

# #1\$2 **THE HIGH RENAISSANCE IN ITALY**

**By Jane Dillenberger**

The eruption of creative activity in the period called the High Renaissance is a kind of miracle. It cannot be accounted for in rational terms alone. The art historian can speak of the development which began in the early fourteenth century with Giotto, and was furthered by Fra Angelico, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Donatello, and a host of similarly great artists of the fifteenth century. He can review the architectural developments which led to a new style, and the masterpieces of sculpture which were made before Michelangelo created his sculptured works of genius. The historian can speak of the rediscovery of the classical heritage. And he can point to the discovery of the world of nature, seen for the first time from the new scientific viewpoint. All of these factors are relevant and important. Yet, when taken together, they do not account for the astonishing flowering of creative genius at this time.

The year 1500 is a convenient round-numbered date to associate with this amazing productivity. The mature works of Leonardo, the last works of Botticelli, the youthful works of Michelangelo were crafted about this time. A meeting of artists in the city of Florence was held in 1504 in order to determine the best location for Michelangelo's enormous statue of David. The record of those who were present on this occasion is a kind of Who's Who of Italian Renaissance art. The number of extraordinarily gifted artists who were there is a measure of the astonishing artistic productivity of this era. In the northern part of Europe, too, this was a period of great creativity, as shall be seen in the following chapter.

## **Leonardo da Vinci**

Whereas the art of the Gothic and Byzantine periods was the product of a corporate consciousness, with the early Renaissance and Giotto we encounter a succession of individual artists. These artists are known to us not only through their works but through documents and biographical accounts and apocryphal tales. With delightful candor these records underline the personality of the artist, savor his idiosyncrasies, and exalt his achievements. Through many of the writings of the artists runs an excited awareness of involvement in a coherent, progressive development which began

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with Giotto. The artists saw themselves as related to and dependent on the achievements of the earlier artists of the Renaissance. Yet they were conscious of, and articulate about, their own contributions in carrying forward discoveries into new realms. Leonardo da Vinci wrote of Giotto with reverence, for he thought of him as the first artist who ceased imitating the work of other artists and turned "straight from nature to art." But Leonardo himself expanded the study of nature far beyond anything that Giotto could have conceived. He wrote:

*It would seem to me that he is but a poor master who makes only a single figure well. For do you not see how many and how varied are the actions which are 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, of springs, rivers, cities, public and private buildings; of instruments fitted for man's use; of divers costumes, ornaments and arts! Things which should be rendered with equal facility and grace by whoever you wish to call a good painter. {bmc Note2.bmp}*

This passage is a kind of table of contents of the hundreds of drawings and sketches made by Leonardo. Paging through the drawings, we find sketches of a warrior wearing an antique helmet and breastplate, a page with the Madonna and Child represented in different positions with sketches of lions' heads along the margin, and drawings of the male nude in every conceivable posture. There is a page where Leonardo shows a double man--his arms outstretched horizontally, his feet together, his body enclosed within a square; superimposed is the same man with arms upraised and feet widespread, his hands and feet on the circumference of a circle. These two figures are illustrations of the proportions of the human body. Significantly, this study of proportions is after Vitruvius, a first-century Roman writer on art and architecture. Thus we again encounter the influence of the classical world upon the Renaissance artist.

Leonardo drew studies of rivers, wooded landscapes, and ravines, numerous drawings of a great deluge and the mortals engulfed by it. There is a beautiful page with flowering rushes, and we see how the artist combined an Oriental sensitivity to the shapes of things with a feeling for the dynamic growth of plants. Another page shows a drawing of a foundry in which a cannon is being assembled. Apropos of this drawing, Leonardo wrote a letter to Ludovico Sforza of Milan in 1493 applying for employment; he listed his capabilities, several of which run as follows :

*In case of need I will make big guns, mortars, and light ordnance*

*of fine and useful forms, out of the common type. Where the operation of bombardment might fall, I would contrive catapults, mangonels, trabocchi and other machines of marvellous efficacy and not in common use. And in short, according to the variety of cases, I can contrive various and endless means of offence and defence.* [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)

The first nine items which Leonardo lists in this letter tell of his engineering acumen and of his skill as a contriver of instruments of war. Only the tenth and last item speaks of his artistic gifts:

*In time of peace I believe I can give perfect satisfaction and to the equal of any other in architecture and the composition of buildings, public and private; and in guiding water from one place to another. I can carry out sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay, and also I can do in painting whatever may be done, as well as any other, be he whom he may.* [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)

Of the artistic mediums which he mentions, the last and the most briefly mentioned is the one for which we remember him particularly. His MONA LISA and LAST SUPPER are two of the most frequently reproduced and written-about paintings of the Western world. Yet this extraordinary man did not see himself primarily as a painter. A contemporary who visited him in April of 1501 reported, "He is entirely wrapped up in geometry and has no patience for painting." [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#) It is conceivable that if he were living today he would be at one of the Institutes for Advanced Studies at a large university in the capacity of research physicist, painting occasionally as a peripheral activity.

The number of paintings by Leonardo is small when contrasted with that of artists whose life-span was about the same length as his. Leonardo died at the age of sixty-seven. There are less than a dozen paintings indisputably by his hand. The total works of Botticelli who died at sixty-six, Fra Angelico who died at sixty-eight, and even Durer who died at fifty-seven, are all very much greater in extent. Compensating somewhat for the small number of finished paintings is the large number of extant drawings. One of the most beautiful of these is the drawing of the VIRGIN AND CHILD 'JUDITH ST. ANNE AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST' [{bmc picture.bmp}](#), now owned by the National Gallery in London. This kind of study, made in the same size as the finished painting, is called a cartoon. Since Leonardo made many changes in the final painting, the composition has come down to us in two rather different forms. Let us consider the cartoon first.

The subject matter is foreign to contemporary thinking. St. Anne,

who was the mother of Mary, is known to us only through apocryphal tales. In Christian art she often symbolizes the church. Theologically interpreted, Anne represents the world of Christian believers; Mary, the handmaid chosen of God, is the vehicle for the Incarnation; and Jesus Christ is the Son of God who turns with the gesture of blessing toward the young John the Baptist. John the Baptist, we learn from Luke's Gospel, was a few months older than Jesus and was related to Jesus, since Mary and John's mother Elizabeth were kin.

Though Jesus is the younger of the two, his gesture of blessing toward the youthful John [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). reminds us of the relationship which John himself pointed to when in their mature years they met

*in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me.' "* [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)

Leonardo has drawn these four figures into a compressed and intricate grouping. A full-grown woman, holding a young child, is seated upon the knees of another mature woman. Indeed, the description sounds ludicrous. We have only to imagine what a group of four persons posed in these attitudes would look like in order to realize the extent to which Leonardo has transformed them into ideal beings, ideally interrelated. The interrelationships are so skillfully and subtly handled that we are unaware of any awkwardness.

The intricate yet perfectly lucid way in which the figures are compressed into a triangular grouping has been achieved through Leonardo's use of *contraposto*. The term means the twisting of the human body on its axis. Imagine a figure standing erect and frontal before us. Were it to drop one shoulder, advance the opposite leg, and allow the weight to fall on the back leg, the spinal column would form a gentle S-curve. The resultant relaxed yet stable posture was one which delighted late classical sculptors. A similar S-curve is to be seen in the Orleans Madonna [{bmc picture.bmp}](#)., and it is typical of Gothic sculpture. But the High Renaissance innovation was twisting the figure into three-dimensional curves. Imagine the figure described above standing frontally with the S-curve of the body evident. Now if the shoulders are rotated in one direction, and the hips in the opposite, we have maximum variety and a complexity of movement, while maintaining stability, ease, and grace of posture. This is what Leonardo has done with his

seated figures in this drawing. Looking at the figure of Mary, for instance, we see that her shoulders slant down slightly while her hips slant up slightly to our right. Her hips and shoulders are rotated in opposite directions. Her thighs present two different planes, as do her legs. Her head tilts to the side and is somewhat rotated, too. Yet how supremely relaxed, easy, and stable is her posture! Similar observations could be made about each of the other three figures.

Leonardo lived and painted at a time when the tradition of Renaissance naturalism came to full flower. Investigations into the correct representation of the human figure had been carried to such a point that Leonardo's own further studies gave him an effective grasp of anatomy. We know from his own statement that he dissected ten cadavers to learn the structure and function of the human body:

*I, to get accurate and complete knowledge of the blood-vessels, have dissected more than ten human corpses, cutting up all their other members and removing with the greatest care all the flesh from around them, without spilling any of their blood other than that from the imperceptible bleeding of the capillary veins. Since a single corpse did not last a sufficient time, I had to proceed from corpse to corpse and thus collect complete information; and this I repeated twice to see the differences.*

*Even if you had a love for such a thing, you would perhaps be prevented by your stomach; if this did not stand in your way, you would perhaps be prevented by the fear of living at night in the company of such quartered and skinless corpses which are frightful to see; if this did not prevent you, perhaps you would lack the ability to draw well, which is necessary for such illustration; if you could draw, you might not have the right perspective, you might not know the method of geometric proofs and the method of calculating the strength and capabilities of muscles; or you might lack patience and therefore fail to exercise diligence.*

*Am I endowed with these attributes? The one hundred and twenty books composed by me will render a verdict of yes or no. {bmc  
Note2.bmp}*

We have his drawings of organs of the body and even one detailed and accurate sketch of a woman's body showing a fetus in the womb. This kind of thorough, firsthand knowledge of the body gave Leonardo a competence and assurance in representing it which allowed him to compose figures in complicated postures without sacrificing a feeling of suppleness and ease.

Looking back at the works of art which we have discussed

previously, we observe that until the time of Giotto the major figures were always presented frontally or in profile. Giotto began to represent the human body in a variety of positions. But Giotto still had a limited repertoire of postures and gestures, and one which was based essentially on the frontal or profile view. Piero della Francesca's art, too, was essentially peopled by persons in these two basic postures. Botticelli, a contemporary of Leonardo, shows some of his figures in a graceful contraposto. The Mary of THE ANNUNCIATION [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). bends in a graceful arc like movement, but her shoulders and hips are rotated on a crescent curve. The resultant contraposto gives an impression of incipient movement. However, the most complex yet subtle use of the device was made by Leonardo in such compositions as the VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ST. ANNE AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Apparently Leonardo was not satisfied with the lower part of this cartoon, with its grouping of legs and feet. In the final version of the composition [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). he changed the posture of Mary so that her body, her right leg, and the child she holds, form a diamond shape which bisects the vertical made by the body of St. Anne. In this final painting the young St. John is no longer present. The Christ Child plays with a lamb, clasping one of its ears, while having one leg, thrown over the animal's back. Although the lamb is painted with convincing naturalism, its significance is symbolic. Its function is to remind us that the Christ Child is the Lamb of God.

Both the cartoon and the finished painting in the Louvre show Leonardo's consummate skill in the use of light and shade. Looking back at the paintings of Giotto, we note the overall, uniform light which surrounds his figures, clearly defining them, rather like the light at noon on a cloudy day. At such a time, light fully reveals the contours of the things it strikes, and with the sun hidden we do not see deep shadows and sharp contours. Leonardo chooses another time of day and another kind of day—a moist, misty day in the late afternoon when light no longer falls upon objects, but rather seems to gleam from some of them, allowing others to slip into mysterious shadow. The beautiful face of Mary glows softly with light across the temples. The light touches her eyelids, the Bridge of her nose, and the upper curve of her cheeks. But the lower lids and cheeks are enveloped in velvety shadow. Soft shadows cling about the mouth, accentuating the smile which plays about her lips. This mysterious smile is similar to the one which we know from his portrait of the MONA LISA.

The final painting was executed by Leonardo and his pupils [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#) and now hangs in the Louvre. It has a beautiful landscape setting for the figures. In the immediate foreground we see a rocky,

pebbly ledge. Its function is clearly to define the position of the figures in regard to the beholder and the picture plane. The picture plane, it will be recalled, is the plane represented by the surface of the picture itself. It is the imaginary point chosen by the artist as his own and as the beholder's position in relation to what is pictured in the work of art. Perhaps the easiest way to see its function is to think of it as the framed opening through which we, the beholders, view the scene which the artist has depicted. The artist can move this frame close to the persons he is representing (as Michelangelo did in the TEMPTATION AND FALL! and the result will be that the figures fill most of the picture area with little space left for landscape or setting. Or, like Bruegel in his CHRIST CARRYING THE CROSS [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). , he can move the frame far away from the scene, allowing us to see a panoramic view with the figures small because seen from afar.

It is possible for an artist to present the illusion that some of the persons or objects push through this picture plane, projecting out of the picture. In his grappling with these problems for the first time since antiquity, Giotto achieved this result rather accidentally and awkwardly in his LAMENTATION OVER THE DEAD CHRIST [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). , where the figure seated in the center at the edge of the composition seems to project out of the picture plane along her lower back and buttocks. Leonardo achieves a similar effect in the cartoon for this painting in that the left knee of Mary seems to invade our space rather than remaining within the space defined by the picture plane. Leonardo could have eliminated this effect of projection had he shown more of the foreground, therefore pushing the figures back into depth. The painting in the Louvre has a wider and more exactly defined foreground. Consequently even if Leonardo had retained the same position of the legs in the painting that he used in the cartoon, there would be no projection beyond the picture plane.

If we note the variety in size, shape, and texture of the stony foreground of Leonardo's painting, and contrast this with Giotto's depiction of a stony ledge, the difference between the two artists' depiction of nature is dramatically underscored again. Giotto has constructed a kind of papier-mache stage set which serves its function by symbolizing a natural setting and locating the scene in space. But Leonardo has carefully studied actual stones. Yet it is not a photographic study of the texture of rock and pebble. He wrote: "The painter who copies with his hand and his eye but without reason is like the mirror which mechanically reflects everything placed before it." [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#) And again,

*The divine element in the art of painting changes the painter's*

*mind into a likeness of the divine mind, giving him the power to evoke the manifold forms of different animals, plants, fruits, regions, and cleft mountains; fearsome and awesome places that terrify their viewers; gentle, peaceful landscapes that delight the eye with their colorful meadows in flower, softly undulating as the gentle wind moves fleetingly over them; streams swollen by heavy rains descending from high mountains, driving before them uprooted plants mixed with rocks, roots, earth and scum, and carrying along with them whatever is in their path of destruction; and the sea as it struggles with the tempest and scuffles with the wind that assails it--as it mounts superb waves that are splintered and converted into foaming froth by the wind which they imprison as they fall. {bmc Note2.bmp}*

Although this poetic passage is descriptive of nature, it abounds in terms which have emotive significance-fearsome and awesome, peaceful and gentle-and which describe the effect of nature on the spectator. In Leonardo's painting in the Louvre, the landscape slopes down behind the figures and rises again at the right, and we see "meadows . . . softly undulating as the gentle wind moves fleetingly over them," and behind are "cleft mountains" with "streams swollen by heavy rains descending from high mountains."

A photograph of the painting, however excellent, can only partially suggest the mystery and magic of the glorious mountain scene in the background. The rugged forms gleam sharply, then melt into the surrounding mist. It is the kind of view for which men risk their lives climbing mountains or flying planes through hazardous mountain passes. Yet it is not the wild and solitary beauty of nature alone; it is beauty as viewed through the alembic of Leonardo's art. It is therefore more than a skillfully depicted mountain scene; it also embodies the vision of this extraordinary man.

Aesthetically, the cartoon and the painting alike are acknowledged masterpieces of art. But what of their religious content? Are they also great works of Christian art! This question presents us with a serious problem of interpretation, and it underlines how time-bound we are in such judgments. Two types of present-day viewers do not see any Christian substance in these works of art. First, there are many who tend to identify suffering with religious experience. Born into a century that has known two immense and catastrophic wars and lives in dread of a third and final holocaust, they see Christ as the Suffering Servant on whom "the Lord hath laid the iniquity of us all." To these believers the ISENHEIM ALTARPIECE Crucifixion {bmc picture.bmp}. evokes more religious awareness than the mysteriously beautiful faces and bodies which Leonardo puts before our eyes in his VIRGIN AND CHILD AND ST. ANNE.



The second and most inadequate judgment is that of the person who relates the excellence of the work of art solely to its obvious content. Thus, an identifiable and faithful picturing of the prodigal son is by virtue of these characteristics a fine work of Christian art, and an "uplifting" sentimental painting of Jesus such as that of Sallman or Hofman, is a fine painting of Christ. Those who use such partial and superficial criteria will not be able to discern the complexity of meaning in Leonardo's painting, any more than those who equate depth of feeling with violence of feeling.

How did Leonardo's own contemporaries see the painting! We are fortunate in having a letter written by Fra Pietro da Novarella after he had visited Leonardo and seen the cartoon for the painting of the VIRGIN AND CHILD AND ST. ANNE. The letter was a kind of report on Leonardo's activities written to Isabelle d'Este, who wanted Leonardo to paint a Madonna and Child for her. The letter is dated April 8, 1501. It reads in part,

*Since he [Leonardo] has been in Florence, he has worked just on one cartoon, which represents an infant Christ of about one year, freeing himself almost out of his mother's arms and seizing a lamb and apparently about to embrace it. The mother half rising from the lap of St. Anne is catching the child to draw it away from the lamb, that sacrificial animal which signifies the Passion. St. Anne, just rising from her seat, as if she would wish to hinder her daughter from parting the Child from the lamb; which perhaps signifies the Church that would not wish the Passion of Christ to be hindered. The figures are life-size, but they fill only a small cartoon, because all are seated or bent, and each one is placed before the other, to the left. The sketch is not yet complete. {bmc  
Note2.bmp}*

This blending of the human and divine, in which the human becomes emblematic of the divine, is characteristic of one side of Renaissance religious art.

Leonardo adds another ambivalent meaning, one which is peculiar to him. In the mysterious smiles, in the slow circular movement of many of the forms, and in the wild and visionary mountainous background, we experience a sense of the primeval power and beauty of nature as an ancient earth-mother goddess who presides over the cycle of birth, growth, death, decay and rebirth, ever changing, yet ever immutable.

### **Michelangelo's PIETA in St. Peter's, Rome**

On August 7, 1498, a contract was drawn up by Jacopo Galli stating that Maestro Michelangelo had agreed,

*at his own proper costs [to] make a Pieta of marble; that is to say, a draped figure of the Virgin Mary with the dead Christ in her arms, the figures being life-size, for the sum of four hundred and fifty gold ducats in papal gold, to be finished within the term of one year from the beginning of the work. {bmc Note2.bmp}*

Michelangelo was then twenty-three years old. The contract goes on to promise "that the said Michelangelo will complete the said work, within one year, and that it shall be more beautiful than any work in marble to be seen in Rome today, and such that no master of our own time shall be able to produce a better." {bmc Note2.bmp}

The boastful assurance of Signor Galli to the prospective owner of the work gives us evidence that Michelangelo's reputation was already rather well established. His prediction turned out to be entirely justified. Michelangelo's PIETA {bmc picture.bmp}., completed when he was not yet twenty-five years of age, is one of the great masterpieces of Christian art.

There is no scriptural basis for the subject matter. John's Gospel states that Mary was standing by the cross of Jesus at the time of the Crucifixion. It is assumed that she would have been there when Jesus was lifted down from the cross, and that she, like any other grief-stricken mother, would have enfolded the body of her son in her arms. It is an event depicted often in Christian art, and one which is known by the Italian word Pieta', meaning pity. In Italian art we usually see St. John and Mary Magdalene as part of the group. But Michelangelo eliminates them, isolating the mother and son who are physically close for the last time.

Mary is seated on a rocky ledge with her knees apart, the leg which supports the upper part of Christ's body being slightly higher. Her head is pensively bowed. One arm encircles the shoulders of the Christ, supporting his head. Her right hand with fingers widespread holds his body against her own. Her left hand with palm up gestures in mute acceptance. Her full flowing robe cascades about her body and legs, providing an ample breadth and depth of support for the limp body she holds.

Mary's face is exquisite in proportion and in the delineation of the delicate features. The rounded forehead arches above a patrician nose and tender mouth. Michelangelo has carefully wrought the intricate and intimate details of physiognomy--the corners of the eyes, the contours of the lids, the curves of the nostrils, the corners of the mouth. He suggests the differences of texture between the brows and cheeks and even slight and subtle differences of color. The lips, for instance, appear a darker tone than the cheeks. This

effect is achieved by the modeling of the mouth and the way it receives the light, not by the use of color. Michelangelo is the first major sculptor to eschew the use of color in sculpture. Many of his contemporaries had gold added to the patterns which edged the garments of the Madonnas and angels. Donatello worked in wood and terra-cotta, both mediums that were painted afterwards. And the della Robbias, with their brilliantly polychromed terracottas, were contemporaries of the youthful Michelangelo. Michelangelo seemed to have an affinity for the beauty of the tone and surface of marble; he suggested texture and color by his direct handling of the surface of the marble.

Michelangelo's Mary, in her pensive submission to the death of Jesus, differs from other artists' depiction's of this subject in which Mary is shown in shock and fainting, or racked by grief. This Mary, with her indrawn expression, seems to recollect the many times when she had held this body in her arms during his childhood days. The expression on her face is very like the Bruges MADONNA AND CHILD which Michelangelo sculptured only a few years after he completed the PIETA. In this group, where the Madonna holds the child Jesus between her knees, her face, far from radiating the celestial assurance of the Gothic MADONNA AND CHILD, [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). has a brooding look of foreboding. She seems to know that a sword shall be thrust through her heart. So the expression of the mother of the PIETA, who holds her dead son in her arms and recalls his childhood, is very like that of the young mother who restrains the vigorous movement of the infant in a moment of insight and foreknowledge of the events and meaning of his life.

The body and face of the Christ are delineated with consummate skill. The lifeless limpness of the figure is underlined by the way in which each member of the body sags back against a support of some kind. The contours of the neck, as the head falls back against Mary's arm, have beauty of line. The complete relaxation of the muscles is shown by the way in which the flesh about the armpit rolls back as Mary's hand offers support. The nude torso is also of great beauty. All of the intricacies of the muscular structure of the body are visible beneath the layer of fine flesh. Yet each is subservient to the whole, with the result that we are aware of the beauty of the whole rather than of the complexity of the parts. Even in such details as the veins of the hand we note that their prominence, which is quite natural when the hand is below the heart, is not over stressed, and does not draw our attention away from the position of the fingers, which fall languidly against a protruding fold of drapery.

The body is that of a young man, and its proportions are delicate and patrician. The cloth drawn across the loins covers a minimal area of the body. With conscious intent Michelangelo has draped this cloth in such a way that its upper edge emphasizes the juncture of the hip with the muscles of the torso above, while the lower edge of the loin cloth emphasizes the inward curve of the buttocks. Like the Greek sculptors, whose reverence for the human body is born anew in this genius of the Renaissance, Michelangelo subtly emphasizes all the areas of the body which are related to our capacity for movement. All of the joints of the body--elbows, hips, knees--are delineated in such a way as to emphasize their potentiality for action and movement. In the case of this dead Christ, the potentiality for movement has just ceased, and all of the joints--elbows, wrists, knees, and neck--sag against a support. Of particular beauty and expressiveness is the backward, convex line of the neck. It creates the first part of the S-curve which continues in a crescent line from throat to knees, and in an inverted curve from knees to feet. But the S-curve (as was the case in Leonardo's painting) is given torsion, or a third-dimensional twist, which creates a contraposto. Again the impression is that of a complexity of relationships which are perfectly organized into an easy and stable composition. In this group, as in Leonardo's VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ST. ANNE AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, the dominant overall form is the triangle, indeed, a very stable triangle, with a broad solid base rather than the attenuated triangle used by such artists as El Greco. {bmc picture.bmp}..

The physiognomy of Christ {bmc picture.bmp}. is different from any we know in Michelangelo's subsequent work; indeed, it is unique in the history of the changing image of Christ. The breadth of forehead and the widespread eyes, the arch of the narrow nose, the thin but shapely lips with a slight mustache and the softly curling short beard, contribute to a youthful, fine-featured face. The slight opening of the lids, and the parted lips, and the way the flesh hollows slightly below the cheekbones, give the impression that the last breath has just been drawn.

Michelangelo minimizes the wounds of Christ, that is, the nail holes in the feet and hands and the slash made by the spear. John's Gospel tells of the official denouement of the event of the Crucifixion. The Romans and Jews wished to complete and tidy up the whole affair:

*Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs [the two malefactors and Jesus] might be broken, and that they might be*

*taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. {bmc Note2.bmp}*

The wound made by the spear is almost always delineated in the right side of Jesus' torso, diagonally near the rib cage. Michelangelo represents this as a mere slit. Similarly, the holes in the hands and feet are tiny in size, inadequate for the kind of nail which must have been used to support the weight of a full-grown man, who in his last anguish would have hung from these extremities.

We have only to contrast the wounds, or stigmata, as depicted by Grunewald with Michelangelo's inconspicuous rendering of them to see two juxtaposed extremes. Where Michelangelo shows us a slight depression or declivity, Grunewald [{bmc picture.bmp}](#) shows a ragged, gaping fissure which still holds a pool of blood. But the contrast extends beyond the stigmata to the whole conception of the body. In the one case, it is idealized and undistorted; in the other, savagely dislocated and violently distorted.

Michelangelo, like the Greeks before him, gave expression to an ideal of the human body. This must not be thought of as a beautifying of the body, that is, simply an elimination of any irregularities and a "touching-up" of the features and proportions. It is a far more profound ideal. Like the Greeks, Michelangelo felt that the beauty and harmony of the body were expressions of inner beauty.

Michelangelo was criticized by his contemporaries for representing the mother of Christ as so young. He is said to have defended himself by replying that a pure woman preserves her youth longer. This was an idea derived from the Neoplatonic thought which dominated the intellectual circles of Florence in Michelangelo's day. Michelangelo was a frequent guest in the home of the Medicis, where the litterati and intellectuals of the day gathered. The revival of classical learning involved the revival of Greek philosophy and the entire scope of Platonic ideas.

The Neoplatonic philosophers of the Renaissance envisaged the painter as being unlike ordinary mortals. As Gombrich says, he was

*a person endowed with the divine gift of perceiving, not the imperfect and shifting world of individuals, but the eternal patterns themselves. He must purify the world of matter, erase its flaws, and approximate it to the idea. He is aided in this by the*

*knowledge of the laws of beauty, which are those of harmonious, simple geometrical relationships, and by the study of those antiques that already represent reality "idealized," i.e., approximated to the Platonic idea. {bmc Note2.bmp}*

Leonardo, as we have seen, understood the painter's role in this light. He believed that in the act of creation the painter's mind is akin to the divine mind, giving him the power to evoke all objects and aspects of the visible world. Michelangelo shifts the emphasis, but expresses the same thought, when he says: "Good painting is nothing but a copy of the perfections of God and a recollection of His painting." {bmc Note2.bmp}

### **Michelangelo's TEMPTATION AND FALL**

A decade after the creation of the PIETA, now in St. Peter's, Michelangelo began work on the vast fresco which was to cover the vault of the Sistine Chapel in Rome with "an apparition of another reality, far removed from ours in space and time and superposed above our shadowy world; vistas into 'true reality,' peopled by the very archetypes of existence." {bmc Note2.bmp} The theme of this immense cycle of paintings is the history of mankind as set forth in Genesis—the creation of the world, the creation of mankind, and the origin of sin. Though deriving from the Old Testament, for the Christian interpreter the episodes show mankind awaiting the coming of Christ the Redeemer. To tell this vast epic Michelangelo painted three hundred figures on an area of over five hundred square feet in a succession of events drawn from the first chapters of Genesis.

One of the most original of these episodes in iconography and content is Michelangelo's depiction of the Fall and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden {bmc picture.bmp}.. The subject matter had been represented frequently in every major period and style before Michelangelo's time. But the usual representation was similar to the panel on the Junius Bassus sarcophagus {bmc picture.bmp}., where the figures of Adam and Eve stand frontally before us, separated by the tree of knowledge around which the serpent is entwined. Michelangelo instead shows us two dramatic moments in the story—the very moment of temptation and the moment of the expulsion from the Garden.

In the first of these scenes we see Eve reclining indolently upon her side, her knees drawn up, her whole body forming a sensuous question mark. She has one hand raised and receives from the serpent a fruit from the tree. Adam's legs arch over her body with a scissor-like triangle of movement. His right foot presses into the

ground, and his buttocks and torso are tense as he lunges forward to seize the fruit. In the center stands the tree of knowledge of good and evil with one of the strangest of all serpents entwined about it. This serpent has two great python-like extremities coiled about each other and the tree, and these in turn are surmounted by a nude female torso and feminine physiognomy crowned with long flowing reddish hair. The corkscrew-like movement of her body terminates in an impetuous and imperious gesture as she offers the fruit to Eve. On the right side of the composition the cherubim with a sword gestures in command as the two sinners depart into the arid and empty plains of earthly existence.

Characteristic for Michelangelo's interpretation of the theme is the depiction of nature in such a reduced and minimal way. If we reread Genesis, the description of Eden offers images of an abundant and beneficent natural setting--

*And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)*

The rocky shelf of ground at the left with its one low, lopsided tree is not consonant with the garden the Lord God planted in Eden as suggested by the above passage. The barren wasteland at the right seems appropriate enough as the territory given over to the two exiles. But it contrasts only minimally with the garden which Genesis describes as "pleasant to the sight." Michelangelo, like many another Mediterranean artist, has ignored the description of the clothing of Adam and Eve. We see neither the fig leaves sewn together as an apron to hide their nakedness, nor the garment of skins the Lord God made for them.

Directly behind and to the right of Eve we see a dead stump with a pronged leafless branch outlined against the sky. Could this desiccated stump be the tree of life referred to in the quotation! The branch of the stump echoes the lines of the upward-reaching arm of Eve. Could the artist be telling us that with the fall of man the tree of life becomes a tree of death! This is possible, but it is also likely that we see here an allusion to a messianic passage in Isaiah--

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)*

To the medieval world the branch here referred to was Jesus Christ,

and Mary the Mother of Jesus was a counterpart of Eve. Eve was "the mother of all living," and Mary was the Mother of God. Paul wrote in his First Epistle to the Corinthians: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#) For the Christian interpreter Eve and Mary had roles analogous to Adam and Christ. So the presence in Eden of a stump with a shoot is a reference to the branch, Jesus Christ, which shall grow out of its roots.

As a composition Michelangelo's fresco the TEMPTATION AND FALL is an excellent example of the High Renaissance skill in presenting a very stable yet complex balancing of forms. The tree is almost in the center of the composition, but the two pairs of figures on either side are not frontal and similar in position as is the case in the mosaic of CHRIST BLESSING THE LOAVES AND FISHES [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). They are differentiated in their positions, and therefore in line and mass. The two figures at the left have a complexity in their physical relatedness, like two pieces of an intricate puzzle which lock together when properly placed, but here are shown asunder. They are placed nearer the tree than the departing couple. But what could have resulted in imbalance is made to balance, because the group at the right have less weight than the two at the left. Here the principle of the fulcrum is at work. Balance can be achieved either by having two objects of equal weight equidistant from the fulcrum, or by putting the lighter weight further from the fulcrum and the heavier nearer. In this instance some of the effect of weight is given by the tension of Adam's stance and the closer compression of the two bodies on the left. By contrast the almost frontal, empty bodies which move slowly away at the right have less psychic weight.

The artists of the Italian Renaissance inherited from their classical forebears a tendency toward the observation of the unity of time, place, and action in a work of art, that is, a single composition would represent one event which takes place in one setting at one moment in time. The High Renaissance artist would not have represented four different episodes (the Nativity, the Journey of the Magi, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Washing of the Christ Child) in one work of art as did the artist of the Byzantine mosaic [{bmc picture.bmp}](#). Chronological time does not exist in the Byzantine mosaic, nor does space accord in any way with our experience of the world about us. The time and space of Byzantine art is that of a realm separate from earthly existence, one governed by eternal relationships, not the transitory relationships of our time-find space-bound existence.

Time and space for the Renaissance artist, however, accord with our



experience of reality in their coherence and veraciousness, but both have an ideal character. All that is momentary and particular and peculiar is eliminated. The result is a kind of space and time which we dream of and which we glimpse occasionally, and know only as a hope or expectation—a space and time ordered and harmonious as a setting for the drama of human existence. We see this kind of naturalistic space in Piero's RESURRECTION, Leonardo's VIRGIN AND CHILD AND ST. ANNE, and in Michelangelo's TEMPTATION AND FALL.

Oddly enough in this fresco Michelangelo disregarded the unity of time and action which characterized most High Renaissance masterpieces. We see two actions involving the same couple in two discreet moments in time. And yet the entire composition has a compelling unity of rhythm and psychic communication. This unity is achieved by two closely interknit means. First, there is the formal way in which the two couples are related to each other by the dissonant tilted arch made by the arms of the couple and the outreaching arms of the cherubim and the serpent. Secondly, their relatedness is psychic, as if we saw one half of the nature of Adam and Eve at the left and the other, complementary half on the right. In the tense rapaciousness of Adam in Eden, with his face significantly shadowed, we see one phase of his being. In the empty body of Adam at the right, whose hands automatically rise in a listless gesture of withdrawal [{bmc\\_picture.bmp}](#), we see the utter hopelessness of one who has sinned and knows no possibility of forgiveness. His face, here seen in full light, is deeply furrowed with the lineaments of suffering. Eve, on the other hand, changes from an attitude of indolent voluptuousness to a cringing self-protective shielding of her body as she peers somewhat curiously, some what slyly, back at her lost Paradise.

It is interesting to note that the unity of Adam and Eve is greater in sorrow than in the act of gratifying desire. Despite Adam's erotic posture with his buttocks swung back and his feet pressing the soil as he eagerly grasps the fruit, and despite Eve's languorous recumbent receptivity, they are individually attracted by the source of temptation, but they are oddly unrelated to each other. When they experience the expulsion from the Garden, they are bound together psychically as well as physically, and are united by their mutual experience of rejection and suffering.

One of the strangest and most fascinating aspects of the composition is the curious inter relatedness of the serpent and the cherubim. Not only are their gestures similar; the puzzling second limb of the serpent as it thickly encircles the tree just below her breast provides a suggestion of a curving arching line which the eye sees as continued in the right arm of the cherubim. In formal, linear

terms the symbol of evil, the serpent, and the symbol of good, the cherubim, seem to spring from one source. Is Michelangelo expressing an insight into the ambiguity of good and evil?

As we have seen, many of the characteristics of Michelangelo's Adam and Eve are unique to his interpretation of his chosen subject matter. His originality is another evidence of the individualism so a part of Renaissance culture, expressing itself in ever-changing forms from the time of Giotto through the whole cycle of this period. The revival of classicism in the life and thought of the Renaissance is evident in Michelangelo's masterful naturalistic depiction of the human body. And at the level of content the profound and complex psychic and dramatic meanings are part of the High Renaissance interpretation of thematic material.

Michelangelo's total emphasis is on the dramatic transformation which takes place in the psyches of his two protagonists, Adam and Eve. It is the dramatic occurrence and epic event which the High Renaissance unveils before our eyes, compelling our participation in the meaning of the event as clarified and crystallized by the artist.

### **Michelangelo's Last Sculpture, the RONDANINI PIETA**

Through many years and many trials searched,  
The right conception of a living form  
To the wise man will come  
In tough hard stone, when he is soon to die.  
For only late we reach  
Strange and exalted things, and do not stay.  
--From a late sonnet by Michelangelo [{bmc Note2.bmp}](#)

In the last years of Michelangelo's life he turned again to the subject he had depicted three times previously in marble--the PIETA. At first glance it is hard to comprehend that the sculptor of the finished perfection of the St. Peter's group could also be the creator of the so-called RONDANINI PIETA, now in Milan [{bmc picture.bmp}](#).. The statue from the hands of the twenty-five-year-old artist glows with a soft luster, and is gentle and harmonious in its communication of sorrow and suffering.

As we turn to the rough, unfinished surfaces of the late RONDANINI PIETA We see strange dissonances and disproportions, facial features which are only vaguely suggested, an unexplained disjunction of the arm at the side of Christ's body, and finally, the quivering unterminated arc of the two fragile bodies. What was the dying sculptor trying to express!

It is important to note that Michelangelo had originally conceived of

the group in quite another position. After roughing out the group he made major changes, but he did not live to complete the new conception. Thus we have a work-in-progress before us in the RONDANINI PIETA. This fact explains the arm which hangs parallel to the slender body of the Christ, but could never have been related to it. Indeed, the true right arm of the Christ has been roughed out and hangs diagonally back along his body and along that of Mary. It is interesting that Michelangelo himself and subsequent owners of this Pieta have left the obtrusive third arm of Christ in place. Could he, and they, have retained that truncated limb because of its function in the design of the whole! The unstable crescent of the two figures moves upward through a succession of diagonal lines like the broken wing of a bird of passage. But the listless, weightfulness of the disconnected arm, like the lower legs with their diagonal sag, anchors the group to the base. Despite the fact that so much of the statue is rough-hewn, the legs are carefully, even naturalistically executed, and the genitals, as is characteristic with Michelangelo's sculpture and painting, are fully modeled. The thighs and knees are highly polished and seem chrysalis-like, as if emerging from an envelope of rough form which is slipping back, revealing the smoothly finished limbs.

The content of the RONDANINI PIETA is at once more elusive and more profound than his youthful statue of the same subject. It too speaks of acceptance, but at a level which is not that of harmony and a submission of act and will to an external reality. Here the reality is internalized, and we see the epic and eternal in the way the beloved son is pressed tenderly against the mother's frail frame. The fruit of her womb has indeed become the sword thrust through her heart, and in her anguish and his emptiness she presses his body to hers in a final closeness of flesh to flesh, beyond tears, beyond lamentation. All that is particular and individual has lost its identity in eternal suffering and self-giving.

The classical view of man and the harmonious and rational view of the world implied in Michelangelo's early works and his Sistine Chapel frescoes are transformed and transcended in the final sculpture of the dying master. Seen from one viewpoint, the RONDANINI PIETA is the final and agonized expression of the greatness and the limitations of the Renaissance coalition of classicism and Christianity. From another viewpoint it is an initial thrust in another direction, one which offers new and profound possibilities of expression for Christian content. Such diverse artistic talents as those of El Greco and Rembrandt and the twentieth-century expressionists are the rightful heirs of Michelangelo's late style.

#<sub>3</sub>\$<sub>4</sub> 1. Edward MacCurdy, ed., *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*  
(New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 167.

3# 1  
4\$ ONE

#5\$62. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), I, 274.

5# 2  
6\$ TWO

#7\$83. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), I, 274.

7# 3

8\$ THREE

#9\$104. Ludwid Goldscheider, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci* (London: Phaidon Press, 1943), p. 19.

#<sup>11</sup>\$<sup>12</sup>5. John 1:28-30.

11# 5  
12\$ FIVE



#<sup>13</sup>\$<sup>14</sup>6. Wade Baskin, ed. and trans., *Leonardo da Vinci: Philosophical Diary* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 53.

13# 6  
14\$ SIX

#<sup>15</sup>\$<sup>16</sup>7. Critics believe that Leonardo himself did the landscape, the figure of St. Anne, and the right arm of the Virgin.

#<sup>17</sup>\$<sup>18</sup>8. Wade Baskin, ed. and trans., *Leonardo da Vinci: Philosophical Diary* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 58.

17# 8  
18\$ EIGHT

#<sup>19</sup>\$<sup>20</sup>9. Wade Baskin, ed. and trans., *Leonardo da Vinci: Philosophical Diary* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 54.

#<sup>21</sup>\$<sup>22</sup>10 Ludwid Goldscheider, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci* (London: Phaidon Press, 1943), p. 19.

#<sup>23</sup>\$<sup>24</sup>11. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art*  
(New York: Doubleday, 1957), II, 3.

#<sup>25</sup>\$<sup>26</sup>12. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), II, pp. 3-4.

#<sup>27</sup>\$<sup>28</sup>13. John 19:31-34

27# 13  
28\$ THIRTEEN



#<sup>29</sup>\$<sup>30</sup>14. Ernest H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), pp. 155-56.

#<sup>31</sup>\$<sup>32</sup>15. Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, eds., *Artist on Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1945), p. 68.

31# 15

32\$ FIFTEEN

#<sup>33</sup>\$<sup>34</sup>16. Charles de Tolnay, *The Sistine Ceiling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 22.

#<sup>35</sup>\$<sup>36</sup>17. Geneis 2:8-9.

35# 17  
36\$ SEVENTEEN

#<sup>37</sup>\$<sup>38</sup>18. Isaih 11:1-2.

37# 18  
38\$ EIGHTEEN

#<sup>39</sup>\$<sup>40</sup>19. I Corinthians 15:22.

#<sup>41</sup>\$<sup>42</sup>20. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, ed., *A Documentary History of Art* (New York: Doubleday, 1957), II, 23.

<sup>#43</sup><sub>\$44</sub> **Giotto di Bondone 1276-1336**

Giotto di Bondone was born in Vespignano. According to the legend, when tending his flock, Giotto was accustomed to draw on the large, flat stones, and while thus employed, Cimabue came upon him, was filled with admiration of his work, and obtained the consent of his father to his taking him to be his pupil. Though this is probably merely a story, it is entirely possible that Giotto did study with Cimabue in Florence. Giotto became a painter, sculptor, and architect. Giotto drew his inspiration from nature, and he is generally regarded as the father of modern painting. His principal works were his fresco paintings, the masterpiece of which is the series of paintings in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Giotto's ideas of space and perspective in architectural backgrounds, his placement of figures and use of gesture, all served to lead art in Italy from the Byzantine world into the western Gothic period. At the time of his death, Giotto had been architect and master of Santa Maria del Fiore two years. He was buried there, and afterwards a monument was erected to him upon which his portrait was carved by Benedetto da Maiano.



#### #45\$46 **Michelangelo Buonarroti 1475-1564**

Michelangelo Buonarroti, who was born at Castel' Caprese near Arezzo in Tuscany, and was one of the world-masters of painting. He is distinguished as sculptor, painter, and architect, as well as engineer and poet. He studied in the workshop of Ghirlandaio. He soon distinguished himself from the other pupils of Ghirlandaio, and attracted the notice of that great patron of art, Lorenzo de' Medici, who gave him a home in his own palace and commissioned him to execute several pieces of sculpture. Here Michelangelo lived for four years, and was brought into contact with many of the greatest and most intellectual men of that time in Italy. The worth of such influence to the young man's life must have been incalculable. He became a diligent student of Masaccio's great frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel and also of the remains of ancient art in Florence. He gave himself up to study of anatomy more like a devotee than an ordinary student. Until 1503 Michelangelo is known (with the exception of a few small pictures) exclusively as a sculptor, but in this year he received the commission to enter the lists as a painter with Leonardo da Vinci. The cartoon made at this time brought him so much fame, that soon after he was summoned by the order of Pope Julius II to execute the decoration of the vault in the Sistine Chapel, but eventually the project grew into the great series of frescoes which monumental undertaking became the master's most famous achievement. He was then so diffident of his own powers as a painter that, having consented, with great reluctance, to undertake the work, he sent for some of his old Florentine companions to paint the frescoes from his cartoons. Not satisfied with their work, however, he destroyed it all and painted the whole with his own hand. He loved sculpture best but it was the fresco paintings which gave him sufficient space for the representation of his mighty conceptions. In these, however, his is the painter-sculptor, not alone the painter, for his frescoes are full of sculptural qualities.

Characteristics.-- First of all, we must notice the greatness and essential poetry of his conception and style. His compositions differ from those of other masters in that each part seems complete in itself. He has placed magnificent figures side by side, and they have to do with each other yet the relative action is not in the least necessary to the full force of expression of the figures. He discarded draperies almost wholly, having had a passion for the representation of the nude human figure. Until the recent cleaning of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, art historians were divided between the opinion that Michelangelo was weak as a colorist, and that he deliberately used dull tones to emulate sculpture. The full, dazzling display of brilliant colors which the cleaning revealed has left both views untenable, and make necessary a new assessment of Michelangelo as a colorist. As a sculptor, Michelangelo's poetry and power are monumental. His great works of sculpture include his famous "David" (Florence), the exquisite "Pieta" for St. Peter's in Rome, the "Bacchus" (Florence), the "Slaves" (Louvre), and the "Moses." His painted works, in addition to the Sistine Chapel, include the "Doni Tondo" (Holy Family), (Uffizi), and the frescoes in Pope Paul III's chapel in the Vatican, including the "Conversion of St. Paul" and the "Crucifixion of St. Peter." In addition to his paintings and sculptures, Michelangelo left a number of drawings and architectural works in St. Peter's, the Farnese Palace,

and the Church of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini. From the unveiling of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Michelangelo was considered the greatest living artist. Strangely, or perhaps due to his monumental greatness, he had no pupils or school, though his creative innovations were adapted into the work of his contemporaries. He stands like a colossus, as monumental an artist as was the nature of his work.

### #47\$48 **Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519**

Leonardo da Vinci was born in Vinci, in the Val d'Arno, below Florence, and is considered to be one of the greatest masters in the history of painting. He was a pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio. Leonardo has been well called a "universal genius." He was painter, sculptor, architect, and engineer. He had a thorough knowledge of anatomy, mathematics, astronomy, and botany, and also was a poet and musician. It was his greatest delight to study the growth of plant life, the hidden laws that govern the mineral world, the movement of planets in the heavens, -- and this love for the deep things of nature he carried into his study of art. It is said that he always wore a sketchbook attached to his girdle, and would wander through the streets of Florence looking for some especially picturesque figure or some face possessing unusual subtlety of expression. He would excite the mirth of peasants so that he could study the line of their laughing faces. It is also said that he even followed criminals to their painful death so that he might gain some new experience that would aid his art. In this way he laid the foundation for the most eminent characteristics of his work. Yet, from the study of Leonardo's life, we must judge that he enjoyed more this study in and for itself than for its results, for he was never satisfied with his experiences when included them into one of his pictures. He was a most devoted and happy student and a most dissatisfied painter. Over and over again would he paint and then destroy his work. It is to this characteristic that the small number of his existing pictures is due. When Leonardo was about thirty, he went to Milan, where he worked, both in sculpture and painting, in the service of the reigning duke. He became master of the Milanese or Lombard school of painting. After many years of work he returned to Florence, and there, at one time, entered into a competition with Michelangelo in the decoration of the two end walls of the great Hall of the Council Palazzo Vecchio. Leonardo chose for his subject "The Defeat of the Milanese by the Florentines at Anghiari"; Michelangelo chose "Pisan Soldiers Called Suddenly to Arms While Bathing in the Arno." The cartoons produced by the two masters mark an important epoch in Italian art. In them we find for the first time the human figure treated with all the truth and splendid fulness of expression of the High Renaissance. Neither picture was completed. A part of Leonardo's cartoon, called "The Battle of the Standard", is now known by an engraving after a copy by Rubens.

Characteristics.--In the latter half of the fifteenth century all the great principles which underlie the art of representation had been mastered. Each great preceding painter had made some important contribution to the general knowledge, until the artist found himself fully equipped for his work. Leonardo's greatest gift to painting was a perfected chiaroscuro. His treatment of this was a revelation to his contemporaries and followers, with his melting and mysterious shadows, and the bewitching way he illuminates his work with light. He used to say to his pupils, "Be as careful for the light in your picture as you would be of a rare jewel". His work shows how well he followed his own precept. His composition, seen at its best in the "Last Supper" was unsurpassed. His drawing is done extremely carefully, and his lines express wonderfully the subtlety of form. His color is clear and silvery, but has suffered very much from his habit of experimenting with technique. He used oils

and painted and repainted, touched and retouched infinitely. His backgrounds show a mannerism that seems to have followed him from the studio of his master, Verrocchio: rocks and dark trees and running water, with diffused twilight mark nearly every one of his works. His ideal woman's face has dark eyes and hair, a long, slender nose, and a somewhat pointed chin, and is marked by a peculiar, languid, subtle smile, as is shown in his masterpiece, the "Mona Lisa".

<sup>#49</sup><sup>\$50</sup> **Angelica, Fra Giovanni da Fiesole 1400-1456 ca**

Fra Angelico, often called Il Beato (The Blessed) by the Italians, was for about thirty years a monk in the monastery of San Marco, Florence. His name owes its high rank (among the painters of his time) to the religious sentiment of his work. Today, however, his innovative style, influenced by Masaccio, and his welcoming of the new ideas of the Renaissance are recognized as most important and influential on the course of Italian painting.

Characteristics.--His most frequent subjects represent the lowliness of soul of God's servants and the devout beauty of angels. His figures are peculiarly quiet; many have passive, folded hands. The motion of his angels, dancing in Paradise, is a most gentle motion, which in no way disturbs the draperies. His execution is elaborate, sometimes almost miniature-like in delicacy. His coloring is most pure and simple and has been little affected by time. His latest works in Orvieto and Rome show the influence of the dawning Renaissance in a better drawing of the figure.

**#51\$52 Piero della Francesca 1416-1492 ca.**

Piero della Francesca was born in Borgo San Sepolcro at the beginning of the Quattrocento, and was one of the greatest Italian painters of that century. He is distinguished for having advanced the study of perspective. He began his career assisting Domenico Veneziano with the frescoes in the Church of S. Egidio in Florence (now almost completely lost, and his early work shows strongly an affinity with Masaccio. His masterpiece is the fresco in the Choir of the church of S. Francesco in Arezzo depicting the "Legend of the True Cross," in which he blended the human presence into precise perspective backgrounds, an accomplishment of supreme importance for painting in Italy. He is famous as a writer on higher mathematics and the laws of perspective as well as painter. He was one of the artists invited to Rome by Pope Nicholas V., whose works in the Vatican were destroyed in order to make room for the frescoes of Raphael.

In addition to the frescoes in S. Francesco, one of the monuments of the Italian Renaissance, Piero's major works include the altarpiece "Our Lady of Mercy with Saints" with the "Annunciation" and the Crucifixion" (Borgo, Pin.), "Flagellation of Christ (Urbino, G.N.), the great "Diptych of the Duke of Urbino" (Uffizi). Piero della Francesca's new vision of volume in space, perspective and light would influence many contemporary artists as well as those to follow, including Perugino, Raphael, Antonello da Messina and Giovanni Bellini.

<sup>#53</sup><sup>\$54</sup>**Donatello di Betto Bardi 1386-1466 ca.**

Donatello (Donato di Betto Bardi) began his career assisting Ghiberti with the bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistery.. This sculptor was a close imitator of nature. He seemed careless of mere beauty, and his works are striking for their marked difference from those of his predecessors, especially in that he defined the forms beneath his draperies, made it possible to believe that the folds concealed the human figure. His work contained a powerful sense of movement, as in his marble statue of "St. George," and he became famous for the technique of "relievo schiacciato" (flat relief) which he developed. Donatello was a giant among sculptors in Florence during the Quattrocento, and his influence on the early Renaissance in Italy is undisputed. Individualistic and dedicated, he invested his work with an overpowering sense of life and driving spirit. Donatello was buried in the Church of San Lorenzo with great pomp. His resting-place was near that of Cosimo de' Medici, so that, as he said, "his body might be near him when dead, as his spirit had ever been near him when in life."

**#55\$56 Alessandro Botticelli 1444-1510 ca.**

Alessandro Botticelli called Botticelli from the name of a goldsmith to whose service he was bound when a boy, was a pupil of Fra Filippo Lippi, and is one of the most important among the fifteenth-century painters. Botticelli was closely associated with the Medici and his fortune paralleled theirs. The death of Lorenzo ended the world in which Botticelli had found honors and fame. Before him the old masters had drawn the inspiration for their works from the Bible; the great mass of pictures had been painted in the service of the church. Botticelli's nature was imaginative: he delighted in myths, fables, and poetry, and freely introduced into his painting all kinds of fanciful creations. Others were beginning to widen the field of art a little, but Botticelli was the first to step boldly forth and make his painting a means for the delight of the secular as well as the religious world. He was a leader in the great movement in the history of art in Florence that led to the protest by Savonarola against the "corrupting influence" as he called it and "of profane pictures". He became an ardent disciple of this great prophet. When Savonarola demanded that bonfires should be made of these "profane" works of art, Botticelli contributed many of his pictures to the burning pile.

Characteristics.--While Masaccio had taken a long step in advance of former artists by making humanity rather than events the chief center of interest in his works, Botticelli pictured not merely humanity, but also human feelings. We see this particularly in his sad-faced Madonnas, whose expressions seem born of a prophetic sorrow, sometimes further denoted by the introduction of the crown of thorns into the picture; it is also seen in the eager, sympathetic countenances of those who surround her. He created a type of face and figure that is most easily recognizable. His figures are unusually tall and graceful, often shown through almost transparent garments; the limbs are slender, the hands long and nervous. His faces are long and thin, with prominent, round chins and very full lips. His style of painting shows early training in the goldsmith's shop; he loved to elaborate with gold-painted embroideries and jewelry, and even gilded the lights upon the heavy locks of hair. His representation of figures in motion is far beyond anything that preceded him and has never been excelled.



### #57\$58 **El Greco 1541-1614**

El Greco's given name was Domenico Theotokopuli. He was born in Candia on the island of Crete. Little is known of his early years, but El Greco may have been a pupil of Titian in Venice. If so, he may have been one of Titian's last pupils. Tintoretto's influence is much more evident in his work. Jacopo Bassano was another early influence on El Greco during the years in Venice. In 1570, El Greco travelled to Rome, where it is believed he may have collaborated with Titian on some of the latter's works there. Another artist whose influence is obvious is Michelangelo. El Greco painted in the Mannerist style and is considered to be the best of the Spanish Mannerists, even though he was trained and spent much time in Italy. Between 1576 and 1577 El Greco went to Madrid and Toledo, where he was commissioned to do his first major work, the High Altar and two other altars at the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo. The High Altar no longer exists in one piece but the two transept altars still remain. "The Trinity" and the "Assumption" (ten and sixteen feet high respectively) are two of the pieces of the High Altar. The transept altar pieces are "Holy Face" and "St. John the Baptist". El Greco was justifiably proud of hard won commissions by King Phillip II, including "Adoration of the Name of Jesus" (more commonly known as the "Dream of Phillip") and the "Martyrdom of St. Maurice" (1580). Unfortunately, King Phillip was displeased with the latter picture. However, this experience did turn out well for El Greco; he was forced to put his efforts into painting in Toledo, where he received much admiration. One of El Greco's last works was done for the church of San Tome in Toledo. It was called the "Burial of the Count of Orgaz" (1586). This painting is still in its original location. El Greco also painted three altarpieces for the chapel of San Jose in Toledo (the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.). El Greco was an extremely prolific artist with a truly unique and individual style. Elongated figures painted in cold tones were a typical device, yet were easily able to convey the intended emotion. El Greco's paintings reflected his own spirituality as well as the religious fervor of his time. Today, El Greco's reputation is secure as one of the most original of the great Masters of Mannerist painting, yet, his work was largely forgotten for two hundred years. His works can be seen in Madrid and Toledo, Spain; however, he is well represented in many museums around the world.

<sup>#59</sup><sub>\$60</sub> **Tommaso di Giovanni Masaccio 1401-1428**

Tommaso di Giovanni Masaccio, one of the greatest masters of the Quattrocento, was born in San Giovanni, in the Val d' Arno. Masaccio came to Florence where the two great influences on his work were the sculptors, Brunelleschi and Donatello, from whom he would bring to his work a new consciousness of the human figure and sense of perspective. He was enrolled in the city guild of painters in 1424; and he died by in Rome in 1428. During his short life Masaccio made an almost phenomenal advance in painting.

Characteristics.-- The conventionalities that had hitherto clung to all pictured works were wholly dropped by Masaccio. His drawing of the human figure (tested by several nude figures in his pictures) is masterly. He puts animation and variety of expression into both figures and faces. In his work real life for the first time becomes the serious subject. While Giotto sought for the best means of telling the story selected as his subject, Masaccio sought, seemingly, a fitting incident which, as a theme, would enable him to portray most forcibly the characters he chose to represent. This study of individual character appears in the work of no earlier master, and was of great importance in the evolution of Italian painting. It marks the beginning of the tendency towards the predominance of the artistic treatment of a picture over its subject, and its inevitable end was to throw out the purely devotional aim which had before characterized painting. Masaccio made a great advance in both linear and aerial perspective; his figures were placed firmly on different planes in the same composition. His works include collaborations with Masolino on the "Altarpiece of the Virgin and St. Anne" (Uffizi), and on the cycle of frescoes for the Brancacci Chapel, S. Maria del Carmine in Florence.