were thereby enriched.

In addition to public spaces, the wealthy commissioned religious works for their private homes. Images of the Virgin and Child were the most common, pictures of a client's patron saints were another type of depiction suitable for a domestic context. As indicated by contemporary texts, these paintings served as models to young mothers on how to interact with their children, and offered spiritual protection for those living under the eye of the holy dignitary.

Fig. 596: Portrait of the Condottiere Pippo Spano, c 1450; fresco – Andrea del Castagno

2.11 SECULAR PAINTING

In adding to the many kinds of religious portrayals, Italian artists were also commissioned to produce a wide variety of secular images for churches, as well as for civic buildings and private homes.

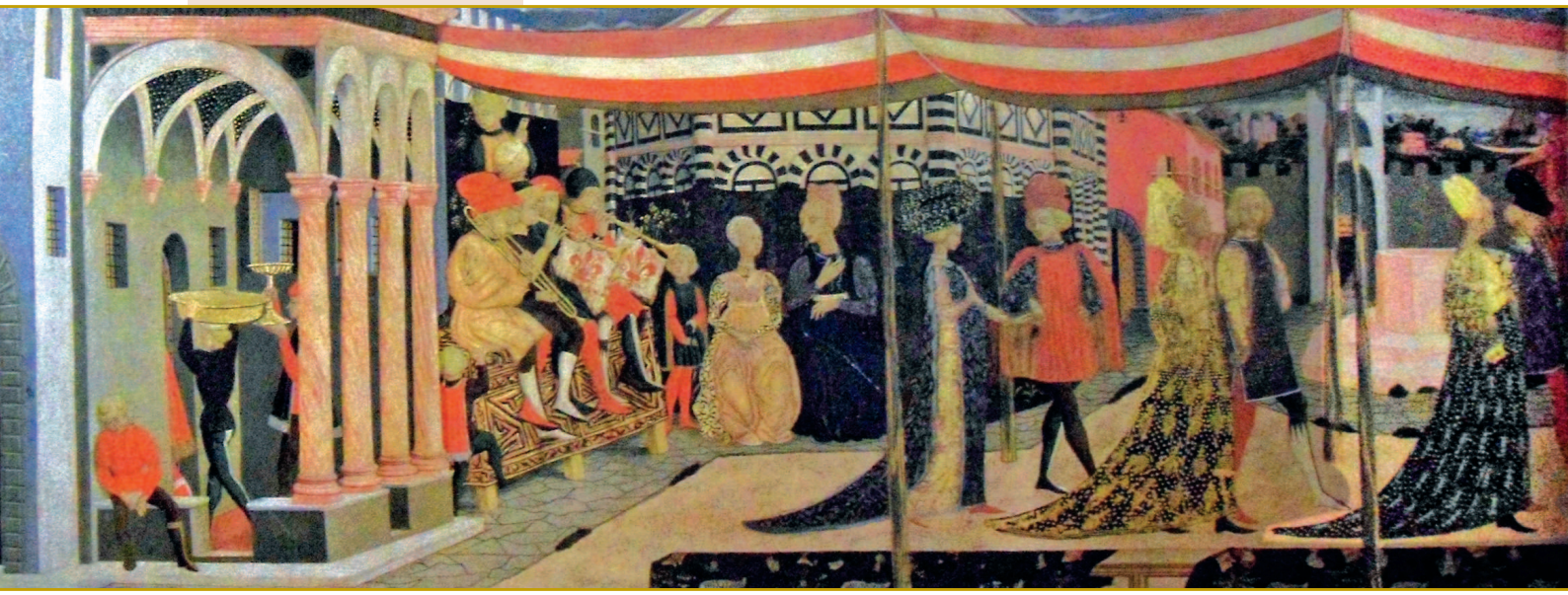
Some of these, such as Paolo Uccello's series devoted to the battle of San Romano, commemorated important military victories; others illustrated ancient myths popular among the learned class; still others captured scenes of daily life.

One functional artifact usually decorated with secular paintings was the cassone, a wooden chest brought by the bride into her husband's home, in which she stored her trousseau. These pieces of furniture were often decorated with elaborate descriptive scenes, the favourites were tales from ancient Roman history that offered new husbands and wives models of honourable conduct. Educated Italians were well versed in ancient literature, be it Livy, on whom they drew for their knowledge of Roman history, or Ovid, whose tales of fateful encounters between gods and mortals inspired Renaissance artists.

These artists produced whatever their patrons might commission, though some painters favoured ancient subjects of heroic scenes from more recent history.

The Florentine artist, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, for example, created classically inspired images in a variety of forms – paintings, engravings, bronze statuettes – drawing his inspiration from ancient myths as well as Classical artworks.

Andrea del Castagno painted heroic illustrations of famous men of recent Italian history. In the Florence Cathedral he completed an equestrian image of the Florentine condottiere (war lord) Niccola da Tolentino in fresco, showing him as if he were a marble statue set on a high pedestal. In 1449-51 Castagno also produced a series of famous men and women at the Villa Carducci at Legnaia, standing, over-lifesize portraits of three Tuscan Poets (Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio), three military commanders (Farinata degli Uberti, Niccolo Acciaikuoli and Pippo Spano and three women from Classical mythology and biblical stories (the Cumaean Sibyl, Ester and Tomiri).



Paolo Uccello, meanwhile painted the companion piece to Castagno's portrait of Tolentino – also in Florence Cathedral an illusionistic equestrian statue of the mercenary, Sir John Hawkwood, – as well as a famous series commemorating the battle of San Romano, in which the Florentines defeated the Sienese. Uccello was particularly preoccupied with linear perspective. Vasari, in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550), recorded that Uccello stayed up late into the night working out how to depict the exact vanishing point in a picture. Uccello also painted animals (his nickname, Uccelli ('birds'), seemingly derives from his affection for them); for the Medici he painted a fierce lion fighting with a venom-spouting snake, later admiringly described by Vasari.

Fig. 597: Adimari Cassone, c. 1440-50; tempera on panel – Lo Scheggia

Fig. 598: The Battle of San Romano, c. 1438-40; tempera on panel – Paolo Uccello

Philosophiae Doctor

2.12 THE MEDICI-RICARDI CHAPEL

The most magical demonstration of private devotion and family pride in the fifteenth-century Florence, is the chapel in the Medici Palace. The tiny, two-room space is like a jewel box, its Cosmati-work floor (inlaid with mosaic of coloured stone) were inspired by ancient examples. Along the walls, stand richly carved wooden seats, and overhead the ceiling bursts with decorative piece and gilded panelling. A panoramic fresco encircles the entire chapel.

The fresco, painted by Benozzo Gozzoli (c.1421-97) between 1459 and 1461, show in detail the procession of the Magi. The wise men of the East wind their way through a craggy countryside to worship the Virgin and Child, depicted in a separate panel over the altar. The adoration of the Magi was extremely popular in Renaissance Florence. Every year on the feast of the Epiphany a procession of costumed actors made their way across the city before performing a sacred play in front of the Baptistery. Act one represented the encounter of the three wise kings with Herod, Act Two the Magi offering gifts to baby Christ, and Act Three the Massacre of the Innocents, authorized with 'imitation babies'. Cosimo I de' Medici (189-1464), the unofficial ruler of the city, wanted to establish his control over Florence in part of making himself a leader and benefactor of the Company of the Magi.

Fig. 599: Journey of the Magi, 1459-61; fresco – Benozzo Gozzoli

Benozzo Gozzoli's frescos are full of details that connect the biblical stories to the Medici. One wall is occupied by a group portrait of the clan, Cosimo is depicted as a man in his sixties, with grey hair and red beret, dressed in a black brocade doublet. He rides on a russet horse behind his son and successor, Piero (the Gouty), shown in profile and dressed in green brocade with gold embroidery. A gorgeous youth in gold brocade and red hose posed on a white horse is an perfect likeness of the young Lorenzo, Cosimo's grandson, who would come to be called '*the Magnificent*'. The crowd of retainers behind the Medici is full of individualized faces, including that of the artist, pictured to the left of the bearded figure in a high conical hat, he wears a red hat embroidered with the gold letters OPUS BENOTII ('work of Benozzo'). Even the hilly, cultivated landscape is a slightly fictionalized portrait of the Florentine countryside, with Medicean villas scattered through it.

In bright and costly pigments Benozzo created a lush world that engulfs and absorbs the visitors to the chapel. The saturated blues and greens, reds and yellows are more intense, through both preservation and restoration, than in almost any other Renaissance fresco. The effect of Medicean power and splendour is overpowering. The Medici, not surprisingly, followed the progress of the chapel with keen attention. In a surviving letter from Benozzo to Piero de' Medici, written in July 1459, the painter responds to his patron's displeasure: '*This morning I received a letter from your Magnificence … and I understand that the seraphims I have done do not seem appropriate to you … I will do whatever you command me to do; two coulds will make them vanish …*'

2.13 PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

Piero della Francesca (c.1415-92)) was one of the most thorough mathematical artists of the Renaissance. His exquisitely coloured compositions are exercises in geometry, his serene figures arranged in harmonious groupings of cylinders, spheres and ovoids (egg-shaped), the logistics of perspective, foreshortening and viewpoint all masterfully controlled. He spent much of his life in Borgo Sansepolcro, a Tuscan market town where his family flourished as owners of several businesses and farms. He also lived for a few years in Florence, where he studied the solid figures of Masaccio, the perspective space constructions of Leon Battista Alberti, the simple elegance of Fra Angelico's compositions, and Domenico Veneziano's luminous use of light.

Fig. 600: Scenes from the Legend of the True Cross, c 1450; fresco – Piero della Francesca

He built on these elements in his subsequent works, creating his own distinct language from the influences of his teachers.

Despite his connection to Borgo Sansepolcro, Piero carried out work at a number of Italian courts. He seems to have been engaged for a time at Ferrara in northern Italy, and in 1459 he painted a fresco (which did not survive) in the Vatican, in Rome. His strongest ties, however, were with the city of Urbino, then ruled by Duke Federigo da Montefeltro (r.1422-82). Though chiefly a brilliant military commander, Federigo was also a man of learning, and like the Medicis in Florence, he was keen to establish a brilliant court to which he invited humanists, poets and artists. Piero executed a number of works for him, including the Flagellation of Christ, which apparently hung in the Urbino *studiolo*, the duke's private retreat; the Madonna and Child with Saints and Federigo da Montefeltro, and the double portrait of Federigo and his wife Battista Sforza.

Piero apparently stopped painting in his later years and devoted himself purely to the study of mathematics and perspective. He composed treatises entitled On Painting in Perspective and On the Five Regular Bodies, a study of geometry. Vasari wrote that with age Piero went blind, which may have been responsible for his shift from practice to theory.

Fig. 601: Opposite page: Madonna and Child with Saints and Frederigo da Montefeltro, Mid - 1470s; oil on panel – Piero della Francesca

2.14 SANDRO BOTTICELLI

Sandro Botticelli, the son of a Florentine tanner, grew up to be permitted papal commissions in Rome and produce work for the Medici's in Florence. From these heights he fell out of fashion within his lifetime, before finding fame again in the nineteenth century.

Botticelli (Alessandro di Mariano Filipepi; 1445-1510) got his nickname, derived from Botticello ('little barrel'), from his older brother Antonio, a goldsmith who first taught him the fundamentals of his Art. Later, as a teenager, Botticelli was enrolled as an apprentice to Fra Filippo Lippi.

Fig. 602: Primavera, c. 1478; tempera on panel – Sandro Botticelli

After he completed his training, he worked with the painter and engraver Antonio del Pollaiuolo, from whom he learned his strong sense of line. He developed a highly personal style, the swaying bodies of his elegant figures defined by strong lines and arranged in graceful compositions. He does not strive to construct rational space, but places his characters in the foreground, centre-stage, the landscape or architecture providing a backdrop parallel to a theatrical set. His work has been described as visual poetry, comparable to the love verses of Petrarch and poems written in that style by Lorenzo de' Medici.

Fig. 603: The Calumny of Apelles, 1490s; tempera on panel – Sandro Botticelli

Botticelli's style clearly vibrated with cultured Florentines, for having set up his own studio in 1470, he made a highly successful career executing commissions for the leading families of the city, including the Medici. In 1481 he was one of four masters to be summoned to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV to decorate the newly constructed Sistine Chapel with a series of frescos. It would be relating episodes from the Old and New Testament, which authorised papal authority. Botticelli painted three large scenes: the *Life of Moses*, the *Punishment of Korah* and the *Temptation of Christ.* Upon returning to Florence, Botticelli, who had a sophistical ability, wrote a commentary on a portion of Dante and illustrated the *Inferno*. Botticelli's drawings accompanied the first printed edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, published in 1481.

Classical literature and mythology was an important part of Florentine Renaissance culture and Botticelli was commissioned to paint many pictures illustrating ancient subjects. During his visit in Rome in 1481-82, he studied ancient sculpture and architecture, and some of the figures in his paintings remind of Roman models. Botticelli's Art transformed the ancient gods, heroes and creatures, giving them a stylized, elegant company and courtly grace of movement. With a shift in taste towards what is now called 'Mannerism' at the turn of the sixteenth century, Botticelli's work fell out of fashion, and for the last few years of his life he produced few paintings. Subsequently his reputation declined still further, and it was only in the nineteenth century that he was hailed again as a great Quattrocento master, thanks to the Art critic John Ruskin's admiration of his linear rhythm.

Fig. 604: Opposite page: Camilla and Centaur, c.1482; tempera on canvas – Sandro Botticelli

Fig. 605: Lorenzo de Medici – Andrea-del-Verrocchio

2.15 LORENZO DE' MEDICI

Lorenzo de' Medici continued the Medicean tradition of supporting Art with enthusiasm. Valori, Lorenzo's contemporary wrote: "*He was such an admirer of all the remains of antiquity*." He unite the architectural and sculptural collections with those that was left by Cosimo and Piero, he placed them in a garden between the Medici palace and the monastery of San Marco.

Lorenzo used his influence to spread the style of Imperial Rome. In this matter he did as much harm as good, for he discouraged in architecture what he was fruitfully practicing in literature – the development of natural forms. But his spirit was generous. Through his encouragement, and in many cases with his funds, Florence was now adorned with elegant civic buildings and private residences. He completed the church of San Lorenzo and the abbey at Fiesole, and he engaged Giuliano da Sangallo to design a monastery outside the San Gallo gate that gave the architect his name. Giuliano built a stately villa for Lorenzo at Poggio a Caiano, and so attractively that Lorenzo recommended him when King Ferdinand of Naples asked him for an architect. Giuliano, send the gifts that Ferrante gave him to Lorenzo – a bust of the Emperor Hadrian, a Sleeping Cupid, and other ancient sculptures. Lorenzo added these to the collections in his garden, which later formed the core of the statuary in the Uffizi Gallery.

2.16 ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO

Fig. 606: Andrea-del-Verrocchio – Self-portrait

Andrea del Verrocchio, born Andrea di Michele di Francesco de' Cioni (1435), was a goldsmith, a sculptor, a bell-caster, a painter, a geometrician, and a musician who worked at the court of Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence in the early Renaissance. Verrocchio produced two of the greatest sculptures of his time. As a painter his chief claim to fame lies in having taught and influenced Leonardo, Lorenzo di Credi, and Perugino; his own paintings are mostly stiff and dead. There are few Renaissance pictures more unpleasant than the famous *Baptism of Christ*; the Baptist is a dour Puritan, Christ, presumably thirty, looks like an old man, and the two angels at the left are womanish bland, including the one traditionally ascribed to Leonardo, But Tobias and the Three Angels is excellent, the central angel foreshadows the grace and mood of Botticelli, and the young Tobias is so fair that we must either attribute him to Leonardo, or confess that da Vinci received more of his pictorial style from Verrocchio than is thinkable. A drawing of a woman's head, in Christ Church, Oxford, again suggests the vague and pensive ethereality of Leonardo's women; and Verrocchio's dark landscape already features the gloomy rocks and mystic streams of Leonardo's dreamy masterpieces.

Fig. 607: Baptism of Christ – Andrea-del-Verrocchio

Vasari's tells that when Verrocchio saw the angel that Leonardo had painted in *The Baptism of Christ* he "resolved never to touch the brush again, because Leonardo, though so young, had so far surpassed him," Verrocchio did continue to paint after the Baptism, but he gave most of his mature years to sculpture. He worked for a while with Donatello and Antonio Pollaiuolo, learned something from each of them, and then developed his own style of stern and angular realism. He took his career in his hands by molding an unflattering bust of Lorenzo in terra cotta – nose and bangs and worried brow.

Fig. 608: Pulpit, Church of Santa Croche – Benedetto da Maiano

Fig. 609: Bust of Filippo Strozzi – Benedetto da Maiano

2.17 BENEDETTO DA MAIANO

About 1489, Benedetto da Maiano built for Filippo Strozzi the Elder the most perfect example of a "Tuscan" style architecture, a style that Brunellesco had developed in the Pitti Palace – internal splendour and luxury behind a massive front of "rustic" or unfinished stone blocks. As an architect, he created the tomb of Filippo Strozzi, with its roundel of Mother and Child supported by cherubs in the church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence; and the portico of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Arezzo. It was begun with careful astrological timing, with religious services in several churches, and with a distribution of offerings. After Benedetto's death (1497) Simone Pollaiuolo, as an architect, created the tomb of Filippo Strozzi, completed the building, and added a fine cornice on the model. Verrocchio's thriving studio was characteristic of Renaissance Florence – it united all the Arts in one workshop, sometimes in one man; in the same bottega one artist might be designing a church or a palace, another might be carving or casting a statue, another sketching or painting a picture, another cutting or setting gems, another carving or inlaying ivory or wood, or fusing or beating metal, or fashioning floats and pennons for a festival procession; men like Verrocchio, Leonardo, or Michelangelo could do any of these.

Florence had many studios like this, and Art students went wild in the street, or lived a Bohemian life in their apartments, or they became rich men, honoured by popes and princes as inspired spirits beyond price, and _ like Cellini – above the law. More than any other city, except Athens, Florence attached importance to Art and artists, talked and fought about them, and told anecdotes about them, as we do now of actors and actresses. It was Renaissance Florence that formed the romantic concept of the genius – the man inspired by a divine spirit dwelling within him. Verrocchio's studio didn't deliver a sculptor to carry on the master's excellence, but he taught two painters of high degree – Leonardo and Perugino – and a less notable talent, Lorenzo di Credi. Painting was gradually expelling sculpture as the favourite Art. It was probably an advantage that the painters were uneducated and unrestrained by the lost murals of antiquity. They knew about Apelles and Protogenes, but few of them saw Alexandrian or Pompeian remains of ancient painting. In this Art there was no recovery of antiquity, and the connection of the Middle Ages with the Renaissance was very visible. The line was deceitful but clear from the Byzantines to Duccio to Fra Angelico to Leonardo to Raphael and to Titian. The painters, unlike the sculptors, had to imitate their own technology and style through trial and error. Originality and experiment were forced upon them.

2.18 ANDREA MANTEGNA

Andrea Mantegna was fascinated by antiquity and very ambitious in his attempts to revive the look and feel on the past. His interest in the archaeological remains of ancient Rome invaded his entire composition, including the most overtly religious compositions. At the age of eleven Mantegna (1430/1-1506) was enrolled in the school run by the painter Francesco Squarcione in Padua. Passionate about ancient Art, Squarcione crisscrossed Italy to examine monuments and assemble a collection of antique statues, reliefs and vases for his pupils to study. Thus trained in the close observation and drawing of marbles, Mantegna followed a sculptural conception of the human figure throughout his work.

The humanistic atmosphere of Padua, fostered by its international renowned university, and the profusion of Roman remains in northern Italy, further informed his interests. In many of his paintings he evoked with remarkable credibility the appearance of Roman structures, costumes and customs, most of all his series of canvases depicting the *Triumph of Caesar*. In addition to their antiquarian subject matter, Mantegna's paintings are characterized by unusual compositions, bold – even daring – use of foreshortening and perspective, and a precisely realistic manner of execution.

His reputation was now established through a number of prominent commissions, he started when he was eighteen years old and engaged to paint the frescos in the Eremintani Church in Padua,. In 1457 Mantegna accepted the position of court artist to Ludovico II Conzaga, Marquis of Mantua. He remained in Mantua for close to half a century, painting altarpieces and frescos, and designing pageants and allegories.

Fig. 610: Camera degli Sposi, Group portrait of Ludovico Gonzaga, 1465-74 – Andrea Mantegna

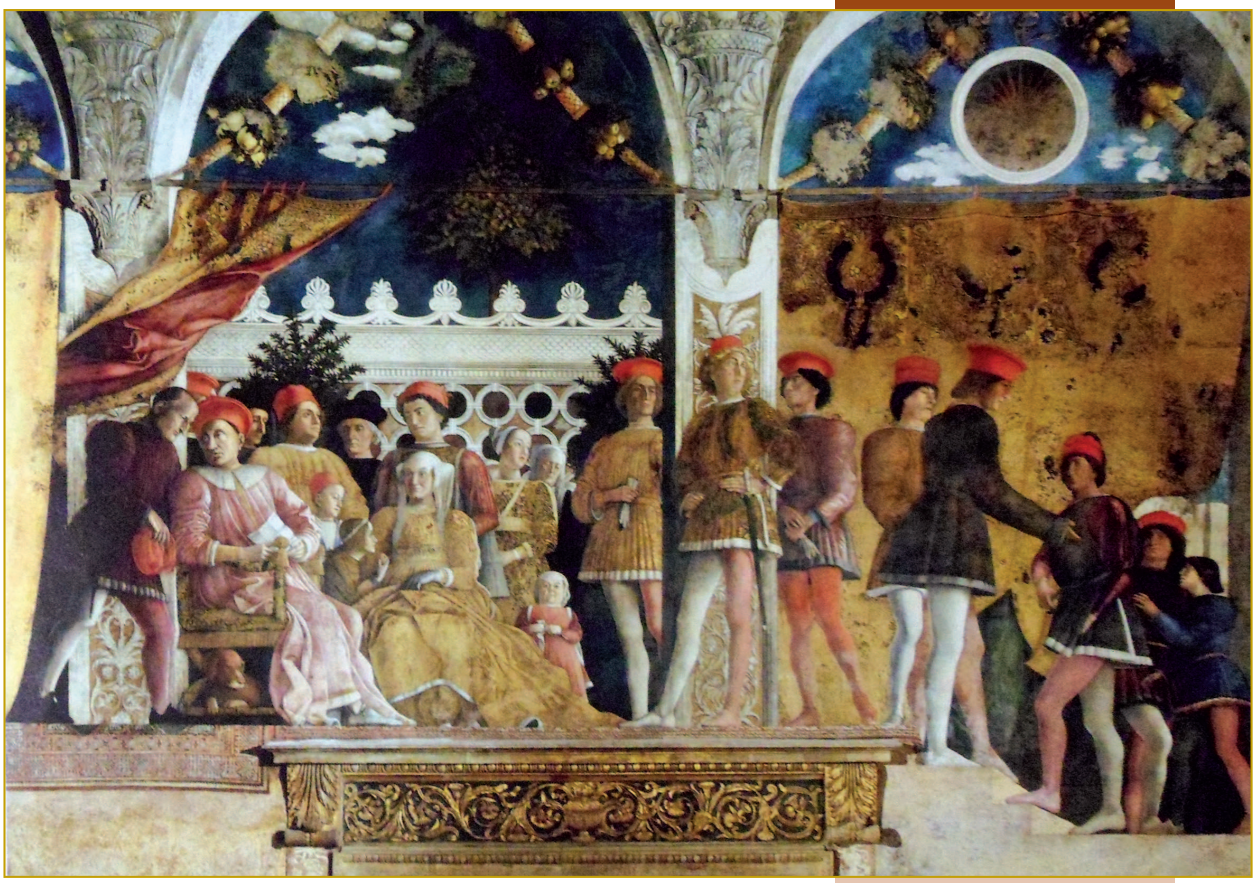


Fig. 611: Presentation in the Temple, 1454-66 – Andrea Mantegna

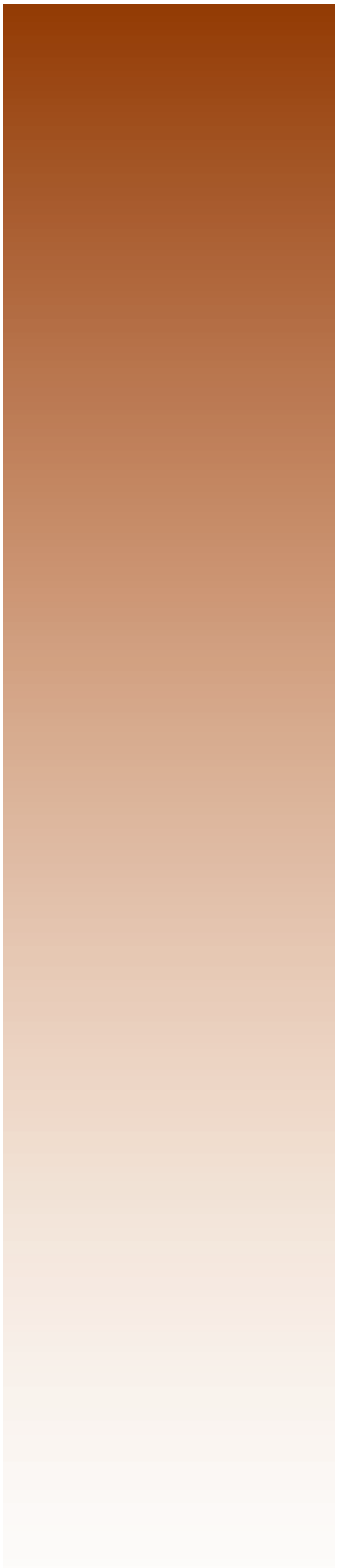


Fig. 612: Opposite page: St Sebastian, 1480; tempera on canvas – Andrea Mantegna

The most famous product of these years is the fresco decoration of the Camera degli Sposi, a room in the ducal palace in Mantua. On its walls Mantegna vividly portrayed Ludovico, his family, courtiers and even pets. The most original part of the room was its painted ceiling, which seemed to open up to the sky – for the first time since antiquity – and show a circular balustrade from which a number of figures peeked down upon the spectators. Illusionistic ceiling designs would become a fundamental addition of palaces and churches in the next two centuries.

Mantegna's nine canvases depicting the *Triumph of Caesar* were an instant masterpiece. Although it is a seemingly accurate portrayal of a Roman triumph, Mantegna actually invented many of the particulars, though he based the details on ancient descriptions of triumphal processions by such authors as Suetonius Plutarch and Appian, and on his own study of ancient monuments. The series was probably commissioned by Francesco Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua , a military man for whom Julius Caesar would have served as a model commander and statesman. The canvases were probably designed to be displayed as a procession in the ducal palace in Mantua. All are lit from the same direction and face the same way, placing the viewer in the position of a Roman spectator.

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2.19 ANTONELLO DA MESSINA

Antonello da Messina spent most of his working life in Sicily, but his models as well as his influence were widespread. He drew inspiration from Netherlandish painting, while his own works influenced artists in northern Italy, especially Venice. In this, he demonstrate the intersecting artistic currents present during the Renaissance and the continuous cross-pollination among far-flung cultures.

As his name indicates, Antonello (c. 1430-79) was born in Messina, in north-east Sicily, and probably first trained as an artist there and in Palermo. He received further instruction in Naples, a thriving political and cultural capital of the day, ruled by the Aragonese king Alfonso I. Alfonso was an avid collector of works by Netherlandish masters, and Antonello probably developed his love and understanding of northern painting in Naples. He travelled to Venice in 1475, to study the paintings of Giovanni Bellini. Artists journeyed long distances to meet their colleagues, but he remained in Venice for nearly two years. His time there proved fruitful, both for him and for Venetian painters. Antonello introduced local artist to the possibilities and subtleties offered by oil painting – a medium employed predominantly by Netherlandish masters but uncommon in fifteenth-century Italy, where artists tended to use tempera.

Fig. 613: Opposite page: St Jerome in his Study, c.1475; oil on panel – Antonella da Messina

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Fig. 614

Fig. 615

With oils, painters were able to create more atmospheric effects in landscapes and interior scenes and to give greater luminosity to faces, fabrics and other objects. Antonello's style combined Northern attention to detail, whether he was painting folds of cloth or the individual features of the human face, with the characteristic monumentality of Italian painting.

Antonello was a superb portraitist. Whereas his Italian colleagues tended to depict their subjects in profile, Antonello adopted the Netherlandish tradition of painting sitters in a three-quarter view, which gave them greater substance and three-dimensionality. He brought the same strategy to his religious paintings, such as the *Virgin Annunciate*.

Fig. 614: Virgin annunciate, c.1465; oil on panel – Antonella da Messina

Fig. 615: Salvator Mundi, c.1465; oil on panel – Antonella da Messina

2.20 FIFTHEENTH-CENTURY PORTRAITURE

The rise of private portraiture in the fifteenth century reflected a new awareness of the individual in the urban societies of Europe. Desire to show off one's accomplishments and riches in an environment where everyone closely watched the doings of their neighbours and competed to match or surpass them, certainly played a part in the growing popularity of the genre. Portraits allowed their sitters to demonstrate their accomplishments both by the act of being able to commission such a work, which would have been expensive, and by being presented in it in all their finery of modish fashions, costly fabrics and expensive jewels. These images also preserved the memory of the sitters after death, an important consideration. Indeed many of the most beautiful depictions of Renaissance women were posthumous, memorializing their lovely faces after they died, usually in childbirth.

The humanist poet Toto Vespasiano Strozzi, in a verse dedicated to the artist Pisanello in 1443, summarized the main purpose of a portrait and the importance of selecting the right artist for the job: *'… because you wish to depict my face in a fine work of Art, I must be grateful to you in no small measure. If my reputation survives for many years in no other fashion, at least it will live on by the favour of your work.'*

Fig. 616: Battista Sforza, c.1472-73;
tempera and oil on panel – Piero della Francesca

Fig. 617: Leonello d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara, c.1441; tempera on panel – Pisanello

Fig. 618: Federigo da Montefeltro, c.1472-73; tempera and oil on panel – Piero della Francesca

Fig. 619: Giovanna degli Albizzi, c.1488-90; tempera on panel – Domenico Ghirlandaio

Fig. 620: A young princess, c.1435-40; tempera on panel – Pisanello

There was an important difference between Italian and Netherlandish portraits in the fifteenth century. In the north, sitters were shown in three-quarter view, which made them seem more tangible and substantial. Their faces, though often somewhat beautified, tended to retain many of their characteristics. In Italy, where artists were influenced by the portraiture on ancient coins, sitters were usually painted in profile, their features idealized. The use of imperial Roman coins as models for Italian Renaissance portraiture is particularly obvious in the development of medals as a form of private celebration.

2.21 FIFTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN PAINTING

A number of factors particular to the city, shaped Venice's distinctive artistic culture. Its location between Italy and the East and its extensive commercial, diplomatic and cultural exchanges with nations around the Mediterranean, produced a cosmopolitan Art filled with elements derived from such diverse sources as the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere.

The city's government sponsored numerous artistic undertakings that expressed the glory of the maritime republic. The Doge's Palace in particular served as an arena for the display of paintings by the foremost masters. Venetian *scuole* – religious confraternities (brotherhoods) that provided social communities and charitable services to its members. They decorated their headquarters with extensive pictorial cycles, narrating episodes from the life of a patron saint or memorable occasions in the history of the scuola. Many masterpieces of Venetian painting resulted from these commissions from the government and the scuola. The city's competitive and educated patricians competed with each other in their display of wealth and culture, and stimulated the creation of both traditional and innovative artworks.

Venetian painting was characterized by its sophisticated use of colour.

Fig. 621: Opposite page: Enthroned Madonna with Saints, c.1505; oil on canvas transferred from panel – Giovanni Bellini

Painters often worked out compositions directly on the canvas, using layered patches of coloured brush-strokes rather than line to define form. The explored the interactions of colour, light, air and substance, dissolving distinctions between solids and space and replacing contour lines with transitions of light and shadow. They also used rich, saturated hues that gave their paintings special luminosity.

Venetian painters often situated their scenes in care-fully reproduced settings, be they specific piazzas and cannals of the city or interior spaces both public and private. This approach, called the ‘eyewitness’ mode, is particularly apparent in the works of Gentile Bellini and Vittorio Carpaccio.

Gentile Bellini was a leading painter in Venice at the end of the fifteenth century, charged not only with major official commissions but also with a sensitive diplomatic mission. In 1479 he was sent to Istanbul to serve as a court painter to the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II. During his two-year stay in the city, Gentile executed various workds, including decorations of the imperial harem in the Topkapi Palace and a portrait of Mehmet. He was honoured by the Sultan with the titles of Golden Knight and Palace Companion.

Fig. 622: Doge Leonardo Loredan, c.1501-02; oil on panel – Giovanni Bellini

Fig. 623: Sultan Mehmet, c.1480; oil on canvas – Gentile Bellini (attrib.)

Fig. 624: Apparition of the ten thousand Martyrs, c.1515; oil on canvas – Vittore Carpaccio

Giovanni Bellini, younger brother of Gentile and the brother-in-law of Andrea Mantegna, became the most influential Venetian artist of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and trained the next generation of masters, including Giogione and Titian. In the course of a career that spanned sixty-five years, Giovanni pioneered the portrayal of natural light, created a new range of images of the Virgin, designed majestic altarpieces, and painted dignified and tangible portraits. When the German painter Albrecht Dürer visited Venice in 1506, he wrote that Giovanni *'is very old and yet he is the best painter of all'.*

Fig. 625: Woman with a mirror, c.1515; oil on canvas – Giovanni Bellini

3. THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

3.1 LEONARDO DA VINCI

Leonardo da Vinci was the most imaginative and visionary artist of the Renaissance, however, he finished only a few works of Art. He was the archetypal Renaissance man, renowned in his own lifetime as a painter, sculptor, draughtsman, architect, engineer, inventor and botanist. He was trained in the studio of the highly successful Florentine sculptor and painter Andrea del Verrocchio (c.1435-88), Leonardo (1452-1519) learned from his teacher to model from close observation, capturing objects from diverse angles as three-dimensional forms, and to invent compositions through quick sketches. One of Leonard's earliest surviving paintings, a portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, may have been painted while he was still an apprentice under Verrocchio. In this painting, the young artist demonstrates a startling mastery of the new medium of oil painting and sfumato technique (the use of soft shading instead of line to delineate forms and features), blending subtle shades of colour. The same technique can be seen in the *Mona Lisa* (La Gioconda).

Fig. 626: Head of a woman, c.1475; ink and white pigment on paper – Leonardo Da Vinci

After leaving Verrocchio's studio in 1478, Leonardo worked in Florence before seeking employment with the Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, in 1482. In a letter to him, Leonardo outlined his expertise not only in painting, sculpture and architecture, but also in hydraulic engineering, bridge building, fireworks and the construction of a wide range of war machines, from portable cannons to tanks and fireproof ships. *'if any of the aforesaid things should seem to anyone impossible or impracticable,'* he concluded, *'I offer myself as ready to make trial of them'.* Leonardo spent nearly seventeen years at the Sforza court (1482/83-99), engaged not only in military and civil engineering projects, but also in composing treatises on the human body and the elements of machines, the phenomena of light, shadow and perspective the movement of water, horses and the flight of birds. He worked out many of these ideas in his drawings, hundreds of which survive, as opposed to only some fifteen paintings, their scope is astonishing. Leonardo's skills as a painter are apparent in the *Last Supper,* in the refectory of the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, in which he explored ideas of geometry, perspective and Classical Forms.

Upon his return to Florence, Leonardo produced the large cartoon, *Madonna and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John the Baptist*. Rather than being a preparatory drawing for a never-created painting, it may be a finished work, perhaps intended as a gift.

Fig. 627: Opposite page: Mona Lisa (La Gioconda), c.1503-06; oil on panel – Leonardo Da Vinci

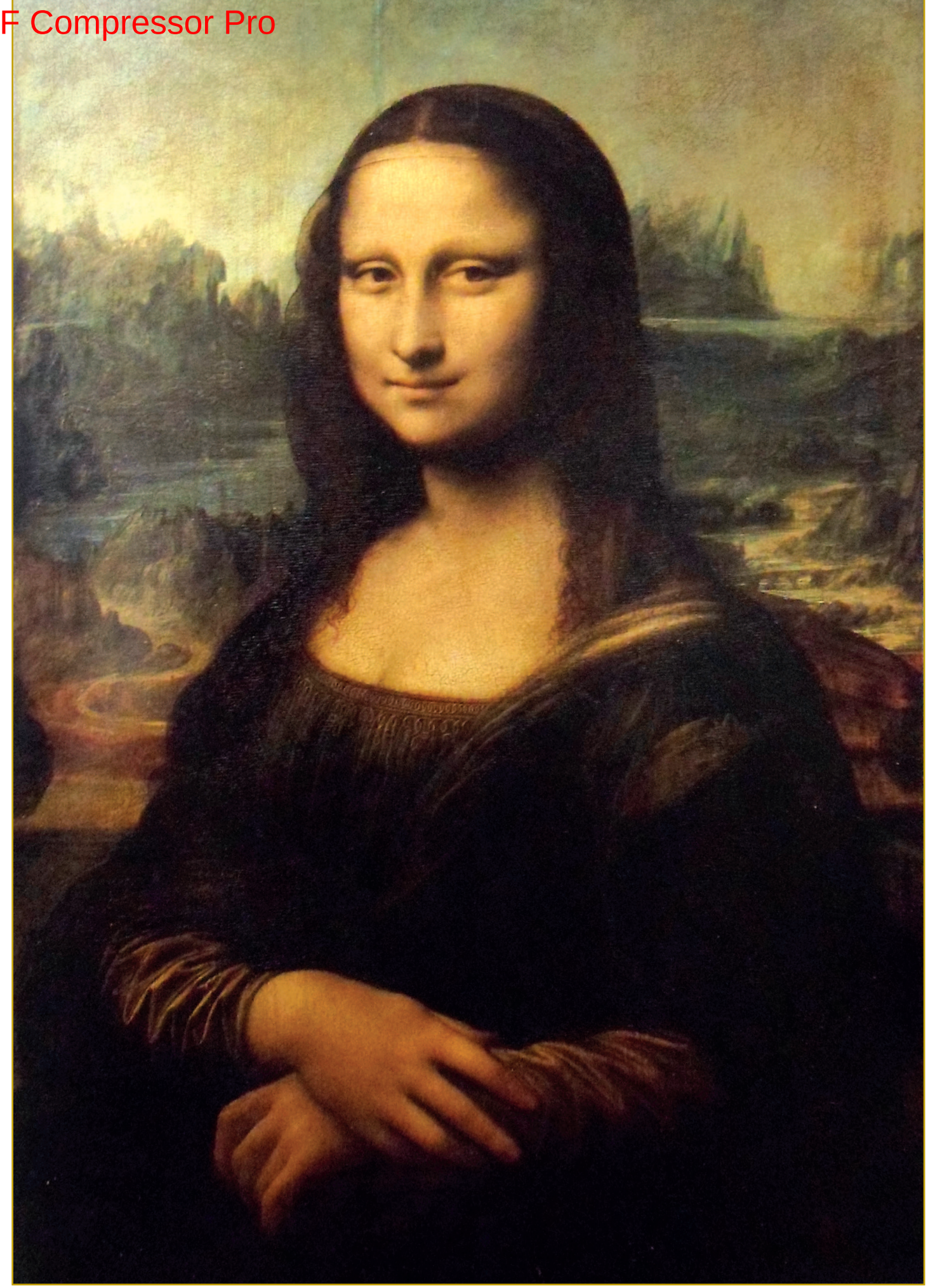

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Fig. 628: Head of an old man and a youth, c.1495-1500; red chalk on paper – Leonardo Da Vinci

Fig. 629: Da Vinci Self-Portrait, c.1512 red chalk on paper.

The illusion of high relief stems from Leonardo's use of the chiaroscuro technique, with strongly contrasted light and dark shades. In the fiercely topical Renaissance debate Leonardo placed painting before sculpture as the truest means of representing the natural world. Indeed, he achieved superb sculptural volume in his painted figures by exploiting the physical properties of light and the gradations of shadows. In this pursuit he explored, and described in his notebooks, the qualities, quantities, positioning and shapes of shadows; the effects of direct, diffused, restricted and subdued light and the motion of shadows with respect to moving or stationary light sources. He integrated this research with his theories on the perception of colour, aerial perspective and the minute optical effects produced by the atmosphere interposed between the eye and visible objects are remarkably precise.

Fig. 630: Madonna and Child with St Anne and the Infant St John the Baptist, c.1499-1500; charcoal with white chalk on paper – Leonardo Da Vinci

Fig. 632: Ginerva de' Benci, c.1474-78; oil on panel – Leonardo Da Vinci

Fig. 631: Left page: Lady with an Ermine (Cecilia Gallerani), c.1489-90; oil on panel – Leonardo Da Vinci

3.2 RAPHAEL

Raphael – painter, designer, draughtsman and architect – had a reputation as one of the most charming of the Renaissance artists. The grace and harmony of his paintings, were admired for their clarity of form and composition. The sublime serenity of expression on the gentle faces of his subjects, reflect his appeal. Handsome in appearance, pleasant in personality and tremendously talented, he earned the nickname 'prince of painters'.

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio or Santi, 1483-1520) grew up in Urbino, the site of a small but enlightened court where Art and humanism were highly prized and actively debated. His father, Giovanni, a minor painter but a man of culture, was keenly interested in the ideas emanating from the court and introduced his son to them and to painting. From Pietro Perugino (1446-1524), with whom he worked in Perugia, Raphael learned perspective and his lyrically sweet depictions of Madonnas and saints. During a stay in Florence (1504-08) he took from Leonardo ideas about pyramidal composition, unassuming intimacy between figures, and technique of chiaroscuro (the contrast between light and shade) and sfumato (the use of soft shading instead of line to delineate forms and features). From Michelangelo he absorbed lessons in the expressiveness of human anatomy.

Fig. 633: Entombment, c.1507; oil on panel – Raphael

Fig. 634: Portrait of Leo X with two Cardinals, c.1517-19; oil on panel – Raphael

Fig. 635: Baldassare Castiglione, c.1515; oil on canvas – Raphael

Fig. 636: St George and the dragon, c.1506; oil on panel – Raphael

As a keen student of archaeology and ancient sculpture, he incorporated elements from these into his paintings. Indeed, after he was appointed commissioner of antiquities for the city of Rome by Pope Leo X in 1517, Raphael oversaw all excavations in the papal territories and drew up an archaeological map of Rome, in the process suggesting ways in which the destruction of antiquities might be moderated. Raphael was first called to Rome in 1508 to serve Pope Julius II, quickly earning key commissions from members of the Roman ecclesiastical and cultural elite. He remained in the city for twelve years, increasingly in demand, his works ranging from portraits to frescos in the papal apartments in the Vatican that became icons of Renaissance Art; from cartoons for ten large tapestries depicting scenes from the lives of St Peter and St Paul for the walls of the Sistine Chapel, to major architectural projects. After the death of the architect Donato Bramante in 1514, Raphael was named architect of St Peter's Basilica by Pope Leo X and transformed the plan of the church from a Greek cross to a Latin longitudinal design and adorn his funerary chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo. Raphael also worked with the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi (c.1470/82-1527/35) to produce prints, some of them copies of his paintings, others intended purely for engraving.

Fig. 637: Opposite page top: School of Athens, c.1509-10; fresco – Raphael

Fig. 638: Opposite page down: Liberation of St Peter, c.1212-13; fresco – Raphael

3.3 THE SCULPTURE OF MICHELANGELO

Michelangelo Buonarroti – painter, sculptor, architect, engineer and poet – was fully aware of his own genius. His contemporaries agreed, often referring to him as Il Divino ('the divine one'), and making him the first artist ever to have been the subject of a biography during his own lifetime – three, in fact, two of which placed him at the pinnacle of Renaissance Art, in which position he remains to this day.

Michelangelo (1475-1564) was born to a family of small-scale bankers and government officials in the Tuscan town of Caprese and began his Art training under Domenico Ghirlandaio, the most fashionable master in Florence at that time. From 1489 to 1492, while still an apprentice, the youth was introduced to the entourage of Lorenzo de' Medici, and in Lorenzo's garden he began to study ancient sculpture and to receive a humanist education alongside Giovanni, Lorenzo's son and the future Pope Leo X, and Giulio, Lorenzo's nephew and the future Pope Clement VII. This early Neo-Platonic schooling would colour his approach to Art for the rest of his life. Michelangelo left Florence in 1494, when the Medici were expelled from the city by the forces behind the monk Savonarola.

Fig. 639: Pietà, c.1497-1500; marble – Michelangelo

Fig. 640: David, c.1501-04; marble – Michelangelo

Fig. 641: Atlas slave, c.1520; marble – Michelangelo

Fig. 642: Opposite page:
Tombs of Lorenzo de' Medici, c.1519-34; marble – Michelangelo

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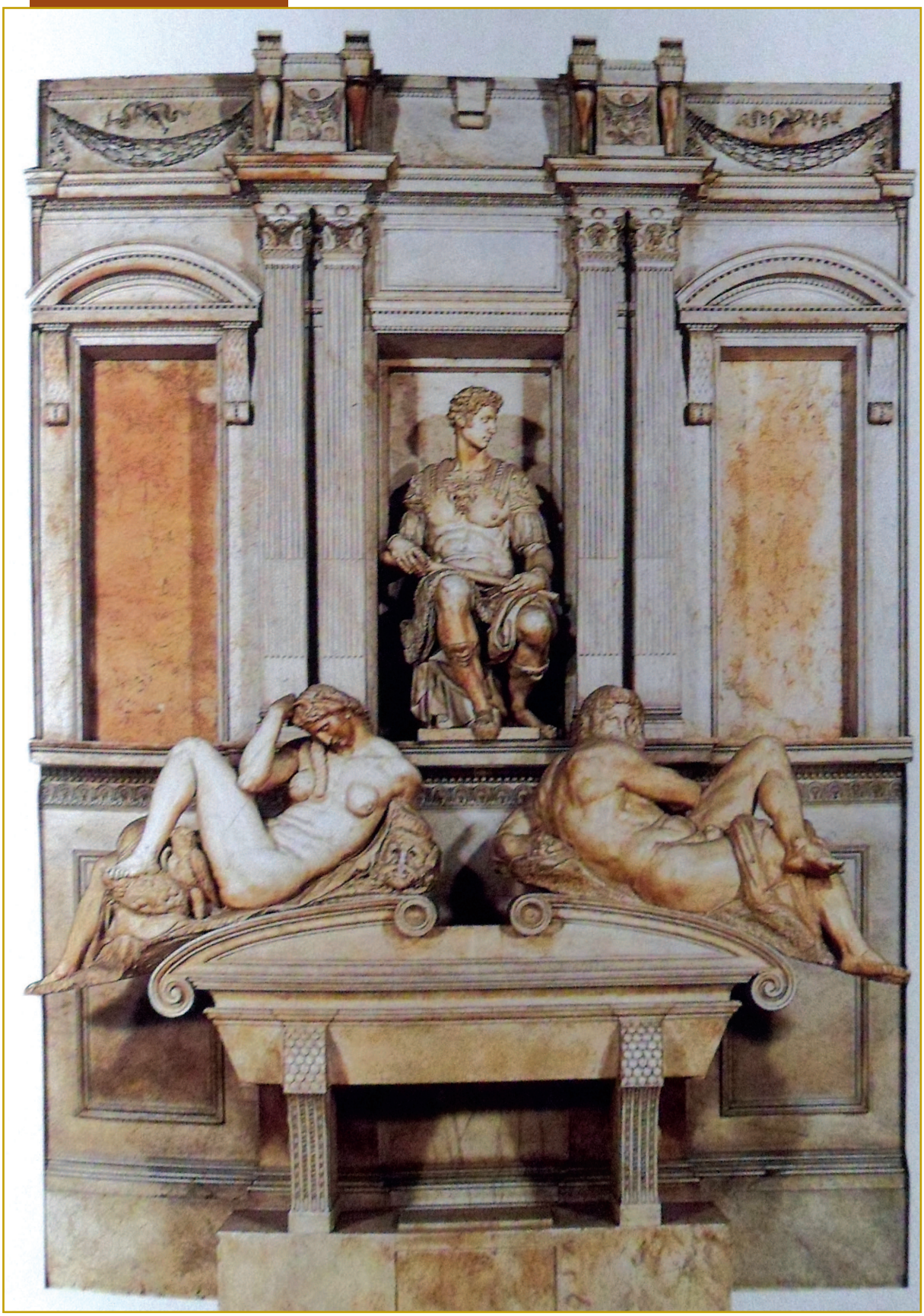
Fig. 643: Tombs of Giuliano Medici, c.1519-34; marble – Michelangelo



In 1496, at the age of twenty one, the artist arrived in Rome, where he carved his first major works, a *Bacchus* (1496-97) and the *Pietà*, which made his name. By 1501 he returned to Florence, where Savonarola had by this time been executed, and here he was commissioned to carve his giant *David* which became a symbol of Florentine freedom. Michelangelo conceived of sculpting as '*liberating the figure imprisoned in the marble',* and exceptionally among Renaissance masters, he regularly visited quarries to select personally the stone he wanted to carve. He claimed to have swallowed his love of marble as an infant through the milk of his wet-nurse, who came from a family of stonecutters. Michelangelo's greatest sculptural project was to be the tomb of Pope Julius II (r.1503-13), an enormous free-standing monument with forty figures, including *Moses* (1513-15) and six figures of slaves. Although he worked on it for some forty years, it was never fully realized, and it exists today as a relatively minor memorial in the church of S Pietro in Vincoli. Another disappointment involved the facade of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence, commissioned by Julius II's successor, Pope Leo X (r.1513-21). Michelangelo envisioned a two-story structure of solid marble, decorated with twelve standing marble statues, six seated bronze ones and nineteen reliefs. He laboured on it for four years and spent months in the quarries at Carrara and Seravezza, but in 1520 Leo X cancelled the project and redirected Michelangelo inside the church, where he was asked to create a splendid new Medici Chapel. In 1524 Pope Clement VII (r.1523-34), Leo's cousin and successor, asked Michelangelo to design the Laurenziana Library adjacent to the church, to hold the Medici book collection and serve as a public library of Florence.

Fig. 644: Michelangelo presents to Pope Paul IV the model of the Cupola of St Peter's, 1619; oil on canvas – Domenico Cresti da Passignano

3.4 THE SISTINE CHAPEL

The most famous hall in Christendom is the Sistine Chapel, named after Pope Sixtus IV, who had it built between 1477 and 1480 to accommodate the increased papal court and to serve as a gathering place for cardinals when they met to elect a new Pope. It was decorated with arguably the most glorious paintings of the Italian Renaissance.

To endow the space with suitable dignity, Sixtus (r.1471-84) called in a team of artists – Pietro Perugino, Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli (1439-after 1506), and their assistants, such as Luca Signorelli (c.1445-1523) – to adorn the chapel with an elaborate fresco programme. Above the paintings of golden drapes, the artists depicted two sets of stories, running opposite each other around the walls: the story of Moses, or the Old Testament Law, and the story of Christ, the New Testament Law, each told in eight panels. Although the artists' styles differ, the scenes cohere visually by employing the same scale of figures, similar landscape and architectural settings, and the same colour palette, and by incorporating a great deal of gold into the frescos.

The last made the scenes come alive in the glow of candlelight. During this first stage of chapel decoration, which happened remarkably quickly, in 1480-81, the ceiling was painted blue with gold stars speckled across it.

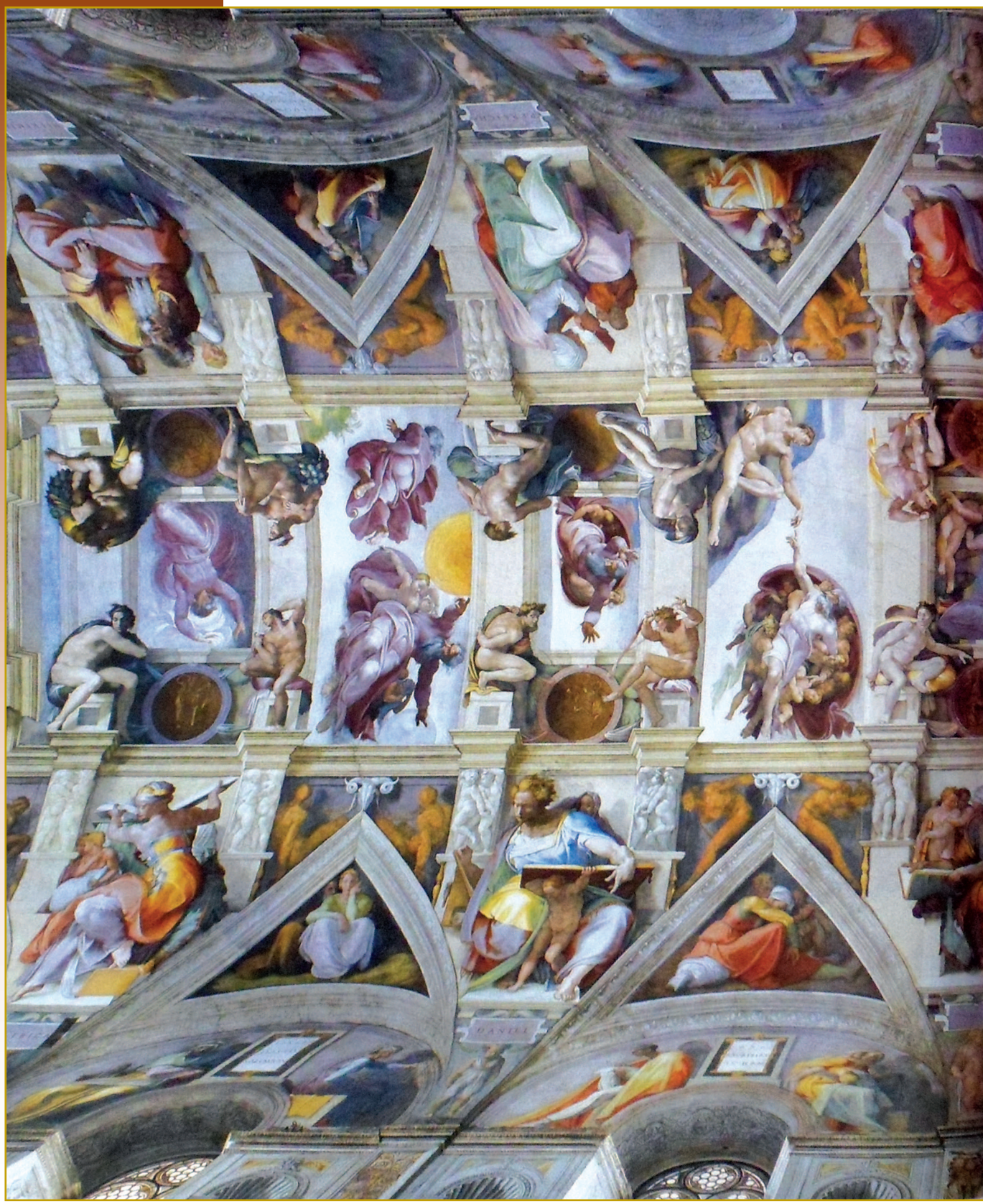


Fig. 645: The Sistine Chapel, c.1508-12; fresco – Michelangelo

Philosophiae Doctor

The uneven terrain under the building soon caused cracks in its walls, and a gash opened in the ceiling. It was repaired, but the painting was damaged. Pope Julius II (r.1503-13), nephew of Sixtus IV, then decided to commission from Michelangelo a far more glorious cycle of frescos. Probably with the help of papal theologians, Michelangelo devised a vast pictorial scheme, with nine central panels devoted to the story of Genesis, form the Creation and the Fall of Man, to the Flood and the rebirth of mankind through the family on Noah. Around these scenes he created a painted architectural framework, at the base of which twelve sibyls and prophets sit on monumental thrones above Christ's forefathers, portrayed in the webs and lunettes. In the four corner pendentives are episodes of the miraculous salvation of the people of Israel. This enormous undertaking was completed in only four years (1508-12), sealing Michelangelo's reputation as the greatest artist of that and any other time. The cleaning and restoration of the ceiling that was completed in December 1999 revealed the astonishing freshness and richness of Michelangelo's palette. Michelangelo returned to work on the Sistine Chapel once again in 1535, at the behest of the new Pope Paul III (r.1534-49), to create the Last Judgement fresco on the altar wall (overpainting the fifteenth-century Assumption of the Virgin altarpiece and the first two episodes of the Stories of Moses and of Christ by Perugino).

The fresco aroused outrage in some contemporaries, who were scandalized by so much nudity in the papal chapel, and after Michelangelo's death one of his apprentices, Daniele da Volterra, was commissioned to obscure the genitals of the figures. In the restoration carried out in the 1990's many, but not all, of these additions were removed

Fig. 646: Christ handing over the keys to St Peter, c.1480-82; fresco – Pietro Perugino

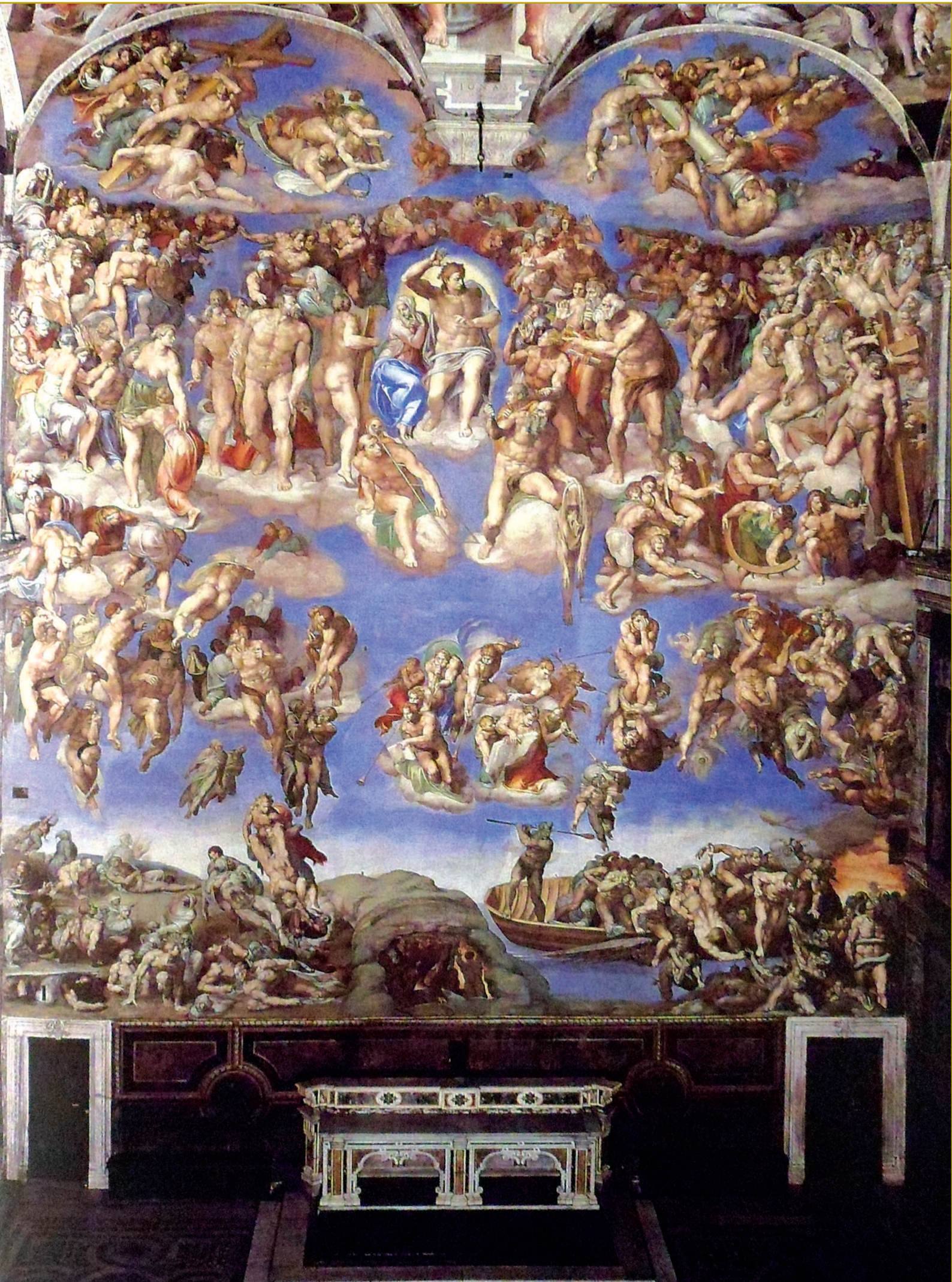


Fig. 648: Punishment of Korah, c.1481-82; fresco – Sandro Botticelli

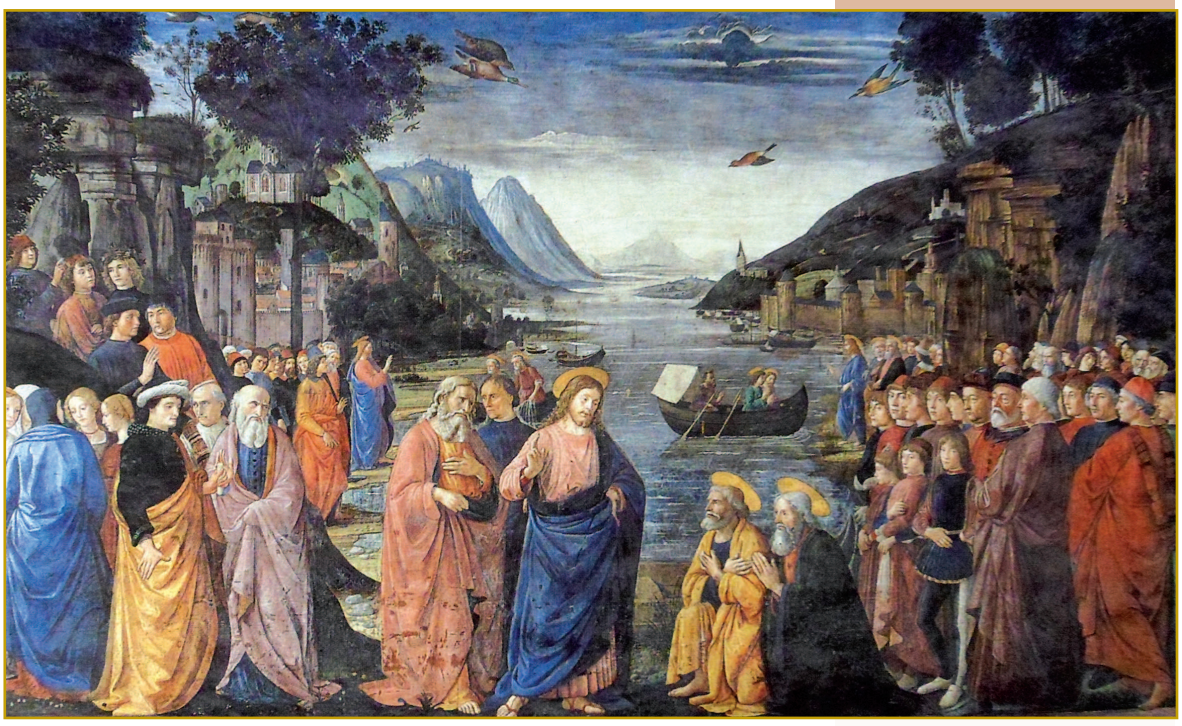


Fig. 649: The calling of Saints Peter and Andrew, c.1481-82; fresco – Domenico Ghirlandaio

Fig. 647: Left page:
Last Judgement, c.1536-41; fresco – Michelangelo

Fig. 650: Parnassus, c.1495-97; tempera on canvas – Andrew Mantegna

3.5 EXHIBITION: THE COURT OF ISABELLA D'ESTE.

Isabella d'Este, Marchesa of Mantua, was one of the few female patrons during the Renaissance, and one supremely confident of her own tastes. She harassed Leonardo da Vinci for anything by his hand; she wrote detailed instructions to Mantegna and Bellini regarding commissions; she threatened the painter Liombeni and marquetry-makers the Mola brothers with imprisonment when projects were delayed; and she kept well abreast of the stocks, prices and sales of antiquities through her dealers scattered throughout Italy.

She (1474-1539) grewn up in an Art-loving household, her parents, Eleanora of Naples and Ercole d'Este, Duchess and Duke of Ferrara, patronized artists and humanists and hosted learned discussions at their court. Her brother Alfonso d'Este became a major Art collector, and Isabella lent him the services of her Classical scholar, Mario Equicola (c.1470-1525), to devise a programme of paintings by artists including Bellini and Titian. Isabella herself hired Ferrarese musicians, gem-carvers and architects to execute projects after she had moved to Mantua, but she also sought artists and works from across Italy.

Isabella kept her most prized artefacts in the grotta, her private retreat in the Mantua palace. Here were stored her hundreds of gold, silver and bronze medals and coins; dozens of carved semi-precious vessels mounted in gold settings; numerous engraved gems and cameos framed in gold; and bronze and marble statues. Her studiolo was located directly above the grotta, where she hung paintings from 'the most outstanding masters in Italy'.

For her studiolo, she had a clear idea of what she wanted: a series of pictures produced by the best artists in competition with each other, similar in size, with uniform direction of light to correspond to the natural light in the room, and illustrating Classical subjects specified by her court poet, Paride Ceresara. She provided painters with detailed instructions and even sketches of what she had in mind and meddled in their execution of these works to ensure she got what she wanted.

She is best known for her patronage of painters, but in fact she expanded greater energy and resources on acquiring creations in rare stones and gold, as well as antiquities – the most prestigious artefacts in her day. Among the treasures she procured was a late second-century AD onyx vase originally carved for the Roman imperial family. Isabella's thinking about the relative values of her artefacts is clear from her will.

When, at the end of her life, she left to her daughters, who were nuns, ivories from her oratory; to her son, Federigo, the contents of the grotta 'for his delight and pleasure'. Her favourite ladies-in-waiting, meanwhile, each received a painting of their choices.

Fig. 651: The Worship of Venus, c.1518-19; oil on canvas – Titian

Fig. 653: Opposite page:
Allegory of Virtues, c.1530; oil on canvas – Correggio

Fig. 652: Battle of Love and Chasticy, c.1531; oil on canvas – Perugino

Philosophiae Doctor

3.6 VENETIAN ART – ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE

The essence of Venetian Art and of its architecture, is intense colour. Most of the Venetian churches, mansions and some business buildings, had mosaics or frescoes on their facades. The facade of St. Mark is glowing with gold-plate and chaotic decoration; every decade brought new rewards and forms, until the face of the temple became a bizarre medley of architecture. To admire that facade with awe, one must stand 576 feet away, at the furthest end of the Piazza San Marco; the perspective of the brilliant composition of the Romanesque doorway, the classical columns, Renaissance railing, and Byzantine domes, blends into one exotic fantasy, an Alladin's magic dream.

The Piazza was not then as abundant and majestic as now. In the fifteenth century it was not yet paved, there were vines and trees, and a stonecutter's yard. In 1495 it it was paved with brick; in 1500 Alessandro Leopardi cast pedestals for the three flagstaffs that no one would later better; and in 1512, Bartolommeo Buon the Younger raised the majestic bell tower. The offices of the Procurators of St. Mark, the Procuratie Vecchie and Nuove, was not so pleasing and were built between 1517 and 1640, and edge the Piazza on North and South with their massive and repetitive facades.

The Palace of the Doges, stood between St. Marks and the Grand Canal, the ultimate glory of civic Venice. It underwent so many renovations during this period that little remained of its earlier form. Pietro Baseggio rebuilt (1309-40) the Southern wing facing the Canal; Giovanni Buon and his son Bartolommeo Buon the Elder raised a new wing (1424-38) on the Western or Piazzetta front, and set up the Gothic Porta della Carta (1438-43) at the Northwestern corner, These Southern and Western facades with their graceful Gothic arcades and balconies, are among the finest products of the Renaissance. Most of the sculptures on the facades and the superb carvings of the column capitals, belongs to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Fig. 654: John Ruskin

Leading English Art critic of the Victorian era, John Ruskin, also an Art patron, draughtsman, watercolourist, a prominent social thinker and philanthropist. He wrote about subjects ranging from geology to architecture, myth to ornithology, literature to education, and botany to political economy. His writing styles and literary forms were equally varied. Ruskin penned essays and treatises, poetry and lectures, travel guides and manuals, letters and even a fairy tale. John Ruskin thought one of these capitals – beneath the figures of Adam and Eve – the finest in Europe.

Bartolommeo Buon the younger and Antonio Rizzo built an decorative arch, named after Francesco Foscari, and combined three architectural styles in an unexpected harmony. Renaissance columns and lintels, Romanesque arches and Gothic pinnacles. In the niches of the arch, Rizzo placed two strange statues, Adam protesting his innocence and Eve wondering about the penalties of knowledge. Rizzo planned, and Pietro Lombardo completed the eastern facade of the court, a pleasant marriage of round and pointed arches with Renaissance cornices and balconies.

The Renaissance popes, as a spiritual power, faced the problem of reconciling humanism with Christianity. Humanism was half pagan, and the Church at one time was determined to destroy paganism root and branch, faith and Art. The demolition of pagan temples and statuary were approved. The cathedral of Orvieto, had only recently been built with marbles taken from Carrara, and from Roman ruins, a papal representative had sold marble blocks from the Colosseum to be burned for lime, as late as 1461. The Palazzo Venezia began with destruction of the Flavian Amphitheatre. Nicholas himself, in his architectural enthusiasm, used twenty-five hundred cartloads of marble and travertine from the Collosseum, the Circus Maximus and other ancient structures to rebuild the churches and palaces of Rome.

To preserve and treasure the remaining Art and classics of Rome and Greece, required a transformation in religious thinking. The status of humanism was already so high, and the neo-pagan movement was so strong in their motivation, their own leaders so deeply involved with it, that the Church had to find a solution for these developments in the Christian life, or risk losing the intellectual classes of Italy, and perhaps of Europe at a later stage. Under Nicholas V, the Church opened up towards humanism with a positive attitude towards literature and Art. According to Francesco Filelfo (an Italian Renaissance humanist), the Church gave the mentalists in Italy ample freedom for an exhilarating century (1447-1534) – giving opportunities in Art and such stimulus, that Rome became the centre of the Renaissance, and enjoyed one of the most brilliant periods in the history of mankind.

3.7 SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN PAINTING: GIORGIONE, TINTORETTO, VERONESE

Venice produced four great masters during the Renaissance: Giorgione, Tintoretto, Veronese and Titian. Each had a distinct visual language and sensibility, but all were unmistakably Venetian in their handling of colour and their approach to composition. Giorgione may have been Titian's teacher; he certainly influenced him profoundly, along with a whole generation of artists in the city and beyond.

We know very little about Giorgione's life, and scholars debate which works can be firmly attributed to him. He came from Castelfranco in the Veneto, probably trained under Giovanni Bellini, worked on paintings for the Doge's Palace and on frescos on the exterior of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (the German merchant's warehouse) in Venice. By 1510 he was dead, possibly of plague, still a young man and an artist in great demand. Giogione's achievement over his brief career was impressive: he was a wonderful colourist, painting in deeply saturated tones, and he created innovative, poetic and often enigmatic scenes set in landscapes strongly imbued with a sense of atmosphere. His untraditional and learned subject matter appealed to members of a humanist aristocratic circle who relished complex and refined visual and literary puzzles, and his tonal painting and evocative landscapes were eagerly emulated.

Tintoretto (Jacopo Comin) was the eldest of twenty-one children of a dyer (hence his name). He was Titian's pupil for ten days, the boy's drawings were either so good as to cause the old master's jealousy, or too advanced for him to be trained in the slow and painstaking way apprentices were taught. So Tintoretto learned on his own, studying casts and masterworks of painting. He declared his aspirations in an inscription over his studio: *'Michelangelo's design and Titian's colour'*.

Fig. 655: Three Philosophers, c.1508; oil on canvas – Giorgione

He began his working career by painting pictures for free. Success came with four canvases narrating the story of St Mark, commissioned by the Scuola di S. Marco in Venice; they secured his reputation as one of the leading masters in the city. The intensity of Tintoretto's personality and visual style earned him the nickname 'Il Furioso', and his dramatic use of perspective and intense lighting effects were ahead of his time, pointing as they did towards Baroque Art.

Paolo Veronese, a native of Verona, was the third great Venetian master, admired for his illusionistic depictions and rich palette. He liked to stage his pictorial narratives in majestic architectural settings, full of colourful personalities and details, which on one occasion got him into trouble with the Church. When his portrayal of the Last Supper was deemed irreverent and heretical, he saved himself by changing the name of the painting. Veronese was one of the first painters whose drawings were sought by collectors during his lifetime, and he was admired for his skill in modelling in dark and light hues – the basis of the chiaroscuro technique taught in European academies of Art. The French painter Eugène Delacroix wrote that Veronese made light without violent contrasts, 'which we are always told is impossible, and maintained the strength of hue in shadow'.

Fig. 656: Finding the Body of St Mark, c.1562-66; oil on canvas – Tintoretto

Fig. 657: Feast in the House of Levi, c.1573; oil on canvas – Paolo Veronese

3.8 SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN PAINTING: TITIAN

Titian was the greatest painter of sixteenth-century Venice. Over the course of his long career he remained an unsurpassed master of colour, his tones deep, saturated and atmospheric, while his style and his approach to painting developed and changed throughout his lifetime. Titian (Tiziano Vecellio; c.1485/90-1576) learned Art of painting from two pre-eminent Venetian masters, Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione, the latter strongly influencing his early style. The two artists worked together in 1508-09 on the decoration of the external walls of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (Inn of the Germans) in Venice. To the annoyance of Giorgione, Titian's sections were deemed superior.

After Giorgione's early death in 1510, Titian emerged as the city's foremost master. His fame arose from the frescos he painted in 1511 in the Scuola del Santo in Padua; form the monumental Assumption of the Virgin altarpiece for the high altar of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice (1515-18), which showed the Madonna soaring dramatically out of the tempestuous group of Apostles; and from his portraits. He also developed a reputation as a painter of mythological scenes for intellectual elites. In 1518 Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara, commissioned Titian to paint a series of works inspired by Classical poetry, this was the first of his commissions from non-Venetian clients.

Fig. 658: Rape of Europa, c.1560-62; oil on canvas – Titian

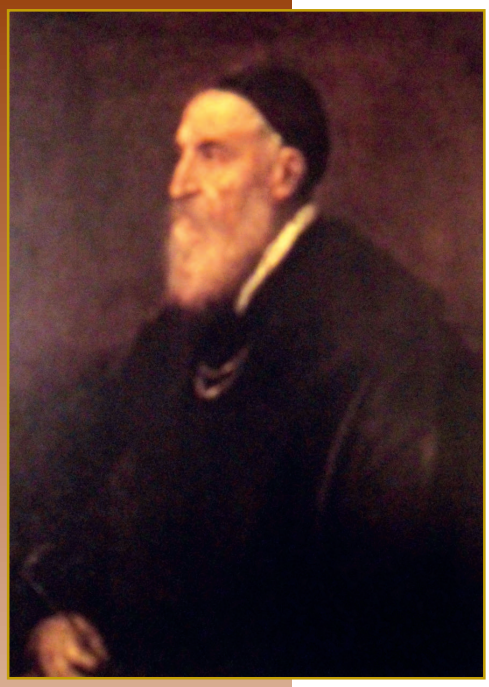


Fig. 659: Self-Portrait, c.1565-70; oil on canvas – Titian

Fig. 660: Man with a quilted sleeve, c.1510-70; oil on canvas – Titian

Fig. 661: La Schiavona (The Dalmatian Woman, c.1510-12; oil on canvas – Titian

Fig. 662: Madonna with Saints and Members of the Pesaro Family, c.1519-26; oil on canvas – Titian

Then came orders from the Holy See under Pope Paul III. However, Titian's most prestigious association was with Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (7) and his son Philp II of Spain: he became the chief painter for the imperial court and was made Count Palatine and Knight of the Golden Spur – an unprecedented honour for an artist.

In his later years, starting in the 1550s, Titian began to paint in a much looser technique, foregoing descriptive detail in favour of more impressionistic renditions. Even as a very old man in the late 1560s and early 1570s, he remained an innovator, pushing his Art to the edge of abstraction in works such as *The Flaying of Marsyas*. Vasari wrote of Titian's late works that they '*are executed with bold, sweeping strokes, and in patches of colour, with the result that they cannot be viewed from nearby, but appear perfect at a distance … The method he uses is judicious, beautiful, and astonishing, for it makes pictures appear live and painted with great Art, but it conceals the labour that has gone into them'.* Titian's painterly approach would influence artists well into the seventeenth century.

Fig. 663: Emperor Charles V at Mühlberg, c.1548; oil on canvas – Titian

3.9 DRAWINGS PORTRAY INDIVIDUALITY AND INTIMACY

Drawing is in many ways the most individual and intimate of the visual arts. During the fifteenth century, artists – encourage by the greater availability and lower cost of paper – were able to capture ephemeral events or natural phenomena in ways impossible in formal paintings, and to explore new artistic forms and ideas.

Drawing became an important part of the formal training of young artists during the Renaissance, helping to develop hand-eye coordination and to teach basic skills such as the use of light and shadow to create relief. The growing accessibility of affordable paper – made from pulped linen from old clothes and hemp from ropes – occurred at the same time as a shift away from the medical acceptance of established models and patterns towards individualistic artistic approaches. Artists were encouraged to experiment with variations in composition, pose and setting, and the immediacy and relative fluency of drawing, especially in pen and ink, help to accelerate the inventive process. The compositions of many iconic Renaissance paintings, for example Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, Mantegna's frescos in the Palazzo Ducale in Milan and Piero della Francesca's Flagellation, were probably conceived and developed in now-lost drawings. Drawing from the life also trained artists to make the mental leaps needed to rotate variants of a pose in the mind before sketching them on paper.

Fig. 664: St John the Baptist Preaching, c.1430-55; metalpoint, pen and brown ink on vellum – Jacopo Bellini

Drawings that were intended to be seen outside the artist's studio included portrait drawings, contract drawings (which served as a visual record of the agreed appearance of a finished work) and presentation drawings – finished pieces intended to stand as works of Art in their own right. These might be handed down to successors and heirs or presented as gifts, and by the sixteenth century they became saleable commodities among collectors.

Metalpoint, also called silverpoint, was commonly used for drawing on prepared vellum: a line of soft metal, usually silver, from a stick was drawn on the rough surface of the skin. Corrections were difficult to make, and tonal range could only be achieved by the density of lines. The technique declined steeply after 1500, at the same time that oil painting began to supersede tempera painting in Italy. Working in tempera required much the same planning and method of blending separate lines and colours as metalpoint, whereas painting in oils offered the artist much more freedom and variety of tonal contrasts – as did drawing in soft chalks or pen and ink washes.

Black chalk was made from a soft carboniferous schist and red chalk from clay containing iron oxide; charcoal was also used. Chalk was commonly employed for finished drawings, whereas quill pens and ink were popular for sketching. The brown ink of surviving drawings would originally have been deep black, made from the chemically unstable iron-gall. Thin ink washes could be applied for shadows, and lead white for highlights.

Fig. 665: Allegory of Abundabce or Autumn, c.1480-85; black and red chalk, pen and brown ink, brown wash heightened with white lead wash on paper – Sandro Botticelli

Fig. 666: Anfrea Quaratesi, c.1531; black chalk, on paper – Michelangelo Buonarroti

Fig. 667: Annunciation, c.1522-25; pen and black ink, grey wash with white gouache highlights, squared with red chalk on pink-washed paper – Correggio

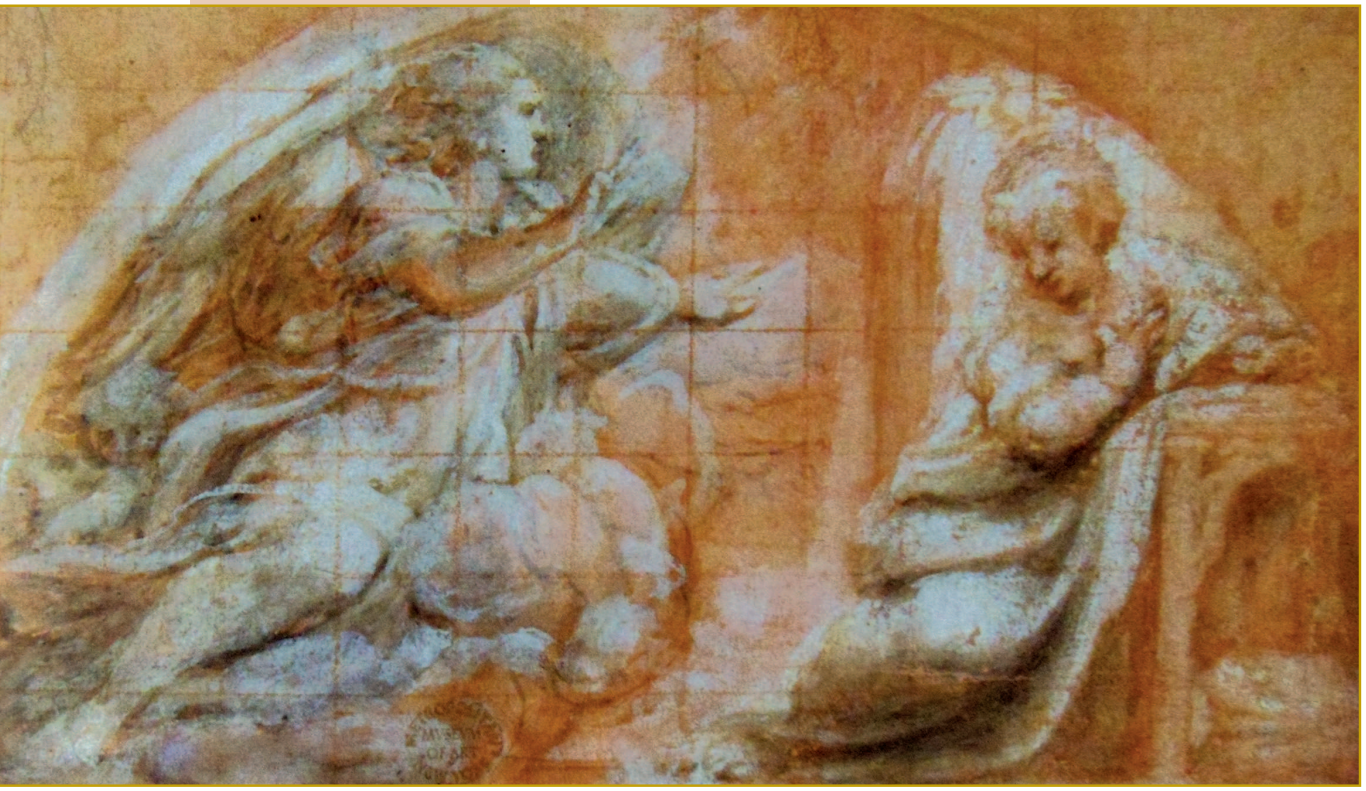


Fig. 668: Study for the head of Julius Ceasar, c.1520-21; red chalk on paper – Andrea del Sarto

Fig. 669: Dream of Human Life, c.1533; black chalk on paper – Michelangelo Buonarroti

Fig. 670: Temptation of St Anthony, c.1552; pen and brown ink, heightened with white gouche or tinted paper– Paolo Veronese.

3.10 MANNERISM

The word Mannerism comes from the Italian *maniera*, meaning 'style' or 'manner', but the application of this label to sixteenth-century Italian Art has long been problematic. It has been used to refer to a style of Art that broke away from High Renaissance ideals of harmony and a rational approach to painting, sculpture and architecture, to embrace exaggerated forms, elongated proportions and more intense colours. It has also been used more generally, and rather vaguely, to describe a period that followed the Renaissance and preceded the Baroque.

Between around 1510 and 1520 Florentine artists began to create paintings with elongated figures that were precariously balanced and inhabited irrational settings illuminated by theatrical light effects. At the same time, in Rome, such artists as Parmigianino and Giulio Romano introduced exaggerated tension into their paintings, drawing inspiration not from the direct observation of nature, as their predecessors had done, but from the study of dramatic Hellenistic sculpture that was being unearthed around Rome. Michelangelo was a Mannerist artist par excellence, as is evident from his twisting Ignudi (male nudes) and colossal sybils on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, painted in intense pastel colours and framed by exuberant architectural elements. *Maniera* artists held Michelangelo as their prime examplar.

Fig. 671: Perseus and Andromeda, c.1570; oil on slade– Giorgio Vasari.

Fig. 672: Madonna of the Long Neck, c.1534-40; oil on panel– Parmigianino

Fig. 673: Allegory with Venus and Cupid, mid-1540s; oil on panel– Agnolo Bronzino

Many Mannerist artists liked to play intellectual games in their works, including in the quotations from literature and other artworks for their educated clients to recognize and appreciate. Working largely for courts and the intellectual elites of Europe, Mannerist artists combined in their creations attenuated elegance with exquisite attention to surface and detail, characteristics that perfectly suited their sophisticated patrons.

The artists exhibited here all produced paintings in the Mannerist idiom for princely and aristocratic patrons. They also made this visual language fashionable abroad. A number of the earliest Mannerist artists who had been working in Rome during the 1520's fled the city after its sack by the imperial troops of Charles V in 1527. As they fanned out across the continent in search of new employment, they carried the Mannerist style throughout Italy and Europe. Although Mannerism went out of fashion in Italy by the end of the sixteenth century, it continued elsewhere well into the seventeenth century. In France, where Rosso Florentino worked for the French court at Fontainebleau, it came to be known as the "Henry II' style. Mannerism was also embraced at the court of Rudolf II of Prague and in the cities of Haarlem and Antwerp in the Netherlands.

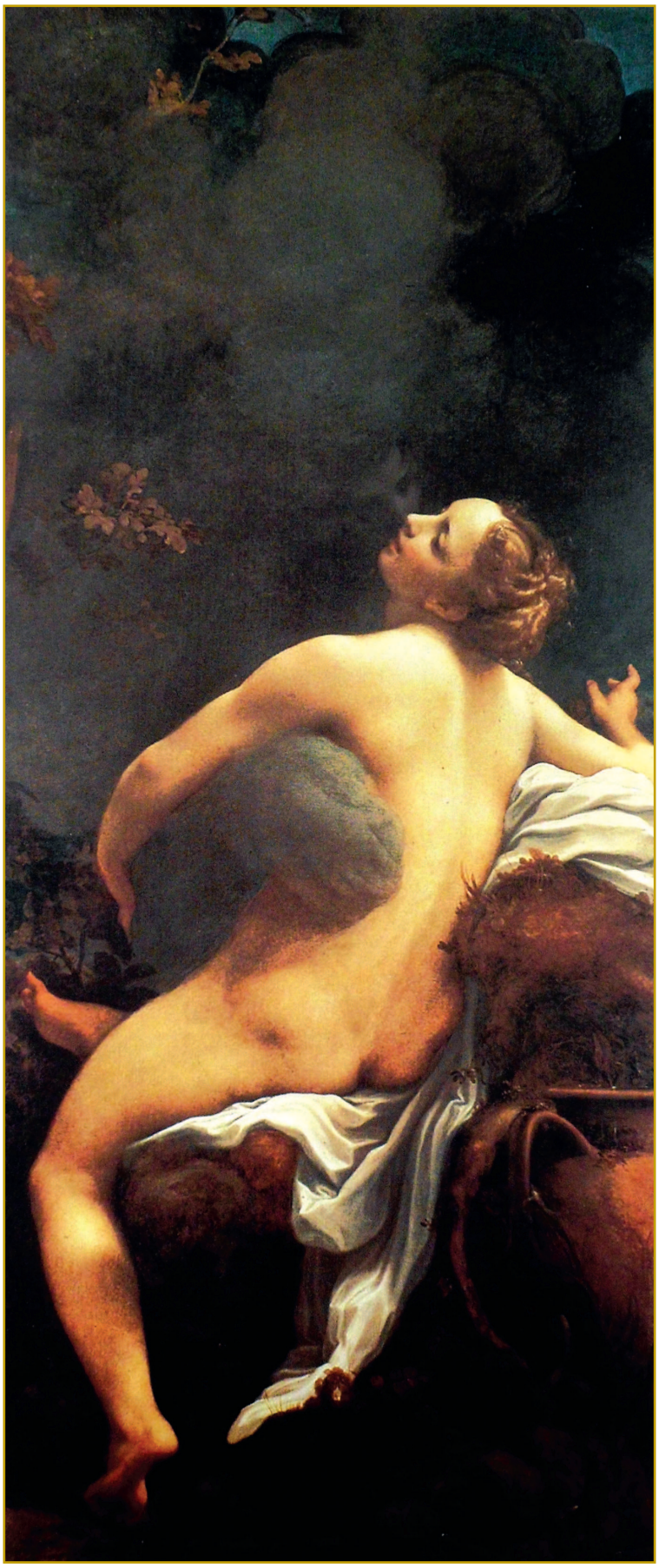


Fig. 674: Jupiter and Io, early-1530s; oil on canvas– Correggio

3.11 MANNERIST PORTRAITS

Like other types of Mannerist paintings, portraits in this style are distinguished by elegance and virtuosity, dynamic poses, intense lighting, and an overall bravura that endows the sitters with a palpable aura of pride.

Sitters in Mannerist portraits often seem to be caught in a moment of turning towards the viewer, considering whether to address him or her, then deciding to preserve a certain distance. These portraits also tend to include objects that signal something about the identity or profession of the sitter, and so immortalize not only appearance but also accomplishments in various spheres of life. Many of these likenesses were produced for rulers, courtiers and other aristocrats, and answered their taste for sophistication and social distinction. They embodied and reflected their owners' refinement and exclusivity. Hung in the sitters' residences, these portraits offered them and their guests an idealized and flattering view.

One of the pre-eminent Mannerist portraitists was Agnolo Bronzino, official painter at the court of the Medici dukes of Florence. His elegant, cool, precise and aloof depictions perfectly suited the aims of Cosimo I and his wife Eleanora of Tolede, that of projecting their authority and asserting their superiority.

Fig. 675: Man in Armour, 1512; oil on canvas – Sebastiano del Piombo

Fig. 676: Gian Galeazzo Sanvitale, 1524; oil on panel – Parmigianino

Fig. 677: Giovan Pietro Maffeis, c.1560-65; oil on canvas – Giovanni Battista Moroni

Fig. 678: Laura Battiferri, c.1560; oil on panel – Agnolo Bronzino

Fig. 679: Cosimo I, c.1543; tempera on panel – Agnolo Bronzino

Fig. 680: Portrait of a woman inspired by Lucretia c.1530-32; oil on canvas – Lorenzo Lotto

Fig. 681: Eleanora of Toledo, c.1543; oil on panel – Agnolo Bronzino

Bronzino paid great attention to the particular attributes of ducal power, his armour, her costly garments and jewels. At the same time he created an emotional distance between his subjects and the beholder, making the duke and the duchess majestic and inaccessible.

Venetian-trained Lorenzo Lotto worked mostly outside the city (whose aristocrats favoured Titian), painting numerous upper-class portraits in characteristically saturated colours. His likenesses often included objects that revealed his sitters' achievements, interests or morals, and clearly indicated their success and self-satisfaction. Lotto's portraits, in contrast to those of Bronzino, also manage to convey the personality and to some extend the psychology of the men and women before him. He was one of the most individualistic painters of his time.

Parmigianino produced portraits throughout his career, creating imaginative and vivid images of his subjects and sometimes including a self-portrait reflected in a convex mirror. He was widely admired as a portraitist, and Vasari specifically praised his paintings in *Lives of the Artists*. Giovanni Battista Moroni built his career on elegantly realistic portraits of aristocrats, churchmen, humanists and government officials in northern Italy. His images offered sophisticated psychological insight, while endowing their sitters with great dignity. The paintings also masterfully captured the material world of his subjects.

3.12 GIULIO ROMANO: PALAZZO DEL TÈ

Giulio Romano was Raphael's most brilliant pupil. He had worked with his teacher at the papal apartments in the Vatican as well as the Villa Farnesina in Rome, before being lured to Mantua by its Gonzaga rulers on the personal recommendation of Baldassare Castiglione, author of *The Book of the Courtier*. The Conzaga got in Giulio the most creative mind of his generation, who produced for them a lasting and truly unique masterpiece.

The Palazzo del Tè, the pleasure of the Gonzaga on the outskirts of the city, was where Duke Federico came to rest and play. He stabled his horses here, and Giulio (c.1499-1546) depicted the noble beasts in individual portraits in one hall of the Palazzo. Federico also kept his mistress here, and another room was painted by Giulio with sensual and lavish scenes illustrating the love of Cupid and Psyche. The most remarkable space in the palazzo, however, was the Sala dei Giganti, the Hall of the Giants.

Created for a visit by Emperor Charles V, it reproduced in fresco the court spectacles staged for the eminent guest, during which stories from ancient mythology were enacted, with stage machinery hosting actors up an down from the heavens.

In the Sala dei Giganti, painted as one continuous scent from floor to ceiling, Giulio depicted the Fall of the Giants from Mount Olympus. Gods and goddesses, seated on clouds, crowd in a circle below the painted *baldacchino* from which Zeus, in his bodily form, hurls down thunderbolts at the Giants who had dared challenge him. All around the viewer the fictive Architecture of the room crumbles, and columns and lintels fall, crushing the Giants and threatening to take down the human onlookder as well. The effect is at once unsettling and fascinating.

Giulio's frescos were as playful as they were clever. The painted circular dome at the centre of the ceiling recalls the room in the main Ganzaga palace in town decorated by Andrea Mantegna, who also created an illusionistic oculus overhead with a number of figures peering down from around it. At the same time, Giulio poked fun at the seriousness of much antique-revival Art by making the Classical subject seem grotesque, the figures ugly and the dignified Roman architecture unstable and perishable.

Giulio brought this extravagant flaunting of reverence for Classical Art to other parts of the palazzo as well. In the courtyard facade he juxtaposed finished and unfinished forms, mixed architectural orders, made triglyph blocks slip from their place in the frieze, placed a pediment below the architrave, and left blank spaces where metopes should go. Nothing like this existed in contemporary Art, and to this day Giulio's creations delight visitors to the Palazzo del Tè.

Fig. 682: The gods on Mount Olympus and the Fall of the Giants, c.1532-34; fresco – Giulio Romano

3.13 SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SCULPTURE: CELLINI AND GIAMBOLOGNA

The Sixteenth-century Italian sculptors had mastered the Classical forms rejuvenated by their colleagues in the previous century and could now play with them in a free and more creative way. Benvenuto Cellini and Giambologna, two sculptors working in Florence under the Medici, represent the advances and the imagination of artists in this era, and their mastery in handling both stone and bronze.

Cellini was the most colourful artistic personality of the age, and the most resolute about his activities. He recorded his experiences in his *Autobiography* (begun 1588), which is as colourful as it is subjective. He possessed neither modesty nor a calm personality, he got into endless fights and scrapes with the law, killed four people, was imprisoned and daringly escaped. A touchy ego, he complained repeatedly on his belief that his genius was not sufficiently recognized and always stated the superiority of his creations over those of any other artist.

In Cellini's bronze *Perseus* the ancient hero has just slain the Gorgon Medusa and holds out her head before him, blood dripping from her neck. Medusa's lifeless body, with more blood gushing from the split arteries, lies below his feet. Perseus' body is that of a Classical nude, but it is depicted with a subtle twisting that invites the viewer to walk around the sculpture and admire its different aspects.

Fig. 683: Perseus, c.1545-54; bronze – Benvenuto Cellini

Fig. 684: Rape of the Sabines, c.1579-83; marble – Giambologna

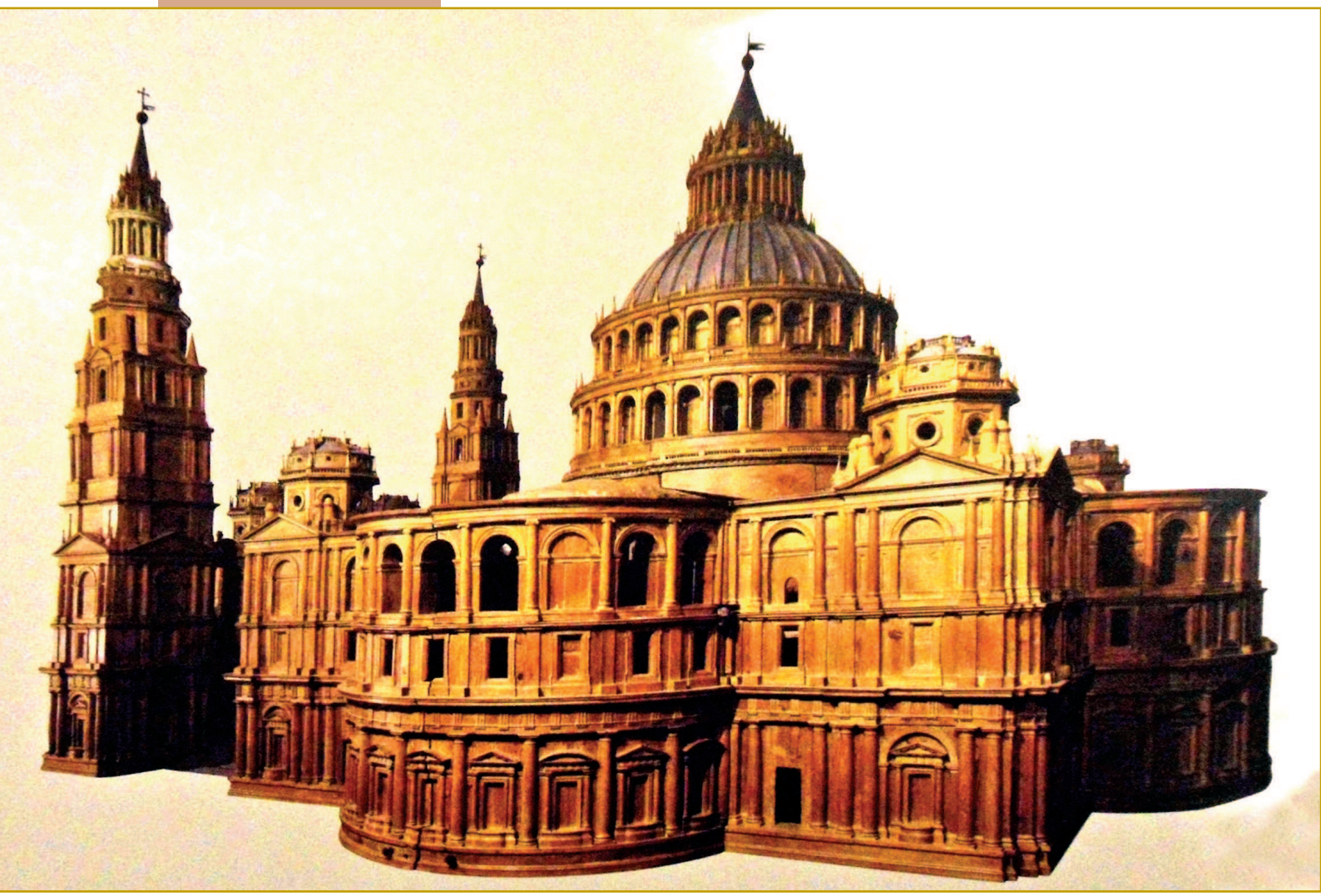
It was a great technical challenge for Cellini to cast this figure in such a way that the flowing metal flow from the Medusa head, held in a raised arm, reach the toe of Perseus's foot. He succeeded admirably and described his process in detail in his Autobiography. Flattering his patron Cosimo I de' Medici (1519-74), Cellini added an inscription to the vase, explaining the fact that the group refers to the Medici as saviours who freed the republic from tyrants.

Giambologna was less of a hothead than Cellini. Born in Douai in Flanders, he moved to Italy as a young man, occupied himself in the study of the Italian style and the works of Donatello, Ghiberti, Michelangelo and contemporary masters, and built a successful career in Florence. Giambologna was fascinated by the expressive possibilities of movement in sculpture, its formal elements mattering to him more than the story.

He began the piece called the *Rape of the Sabines* as a free invention intended to solve a complex compositional challenge. When he was asked about the subject of the group, he thought it could be Paris and Helen, or Pluto and Prosepina, or Phineus and Andromeda. His mentor, Raffaello Borghini, suggested that it looked more like the Rape of the Sabines, and so the piece was named thereafter.

For Giambologna, the point of the statue was to show the coiled energy within the spiralling figures, and the power contained within the male and female bodies. Gian Lorenzo Bernini would draw inspiration from Giambologna in creating compositions such as *Apollo* and *Daphne*.

Fig. 685: St Peter's Basilica, c.1539-45; wood – Antonio da Sangallo the Younger



4. CONCLUSION

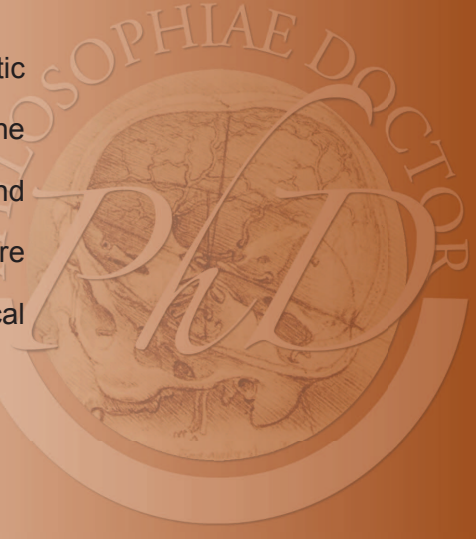
The Renaissance marks the switch in European history from the close of the Middle Ages to the dawn of the modern world. The term 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth' and refers to a revived interest in the intellectual and artistic treasures of ancient Greece and Rome. Works by classical authors such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and Homer, which had fallen into obscurity in the West, were rediscovered, and a new humanistic outlook blossomed, that highlighted humanity and human achievement.

Although by no means a rejection of theological scholarship – Christian worship and symbology continued to inspire Renaissance artists – this approach was out of step with the teachings of the medieval church, which had insisted that humankind could achieve nothing without God's help. The rediscovery of the classical world radically altered the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture in Italy. Roman history and mythology were explored for subject matter. Devotional Art – flat and linear in the Middle Ages – became more naturalistic, reflecting closer observation of the human form and nature along with the development of artistic techniques such as perspective. Although no single factor can explain the unrivalled artistic flowering that Florence experienced in the early 1400s, there were key contributions by Brunelleschi in architecture, Donatello in sculpture and Masaccio in painting.

During this period of great artistic innovation, the Medici family came to dominate the politics and life of the city of Florence. By 1478 Lorenzo had complete control of the city, and through his diplomacy and political skill, gave Florence a period of relative stability until his death in 1492. His support and patronage enabled this period of intense artistic activity to continue, reaching its height in the late 15th century with the work of artists such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564).

By the close of the century, a number of factors, including the death of Lorenzo, the extravagance of the Florentine middle class and the invasion of Charles VIII of France, saw the centre of artistic patronage shift to Rome, heralding a new period in Art history – the High Renaissance.The papal capital had two formidable cultural assets: it's Christian heritage and its classical Roman past. Both made Roman a magnet for artists and scholars from all over Italy and Europe.

The artists of the High Renaissance shared the humanistic philosophy that placed man and human achievement at the centre of all things. Their outlook is illustrated by the drawings and anatomical studies of Leonardo da Vinci. As patrons became more knowledgeable about the ancient city, they requested classical mythologies and ornamentation in their commissions.



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