

**TITLE:** Pazzi Chapel (Basilica di Santa Croce) **LOCATION:** Florence, Italy **DATE:** 1429-1461

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**ARTIST:** Filippo Brunelleschi **PERIOD/STYLE:** 15th century Italian Renaissance **PATRON:** Andrea Pazzi

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### **MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

#### **FORM:**

A twelve-ribbed dome on a square base. Brunelleschi used the wondrous architectural form of the pendentive (like the Hagia Sophia). The façade, or face, of the chapel really introduced 15th-century churchgoers to an architectural language that would signal the beginning of the Renaissance. With little decoration, this feature shows the architect's restrained approach. This can be seen in the interior as well, where he used a grey stone called pietra serena, complemented with white plaster and very little color. Interested in balance and harmony, Brunelleschi constructed the interior with a ratio in which the length was twice the length of the width.

#### **FUNCTION:**

This is a "Chapter House" or meeting place for the monks of Santa Croce. The Pazzi family, like several other wealthy Florentine families, sponsored this chapel as a gift to the Franciscan order. It was intended to ensure the well being of the souls of the individual members of the Pazzi family and their ancestors.

### **CONTENT:**

The chapel is decorated with Pietra Serena (grey marble) to give it a decorative contrast. It also includes terracotta roundels as decoration within the roundels of the pendentives by artist Lucca Della Robbia called Tondi.

### **CONTEXT:**

Brunelleschi was a goldsmith, sculptor, mathematician, clock builder and architect. He is given credit with discovering mathematical perspective and championed the central planned building concept that replaced the medieval basilica. Brunelleschi had only just solved one of the most hair-pulling architectural dilemmas in the history of the world by creating a self-supporting dome for Florence's Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Flower. This building is the first independent Renaissance centrally planned building. The building was not completed until after Brunelleschi's death. He was also responsible for the dome of the Florence Cathedral, considered the 8th wonder of the world.

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Brunelleschi went back to the roots of Classical architecture, reintroducing the Corinthian column in the facade. He also added an entablature, the horizontal element that runs above the columns. This chapel feels like an ancient Roman temple because of its rational centralized plan. It is a revitalization of this ancient Roman style. Bramante and Michelangelo will continue using this Roman aesthetic in the plans for the St Peter's Cathedral. The clear cut simplicity of its design made the Pazzi Chapel a highly influential prototype throughout the Renaissance, and the unity of its centralized organization under a unifying dome became the point of departure for the later church plans of Alberti, Bramante and Michelangelo.

### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Brunelleschi added two barrel vaults to the sides of the centrally planned square to increase the space under the dome. Brunelleschi used a basic unit that enabled him to construct a balanced, harmonious and regularly proportioned space.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

Changes in Christian doctrine prompted these concerted efforts to enhance donor's chances for eternal salvation. Until the 13th century, most Christians believed that after death, souls went to either heaven or hell. In the late 1100's and early 1200's the concept of Purgatory--a way station between Heaven and hell where souls could atone for sins before judgment day--increasingly won favor. Pope Innocent III officially recognized the existence of purgatory in 1215. When the church extended to the living the concept of earning salvation in Purgatory, charitable work, good deeds and devotional practices proliferated.

### **DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

He invented a pulley system that allowed materials to be lifted to the top of the cathedral for the dome's construction.

**TITLE:** David **LOCATION:** Florence **DATE:** 1440-1460

**ARTIST:** Donatello **PERIOD/STYLE:** 15th Century Italian Renaissance **PATRON:** Medici

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Bronze

**FORM:**

Donatello has used a relaxed and classical contrapposto stance and the proportions and sensuous beauty of the gods that Praxiteles portrayed in his statues. His weight is on the right foot, while the left is on the severed head of the conquered Goliath. Serenity of the classical profile and the stance and modeling of the youthful body show a hellenistic influence.

**FUNCTION:**

Originally cast in bronze for display in the courtyard of the Medici Palace in Florence, Italy. It may have been a portrait of young Lorenzo De Medici who was 14 at the time. (A favorite grandson of the Medic family.)

**CONTENT:**

The subject of this sculpture is David and Goliath, from the Old Testament. According to the story, Israel (the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) is threatened by Goliath, a "giant of a man, measuring over nine feet tall. He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds." Goliath threatened the Israelites and demanded that they send someone brave enough to fight him. But the entire Israelite army is frightened of him. David, a young shepherd boy, asserts that he is going to fight the giant, but his father says, "There is no way you can go against this Philistine. You are only a boy, and he has been in the army since he was a boy!" But David insists that he can face Goliath and claims he has killed many wild animals who have tried to attack his flock, "The LORD who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine!" They try to put armor on David for the fight, but he takes it off. David faces Goliath and says to him, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD Almighty—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." David kills Goliath with one stone thrown from his sling into Goliath's forehead. Then he beheads Goliath.

**CONTEXT:**

The classical nude had gone from indecent and idolatrous, only used for moralizing and biblical contexts, to a renewed classical motif because of the patronization of humanists such as the Medici. Donatello traveled to Rome with Brunelleschi to study the finest surviving classical statuary. He was comfortable in all subjects and media. His tremendous power of epic expression, enormous energies, sweeping passions and impetuosity make him the representative sculptor of his period and the immediate artistic ancestor of Michelangelo. Like David, Florence was the underdog that withstood repeated attacks from Milan and yet, like young David, thanks to God's favor, Florence was victorious (or at least that's how the Florentines interpreted these events!). And as a result, many Florentine artists will tackle this subject.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

This is the first Renaissance sculpture to portray the nude male figure in statuary. With this piece intended to be seen from all angles it is a definite departure from the Gothic tradition of sculpture in niches and as architectural embellishment. It is the first sculpture in the round in 1000 years.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Donatello, after a thousand years, reclaims the ancient Greek and Roman interest in the nude human body. Of course, artists in the middle ages, a period when the focus was on God and the soul, rarely represented the nude. Donatello does so here with amazing confidence. In fact, this is the first free-standing nude figure since classical antiquity, and when you consider that, this achievement is even more remarkable! There's an undeniable sensuality here that almost makes us forget that we're looking at an old testament subject. The differences between the artist's first David sculpture and the second attest to the evolution of Donatello's humanist perspective, which is emblematic of Renaissance enlightenment. As such, Donatello's bronze David illustrates the merger of classical influences with such features as nudity, and realism, such as the artist's choice to show David as the undeveloped youth of the Bible story rather than a classic hero.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The bronze statue was controversial during the Renaissance and thereafter due to the sexual connotations some experts took note of, such as the wing from the giant's helmet which rests along the length of David's leg. The laurel leaves in the wreath on the base as well as those on David's hat are a code for the nickname of Cosimo de' Medici's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent. He was always known as "Lauro" by the family and "Lauro" means Bayleaf or Laurel in Italian. The encasing of the figure of David in the symbols of the Medici and specifically in the visual codes for "Lauro" is Donatello's way of saying that we are looking at an idealized portrait of Lauro as the ancient hero David.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The hat is a Tuscan Shepherd's hat. The flower is a laurel which indicates that David was a poet. The inscription on the base reads "The victor who defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, O Citizens!". Given its breadth, the ramifications of male sodomitical practices touched all Florentines in one way or another. So famous was the city on the Arno for promoting it, that in Germany, homosexual sex was described by the verb florentzen, and in France it was called "the Florentine vice."...

**TITLE:** Palazzo Rucellai **LOCATION:** Florence, Italy **DATE:** 1450

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**ARTIST:** Leon Battista Alberti **PERIOD/STYLE:** 15th Cent. Italian Renaissance **PATRON:** Giovanni Rucellai

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Stone, masonry

**FORM:**

The three most significant architectural forms that can be identified on the façade are the pilasters, entablatures, and the gradation in the size of blocks (the blocks on the ground floor are larger than those on the upper stories). The pilasters, or columns that are attached to the wall, were modeled after the three different classical orders of columns: Doric (bottom floor), Ionic (second floor), and Corinthian (third floor). Typically, the Doric column was the least embellished. The Ionic had more embellishment, but it was the Corinthian that featured lots of curves and floral forms.

**FUNCTION:**

The Palazzo Rucellai was built to serve as the private home of the wealthy mercantile family. It also served as a canon for Alberti's treatise on Architecture.

**CONTENT:**

The Palazzo Rucellai actually had four floors: the first was where the family conducted their business; the second floor, or piano nobile, was where they received guests; the third floor contained the family's private apartments; and a hidden fourth floor, which had few windows and is invisible from the street, was where the servants lived. The first floor pilasters are Tuscan (derived from Doric), the 2nd floor are Alberti's own invention (derived from Ionic), and the 3rd are Corinthian. The roof is topped with a strong classical cornice. Pilasters rise vertically dividing the facade into square shapes. The friezes include billowing sails, a symbol of the Rucellai family.

**CONTEXT:**

Alberti was a true "Renaissance Man." He studied law, philosophy, architecture, mathematics, physics, and astronomy. As a young man, Alberti spent many years earning a degree in law and, upon arriving in Florence around 1430, became close friends with Brunelleschi. The two men shared a love of mathematics, which triggered Alberti's interest in architecture. He traveled extensively to Rome, where he saw the great buildings of antiquity, including the Colosseum.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Alberti's book on architecture was equally groundbreaking in that it was modeled on a book of the same name written by a Roman architect. Alberti wrote his treatise just after designing the Palazzo Rucellai, which incorporated all the Roman details he knew and loved. Columns became pilasters, meant for decoration only. However, this didn't matter because they were an architectural citation: the referred back to the Colosseum. In many ways, this building is very similar to the Colosseum, which Alberti saw in Rome during his travels in the 1430s. The great Roman amphitheater is also divided into tiers. More importantly, it uses architectural features for decorative purposes rather than structural support; like the engaged columns on the Colosseum, the pilasters on the façade of the Rucellai do nothing to actually hold the building up. In 1446, Leon Battista Alberti, whose texts *On Painting* and *On Architecture* established the guidelines for the creation of paintings and buildings that would be followed for centuries, designed a façade that was truly divorced from the medieval style, and could finally be considered quintessentially Renaissance: the Palazzo Rucellai.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

The repetitive elements and emphasis on proportion was all part of Alberti's architectural philosophy. While Alberti was the brains behind the construction, he enlisted the help of Bernardo Rossellino in executing the Palazzo. Together, the two men combined eight separate homes that dated to the Middle Ages into the Palazzo. On close inspection, a bench can be seen running all the way around the building, incorporating a place to rest one's weary feet right into the facade.

**INTERPRETATION:**

In his treatise on Architecture Alberti sought to ennoble the profession of architect. *"it is he who is responsible for our delight, entertainment, and health while at leisure, and our profit and advantage while at work, and in short, that we live in a dignified manner, free from any danger. In view then of the delight and wonderful grace of his works and of how indispensable they have proved, and in view of the benefit and convenience of his inventions, and their service to posterity, he should no doubt be accorded praise and respect, and be counted among those most deserving of mankind's honor and recognition."*a

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

**TITLE:** Madonna and Child with Two Angels **LOCATION:** Florence **DATE:** 1465

**ARTIST:** Fra Filippo Lippi **PERIOD/STYLE:** 15th Century Italian Renaissance **PATRON:** Unknown, possibly Giovanni Medici

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Tempera on wood

**FORM:**

Lippi has created a humanistic representation of the Virgin and Child. Seated in front of a window that acts as a frame for the composition. The artist has used atmospheric perspective to create a Florentine landscape that moves deep into space in the background.

**FUNCTION:**

This work of art functioned as an altarpiece for devotion on a very intimate and human level. On display in one of the Medici palaces in the 17th century.

**CONTENT:**

In the painting *Madonna and Child with Two Angels*, Fra Filippo Lippi depicts Mary, Jesus, and two angels. There is an open window behind the figures that reveals a pastoral scene of a plowed field and a rocky outcropping. In front of the window, Mary sits in an elaborate chair with a shell decoration on the armrest. She wears a string of pearls wrapping around her hair to meet on her forehead, with a larger pearl topping her elaborate hairdo. Lippi treated Mary's face with particular care. She has delicate features and shading along her chin and neck that make her look three-dimensional.

**CONTEXT:**

Fra Filippo Lippi was a friar that was unsuited for monastic life. He indulged in misdemeanors ranging from forgery and embezzlement to the abduction of a pretty nun, Lucrezia Buti, who became his mistress and the mother of his son, Filippino Lippi. Only the intervention of the Medici on his behalf at the papal court reserved Fra Filippo from severe punishment. He was also the art teacher of Boticelli. Lippi was chaplain to a convent in Prato, near Florence, where, says Vasari, he was painting an altarpiece for the nuns of St Margherita. There he saw the "beautiful and graceful" Lucrezia Buti, a novice. He persuaded the nuns to let him paint her as Our Lady, then persuaded Lucrezia to run away with him. The nuns were shamed, Lucrezia's father "never smiled again" - but she stayed with Filippo.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

He witnessed the decoration of the Brancacci Chapel by Masaccio. He was later inspired by the linear style of Ghiberti and Donatello's relief sculptures. The close-up style, with the group painted as little more than half figures, placed in a small space and bordered by a Serena stone frame, make this composition similar to numerous relief sculptures made by the Florentine sculptors of the same period.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

All of the figures suggest the use of live models. The scene through the window incorporates recognizable features of the Arno valley, and the Virgin sits in an elegantly furnished Florentine home. The holy image has been translated with a deep sense of humanity, both through the expression of affections and in the choice of clothes and hairstyles, which have been inspired by the fashions of the same period. The Virgin is dressed most elegantly, with a crown of pearls and veils woven into her hair, in the same way as Florentine noblewomen from the late 15th century. The halos are barely hinted at: fine crowns and rays of light that do not cover the landscape behind. As yet there is nothing to confirm the idea that the Virgin's face is none other than that of Lucrezia Buti, the young nun from Prato, who went on to become Lippi's wife.

**INTERPRETATION:**

The Carmelite brother interpreted his subject in a surprisingly worldly manner. This work shows how far artists had carried the humanization of this traditional religious theme. There is a change in the status of the artist—and a related change in the way people are thinking about art. Art is beginning to be thought of not just as something made by a skilled worker, but something that comes from a "inspired" place—from someone who is especially gifted. According to the rest of the story, Cosimo de Medici (Lippi's patron) learned that artists need to be treated with respect—a sign of the changing status of the artist in the Renaissance—from skilled laborer to respected professional and intellectual.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The quattrocento is another term used for the 15th century, or the 1400s.

**TITLE:** Birth of Venus **LOCATION:** **DATE:** 1484-1486

**ARTIST:** Sandro Botticelli **PERIOD/STYLE:** 15th Century Italian renaissance **PATRON:** The Medici Family  
Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Tempera on canvas

**FORM:**

Venus is slightly to the right of center, and she is isolated against the background so no other figures overlap her. She has a slight tilt of the head, and she leans in an awkward contrapposto-like stance. At the center of the painting, Venus rises from the water on the bed of a shell that hovers above greenish-blue waves. Her red, knee-length hair blows in the wind as she covers her breasts and nether regions with her hands. She appears to gaze beyond the picture frame, disregarding possible onlookers as if something in the far distance has caught her gaze.

**FUNCTION:**

This piece was a gift for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco for his home. He kept it hidden for 50 years, because he knew that it was possibly too controversial.

**CONTENT:**

The theme of the Birth of Venus was taken from the writings of the ancient poet, Homer. According to the traditional account, after Venus was born, she rode on a seashell and sea foam to the island of Cythera. In the painting we see here, Venus is prominently depicted in the center, born out of the foam as she rides to shore. On the left, the figure of Zephyrus carries the nymph Chloris (alternatively identified as "Aura") as he blows the wind to guide Venus. On shore, a figure who has been identified as Pomona, or as the goddess of Spring, waits for Venus with mantle in hand. The mantle billows in the wind from Zephyrus' mouth.

**CONTEXT:**

The demand for this type of scene, of course, was humanism, which was alive and well in the court of Lorenzo d' Medici in the 1480s. Here, Renaissance humanism was open not only to the use of a pagan sculpture as a model, but also a pagan narrative for the subject matter. Botticelli painted a companion piece to the Birth of Venus, titled La Primavera, or Spring. Similar to the Birth of Venus, the painting had a nonreligious theme, Venus making merry upon the arrival of spring with a number of allegorical female figures that are all happily dancing around. The blooming laurels of spring were enough reason for celebration for these mythical figures. Botticelli's style departs from the typical Florentine renaissance interest in naturalism, rationalism and mathematic perspective. His works were more courtly and poetic. Related more to pageantry and myth.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

It is important to take note of the medium. This is a work of tempera on canvas. During this time, wood panels were popular surfaces for painting, and they would remain popular through the end of the sixteenth century. Canvas, however, was starting to gain acceptance by painters. It worked well in humid regions, such as Venice, because wooden panels tended to warp in such climates. Canvas also cost less than wood, but it was also considered to be less formal, which made it more appropriate for paintings that would be shown in non-official locations (e.g. countryside villas, rather than urban palaces). This painting broke with Renaissance tradition in the sense that the figures don't occupy real space; rendering space in a realistic manner was Renaissance artists' whole shtick. Botticelli did fall in line with Renaissance bros in another way, though. As a lover of Roman and Greek literature (including Homer, Virgil, Ovid), Botticelli, like the others, was a humanist through and through.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Botticelli paid much attention to her hair and hairstyle, which reflected his interest in the way women wore their long hair in the late fifteenth century. He gave Venus an idealized face which is remarkably free of blemishes, and beautifully shaded her face to distinguish a lighter side and a more shaded side. Of obvious importance in this painting is the nudity of Venus. The depiction of nude women was not something that was normally done in the Middle Ages, with a few exceptions in specific circumstances. For the modeling of this figure, Botticelli turned to an Aphrodite statue, such as the Aphrodite of Cnidos, in which the goddess attempts to cover herself in a gesture of modestly. In painting Venus, Botticelli painted a dark line around the contours of her body. This made it easier to see her bodily forms against the background, and it also emphasized the color of her milky skin. The result of all of this is that Venus almost looks like her flesh is made out of marble, underscoring the sculptural nature of her body.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Although the Birth of Venus is not a work which employed Renaissance perspectival innovations, the elegance of the classical subject matter was something that would have intrigued wealthy Florentines who patronized this type of work. However, it would not have appealed to everyone, like those who viewed the worldly behavior of the ruling Medici family as corrupt or vile. By the 1490s, the tension that resulted from the clash between courtly excess and those who wanted religious reform came to a climax when the preacher Savonarola preached his crusade to the people of Florence. One of the people influenced by the preacher was Botticelli, whose change of heart moved him to destroy some of his early painting by fire.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The orange fruit in the Primavera were "Medicinal Apples", and a reference to the name Medici meaning "doctors".



**TITLE:** Last Supper **LOCATION:** Milan, Italy **DATE:** 1494-1498

**ARTIST:** Leonardo da Vinci **PERIOD/STYLE:** High Renaissance **PATRON:** Ludovico Sforza

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** oil and tempera

**FORM:** Christ sits at the center, his body creating a triangle symbolizing the Holy Trinity. The top of the triangle is the vanishing point from which all lines diverge. The balanced composition is anchored by an equilateral triangle formed by Christ's body. He sits below an arching pediment that if completed, traces a circle. These ideal geometric forms refer to the renaissance interest in Neo-Platonism (an element of the humanist revival that reconciles aspects of Greek philosophy with Christian theology). In his allegory, "The Cave," the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato emphasized the imperfection of the earthly realm. Geometry, used by the Greeks to express heavenly perfection, has been used by Leonardo to celebrate Christ as the embodiment of heaven on earth.

**FUNCTION:**

To serve as a devotional piece in the dining hall of the Dominican Abbey in Milan.

**CONTENT:**

The Last Supper is Leonardo's visual interpretation of an event chronicled in all four of the Gospels (books in the Christian New Testament). The evening before Christ was betrayed by one of his disciples, he gathered them together to eat, tell them he knew what was coming and wash their feet (a gesture symbolizing that all were equal under the eyes of the Lord). As they ate and drank together, Christ gave the disciples explicit instructions on how to eat and drink in the future, in remembrance of him. It was the first celebration of the Eucharist, a ritual still performed. Specifically, The Last Supper depicts the next few seconds in this story after Christ dropped the bomb shell that one disciple would betray him before sunrise, and all twelve have reacted to the news with different degrees of horror, anger and shock.

**CONTEXT:**

During World War II, in August of 1943, the Allies launched a massive bombing campaign on Milan and its outskirts. The explosions and the ensuing fires killed over 700 people and destroyed many of the city's most important buildings and monuments, including a significant portion of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Miraculously, the wall with the painting survived, probably because it had been shored up with sandbags and mattresses, but the roof of the refectory was blown off and the other walls were decimated. The Last Supper remained exposed to the elements, covered only with a tarp, for several months, until the refectory (the dining room of the monastery where the Last Supper was painted), was rebuilt and a team of restorers began working to preserve and restore the painting.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Leonardo simplified the architecture, eliminating unnecessary and distracting details so that the architecture can instead amplify the spirituality. The window and arching pediment even suggest a halo. By crowding all of the figures together, Leonardo uses the table as a barrier to separate the spiritual realm from the viewer's earthly world. Paradoxically, Leonardo's emphasis on spirituality results in a painting that is more naturalistic. Because Leonardo sought a greater detail and luminosity than could be achieved with traditional fresco, he covered the wall with a double layer of dried plaster. Then, borrowing from panel painting, he added an undercoat of lead white to enhance the brightness of the oil and tempera that was applied on top. This experimental technique allowed for chromatic brilliance and extraordinary precision but because the painting is on a thin exterior wall, the effects of humidity were felt more keenly, and the paint failed to properly adhere to the wall.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Unlike his contemporaries, who used the fresco method, da Vinci did his own thing, blazing a new method for painting on a wall called secco (dry). Whereas the fresco method required painters to work very quickly by laying paint onto wet plaster before it dried, the secco method allowed da Vinci to be more leisurely with his work. With the pressure off, he could take his time, which he did. The painting took between three and four years to complete. Commissioned for the Santa Maria delle Grazie refectory, it became one of the artist's most recognized works.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Referring to the Gospels, Leonardo depicts Philip asking "Lord, is it I?" Christ replies, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me" (Matthew 26). We see Christ and Judas simultaneously reaching toward a plate that lies between them, even as Judas defensively backs away. Leonardo also simultaneously depicts Christ blessing the bread and saying to the apostles "Take, eat; this is my body" and blessing the wine and saying "Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26). These words are the founding moment of the sacrament of the Eucharist (the miraculous transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ).

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The twelve apostles are arranged as four groups of three and there are also three windows. The number three is often a reference to the Holy Trinity in Catholic art. In contrast, the number four is important in the classical tradition (e.g. Plato's four virtues). Twelve also refers to the passage of time, the hours of the days and months of the year, in which salvation is to be sought.

**TITLE:** Sistine Chapel ceiling and altar with frescoes **LOCATION:** Vatican City, Italy **DATE:** 1508-1512 ; 1536-1541

**ARTIST:** Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni **PERIOD/STYLE:** The High Renaissance **PATRON:** Pope Julius II

### **MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

#### **FORM:**

Michelangelo has organized this fresco with triangles, squares and circles as symbols of the Platonic tripartite theory of eternal forms that furnish the clues of the true nature of the universe. He has also organized the composition based on three platonic stages that relate to the world of matter, the world of becoming, and the world of being. These levels also relate to society and man such as (appetite, emotion and rational thought), (gain, ambition and truth), (abdomen, breast and head), (ignorance, opinion and knowledge)

#### **FUNCTION:**

The Sistine Chapel was erected as a place where new popes were to be elected. It also serves as the Popes private chapel.

### **CONTENT:**

In the ceiling we see the story of Noah's family and their escape from rising waters in Genesis 7. The Creation of man, the expulsion from the Garden and the Last Judgment. The final fresco of the Last Judgment wasn't completed until 1541, so it features mannerist sensibilities with characters from Dante's inferno, Minos and Charon. Saint Bartholomew is modeled after a contemporary art critic, but the skin is modeled after Michelangelo's. (A remark about how critics skin him alive with their writing.) Michelangelo combines Christian theology with Pagan mythology through the illustrations of the ancestors of Christ, three stories of Noah, the Creation and Downfall of Adam and Eve, the Creation, and the prophets and sibyls. The figures of the sibyls and prophets in the spandrels surrounding the vault, which some believe are all based on the Belvedere Torso, an ancient sculpture that was then, and remains, in the Vatican's collection. One of the most celebrated of these figures is the Delphic Sibyl.

### **CONTEXT:**

Michelangelo was interrupted from working on the great tomb for Julius II and was a reluctant painter. He selected 300 figures to represent the Neo-Platonic ideals of Man's ultimate awareness of God's presence and the nature of man as part of Plato's philosophy about society, the body, existence, knowledge and man's appetites. He uses narratives from the Old Testament such as the flood in Genesis. The Deluge was considered to prefigure baptism, while the Ark was the symbol for the Church itself. The lustral water of the baptism removes the original sin, while that of the flood cleansed the world of sinners. Noah was saved from the water by the wood of the Ark, just as the wood of the Cross offers salvation to those who are in the Church. Three different patterns of behaviour may be distinguished in human beings: while the righteous take refuge in the Ark (the Church) and find salvation therein, the damned attempt to assail it, and others are lost due to their excessive attachment to worldly things, and seek safety carrying their possessions with them.

### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Michelangelo was the master of monumental figure drawing and movement. His gestures and poses are symbolic of the strength and energy of each character. He has perfected the art of fresco by working from a 17 story scaffold. His style gave birth to mannerism.

### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Michelangelo chose to depict the first few chapters of Genesis, with accompanying Old Testament figures and antique sibyls (prophetesses) based on antique sculptures. These Greco-Roman figures were accepted by Christians as a symbol of the foretelling of the coming of Jesus Christ. There are 300 figures in the scene and no two are in the same pose. They feature Michelangelo's life long obsession with human motion. There is a highly organized blending of pagan and religious symbols in the frescoes.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The acorns in the ceiling are inspired by the crest of the patron Pope Julius II. The spiraling composition of the mannerist Last Judgment scene is symbolic of the disunity of the church during the reformation. In the lower outside level he placed the unenlightened men and women imprisoned by their physical appetites and unaware of the divine word. In the intermediate area he added the inspired Old Testament prophets and pagan sibyls who through their writings and prophecies impart knowledge of the divine will and act as intermediaries between humanity and God. In the central section are the panels that tell the story of men and women in their direct relationship to God. They are seen through the architectural divisions as if they were beyond on a more cosmic plane.

### **DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The Sistine Chapel was originally erected in 1472 and had interior decoration from Botticelli, Perugino and Ghirlandaio (Michelangelo's teacher)

**TITLE:** School of Athens      **LOCATION:** Vatican City, Italy      **DATE:** 1509-1511

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**ARTIST:** Raphael      **PERIOD/STYLE:** The High Renaissance      **PATRON:** Pope Julius II

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### **MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:**

#### **FORM:**

The decoration for the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican has a suite of several rooms (stanze). The room called the Stanza della Segnatura (Room of the Signature) the Papal library is where later popes signed official documents. On the four walls of this room, Raphael painted images representing the 4 branches of human knowledge and wisdom under the headings Theology, Law (Justice), Poetry, and Philosophy.

#### **FUNCTION:**

Decoration for the Pope's library in the Vatican apartments. One of four in a cycle meant to illustrate the vastness of the Pope's book collection. The images in the Stanza Della Signatura were supposed to allude to Julius II desire for recognition as a spiritual and temperol leader. Theology and Philosophy face each other, which balances the images of the Pope as cultured, knowledgeable, wise, and divinely ordained.

#### **CONTENT:**

The gestures of the figures echo the philosophical thought of each figure. The monumentality of the forms and greatness of the figures represent the importance of these classical thinkers during the Renaissance. The building in the background may illustrate the plans for Bramante's St. Peters Cathedral. Plato on the left is modeled by Leonardo and Aristotle on the right. They are surrounded by luminaries revered by Renaissance humanists. The setting is a vast hall with massive vaults that recall ancient Roman architecture. Apollo and Athena appear in the sculptured niches in the sides. Ancient philosophers that are concerned with ultimate mysteries that transcend the world stand on Plato's side. While on Atistotle's side we have philosophers and scientists that are concerned with practical matters such as math.

#### **CONTEXT:**

The Stanza della Signatura features several frescoes representing the Cardinal virtues (Theological virtues: Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance, Justice, Charity, Hope and Faith) represented as allegorical figures. Bramante recommended Raphael to the pope for these projects and he advised him on the design of the interior setting of the School of Athens. In other scenes around the room Raphael represents the allegory of beauty, music and poetry. Apollo holding his lyre, surrounded my the nine muses. The compositions in each of the stanzas work as an explicit manifesto in favor of the papacy's temporal power. The revival of Platoism began its slow spread in the city of Florence when Manuel Chrysolaras from Greece was invited to give a series of lectures at the University of Florence sometime in the early years of the 15th-century. Chryso-laras' student circle included the young Cosimo de' Medici (right). He and others who were interested in the study of philosophy, gathered around Ambrogio Traversari in the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli. The young Cosimo was also a member of that group.

#### **INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

Raphael was in Florence when he received word that Pope Julius II, the same man who asked Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Ceiling, asked him to decorate apartments on the second floor of the Vatican Palace. He was hoping to outshine the Early Renaissance paintings his predecessor, Pope Alexander VI, had done in the Borgia Apartments, which sat directly below. It could be seen as a bold choice, as a young Raphael had never executed fresco works as complex as the commission would require. At that point, he'd mainly been known for his small portraits and religious paintings on wood, in addition to a few altarpieces. Some believe that his friend Bramante, who was the architect of St. Peter's, recommended him for the job. They'd both grown up in Urbino and knew each other well.

#### **ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Raphael includes himself in the fresco in the category of mathematicians. He is recognized as perfecting pictorial science in this work. A vast perspective space has been created in which human figures move naturally without effort--each according to his intention as Leonardo might say. The western artist know now how to produce the human drama. That thus stage-like space is projected onto 2 D surface is the consequence of the union of mathematics and pictorial science. Raphael captures the intellectual atmosphere and the zest with which Renaissance ideas were argued. He also clarifies the philosophical treatises of his time.

#### **INTERPRETATION:**

Originally titled Philosophy because the Pope's philosophy books were to be housed on shelves just below. The groups appear to move easily and clearly, with eloquent poses and gestures that symbolize their doctrines and present an engaging variety of figural positions. The self-assurance and natural dignity of the figures convey calm reason, balance, and measure--those qualities that Renaissance thinkers admires as the heart of philosophy.

#### **DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

Raphael also designed the Stanza della Heliodorus (featuring the Freeing of St. Peter) and the Stanza della Borgo Fire. These frescoes were primarily the work of Raphaels' assistants. Guilio Romano and Francesco Penni and their assistants were responsible for the Stanza della Constantine.



**TITLE:** Entombment of Christ **LOCATION:** Florence **DATE:** 1525-1528

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**ARTIST:** Jacopo Carucci AKA Pontormo **PERIOD/STYLE:** Mannerism **PATRON:**

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**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on wood

**FORM:**

Jacopo da Pontormo's painting Entombment of Christ depicts the moment before Christ is taken to the tomb after his death. This is a very dramatic moment: Arms flail, fabric engulfs Christ's mother Mary and her attendants, and facial expressions range from shock to sadness. Mary outstretches her right arm, giving the impression that she was just holding Christ's left hand and is now being pulled away. The figures all seem to move at once, without a central grounding focal point.

**FUNCTION:**

This work of art functioned as an altarpiece for the Capponi chapel of the church of Santa Felicita in Florence.

**CONTENT:**

Meanwhile, two other figures visibly struggle to carry Christ's lifeless body, the most prominent being the crouching man carrying Christ's legs. He stares out at the viewer, expressing strain both from the weight of the body and from the burden of melancholy, the dominant emotion on every face and the prevailing mood of the piece despite its bright colors. This work lacks the visual cues one would expect in a deposition or entombment of Christ. There is a small self portrait of Pontormo in the far right corner.

**CONTEXT:**

Completed in 1528, the painting was installed as the altarpiece for the Capponi Chapel in the church of Santa Felicita in Florence. A church built by Brunelleschi in a very early Renaissance style. Linear perspective and naturalistic settings were so important to renaissance painters, and both are lacking in this work of art. This work also lacks the pyramidal composition and weight. Pontormo disregards several high renaissance rules for figurative representation and composition. It features artificiality and creativity instead of strict adherence to natural observation.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The figures in the foreground appear to stand on a stone floor. However, others appear to float within the swirly vortex of biblical emotion. Upending any logical sense of gravity, the hovering swarm of figures and fabric hint at a new trend in painting called Mannerism. This painting was an example of pre-Mannerist because it throws order to the wind and instills the scene with dynamism, movement, and a lot of questionable levitating instead. Mannerism was a short-lived movement that favored instability over clarity, the principle that dominated the High Renaissance. This way of painting helped to depict scenes that were emotionally charged, like the Entombment of Christ. Another artist named Agnolo Bronzino was the face of Mannerism. It's not surprising that Bronzino studied under Pontormo, from whom he gleaned the tricks of the Mannerist trade. He was the court painter under Cosimo I de Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Mary's pose is reminiscent of the controversial "Swoon of the Virgin," the act of depicting Mary as swooning (fainting) from the stress of witnessing the crucifixion, which was popular earlier in the Middle Ages. As this moment is not described in the four canonical gospels of the Catholic Church (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), artists were discouraged from including it in works starting in the 16th century. Pontormo's work is highly personal, idiosyncratic, affected, exaggerated modes of behavior, highly sophisticated, stylish and overrefined.

**INTERPRETATION:**

This piece breaks from renaissance convention and is directly related to the increase in spiritual dogma of the counter reformation. Art no longer looked to nature for inspiration, but to art itself. When Vasari used the term maniera, he meant working in the manner of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael. By reducing their art to a system of rules, he could work fast and efficiently. Such academic mannerist artists did not go to nature for their models, as Leonardo had done, but studied great works of art with the thought of mastering systematically the artistic vocabularies of the late Renaissance genius.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

The term mannerism came from the word manierato, or mannered, which defined the dynamism of the genre, and was coined by Giorgio Vasari, a painter and writer living in the 16th century. He wrote one of the greatest texts of the era, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects.

**TITLE:** Venus of Urbino **LOCATION:** Venice **DATE:** 1538  
**ARTIST:** Titian AKA Tiziano Vecellio **PERIOD/STYLE:** Venetian Renaissance **PATRON:** Duke of Urbino  
Giobaldo della Rovere)

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Oil on canvas

**FORM:**

This Venus reclines on the gentle slope of her luxurious pillowed couch. Her softly rounded body contrasts with the sharp vertical edge of the curtain behind her, which serves to direct the viewers attention to her left hand and pelvis as well as to divide the foreground from the background. At the woman's feet is a slumbering lapdog, where cupid would be if this were Venus. Titian masterfully constructed the view backward into the room and the division of space into progressively smaller units. (fibonacci sequence)

**FUNCTION:**

The present title now conveys that the painting was a portrayal of the goddess of love, Venus, and therefore a representation of ideal beauty at the time. More than that, the painting was also a form of Renaissance "bedroom art" that was intentionally meant to spark desire in its viewers, namely the Duke.

**CONTENT:**

A maid rummages through a Cassoni (trunk) to find clothing in the trousseau (collection) of the courtesan on the lounge. The reclining "Venus" figure is in the foreground, with the maids in the middle ground and the open window alluding to further distance in the garden. The dog represents the symbol of fidelity.

**CONTEXT:**

In contrast to the Florentines and Romans whose paintings valued line and contour, the Venetians bathed their figures in a soft atmospheric ambiance highlighted by a gently modulating use of light. Bodies are sensuously rendered. While Florentines and Venetians both paint religious scenes, Florentines choose to see them as heroic accomplishments, whereas Venetians imbue their saints with a more human touch, setting them in bucolic environments that show a genuine interest in the beauty of the natural world. This natural setting is often called "Arcadian".

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

It was most likely modeled on another artist's painting, Sleeping Venus, painted by Giorgione in 1510. He trained under the Bellini brothers, as well as Giorgione, from whom Titian derived most of his style. Titian's version is almost a dead ringer for Giorgione's, with nearly the exact same womanly proportions. The only major difference is the setting; in the earlier work, Venus appears to be napping on a bed on the hillside. This doesn't seem plausible, but she was a goddess after all. The fact that she's sleeping makes viewers feel a bit like peeping toms, whereas Titian's Venus appears to fully acknowledge spectators with her smoky gaze.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

Titian was best known for his sumptuous use of color. His palettes is described as "extraordinarily brilliant with bright tonality". Titian used the red tones in the matrons skirt and tapestries as counterpoint for the rich Venetian red of the couch cushion. This creates an implied diagonal to contrast the diagonal line of the figures body. Titian used color not simply to record the surface appearance of the objects, but to organize his placement of forms.

**INTERPRETATION:**

This painting is the renaissance first important "reclining nude", which starts a tradition that lasts hundreds of years.

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**

He was commissioned to create works for royalty, including Charles the V—the Holy Roman Emperor—who wouldn't let anyone but Titian paint his portrait, as well as several dukes, including the Duke of Urbino.

**TITLE:** Il Gesu (The church of Jesus) **LOCATION:** Rome, Italy **DATE:** 1568-1679

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**ARTIST:** Giacomo da Vignola (plan) **PERIOD/STYLE:** Late Renaissance/Baroque **PATRON:** Cardinal Alexander Farnese (Nephew) of Pope Paul III

**MATERIAL/TECHNIQUE:** Brick, marble, fresco, and stucco

**FORM:**

The nave takes over the main volume of the space, making the structure a great hall with side chapels. The transept is no wider than the nave and chapels and Vignola eliminated the normal deep choir on front of the altar, consequently, all worshipers have a clear view of the celebration of the Eucharist. The design became the model of catholic churches even in modern times. The opening of the church into a single great hall provides an almost theatrical setting for large promenades and processions.

**FUNCTION:**

The mother church of the Jesuit Order. It had a tremendous impact on Counter-Reformation efforts.

**CONTENT:**

The ceiling of the Il Gesu was painted in 1676 by Baroque artist Giovanni Battista Gaulli. The fresco is titled the Triumph of the Name of Jesus. It is painted with stucco figures that are at times physically projecting from the surface of the ceiling. The image vividly demonstrates the dramatic impact that Baroque ceiling frescoes could have in ecclesiastical contexts. Gaulli represents Jesus as a monogram (IHS) floating heavenward in a blinding radiant light. In contrast, sinners experience a violent descent back to earth, The painter glazed the gilded architecture to suggest shadows, thereby enhancing the scenes illusionist quality.

**CONTEXT:**

The activity of the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits, was an important component of the Counter-reformation. Ignatius of Loyola a Spanish nobleman who dedicated his life to the service of God, founded the Jesuits in 1534 with preaching and missionary work as the key component of their spiritual assignment. In 1540 the Pope recognized the Jesuits as an official order. They were made to be very important in the Popes quest to reassert the supremacy of the Catholic Church. This church was appropriate for the new churches prominence. Essential to the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Ignatius and the Jesuit Society had a philosophy of simplicity, favoring austerity over opulence, which Catholics had been known for and which was one of Luther's main critiques. This preference for austerity came from the Jesuit vow of poverty. At the same time, Ignatius and other Jesuits saw the importance of images in keeping Catholics in the fold. Completely over-the-top and emotionally charged, Baroque art became the artistic language of the Counter-Reformation despite Ignatius' call for simpler lifestyles and religious settings.

**INNOVATION/CONVENTION:**

The union of the lower and upper stories of the facade with the scrolled buttresses harks back to Alberti's design for Santa Maria Novella. The classical pediment is familiar to Alberti and Palladio's work. The paired pilasters look like those of Michelangelo from the St. Peters cathedral. Many 17th century church facades are variations of Della Portas design. Initially, Il Gesù followed the principals of austerity that the Jesuits practiced by giving the church simple white interior walls. Then Baroque artists got their hands on the vault of Il Gesù and decorated it with the same excitement of kindergartners who have just gotten their hands on glitter and Elmer's glue. That is to say, they went all out, especially Il Baciccio, who painted the tornado of figures that sweep across the vault. A protégé of the Baroque master Bernini, Il Baciccio painted in the manner of his teacher. With real gusto, he created the illusion of a vast spiritual realm of clouds, bodies, and bright light.

**ARTISTIC DECISIONS:**

To increase the drama and illusionistic quality of the ceiling fresco, Gaulli (AKA Il Baciccio) actually painted several of the fallen souls on pieces of Masonite that project from the surface.

**INTERPRETATION:**

**DETAILS/TERMS/DEFINITIONS:**