

SECTION II: CHRISTIAN THEMES



Christian themes acquired a new human dimension during the Renaissance, as artists began to set biblical subjects in the contemporary world. The incidental details of daily life became as intriguing for painters to record as the religious messages. The saints and prophets who had long been the subjects of their work were now imbued with human emotional reactions and an intensity of feeling not seen in painting of an earlier era. The widespread veneration of Mary was reflected in the many paintings depicting aspects of her life, notably the Annunciation and the Nativity. Here, too, she was no longer the remote, otherworldly figure of Byzantine art. Patron saints and Old Testament heroic figures such as David and Judith also became popular subjects of Renaissance painting, often taking on political overtones in the power struggles of the Renaissance rulers and city-states.

Jan van Eyck
 (Yon van **Ike**)
 Netherlandish (c. 1390–1441)
The Annunciation, c. 1434/1436
 Oil on wood transferred to canvas,
 35 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{7}{8}$
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Van Eyck sets his Annunciation in a church—a long-established tradition in northern miniatures—but his innovative use of the oil technique allowed him to achieve a more naturalistic rendering of an interior space and also to capture its atmosphere through subtle gradations of light.

Mary stands in the nave, attired in the blue cloak of humility, before a table on which a Bible is resting. Near her are several white lilies, traditional symbols of her purity. The archangel Gabriel, regally dressed, greets Mary with the words in Latin from the gospel of Luke, “Hail, full of grace.” Mary’s reply, also in Latin and written in gold letters, is “Behold, the handmaiden of the Lord.” (Her words are presented upside down, presumably so that they can be read in heaven.) Christian theology posits Mary as the intermediary between God and mankind, so in Van Eyck’s composition she stands directly beneath a stained-glass window depicting God the Father and in back of a small footstool, which may refer to the



words of God through the prophet Isaiah, “The earth is my footstool.” According to Scripture, the miraculous conception occurred as the Holy Spirit came upon Mary. Van Eyck has painted a dove (symbol of the Holy Spirit) descending from an upper window on seven golden rays, which symbolize the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. The light is a symbol of Christ entering the world.

The cathedral architecture also has symbolic meaning. The single stained-glass window is located in the older, Romanesque part of the building. Below it are three windows of clear glass and Gothic pointed arches. This stylistic difference represents the old order giving way to the new life in Christ; the Old Testament God above becomes the tripartite divinity of the Holy Trinity.

The composition includes many references to the Old Testament that serve as prefigurations of the entry of Christ into the world. Deep in shadow on the upper wall are murals depicting stories of Moses, who brought the covenant to the people of Israel just as Christ is bringing the new covenant to Christians. The tiled floor in the foreground depicts scenes from the lives of Samson and David, considered since the early Middle Ages to be Old Testament prototypes of Christ.

The extraordinary realism of northern Renaissance art finds full expression in Van Eyck’s painting. The glittering jewels and heavy brocade fabric of the angel’s robe are depicted with painstaking precision. The gleaming gold of the angel’s costume, the attention to the individual golden strands of his hair, and the luminous glow on his face all faithfully reproduce aspects of worldly reality, but these glowing surfaces may also be interpreted as a supernatural radiance, the divine light of Christ made present in the world at the Annunciation. (See profile on Van Eyck for further discussion of his work.)

Rogier van der Weyden
 (Rah-**j**er **van der Vy**-den)
 Netherlandish (1399/1400–1464)
Saint George and the Dragon, c. 1432/1435
 Oil on wood, 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{3}{8}$
 Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

This postcard-size painting depicts the popular medieval legend of Saint George and the Dragon as it is related in Jacopo da Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*. On his travels through Asia Minor in the third century, this Roman soldier, later martyred for his Christian faith, encounters a weeping princess whose kingdom is being devastated by a fierce dragon that has demanded the sacrifice of sheep and is devouring the town's children. Saint George, mounted on a white horse, slays the dragon, saving the princess and her kingdom. In a devotional image such as this work, Saint George, patron saint of England, Venice, and several other places in Europe, represents the triumph of the Christian faith over evil and paganism, as symbolized by the dragon.

This painting has been attributed to Rogier van der Weyden of Brussels, whose international fame in the fifteenth century equaled that of Jan van Eyck; his influence on younger painters was even greater. Despite renown in his own time, he did not follow Van Eyck's practice of signing and dating his work. As a result, all the paintings attributed to Van der



Weyden have been assigned on the basis of old documents and stylistic analysis. Some attributions, such as the *Saint George*, remain controversial, but its high quality and many of the stylistic elements seem to confirm it as an early work by this artist.

Before Van der Weyden developed his own style, which is characterized by an emphasis on line and surface pattern and highly emotional religious themes, he was experimenting with elements of the prevailing International Style as well as the styles of his teacher, Robert Campin of Tournai, and Van Eyck. The *Saint George* contains all these influences.

The compositional arrangement, the fantastic architecture of the castle, the pose of the horse, and the parenthetical mountains that rise on either side of the painting stem from the manuscript traditions of the International Style. The deep landscape, sailing ships, and contemporary half-timbered houses reflect work by Campin. The delight in rendering the effects of light—the reflections on Saint George's armor and the dragon's scales, the glowing embroidered gown, the reflections of the walled city in the water below—and the effects of **aerial perspective** in the distant horizon reveal Van Eyck's influence. However, the facial types and strong outlines of the rock formations and horse are important features of Van der Weyden's mature style. Whoever is responsible for this beautiful painting created an exquisite world of fantasy counterbalanced by trenchant observation of light that is true to nature.

Giovanni di Paolo di Grazia
 (Jee-oh-vah-nee dee Pow-loe dee
 Grat-zee-ah)
 Sinese (c. 1403-1482)
The Annunciation, c. 1445
 Oil on wood, 15¾ x 18¼
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

With its elongated figures, elegant contours, and rich surfaces, Giovanni di Paolo's *Annunciation* illustrates the continuing attraction of the International Style in fifteenth-century Siena. At the same time the artist shows his awareness of Renaissance experiments with linear perspective and the concern for realistic details. This work is thought to have been one of five panels adorning the lower part of a large, as yet unidentified, altarpiece. The central area portrays the archangel Gabriel announcing the impending birth of the Christ child to the Virgin Mary, who sits in a small chapel-like Gothic enclosure that reinforces the sacred nature of the event. Outside the house a garden in full bloom indicates that it is the spring season of the Annunciation. The vegetation and leaping rabbits symbolize the fertility of the earth and procreation, as opposed to the spiritual nature of the Annunciation.

This landscape also serves as an appropriate setting for the depiction, at the left, of Adam and Eve being ejected from the Garden of

Eden by a vengeful angel. The artist links the Expulsion to the Annunciation by means of the unifying figure of God the Father, who is seen at the upper left corner. He points out the disgrace of Adam and Eve while at the same time looking toward the Annunciation in anticipation of divine redemption.

Most artists of that period did not include Joseph in representations of the Annunciation in order to emphasize his physical separation from Mary at the time of the miraculous conception. In Giovanni's painting an elderly Joseph does appear, but he is separated from Mary by an architectural barrier. In his area of the picture a different season is also suggested; Joseph is shown warming his hands by the fire, an allusion to wintertime indicating the season of the approaching Nativity. In the original format, this would undoubtedly have been the subject of the adjacent panel. Inside the house the receding lines of the tiled floor, in both Joseph's and Mary's areas, attempt to define a deep three-dimensional space. The scene of the Expulsion, however, remains quite flat and two-dimensional, within the realm of the medieval pictorial tradition.

Giovanni di Paolo's work often reflects the style of his contemporaries, notably Gentile da Fabriano and Sassetta. Yet his ability to assimilate various influences and merge them into a unified personal style made him a significant figure in the history of Italian painting.



Fra Angelico (Frah An-jay-lee-coe)
and Fra Filippo Lippi
(Frah Fee-leep-poe Lee-pee)
Florentine (c. 1400–1455) and (c. 1406–1469)
The Adoration of the Magi, c. 1445
Tempera on wood, diameter: 54
Samuel H. Kress Collection

This painting is the product of a collaboration by the two leading Florentine painters of the mid-fifteenth century. Both men were members of monastic orders, but quite different in temperament. The saintliness of the Dominican friar, Fra Angelico (“angelic brother,” as nicknamed by his fellow friars), was in stark contrast to the undisciplined life of Fra Filippo Lippi, who was eventually asked to leave the Carmelite order. Art historians have long debated the extent of each artist’s contribution to the work. Most authorities now agree that Fra Filippo Lippi did the greater part of the work, completing the picture begun by Fra Angelico, who left it unfinished when he went to Rome in 1445.

The painting is thought to have belonged to the Medici family, who were the chief supporters of the Festa de’ Magi, a glittering procession held in Florence that dramatized the coming of the magi. The festive atmosphere of this painting may reflect the pagantry of a contemporary Festa.



This delightfully realistic version of one of the most popular subjects of the fifteenth century is in a circular format called a tondo. The crowd of figures radically diminishes in size to create the illusion of depth in space while conforming to the circular shape. The subtle use of **chiaroscuro** on the rich fabrics of the kings and the Holy Family makes the forms look solid and real. The depiction of the Virgin Mary is characteristic of Fra Angelico’s style: the pure, simple form of her head and the gentle refinement of her features. Her drapery falls in a beautiful series of curving folds. Other sections often attributed to Fra Angelico include the city scene to the right and the small figures at the end of the procession to the left.

The painting includes a wealth of realistic detail, from a mother with two small children on the far right, raising her arms in astonishment as the cavalcade of people approaches, to the depiction of blacksmiths busily at work in a stable. In the varied positions and gestures of the people and the animals depicted, the artists had ample opportunity to utilize the device of **foreshortening**, the representation of objects projecting forward or receding in space.

According to sacred history, the Epiphany is of great significance in the universal drama of human salvation. The three kings represent pagan mankind from all parts of the earth acknowledging the divinity of Christ. Many details in this painting are derived from the large body of secular and sacred texts that had appeared by the fifteenth century. For example, the motif of the king kissing the Christ child’s foot comes from a thirteenth-century text by Saint Bonaventure. Medieval bestiaries and herbals also provided appropriate symbolic details: the peacock perched on the stable symbolizes immortality; the seed-filled pomegranate held by the child signifies the diversity of souls unified by the Church.

Andrea del Castagno
 (Ahn-**dray**-ya del Kah-**stahn**-yo)
 Florentine (1417/1419–1457)
The Youthful David, c. 1450
 Oil on leather mounted on wood,
 45½ x 30¼ to 16⅞
 Widener Collection

Although Andrea del Castagno was one of the most innovative artists of his day, little is known about his life. He came from a small mountain village near Florence and was active in Tuscany and in Venice. At a relatively young age he died in a plague that swept Florence in 1457.

Andrea's *Youthful David* is unique in Renaissance art because it is the only known example of a painted shield that can be attributed to a great master and also because it is decorated with a narrative scene rather than with a coat of arms. With its remarkable combination of realism and symbolism, it has been cited as one of the first great action pictures of the Renaissance.

The Old Testament hero David had a special significance for the citizens of Florence. The shepherd boy who, with a single stone, killed the mighty giant, Goliath, paralleled the triumph of Florence over the superior forces of Milan in 1402. Thereafter, David became the symbol of political liberty and one of the

most frequently used subjects in Florentine Renaissance art. Among the great artists who depicted the hero were Michelangelo, Donatello, and Verrocchio.

As in many early Renaissance paintings, the action and its outcome are rendered simultaneously. Here David has loaded his sling with a stone in preparation for attacking Goliath, yet the giant's head already lies at his feet. The artist's close observation of the human form is clearly evident in this painting. To suggest the roundness of the human body, Andrea modeled the figure in light and shadow. He articulated the muscles and veins of the arms and legs, adding powerful activity in David's running posture and windblown garments. Although it is very likely that Andrea carefully observed his fellow Florentines in action, he may also have known ancient statues depicting vigorous movement.

Intended for display in a pageant rather than for protection, the shield is made of leather stretched over a wooden frame. The figure of David fills the space, which would have made him easily visible when the shield was carried through the streets. It may have been used during civic ceremonies or religious festivals in Florence, or possibly was used as a sign of authority by a citizen chosen to govern one of the smaller cities in Tuscany.



Sandro Botticelli
 (Sahn-droe Bot-tee-**chel**-lee)
 Florentine (1444/1445-1510)
The Adoration of the Magi, early 1480s
 Tempera on wood, 27 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 41
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

For Botticelli, as for other Florentine artists of his day, the story of the three magi held special interest in a city that celebrated the Epiphany with a great festival. Many artists appropriated these festival processions as the focus of their paintings, placing the Holy Family off to one side. In this painting, however, attention is centered on the adoration of the Christ child.

By the late fifteenth century attitudes had changed. The Church had grown increasingly critical of the luxurious lifestyles and worldly concerns of the Florentines, especially the Medici and other wealthy merchants. Saint Antoninus and Fra Girolamo Savonarola preached sermons advocating a simpler, more saintly and penitential way of life. A few years before Botticelli painted this work, the elaborate Epiphany festivals had been discontinued by the sponsoring religious confraternity, which instead turned to more devotional activities. Botticelli's painting may thus be seen as a pictorial sermon directed to this audience.

The mood is one of quiet reverence, not pagantry, although Botticelli has not eliminated the procession. The people winding their way toward the Holy Family are elaborately dressed, but their attention is focused on the Christ child as they reverently clasp their hands. One is also led to view this scene as a devotional image because of the priestly stance of the kings. Two of them hold veils draped over their hands in the manner of priests celebrating the Mass.

Botticelli is thought to have executed this painting in Rome, where he worked briefly at the invitation of Pope Sixtus VI. The ancient temples he saw there undoubtedly influenced the classical motifs in this work, such as the structure dominating the middle of the composition where the Holy Family is positioned. These classical ruins can also be understood symbolically as the ruins of the pagan world out of which Christ's kingdom on earth will grow, just as the saplings sprout out of the stone.



Andrea Mantegna
 (Ahn-**dray**-ya Mahn-**tayn**-ya)
 Paduan (1431–1506)
Judith and Holofernes, c. 1495
 Oil on wood, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$
 Widener Collection

The story of Judith and Holofernes, like that of David and Goliath, had a special appeal for the people of Renaissance Italy. Wars between neighboring city-states were frequent, requiring all the courage and cunning that could be mustered to assure independence. These were the very qualities displayed by Judith, a young Israelite widow who saved her city from being destroyed by the attacking Assyrian army. According to the Old Testament Apocrypha, Judith and her attendant entered the enemy camp, where she convinced the Assyrian general, Holofernes, that she had betrayed her people. Charmed by the beauty of the young widow, Holofernes held a feast in her honor, at which he drank too much and fell into a stupor. Left alone in his tent, Judith used his sword to sever his head, which she placed in a sack. Then she and her attendant fled, whereupon the Israelites defeated the Assyrians, in disarray because of their leader's death.



Mantegna, who depicted the Judith theme several times, ignores the gruesome aspects of the story here. Judith stands calmly, showing no emotion after the deed is done. Her Roman-style coiffure, white gown, and sandals and her **contrapposto** stance are reminiscent of an antique statue.

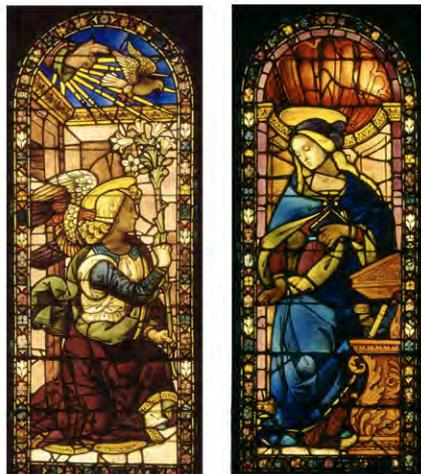
Mantegna's composition emphasizes the heroine's grandeur. She and her attendant are framed by the triangular dark opening of the tent, reflecting the Renaissance principle of classical order. The geometric form of the tent's outline serves as a foil to the central action. In posing Judith's attendant stooping over to hold the sack for her mistress, Mantegna gives further emphasis to Judith's physical stature, contributing to her domination of the composition.

Andrea Mantegna was an independent artist in the university town of Padua by the age of nineteen. In 1459 he was appointed official painter to the ruling Gonzaga family at Mantua. It was at the court of Francesco Gonzaga and his wife, Isabella d'Este, that Mantegna painted this picture.

Giovanni di Domenico
 (Joe-oh-**vahn**-ce dec Doe-**men**-ee-ko)
 Florentine (active c. 1500)
The Angel of the Annunciation and
The Virgin Annunciate, c. 1500
 Stained glass, each 78½ x 31
 Widener Collection

This pair of arched windows depicting the Annunciation was made for the Church of Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi in Florence, where they adorned the choir chapel behind the high altar. The left window, *The Angel of the Annunciation*, shows the archangel Gabriel telling Mary of the impending birth of Jesus, while the companion window, *The Virgin Annunciate*, depicts Mary receiving the news with calm humility.

Archival records indicate that a priest known as Giovanni di Domenico “de vreti” (“of the glass windows”) was paid for “two windows made in the choir with figures.” It is thought that he may have belonged to the Gesuati order, which was famous for its stained-glass workshop on the outskirts of Florence. While the windows are clear evidence that Giovanni was a skillful glazier, the fact that he was paid for this work does not prove that he also designed them. His name cannot be linked with any other surviving figural windows, and



in Italy the craftsmen who made stained-glass windows were often working from designs by other artists, some of whom were famous painters or sculptors.

The designer’s anonymity here is particularly intriguing, as the figural style of the windows bears resemblance to works by major Florentine painters of the late fifteenth century. Several features, such as Mary’s long blond hair and headdress, suggest a special appreciation for the art of Filippino Lippi, while the pose and lowered right hand of Mary recall Botticelli’s *Annunciation* altarpiece. The arrangement of the figures’ garments and their colors have some similarities to Ghirlandaio’s *Annunciation* fresco at the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

Although stained-glass pictorial windows were being made in Europe as early as the ninth century, they gained new importance from Gothic and Renaissance philosophers. According to the Neoplatonists of the fifteenth century, truth or reality was manifested in pure form in the mind of God and could be seen and known to man only as reflections. Light was regarded as the noblest of these reflections, conveying insight into both spiritual and physical being. Thus stained-glass windows depicting Bible stories, through which the sun illuminated a church interior, became the means for intellectual illumination of the mind and moral illumination of the soul.

Raphael (Rah-fay-el)
 Umbrian (1483–1520)
The Alba Madonna, c. 1510
 Oil on wood transferred to canvas,
 diameter: 37¼
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

What separates the art of Raphael and other painters of the High Renaissance from the major accomplishments of the fifteenth century is a more highly developed integration of figures in a three-dimensional space. Raphael adopted Leonardo's subtle nuances of shadows and highlights and Michelangelo's complex groupings of figures, often combining these elements in an atmosphere of total repose and tranquillity. By comparison, a fifteenth-century work such as Fra Angelico's *Adoration of the Magi* seems composed of separate, isolated parts.

The Alba Madonna—so named because it was once owned by the Spanish dukes of Alba—was probably painted for private devotional use rather than for a church. The **tondo** form lends the work a majestic dimension, which is enhanced by the arrangement of the three figures in a triangle. The forms rhythmically interlock; for example, the Christ child's arm and that of his mother are parallel.



Raphael's setting for the painting is the peaceful Roman countryside. Mary is portrayed as a Madonna of Humility, seated on the ground rather than regally enthroned as the Queen of Heaven. The young Saint John the Baptist holds the symbol of Christ's death, a thin reed cross, which the Christ child reaches out to grasp. Adding to the spiritual implications of the painting are the plants in the foreground: the dandelion near Christ a bitter herb that symbolizes his suffering and death on the cross; the violet near Mary that signifies her humility. Raphael's admiration for ancient sculpture is reflected in his depiction of the three figures. Their bodies are not those of ordinary mortals but rather possess the weighty, solid form and ideal beauty of classical art.

Born in Urbino and apprenticed to Perugino, Raphael lived in Florence from 1504 to 1508, where he observed the work of Leonardo and Michelangelo. He went to Rome about 1508, where he soon became the principal artist working in the Vatican for Pope Julius II, with the exception of Michelangelo, who was then painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Raphael's extraordinary ability, along with his delightful temperament, won him the close friendship of high-ranking members of the papal court. When he died at the age of thirty-seven, the renowned scholar Cardinal Bembo wrote the epitaph for his tomb:
*This is Raphael's tomb, while he lived he made
 Mother Nature / Fear to be Vanquished by him
 and, as he died, to die too.*

Albrecht Dürer
 (AI-brekt Dure-er)
 German (1471–1528)
Saint Jerome in His Study, 1514
 Engraving, 9 ⁹/₁₆ x 7 ³/₈
 Rosenwald Collection

Saint Jerome lived a life of penitence and scholarship in Palestine and Rome in the fourth century A.D. During the Renaissance he was frequently shown either as a penitent in the desert or, as in Albrecht Dürer's engraving, as the scholarly author of the first Latin translation of the Bible. Saint Jerome is recognizable by his attributes: a cardinal's hat and a lion, which, according to legend, became his devoted friend after Jerome pulled a thorn from the animal's paw.

Dürer, in one of the great masterpieces of engraving, chose to represent the saint in his study, imbuing the scene with a peculiarly northern European warmth and coziness. As the saint labors over his biblical translation, sunlight streams through the bottle-glass windows, throwing exquisitely rendered shadows on the walls, picking out the subtle wood grain of the ceiling and highlighting the artfully arranged symbols that enrich the meaning of the work: the drowsy lion curled up beside a sleeping dog, the cardinal's hat on the wall,

the books on the bench, as well as the traditional symbols of the transience of life—the hourglass on the wall and the skull on the window ledge.

By this time in his career, Dürer had fully mastered linear perspective, which he manipulated here to create a greater sense of intimacy. The room recedes on a diagonal away from the picture plane, and the vanishing point is placed low, near the beads on the back wall. The viewer seems to look up into the room from one of the steps that drop off in front of the lion. To enhance the gentle ambience of the scene, Dürer eliminated sharp contrasts of light and dark, giving it instead a warm, even tonality and still managing to capture the characteristic texture of each individual object. With a remarkable control of the burin, Dürer achieved an unprecedented mastery of the medium of engraving. This control enabled him to create a tangible world of light, atmosphere, and space with the simple means of black and white lines. (For further information on the engraving process, see the section on Art Techniques.)



Sebastiano del Piombo
 (Seb-ah-stee-oh-noe del Pee-ahm-boe)
 Venetian (1485-1547)
A Prophet Addressed by an Angel, 1516/1517
 Black chalk with gray and brown wash,
 heightened with white on blue paper,
 squared in red chalk, 12 9/16 x 9 7/8
 Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith

This carefully worked drawing is a study for part of a chapel decoration in the Church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome, which was commissioned by Pierfrancesco Borgherini, a Florentine with business interests in Rome.

Beginning in the fifteenth century, with a growing supply of cheap paper, drawing became an essential part of the creative process, as artists first worked out on paper their ideas for commissioned works. Some artists worked out every detail, starting with rough compositional sketches, studies of individual figures and groups of figures, culminating in highly finished drawings, such as this one by Sebastiano, that would be enlarged to the scale of the final composition.

Sebastiano's drawing for the Borgherini Chapel is done in black chalk with gray and brown ink washes heightened with opaque white **gouache**. Like many artists of the Venetian school, he used a blue paper. The figure group in the drawing is squared in red



chalk so that the design could be enlarged and transferred to the wall. The modeling of the prophet is forceful and intense. Bold shadows describe the anatomy of the neck and hands and the sweeping folds of the drapery. Heightened by areas of white, the figure has a finished quality that indicates the last stages of preparation for the final painting.

Sebastiano's career is deeply intertwined with that of Michelangelo, who befriended the young Venetian painter when he arrived in Rome in 1511. Michelangelo had developed an energetic figural pose that is recalled in this prophet's contorted posture. For Michelangelo, such poses were an outward reflection of the inner anxiety and emotional struggle of the figure.

Although Sebastiano was greatly influenced by Michelangelo, his Venetian training—possibly under Bellini and Giorgione—contributed warmth to his figures. Also Venetian was Sebastiano's effort to merge his figures with their surroundings, closely observing how light falls on the body. This synthesis of Venetian and Roman artistic traditions was to become the hallmark of his mature style.

Drawing or design became increasingly important to Renaissance artists, not only because their intricate compositions, with perspective and foreshortening, required careful preparation, but also because of new attitudes. Leonardo compared drawing to the act of writing by poets, and Vasari considered drawing important because it was closer to the first thoughts of the artists than was painting. It is this new enlightened viewpoint that in large measure accounts for the wealth of Renaissance drawings that have survived.

SECTION III: CLASSICAL THEMES



The humanist culture of the Renaissance greatly widened the choice of subjects available to the artist and the patron. Themes from classical mythology began to figure prominently in Renaissance art and were soon commissioned, by popes and princes alike, as frequently as religious images. Although classical subjects appeared first in fifteenth-century Italy, where painters had more ready access to their antique heritage, by the early sixteenth century northern artists had also incorporated the myths of the ancient Greeks and Romans into their paintings.

The world of classical mythology provided a new body of symbols that gave expression to the humanist ideas of the period. The figure of Venus, for instance, came to represent not only the goddess of beauty but the Neoplatonic ideal of celestial love. Satyrs and other pagan figures symbolized a pre-Christian world in contrast to the enlightened thought of a humanist culture.

Printed translations of classical texts and illustrations were widely distributed throughout Europe and helped to fashion the taste for these themes. By the sixteenth century classical imagery was providing the decorative elements for even utilitarian objects such as **majolica** plates, bronze inkstands and lamps, and furniture.

Giovanni Bellini
(Joe-**vahn**-nee Bel-**ee**-nee) and
Tiziano Vecellio, known as Titian
(**Tih**-shun)
Venetian (c. 1427-1516) and
(c. 1490-1576)
The Feast of the Gods, 1514/1529
Oil on canvas, 67 x 74
Widener Collection

Duke Alfonso d'Este, ruler of one of the most brilliant courts in Italy, commissioned Bellini to paint *The Feast of the Gods* for his private study. The work was intended to be the central image of a decorative cycle including paintings by other major artists, all of them depicting classical bacchanalian themes.

Extensive scientific analysis has led to the conclusion that at least two artists worked on this painting, which was completed in three stages. The finished work combines the classical nobility of the original conception by Bellini (who was then in his eighties) and the more dramatic, vital qualities of Titian, his young colleague. X-ray studies reveal that Bellini originally painted a curtain of trees that created a shallow space for the figures. As repainted by Titian, a monumental rock form was substituted. This not only provided a more dynamic setting for the figures but also harmonized better with Titian's compositions hanging nearby in the duke's study.



The pagan deities depicted in the painting are classically noble and yet believable as ordinary mortals. Many are identified by their attributes. To the left of the composition, old Sylvanus, god of the forest, stands beside his donkey, while the young Bacchus, god of wine, pours wine from a barrel into a glistening glass pitcher. In the foreground, Mercury, messenger of the gods, is identified by his helmet and herald's staff. Beside him, Jupiter, king of the gods with his imperial eagle, drinks from a silver and gold chalice. In front of Jupiter, the woman holding a quince has been identified as Cybele, goddess of fertility, or possibly Amphitrite, goddess of the sea. Slyly gazing at her is Neptune, ruler of the sea, identified by the trident lying nearby on the ground. Ceres, the earth goddess, a wreath of wheat on her golden hair, holds the elbow of Apollo, who drinks from a goblet and holds a stringed instrument that identifies him as the patron of music. In the shadows behind the group is the figure of Pan, who plays his pipes for the Olympian gathering.

To the left of the composition are Priapus and Lotis. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the gods and goddesses were enjoying their feast when Priapus made advances on the chaste, unsuspecting Lotis. The donkey of Sylvanus brayed to awaken the sleepy, drunken celebrants, who condemned Priapus for his actions, and in revenge he demanded that a donkey be sacrificed to him every year.

The brilliance of the colors and the warm glow of natural light are hallmarks of the Venetian style of painting, carried to a distinctively high level of achievement in this work by Bellini and Titian.

Lucas Cranach the Elder
 (Loo-kus Krahn-ahk)
 German (1472-1553)
The Nymph of Spring, after 1537
 Oil on wood, 19 x 28¾
 Gift of Clarence Y. Palitz

A legend circulating in Germanic areas in the late fifteenth century told of an enchanted spring feeding into the Danube River, guarded by a slumbering nymph carved into the rock along with an inscription forbidding passers-by to disturb the spring or the nymph. The legend and the inscription, said to be “antique,” aroused great interest; people began to search far and wide for the spring, believing that they had discovered it in numerous locations, many not even remotely connected to the Danube River. Lucas Cranach the Elder employed this pagan tale as the basis for a series of paintings he began in 1518.

Early in his career Cranach was influenced by the circle of humanists he encountered in Vienna. His work of that period is suffused with naturalism, including sweeping views of the Danube landscape and monumentally conceived figures. By the 1520s, however, his art had changed to suit the courtly, mannered tastes of the Electors of Saxony, rulers of the northern German town of Wittenberg, where he finally settled. Cranach also employed his artistic skills to aid the religious reforms of his close friend and Wittenberg’s most famous

resident, Martin Luther. While Luther regarded art as a useful educational tool, many Protestants felt otherwise, believing all religious art to be idolatrous. Cranach, like most northern artists, was forced to turn increasingly to secular subject matter such as *The Nymph of Spring*.

In Cranach’s painting a lissome young woman, nude save for her jewelry and a filmy gauze transparently covering her thighs and head, rests on a carpet of grass and leaves. An elaborate court dress serves as a pillow for her head. Water arcs from a spring in a cave carved out of a cliff. A red-roofed town framed by the cliff and a tree fill the distant background. An abbreviated form of the “antique” poem inscribed in the upper left-hand corner reads: *I am the Nymph of the Sacred Spring. Do not disturb my sleep. I am resting.*

The original poem, actually written in the late fifteenth century, was well known in Europe and appeared frequently on contemporary Italian fountains decorated with slumbering nymphs. It has been suggested that Cranach was inspired by early Venetian paintings of Venus or by Italian prints. Despite this possibility and the classical or pagan subject matter, Cranach’s conception of the ideal nude is quite different from similar subjects by Italian artists. She is very Northern or Gothic in appearance: small head, tiny mouth, pointed chin, narrow shoulder, prominent abdomen, and elongated limbs. Her sidelong glance, curious smile, ribbons, necklace, and veil give her a sensuality that belies the inscribed admonition not to disturb her.



Titian
 (Tih-shun)
 Venetian (c. 1490–1576)
Venus with a Mirror, 1555
 Oil on canvas, 49 x 41½
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

The subject of *Venus with a mirror* was frequently used in Hellenistic and Roman art, but it was Titian who revived and popularized the theme during the Renaissance. Indeed no other painting of the High Renaissance has inspired so many copies and variations as this work. Titian himself returned to the theme several times, one version of which was owned by his greatest patron, Philip II.

In the frequent portrayals of Venus in the Renaissance and in the following centuries, the ancient goddess of love and ideal of feminine beauty served as a symbol of fertility in marriage, an object of erotic desire, or a vehicle for the contemplation of heavenly love, as taught in the philosophy of Neoplatonism. Titian's Venus was perhaps inspired by an antique statue known as the Medici Venus, which he might have seen during a trip to Rome in 1545. Even with this influence from classical antiquity, Titian's Venus has a beauty that is intensely human. Radiating physical vitality and a proud awareness of her charms, she is nonetheless such a monumental figure

that her Olympian origins are never in doubt. The perfect beauty and dignity of this figure are characteristic of Renaissance art.

Titian's Venetian orientation is strongly evident in this painting. The sumptuous colors and rich details of the composition reflect the Venetian taste for opulence. Venus sits on a silken couch, draped in a sable-trimmed velvet cloak. Her hair is adorned with pearls, her hands and wrists with sparkling gems. With remarkable facility, Titian was able to produce the look and feel of these different objects. The fine sable fur on Venus' robe was rendered with tiny brushstrokes, and thicker paint was used to suggest the heaviness of her velvet cloak. Thin, almost transparent oil glazes were used to achieve Venus' soft, translucent flesh. Keeping her company are two cupids: one holds a mirror so Venus can admire herself, while the other is about to crown her with a garland of flowers in tribute to her beauty.

The opulence of Titian's painting was not just a matter of precise rendering of luxurious accessories. His extraordinary ability to handle vibrant color and tonal variations is the key to his achievement. (See the profile on Titian for further discussion of his work.)



Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo
(Frahn-**ches**-koe **Zahn**-toe Ah-**vel**-cc
da Row-**vee**-go)

Urbino (active 1530/1542)

*Dish with Landscape Scene of the Death
of Laocoön and Sons*, 1539

Earthenware (majolica), 10 $\frac{3}{8}$
Widener Collection

This shallow majolica bowl is attributed to Francesco Xanto Avelli, who worked for many years in Urbino, a major center of majolica production in the sixteenth century. In the spirit of the times, Xanto was not only a ceramicist but a man with literary interests; he wrote poetry, read Petrarch and classical literature, and often chose classical themes and images for his painted decorations.

Reflecting Xanto's humanistic interests, this bowl is decorated with a scene from the Trojan War showing the death of Laocoön and is based on a contemporary engraving for Virgil's *Aeneid*. The story of Laocoön was of particular interest by the time Xanto began work on this bowl because of the discovery in Rome in 1506 of the ancient marble sculpture of the priest (now in the Vatican).

As recounted in the *Aeneid*, the Greek army attacking the city of Troy pretended to abandon the siege, leaving behind a great wooden horse that was secretly filled with soldiers.



Laocoön, priest of Neptune, warned the Trojans that the Greeks could not be trusted: "I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts." A short time later the goddess Minerva, who supported the Greeks, sent a monstrous serpent to strangle Laocoön and his two sons. Thereupon the Trojans pulled the horse inside the walls of the city, enabling the Greeks to sack Troy.

Xanto rarely developed a composition based on a single engraved source or book illustration. Instead he used a combination of figures taken from Raphael-school engravings and other sources; he would often alter the appearance of the figure, giving it his own distinctive stamp. For this majolica bowl, Xanto used an engraving by Marco da Ravenna, which was freely based on the famous antique sculpture of Laocoön, set on a seashore with altars and temples. In Xanto's expressive representation of the subject, the gigantic figure of Laocoön writhes in agony as the serpent surrounds him and his two young sons. The female figure on the left of the bowl is derived from an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi.

Majolica is a hand-painted, tin-glazed pottery that is characterized by bright colors and energetic design. The earliest examples of majolica from the thirteenth century are painted with the abstract or geometric patterns favored in the Islamic world. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries several towns in central Italy became centers of majolica production, including the town of Faenza (whose name supplied the similar French term *faïence*). Owing to its beauty and relatively low cost, majolica pottery was widely used for household objects during the Renaissance, as well as for decorative tiles in buildings. Bowls such as Xanto's, however, with their elaborate stories and classical imagery, may have been reserved for special occasions or display.

Circle of Andrea Riccio

(**Ree**-choc)

Paduan (c. 1470-1532)

Inkstand with Bound Satyrs and

Three Labors of Hercules, 1530-1540

Bronze, 9¾ (h)

Widener Collection

Small bronzes became increasingly popular among humanist patrons in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to the classical writer Pliny, ancient Etruscans and Romans had enjoyed small bronze sculptures and decorative objects in their homes. Interest in these objects was stimulated not only by classical literature but also by the fact that Renaissance excavations brought to light many small bronzes. Renaissance sculptors copied these ancient models, inventing new combinations of classical subjects and motifs. Especially in Padua, where interest in antiquity and archaeology remained strong throughout the Renaissance, the small bronze ornament came to embody many of the values of humanism.

This triangular inkstand designed for a scholar's desk was made in Padua, a major center for the production of small bronzes and the location of a great university. It was produced by an artist familiar with the works of Riccio and Moderno, two renowned makers who produced classicizing bronzes in abundance for

a learned humanist clientele. For this inkstand the artist used a classical motif of bound satyrs on the handle of the lid and at the three corners of the triangular base. In Neoplatonic thought the satyr, half-man and half-beast, represented the unenlightened pagan world before the dawn of Christianity. This mythical creature could also suggest the bestial nature of man, imprisoned in the body but longing for liberation to higher realms of thought.

The three rectangular reliefs depict scenes for the Labors of Hercules: Hercules and a Centaur, Cacus Stealing the Oxen of Hercules, and Hercules and the Oxen of Geryon. The compositions are each dynamically conceived, and even though small in scale assert the energetic movement and muscular anatomy of the ancient hero. Surrounding the base of the inkstand are thick swags of garlands, shells, and horned masks, all typical of the classical decorative elements that became popular in the Renaissance.



SECTION IV: PORTRAITURE



Portraiture is so familiar to the modern world that it may be difficult to imagine a time and place when no such art form existed. The desire to make a likeness of a person is a Renaissance phenomenon, reflecting the new spirit of individualism and the belief that such attention was merited. Portraiture also gave artists the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to depict in meticulous detail the features of the subject as well as his or her costume and surroundings.

Surviving fragments of classical antiquity, such as the images of Roman emperors on coins and the portrait busts of the mighty, were visible reminders of the glorious achievements of the ancients and provided inspiration for Renaissance sculptors.

In the fourteenth century painters began to include portrait likenesses of their contemporaries in compositions; donors of religious works were depicted to identify them more closely with the Christian themes of atonement and devotion. By the fifteenth century individual panel portraits were being painted, less concerned with attaining salvation than with celebrating human endeavors. The fifteenth century also saw the first appearance of the self-portrait, another reflection of the spirit of individualism.

LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

Leon Battista Alberti
(Lee-**on** Bah-**tee**-stah Al-**bare**-tee)
Florentine (1404-1472)
Self-Portrait, c. 1435
Bronze oval: 729/32 x 511/32
Samuel H. Kress Collection

Alberti's *Self-Portrait* is one of the earliest extant Italian Renaissance examples of realistic portraiture in any medium. It is also one of the very few works of sculpture associated with Alberti, who gained renown for his treatises on architecture, sculpture, and especially painting. This bronze plaque is thought to have been made about the same time that Alberti was writing his first treatise, *De Pictura* ("On Painting").

Alberti belonged to a great Florentine family that had been expelled from the city before his birth. He received a superior humanistic education at the University of Bologna before going to his ancestral city in the early 1430s. Alberti's introduction to the stylistic innovations in Florentine art had an enormous impact on him. The lifelike quality of his bronze self-portrait clearly reflects what he had absorbed of this new realism.

Alberti's university education also had acquainted him with the classical writers such as Pliny, who had described how the ancient

Romans revered the portraits of their ancestors. Alberti was later to write in *De Pictura*: "Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent friends present, as friendship is said to do, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive."

This self-portrait reveals Alberti's knowledge of ancient portrait sculpture. Representing himself in full profile facing left, he is attired in the classical drapery of ancient Rome. The lettering on the plaque emulates the ancient Roman style. To the left near his neck is the artist's personal emblem, the hieroglyph of the winged eye. This may refer to Alberti's theories on optics and perspective, and also to his beliefs that the eye is the most noble and divine feature of the human body, and that the eye of God is all-seeing. The inclusion of such details suggests that Alberti was interested not only in recording his physical features but also in making a statement about his intellectual achievements.

This self-portrait, with its revival of classical conventions, predates most of the Italian portrait medals and plaques that became an important art form in the following decades.



Rogier van der Weyden
(Rah-jer van der Vy-den)
 Netherlandish (1399/1400-1464)
Portrait of a Lady, c. 1460
 Oil on oak, 13⁷/₈ x 10¹/₁₆
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

In general, the Italian theorists of the sixteenth century denigrated northern painting. They believed that northern portrait painters were content to copy exactly what they saw. Their view is contradicted by the work of painters like Rogier van der Weyden, whose *Portrait of a Lady* clearly indicates his ability to go beyond a mere physical likeness of the sitter. He distorts, simplifies, and abstracts reality to create an unforgettable work of art.

It is thought that Rogier executed this painting not long before his death in 1464. He has manipulated the forms into a beautiful abstract pattern: the pale face and the interlocking diagonals of her white veil and décolletage carefully balance the dark background and her black, fur-trimmed robe. The austerity of this color scheme is relieved by touches of red on her full, sensuous lips and gold-trimmed belt. The belt also provides a strong horizontal base for the ascending and descending pattern of lines created by the robe and veil.

The sitter's downcast eyes and clenched intertwining fingers convey a sense of inner turmoil that belies the outward calm and balance of the portrait itself. Despite capturing an essential part of her inner life, Rogier has left no clues as to her identity. She is fashionably but not expensively dressed, yet the artist has transformed her face into an aristocratic ideal, submerging any physical imperfections to create an ethereal beauty.

This aristocratic ideal is so closely linked to Rogier's portrait style that he is often credited with having originated it. Yet, as is the case with so many features of court life of this era, it seems, in fact, to have stemmed from the Valois court of the early fifteenth century. In the few surviving portraits associated with this milieu—such as the National Gallery of Art's Franco-Flemish *Profile Portrait of a Lady*—the aristocratic ideal is clearly discernible (see page 37). It was no doubt a quality demanded by these discriminating patrons.

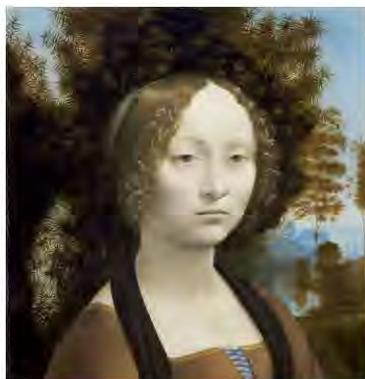


LEONARDO DA VINCI

Leonardo da Vinci
(Lay-on-ard-o da Vin-chee)
Florentine (1452–1519)
Ginevra de' Benci, c. 1474
Oil on wood, 15¼ x 14½
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Leonardo da Vinci had specific ideas regarding portraiture. He wanted to capture the “motions of the mind” and to model and draw contours with gradual changes in tone, doing away with line. These ideas are evident in his portrait of *Ginevra de' Benci*. The artist depicts the young Florentine woman in the three-quarter view favored by northern artists. The half-closed hazel eyes and pallor of her face contrast sharply with the dark olive-green of the spiky juniper bush that frames her head. Her high forehead, calm gaze, and firmly closed mouth give her an air of intelligence and resolve tinged with melancholy.

Ginevra's contact with Leonardo came through her cultured family, which had a long tradition of art patronage and learning. It is thought that her portrait was one of the artist's very early works. A contemporary document from her husband notes that the young woman suffered from a lengthy illness, which could be the cause of her pallor, although a pale complexion was cultivated for beauty's sake. Her conservative attire—a brown dress decorated with blue ribbon and white blouse with touches of gold



and her black velvet shawl—conforms to the narrow range of colors Leonardo has employed in the painting. Her auburn hair, tied in a knot in the back and framing her face with a cascade of curls, uses subtle variations of brown tinged with gold. The curls recall the whirling eddies of water that Leonardo drew over and over again in his *Notebooks* and remind us of his continual search for parallels in nature.

Ginevra's face is softly illuminated from high on the right. Leonardo wrote in his *Notebooks* that this was the best type of lighting for portraiture because “faces acquire great relief, especially where the light is above the face.” He also advised against bright light: “Make your portrait at twilight, or when there are clouds or mist. That is the perfect atmosphere.” This type of light helped him achieve the soft, smoky, veiled effect—his famous technique known as *sfumato*. (See the profile on Leonardo for further discussion.)

The panel is painted on both sides and was originally larger. Unfortunately it became necessary to cut six inches from the lower half because of the effects of moisture. This seems to have included Ginevra's hands, which held a sprig of juniper. The motif of the juniper is also found on the reverse framed by a laurel and palm—references to the accomplishments of poets and artists. The juniper is a play on the subject's name; in Italian dialect the feminine form of juniper is *ginevra*. According to a recent theory, it may also refer to her platonic lover, Bernardo Bembo, the Venetian ambassador to Florence, whose personal symbol was the juniper. The work may have been painted for him c. 1475 or c. 1478. A scroll is inscribed in Latin: “Beauty Adorns Virtue.” The admiration accorded Ginevra de' Benci by her contemporaries is echoed in this inscription and in the haunting portrait itself.

Jan Gossaert
 (Yan **Goh**-sayrt)
 Netherlandish (c. 1478–1532)
Portrait of a Merchant, c. 1530
 Oil on wood, 25 x 18¾
 Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Jan Gossaert's *Portrait of a Merchant* is one of the finest extant examples of the northern "occupational portrait." In such works an individual is depicted surrounded by the tools of his trade—a congenial combination of the northern painters' delight in the representation of everyday objects and their consummate skill in the field of portraiture. Wealthy merchants and bankers of the Renaissance wielded great economic power, but their profit-making activities were not held in high esteem by the Church or by society in general. The widespread abuses of the newly emerging capitalist system that occurred in Flanders in the early sixteenth century, exacerbated by the huge influx of gold from the New World, resulted in an outpouring of satirical works in art and literature on merchants, moneylenders, and tax collectors. As Erasmus wrote: "When did avarice reign more largely and less punished?" Gossaert's portrait is unusual for its time in that it is *not* a caricature of a businessman. Yet some see in the furtive glance and primly set mouth of the sitter the uneasiness and apprehension of the capitalists' position in contemporary society.



Jan Gossaert was one of the first "Romanists," Netherlandish painters of the sixteenth century who traveled to Rome or other cities in Italy to study Renaissance and classical art. Gossaert's 1508 trip in the entourage of his patron, Philip of Burgundy, acquainted him with the work of Jan van Eyck, Albrecht Dürer's graphic art, the classical style of antiquity, and the Roman High Renaissance, all of which led him to reject his mannered early style.

In this "occupational portrait," Gossaert presents a "still life" of the businessman's world. Balls of twine, a dagger, and batches of paper hang on the wall. On the desk from left to right Gossaert has depicted a shaker for talc or sand used to dry ink, what appears to be a magnifying glass, scissors, an inkpot, a large pile of coins, a pair of scales containing a gold coin on one of the pans, a leather-bound book, and an elaborate metal container holding red sealing wax, quill pens, and rolled-up paper. Gossaert has captured all the objects with Eyckian clarity and precision. The varied surfaces of the sitter's face and hands, the crinkled and folded batches of paper catch the light, resulting in an unusual richness. The imposing figures and touches of violet in the flickering shadows recall the work of Raphael and Leonardo.

This painting, which impresses the viewer with its strong, objective character, is an outstanding example of the development in northern Renaissance portraiture that culminates in the work of Hans Holbein. It is thought that the work was seen by Holbein on his way to England through Flanders, as its style is reflected in his later portraits of the Hanseatic merchants of London.

Studio of Marcus Gheeraerts
 (Mar-kus Geer-airts)
 British, active (c. 1561/1562-1636)
Robert Devereaux, 2nd Earl of Essex,
 c. 1596/1601
 Oil on wood, 45½ x 34½
 Gift of Mrs. Henry R. Rea

The court of Elizabeth I continued the tradition of portraiture established by Hans Holbein, though few artists could match his abilities. The paintings produced at this time are further separated from the naturalism of Holbein and contemporary continental work because, according to an Elizabethan treatise on painting, the queen banned the use of shadows in the belief that they indicated some blemish on the part of the sitter that needed to be disguised. As a result, late Elizabethan portraits such as this one were imposing displays of finery and symbols of prestige but tended to look very flat and stiff.

Robert Devereaux became a favorite of the aging Elizabeth while he was still very young. His bravery in the field of battle and his victory over the Spanish at Cadiz made him immensely popular with the public and the recipient of many honors bestowed by the queen. Unfortunately his vanity and fiery temperament caused him to run afoul of the queen and her counselors. Having plotted



against them, he was beheaded for high treason in 1601. Public reaction to his execution was strong, and sonnets eulogizing him had to be suppressed by the queen for many years.

No doubt the numerous portraits of Devereaux, like the National Gallery's example, helped to perpetuate his fame and the public's sympathy for him. This painting, from the studio of Marcus Gheeraerts, is based on the artist's own earlier full-length portrait, which depicts Devereaux as a military hero, with the burning tower of Cadiz in the background. Gheeraerts, who had fled the religious turmoil in his native Flanders, revolutionized English portrait painting by introducing the full-length portrait with a landscape background, a novelty that proved enormously popular. This version, however, has a plain blue background, with the earl depicted at three-quarter length and dressed as a courtier rather than as a soldier. The Elizabethan costume, with its low-waisted coat and high ruff collar, elongates the figure unnaturally. In this society the higher the collar and the stiffer the torso, the more prestigious the person. The outline of the earl's figure stands out strongly against the blue background, creating an abstract pattern of shapes.

Elizabethan court portraits also employed emblems and colors for their symbolic value. The Saint George pendant, emblem of the Knights of the Garter, which hangs from the azure blue ribbon, is the most noticeable of these symbols, for it indicated that the wearer had received the highest honor of English chivalry. The choice of colors selected by the patron also has meaning. According to handbooks of the time, carefully selected colors could express a gentleman's feelings for a lady. Essex demonstrates his fidelity to Elizabeth I by wearing her personal colors: white symbolizes her virginity, black her constancy.

SECTION V: NATURE AND THE FIGURE



enaissance artists, by the sixteenth century, had mastered the techniques that enabled them to infuse their paintings with an astonishing realism. They could not only render nature faithfully but also investigate its many moods and interpret them expressively. Giovanni Bellini had led the way in the late fifteenth century, injecting a sense of the poetry of nature into his pictures. If Bellini may be credited with inventing the Venetian landscape, his pupil Giorgione presented a new vision of the arcadian life in pastoral landscapes such as *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. A contrasting view is evident in German artist Matthias Grünewald's *Small Crucifixion*, in which the dramatic and emotional aspects of the religious subject are echoed in the landscape through vividly contrasting colors and writhing linear contours.

The representation of the human figure also moved in the direction of inventive and expressive form. From the simple elegance of Perugino's saints, whose idealized and controlled postures reflect the classical spirit, to the daring figure of Titian's *Saint John the Evangelist*, Renaissance artists were able to give form to a whole range of human experiences.

Fra Carnevale

(Bar-ber-ee-nec)

Umbrian-Florentine (active third quarter of fifteenth century)

The Annunciation, c. 1450

Tempera on wood, 34½ x 24¾

Samuel H. Kress Collection

The Annunciation, a favorite theme of Renaissance artists, is here set in a courtyard of that era. Following the gospel of Luke, the artist depicts the dove of the Holy Ghost descending from the sky in the upper, central portion of the picture. The archangel Gabriel holds a lily as he bows to Mary, who stands near a vase of roses. Both flowers are traditional symbols of the purity of the Virgin.

The unidentified artist who created this work is known as the Master of the Barberini Panels, based on his presumed execution of two panels formerly in the Barberini Collection in Rome. Both works, which depict the birth and presentation of the Virgin, show a similar relationship between figures and architecture and demonstrate the artist's keen interest in perspective. He had undoubtedly absorbed Leon Battista Alberti's influential theory of **linear perspective**, which offered him the means to achieve a systematic ordering of space on a painted surface. In *De Pictura* Alberti had advised artists to choose the most

beautiful details from nature and then combine them into a whole that was more perfect than nature itself. In this work the Master of the Barberini Panels has followed Alberti's guidelines, bringing together the architectural details, vase, flowers, drapery, and figures within that desired system of ordered space.

The diagonal lines formed by the divisions in the pavement and buildings all converge to a single vanishing point, to the right of the doorway above the angel's head. Both Mary and Gabriel are parallel to the picture plane. Unlike Gabriel, she is not shown in profile but rather turns toward the viewer, silhouetted against a white building. Gabriel's placement and his triangular configuration serve to lead the viewer's eye through the doorway to the landscape and open sky beyond. The stability of Mary's position, however, causes the viewer's eye to rest on her. She attains an air of permanence in the human world.

In retelling this favorite biblical story, the Master of the Barberini Panels also seized the opportunity to demonstrate his mastery of the new naturalism of Renaissance art.



Pietro Perugino
 (Pec-ay-troe Pare-oo-jee-noc)
 Umbrian (probably 1445-1523)
Crucifixion with the Virgin, Saint John, Saint Jerome, and Saint Mary Magdalene, c. 1485
 Oil on wood transferred to canvas,
 left panel: 37½ x 12
 middle panel: 39¾ x 22¼
 right panel: 37½ x 12
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Perugino's three-part altarpiece, or triptych, was painted for the Church of San Domenico in the town of San Gimignano. Unlike most Florentine representations of the Crucifixion, grief and anguish are not displayed here. The artist has chosen to convey the spiritual meaning of Christ's death rather than to depict the actual event. The mood is therefore one of complete calm, with Christ's triumph over death idealized. On the cross he is a figure at peace, which evokes a similar response from the Virgin Mary and attendant saints. They betray no trace of grief but stand in quiet, prayerful contemplation of Christ the redeemer. At the foot of the cross with Mary is Saint John the Evangelist; Mary Magdalene occupies the right panel, and Saint Jerome, with his lion, is on the left. The inclusion of Jerome, a fourth-century saint who could not have witnessed the Crucifixion, conveys the idea that Christ's sacrifice transcends time.



The tranquil landscape setting recalls Perugino's native Umbria in central Italy. His close attention to details reflects the consuming interest in the natural world that was typical of Renaissance artists in the late fifteenth century. Such keen observation may also indicate Perugino's familiarity with the painting of northern Europe (the nearby court of Urbino had imported northern artists who knew the oil technique). The realistically painted flowers and plants in the foreground were the kinds that people associated with the Crucifixion because of their name, shape, or color: the poppy for its blood-red color; the iris, known as the sword lily, in reference to piercing sorrow; and the violet, whose low growth suggested humility.

Perugino's ability to create the illusion of deep space stemmed from his awareness—shared by other Renaissance artists of the period—that distant objects appear to be smaller in scale and shrouded in an atmospheric haze. He was thus able to create an **aerial perspective** that contributes to the realism of the painting. The continuous landscape flows from panel to panel, and the rocky cliffs form a “V” that converges at the base of the cross to dramatize the silhouetted figure of Christ.

Perugino's career took him from his native Perugia to Florence and Rome, where he was involved with the decoration of the Sistine Chapel. Raphael, his most famous pupil, developed under his influence but then went on to surpass his master.

Giorgione
 (Jor-or-joh-nee)
 Venetian (1477/1478-1510)
The Adoration of the Shepherds,
 c. 1505/1510
 Oil on wood, 3¾ x 43½
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

A certain mystery surrounds the life of Giorgione, complicated by his early death in the plague of 1510 and the scarcity of records on his work. It is known that he was born in Castelfranco, a small town on the Venetian mainland, and went to Venice at an early age, where he became a pupil of Giovanni Bellini. His accomplishments as a singer and musician as well as a painter made him a popular member of a circle of poets, philosophers, and Venetian aristocrats with humanistic interests.

Giorgione created paintings for a new type of patron, the private collector. These aristocratic patrons, having read Virgil's *Eclogues* and the work of other classical writers, were intrigued by the idea of a simple Arcadian life. Themes of the idyllic past became popular in literature of the period: Jacopo Sannazaro published his *Arcadia* in 1504, and a new form of poetry called the *pastorale* evoked the ancient landscape as a place of refuge.



Giorgione's paintings came out of this Venetian context. He developed a view of nature that was not simply an illusionistic rendering of observed details but a revelation of nature's poetic qualities and mysterious moods. He surrounded the quiet grandeur of his figures with a softened atmosphere, uniting man and nature in rapturous harmony.

The Adoration of the Shepherds is in marked contrast to the numerous fifteenth-century representations of the Adoration of the Magi, with their rich costumes and elaborate surroundings. Instead, Giorgione emphasizes the humble circumstances of Christ's birth and the fact that it was the poor shepherds who received the message of the divine birth before anyone else. This new approach reflects the influence of pastoral poetry and also the tradition of monastic piety, especially among the Franciscans who advocated a life of poverty and humility.

Giorgione has placed the shepherds and the Holy Family at the right of the composition and describes in deep shadows the wild look of a cave—a motif often seen in Byzantine Nativity scenes but here given new power because of its immense scale. Light animates and permeates the entire painting, uniting the intimate scale of the group of figures with the grander dimensions of the landscape. With genuine simplicity and awe, the kneeling figures adore the child. And nature, which surrounds them, also pays homage.

Matthias Grünewald
 (Mat-ii-as Groo-ne-vald)
 German (c. 1475/1480–1528)
The Small Crucifixion, c. 1511/1520
 Oil on wood, 24¼ x 18¼
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

The religious mysticism of the sixteenth century frequently focused on the human suffering of Christ, asking the believer to identify personally with his agony. To evoke such empathy, German artists as early as the fourteenth century often depicted the body of Christ with a gruesome and frequently exaggerated realism that conveyed the horror of his torture and death on the cross. Even as the classicism and idealism of the Italian Renaissance were making inroads into German art in the work of Dürer and Cranach, this tradition of deeply felt emotions lived on in the work of artists like Grünewald.

Grünewald was a contemporary of Albrecht Dürer, but their means of expression are at opposite ends of the artistic spectrum. Dürer, working primarily in a linear style, engaged in an intellectual pursuit of the ideal in the natural world. Grünewald, on the other hand, focused on color and extremes in beauty and ugliness to draw an emotional reaction from the viewer. Listed in documents as a painter and maker of fountains, he remains a somewhat mysterious figure. It is not known where



he received his early training, but his skill was clearly recognized, for he was appointed court painter to the archbishop of Mainz, Uriel von Gemmingen, and his successor, Albrecht of Brandenburg. Like most important German Renaissance artists, Grünewald was therefore exposed to some of the most advanced intellectual thinking in the Germanic areas. Yet his reaction to this stimulation, typified in *The Small Crucifixion*, was quite different from that of his peers.

Unlike the idealized figures of Dürer, Grünewald depicts the tormented, distorted body of Christ hanging on the rough-hewn cross. The numerous wounds, tattered loin-cloth, sharply turned right foot, distorted arms, and clawlike fingers, which reach heavenward as if in supplication, and the protruding chest all serve to emphasize the human suffering of Christ and to wring emotion from the viewer. The Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene witness this terrifying death set against a darkness at noon—the solar eclipse described in the gospels. Grünewald's mastery of the expressive power of color is seen in the brilliant tones of red and purple in the Magdalene's gown set against the Virgin's blue-green robe. A powerful light comes from the right, illuminating Saint John and Christ with a harsh glare. This display of high-key color is balanced by the more somber tones on the left side of the painting.

Here, as in his most famous work, the powerful *Isenheim Altarpiece*, Grünewald confronts us with the harsh reality of human suffering and death but uses artistic elements such as light, line, and color to distort the realism in order to arouse us from our indifference. His work mirrors the deep religious turmoil felt in this pre-Reformation period in Germany.

Titian
 (Tih-shun)
 Venetian (c. 1490–1576)
Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos, c. 1547
 Oil on canvas, 93½ x 103½
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

Titian's *Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos* was the central panel of an elaborate ceiling decoration designed for the new board room of the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista in Venice. This religious fraternity also commissioned the artist to design twenty subsidiary panels relating to its patron saint, John the Evangelist. Records indicate that Titian was probably involved in designing the entire room as a setting for his central panel.

Ceiling panels were a popular form of decoration in the Renaissance. From religious subjects in churches and chapels to scenes from classical mythology in the villas and palaces of princely patrons, the ceiling painting provided a challenging opportunity for artists to experiment with **foreshortening** and creating the illusion of deep space.

Titian's dramatic flair led him to depict the saint in ecstasy, with his book and his attribute of the eagle, symbol of the flight of divine inspiration. The artist's source for this image

was the apocalyptic book of Revelation, in which Saint John describes his encounter with God:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.... And I turned to see the voice that spake with me, ... And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

Because Titian realized that the painting would be viewed from some distance in the dimly lit space, he was bold in his overall conception. With highly original gestures, he depicted John in the moment of revelation. Startled by the burst of light, the expressively foreshortened figure of the saint leaps up in a diagonal thrust, his upraised arms and flowing drapery heightening the intensity of his emotions. A bold composition employing strong diagonals and broad brushstrokes further assures the dramatic impact of the work even seen from afar. (See the profile on Titian for further discussion of his work.)



SECTION VI: ARTISTS AND PATRONS



In the Middle Ages the primary source of patronage for artists had been the Church, whereas in the Renaissance a wider range of patrons sought their services. The wealthy private patron—including rising merchants of the middle class and the aristocratic princes who ruled Renaissance city-states—began to “collect” favorite artists and to commission work that would glorify their achievements.

This section focuses on the different types of private patronage in the Renaissance. The continuing, if diminished, patronage of the Church is exemplified in Cardinal Bandinello Sauli’s commissioning of a group portrait by Sebastiano del Piombo. Representative of the princely patron is Leonello d’Este, a member of one of the great dynastic families in Italy, whose desire for fame and glory is expressed by Pisanello in his portrait medals. The wealthy merchant patron par excellence is Lorenzo de’ Medici of Florence, who surrounded himself with a circle of gifted humanists and artists that included Andrea del Verrocchio. King Henry VIII of England appointed Hans Holbein the Younger as court painter, which led to a series of memorable portraits of the king and members of his court that glorify the Tudor dynasty. Less exalted in rank, and typical of the new middle-class patron, were the wealthy couple who commissioned the Netherlandish artist Petrus Christus to paint a small devotional work that includes their portraits.

Florentine 15th or 16th Century,
probably after a model by Andrea del Verrocchio
and Orsino Benintendi

Lorenzo de' Medici, 1478/1521

Painted terracotta, 25 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$

Samuel H. Kress Collection

Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492), called “the Magnificent,” was the virtual ruler of Florence in the late fifteenth century. Under his patronage the city reached the pinnacle of glory as Renaissance Italy’s cultural and financial center. He was not only a shrewd politician but also a musician and a poet. An outstanding humanist education had given him a deep appreciation of literature and the arts.

Although his personal commissions were relatively few in number, his interest in the arts and his inheritance of vast family collections made the Medici name synonymous with patronage of the leading artists and writers of the day. The Platonic Academy of the Medici court included such luminaries as the philosophers Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino and the poet Poliziano. The Medici court also patronized the young Michelangelo and the sculptor and painter Andrea del Verrocchio, who designed processional banners and other decorations.

Verrocchio’s terracotta bust of Lorenzo shows him attired in the plain tunic and headdress of a Florentine merchant, a reference to the source of the family’s wealth in the wool trade



and banking. This simple outfit belied the immense power wielded by Lorenzo, even though Florence was ostensibly a republic. Those who governed the city and led the Church owed their appointments to Lorenzo’s machinations. (His son and his nephew, for example, eventually became Popes Leo X and Clement VII respectively.)

Guicciardini, the Florentine historian and political adviser to the later Medici, wrote that Lorenzo “desired glory and excellence above all other men and can be criticized for having too much ambition even in minor things; he did not want to be equalled or imitated even in verses or games or exercises and turned angrily on anyone who did so.”

Something of that will to power is captured in Verrocchio’s bust, while at the same time the artist’s skillful modeling has succeeded in conveying other aspects of Lorenzo’s character. Looked at full face, Lorenzo has a menacing scowl. However, in a dimmer light that softens the shadows, a hint of melancholy about the figure suggests the sensitive humanist who formed another aspect of Lorenzo’s complex nature.

Lorenzo faced his greatest challenge in 1478 when the Pazzi, a rival merchant family, led a rebellion against the Medici. Lorenzo’s brother Giuliano was killed, and he himself was wounded but managed to escape with the help of friends. Afterward Lorenzo ruthlessly suppressed all opposition and emerged stronger than ever. It is thought that this bust was made in the aftermath of the Pazzi rebellion when numerous portraits of Lorenzo and his brother were commissioned.

Pisanello (Pee-zahn-el-oe)
 Veronese, (c. 1395–1455)
 Obverse: *Leonello d'Este, 1407–1450,*
Marquess of Ferrara 1441, 1444
 Reverse: *Lion Being Taught by Cupid to Sing*
 Bronze, diameter: 4 1/6
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

Leonello d'Este (1407–1450) ruled Ferrara in the first half of the fifteenth century and created one of the greatest humanist courts of Renaissance Europe. Among the artists and poets who contributed to its brilliance was Piero della Francesca, who decorated rooms at the palace; in the service of the subsequent Duke of Ferrara was Ludovico Ariosto, the epic and lyric poet famous for his chivalric romances. The masque—a play combining comedy, dance, and music—originated at the court of Ferrara; indeed the first permanent theater to be constructed in Renaissance Europe was built for the d'Este family.

Pisanello's medal for Leonello d'Este, one of a series he designed for the ruler, was made to commemorate his marriage to Maria of Aragon, daughter of Alfonso I, King of Naples. In a standard format it shows Leonello in profile on the front. The sharp outline of his face, the short curly hair, and the regal bearing of the figure recall ancient Roman medals and coins. The inscription in Latin proclaims the extent of Leonello's domain: "Leonello, Marquess of Este, Lord of Ferrara, Reggio, and Modena, Son-in-Law of the King of Aragon."

On the back of the medal is a delightful allegorical image that highlights Leonello's musical talent and the wedding festivities: a lion (Leonello) is being taught how to sing by a winged cupid holding a scroll of music. The pillar behind the figures carries the Este family insignia, a mast at full sail, and bears the date. Sitting on a branch to the left is an eagle, another family emblem. The artist has signed the medal in Latin: "The work of Pisano the painter."

Although Pisanello did substantial work as a painter, he is perhaps best known as a medalist and a skilled draftsman. He was trained in Verona and became a follower of the painter Gentile da Fabriano, carrying on that master's commitment to the International Style. He was a painter of frescoes, but his drawings merit special praise. His studies of animals, minutely detailed and capturing the personality of each beast, and his elaborately costumed figures are among the most perceptive drawings of the early Renaissance.

Pisanello was the earliest master of the portrait medal and one of its greatest practitioners of all time. As a medalist, he also worked for the powerful Gonzaga family of Mantua and for various princes and ecclesiastical figures in northern Italy, Rome, and Naples.



Anonymous Flemish Artist,
Brussels
The Triumph of Christ, "Mazarin Tapestry,"
about 1500
Woven wool, silk, gold and silver,
134 x 158
Widener Collection

Tapestries were among the most coveted art objects of aristocratic patrons during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. France and later Flanders, stimulated by early Valois and Burgundian court patronage, produced the most sought-after tapestries. These woven wool and silk wall and bed hangings not only decorated and insulated the vast interiors of castles and cathedrals but were also symbols of wealth, power, and splendor. They accompanied their aristocratic owners from place to place and served on many occasions as elaborate backdrops for feasts, outdoor festivals, and processions.

Tapestries, often woven in sets, were frequently commissioned as gifts for significant events, such as weddings, coronations, or peace treaties. The Mazarin Tapestry, so-called because it once belonged to Cardinal Jules Mazarin, chief minister to Louis XIII and Louis XIV of France in the seventeenth century, relates to the Revelation of Saint John. The fineness of its weaving—twenty-two warp threads per inch—and the costliness of the materials, including silk, gold, and silver



threads along with the traditional wool, suggest that it was woven for a very wealthy, probably royal, patron. It is thought to have been woven in Brussels, the leading tapestry-making center in Europe at that time.

The tapestry depicts the theme of *The Triumph of Christ*, which represents the belief that Christ will rule in majesty as the ultimate judge of mankind. As the year 1500 approached, many Christians believed the second coming of Christ was imminent. In the center panel the enthroned Christ raises his right hand in benediction and holds the gospel in his left. The Lily of Mercy appears on his right, the Sword of Justice on his left. Kneeling before him are two groups of people, whose individualized features suggest they are contemporary portraits. The position of greatest honor, to the right of Christ, is reserved for the ecclesiastical world: a pope, cardinals, clerics, monks, and nuns; the opposite, lesser side is occupied by the laity: an emperor and a king, young cavaliers, elegant ladies, elderly men, and peasants.

The flanking panels contain stories symbolizing Christ's triumph over the pagan and Old Testament worlds. On the left is the Emperor Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl, on the right the Persian King Abasuerus and his Jewish bride, Esther, whose pleas to her husband on behalf of her people saved them from destruction. This Old Testament story was seen as a prefiguration of the salvation of mankind through Christ. It has been suggested that this tapestry was commissioned to commemorate the marriage of Philip the Handsome to Joanna, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain.

Petrus Christus
 (Pay-trus Kris-tus)
 Netherlandish, Bruges (active 1444-
 1472/1473)
Portrait of a Male Donor and
Portrait of a Female Donor, c. 1455
 Oil on oak,
 16½ x 8¾ and 167/16 x 8½
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

The two panels of a male and female donor by Petrus Christus represent several aspects of the new types of patronage that developed during the fifteenth century in the North. As the wealth of the middle class increased, many of its members were able to imitate the aristocracy and the clergy by commissioning works of art, including their own portraits. The individualized features and the dress indicate that these two panels portray a middle-class couple from Flanders. The shields behind the donors' heads identify them as members of prominent Italian merchant families who were probably living in Bruges as a result of the strong economic ties between Italy and the Netherlands. Many Italians of the period were fascinated by the realism of northern painting and eagerly patronized Flemish artists.

The prayerful poses and the removal of the male donor's wooden shoes—a traditional symbol indicating he is standing on holy ground—are evidence that the two panels once

formed the outer wings of a religious triptych whose central panel probably contained a Madonna and saints. The small dimensions of the panels and the fact that the donors kneel in a house rather than in a church suggest that this triptych was a small altarpiece commissioned for use in the home—an outgrowth of the desire for a more private form of devotion. This is also reflected in the *prie-dieu*, or prayer stand, used by the female donor, as well as her devotional manuscript, probably a fashionable and expensive book of hours.

The early training of Petrus Christus is still debated. He was documented in Bruges in 1444, three years after the death of its most famous master, Jan van Eyck. His dependence on certain aspects of the latter's style led some scholars to consider Petrus as Jan's apprentice and heir to his shop. However, Petrus was an eclectic artist who borrowed from a variety of artists, including Rogier van der Weyden and especially the painters associated with the Haarlem school in the northern Netherlands. The proximity of his birthplace, Baerle, to Haarlem makes it more likely that his artistic origins stem from the latter city.

With the Haarlem school, Petrus shared a delight in depicting his subjects in complex and interesting landscapes or architectural settings. He often placed his sitters in settings reflecting their everyday world. This donor, for example, kneels in the doorway of a house, his wife in a room with an arcaded porch. Both rooms open onto a brightly lit, hilly landscape. The elements of the setting are arranged to emphasize the illusion of three-dimensionality: the floor tiles recede with a measured consistency; the walls and doors are organized to convince the eye that the rooms go on behind the foreground figures, and the illusion of depth is continued by the landscapes beyond.



Hans Holbein the Younger
 (Hahnus **Hole**-bine)
 German, (1497/1498–1543)
Edward VI as a Child, probably 1538
 Oil on wood, 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{8}$
 Andrew W. Mellon Collection

An appointment as court painter to a powerful and wealthy king usually guaranteed an artist's financial security and renown. However, as in the case of Jan van Eyck and Leonardo da Vinci, court activities did not always assure the survival of a large body of works. This is particularly true of Hans Holbein's tenure as court painter to Henry VIII of England. Many of his royal commissions were ephemeral in nature or have been destroyed by later generations. Fortunately, owing to the requirements of his image-conscious patron and Holbein's own productivity, numerous paintings remain. His splendid court portraits, such as *Edward VI as a Child*, afford a unique glimpse of a royal court of the Renaissance.

Individual portraits of children were not common during the Renaissance. Those that exist were usually painted for dynastic reasons. Holbein's work, however, was not a royal commission but seems to have been a New Year's gift from the artist to his royal employer; it was certainly meant to flatter the king and appeal to his fatherly pride. Edward VI was a fragile child, but Holbein's portrait does

not convey this at all, giving us instead a regal, robust infant who embodies the pride and hope of the Tudor dynasty.

Edward VI, little more than a year old when Holbein painted this work, stands behind a cloth-draped parapet. His regal outfit—a red tunic and white shirt trimmed in gold, a cap covered with a flat red hat decorated with gold aiguillettes and an ostrich feather—emphasizes his princely demeanor. He raises his right hand in a solemn declamatory gesture. Yet Holbein adds a touch of humor to the sober dignity; the baby holds a rattle in his left hand in the same way that aristocratic males hold a sword in conventional portraits.

Edward's frontal and hieratic pose accords well with the image of royal dignity and power. Though Holbein, usually an astute observer of reality, has given the child highly individualized features, his physical frailties are ignored. Reinforcing the majesty and authority of the portrait is Sir Richard Morison's inscription on the bottom of the panel:

Little one, emulate thy father and be the heir of his virtue; the world contains nothing greater. Heaven and earth could scarcely produce a son whose glory would surpass that of such a father. Do thou but equal the deeds of thy parent and men can ask no more. Shouldst thou surpass him, thou has outstript all kings the world has revered in ages past.

Thomas Cromwell, counselor to the king and lord chancellor, had employed both Holbein and Sir Richard Morison in his campaign to bolster the Tudor family's claim to the throne and to consolidate Henry's power. Their collaboration in this portrait can be seen as a manifestation of this campaign.



Sebastiano del Piombo
 (Seb-ah-stee-ah-noe del Pee-ohm-boe)
 Venetian (1485-1547)
*Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary,
 and Two Geographers*, 1516
 Oil on wood transferred to canvas,
 48 x 59¼
 Samuel H. Kress Collection

As one of the most sought-after portrait artists in Rome in the early sixteenth century, Sebastiano del Piombo was a natural choice to depict the powerful and learned Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, who is shown in this painting with three companions. The cardinal's surroundings reflect the wealth and learning of the papal court of Leo X and Sauli's own role as a leading member of that court and a prominent patron of letters.

Sauli tilts his head slightly to hear the words of his secretary, who enters the scene at the far left. The cardinal's conversation with his two companions at the table has been momentarily interrupted as he calmly turns his gaze toward the spectator. These two men appear to be discussing the manuscript illustrated with maps lying on the table, allowing us to conclude that they shared a fascination with cartography typical of the Age of Discovery.

Sebastiano has included numerous realistic details in the portrait. The Turkish carpet covering the table was a fashionable decorative



object of the period. A bronze bell, bearing an inscription that identifies him as Cardinal Bandinello Sauli of Genoa, rests near the cardinal's hand. The artist's gift for illusionistic detail can be seen in the lower right corner, where he has depicted a piece of paper, unfolded, bearing the date of the painting and his signature. In an even greater display of virtuosity, Sebastiano has painted a fly on the cardinal's robe, near his left knee, which was made to appear as if it had alighted on the surface of the picture. More than once, we are told, printers would attempt to "correct" their reproductions to omit the fly.

Sebastiano's portrait reveals the Venetian love of color that was inevitable in an artist who was a pupil of Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione. The solidity of his figures, however, shows the influence of Michelangelo, with whom he associated after moving to Rome.

Few Italian artists before Sebastiano had ever attempted a group portrait with as many as four people. In this work he has not been entirely successful in creating a unified arrangement of figures; instead it seems to be composed of two separate double portraits. Nevertheless, the painting would point the way for similar ambitious undertakings by other artists.

Although clerical patronage of the arts diminished during the Renaissance, it did not end completely, as this portrait indicates. Yet despite the fact that it was commissioned by a church prelate, the painting shows how thoroughly secular and humanist ideas had penetrated Italian papal circles; other than the cardinal's attire, there is no easily identifiable religious motif in the entire work.

General Activities

Display the reproductions and/or project the slides in the classroom. Discuss them with your students in terms of subject, style, and emotional expression, getting student impressions first.

Ask students to choose paintings that create the *illusion of deep space*. Then ask them to find examples of various methods of creating this illusion: linear perspective, aerial perspective, diminishing size of forms and figures, and overlapping. (For more information on linear perspective and the illusion of space in painting, see pages 246-251 of Ernest Goldstein et al., *Understanding and Creating Art* [Book Two: Annotated Teachers' Edition]. Dallas, Texas: Garrard, 1986.)

The Renaissance saw the *revival of interest in classical antiquity*. Students should find examples of classical motifs, myths, and architecture (arches and temples, garlands and swags), and composition and idealization of the figures.

The study of the *human figure and anatomy* assumed renewed importance during the Renaissance. Ask students how this is demonstrated in the various art objects. Compare, for example, the treatment of the anatomy of the Madonna and Child in the paintings by Giotto and Raphael. Or compare the figure of the child in the Giotto, Botticelli, and Holbein paintings.

Ask students to find works that demonstrate the importance of the *individual*. They should look for distinctive personalities, settings, personal belongings and symbols, costumes, individual poses, and gestures.

Renaissance art reflects the *shift from otherworldly to secular concerns*, as the artist became more interested in depicting everyday life. Students might compare the two nativities by Duccio and Botticelli in terms of space, background, and human subjects (holy versus secular).

The study of the *human figure* is one of the foundations of the Renaissance style. In Renaissance theory, the movements and gestures of the body reveal the thoughts and moods of the person. Ask your students to compare the varieties of poses. Have them find examples of the **contrapposto** stance used by artists in these paintings. How do pose and gesture convey an attitude or mood for each figure?

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities for
Section I*

Beginning Discussion

The Death of Saint Clare expresses love and caring. Ask students how the artist used hands, gestures, and body language to show this.

Activities

Have students trace hands in different positions on paper. Create a design by cutting out the hands and pasting them down to show a connection. Or make a drawing of a mother and child and express the love between them by emphasizing the placement of hands.

Intermediate Discussion

Have students list adjectives that describe these paintings. Discuss the use of gold leaf for the backgrounds. What does it symbolize or suggest about the subjects of the paintings? What might the various colors mean or express? Point out the blue mantle of Mary's humility, the white flower of purity, and other colorful details. Can students now add more adjectives that describe the paintings? What symbols exist in society today and what do they mean?

Activities

Have students make a drawing or write a poem that uses colors to express ideas or feelings. Make an International Style artwork. Use metallic or foil paper. On a soft surface, with a dull pencil, incise lines in a decorative pattern. Students can attach the foil to the background of another piece of paper and create a portrait on it. In discussion, talk about how the paintings look. What does the foil do to the sense of space? Does it reflect light? Does it create an "otherworldly" effect?

Advanced Discussion

There are varying levels of realism in these pictures. Have students determine which look most realistic. Can they find examples of elongation? Changes of scale? Where are light and shade used to create the illusion of three dimensions (drapery, faces, limbs)? Find elements that appear to be distorted or unrealistic (proportions of figures, angels, gold backgrounds, bedcoverings).

Activities

Have students make a drawing focusing on the use of modeling. Draw a geometric shape (cone, sphere, cube, cylinder) or try a drapery study using one strong light source to achieve the sense of three dimensions. Repeat this activity with a still life.

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities for
Section II*

Beginning Discussion

Pageants and parades were an integral part of Renaissance life. Using *The Adoration of the Magi* tondo, discuss parades and processions. Ask whether students can describe from personal experience a parade, wedding procession, or circus. Discuss the atmosphere of these events, filled with many people, and point out similar details in the painting by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi. Examine the Castagno shield as an example of a decorative object for a parade. Why would a hero appear on a parade shield?

Activities

Have students make shields out of cardboard and construction paper. They should decorate the shields with the images of heroes or of their school or neighborhood. Have a parade with the shields.

Intermediate Discussion

Discuss the following questions about storytelling in these paintings: What moment is chosen? Is more than one moment in time portrayed? How? Why? How do expressions help tell the stories? How does the artist organize figures and shapes and use color to help convey the narrative?

Activities

Have students draw a picture of an imaginary hero or heroine. They might use the Renaissance device of **simultaneous narrative**, referring to events taking place at different points in time within their drawings.

Advanced Discussion

Discuss in detail the heroic deeds of Judith, Saint George, and David. Ask students what moral principles each might signify. Define hero. Ask students why and how stories of triumph over great odds are important to people.

Activities

Based on their examination of the way Renaissance artists achieve the illusion of distant space, have students make a landscape drawing or painting that uses linear perspective, **atmospheric perspective**, diminishing sizes of figures, and foreshortened effects.

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities
for Section III*

Elementary Discussion

Using Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* and Bellini's *Feast of the Gods*, discuss classical myths and the gods and goddesses of the ancient world. Explain their meaning and attributes. For example, Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, is accompanied by Cupid, who shoots an arrow into the heart of the one who falls in love (students may recall cupids on Valentine cards).

Activities

Ask students to write a poem or a story about Cupid or a god or goddess that includes the attributes of the figure and his or her function in mythology. Share the stories with the class.

Intermediate Discussion

Discuss Renaissance decorative-art objects in this packet in terms of why everyday objects are decorated. With the class, examine images that adorn these objects. Make a list of decorative functional objects in students' homes. Compare their ornamentation with that of the Renaissance object. How does art touch daily life today?

Activities

Using the Laocoön as an example, have students design a decoration for a plate based on a mythological subject that has personal meaning for them.

Advanced Discussion

Using the examples of the Nymph and Venus, as well as the Madonna and Judith in previously noted works, discuss the images of women in these paintings. Describe how the artists portray them. Are they idealized? Are they realistic? Discuss the varying standards of beauty and think about how standards of beauty vary in different times and places. Compare these images with the treatment of women in twentieth-century art or in advertising.

Activities

Ask students to research the way women have been portrayed in art. Write an essay that compares Titian's *Venus with a Mirror* with Andrea Mantegna's *Judith and Holofernes* in terms of the depiction of women and what they represent.

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities for
Section IV*

Elementary Discussion

Discuss what portraits can tell us about people. They can tell us:

- what people do for a living (*Portrait of a Merchant*)
- where people live and how they dress (*Portraits of Donors*)
- how important they are (*Robert Devereaux, 2nd Earl of Essex*)
- what people's interests are (*Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary, and Two Geographers*)
- what people are feeling (*Portrait of a Lady* and *Ginevra de' Benci*)
- what a person wants to be (*Alberti's Self-Portrait*)

Portraits give clues to individual identities. Discuss the portraits in this packet and have the students describe what they can learn about the people depicted. Have each student try to describe himself or herself in three adjectives. Does the student have a favorite toy or object that tells us about his or her interests or personality? If a student had a portrait painted by a famous artist, what object would he or she want to be included? What object would they want in the background? What would they choose to wear?

Activities

Pair the students in the class. Have them interview each other and then write a brief paragraph describing each other's interests and personality. Finally, have the paired students draw portraits of each other with those identifying characteristics.

Intermediate Discussion

Discuss how artists describe the personalities of the people portrayed. List the adjectives that describe the various moods presented. Talk about how emotions can be expressed through gestures of the body: tightly clasped hands, furrowed brow, scowling face, puffed-up chest, or prayerful posture.

Activities

With the portraits included in this packet, or with postcard reproductions of portraits that students bring to class, order all the facial expressions from "least emotional" to "most expressive." Is this a great range of expressions? What conclusions might students draw about Renaissance conventions of portraiture? Examine and describe the facial expressions in the portraits. Are they typical of what you'd expect to see today? Why or why not? Have students draw an "emotional" self-portrait, with an emphasis on gesture and facial expression.

Advanced Discussion

Look for the various poses used in portraiture (profile, three-quarter view, and full face). Compare Alberti's incisive profile in his *Self-Portrait* with the frontal view of the *Earl of Essex*, or the three-quarter view of *Ginevra de' Benci*. Which is more revealing, and why?

Activities

According to classical legend, the ancients invented painting when a potter's daughter in Corinth, Greece, drew the profile of her lover by tracing his shadow cast on the wall from the light of a candle. This first "profile" portrait captured the face in a pure, clean outline. Many Renaissance artists use the precise outline to capture the likeness of an individual. Have students draw each other's portraits using this method: set up a spotlight to cast a shadow of the face on a large piece of paper hanging on the wall. Draw the outline of the face in chalk or pencil. Surround the finished profile with emblems or images that describe the person's interests and aspirations.

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities for
Section I*

Beginning Discussion

Discuss the landscapes and settings of these paintings. Which tree most closely resembles those you have seen outdoors? Which picture shows you a path you could travel down? How has the artist made one place appear bigger than another? Which of these places would you like to visit and why? Make a list of adjectives for your choice.

Activities

Have students make a three-dimensional landscape. Using construction paper, cut out diminishing sizes of one image: a tree pattern, a building, a simple figure, or a geometric shape. On a plain piece of paper, have the students position the cutout shapes on two diagonal lines in order of diminishing size. Draw a horizon line for the background, and complete the drawing by filling in the details with markers or pencil.

Intermediate Discussion

Have students discuss and define different types of perspective. Using Giorgione's *Adoration of the Shepherds* and Perugino's *Crucifixion*, discuss how the artist portrayed deep space: linear perspective, objects and people that become smaller in size, a winding road that leads to the background, or colors that become more muted in the distance (atmospheric perspective).

Activities

Explain **linear perspective**. In the *Annunciation* ask students to find the vanishing point by tracing the lines of perspective. Students can then attempt their own perspective drawing. Or paint an outdoor scene using atmospheric perspective. Use intense colors in the foreground and gradually more muted colors in the far horizon.

Advanced Discussion

Examine Titian's figure of *Saint John the Evangelist on Patmos*. Discuss the conditions for a ceiling painting: it must be bold enough to be viewed from a distance and foreshortened to appear realistic from the floor below. Has Titian created a convincing ceiling image? What features make this work so dramatic? Does an action scene such as this one lend itself to ceiling painting? How?

Activities

To understand **foreshortening**, have students sketch an object from different vantage points. Then make a ceiling painting by using the illusionism of foreshortening. Draw objects (or figures) as if viewed from below. Make the outlines bold and the colors dark so they can be seen from a distance. Display the finished works on the ceiling of the classroom, then critique the illusion created.

*Discussion
Questions and
Activities for
Section VI*

Elementary Discussion

Who collected art during the Renaissance? Do you collect anything? What is fun about collecting? Students might bring in items from their collections to share with the class.

Activities

Make a classroom museum with student collections. Label and classify the displays and list the names of the collectors.

Intermediate Discussion

The emblem of the singing lion and cupid was designed for Leonello d'Este. The name Leonello derives from the Latin word for lion, Leo. Have students design an emblem based on their name. The emblems can be images that sound like the name or contain some personal reference to the student. Draw the emblem on a medallion that can be cut out and worn around the neck.

Activities

The portrait medal of Leonello d'Este includes symbols, such as a billowing mast, an eagle, a date in Roman numerals, as well as the cupid and lion. Have students make their own "Renaissance" medals, either as a drawing on poster board or clay sculpture, following the format of a self-portrait on the front and an emblem with the date on the back.

Advanced Discussion

Discuss the notion of patronage (individual, royal, church) in the Renaissance and compare with contemporary society (corporate, individual, institutional, governmental). Who are today's patrons of the arts? Should art enhance the image or prestige of the person who owns it? Is this the function of art? If the government commissions an artwork, should the art reflect the ideals of that government? Discuss the potential constraints and limitations facing an artist when he or she has to please a patron.

Activities

Have students research local patronage of the arts in their city and write a report about it. Find examples of artwork commissioned publicly and privately and examine the relationship between the artwork, the artist, and the patron.

ART TECHNIQUES

Painting

During the Renaissance, two different painting methods were used (sometimes in combination with one another): egg tempera painting and oil painting. The basic difference between the two techniques is the type of liquid *binder* used to hold the powdered colors, or ground pigments, to the picture surface.

Egg Tempera. The most important painting technique from the Middle Ages through the fifteenth century was egg tempera. Paint colors were made by grinding various minerals or plants and then blending these substances with egg yolk and water, which serve as the binder. Unlike oil, egg yolk dries very quickly and becomes hard, so artists had to work on one small area at a time, applying paint rapidly with short, quick brushstrokes and using flat colors rather than blending a number of colors.

Compare: If you look closely at the reproduction of Giotto's *Madonna and Child*, you can see a series of fine parallel lines built up to create an illusion of contours, or roundness, in the body of Jesus and the face of the Virgin. Compare Giotto's method of painting flesh with the way Leonardo—using oil paint—created the illusion of roundness in the face of *Ginevra de' Benci*. Oil allowed Leonardo to blend colors and brushstrokes more thoroughly and thus achieve a more convincing, or “realistic,” illusion of volume.

Preparing the Picture for Painting. Most Renaissance tempera paintings were made on wood panels (the use of canvas as a support for pictures does not become widespread until the mid-1500s). The following diagram and description may clarify how an egg tempera painting on wood was constructed.



a b c d e f

In order to smooth the wood surface, the panel was covered with (a) a mixture of plaster and glue called *gesso* (b). Sometimes this layer of gesso was covered with a surface of linen soaked in gesso; more layers of gesso would then be applied and sanded smooth. Next, the artist mapped out the composition, making a preliminary under-drawing (c) in charcoal or lead. Sheets of hammered gold leaf (d) were fixed to the surface with a layer of red sizing (not illustrated). Faces and some areas of drapery were then built up with underpainting (e), which allowed the artist to vary the light and dark areas and create an illusion of depth. Finally, when the painting was completed, a layer of protective varnish was applied (f).

Oil Painting. Exactly when and where oil painting was first developed is uncertain, but the use of oil as a binding substance for paint was known during the Middle Ages. However, it was not widely used until the fifteenth century—especially in the Netherlands—when oil gradually replaced egg as the preferred binder. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck pioneered in developing techniques of handling oil paint to achieve rich surface effects. The oils typically used by artists were linseed, poppy, or walnut.

Fresco. Murals were generally executed in the fresco technique. Pigments, mixed with water, are painted on freshly laid lime plaster. As the plaster dries, the pigments become an integral part of the wall surface. The wall must first be prepared with several layers of plaster. When the next-to-last plaster layer is dry, a drawing of the composition, or **cartoon**, is transferred to the wall. The final layer of plaster (the *intonaco*) is laid over the cartoon in sections only as large as the artist expects to complete at one time. Areas of the intonaco layer that dry or remain unpainted must be cut away and relaid at the beginning of the next painting session.

Sculpture

Renaissance artists drew inspiration from surviving Greek and Roman sculptures. The materials most frequently used were clay, stone, wood, and cast metal, usually bronze. The different methods used for creating sculpture are modeling, carving, and casting.

Modeling. A soft material such as clay is *shaped with the hands and tools*. The sculptural forms are built up, or added to, as the artist's conception of the finished object develops. "Terracotta" is a term given to clay sculpture that has been dried and baked in an oven or kiln. After baking, the sculpture may be painted or "glazed" with a colorful protective coating. (Glazing necessitates an additional firing.)

Carving. Hard materials such as stone, wood, ivory, or bone are carved—a process of *cutting away* from the original piece of material using various chisels and a mallet. Other tools are used to obtain greater detail after the general form has been roughed out. The final stages involve polishing with abrasives and rubbing to attain the desired degree of smoothness.

Casting. This technique is used to create a metal sculpture. The artist models a full-size clay or wax figure from which he or she makes a mold, generally of plaster. The mold is then used as a “cast,” into which hot liquid metal is poured. After the molten metal cools and hardens, the mold is broken off, and the sculpture is ready for polishing and finishing.

Printmaking

Printmaking played a key role in the dissemination of visual images during the Renaissance, as it allows multiple images to be taken from a single design source. The print media of greatest importance to European Renaissance artists were the woodcut and the engraving.

Woodcut. The artist’s design is made on the surface of a piece of wood cut lengthwise along the grain. The lines of the design are left intact, while the wood surrounding them is cut away. After inking the raised lines of the block, the artist makes a print by laying a sheet of paper over the woodblock and exerting pressure—either manually or by putting the block and paper through a printing press.

Engraving. The image is incised into a copper plate with a *burin*, a steel rod that is beveled and sharpened at the tip. The width and depth of the cuts are controlled by the artist’s pressure on this engraving tool. Ink is then smeared over the plate and wiped off the surface until it remains only in the incised grooves. To make a print, a sheet of paper is placed over the plate, and both are run through a press, whose great pressure forces the ink out of the grooves and onto the paper.

Tapestry Making

The materials most often used in tapestry making are linen and wool, along with gold and silver thread. Silk is also used in many finer works, such as the Mazarin Tapestry. Woven on a loom, tapestries are composed of vertical threads, called the *warp*, and horizontal threads, called the *weft*. Threads of the weft are wound over and under threads of the warp, which are attached to the loom. In tapestry making, the weft completely covers the warp. A tool called a *reed* is used to pack the threads of each finished row against the preceding row. The weaver works from the back of the tapestry and follows a design called a *cartoon*.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

altarpiece: a devotional image in a Christian church that is designed for the top of the altar; it may be painted or sculpted, and it often consists of hinged panels that open and close.

atmospheric (aerial) perspective: the illusion of a distant space in a scene, achieved through the use of paler tones and less distinct outlines in the background. Generally used along with linear perspective.

attribute: an object that functions as a sign or symbol of a figure's identity.

Byzantine: the medieval culture of the eastern Mediterranean centered in Byzantium (later named Constantinople), which also characterized the culture of Venice and eastern Italy in the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. Byzantine art is characterized by symbolic content, lavish use of gold leaf, and two-dimensional patterns.

cartoon: a full-size drawing used in the final preparation of a fresco or painting.

chiaroscuro: (kya-ro-skur-o) Italian for light (*chiaro*) and shade (*oscuro*); the technique of blending light and dark tones in a painting to achieve the illusion of a solid form.

contrapposto: (cone-tra-poes-toe) a figural pose derived from classical statues that projects an air of ease and grace; one leg bears the weight of the body, and the other is relaxed and free, introducing a spiral in the body's axis.

foreshortening: reducing or adjusting the dimensions of forms as they recede from the foreground of a painting or drawing in order to maintain proportions that appear natural to the eye. See, for example, the outstretched arm in Castagno's *Youthful David*.

glaze: a transparent film of oil, containing only a small amount of coloring pigment, which is applied to a painting's surface to enrich or alter the colors underneath.

gold leaf: thin layers of beaten gold used to embellish a work of art.

gouache: a type of watercolor based on opaque pigments.

linear perspective: Renaissance art theory based on mathematical formulations by Leon Battista Alberti, which describes how the convergence of parallel lines at a distant vanishing point gives the illusion of depth in a painting.

majolica: (my-o-lee-kah) hand-painted, tin-glazed earthenware pottery that became popular in the Renaissance.

orthogonals: the lines in a linear-perspective drawing that recede to the vanishing point.

punching: a method for decorating the gold-leaf areas of a painting, creating patterns with a tool called a punch.

sfumato: (sfoo-mah-toe) from the Italian word meaning “smoked”; a painting technique in which the dark tones are subtly blended into light ones, creating a hazy atmosphere.

simultaneous narrative: a method of telling a story in art in which events occurring at different times are depicted together.

tondo: Italian term for a circular painting.

tooling: decorative treatment of a gold-leaf background in a painting.

transversals: lines in a linear-perspective drawing that run horizontal to the picture plane and recede at a regular, mathematically measured distance.

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The initial capital letters are replicas of those printed in Venice in 1477 by Erhard Ratdolt.

The design of this book is by Susan Schunick Rabin.

This book is printed by Schneidereith & Sons, Baltimore