

The Sixteenth Century

1. Italy

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(main artist only)

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Italian High Renaissance - Florence

Artists were the great minds of the age. Popes and princes clamoured to be their patrons. Leonardo da Vinci was called a “*universal man*”: a scientist and daring thinker. Michelangelo was a notable poet. With Titian and Raphael, they were supreme artists whose achievements were to dominate western art.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

Leonardo da Vinci was illegitimate son of a notary Piero di Antonio and a farmer’s daughter, Catarina (a situation smacking of a bad romance novel). Leonardo spent his childhood in the small town of Vinci, not far from Empoli, before being apprenticed in 1469 to Florentine artist Andrea del Verrocchio. Leonardo moved to Milan in 1482 and spent most of the next 30 years there, with a brief return back to Florence. His contribution to art is profound: “*it was Leonardo who brought about a decisive advance in painting (Wolfflin)*”.

Many of his innovations are manifest in his *Last Supper*; “*after Raphael’s Sistine Madonna this is the most popular picture in the whole of Italian art (Berenson)*”. Because of the significance of the *Last Supper* we’ll linger with it. The typical scheme for the subject in the 15th century is shown in Ghirlandaio’s version, painted 15 years earlier.

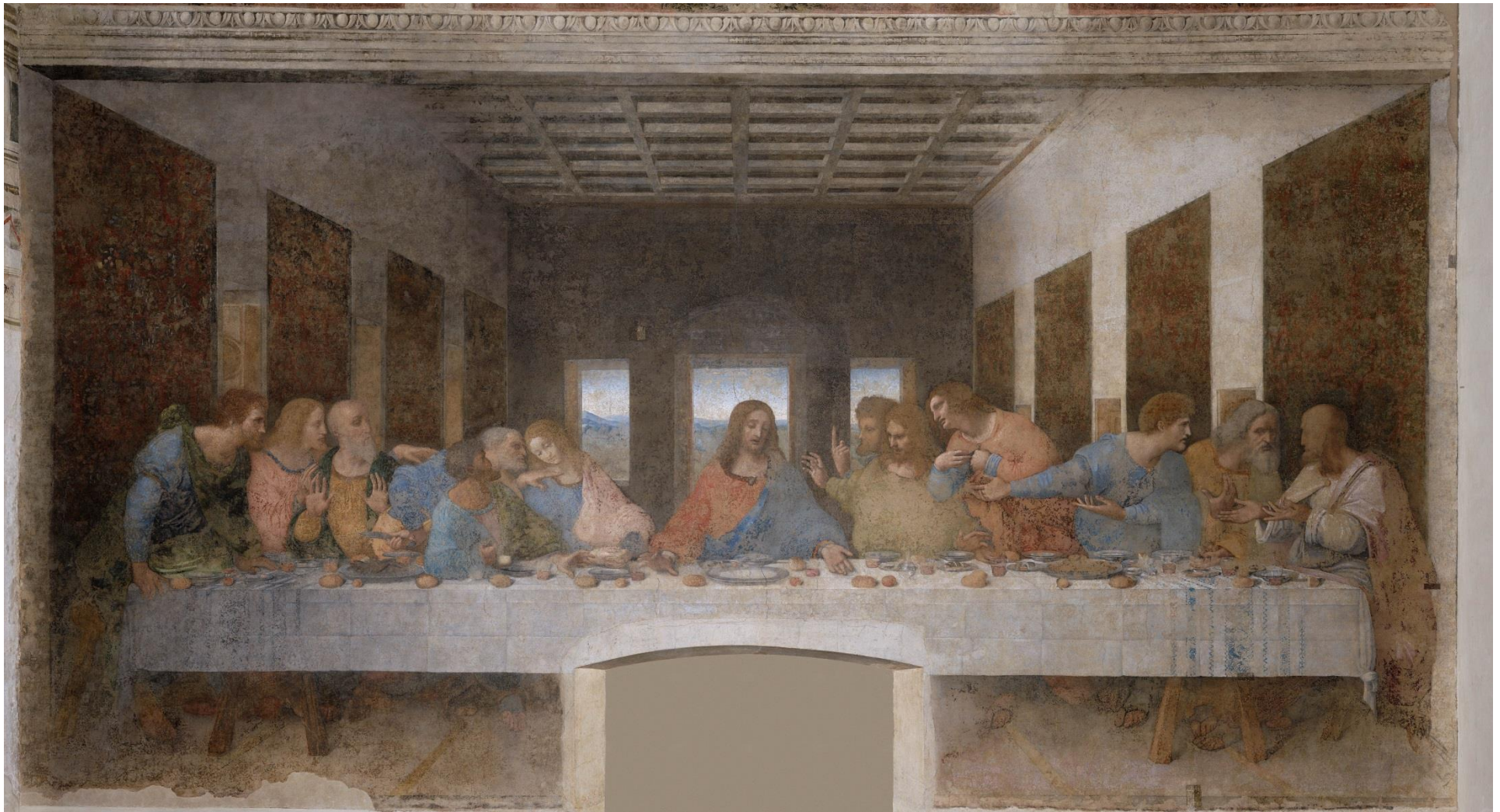


Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Last Supper*, (fresco, Cenacolo di Ognissanti, Florence), 1480

Judas, the traitor, is isolated on the near side of the table. This marked him out and allowed the artist to show us the bag containing the 30 pieces of silver while keeping it hidden from the other disciples. Christ is the most active of the figures. He is talking, his right hand raised asking for quiet as he finishes telling the company that he will be betrayed. The disciples are starting to react, but there is not much animation yet.

Leonardo chooses a different moment. Christ finished speaking some time ago and the uproar of the company is fully developed. This would have shocked 15th century Italian artists who were taught that the principal figure should not only be active but more so than anyone else.

Leonardo’s composition is novel. He highlights Christ with lines of perspective and a frame of light. Christ’s figure, which is thus made the immediate focus, is shown as a triangle; a monumental form used to indicate timelessness. The calmness this produces is enhanced by Christ’s silence.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Last Supper* 1495-98 (mural, refectory of the convent of Santa Maria della Grazie, Milan) (tempera and oil)

The silence heightens the emotional excitement around Christ, which serves to increase his significance. Only Raphael understood Leonardo in this. A *Last Supper* designed by him and engraved later has Christ depicted at a similar moment, staring into space motionless, eyes open and looking out of the picture; his head a pure vertical, between two strong columns, and the only one to be seen from the front.



After Raphael, *Last Supper* (1515-16), engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi

Contrast is crucial to all of Leonardo's art, and indeed most art of the High Renaissance. Leonardo's disciples display two other innovations important in High Renaissance art: movement and personality.

Ghirlandaio's horizontal line above the heads of the disciples restricts their movement, and pretty much they are paired together. Leonardo frees them – most have risen from their seats abruptly in various attitudes - but controls their movement in such a way as it builds to a crescendo towards Christ. He groups the disciples into threes. At each end of the table is a vertical figure from which the movement starts; carried by arms and hands from Christ's left and largely by glances from His right.

Leonardo stipulated that:

"a good painter has two chief objects to paint, man and the intention of his soul; the former is easy, the latter hard, because he has to represent it by the attitudes and movements of the limbs ... a picture, or rather the figures therein, should be represented in such a way that the spectator may easily recognise the purpose in their minds by their attitudes."

Leonardo gave each disciple features he thought characteristic and after long study gave each one gestures and facial expressions that would complete their psychological description. Thus, Peter is identified by his dagger (with which he will later, at dawn, cut off the ear of Malchus, one of the soldiers arresting Jesus) and one can sense his murderous intent. Judas reaches for the bread, clutching his bag of silver and knocks over a saltcellar, a sign of misfortune. He is the only one who shrinks back from Christ, and so remains isolated even though he is on the same side of the table as the rest.

Leonardo's composition of the *Last Supper* is original without being eccentric. Indeed, it now seems to be the only possible way to show the event. Most important for the High Renaissance artist, the composition is unified; every detail is indispensable to the whole. Ghirlandaio filled his work with marvelous birds and fruit trees, but they detract from the essence. This reflects the Flemish love of stuff which influenced Italian artists, and Ghirlandaio (as seen in the 15th century notes) packed all manner of wonderful objects into his *Adoration of the Shepherds*. The High Renaissance artist depicted only the essential, with the most significant and emotionally expressive action – in a sense a return to Giotto. Sometimes this meant realism had to suffer. Here the table is too small for the feast (and later, with Raphael, we shall see boats too small for their occupants).

This has been an unusually long stretch of text, but no apologies. All these innovations are essential and worth explaining. They account for Wolfflin's verdict which assessed Leonardo's *Last Supper* as; *"the most famous and important work in the history of painting"*.

Sadly, today the *Last Supper* is in a poor state, partly because it is not a true fresco. Leonardo worked slowly, sometimes painting only a few strokes in a day. Vasari recounts how the prior of the convent became frustrated, puzzled by Leonardo often spending half a day contemplating what he had done so far. Eventually, after berating Leonardo to no effect, the prior complained to Leonardo's patron, the Duke of Milan. Leonardo explained to the duke that an artist accomplishes most when they work the least, forming in their minds perfect ideas which they then express with their hands. The duke understood, and asked what occupied Leonardo's imagination just then. Leonardo replied he still had two heads to paint, Christ's and that of Judas. The latter was giving him the most trouble as he could not imagine the features of a man who *"with all his blessings would betray his own master and the creator of the world"*. It was a tricky chore to find a model. But, noted Leonardo, in the last resort he could use the *"head of the tactless and importunate prior."* The duke roared with laughter and made sure Leonardo was no longer hurried.

True fresco with wet plaster demands fast work. Leonardo instead painted over two ground layers using oil and tempera, just as he did for panel paintings. The work did not bind to the wall and the damp climate took its toll; today most of the colour is lost and much of the definition. We should be thankful for small mercies. Twice the masterpiece was nearly lost altogether. After conquering Milan in 1499, the French king wanted the work taken to France, but was dissuaded as that would have destroyed it. A bomb exploded during an air raid in 1943 and destroyed the roof and the wall to the right of the *Last Supper*, but the work was protected by sand bags.

Two early accurate copies of the original still exist, one in Switzerland and the other, by Giampietrino (a member of Leonardo's school), was used as the main source for the restoration work done on the original from 1978 to 1998.



Giampietrino, *Last Supper* (copy based on Leonardo's fresco), c 1520

"Leonardo's disposition was so lovable that he commanded everyone's affection ... he was so generous ... he sheltered and fed all his friends (Vasari)." Berenson maintained that *"of all Renaissance artists Leonardo was the one who most enjoyed the world"*. This can be appreciated by what Leonardo said about his own sense of wonder (and a lesson to us all in appreciating our environment – look and you shall see):

"Do you not see how many and how varied are the actions performed by men alone? Do you not see how many different kinds of animals there are, and also of trees and plants and flowers? What variety of hilly and level places, or springs, rivers, cities, public and private buildings; of instruments fitted for man's use; of diverse costumes, ornaments and arts?"

Leonardo left few paintings but made countless sketches, as he placed a high value on drawing. His first biographer, Paolo Giovio talked about how Leonardo treated his apprentices: *"until they were 20 years old, Leonardo utterly forbade them to work with brushes and colours, and only allowed them to practise with a slate pencil."* Leonardo annotated many of his drawings. All his notes were written in mirror writing, not to hide any secrets, but simply because this was a way of not smearing the ink when writing with his left hand (travelling left to right across the text he had just written). Mirror writing allowed him to write right to left.

His many studies of nature, especially people, explain why Vasari maintained Leonardo “*painted figures that moved and breathed.*” He often made many sketches, some quite rough, before tackling a canvas. This was true of his Madonnas, an approach spurned by most artists who simply copied older images. Thus, Leonardo’s paintings of the Madonna and Child are very different. The figures don’t look out at us in a still, calm manner. Leonardo painted them as a real mother and son. Here they are engrossed in their game; their movements, hands and expressions utterly lifelike. Mary looks like a delighted young mother.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Benois Madonna*, 1478
(Hermitage)



Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks*, 1483-86
(Louvre)

Virgin of the Rocks, now in the Louvre is also different. Mary is kneeling, her attention devoted to St John who presses forward in prayer towards Christ, who blesses him. Together with their inter-locked gestures, Mary’s arms unify them, but not in a simplistic way – they are at right angles, one coming forward with lovely foreshortening. The large and beautiful angel looks out at us and directs our attention with a hand, simple and clear as a signpost. This allows the viewer to participate in the events (as Alberti recommended).

The modelling of the figures is enhanced by the contrast between light and shade, and by being placed in front of a dark background, another contrast, which achieves a backlit effect. Despite the solidity of the figures and the pyramid they form, they are animated and movement is clearly sensed in all of them.

The contract for this work, which dates from 25 April 1483, was to form the central panel of a larger altarpiece commissioned by the convent of San Francesco Grande. Leonardo was required to paint two prophets and two angels with Mary and the Christ Child, but he painted one of each (St John being a prophet). This breach of contract meant negotiations between Leonardo and the Franciscans lasted until 1508. The copy of this work in the National Gallery in London, attributed to Leonardo with the assistance of his workshop, is vastly inferior. The pointing finger is gone and the angel does not look at us which leaves a gap. The drawing and modelling have been simplified so many nuances are lost.

Landscape is a feature of Leonardo's works and is seen in *Madonna and Child with St Anne*. The worship of St Anne, Mary's mother, grew in the late middle ages when the worship of the Madonna was increasing in importance. Anne became more important in the 15th century when Popes Sixtus IV and Alexander VI allowed indulgences to be obtained through praying to her. The tradition in paintings was to place the Christ Child on Mary's lap and to place her on her mother's. Gerolamo's work is typical.

This was far too unnatural for Leonardo. He changed the composition by putting Jesus at Mary's feet with a lamb. Mary tries to stop him playing with the beast, but Anne tells her to let the boy be: he must accept his fate, death for the salvation of mankind, the lamb being symbolic.

All the figures in Leonardo's version have contrasting movements which are restrained by a compact triangle. A previously lifeless framework becomes animated. The bending forward of the Virgin is of enchanting warmth and beauty; the lines of shoulder and head stand out in relief. The benevolence and restraint of St Anne are lovely, providing a quiet contrast to the action. The group is closed by the Child and the lamb both glancing upwards



Gerolamo dai Libri, *Virgin and Child with St Anne*, 1510-18



Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna and Child with St Anne*, 1508-1518 (Louvre)

Leonardo again uses landscape to enhance the solidity of his figures. His deep landscapes create peacefulness but Leonardo is careful to make them insubstantial so as to contrast with and enhance the tangible bulk of the figures. Leonardo studied rocks and mountains conscientiously and scientifically as can be seen in the foreground. The figures in *Madonna and Child with St Anne* are larger in scale, filling more of the canvas; another feature of High Renaissance art.

The *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci* shows Leonardo's use of an incompletely defined landscape as contrast to the sculptural form of the figure. The sense of relief is helped by the highlights in the hair, which Leonardo loved painting, against the dark background of the juniper tree (which reflects the woman's name). The spikiness of the leaves contrast with the soft ringlets of Ginevra's hair. By now, this theme of contrast should be hammered home! Five inches of the original painting are missing from the bottom.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci*, 1475-76 (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC)

Leonardo was extremely sensitive to the beauty of the female body; “one could say that he was the first to realise the soft texture of skin (Berenson)”. The gentle blush of Ginevra's cheeks and the smoothness of flesh under the gauze bodice demonstrate this. Leonardo used the ball of his thumb and his fingertips to obtain smoother transitions than he could manage with brushes. Leonardo said that modelling was the soul of painting. Here light and shade produce a wonderful effect. The shadows cast over the eyes by the eyelids, and those cast by the nose and the lower lip are examples of Leonardo's subtle *chiaroscuro* which bring Ginevra to life.

The sensitivity to woman's skin is clear in the face of the *Mona Lisa*, a calm, timeless ideal. Portraits in the 15th century sought to go beyond mere representation and mirror the mood. Leonardo achieves this in *Mona Lisa*: "like a breath of wind rippling the water, the soft planes of her face are moved, and the light and shadow play across it in whispered dialogue which we never tire of listening." She has no eyebrows and a high forehead. The latter was accounted beautiful and it was fashionable for women to pluck their eyebrows in the 15th century. Later in the 16th century (as we shall see) fashion changed - the line of the forehead was lowered and eyebrows returned.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503-6 (Louvre)

The rigid and vertical pose conveys distinction but is softened by Leonardo. She is not lacking in movement; sitting sideways, but with her upper half turned slightly towards us and her face turned still more. The sensuous quality of the painting is shown especially well by the hands. One lies elegantly on the left arm, the other grasps the chair, with the little finger elegantly extended. *Mona Lisa* forms a pyramid, her arms and hands defining the base, adding to the sense of timelessness. Insubstantial landscape is used once more, adding to luminosity of the face. Girl and landscape are linked. The arch of the veil over the left shoulder continues into the bridge; the curving path mirrors the pattern picked out on the sleeves.

Leonardo studied optics to develop his *sfumato* technique, which he used to idealize the face of *Mona Lisa* (much like Bellini did in his portraits in the 15th century). In *St John the Baptist* Leonardo uses *sfumato* for modelling. The figure is not determined by a tangible line, it blurs into the background. Light is used for emphasis, for example, highlights in the hair. *St John* is connected to the *Mona Lisa* by his smile and gaze.



Leonardo da Vinci, *St John the Baptist*, c 1510-15

St John is probably the last painting produced by Leonardo himself. He left Milan in 1513 when the political situation was uncertain. In 1516 Leonardo was made “*first painter, engineer and architect*” by French king Francis I and he spent his last years in the king’s chateau of Clos Luce in Amboise.

Antonio de Beatis visited Leonardo and recorded in his journal on 10th October 1517:

“And it is true that no more good can be expected of him [Leonardo] because his right side is paralyzed. He enlisted the aid of a student from Milan who works quite well, and although Master Leonardo can no longer paint with the delicacy one expects of him, he still draws and teaches others.”

In legend (by contemporary accounts the king was far away from Amboise) started by Vasari, and depicted by Ingres, Leonardo died embraced by Francis I on 2 May 1519.

“He was seized by a paroxysm, the forerunner of death, and, to show him favour and to soothe his pain, the king held his head. Conscious of the great honour being done to him, the inspired Leonardo breathed his last in the arms of the king.”



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Death of Leonardo da Vinci*, 1818

Berenson sums up this great master;

“Leonardo is the one artist of whom it may be said with perfect literalness: nothing he touched but turned into a thing of eternal beauty, Whether it be the cross-section of a skull, the structure of a weed, or a study of muscles, he, with his feeling for line and for light and shade, forever transmuted it into life-communicating values.”

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Michelangelo's highest allegiance was to beauty rather than scientific truth, and the human figure was the form in which Michelangelo found divine beauty. In comparison to Leonardo, Michelangelo experienced no joy in everyday things, and scorned Flemish painting:

"In Flanders they paint with a view to external exactness ... without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful choice or boldness".

Nude bodies and movement are the objects of Michelangelo's art. Vasari, a close friend, remembered:

"Michelangelo concentrated his energies on achieving absolute perfection in what he could do best, so there are no landscapes to be seen, nor any trees, buildings or other embellishments and variations; for he never spent time on such things, lest perhaps he should degrade his genius."

His vision of the human nude is without parallel. Anatomy and the mechanics of movement are expressed accurately which allows the viewer to empathize and so share the experience. This is what Berenson means by "life-communicating". We see Michelangelo's figures and we feel the physical stress and emotion directly and vividly. Thus, Michelangelo's obsession with the human body and the artistic beauty he saw in it.



Michelangelo, *Pietà*, 1498-99 (St Peter's, Vatican City)

Michelangelo had a long life. His early works in Rome represent the full blossoming of the High Renaissance, but before he died Mannerism was firmly established. *Pieta* is a beautiful and innovative work. The two figures are combined in easy harmony. Mary grasps her burden but is not overwhelmed. The attitude of Christ with his shoulder forced upwards and head downwards gives unsurpassed pathos to the dead body. Mary's expression is new. Earlier masters show her with a weeping face distorted with grief, a swooning collapse. Michelangelo said, "*the Mother of God does not weep like an earthly mother*". Vasari agreed:

This work did wonders for Michelangelo's reputation. To be sure, there are some critics, more or less fools, who say that he made Our Lady look too young. They fail to see that those who keep their virginity unspotted stay for a long time fresh and youthful, just as those afflicted as Christ was do the opposite. Anyhow, this work added more glory and lustre to Michelangelo's genius than anything he had done before."

Mary bows her head, betraying no emotion, only her drooping left hand with finger extended is eloquent, and it is easy actually to feel the gesture in one's own hand and hence appreciate the meaning, "*this, my son, dead for the sake you, mankind*". Mary's hand is an example of Wolfflin's comment on Michelangelo's art:

"every bend of a limb, every turn has a latent power ... quite trivial displacements have an incomprehensibly powerful effect ... half-open her hand accompanies the mute monologue of anguish."

Michelangelo overheard a group of strangers enthusing over the work, and was horrified when one claimed it was by Gobbo of Milan (aka Cristofori Solari). Vasari reported: "*Michelangelo had put into this work so much love and effort ... so one night, taking his chisels, he shut himself in with a light and carved his name on the statue [on Mary's sash] something he never did again."*

The face of the Virgin is delicate and narrow, a type favoured in Florence. A few years later Michelangelo changed the features and, more importantly, revolutionised the depiction of Mary. Leonardo had shown the power of strong clear figures, unencumbered by unnecessary ornament. Michelangelo followed this, as can be seen by comparing his *Bargello Tondo* with Rossellino's relief.



Michelangelo, *Bargello Tondo* (also known as *Pitti Tondo*), 1504-5



Antonio Rossellini, *Adoration of the Child*, c 1463

Michelangelo's form is larger and hence calmer;

"the delight in caprices and in multiplicity of small surface undulations ceases and gives way to a desire for large, still, masses of light and shade".

Because of this clarity, Michelangelo's work has a much more immediate and serious impact.

The *Bargello Tondo* shows the genesis of a new ideal of feminine beauty; more powerfully built, with large eyes, broad cheeks and a firm chin. She looks like a woman who would protect her charge against any danger, intellectual or physical. No more delicate and pious little woman, but the future Queen of Heaven; strong, stalwart and completely reliable. (We shall see this trend with Raphael too.) The break with the older Florentine grace is completed in Michelangelo's *Holy Family*.



Michelangelo, *Holy Family (Doni Tondo)*, c 1507 (Uffizi, Florence)

The Madonna is clearly the leader of this household, full of resolve and power. The painting was produced when Leonardo's *Madonna and Child with St Anne* was causing great excitement by its unified figures. Michelangelo had Joseph for St Anne, but had the same problem. His solution has greater movement, Leonardo's is calmer and more expressive. Yet even Leonardo cannot show anything comparable to Mary's outstretched arm, rendered in gorgeous light and shade and such stunning accuracy we feel we can reach out and stroke it;

"full of life in every joint and muscle and of essential significance in the whole composition – not for nothing is the arm bared to the shoulder."

In the High Renaissance joints became important in conveying movement, and in allowing the spectator to share in the action, so they had to be visible. Michelangelo was the only one to bare the arm of the Virgin, but male saints now often have their sleeves rolled up and the shoulder was usually displayed, particularly in angels. Vasari reckoned this *Holy Family* tondo was *"beyond doubt the most beautiful and perfect of the few panel pictures he painted."* Michelangelo shunned the medium, rating *"oil painting as fit for only women and the lazy"*.

Michelangelo was unsociable, mistrustful, untidy, moody, obsessed with his work and almost pathologically proud. Generally, he held himself aloof from other artists: *"I was never a painter or sculptor like those who set up shop."*

He came from an impoverished Florentine family with claims to nobility, and who tried to beat the taste for art out of the young Michelangelo who neglected chores and lessons to draw incessantly. Finally admitting defeat, the father had his son apprenticed to Ghirlandaio. Soon afterwards Michelangelo's work attracted the attention of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who gave the young master a room in the Medici household and treated him like a son. Michelangelo stayed with the Medici for four years until Lorenzo died in 1492.

Later in Florence, Michelangelo produced his most famous work. The statue, erected in 1504, was intended as a symbol of liberty. Just as David had protected his people and governed them justly, so should whoever now ruled Florence (which, as described in Sandro Botticelli's late works, had seen much tumult).

The marble block from which *David* was carved had been worked on in 1464 then abandoned. That reduced the amount of material with which Michelangelo had to work when he started the statue almost 40 years later. Perforce, the figure has little depth. This is not apparent from the front from which point David looks complete and convincing, but explains why the final position of the statue was chosen with great care.



Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-3, marble

David encapsulates Michelangelo's perception of divine beauty in the human form. The work is unusual in not including Goliath's severed head, probably so as not to distract from that perfection. One of the most striking examples of the traditional pairing is Donatello's statue of *David*, also commissioned by the Medici for propaganda. The work stood prominently in the Medici palace at Florence with an inscription encouraging everyone to follow the example of the young warrior and fight against such tyrants as the Duke of Milan who then threatened the republic.



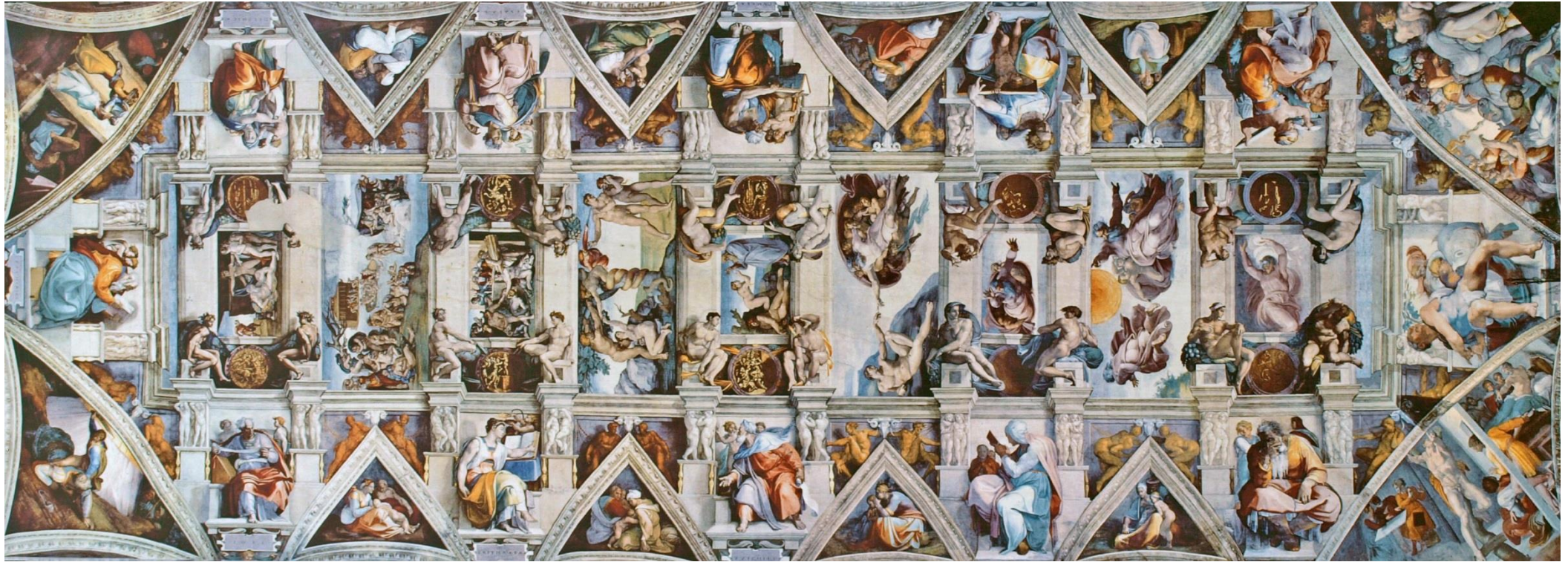
Donatello, *David with the Head of Goliath*, bronze, c 1420s



Michelangelo, *Moses* from *Julius II's Memorial*, San Pietro in Vincoli, Rome

David was so successful, Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by Pope Julius II to design his tomb, which Michelangelo worked on intermittently for 40 years, through arguments and several changes of contract. Eventually, the magnificent free-standing tomb with three levels and 40 statues (originally envisaged for St Peter's) was reduced to a wall memorial (and moved from St Peter's), a decision Michelangelo considered the greatest tragedy of his life. The memorial is centred on Moses, which Michelangelo thought was his most lifelike work.

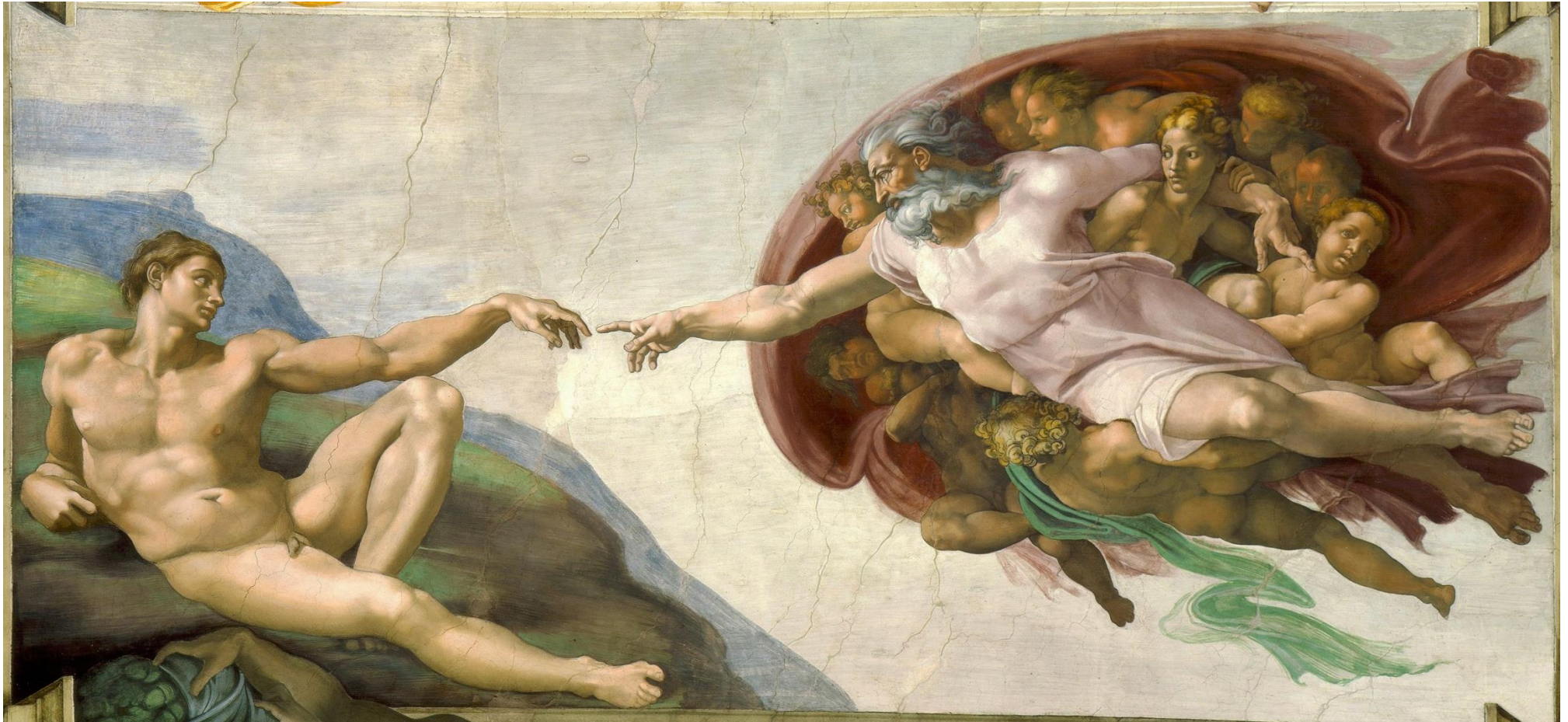
Julius interrupted Michelangelo's work on the tomb and told him to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo protested, but Julius was bad-tempered and prone to hot rages, and so had his way. The old St Peter's, built in the 4th century, had been devastated by Goths, Vandals and other invading armies, along with fire, storms and earthquakes. Julius had five projects: the rebuilding of St Peter's designed initially by Bramante and later taken over by Michelangelo; the enlargement of the Vatican by Bramante; the decoration of the new Vatican rooms by Raphael; his tomb; and the decoration of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.



Michelangelo, *Sistine Chapel Ceiling*, fresco, 1508-1512

Michelangelo was inexperienced with fresco so sent for several painters from Florence to show him their techniques. When he saw their work, he locked himself in the chapel and refused to let them back in, resolving to complete the ceiling on his own. He did so in two stints of about 18 months (winter 1508/9 to summer 1510 and Feb 1511 to Oct 1512). That was an astonishing pace of work. Even so Michelangelo was put under great pressure by Julius who badgered throughout, even threatening to have Michelangelo thrown from the scaffolding. The chapel was opened to the public (the wealthier members, anyway) on All Saints' Day and the Pope sung mass.

Down the spine of the ceiling are nine scenes from Genesis: (from right to left) the Separation of Light and Darkness; Creation of Sun, Moon and Earth; Separation of Land and Water; Creation of Adam; Creation of Eve; Temptation and Expulsion from Garden of Eden; Sacrifice of Noah; Great Flood; Drunkenness of Noah. Above and below this spine and at the ends are figures who foresaw the Coming of Christ: seven male prophets of Israel and five female sibyls of the ancient world. The four corners show scenes associated with the Salvation of Israel: (clockwise from the north-east) Moses raising the Brazen Serpent; Punishment of Haman; David killing Goliath; Judith killing Holofernes. The triangular spandrels contain members of the family of Christ with the apex of each spandrel (and also the corner-pieces) decorated with athletic male nudes (*ignudi*).



Michelangelo, *The Creation of Adam*, detail of Sistine Chapel, 1508-12

Adam is the most famous scene; a combination of latent power and complete helplessness producing great vitality:

"He lies in such a way that one knows he cannot rise of his own accord – the drooping fingers of his outstretched hand make that clear – he can only turn his head to God ... yet what colossal movement there is in that motionless body, in the upraised leg and twist of hips, in the torso seen from the front and the limbs in profile" (Wolfflin).

"A figure whose beauty, pose and contours are such that it seems to have been fashioned that very moment by the first and supreme Creator rather than by the drawing and brush of mortal man" (Vasari).

Vasari reckoned Michelangelo achieved more with his sibyls and prophets than the central scenes from Genesis. The *Delphic Sibyl* has the movement, energy and contrast so typical of High Renaissance art. She suddenly looks up from reading her scroll. The stable vertical axis is produced by shadowing half the face, the peaked fold of the headcloth and by the knee. The movement to our right is created by the eyes, the flowing hair, and the sweep of the mantle (like a sail being blown from the left). The striking arm (almost a repeat from the Holy Family) provides a contrasting move to our left.



Michelangelo, *The Delphic Sibyl*, detail of Sistine Chapel, 1508-12

The drapery is another example of contrast which Michelangelo often employs between right and left silhouettes; one a simple closed line, the other jagged and full of movement. The arms differ too; one high and tense, the other a dead weight.

The *Libyan Sibyl* is a complicated pose of movement; she reaches backward while looking in another direction. She is more of a diamond composition formed by the diagonal line of the shadow running down the back, her spine and the join of her robe which is crossed by the line from half of the book, through her shoulders and continued into the cherub's arm (this line being repeated in her left thigh). One can sense the strain on her toes - beautifully rendered - as they take the weight of the turn.



Michelangelo, *The Libyan Sibyl*, detail of Sistine Chapel, 1508-12



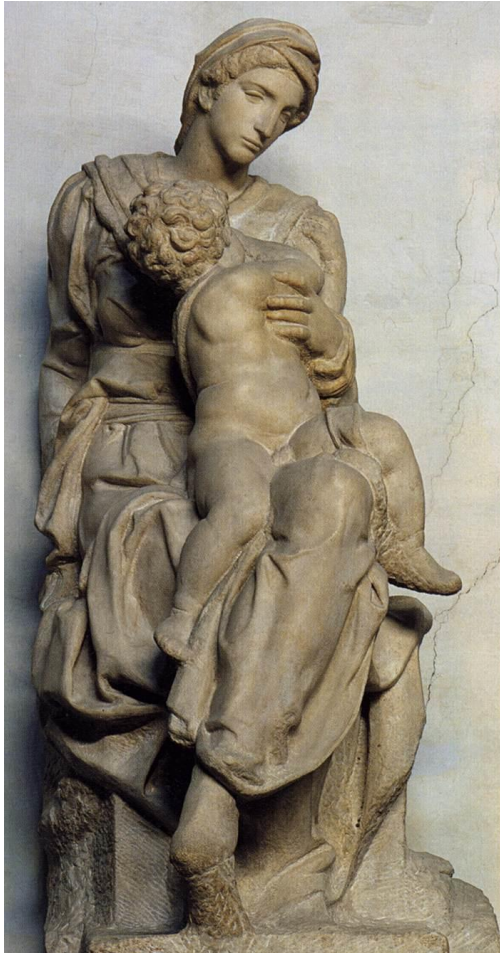
Michelangelo, *The Eritrean Sibyl*



Michelangelo, *The Persian Sibyl*

The *Eritrean Sibyl* exhibits power, enhanced by vibrant colour. The *Persian Sibyl* allows Michelangelo to depict old age - she must peer closely at her book and her face is delicately lined. The muted colours of her robes fit her age. She is the only sibyl fully covered – an example of Blunt's assertion that for all his interest in the human body Michelangelo preferred the beauty of youth to the truth of decaying old flesh.

Back to Florence for more work for the Medici, including their tomb (uncompleted). Michelangelo produced more complicated statues, with much more movement than his *Pieta* in St Peter's and, perhaps as a consequence, of less emotional impact. The tortuous and broken line of the *Florentine Pieta*, however, does help convey the anguish of the moment. The features of Joseph's face are a self-portrait of the artist.



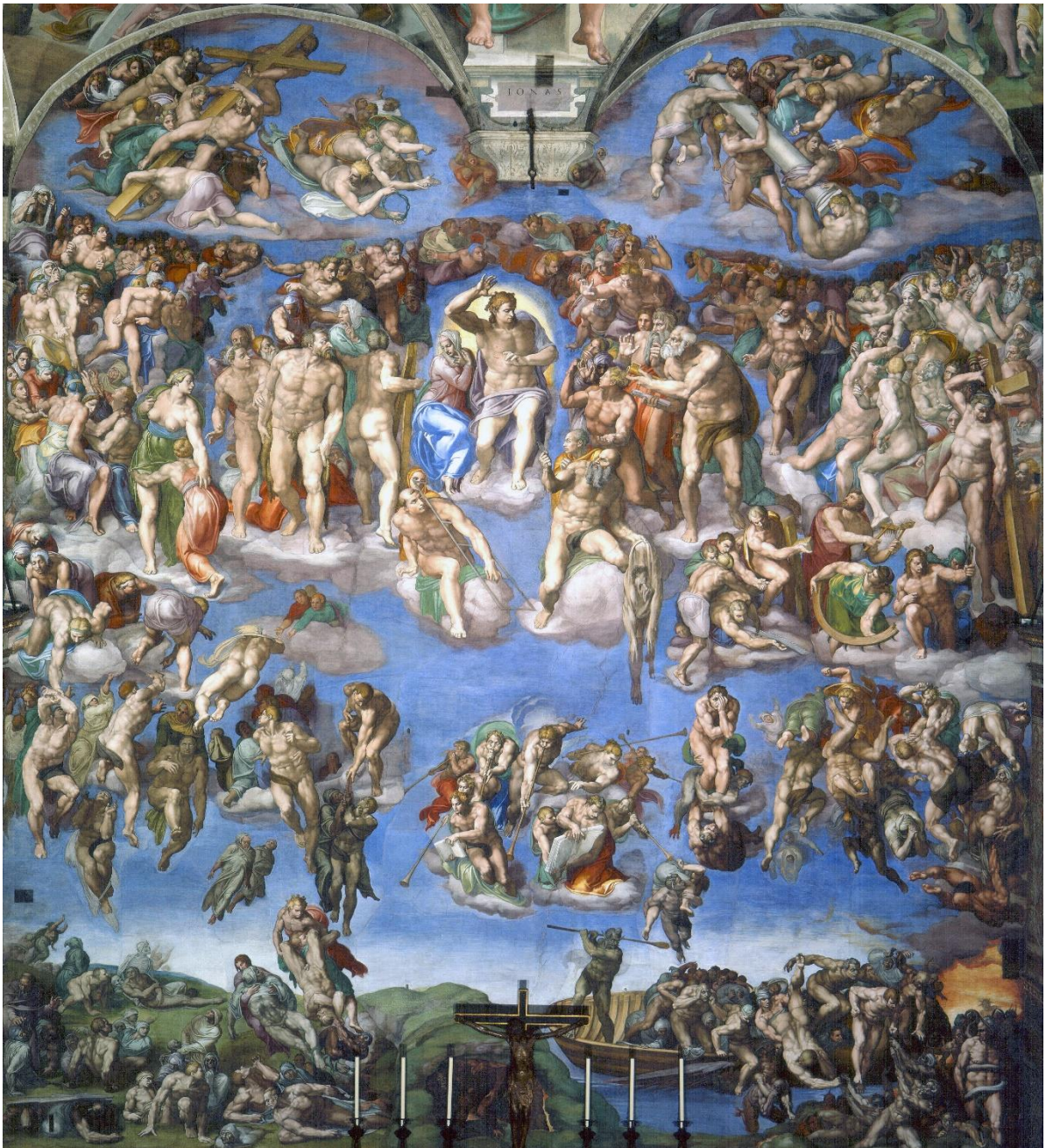
Michelangelo, *Medici Madonna*, 1521-31



Michelangelo, *Deposition (The Florentine Pieta)*, c 1547-1553

Michelangelo worked on this sculpture for eight years for exercise and recreation according to Vasari, intending it for his own tomb. The sculpture then broke into four pieces, perhaps because of a flaw in the marble. Michelangelo may have broken it out of frustration – Christ's left leg is missing and his left arm seems inappropriate being that of a muscular chap and jarring with the emaciation of the right leg and ribs. Michelangelo often abandoned sculptures if he detected the slightest error in his work, which he explained, was why he finished so few pieces. Anyway, Michelangelo gave the broken Pieta to Francesco Bandini as a gift (it is sometimes referred to as the *Bandini Pieta*), who got the pieces put together, but no further work was done.

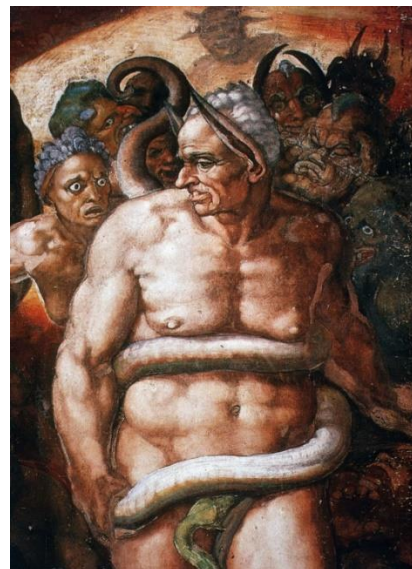
Michelangelo's close association with the Medici continued in Rome. A few days before his death, the Medici pope, Clement VII, commissioned Michelangelo to paint the *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel. The death of Clement saw the family ousted from power. However, the new pope, Paul III pardoned Michelangelo for his support of the Medici and confirmed the commission. In 1534 Michelangelo returned to Rome to paint the *Last Judgement*.



Michelangelo, *The Last Judgement*, fresco, 1535-41

Pope Paul went to see the work when it was three-quarters done. His aide, Cardinal Biagio de Cesena, reckoned the nude figures were disgraceful, fit only for public baths or taverns and certainly not for a sacred place. Michelangelo (in an echo from Leonardo and Judas in the *Last Supper*) took his revenge by using Biagio as the model for Minos placed bottom right above a door so everyone could see it easily. In myth, every 9 years Minos sent 14 children to be eaten by the Minotaur. Biagio pleaded with the pope to get Michelangelo to change the image, but the pope sided with the artist; Biagio's likeness remained.

The seated figure of Christ turns his stern and terrible countenance towards the damned in order to curse them. In great fear Mary draws her mantle close and shies from the desolation. Beneath Christ is St Bartholomew, his flayed skin bearing a self-portrait of Michelangelo, and St Lawrence holding the gridiron on which he was roasted.



Michelangelo, *Biagio de Cesena as Minos*

Michelangelo worked on the *Last Judgement* for eight years, and Vasari reported that the fresco was thrown open to the public on Christmas Day 1541 (he himself went to see it later in the year). The work coincided with the early years of the Counter-Reformation. The Council of Trent between 1545 and 1563 hardened Catholic doctrine and laid down rules for religious art. Nude figures gave offence. Michelangelo was denounced in 1549 as “*an inventor of filthiness, who cared more for art than for devotion.*” Among the first acts of Pope Paul IV in 1555 was to cut off Michelangelo’s pension and to order the master to re-paint the nudes in the *Last Judgement* more modestly. Michelangelo refused. After his death loin-cloths were over-painted and there were repeated proposals to have the whole fresco erased. St Catherine, to the right of St Bartholomew’s flayed skin and holding half of her wheel, was originally entirely nude but was clothed in green later.

Michelangelo never married, which once drew a query from a priest. The master observed:

“I’ve always had only too harassing a wife in this demanding art of mine, and the works I leave behind will be my sons. Even if they are nothing they will live for a while. It would have been a disaster for Lorenzo Ghiberti if he hadn’t made the doors of San Giovanni, seeing that they are still standing whereas his children and grand-children squandered all he left.”

Michelangelo died in Rome after developing a fever. He had expressed a wish for his body to be returned to Florence, which he loved deeply. So his nephew, Lionardo, smuggled his corpse in a bale disguised as merchandise out of Rome. Vasari designed the Michelangelo’s tomb – the three statues represent Painting, Sculpture and Architecture:

“Michelangelo, as clearly recognized, achieved in the three arts a perfect mastery that God has granted no other person, in the ancient or modern world, in all the years that the sun has been spinning round the world.”



Michelangelo’s Tomb, Santa Croce Florence

Raffaello Santi - Raphael (1483-1520)

Raphael is usually accepted as the painter in whose work the Renaissance ideal of order and harmony was finally attained. The grace and elegance of his art characterised his life; Raphael was modest, well-mannered, widely read and exceptionally charming. He threw no tantrums, was good-humoured and had a lively appreciation of women. The greatest tragedy in Western art is that Raphael died so young.

Raphael invigorated composition with his genius. He developed depictions of the Holy Family. He saw that Leonardo used the pyramid to arrange figures in a compact group. *The Canigiani Holy Family* repeats this. Christ and St John with their mothers are on either side of the central figure of Joseph. His unusual dominance in a Holy Family scene is softened by earth tones and shadow. Only Mary's face is lit and we see only her eyes and are thus drawn towards her. Raphael signed his name on the hem of her blouse.



Raphael, *The Canigiani Holy Family*, 1507 (Alte Pinakothek, Munich)

In *Madonna of the Meadow* Raphael departs from a symmetrical composition. The children are offset, forming a small triangle, inside the larger triangle of the group. Mary is calm and serene, mirrored by the uncluttered landscape, which has much less detail than in the *Canigiani*. Mary's long arm (from Leonardo's *St Anne*) actually separates the children, which breaks the unity a little.



Raphael, *Madonna in the Meadow*, 1505-6

Then there is the concentrated richness of the *Alba Madonna*, a painting epitomising Raphael's genius to inspire; the grace and beauty evoke peaceful reassurance and utter devotion. The group is more solid with Mary's arm again pulling the boy St John closer and Jesus is secure amid his mother's legs. The unity of the figures is more convincing as they are rendered in a still flatter triangle which is no longer equilateral. There is more movement, with the Virgin's head shadowing Christ's turn and arm; their eyes on the cross. Mary's right arm is mirrored by her leg, producing almost a diamond-shaped enclosure, contrasting with the tondo frame.

By the time Raphael painted the *Alba Madonna*, he had spent time in Florence (1504-1508) and seen Leonardo's *St Anne*, and Michelangelo's *Holy Family*. Vasari reported Raphael was entranced by Leonardo's facial expressions, and movement and solidity of figures. In the *Alba Madonna* he captures the inward grace of Leonardo's Mary and St Anne. Raphael also extends the idea of Michelangelo's Mary. She is now a powerful heroine, underlined by the military style of sandal she wears, clearly able to offer protection. Christ, indeed, looks combatant and fearless, sustained by his mother's strength.



Raphael, *Alba Madonna*, 1510 (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC)

Raphael absorbed influences and developed them. He was a precocious talent from the start. His father, a court painter and poet at Urbino, a mountain town some distance south-east of Florence, realised how important it was for children to be reared in the family home on the milk of their own mothers rather than that of wet-nurses, then, as in Victorian times, of the servant or peasant class. Raphael was suckled by his mother. Thus, he experienced as a baby the quiet and gentle family ways at home instead of being exposed to the loudness and rough manners of a peasant house. Michelangelo had a wet-nurse. Indeed, noting his family's aversion to his being an artist, Michelangelo said he acquired a love of sculpture with the milk of his wet-nurse who was a stone-cutter's wife - a view of inheritance which would have alarmed the scientific Leonardo. Raphael lost his familial haven at the age of 11 when his father died, his mother having died three years previously. Raphael was placed with Pietro Perugino, an outstanding painter of Central Italy.

Perugino is thought to have had a sensitive feeling for space, and Raphael emulated him, but soon outstripped his master. Raphael's *Entombment* compared to Perugino's *Mourning* shows how he moved away from his master in a very short time.



Pietro Perugino, *Mourning of the Dead Christ*, 1495

Raphael was commissioned to paint *Entombment* by Atalanta Baglioni as an altarpiece for her family chapel in the church of San Francesco al Prato in Perugia. A few years earlier her son had murdered his relations to gain control of the government, only to be killed himself a few days later. He died in his mother's arms as she begged him to forgive his killers.

Raphael's initial sketch for the work was similar to Perugino's composition, but the painting he delivered has much more dramatic power. Two men carry the corpse up the steps into the tomb on the left, immediately bringing in movement. They are different in age and character, and one is walking backwards. Their effort and animation contrasts with the lank body of the dead Christ. The feeling of grief among the lamenters is enhanced by the indifference of these two men who are simply concentrating on their labour. Perugino's work leaves the spectator apathetic as all the heads have the same intensity of expression. Raphael increases the drama by strong contrasts.



Raphael, *Entombment*, 1507 (Galleria Borghese, Rome)



Raphael, *The School of Athens*, fresco, 1509 *Stanza della Segnatura* (now *Stanza di Raffaello*), Apostolic Palace, Vatican City

Raphael's works got him invited to Rome to decorate the new papal apartments. Julius II gave Raphael the job of decorating the *Stanza della Segnatura*, which had been used as the room in which the pope signed and sealed Papal Bulls, but which Julius wished to use as a library. The traditional way of decorating libraries originated in the Middle Ages. The four walls each had one faculty from the spectrum of knowledge; Theology, Philosophy, Jurisprudence and Medicine and depicted men and women famed in the field. In the 15th century, Medicine was replaced in this scheme by Poetry. Raphael's decoration of the *Stanza della Segnatura* follows this scheme. On three walls are the *School of Athens* (Philosophy), *Disputa* (Theology), *Parnassus* (Poetry) and, on the fourth, depictions of Justinian and Gregory XI (Jurisprudence). These large scenes are linked by ceiling *tondo*. We will look at two in detail.

School of Athens has long been regarded as a masterpiece and the embodiment of the classical spirit of the High Renaissance. Berenson claimed Raphael was the greatest master of composition that Europe had produced down to the end of the 19th century (presumably Degas then took the crown), and Raphael's work for the papacy shows his talent for composition, for his sense of space, for grouping figures together and for gestures.

In the centre of *School of Athens* stand Aristotle, holding his book *Etica* ("Ethics"), and Plato, holding *Timeo* in which he reflected on the nature and creator of the cosmos. Plato and Aristotle draw the attention through the same devices Michelangelo used in his *Last Supper* - the open space behind their heads and the perspective lines of architecture. Socrates, Plato's teacher, spoke of four steps which a pupil must climb in order to conduct a philosophical discussion: geometry, astronomy, arithmetic and solid geometry. Thus, Raphael painted four steps and at the top of them to the left shows Socrates (in an olive robe, side-on) counting off the steps on his fingers. Socrates' steps are then shown in different groups on the lower level. The whole work is therefore coherent in subject as well as form.

Raphael skillfully builds up his groups. The varied poses complement each other and their subject. The four geometers, with the bending Euclid, in the right foreground are directed towards a single point. Pythagoras sits on the left writing in a large book and his three students, of different ages, press forward and so form a rough triangle. They are bracketed by two men, both holding books and with similar hair at the same level. The one on the left in blue leans on a column. The other, pointing out a passage, has the pose of Leda in Leonardo's *Leda and the Swan* (now lost). Astronomy is represented by Zoroaster, holding the heavens, with whom stands the geographer Ptolemy holding a globe of the world. The youthful figure, looking out from the group and wearing a black cap, is a self-portrait of Raphael.



Raphael, *The School of Athens*, (detail)

On another wall is *Parnassus*, with Apollo, classical god of music and poetry, the central figure. Mount Parnassus is, like the hill of the Vatican, a place where in ancient times there was a shrine to Apollo. Through the window on the wall in which *Parnassus* is painted there is a view of the Cortile del Belvedere and the hill of the Vatican. There were newly-discovered classical sculptures in the Cortile when Raphael painted his frescoes, and he used the Ariadne there as a model for the muse to the left of Apollo.



Raphael, *Parnassus*, fresco, 1511

Apollo plays a *lira da braccio*, gazing upwards to indicate his arts are divinely inspired. He is surrounded by the nine Muses. Nine ancient and nine modern poets are at the sides. Raphael used the classical sculpture of Laocoon for the head of Homer, dressed in blue robe, to the left of Apollo. To the left of Homer stands the Florentine poet Dante Alighieri, whose verse epic *Divine Comedy* (1320) was considered a theological work in Raphael's time. Behind the sightless Homer is his guide Virgil explaining the scene. The face over Virgil's shoulder is Raphael's.

Apollo is bracketed by two reclining Muses; Erato (the lovely one) with her lyre and Calliope (beautifully-voiced). The three form a broad triangle with other Muses disposed around it. The central group is book-ended by Homer, facing us, and a majestic Muse, turned away. Each starts a curving movement down to figures who brace the window. Homer's arm points to the boy writing with a stylus, whose bare right thigh (continuing the line of Homer's arm) leads to the heads of the group below. Their glances circle us round and back through the yellow arm and red-clothed leg to the right arm of Sappho, the greatest poet in antiquity. She also serves as a lead into the picture from the window through her gaze.

The same curve can be seen on the other side, starting with the chap who looks directly at us in contrast to the Muse next to him. That curve ends with the counterpart of Sappho on the other side of the window. And a worthy one he is too, literally and pictorially, for he is Horace, the Roman poet. His foreshortened naked arm (by now obligatory!) culminating in a finger which seems to break through the wall. Raphael uses laurel trees in three groups disposed in depth diagonally to add a sense of space. The middle laurels point out Apollo, just as Giotto and Duccio used trees to draw attention to Christ. The poses, expressions and colour are wondrous and, again, everyone is unified in the composition. *"These figures are so incredibly beautiful that they seem to breathe with grace and life."*

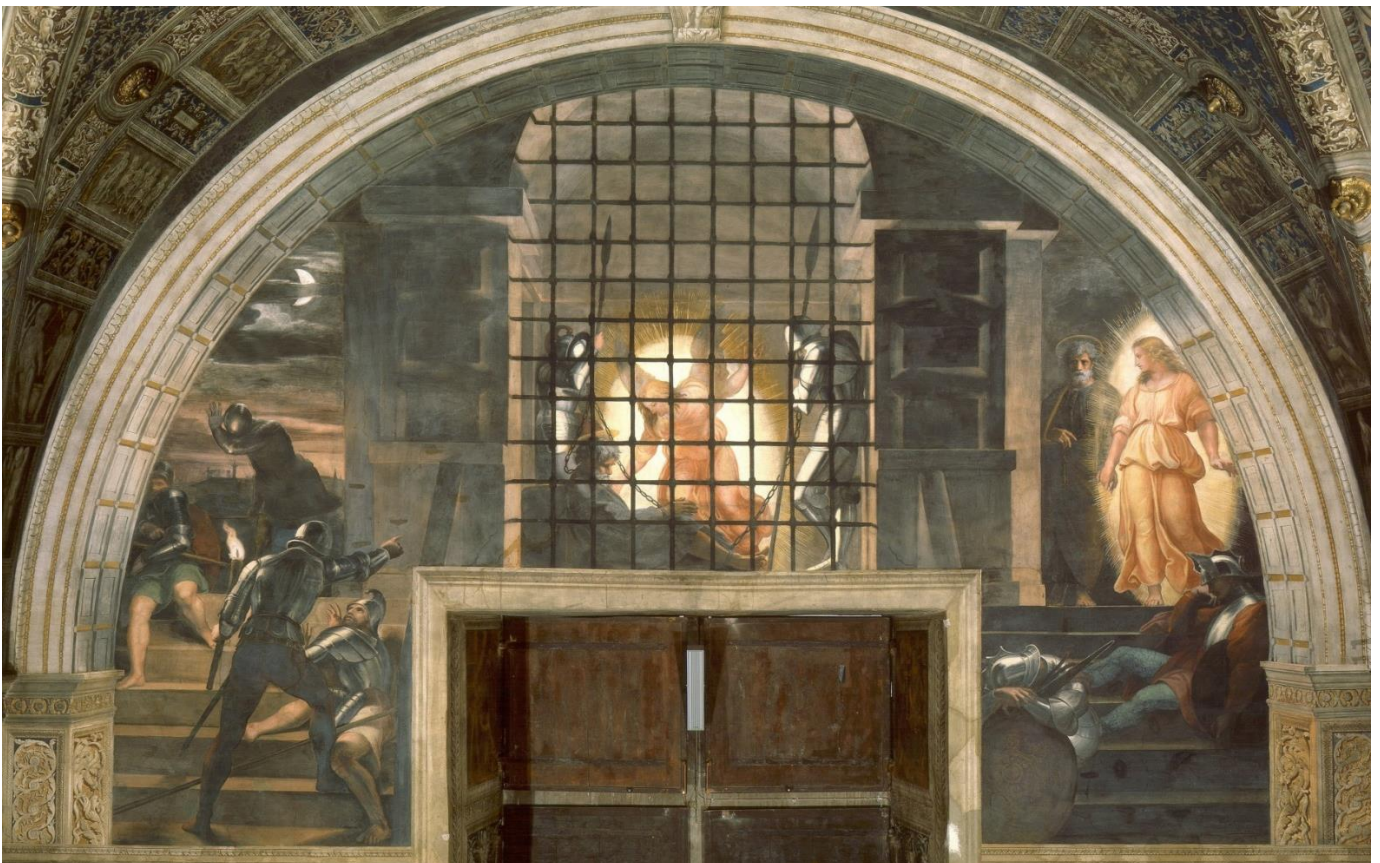
On the wall devoted to Jurisprudence Roman Emperor Justinian is shown with documents of Civil Law and Pope Gregory is shown with Church Law. Raphael used the features of Julius II for Pope Gregory and after seeing the result, Julius II commissioned Raphael to paint his portrait.



Raphael, *Pope Julius II*, 1512

Julius is presented as if the spectator is enjoying a private audience: standing while the Pope sits. He listens (as "audience" implies) intently, his grave expression suggesting he is not entirely happy with what he has heard. That sense is augmented by the strong grip around the left-hand arm-rest. Julius was from the della Rovere family. The acorns on the backrest finials come from the family's coat-of-arms. Raphael introduces a defect in the composition to attain an artistic effect: the finial on the right has been moved to the right to ensure the pope's head is entirely highlighted by the green background. Raphael uses falseness in other works, yet the overall effect remains so natural the trickery is barely noticeable.

Once Raphael had finished the *Stanza della Segnatura* Julius II commissioned him to decorate the *Stanza di Eliodoro*. Julius intended to use the room as a private audience chamber, so the decoration was meant to illustrate the power of the Church. The ceiling has four scenes from the Old Testament showing God's intervention at critical moments. The Deliverance of St Peter on one wall is notable for the treatment of light, natural (dawn and the waning moon) and artificial (angel and flaming torch), reflected as well as direct. "As a work reproducing the effect of night this picture is truer than any other, and it is universally regarded as outstanding and inspired (Vasari)."



Raphael, *The Deliverance of St Peter*, fresco, 1514

The name of this second room Raphael decorated for Pope Julius II is named after the Syrian general Heliodorus who was sent by his king to Jerusalem to rob the temple of money which belonged to widows and orphans. The treacherous overseer of the temple, Simon the Benjamite, had betrayed his High Priest by telling the king about the money. During the raid the High Priest prayed at the altar for help, but Heliodorus carried on emptying coffers undisturbed and seemed unstoppable. Then, suddenly a Heavenly rider in golden armour appeared. The robber was trampled on by the horse and two youths scourged him. This was the story told in the bible. Raphael's rendering was novel.

The composition surprised the Vatican and shocked the public in Rome: the principal action should always be in the middle of the picture, yet here it is at the extreme edge with a void in the centre. Raphael departed too from the usual depiction of the crushed and bloodied Heliodorus. Instead, he depicts the moment of arrival, full of movement. Opposite is another wonderful Raphael group. The women and children are huddled with movement; questioning glances, answering gestures, pressing back, attempting to hide. Yet despite the impression of a great crowd and panic there are surprisingly few figures. Julius appears again, Raphael uses him as a calm oasis amid all the excitement.



Raphael, *The Expulsion of Heliodorus*, fresco, 1512

Leo X succeeded Julius II. On important feast days wall-hangings depicting scenes from Christ's Passion were hung in the Sistine Chapel. According to legend they came from Jerusalem. However, Leo thought they were worn and unsightly, and commissioned Raphael to make cartoons for replacements, showing acts of the apostles. Raphael's cartoons were sent to Flanders, where they were used by weavers. The vertical cuts they made can be seen. Seven tapestries were ready to be hung in the Sistine Chapel for Christmas 1519 and three others arrived just before Leo's death in 1521. During the Sack of Rome in 1527 the works were stolen.

The cartoons seem *"to have been created by miracle rather than by human skill."* For the first time in tapestry cartoons Raphael abandoned the usual monochrome background in favour of a genuine deep picture space. He also continued with his inventive compositions.



Raphael, *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, tapestry cartoon, 1515 (V & A, London)

Christ, the principal figure is on the extreme left, sitting, yet he dominates. Raphael has made one major line beginning with the oarsman on the right and rising, climaxing with the standing figure and then turning down and rising again to Christ. The line of the landscape follows this. Even the birds flying towards us from the background arc towards Christ. The standing man was originally to be a plain oarsman, but Raphael replaced him with another figure adoring Christ. The two, who must be Andrew with Peter in front of him, are linked by showing successive poses in the act of moving from standing to kneeling - a masterful connection.

Raphael makes sure the boats do not compete with the figures by making them unnaturally small, but we hardly register the discrepancy. The herons in the foreground close a gap without distracting from the figures, being in a similar tone to the water which almost completely encompasses them.



Raphael, *Paul preaching at Athens*, tapestry cartoon, 1515 (V & A, London)

Paul preaching at Athens is another great innovation – a flattened X in composition. The preacher with arms raised dominates. His pose on the very edge of the steps adds urgency to his speech. Other figures are deliberately small so as not to draw away focus. Those who are lit are arranged on a diagonal back into the composition from the front right. The statue of Mars, with his arm raised, mirrors the preacher and completes an opposing diagonal. *Christ's charge to St Peter* has an offset principal figure, but attention is drawn by Christ being in shining white with white sheep. Light falls on him fully too. Christ's energetic gesture with his arms, each enhanced by an urgent pointed finger, convey the powerful command he gives.



Raphael, *Christ's charge to St Peter*, tapestry cartoon, 1515 (V & A, London)

The *Healing of the Lame Man* has the great twisted columns said to frame the porch of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (and later used by Bernini for the *Baldacchino* in St Peter's). They frame the main subject, and make a crowd easier to render with economy without swamping the principal figures.



Raphael, *Healing of the Lame Man*, tapestry cartoon, 1515 (V & A, London)

Leo X was much given to sensuous pleasure. After his election as pope, Leo said; *"God has conferred the pontificate upon us, we therefore intend to enjoy it!"* He was an enthusiastic patron of the arts, and enjoyed his relationship with Raphael. In contrast, although he had known Michelangelo since childhood, Leo remarked despondently, *"Michelangelo is impossible to deal with"*. The French historian Paul Larivaille considered Leo exhausted the treasures of three popes – the wealth accumulated by Julius II, his own income and that of his successor.

He was unrestrained in his nepotism. Members of the College of Cardinals attempted to kill him. After that, appointing more of his relatives as cardinals seems understandable. Leo is shown with his cardinal nephews one of whom (on the left), was to be Pope Clement VII. Raphael portrayed his patron capturing, as Berenson put it, the *"brutish greasiness"*.

Vasari, rather more loyal to the Bishops of Rome, concentrated on the materials: *"One can see the pile of the velvet, with the Pope's damask robes rustling and shining, the soft and natural fur of the linings, and the gold and silver imitated so skillfully that they seem to be real gold and silver rather than paint. Then there is an illuminated book of parchment which is utterly realistic and an inexpressibly beautiful little bell of wrought silver."*



Raphael, *Portrait of Leo X*, 1518-9

Raphael's portraits were in great demand. Berenson considered "*Raphael's portraits, in truth, have no superiors as faithful renderings of soul and body*", and cited as an example *Bindo Altoviti*, but it is Raphael's portrait of Castiglione which captures best the character of the sitter - the epitome of the courtier described in his famous book: moderate, underplayed but comfortable and substantial. His piercing eyes remind us of his intellect and perception. He was a close friend of Raphael, who painted him with affection. Raphael recalls *Mona Lisa*; the half-turned pose of the head and shoulders, the clasped hands and quiet colour. Raphael dispenses with Leonardo's fantastic landscape. A plain background suits the personality of Castiglione and was becoming usual in portraits. In turn, this portrait would inspire Rembrandt.



Raphael, *Baldassare Castiglione*, 1514-5

While he was in Rome, Raphael wrote to Castiglione regretting that there were "*so few beautiful women available in Rome as models*". He managed to find one for the painting in the Vatican *The Fire in the Borgo*, using for her the lovely water-carrier. Raphael knew a gorgeous girl when he met one, and he soon used her as a model again. Raphael was commissioned by a Sicilian monastery in Palermo to paint *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary*, known also as the Swoon of the Virgin or "*Lo Spasimo*". The profile and tresses of Raphael's water-carrier in the Borgo re-appear in the beautiful woman on the far right. We shall see her again. Joseph of Arimathea cuts a vigorous, majestic figure as he supports the cross. The painting also shows the final development of Raphael's career; flickering light effects with pockets of dramatic bright and dark areas.



When the altarpiece was being transported by sea from Rome to Sicily the ship got into trouble and sank. Vasari narrated the episode:

...As it was being borne by sea to Palermo, a great tempest cast the ship upon a rock, and it was broken to pieces, and the crew lost, and all the cargo, except this picture, which was carried in its case by the sea to Genoa. Here being drawn to shore, it was seen to be a thing divine, and was taken care of, being found uninjured, even the winds and waves in their fury respecting the beauty of such a work.

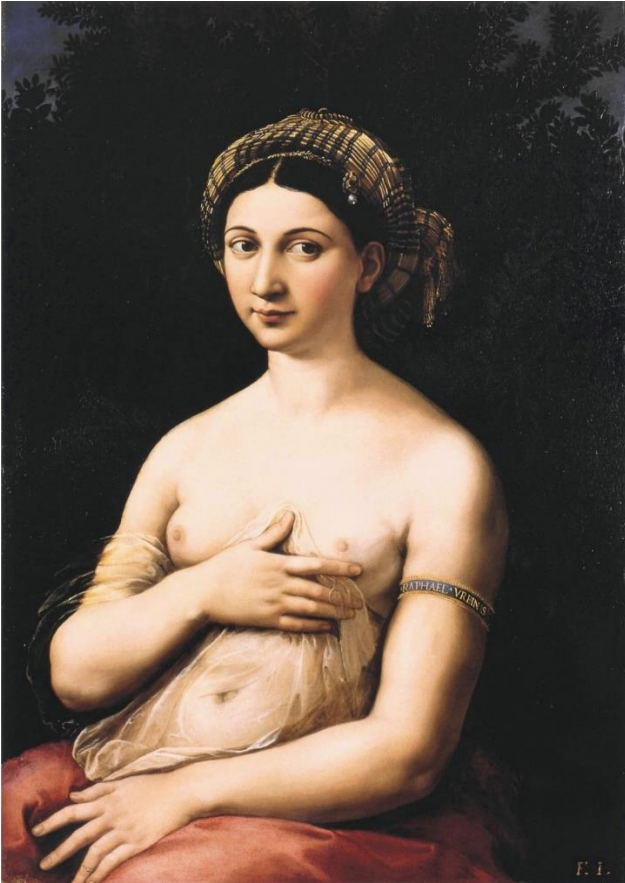
The Sicilian monks had to appeal to the Pope to intercede on their behalf to retrieve the miraculous painting from the Genoese. Three centuries later it was plundered by Napoleon and taken to Paris. There it was transferred from wood panel to canvas, a practice prevalent in France in the early 19th century.

Raphael, *The Fire in the Borgo* (detail), fresco, 1514



Raphael, *Christ Falling on the Way to Calvary* (Lo Spasimo), 1515 (Prado, Madrid)

Raphael, relates Vasari “was indeed a very amorous man with a great fondness for women whom he was always anxious to serve; he was always indulging his sexual appetites.” Nonetheless, Raphael apparently had a great love, Margarita Luti. She was the model for *La Fornarina* (“baker’s daughter), a version of Venus, and for the richly opulent and more entrancing *La Donna Velata*. In both, Margarita wears a pearl ornament in her hair, and holds her hand over her heart in the gesture of love. Their romance was alluded to by Flaubert, Balzac and Baudelaire and by many painters - Ingres painted a picture of them embracing in front of *La Fornarina*.



Raphael, *La Fornarina*, 1518-19



Raphael, *La Donna Velata*, 1516

Margarita was the model for figures in Raphael’s religious works, including the best known, the *Sistine Madonna*. The 16th century taste for altarpieces preferred larger figures and simpler compositions. A sharper distinction was drawn between the heavenly and the earthbound. That took the Virgin Mary from her solid throne of the 15th century (see Bellini’s *San Giobbe Altarpiece* for example) and up into the clouds, usually surrounded by adoring putti.

Raphael embodies these trends in the *Sistine Madonna*. He softens the putti to almost indiscernible ghosts, leaving the Madonna in simple isolation. She is wonderfully light, and finely balanced, her drapery blown gently backwards as she is borne on clouds towards us. She has soft features (of Margarita) yet is aristocratic and powerful. As we have seen with Michelangelo’s *Holy Family* and Raphael’s *Alba Madonna*, the portrayal of Mary as a strong woman was preferred by the High Renaissance. Here again Raphael shows her in that vein: “no other Madonna achieved such effortless splendour” (Murray). She is, after all, the Queen of Heaven (and not the weak washerwoman that Rubens would so often depict).

Raphael continues the contrasts: St Barbara (her tower behind her) looks down; the Pope looks up; one gestures out, the other inward. The Christ child is once again serious, neither giving a benediction nor playing, but gazing unwaveringly before him. He is unlike other children; his hair is dishevelled and standing on end like a prophet’s. One of the angels (the pair much exploited commercially) has only one visible wing, so as not to build up too large a mass at the base. The simplicity of the work greatly adds to its peace and power, and demonstrates why High Renaissance altarpieces with fewer figures were much more effective.



Raphael, *Sistine Madonna*, 1512 (Gemaldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden)

Raphael's last work was commissioned by the Archbishop of Narbonne for his cathedral. Here Raphael uses many more figures because he augments the *Transfiguration* with an earthbound miracle. Unusually for a *Transfiguration* scene, Christ is raised in glory instead of standing on the ground (as in Bellini's version). Christ is the source of power and light, and the disciples below are masterfully posed so as to complete the circle of energy dominated by the Lord. They are made smaller and those on the rock are pressed down, so adding to the freedom of the floating figure. Wolfflin would happily have settled for just this:

"Had Raphael bequeathed nothing else to the world, this group alone would be a complete monument to his conception of art."

But then Raphael added the story of the possessed lunatic boy, shown twisted and convulsing, which follows the *Transfiguration* in Matthew's Gospel; juxtaposing divine radiance with earthly miracle. The gorgeous girl from the *Fire in the Borgo* and *Christ Falling* takes centre stage in this scene. An apostle at the bottom left turns away from the distressed child with a gesture of compassion. His hand and foot seem to protrude from the picture. His shoulder and glance and the girl's arms start a diagonal line up through the crowd. Just as in *Christ Falling*, light and dark patches enhance the drama. The *Transfiguration*, with its exceptional and complicated light, had an enormous impact on Caravaggio and the Tenebrists.



Raphael, *Transfiguration*, 1516-20 (Vatican Museums)

Raphael succumbed to fever, attributed by doctors to heat-stroke, and died on Good Friday – his birthday - aged only 37. As he lay dead in the hall where he had been working, the almost-finished *Transfiguration* was placed at his head. *“He was laid out in the room where he last worked and at his head hung his picture of the transfigured Christ, which had been completed for Cardinal de’ Medici. The contrast between the picture, which was so full of life, and the dead body filled everyone who saw it with bitter pain.”*

So said Vasari, who tells us even the Pope wept, and eulogised:

“Whereas pictures by others may be called simply pictures, those painted by Raphael are truth itself: for in his figures the flesh seems to be moving, they breathe, their pulses beat, and they are utterly true to life ... one can claim without fear of contradiction that artists as outstandingly gifted as Raphael are not simply men but, if it be allowed to say so, mortal gods.”

Raphael’s death prompted Pandolfo Pico della Mirandola to write to Isabella d’Este:

“Here, people are talking about nothing but the death of this exceptional man, who has completed his first life at the young age of 37. His second life – that of his fame, which is subject to neither time nor death – will endure for all eternity”.

Antonio Correggio (1489/1494 – 1534)

Correggio was born thirty miles from Parma and spent at least two years as a pupil of Mantegna. Correggio's soft modelling and tenderness of expression are hard to connect with Mantegna's hard linear style. However, Mantegna's influence is evident in Antonio's ceiling decorations, which were among his first commissions, one being the dome of Parma Cathedral.



Antonio Correggio, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1526-30, fresco, dome of Parma Cathedral



The swirling, congested mass of figures is more like 17th century Baroque than Renaissance art. Berenson believed Correggio lacked restraint: "... possessing supreme command over movement, Correggio squandered it like a prodigal, rioted with it ... everybody must be doing something, even when least to the point"

Clearly true of the dome, examples also appear Correggio's altarpieces. The *St Francis* is the only one in which Antonio adopts the High Renaissance practice of elevating the Virgin above the remaining figures. In others she appears as the centre of a crowd, allowing Correggio to assuage his desire for a mass of movement. The impish boy making a face as he smells Magdalen's vase of ointment in *Madonna with St Jerome* is one example of Berenson's point.



Antonio Correggio, *Madonna of St Jerome ("Day")*, c 1527-28

Vasari was enchanted with the angel holding the book, "smiling so naturally that anyone looking at him has to smile as well and even the most melancholy person cannot help responding cheerfully."

Correggio's great strength, was his depiction of women, for he had a strong sense of feminine charm. When his paintings concentrate largely on a woman; "*his nervousness, his restlessness disappear entirely and we are left with only his finer qualities singing (Berenson).*" This is at its finest in Correggio's series of mythological paintings commissioned by Federico II of Gonzaga for his Ovid room: "*The Loves of Jupiter*".



Antonio Correggio, *Leda and the Swan*, c 1532 (Gemaldegalerie, Berlin)

Leda embraces the Swan (Jupiter or Zeus in disguise) with such feminine charm, the desire of the god is easy to explain. To the right are depicted an earlier scene, Leda initially refusing, and a later scene, Leda's longing look with the slightly flushed face of a satisfied maiden as her lover leaves.



Antonio Correggio, *Danae*, c 1531

Danae is seduced by Jupiter in a shower of gold rain. The colouring of these two paintings was considered to have reached perfection by Correggio's contemporaries: "so soft in colouring and with the shadows of the flesh so skilfully painted that they look like flesh and blood rather than paint (Vasari)". Berenson considers Correggio among the very best who have attempted to paint the surface of the human skin; Danae depicts the "shiver of sensation passing over the nude like a breeze over still waters." Vasari believed Correggio showed artists how to paint hair: Io's and the dog's presumably being examples.



Antonio Correggio, *Jupiter and Io*, c 1531



Antonio Correggio, *Ganymede Abducted*, c 1531

These paintings from Correggio's mythological series are considered his most perfect works. Federico enjoyed them only for a few years: he gave them to the visiting Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who found them delightful and wanted them for himself.

Italian High Renaissance - Venice

Florentine art was attached to classical ideas of form and composition and was discovering scientific methods. That was far too academic for Venetians who loved comfort and splendour. Venetian pictures were not intended for devotion but for enjoyment. Demand for paintings as interior decoration in Venice blossomed in the early 16th century. Pleasant scenes in vibrant colour of merry-making, country parties or sweet dreams of youth were wanted.

Giorgione (c 1477/8-1510)

Giorgione was the great exponent of such paintings: “*combining the poetry of Bellini with gaiety and love of beauty and colour*”. He was born in Castelfranco, 35 miles north-west of Venice, but was brought up in the city as a pupil of Giovanni Bellini. He signed none of his works, and there is confusion with Titian because the latter completed some works unfinished by Giorgione at his untimely death. Giorgione’s only altarpiece is one of his earliest works. The landscape is as serenely peaceful as those in Bellini’s late Madonnas. The undramatic light casting soft shadows adds to the tenderness of the work. The Madonna is separated from the saints and the landscape (as noted already this was common in 16th century, here she remains on her throne but is raised on a pedestal). Her distant dreamy air is close to Bellini’s vision.



Giorgione, *Madonna and Child with Sts Francis and Liberale (Castelfranco Madonna)*, 1503-4

The Madonna’s mood is mirrored by the landscape, and this is one of Giorgione’s traits; his figures match the landscape. This is evident in the *Tempest*. The contemplative and rather melancholy expressions of the figures are in harmony with the ominous aspect of the landscape, with its broken columns and distant city illuminated by an uncanny light. The *Tempest* is one of the best examples of a poetic landscape of mood.



Giorgione, *The Tempest*, c 1507

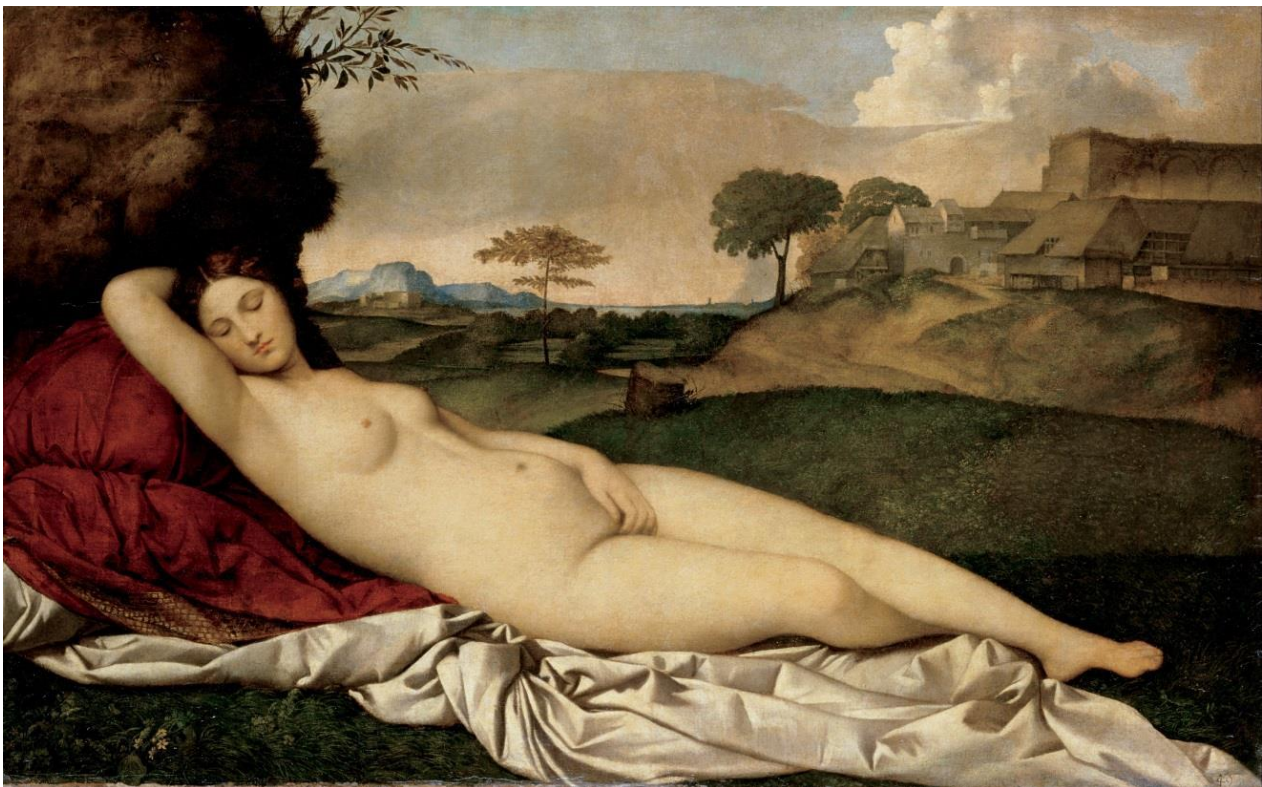
The painting is, however, a mystery. No-one has ever suggested a plausible subject. The Venetian connoisseur, Marcantonio Michiel, who recorded the pictures he saw in Venetian houses between 1525 and 1543 noted the work as “a small landscape with the storm, and the gypsy and soldier.” Venetian art lovers took delight in disguising the subjects of their paintings, and perhaps too there was a taste for pictures without symbolism or meaning, designed solely to please the eye and give free rein to the imagination. *The Tempest* has magical power, enhanced by inconsistencies that are dream-like (the ruins, and the figures unaware both of each other and the approaching storm). Faced with Giorgione’s work, Vasari confessed;

“I for my part have never been able to understand his figures nor, for all my asking, have I ever found anyone who does ... I have not been able to interpret the meaning of this.”

Giorgione’s figures are not defined by outlines, so they often seem to be moving slightly, adding to the magic of his works. *The Three Philosophers* is another mystery. What is the subject - the Magi; the Three Ages of Man; the Active, Contemplative and Enquiring Mind? The painting has been badly cut-down on the left. The landscape and the figures suit each other. Leonardo had done this in the *Virgin of the Rocks*, and Giorgione was deeply influenced. Leonardo and Giorgione met in Venice in 1500. Soft and tender modelling and the harmony of figure and landscape can be seen again in *Sleeping Venus*. The landscape is dreamier and less well-defined than in *Philosophers*, who are seeking clarity of thought and detail.



Giorgione (finished by Sebastiano del Plombo), *Three Philosophers*, 1509



Giorgione (finished by Titian), *Sleeping Venus*, c. 1510

There are common features in these three Giorgione landscapes: on either side are dark masses of tree, rock or building, like the wings of a theatrical scene, leaving the centre of the picture free. Even figures are often placed to one side, sky and distance taking the principal place. These elements were to form the basis of compositions used by Claude in the 17th century.



Giorgione (finished by Titian), *Concert Champetre*, c 1510

Concert Champetre is a contested attribution between Giorgione and Titian. The pair were close friends, living and working together. The Muses of Poetry (tragedy standing and comedy/pastoral sitting) look like figures painted by Giorgione and so does the landscape. The musicians look into each other's eyes with a yearning, hauntingly intimate glance. That look is a favourite device of Titian. In most of his compositions, religious or secular, he uses it to tie together his figures. Giorgione's folk rarely look at each other – sometimes they seem barely aware of another's presence.

The well-dressed man in *Concert Champetre* is playing the lute. Giorgione loved music. He was a noted musician of the lute and was much in demand at musical recitals and social gatherings, where he sang too. Very little is known of Giorgione's life – Vasari is the main source. Like Raphael he was a great lover of women. From one mistress he became infected with the plague, from which died in his early thirties. Giorgione was a gentle and courteous soul. His works were novel, depicting no story and with ambiguous action. Giorgione concentrated instead on colour and mood, so his art is intensely poetical.

Tiziano Vecellio - Titian (c 1484/8-1576)

In Titian Venetian art reaches its climax. Titian was born in the hill town of Cadore. His family, the Vecelli, were the noblest in the region. At the age of nine he was sent to Venice and completed an apprenticeship with a mosaic maker before being trained by the Bellinis. Titian's earliest work shows Giovanni Bellini's influence in the tightly crumpled folds of St Peter's raspberry-pink cloak, but the other figures are more freely painted – an indication of Titian turning away from his master.



Titian, *Jacopo Pesaro (Bishop of Paphos) presented by Pope Alexander VI to Saint Peter*, c 1503-6

Titian left Bellini's studio early in the 16th century, and adopted Giorgione's style. In 1510 he was in Padua painting frescoes. Sebastiano del Piombo left Venice for Rome in 1511 and with Giorgione dead and Bellini in his eighties, Titian realised he could become the predominant painter in Venice. So, in 1513 Titian declined an invitation to Rome and returned from Padua to Venice, anticipating a rapid rise to fame. Bellini, however, lived for another three years. Titian, impatient, caballed against him relentlessly in an attempt to displace him from official positions. This seems one of the rare periods in which Titian departed from being courteous and kind.

A shadow cast across the face became a sign of tragedy in Titian's work. Here the shading marks the tragic loss of life in Venice, symbolised by St Mark. Later, Danae and, especially, Callisto and Actaeon will be seen darkened with the fore-shadowing of death.

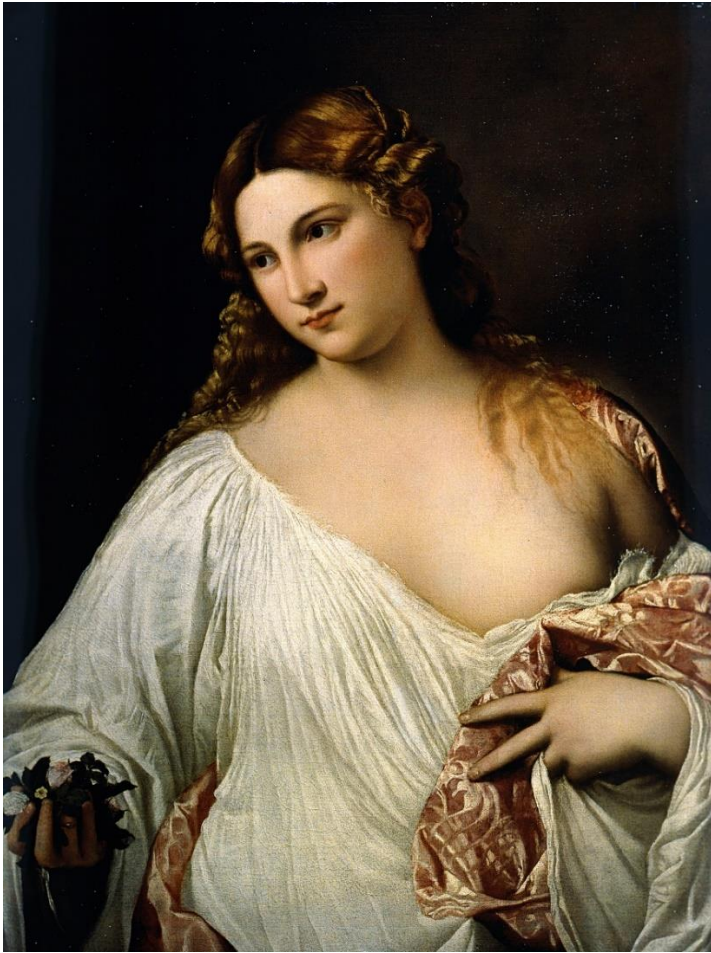
Giorgione's love of mysterious pictures is replicated by Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love*, variously thought to represent heavenly and earthly love, spiritual and sensual love, Virtue and Vice or to be an allegory of Spring. The painting is a marriage picture. The family's coat of arms is on the sarcophagus next to the spigot and inlaid in the silver bowl. The rabbits (left), a symbol of fecundity, the lovers on the edge of the wood (right), and Cupid playing with charmed waters are all related to love.



Titian, *Sacred and Profane Love*, c 1515 (Galleria Borghese, Rome)

The mood of the painting, with the landscape bathed in the evening light of sunset, appeals to the emotions, just as do Giorgione's works. Titian loved sunsets. The buildings on the left are, with the exception of the round tower, those found in Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*. Titian used them again, on the same hill, in his *Noli me Tangere* (1514).

Titian's nudes are not diffident like Giorgione's. Both women here are direct in their gaze and have decided attitudes. The same is true of women in Titian's portraits in the years following Giorgione's death. Giorgione had painted a shy and tender *Laura*, but Titian developed a more opulent and grander type of female beauty with the sensual *Flora*.



Titian, *Flora*, 1515-17

The Assumption of the Virgin (below) shows Titian was influenced by Raphael. Like Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* (contemporary with this altarpiece), the Virgin is the Mother of God, confident and aware of her glorious destiny. Light and shadow are convincing. Titian loved red and played with it all over his works. The *Assumption* was praised by Lodovico Dolce, Venetian Humanist and author of *Dialogue on Painting*: "surely in this panel are to be found the grandeur and awesomeness of Michelangelo, the charm and grace of Raphael, and the colouring of nature itself?" Dolce goes on to remark, as Vasari did, on the shock of the audience when the altarpiece was unveiled:

"For all that, the oafish painters and the foolish masses, who until then had seen nothing but the dead and cold works of Giovanni Bellini, of Gentile, of Vivarino ... which were without movement and modelling grossly, defamed the picture. Then, as envy cooled and the truth slowly dawned on them, people began to marvel at the new style established in Venice by Titian."

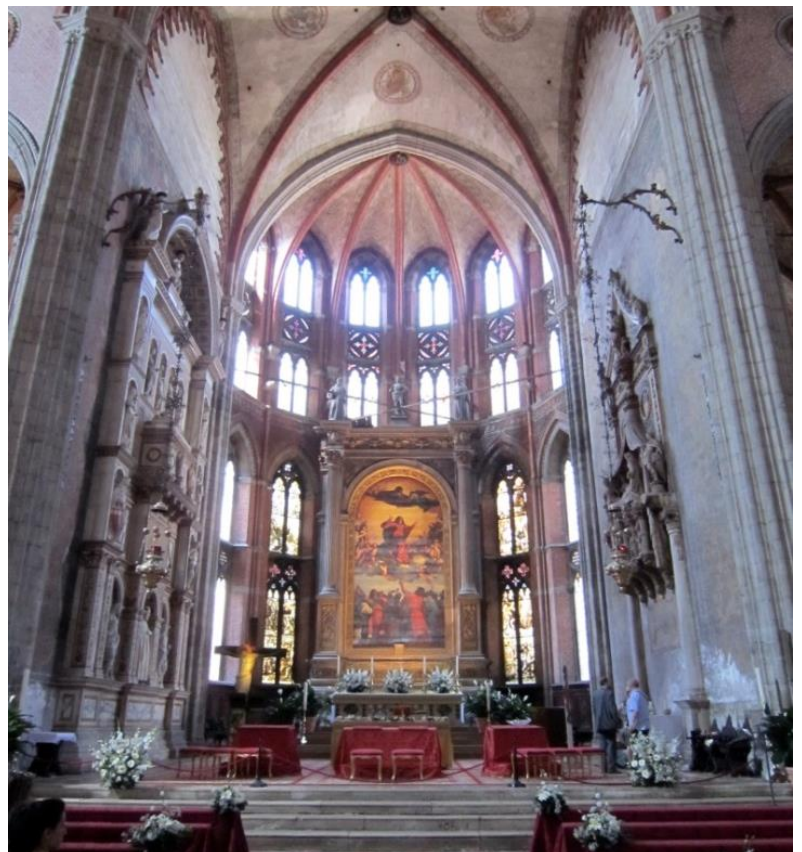
The *Assumption* is huge; 22 feet high, more than twice the size of any work produced by Titian. It was painted for the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, wherein Titian would later be buried. Carlo Ridolfi (to Venice as Vasari was to Florence), wrote that Titian was continually disturbed during his work by monks, who complained vigorously that the figures of the apostles were much too large.

Ridolfi records:

"... trying desperately to correct their ignorance, Titian sought to explain to them that the figures had to be proportioned to the vast space in which they were to be viewed, and that when seen from that distance they would appear in proper scale."

When the monks heard that an imperial envoy wanted to purchase the work and have it shipped to Vienna, they quickly changed their tune.

In any case, Titian's calculation is excellent. The apse is enormous, but *Assumption* fits perfectly. Yet, this was not the end of his considerations. Most people would not progress deeper towards the apse than the choir screen. For those distant viewers the altarpiece remains clear. Moreover, Titian repeats the gilded arch of the 15th century choir screen in his frame of the *Assumption*.





Titian, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1516-1518 (Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari)



The *Assumption* is Titian's first rendering of groups of figures, and his skill in the composition of the apostles (form, gesture and colour) and angels suggests he approached Raphael's genius.

In *Heliodorus* Raphael created a seemingly teeming crowd of women and children with surprisingly few figures. In *Galatea* he suggested a riotous, revelling crowd speeding over the water with only seven figures.

Titian pulled off the same trick in *Bacchus and Ariadne*. Theseus, whose ship is shown in the distance, has just abandoned Ariadne on the island of Naxos after she helped him kill the Minotaur. Bacchus arrives on his chariot drawn by two cheetahs. The ears of one of them are turned backwards, suggesting the cat has heard the approach of the viewer. Bacchus falls immediately in love with Ariadne and leaps off his chariot to embrace her.

Bacchus raised her to heaven. Her constellation is shown in the sky. We see, also, the first of Titian's wonderful dogs; he loved them and may have had one as a studio pet. As in *Assumption*, Titian produces tender effects of light and dappled shadow. Berenson enthused over the painting; "so brim-full of exuberant joy! You see no sign of a struggle of inner and outer conditions, but life so free, so strong, so glowing that it almost intoxicates."



Raphael, *Galatea*, fresco, c 1511 (Villa Farnesina, Rome)



Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1522 (National Gallery, London)

The *Bacchanal of the Andrians* celebrates wine and sexual desire. The sheet-music of a French song in the foreground proclaims; "*Who drinks and does not drink again, does not know what drinking is*". Titian departs from Giorgione's soft relaxed Venus; his lascivious nude sleeping off her drunken stupor compels attention. She it was who inspired Goya to paint *Naked Maya* almost three centuries later.



Titian, *Bacchanal of the Andrians*, 1523-26

In the same year Titian finished *Bacchanal*, he completed the altarpiece for the Pesaro family chapel in the same church for which he had painted the *Assumption*. For the first time an Italian altarpiece has an oblique composition; the Madonna is seated high up and to one side. Side chapels in the church are not enclosed, so *Pesaro Madonna* was visible to anyone walking down the nave. It was on the left-hand wall so people's first view was from an angle and Titian's design caters for that. *Pieta* (below), which Titian designed for his tomb on the right-hand wall of the church has an oblique construction again, but this time in the other direction. These works are a reminder of how important it is to see paintings and frescoes in their original settings.

By shifting the main figure to one side as Raphael had done, Titian allowed a greater sense of movement through the painting. The members of the Pesaro family, kneeling on either side, help create depth. The huge columns are important, punctuating the composition carefully. The vertical rising from the kneeling Pesaro on the right continues through St Francis and the upright Christ Child, and the one on the left defines the back plane of the picture and makes split between St Peter leaning towards the Madonna and the standard bearer look more natural. The line of the Madonna's head, the base of the column behind her, St Peter's head and his golden robe forms a diagonal down to the dark figure of Jacopo Pesaro in his black silk gown. The columns pierce a cloud bearing putti: a device which not only fills the upper part but provides the foundation for light and shade below.



Titian, *Pesaro Madonna*, 1519-26 (Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari)

Titian's departure from Giorgione's *Venus* is completed with *Venus of Urbino*, a sophisticated woman confident in her beauty. She holds a small posy of roses, a symbol of pleasure and fidelity in love, reiterated by the myrtle plant in the window to indicate constancy and the devoted sleeping dog. Marriage is suggested also by the maids looking for clothes in the rich bridal chests. Perhaps to us, familiar with Manet's prostitute *Olympia* which based on this work, the *Venus of Urbino* appears to be a courtesan (an impression perhaps heightened by where the vertical of the dark curtain is placed). However, marriage pictures of this kind were common in Italy and did not depict the features of the bride, but instead a beautiful woman. For Catholics, licit love meant procreation, vital for important families requiring male heirs, so the combination of sexual invitation to her on-looking husband and faithfulness would be an appropriate image for the marital bedroom.



Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, c 1538 (Uffizi, Florence)

Titian paints the prevailing ideals of beauty (with the exception of her high forehead) – eyebrows are back! Although most Italian women had dark hair, the fashionable colour was blonde. Women in Venice used, “*spirits and other remedies to turn their hair, not only golden, but snow white*”. The ideal figure was now more solid than slender predecessors. Breasts were considered beautiful only if small, firm and round (not the fullness of maturity) and a narrow waist was thought undesirable. The belly was shown by Renaissance painters more naturally, doing away with the earlier exaggerated curves (the Flemish protuberance, for example). Yet, the tummy as a symbol of fertility, remained a focal part of the body. Titian’s female portraits set new standards. *Isabella* (ace collector spurned by Bellini) and the stunningly gorgeous *La Bella* are women portrayed with expressive force in a clear composition.



Titian, *Isabella d'Este*, 1534-36



Titian, *La Bella*, c 1536

In the 1530s Titian became the most important portrait painter in the world, painting doges and, most famously, the equestrian portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Charles V immediately recognised Titian’s ability and decided he would not be painted by anyone else. He ennobled Titian, securing an annual allowance of 200 crowns and each time Titian painted the Emperor, Charles paid him 1000 crowns. Charles explained he was following Alexander the Great who had allowed only Apelles to paint him.

Charles V spent thirty years attempting to rid his German realms of Protestant heresy, fending off French ambitions in Italy (usually at the behest of conniving popes), keeping the Netherlands Catholic and fighting the infidel Ottoman Turk on land (to the outskirts of Vienna) and at sea. This great man, the last powerful European monarch, exhausted by his largely futile efforts, decided in the early 1550s to abdicate and split his empire between his son Philip II (Spain, the Netherlands and Italy) and his brother Ferdinand (Germany, Austria and the title Holy Roman Emperor).

After resolving to abdicate Charles asked Titian to paint a Last Judgement. *La Gloria* is a unique version. Charles, his crown cast off by his side, kneels before the Holy Trinity wearing the white robes of penitence. His son, Philip II, bearded with hands tented in prayer and following Charles’ gaze, is farther right.



Titian, *La Gloria*, 1551-1554

Mary Magdalene appears as an intercessor, but the remaining figures are all from the Old Testament. Ezekiel is borne by an impressive eagle, and helps Moses hold one of his tablets of law. King David (in a blue robe) is shown with a harp. The painting was placed above the high altar at the monastery of Yuste in Northern Spain to which Charles retired after abdicating. He could see it from his bedchamber. How often must this valiant man have wondered how his relentless but unsuccessful efforts to protect God's church on earth would be judged in Heaven?

One of Titian's most famous works, albeit unfinished is *Pope Paul III and his Grandsons*. Paul III and Charles V sustained a bitter rivalry. This was a continuation of the long-standing argument over supremacy in Europe between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, but was given extra bite by the untrammelled ambition of Paul III. Once Charles V had secured Titian's services, Paul III insisted he should be painted by the artist too. Titian refused to go to Rome, and it was beneath the pope to travel to a studio in Venice. In 1544, however, Titian was induced to go to Rome on the promise that his son would be awarded a living at a monastery or a church.



Titian, *Pope Paul III and his two Grandsons*, 1545

Paul came from the Farnese family of the lower aristocracy. They had no links to the Church, but Paul had a very attractive sister. He sent her off to Rome, as Martin Luther (completely unbiased, of course) put it, “*to have an affair with the Pope and was made a cardinal in return.*” As Pope, Paul III kept a concubine by whom he had three sons and a daughter. This was quite normal for a pontiff. After all, one had to secure one’s family’s succession. Popes were not expected to be pious. A religious career meant first and foremost an opportunity to profit from the income of the Church. Alessandro, on the left, was made a cardinal at the age of 14 and Paul III put the income of 30 bishoprics his way. He aspired to succeed his grandfather - Titian portrays him grasping the knob of the papal chair - but was to be disappointed.

Ottavio is shown, in Titian’s mastery of body language, to be smooth and snakelike; an accurate characterisation. He was cheated out of promised fortunes by his grandfather’s machinations with secular rulers. Indeed, deceit and hypocrisy were highly prized by Paul III. Titian manages to convey this; the pope looks cunning, greedy and thoroughly unreliable. The picture was never finished; the pope’s right hand is barely sketched in. Speculation mounted that Paul III was not pleased and instructed the work to be abandoned but there was no evidence of a quarrel between artist and patron. With customary arrogance, Paul III reneged on the promise of a living for Titian’s son.

Correggio’s paintings of scenes from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* for the Duke of Mantua were given to Charles V in the 1530s. Charles’s son, Philip II, commissioned a series for himself from Titian when he came to power. Various copies of *Danae* were painted by Titian but in each her pose mirrors that of Michelangelo’s sculpture of *Night* on the Medici tomb. Jupiter appears to Danae in the form of shower of gold, for which she parts her legs: Perseus the ensuing progeny. Here a nursemaid replaces the usual Eros and, naturally enough, Titian includes a dog.



Titian, *Danae*, 1553-54

Titian has more excuse to paint lovely dogs in his scene of *Venus and Adonis*. Venus pleads for Adonis to ignore the hunting call, knowing that he will be killed.



Titian, *Venus and Adonis*, c 1553



Titian, *Diana and Callisto*, 1556-59

Diana discovers that her maid, Callisto, her swelling belly revealed by the lifted cloak as she swoons, is pregnant by Jupiter and expels her from the group. Callisto's anguish is clear: her death is portended by Titian painting her face in shadow. He repeats this for Actaeon, soon to be eaten by his hounds.



Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1556-59

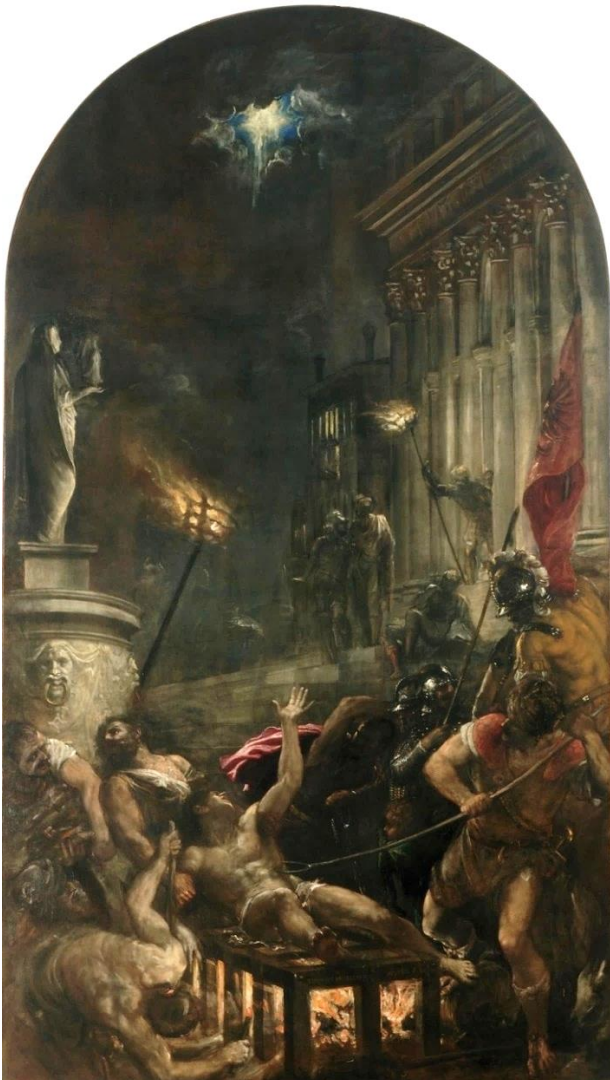
By the time he painted these *poesies* Titian was an old man. Vasari visited him in 1566, and found the master's eyesight failing and his hand wavering.

It is certainly true that the method used by Titian for painting these last pictures is very different from the way he worked in his youth. For the early works are executed with incredible delicacy and diligence, and they may be viewed either at a distance or close to hand; on the other hand these last works are executed with bold, sweeping strokes, and in patches of colour, with the result that they cannot be viewed from nearby, but appear perfect at a distance."

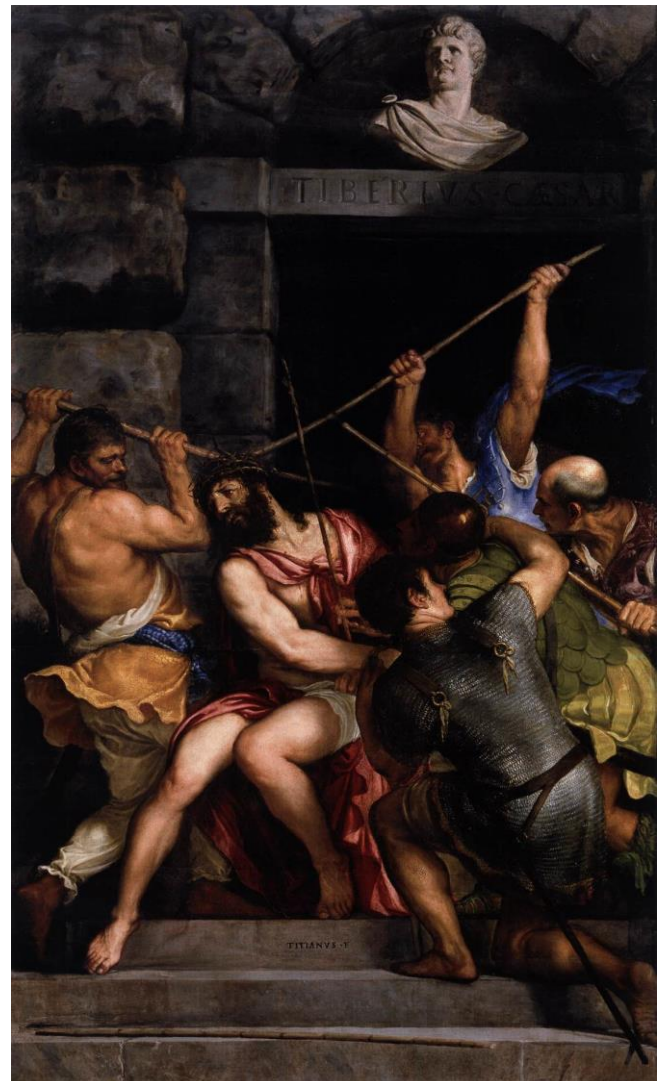
Apparently portraying beauties took its toll – a warning to Romeos everywhere. The Duke of Ferrara's agent wrote to his master:

"Titian is not ailing, merely somewhat frail, but I fear that painting young ladies in all manner of poses every day exerts him more than his fragile constitution allows."

Titian's later religious works are darker and more heroic. This was due to the alliance the pope made with Spain after the Sack of Rome in 1527, which brought suspicion, iron discipline and the Inquisition. *"The spread of Spanish influence brought home to all Italians, even to the Venetians, the sense of the individual's helplessness before organised power (Berenson)".* The *Martyrdom of St Lawrence*, full of flames and torchlight, agony and terror, and *Crowning with Thorns*, depict the brutality of imperial power.



Titian, *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*, 1548-57



Titian, *Crowning with Thorns*, 1542

Entombment of Christ clearly shows the softened outlines of Titian's later method. This blurring of contours and thickly-applied paint drew much criticism from Florentines, but this never dismayed Titian. He was further lambasted for his later nudes in which Titian abandoned interest in anatomy and proportion and explored the tenderness of flesh – studies which would energise Rembrandt.



Titian, *Entombment of Christ*, 1559 (Prado, Madrid)

Titian's technique for his final works was described by his trusted pupil, Palma Giovane:

"He under-painted in plain red earth for the half-tones, or white lead. With the same brush dipped in red, black or yellow he worked up the light parts, and in four strokes he could create a remarkably fine figure ... Then he turned the picture to the wall and left it for months without looking at it, until he returned to it and stared critically at it, as if it were a mortal enemy ... By repeated revisions he brought his pictures to a high state of perfection, and while one was drying he worked on another ... The final touches he softened, occasionally modulating the highest lights into half-tones and local colours with his finger; sometimes he used his finger to dab a dark patch in a corner as an accent, or to heighten the surface with a bit of red like a drop of blood. He finished his pictures like this and in the last stages used his fingers more than his brush."

Giovane applied the final touches (most notably, to the flying angel with its neat contour and smooth surface) to Titian's last work, *Pieta*. The design was Titian's – this was the altarpiece which would first be seen obliquely from the right, so the foreground figures rise in a diagonal from the right corner. The pelican in the dome and the rod held by Moses, used by him to strike water from rock, prefigure the sacrificial blood of Christ. The sibyl (on the right) wears a crown of thorns and holds a cross. The arm at the foot of the sibyl refers to the hand which struck Christ at the beginning of the Passion. The work, intended as an altar piece for the Frari church, was delivered and hung. The Franciscans, perhaps alarmed by its boldness, soon removed the painting and returned it to Titian on 27 April 1575.



Titian, *Pieta*, 1573-76

Like his long-gone young friend, Giorgione, Titian died of plague on 27 August 1576 during a terrible epidemic of the disease. When Vasari wrote his *Lives*, Titian was still alive:

“Titian, therefore, who has adorned with great pictures the city of Venice, or rather all Italy and other parts of the world, deserves the love and respect of all craftsmen, who ought to admire and imitate him in many things. For he is a painter who has produced and is still producing works which command unstinted praise and which will live as long as the memory of illustrious men endures.”

In the 17th century, painters such as van Dyck, Rubens and Rembrandt and most notably Velazquez considered Titian the “*unsurpassed sorcerer of colour*”. The 19th century Eugene Delacroix, a master of the painterly style, wrote:

“If one were to live a hundred and twenty years, one would prefer Titian above all others ... he is the least mannered and thus the most versatile of all painters ... Titian never flaunts his talent [the French Salon at the time Eugene wrote this was full of men who did]; on the contrary, he despises all that does not lead to a more lifelike expression of his idea.”

Lorenzo Lotto (1480 – c 1556) was probably trained in Bellini’s workshop. His first work, for a church in Treviso in 1505 uses the same disposition of figures and architecture as Bellini’s San Zaccaria altarpiece. Lotto’s portraits are his best works. They always have a bold silhouette, an authoritative placing of the sitter and evocative still-life. Rich colours and contrast of light and shade add vivacity.

Lorenzo’s great gifts availed him little. He struggled to assimilate ideas and found competition in Venice hard to withstand. He abandoned art in 1552 and became a lay brother in the monastery of the Santa Casa in Loreto, and by 1556 he was dead; lost and forgotten, the date of his death not even recorded.



Lorenzo Lotto, *Andrea Odoni*, 1527



Lorenzo Lotto, *Venetian Woman in the Guise of Lucretia*, 1533

Mannerism

Mannerism properly only refers to Italian art, as it developed out of forms and ideas of the High Renaissance. Raphael's developments towards stronger *chiaroscuro*, less centralised compositions, greater movement and grand figures were starting points taken by Mannerists, as were the great variety of nude poses in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. Great importance was placed on technical virtuosity and extravagant accomplishment; the artist's skill became much more important than the subject. Murray summarises:

"The painter is no longer to be bound by perspective, or by the necessity of presenting his subject in a rational, objective manner. He may use light and colour, chiaroscuro and proportion as he pleases; he may borrow from any source he chooses; the only obligation upon him is to create an interesting design, and the various parts need bear no relationship to each other. The colour must be evocative and beautiful in itself."

Jacopo Pontorno (1494 – 1557) trained with Piero di Cosimo [15th century notes] but he soon departed from Piero and developed a Mannerist style, embodied in *Joseph in Egypt*.



Jacopo Pontorno, *Joseph in Egypt*, 1515-1518

Pontorno's work has lots of poses, though few nudes, and the technical excellence of the stairs round the rotunda. His pupil **Bronzino (1503 – 1572)** would supply plenty of nudes. Bronzino was in Pontorno's studio from childhood, hence his status as adopted son. From 1539 he was the chief court painter to the Medici ruler, Cosimo I and his wife Eleanora of Toledo, and for them Bronzino decorated the chapel in the Palazzo Vecchio with frescoes of fantastic colour, filled with the usual Mannerist men in extreme foreshortenings and exaggerated muscles, and women of cold classical beauty.



Bronzino, *Crossing of the Red Sea*, c 1540, fresco, Palazzo Vecchio Chapel, Florence

Bronzino was very popular in the Florence court as a portraitist. His static, elegant figures were regarded as exemplars of unemotional haughtiness and assurance. The absence of passion is a feature of Mannerist art. The spectator must remain detached to concentrate on admiring the performance. Bronzino's allegory, sent to King Francis I of France by Cosimo, Medici is an example. Little passion is conveyed. The uncertain meaning of some figures, their serpentine forms and the cramming of the space are features of Mannerism.



Bronzino, *Venus, Cupid, Time and Folly*, 1545

Pontormo had a definite physical type; very tall with long legs and a compact head with a symmetrically small face containing small features with wide-open eyes and a little half-open mouth – a face that can show many emotions, chiefly grief and anxiety. Jacopo's *Deposition* is filled with such figures. The radiant colour was chosen partly because of the very dark chapel, San Felicità in Florence, for which it was painted.



Jacopo Pontormo, *Deposition from the Cross*, 1525-28

Pontormo's slender figures would inspire **Parmigianino (1503 – 1540)**. Parmigianino was born in Parma and of all the Mannerist artists he was the one instinctively inclined to grace. In later art theory there is a word *imparmiginare* which means to submerge the subject in elegance and delicacy: the chief characteristics of Parmigianino's art. By 1524 Parmigianino was in Rome, hailed as a prodigy: in him, it was said, was reborn the spirit of Raphael. He was more sensitive than his colleagues and luxuriated in breath-taking beauty, such as the head of St Catherine in *Mystic Marriage*, one of his early works in Rome.

The composition is full of curves. The one through the hands and arms of Catherine mirrors the arc of her wheel. The head in the lower left corner, probably Zacharias, seems bizarre in that position. The device of a head in the foreground, a *repoussoir*, serves to draw the eye into the picture but the white of his hair provides a balance too. The fingers exchanging the ring are placed dead centre and framed by a door.



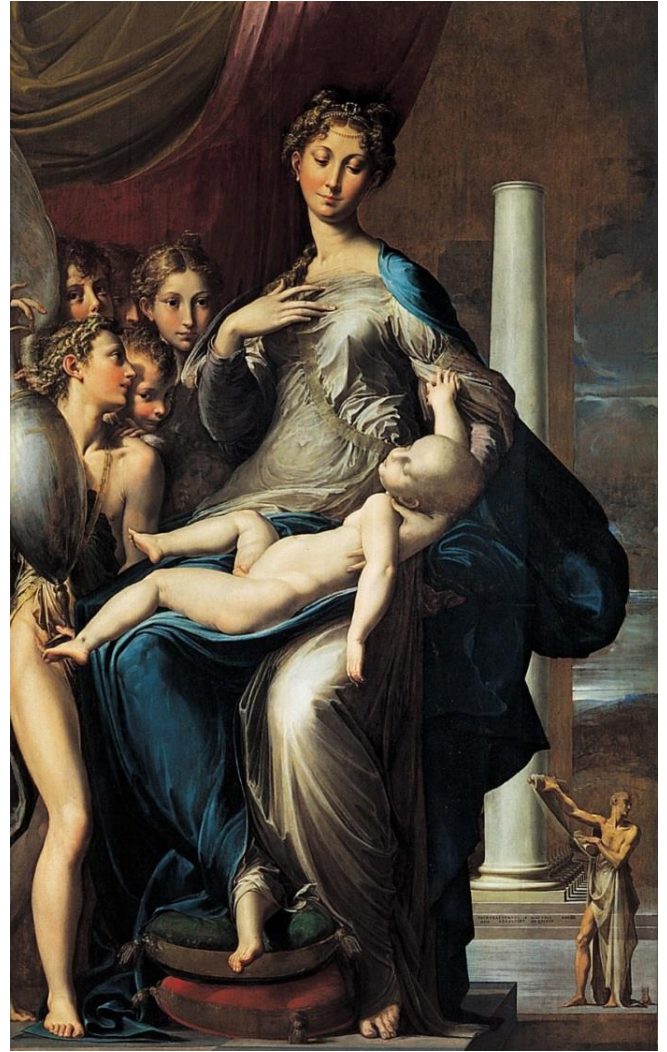
Parmigianino, *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine*, 1526 (National Gallery, London)

One year later Parmigianino was working on the huge *Vision of St Jerome* during the Sack of Rome. The painting betrays his mixed allegiances: the Madonna is adapted from Raphael; the Baptist's gesture directly from Leonardo and the recumbent figure of Jerome from Correggio's figure of Daniel in the small frescoes in San Giovanni Evangelista. The elongation of the figures would be complete in Parmigianino's most famous work, *Madonna of the Long Neck*.

By the time Parmigianino began this painting he was back in Parma, arriving from Rome in 1530. In his later years he developed such an obsession with alchemy he had little time for work. *Madonna of the Long Neck* was painted in bursts from 1534 to 1539 and was still unfinished at his death (the foot of an incomplete figure is next to St Jerome who holds a scroll). He so neglected his painting, Parmigianino was jailed for two months for breach of contract. Necks and legs are elongated and the Christ Child is quite alarming. Vasari described Parmigianino as having changed from an elegant and delicate person into an unkempt and almost savage creature. He died of fever at the age of 37.



Parmigianino, *Vision of St Jerome*, 1526-27



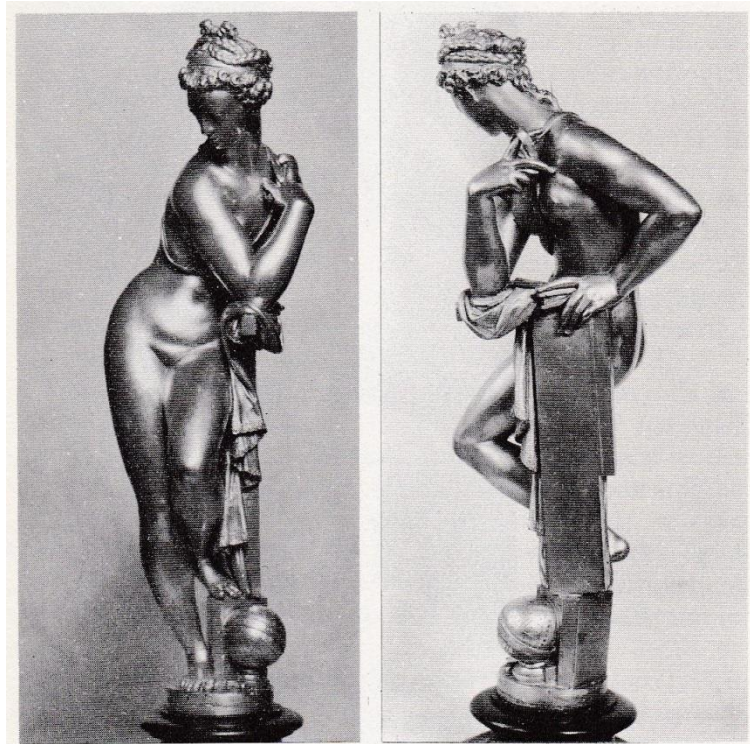
Parmigianino, *Madonna of the Long Neck*, 1534-39

Mannerism was also applied to sculpture. The High Renaissance emphasis on a single viewpoint and simplicity was replaced with a yearning for multiplicity of views and broken silhouettes. A Mannerist statue must be walked around for all its angles of view are important. **Giovanni da Bologna “Giambologna” (1529 – 1608)**, a Fleming, was the greatest sculptor in Florence after Michelangelo left. His *Rape of the Sabine* is the model of Mannerist sculpture, with many viewpoints and maximum movement and drama. As one walks round the group its elements shift out of one pattern and into another, but always balanced.



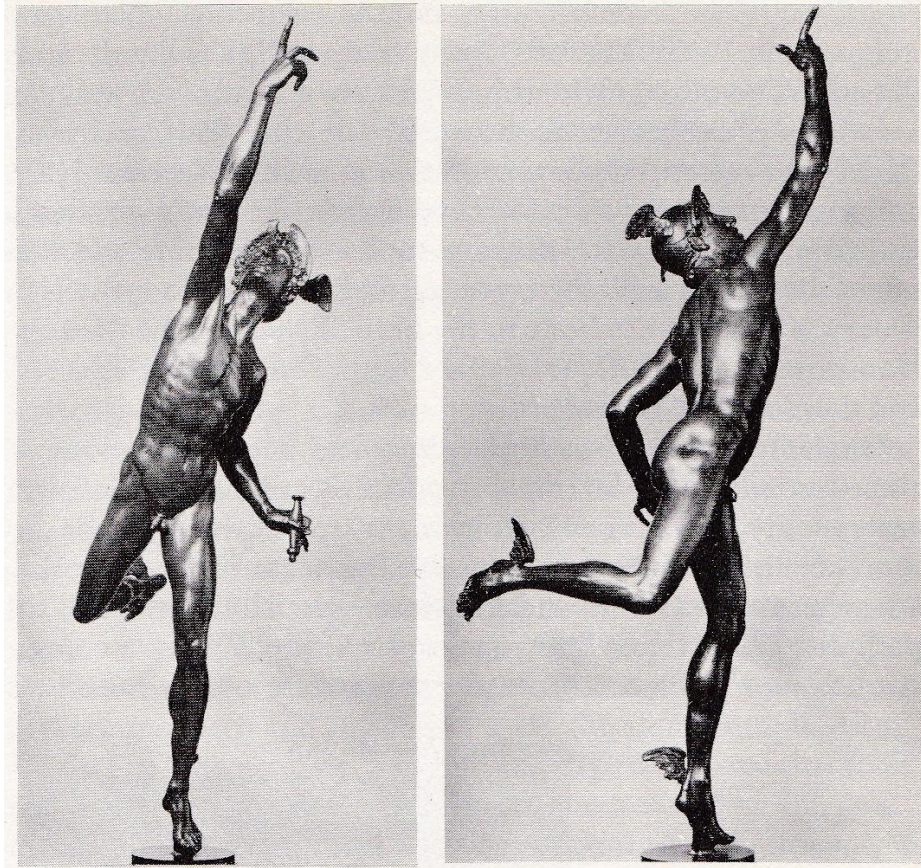
Giambologna, *Rape of the Sabines*, 1582 (Florence)

The *Rape* is an example of Giovanni's imaginative genius. But his infallible touch is perhaps best appreciated in his small bronzes. They are made to be turned round in the hand and savoured. Photographs are inadequate but the difference between the front and side view of *Astronomy* astonishes: how can one figure be composed to give such variety? From any angle there is no flaw in the balance.



Giambologna, *Astronomy*, c 1573

Mercury was Giovanni's great achievement, again composed fluently. From the front the raised right arm rises like a rocket from the weight-bearing foot. Yet from the side it is gently curved to match the lowered left arm and contrasts with two other curves: from head to right foot and from left elbow to left foot. Turn the bronze a little more and the raised arm flows into the right leg and the line from the left foot runs through the body to the head. *Mercury* is the epitome of Mannerist art: we wonder at the work and the subject itself seems relatively unimportant. Giovanni's compositions were widely imitated but none approached the perfection of the original.



Giambologna, *Mercury*, c 1576

Later 16th Century Venice

Paolo Veronese (1528-1588)

Paolo, born in Verona, was the son of a stonecutter and he briefly worked with his father before joining a workshop of local painters. His skill with colour quickly became evident, and is regarded as one of the great colourists, even more so than Titian. Delacroix later praised him for making light without violent contrasts. Veronese was also a master of creating spectacular scenes filled with light. All this can be seen in *Adoration of the Kings*. The light catches a shepherd looking down from the eaves on the right, unusually humble for Paolo whose paintings are populated with folk seemingly well-off. He was fascinated by the way things look and in showing them perfectly: his materials are beautifully rendered.



Paolo Veronese, *The Adoration of the Kings*, 1573 (National Gallery, London)

Very often Veronese's backgrounds are painted in subdued and sometimes faintly rendered tones. The device means that the intense hues of his costumes are set off, like jewels, against the relatively neutral and light colours of the backdrop. The pale stones of the architecture in *Adoration* provide one example. Rather more striking ones are Paolo's large-scale tableaux. The *Family of Darius* is the first example.

Paolo does not want the attention of his spectator wandering off into the background. To help the spectator's eye to travel across the tableau slowly enough to absorb detail, Veronese often introduces architectural details which divide the canvas into smaller vignettes. Arches are used, rather weakly in *Family of Darius* but more strongly in the *Feast in the House of Levi*.

Segments of the balustrade serve a similar purpose in *Wedding Feast at Cana*. Veronese plays the tenor violin in the centre foreground (in a white robe) and Titian (naturally in red) plays the double-bass on the right. Tintoretto plays the second viol behind Veronese. The hourglass on the table refers to Christ's response to his mother; "*mine hour is not yet come*". Dogs are littered throughout this composition. Veronese loved dogs and cats. A cat can be seen in the right foreground playing with a wine jug.



Paolo Veronese, *The Family of Darius before Alexander*, 1565-70 (National Gallery, London)



Paolo Veronese, *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, 1563 (Louvre)



Paolo Veronese, *The Last Supper (Feast in House of Levi)*, 1573

Veronese got into trouble with the Inquisition in 1573 for introducing figures of German mercenaries, dwarfs, buffoons, dogs, monkeys, and fools into a scene of the *Last Supper*. One part of his defence explains much of his art as a decorative genius, and another refers to the arches used in the painting to isolate the *Last Supper*:

"My commission was to make this picture beautiful according to my judgement; we painters use the same licence as poets and madmen ...I intended to cause no confusion, especially since the figures of buffoons are outside of the place where Our Lord is depicted."

He refused to change his painting of the Last Supper, but amended the title to *Feast in the House of Levi*.

After moving to Venice in about 1553 Veronese was soon recognised as one of the principal artists in the city. He was celebrated too for the magnificent fresco *Triumph of Venice* in the Doge's Palace which featured daring feats of perspective. The art critic Marco Boschini in 1660 observed:

There certainly never has been seen among painters such regal pomp and circumstance, such majestic actions, such weighty and decorous manner! He is the treasurer of the art and of colours. This is not painting, it is magic that casts a spell on people who see it."



Paolo Veronese, *Triumph of Venice*, 1572 (fresco Doge's Palace)

Veronese's colour and perspective are evident in smaller compositions: *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* shows the saint convincingly crushed into a corner, with lovely foreshortening, and a wonderfully expressive face and arm. The arm of the devil and his back and leg make the asymmetrical composition work. The brooch and the pearl betray Veronese's love of detail and provide highlights. *Lucretia* is emotive, her desperation and shame evident in her reddened eyes, pale face and downward glance. Her lips part in pain as the blood flows down the shaft of the knife. The end of her life is contrasted with the riches of the earth.



Paolo Veronese, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony Abbott*, 1552



Paolo Veronese, *Lucretia*, 1580-85

Veronese was known for his strict religious observance, and for the probity of his morals. While staying at his country house near Treviso in April 1588, Paolo caught a violent fever and died a few days later in Venice. One of the Carracci [see 17th century notes] wrote on their copy of the 1569 edition of Vasari's *Lives*:

"I have known Paulino and I have seen his beautiful works. He deserves to have a great volume written in praise of him, for his pictures prove that he is second to no other painter, and this fool [Vasari] passes over him in four lines, just because he wasn't a Florentine."

Jacopo Bassano (1510 – 92), who inspired Veronese's white-clothed shepherd in *Adoration*, evolved a new kind of subject, the rustic genre scene. Bassano was perhaps the first modern landscape painter. Many had painted beautiful landscapes before him (Titian, Giorgione, Bellini) but they were seldom direct studies from nature. Bassano's landscapes were taken from the life in the streets in Bassano and the country just outside the gates: *"even Orpheus to him becomes a farmer's lad fiddling to barnyard fowls"* (Berenson). His religious pictures are rustic scenes. Never have magi looked less regal.



Jacopo Bassano, *Adoration of the Kings*, 1540s

The third quarter of the 16th century saw the rise of the picture collector in Venice and these rustic scenes were appealing, with their lovely colour and profusion of details. Jacopo's dramatic light and dark landscapes were also popular. The *Good Samaritan* is a fine example. The distant town under a glowering sky to which the priest and the Levite are hurrying is Bassano. The wine bottle, dagger and clothing stuffs glisten; the dogs and donkey are beautifully formed. The bodies of the two figures are in identical poses (rotated) emphasising how easily their situations could be switched and underlining the eternal message - *"do unto others ..."*. Health and sickness are conveyed through the contrast of flesh and robing.

Jacopo's colouring, dramatic light and detail can be seen again in his sweeping composition for *Laban and His Flock*. Jacopo lived in Bassano in the mountains above Venice from most of his life. He died in 1592 and one of his sons, Francesco, committed suicide in the year of his death. The other son, Leandro, lived until 1622 and continued Jacopo's style.



Jacopo Bassano, *The Good Samaritan*, 1562-3



Jacopo Bassano, *Laban and His Flock*, c 1570s

Jacopo Robusti "Tintoretto" (1518 – 1594)

With Tintoretto ("Little Dyer", named after his father's profession) the Renaissance in Venice comes to an end. He was born in Venice in 1518 and little is known about his early years, although he claimed to have been in Titian's studio. From the first, Tintoretto developed interesting perspectives usually with deep recession. His works have depth in contrast to Veronese's shallow stage. He used counterpoints of swaying figures, or principal lines weaving back and forth. *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet* was a favourite topic of his and a frequent ceremony in Venice. The Doge washed the feet of 12 paupers on Maundy Thursday, and 12 noblemen washed the feet of poor syphilitics. Noblewomen performed the same ritual for sufferers of their own gender. *Christ Washing* shows how Tintoretto deployed his figures in depth to animate the whole space.



Tintoretto, *Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet*, 1548-9

Tintoretto, when young, declared his ambition to combine Titian's colour with Michelangelo's drawing. He knew the main works of Michelangelo and Raphael through engravings. He made his reputation in 1548 with the *Miracle of St Mark*, a composition carefully worked out. Each figure balanced by another and each person fitted in carefully.



Tintoretto, *Miracle of Saint Mark rescuing a Slave*, 1548

The *Miracle* was commissioned by the Scuola di San Marco, but the confraternity was divided over whether to accept the finished work. Tintoretto, understandably offended, took the picture home. Eventually the members saw sense. Pietro Aretino, Europe's first international journalist as well as an art enthusiast, praised the work, but counselled that Tintoretto should moderate the speed of his work. Vasari said something similar: *"if only the brash Venetian would slow down and bring his works to a proper state of finish, he might become one of Venice's greatest painters."*

St Mark plunges in wonderful foreshortening in a pose complemented by the nude slave. The colour is strong, learnt from Titian, and deployed carefully over the canvas. The gold of St Mark's billowing cloak is continued in patches across the canvas, and the pink of his robe picked up by headpieces and fragments. The same is true for the areas of blue.

The story concerns a Provençal slave who was a devotee of St Mark. Against his master's wishes the slave made a pilgrimage to the church of San Marco in Venice to pledge himself. On his return he is condemned by his master, sitting on the right, who orders the slave's eyes should be put out with spikes. The spikes shatter causing no harm. In succession, the master then commands the slave's legs should be cut off and then to be tortured with hammers. All instruments of cruelty broke. Marvelling at the saint's protection, the noble and his men repented and made a pilgrimage to Venice, where in San Marco they confessed their sin and related the miracle they had seen. Tintoretto produces surging movement and rhythm. He shows himself to be a choreographer. Meaning and tension is conveyed by position, pose and gesture not through emotions displayed on faces.

On the left a curious mother holds her child, straining to get a better view - a motif in Tintoretto's art. Tintoretto had eight children in his 30-year marriage from 1555 to Faustina Episcopi, the daughter of the superior of the Scuola di San Marco, for which this work was painted. Despite domestic harmony, Tintoretto had a taste for solitude and owned a cottage on the mainland to which he repaired occasionally for peace.

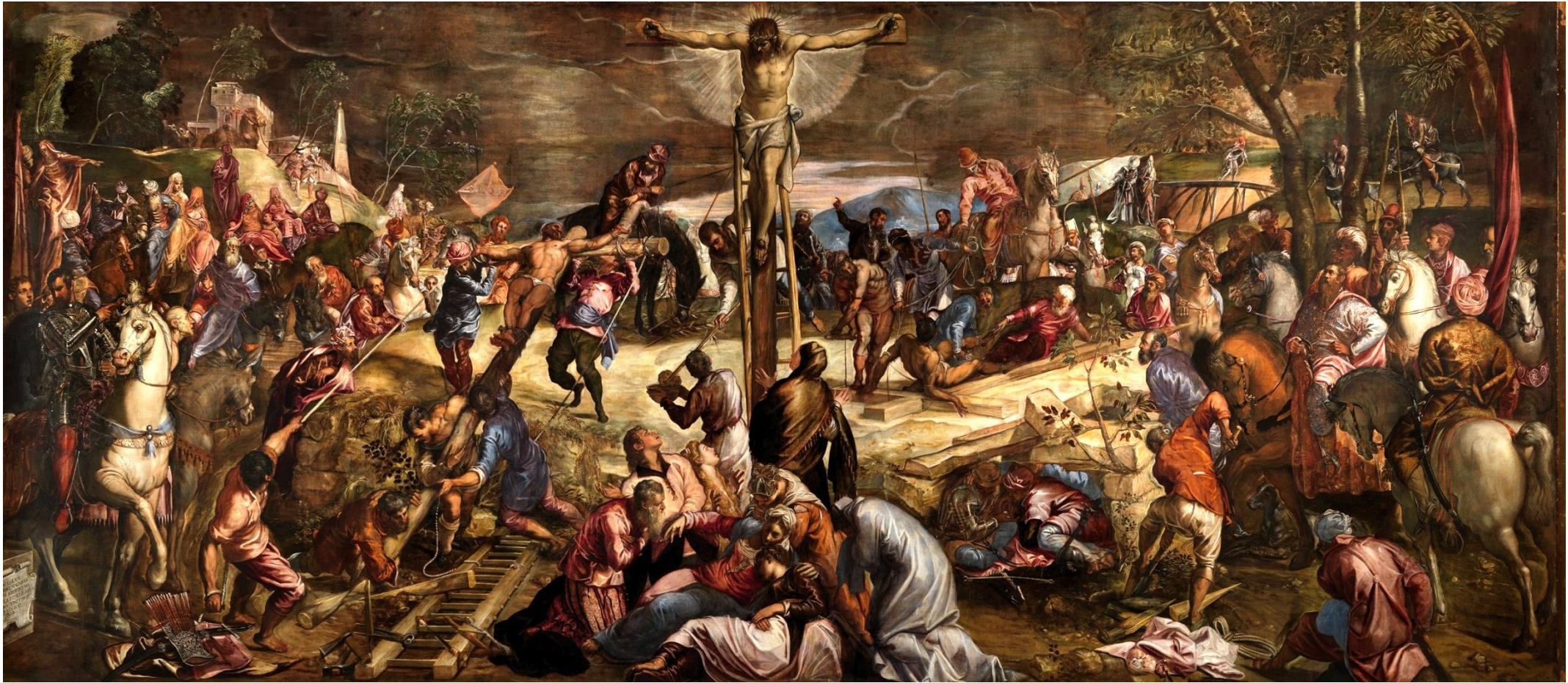
Tintoretto sometimes seems Mannerist. The *Presentation of the Virgin* shows 15 steps, which refer to the 15 psalms sung by pilgrims in annual temple processions and the obelisk next to the young Mary symbolises her eternal life. These are usual components but Tintoretto adds his mother and child in a prominent place on the right. The *Presentation of the Virgin* is normally portrayed across a horizontal canvas (Titian painted such a tableau version 15 years earlier in Venice) but Tintoretto twists the action into a vertical curve: “figures are scattered about so as to enhance the tension, just as light and shadow is used to increase the drama” (Murray).



Tintoretto, *Presentation of the Virgin*, 1551-2

Vasari, an enthusiast for Mannerist devices, praised this as Tintoretto's finest work, but generally disapproved entirely of the artist. This censure seems to derive from Tintoretto's use of colour. Rather than using it as Veronese and Titian did to amplify the splendour of forms, Tintoretto used it to create a mood, and usually one of tension.

The Mannerist tendency to include many figures seems apparent in Tintoretto's *Crucifixion*, but all of them are relevant as minor episodes scattered across the 40-foot canvas. Most of the people see the event as a common crucifixion and attend as tedious duty on menial tasks. Tintoretto shows his genius for novel perspectives. The outstretched arms of Christ seem naturally to justify the great width of the work. The V-shape leads to the central scene of the cross. The good thief is being raised on a cross to the left. The ropes and his gaze lead the eye to Christ. The bad thief, being fixed to his cross on the right, has already turned his back on the Lord. The hole for his cross is being dug in the foreground. Thus, all the stages of a crucifixion are shown. Christ returns the glance at the good thief: “*Today shalt thou join me in paradise*”. A vinegar-dipped sponge is being prepared. In the background, a centurion sits on his grazing horse, his lance pointing towards Christ, who has yet to suffer its piercing wound.



Tintoretto, *Crucifixion*, 1565 (Scuola di S Rocco, Venice)

. *Road to Cavalry* shows another wonderful Tintoretto perspective.



Tintoretto, *Road to Cavalry*, 1566 (Scuola di S Rocco)

Although a religious painter, occasionally Tintoretto produced mythologies. He executed four paintings of fables for Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor from 1576 to 1611, based on the adventures of Hercules. The *Origin of the Milky Way* shows Jupiter (Zeus) holding the baby Hercules to the breast of his wife, the goddess Juno. Jupiter loved many mortal women (as we have seen) and with one, Alcmena, he begot Hercules. Drinking Juno's milk gave Hercules immortality and Jupiter, shown with wonderful foreshortening, sneaks up on her while she is asleep. Starting up in surprise, some milk is sprinkled into the firmament, from which the Milky Way was formed (a story given in the 1st century BC by Caesar Augustus' librarian).

The bottom of the painting has been lost. Tintoretto's sketch for the work shows Alcmena lying beside long-stalked lilies which sprung to life from the drops of Juno's milk which fell to earth. These drops can be seen in the painting. Tintoretto shows cupids flying in from all sides, along arcs aimed at Juno and the head of Hercules.

Rudolf struggled to rule over an empire divided by religious disputes, regional conflicts and Hapsburg family feuds. Then there were the Turks. He gave up in 1583 and retired to Prague to patronise the arts and sciences.



Tintoretto, *The Origin of the Milky Way*, c 1580

Tintoretto painted the *Last Supper* many times, initially in the standard form of the full frontal, and then with ever novel compositions. Common to all his *Last Supper* scenes, Tintoretto's Apostles are kneeling or seated on stools or wicker chairs, dressed in simple clothes, often patched. They are poor and humble, just like the folk destined to see them. Tintoretto's Last Suppers were for small chapels in Venetian churches whose patrons came from much more modest means.



Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Last Supper*, 1591

His last version in 1591 continues this humble theme in another novel composition. The great table splits the room diagonally. Christ's halo is in the middle of the picture, and the diagonal carries us along an oblique ellipse (down the table, then the servers and back to the woman and the cat). Tintoretto leads us to Christ. The woman and the angels incline towards Jesus, and the men turn back towards him too. The scene is lit with flickering light but retains a dramatic and religious feeling.

Tintoretto died on the 31st May 1594. Calmo, the talented Venetian playwright whose comedies satirized courtly manners, was a close friend but admitted that Tintoretto made enemies not only because of his great natural gifts but also because of his exceptional enthusiasm and extraordinary capacity for work. Tintoretto was not overly concerned with making money. He embarked on grandiose schemes for very modest rewards.

Titian is regarded as the great artist from Venice. His reputation and mastery spanned Europe across which he travelled and worked. Tintoretto, however, is the Venetian artist, remaining in the city and extolling through his art the two sources of strength for the Republic; civic authority and an ardent faith in good works. He himself was deeply religious, with a sincere faith in prayer which he shared with the common people. As El Greco was for Spain, Tintoretto is the last great religious artist of his country.

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