



9.12

Giovanni Bellini, *St. Francis in Ecstasy*, c. 1480. Oil and tempera on panel, 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4'8" (1.2 x 1.37 m). Frick Collection, New York

primary interest of Bellini's as well, and this suggests that the new naturalism of painters was not merely a matter of the absorption of other regional styles or of an adjustment in the substances from which they made their works. It was also evidence of a new empiricism, a desire to capture likenesses of the things they saw around them.

The attraction to painters of life study was not new: the drawings of Pisanello and the birds and leaves in the reliefs with which Lorenzo Ghiberti surrounded his baptistery doors (see figs. 2.14 and 4.4) make this plain. In the early 1470s, though, it becomes apparent how life study had entered into workshop teaching. If, previously, apprentices had been made to copy exemplary compositions from the recent or distant past and ultimately to mold their own hand to that of their master, now youths were expected to render things placed newly before their eyes.

We find evidence of this in a group of drapery studies in ink and wash on linen that comes from the workshop

of Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–1488). Verrocchio was a true polymath: a goldsmith, painter, sculptor, bronze caster, and restorer of antiquities who was responsible for, among other works, lifesize wax effigies, wooden crucifixes, and the ball that topped the lantern on Brunelleschi's dome for Florence Cathedral (see fig. 4.6). He was also a remarkably effective studio boss, controlling one of the two major artists' workshops in that city as well as a second shop in Venice. A number of the best artists of the following generation, including Pietro Perugino, Giovanni Francesco Rustici, and, as we shall see below, Leonardo da Vinci, owed their training to Verrocchio, and drawing draperies was probably the sort of exercise that all of these artists tried their hand at.

The aim of these studies was to reproduce the effects of light on cloth and the ways in which fabric reveals the form beneath it (fig. 9.13). The artists may have drawn from wet cloths that had been placed on clay models (Vasari claims that Piero della Francesca followed such a

procedure). To a certain extent, the creation of the sheets would have been an end in itself, though the survival of the studies inevitably shapes the way we see the works that come from Verrocchio's orbit.

Consider the *Christ and St. Thomas* (fig. 9.14), begun in 1467, completed in 1481. The pair was made for the niche on the exterior of Orsanmichele that had previously belonged to Donatello's *St. Louis of Toulouse* (see fig. 4.12). The Parte Guelfa, strapped for cash, had sold off the tabernacle to the Mercanzia, the body responsible for the city's commercial law courts, and had taken Donatello's statue to the church of Santa Croce. The decision to give the new commission to Verrocchio, known initially as a specialist in metalwork, may have reflected the patrons' decision to replace Donatello's figure with another work in bronze. The choice of St. Thomas as a subject would not have been a surprising one for a guild like the Mercanzia, for observers had often associated the theme of Thomas poking the wound of the risen Christ, to verify that he is who he seems, with the search for truth and thus with the work of the courts. What heightened the stakes, though, was that the subject of Thomas called for a two-figure composition – the only one of its kind at Orsanmichele. Convention required that Thomas be shown carrying out his famous proba-

tory act, and thus not alone but paired with the risen Christ. Thomas's hem offers the words he spoke on realizing that the body before him was real: "My Lord and my God, Savior of the people." On Christ's hem is his reply: "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed" (John 20:29).

Nanni di Banco, confronting the problem of accommodating multiple figures within a single niche, changed the niche itself to give them more unity. Verrocchio, however, seems not to have wanted to damage the architecture Donatello had left. The problem was that if he made the figures roughly equal in height to others on the building and proportional to the niche itself, they would not both fit within it. In part for this reason, he opted to use not only the niche proper, but also the ledge before it.

One advantage of this was that Verrocchio could project the composition into the street, where it could be seen more readily by passersby walking between the cathedral and city hall. He could do so, moreover, and still align Christ himself on the axis of the niche, making him the viewer's focal point, no less than Thomas's. All of this meant, however, that Verrocchio had to make his figures even more shallow than his predecessors had. He must have studied Donatello's work with

RIGHT

9.13

Andrea del Verrocchio,
Drapery Study, 1470s.
Brush and gray tempera
on linen, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
(31.5 x 16.8 cm). Musée
du Louvre, Paris



FAR RIGHT

9.14

Andrea del Verrocchio,
Christ and St. Thomas,
1465–83. Bronze, height
(Christ) 7'6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (2.3 m),
(Thomas) 6'6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (2 m).
Orsanmichele, Florence





of little else. And while he gives us a few whole limbs – the raised right arm of Christ, the extended right leg of Thomas – Verrocchio also distracts us with masses of bunched folds, hanging in large swaths, which so impress us with their own richness and bulk that we forget to ask what is behind them.

That this approach was more a response to the circumstances of site than a hallmark of Verrocchio's style is suggested by the artist's roughly contemporary *David* (fig. 9.15), where the costume involves little that we could really call "drapery" at all. Just when Verrocchio started the statue remains uncertain, but it seems initially to have been in the hands of the Medici, for in 1476 the Signoria purchased it from the family. Perhaps it was Lorenzo the Magnificent who commissioned it, as a follow-up to the bronze statue on the same theme that Donatello had made for Lorenzo's grandfather. After the 1476 sale, in any event, a similar comparison would have been unavoidable, for the Signoria placed the bronze near Donatello's earlier marble in the Palazzo Vecchio. Seeing the two works together must at first have been disconcerting, for Verrocchio seems neither to follow the earlier artist's model nor to return, as Donatello himself had done, to ancient prototypes. Verrocchio's *David*, with his slim physique, his stylish contemporary haircut, and his swagger, looks more like a boy from the city than an evocation of an authoritative sculptural tradition. There is more attention to the rendering of anatomy than there is to capturing beautiful contours. And rather than showing the artist's mastery of movement, reproducing a classic shift of weight or swung hip, Verrocchio's boy gives the impression of a model striking a pose.

Leonardo da Vinci's Beginnings

It was in Verrocchio's workshop, with all of this happening, that Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) got his start. The painter was of illegitimate birth and his beginnings are obscure, but by the early 1470s he was working with Verrocchio – most modern scholars accept Vasari's assertion that Leonardo painted the angel on the left in Verrocchio's *Baptism*, c. 1476 (fig. 9.16), which again attests to the importance of drapery studies (fig. 9.17). Several of the surviving sheets, in fact, have shifted in attribution between Verrocchio and Leonardo, and the younger artist must have participated in whatever drawing exercises Verrocchio assigned to his students. Determining just what role Leonardo had in the workshop, however, is complicated by the fact that, by the time he worked with Verrocchio on the *Baptism*, he had already taken on independent commissions.

9.15

Verrocchio, *David*, 1473–76. Bronze, height 49 1/4" (125 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence. A restoration completed in 2003 (after this photo was taken) resulted in the repositioning of Goliath's head behind and to the outside of David's right leg.

particular care: like the *St. Louis*, which Verrocchio could have seen from all sides during its removal, his figures are hollow behind: no expensive metal was wasted on parts that would not be visible. Like Donatello's *St. Mark* (see fig. 3.5), in fact, Verrocchio's Christ and St. Thomas are really nothing more than free-standing reliefs, designed to work only from the limited range of views that the wall of the oratory allowed. No less than Donatello before him, Verrocchio had to persuade viewers that they were looking at volumetric bodies and not just flat panels, and to do so with one figure that was projected into the street and available for inspection from different sides. It was onto the draperies that this burden fell: apart from the hands, feet, and heads, Verrocchio's sculptures consist



ABOVE

9.16

Andrea Verrocchio and Leonardo da Vinci, *Baptism of Christ*, c. 1475. Tempera and oil on panel, 5'10" x 4¹/₄" (1.8 x 1.52 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

RIGHT

9.17

Leonardo da Vinci, *drapery study*, 1470s. Brush and gray tempera on linen, 7¹/₈" x 9¹/₈" (18.1 x 23.4 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris

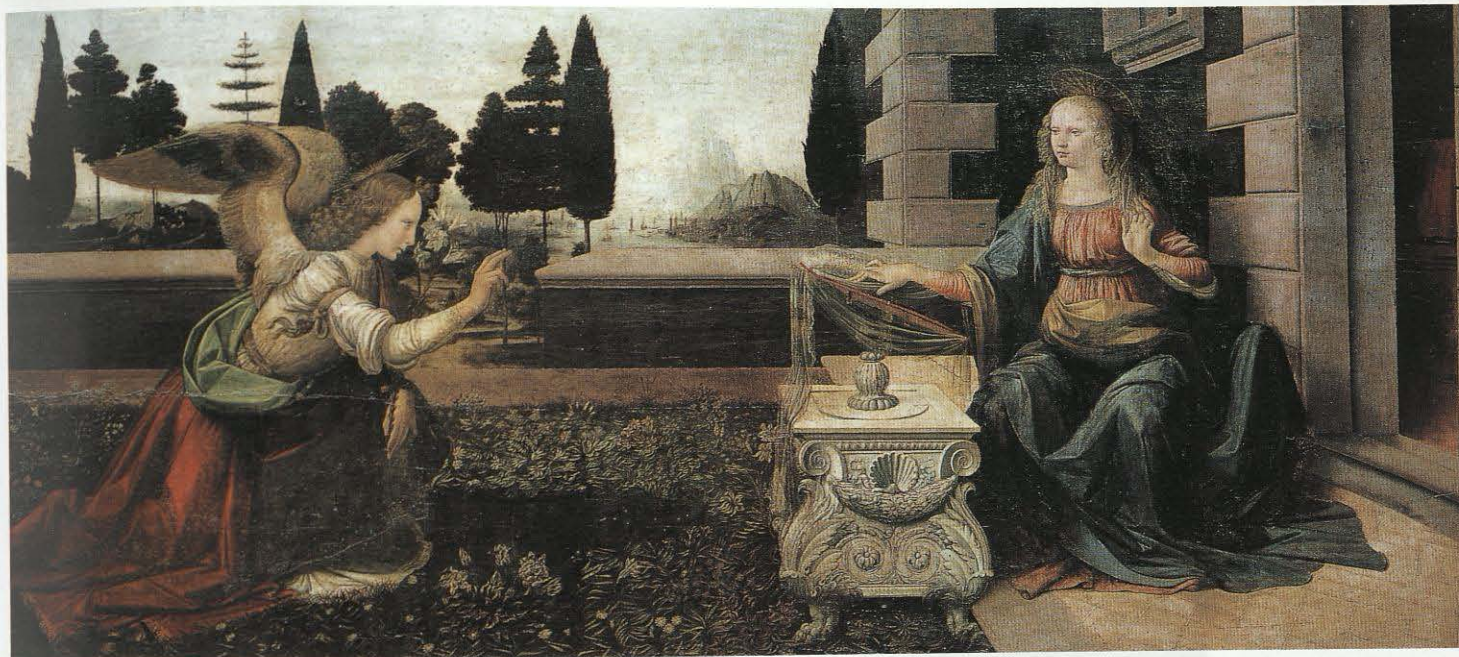


The most important of these was the *Annunciation* (fig. 9.18), now in the Uffizi, that Leonardo painted around 1473 for the convent of Monte Oliveto, outside Florence. The image of God communicating with a reclusive veiled Virgin who reads from a devotional text may have held special appeal for the nuns in the convent, though the painting's material derives from Leonardo's study of the world around him. The lectern before the Virgin may point to the experience of draw-

ing after sculptures, while the interest in the landscape background and detailed depiction of different species of plants in the Virgin's garden betray the same kind of attention to nature that we see in Flemish paintings from the period. What really sets Leonardo apart from his predecessors in this early painting is the way he approached color.

Painters of the previous generation still depended largely on an "absolute color" system, one that had been in use with only modest changes since the Middle Ages. This system exploited the fact that the pigments painters used came from minerals, many of them valuable, and it put a premium on the richness of the resulting surface. Painters would arrange the hues on their palette in a series of gradations, starting with the most intense or saturated version of a pigment and proceeding through tones that had been made lighter by blending them with white. (Cennini describes one characteristic way of proceeding, according to which the painter would use three different tones of each hue, laying these in next to one another to model forms.) The painter would approach each object he wanted to represent with any given color more or less independently, modeling it with a pigment that had a greater or lesser proportion of white. A good example of the system is Filippo Lippi's *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 9.19). Although there are some very dark passages – the vegetation, for example, or the black horses in the retinue of the Magi – the painter is reluctant to compromise the brightness of the costumes that any of the characters wear. The colors range from the deepest version of any particular hue to a nearly pure white highlight.

The absolute color system was particularly appealing for images where richness was itself a theme, but a painter who studied the real effects of light in nature was bound to be unhappy with it for a number of reasons. To begin, the relationship between light and color that it implied would be precisely the opposite of what one actually witnessed. Because in the absolute color system the darkest tones are typically the most saturated, truly intense colors correspond mostly to areas of shadow. But since the perception of color in nature depends on the reflection of light, it is in areas of illumination, not shadow, that they should appear. The system can also result in a kind of fragmentation of the picture, since the painting of any solid-colored object will be determined with a mind to the overall pattern of the surface but with minimal consideration of the tones used for any two neighboring objects. Coloristic effects, finally, could even contradict the apparent positioning of the object in the virtual space of the painting. Lighter colors seem to project forward and darker colors seem to recede. Because they were not planned in conjunction, the pink drapery worn by the



ABOVE

9.18

Leonardo da Vinci,
Annunciation, c. 1473. Oil
and tempera on panel, 38 $\frac{1}{4}$
x 85 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (98 x 217 cm). Uffizi
Gallery, Florence



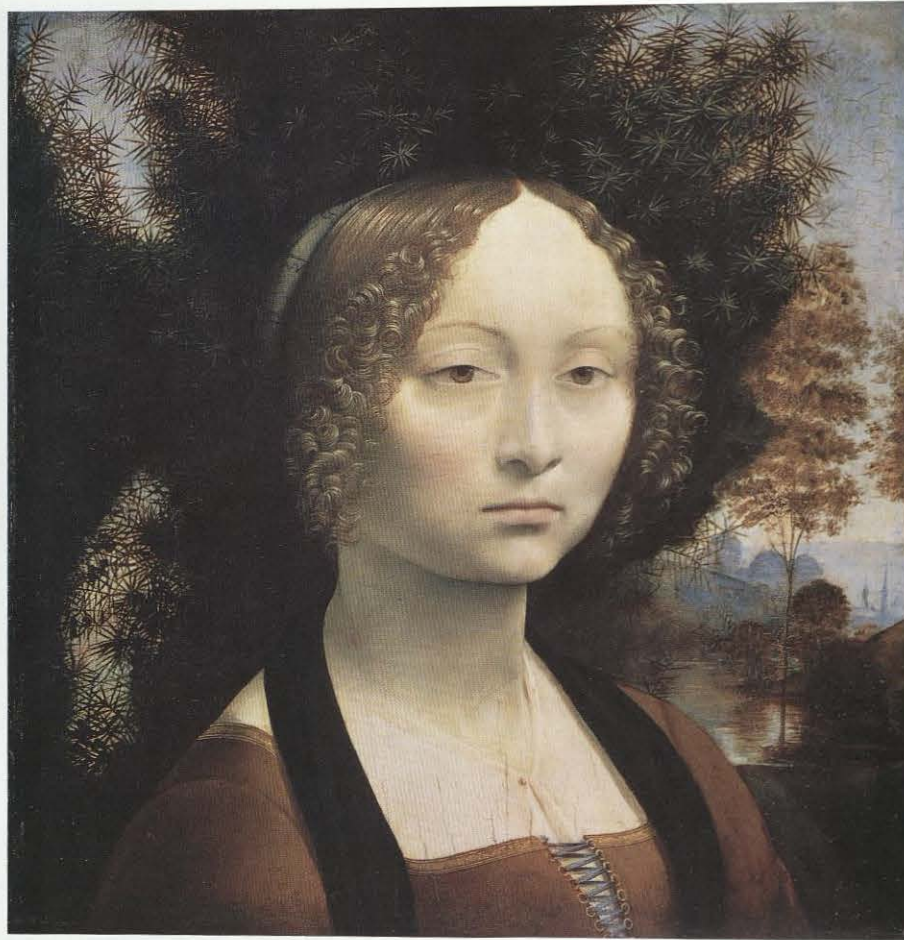
LEFT

9.19

Fra Angelico and Fra
Filippo Lippi, *The
Adoration of the Magi*,
c. 1445. Tempera on panel,
diameter 54" (137.3 cm).
Samuel H. Kress Collection,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.

9.20

Leonardo da Vinci,
Ginevra de' Benci, 1478–80.
Tempera and oil on panel,
15 1/2 x 14 1/2" (38.8 x 36.7
cm). National Gallery of
Art, Washington, D.C.



attendant in the lower left of Lippi's painting appears to project forward more than the blue one beside it, even though the figure in blue is positioned closer to the picture plane.

It is for such reasons that Leonardo approached the problem of pictorial color differently. Rather than establishing the tonal range of a given hue by mixing in a greater or lesser proportion of white, he created for each color a scale that ran from white to black. This allowed him to show colors at lesser intensity where they were to be enshaded, implying that the absence of color corresponded to the absence of light. In addition, he coordinated the tonal scale used for each hue with every other, so that the painting had a single overall light to dark range. Rather than accepting, for example, that yellow had to be higher in tone than blue, he created both whiter blues and blacker yellows. Neighboring objects, regardless of color, could thus be shown to react uniformly to the same conditions of illumination – a goal that the absolute color system, which encouraged painters to think of each color field apart from its neighbors, generally impeded. The results can be seen, to give just one instance, in the yellow sash that the Virgin in Leonardo's *Annunciation* (see fig. 9.18) wears around her waist, which reads convincingly as being further back in space than the blue cloth covering the tops of her legs, despite

the fact that blue in its most intense form is the darker of the two hues.

What Leonardo sacrificed with all of this was coloristic intensity. Modifying hues with respect to their neighbors required him to tone down the saturation of most of the pigments he used, and his pictures simply look less bright than those from earlier in the century. What Leonardo gained, on the other hand, was a cohesive effect of illumination. Just as the introduction of linear perspective resulted in a kind of pictorial unity, with all objects notionally occupying a single virtual space, so would those objects now be further unified through light. The effect is perhaps most apparent in his pictures' strong sense of modeling; from the beginning, Leonardo's paintings look almost sculptural relative to their predecessors, with an overall tonality that runs from true white to true black. Here it seems significant that Leonardo matured in a workshop that emphasized the study of light and dark on sculpted objects, including draped clay models.

In fact, the relationship between Leonardo's paintings and Verrocchio's sculptures is strikingly close, as can be seen from a comparison of Leonardo's first surviving portrait, the *Ginevra de' Benci* (fig. 9.20), with Verrocchio's *Woman with a Posy* (fig. 9.21). Leonardo hints at the identity of his sitter with the juniper (*ginepra*) that grows behind her, a pun on her first name. The painting was

originally longer, showing the sitter to her waist, but one of its owners at some point cut it down at the bottom. A surviving silverpoint drawing (fig. 9.22) may be a study for the part that is now lost, and the more defined of the two right hands on the sheet holds what appears to be a small bundle of flowers. The original gesture, then, may have been almost exactly what Verrocchio, too, shows – in both cases, the hand seems to hold the flowers against the woman's heart, to express affection – and the two women have similar features and nearly identical hair. It is possible that Verrocchio's sculpture even portrays the same woman, though other contemporary pictures reveal that hair in precisely this arrangement was much in fashion in the mid 1470s, and as we shall see at the end of this chapter, identifying the sitters in female portraits from the period is rarely a simple matter.

What is certain is that one artist had the other's work as a model. But which came first? In favor of Leonardo's priority is the fact that no earlier Renaissance portrait bust extends low enough to show a sitter's arms. The format, at least, of Verrocchio's marble was more radical. Then again, Verrocchio could have followed the example of earlier paintings just as easily as Leonardo did, and what distinguishes Leonardo's painting is its forceful plasticity. In part, Leonardo achieved this by shifting from a profile to a three-quarter view, as if it were a bust,

approached slightly from the side that he wanted to show. In part, he achieved the effect through his light–dark contrasts (the technical term is *chiaroscuro*), which generate the impression of relief. The juniper bush behind the sitter may be symbolic, but it also creates a nearly black background from which her face emerges. The greater the tonal range, the more three-dimensional the painter's illusion; by moving from the darkest zone of the picture to the lightest, Leonardo brings the sitter into our own space.

Here again, we see Leonardo unifying the picture through the action of light. And where he departs both from Verrocchio's own approach and from any kind of real sculptural interest, he develops still other techniques to contribute to that unity. Chief among these is his blurring of contours, especially those further back in space, to suggest the presence of an airy atmosphere, or *sfumatura*, that envelops the whole scene. From close up, we can see that Leonardo did not simply apply his paint evenly with the brush, but took full advantage of the new oil medium, smudging strokes he had made and occasionally even manipulating paint with his fingers to achieve a fine haze, dulling any sculptural edge. This helps explain his decision not to extend the dark ground he had established behind Ginevra's face across the whole surface of the picture, but rather to add at the right a view into a



FAR LEFT

9.21

Andrea del Verrocchio,
Woman with a Posy,
c. 1475–80. Marble,
height 24" (61 cm).
Museo Nazionale del
Bargello, Florence

LEFT

9.22

Leonardo da Vinci, studies
of hands, 1478. Silverpoint
on cream prepared paper,
8½ x 5⅞" (21.5 x 15 cm).
Royal Library, Windsor



ABOVE

9.23

Sandro Botticelli,

Primavera, mid 1470s.

Tempera on panel, 6'8" x
10'4" (2.03 x 3.15 m). Uffizi
Gallery, Florence

RIGHT

9.24

Andrea del Verrocchio,

Water Sprite, c. 1470.

Bronze, height 27¹/₄" (69
cm). Sala del Cancelliere,
Palazzo Vecchio, Florence



distant landscape. Here, more than anywhere, he would show the way that air shrouds faraway visions, diminishing what we can see. It also served as a reminder that although sculptors could frequently get away with rendering a single discrete object, painters had to portray entire worlds. The task of pictorial unification, for Leonardo a primary aspect of naturalism, could not depend on the artist's control of light and shade alone.

Nature and the Classical Past

To this point, we have been treating naturalism fundamentally as a problem of imitating the physical world: what sights the naturalistic painter might paint, and how he might approach the problem of painting them both technically and theoretically. A number of artists and patrons in the 1470s, however, preferred to see nature not as if in a mirror, but at one remove, with a symbolic visual language that only the most sophisticated of viewers would comprehend. An example is Verrocchio's *Water Sprite* of c. 1470 (fig. 9.24), made for the Medici Villa at

Careggi, near Florence. The motif of the winged infant (or putto) carrying a dolphin was an ancient one, though a sculptor in Verrocchio's time would have thought about the ancient prototype in conjunction with Donatello's *spiritelli* (see fig. 5.20). The animal this putto holds designates him as a water creature himself. Verrocchio's little statue originally topped a fountain, and his frolicking pose would have celebrated the curling streams of water that played down the basin's side, embodying both the "spirit" in all water and the particular pleasures that garden waters brought their visitors.

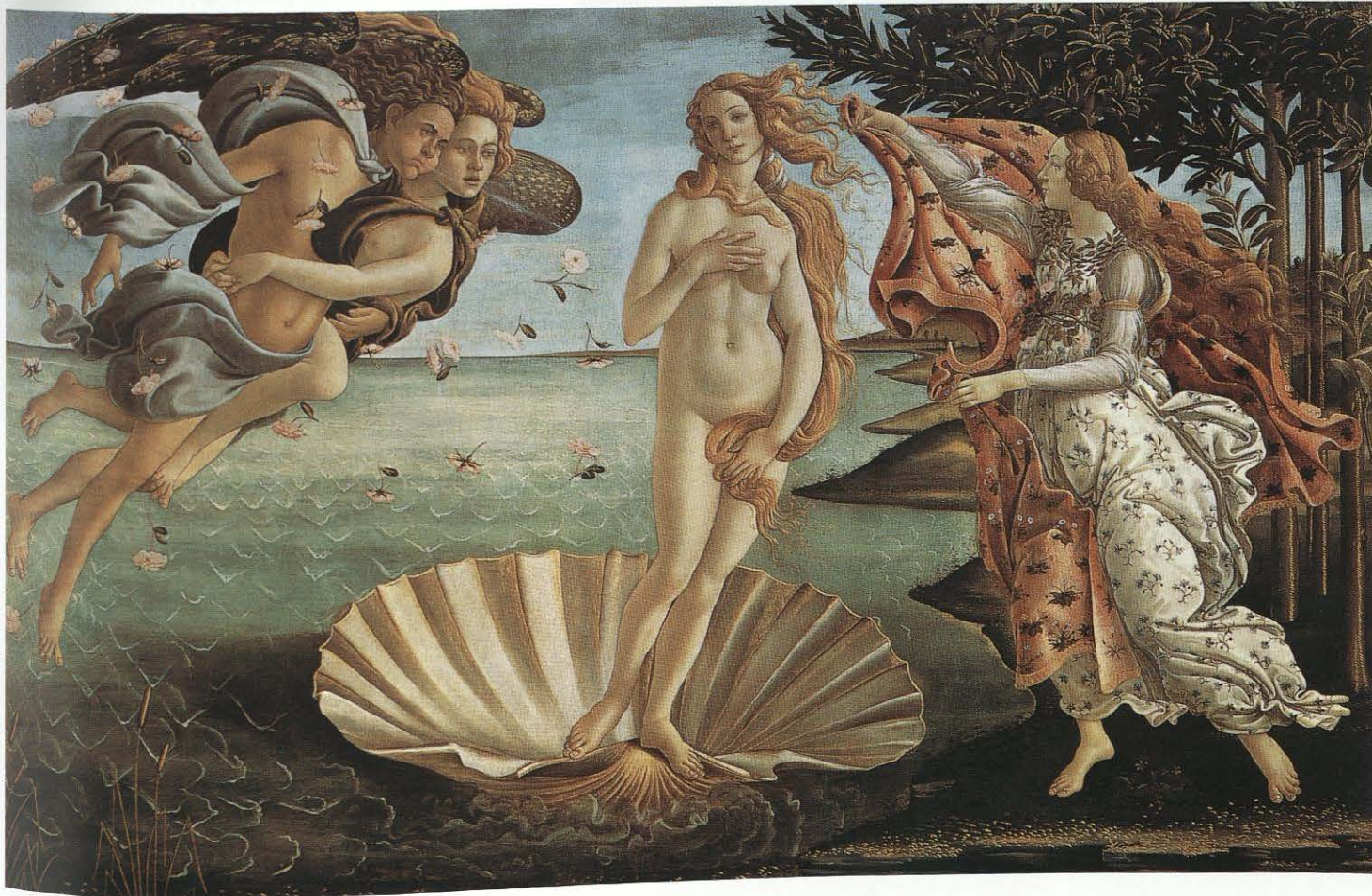
This is the kind of thinking that also guided another major Medici commission, Sandro Botticelli's (c. 1445–1510) *Primavera* (fig. 9.23), a painting that remains the subject of considerable scholarly controversy. Documents demonstrate that the work was, by the 1490s, in a house that had been occupied by Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, the ward of his older cousin Lorenzo the Magnificent until the younger Lorenzo's marriage, at the age of nineteen, in 1482. It may have been the younger Lorenzo, in fact, who commissioned the work, perhaps even on the occasion of his wedding: the flames that appear on the garment of Mercury, on the left, are the same used in

another painting made for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco in 1495. The more likely alternative, though, is that the picture passed to the younger Lorenzo from his guardian's collection, having been made for Lorenzo the Magnificent while Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco was just entering his teens.

The painting shows nine mythological characters arrayed in a garden setting. All were known primarily from ancient Latin texts, especially Ovid, Virgil, and Lucretius, who characterized one or other of these figures as rustic gods of nature and the earth or with the spring season, though there is no single story from classical antiquity that explains just this congregation. Reading from right to left, we see the nymph Chloris, who, raped by the wind god Zephyr, transforms into Flora, the goddess of flowers; it is as if the arrival of a warm west wind marking the end of winter and the beginning of the New Year were being re-enacted with human beings in nature's roles. In the center is Venus, attended by the Graces while her son Cupid floats overhead; she is here associated with April, in part on the basis of etymologies linked to her Greek name, Aphrodite. Mercury, on the left, represents May. He stirs clouds to bring a change in the weather.

9.25

Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, c. 1485. Tempera on canvas, 5'9" x 9'2" (1.75 x 2.8 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

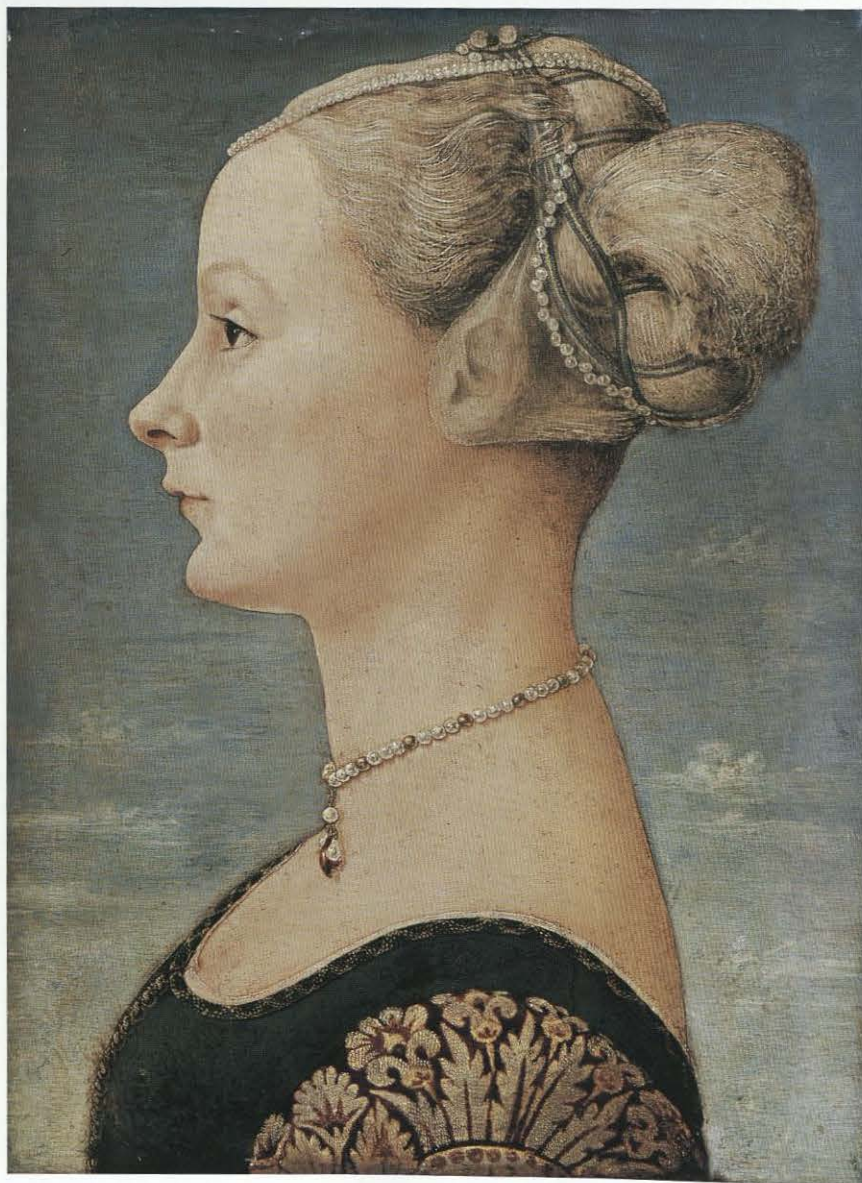


Moving from the right to left, we essentially pass through the spring months, from the beginning to the end of the season.

The painting does not illustrate any particular scene or story from classical antiquity or any known text. The subject, in other words, is an invention, one in which the contemporary poet and philologist Angelo Poliziano probably played a significant role. Classical antiquity here provided motifs that an artist, in consultation with literati, could combine to convey an abstract idea. The means, in this case, are just as important as the ends, for to embody the arrival of spring in newly recovered ancient forms was to suggest that it was both a season and antiquity itself that were returning. Such was also the appeal to Lorenzo and his circle of a second mythology by Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus* (fig. 9.25), c. 1485. On

9.26

Antonio del Pollaiuolo,
Portrait of a Young Woman,
1467–70. Panel, 18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ "
(46 x 34 cm). Museo Poldi
Pezzoli, Milan



canvas rather than on panel and slightly smaller than the *Primavera*, the second painting may have been intended for an altogether different location, but the meaning is similar. The foam of the sea here brings Venus into being; wind divinities waft her to shore, where a nymph receives her. The Roman encyclopedist Pliny the Elder had recorded a celebrated work by the ancient Greek painter Apelles showing Venus arising from the sea; Botticelli thus had the opportunity to re-create a lost masterpiece. His approach, nevertheless, shows little attempt to emulate the art of antiquity: the fluttering hair and draperies recall relief images of dancing nymphs, but the figures' proportions are distinctly unclassical.

The myth concerns the birth of love itself, which results not only in the fertility of the earth and its creatures but the motivation for peace, civility, and the cultivation of the arts among human beings: this would have offered a mirror of the political myths that sustained the rule of Lorenzo. *The Birth of Venus*, like the *Primavera*, implied that their Medici sponsor was ushering a new Golden Age into Florence, one manifest not just in images like these, but also in the pageants and other embellishments the Magnificent brought to the city. More broadly, the paintings offered an allegory of “the Renaissance” itself, for they showed the return of an old, lost knowledge as nothing other than a rebirth. That all of this happens in a garden hints that the “Renaissance” at issue depended on an experience of nature. By contrast to artists like Leonardo or Bellini, though, Botticelli suggests that such an experience could be captured only when painting behaved like poetry, with parts that fit together and had to be read, not merely seen.

Beauties beyond Nature

The *Primavera* and *The Birth of Venus* each tell a story, but Botticelli also composed both much in the manner of a triptych, centered on Venus. This makes clear that the paintings are not just about gardens, or the changing seasons, or the recovery of the past. They suggest a cult of love, and they raise the question as to just what kind of love was at issue. Perhaps the focus on Venus lends weight to the argument that one or both of the paintings were for a wedding. If Lorenzo the Magnificent was in fact the patron of the *Primavera*, though, the occasion of its commission would likely have been the joust that he and his brother Giuliano hosted in 1475, an event they dedicated not to their wives but to two other women, Lucrezia Donati and Simonetta Cattaneo. (Poliziano's poem in celebration of the joust contains a long description of a relief depicting *The Birth of Venus* that is close in many respects to Botticelli's painting.) Any case in favor

of this is complicated by the fact that no secure portraits of Lucrezia or Simonetta have ever been identified. Even if we did have portraits of the two, moreover, it is not clear what kind of evidence that would present.

We have been surveying ways of looking at the art of the 1470s that emphasize the truth of that art to the appearances it represents, in part to show that in using the term “naturalistic” (or “realistic”) we must explain just what it is we are referring to. The general Renaissance interest in naturalism, however, often competed with other interests, especially where images of women were concerned. It would be difficult to imagine a more lovingly descriptive painting, for example, than Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s (1431/2–1496) *Portrait of a Young Woman* (fig. 9.26), probably painted in the early 1470s. The hair running back from the woman’s plucked forehead is mapped with special care, allowing the beholder to follow the bundled tresses, twisted into a bun then wrapped in a veil transparent enough to allow a clear view of the ear, or the few strands that escape this and curl to touch the string of pearls. The shoulder of her dress is distinguished both in color and texture, enough to allow a nearly exact impression of the brocade of which it was composed. Shown in profile, the woman does not return the gaze of whatever man commissioned or looked upon her, inviting him to linger on the rendering of the fine materials, the elongated neck, and the delicate contours of the face. The close cropping of the picture field only underscores the sense of nearness.

Particularly in a genre like the portrait, these features combine to give the sense of a present, living person, as if the portrait’s object were just beyond the picture plane. And yet, nearly all of the details that seem most individualizing are also highly conventionalized. Facing to the left, the figure follows the format of nearly every other painted picture of a woman from the period. The sky and clouds behind her face are not markers of an actual place, but components of the standard blue background used in the Pollaiuolo workshop for such works, bringing out the lovely if suspiciously un-Mediterranean paleness of the woman’s skin. Perhaps the sitter dyed her hair blonde, but even if she did not, the painter would likely have made her blonde for the permanent record, since this was an essential feature of the ideal that had been canonized in poetic descriptions of beautiful women. Even the profile itself has likely been adjusted to give the sitter the overbite that contemporaries found especially attractive. It is entirely possible that the jewels she wears resemble their model more than the face they ornament does, and it is symptomatic that the portrait, though made by a famous painter for a wealthy patron, remains anonymous.

The same fundamental issues, for example, bear on a series of marble female busts by Francesco Laurana



9.27

Francesco Laurana, *Isabella of Aragon* (?), c. 1490. Marble, height 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (44 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

(c. 1430–1502). Born in Vrana (a city in modern-day Croatia), Laurana worked in northern Italy and southern France before moving to Naples, where he was among the sculptors involved in the completion of Alfonso I’s triumphal arch. Documentary evidence shows him moving to Palermo in Sicily, then north through Naples to France, but this information does little to help with an object like the exquisite bust in Vienna (fig. 9.27). Laurana sculpted the portrait in marble; then, as though applying make-up, painted the lips, lashes, and eyebrows, adding further polychromy to the hair and dress. For other details, including the flowers in her wimple, Laurana fashioned pieces of wax and applied them to the finished sculpture. Here a poetic conceit of the lady having skin white as marble becomes literal.

Yet who is this? The bust usually goes under the name of Isabella of Aragon, on the assumption that Laurana made it in Naples, perhaps as late as 1490, but there is no real evidence for any of this. In fact, the entire chronology of Laurana’s busts, which he began producing no later than the 1470s, remains a matter of speculation. Where women in portraits do not wear heraldic devices that associated them with their families and when the portraits themselves are not paired with portraits of their husbands, they verge on the generic. What naturalism there is here is an effect, one mitigated by the requirements that the portrait look like others of its kind, that it be a beautiful rendering of a beautiful subject.



I480—I490

Migration and Mobility

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10

1480–1490

Migration and Mobility

Portable Art

Canvas and Bronze: Mantegna, Bertoldo, Pollaiuolo

When, in 1460, Andrea Mantegna painted the San Zeno altarpiece (see fig. 8.18), he had worked on panel, and indeed this was his preferred support for easel pictures through his early career. By 1480, however, he had shifted to working almost entirely on canvas. A large picture that Mantegna (c. 1431–1506) painted late in the decade for the Gonzaga in Mantua, showing the triumphal car of Julius Caesar in “Caesar in Triumph” (fig. 10.1), invites reflection on the change. The image drew on a group of ancient Greek and Latin authors who described the victory processions of Roman generals with their seemingly endless displays of captured arms, treasure, and prisoners. And, once Mantegna had completed the Caesar

10.1

Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar: Caesar in Triumph*, c. 1488. Distemper (?) on canvas, 8'9" x 9' (2.68 x 2.79 m). Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Hampton Court, Surrey



canvas, he began expanding the theme into an ambitious project that would absorb him for twenty years. The nine paintings on canvas together depict the various stages of a Roman triumph, an inventive series with no precedent in panel painting. Preceding Caesar's car are images of standard-bearers, musicians, and prisoners of war, along with bearers of plundered works of art, military trophies, and gold coins (figs. 10.2–10.3). The whole formed a dazzling and colorful display, founded on Mantegna's deep antiquarian knowledge, but it placed a particular emphasis on the varieties of artifact then in circulation between dealers, artists, and collectors in different cities: weapons, armor, candelabra, paintings, vessels, jewelry, musical instruments. The array of products displayed in Mantegna's triumphal procession constitutes a kind of imaginary museum.

Ultimately, what Mantegna showed was a scene of transport, and this had a political dimension. Mantua was one of the Italian cities that had long claimed Caesar's modern counterpart, the Holy Roman Emperor, as its legal overlord. For decades, however, Emperor Frederick III had been culturally and geographically remote from his Italian territories, and held little real political influence there. The emperor, who had visited nearby Ferrara in 1468 and who had been portrayed by Mantegna in the *Camera Picta* (see figs. 8.19 and 8.21), was valued in Italy primarily for the noble titles he sold to replenish his diminishing financial resources. We have already seen (chapters 7–9) that rulers of states like Naples or Rimini had begun to fashion themselves according to the model of the ancient emperors, and the Gonzaga princes may themselves have been laying claim to the role of “new Caesar” with such commissions as the *Triumphs*. One striking feature of the work is that although the procession seems, in the first canvas, to begin in Rome, it soon appears to wander across open countryside. The implication is that it is moving towards Mantua, as if the imperial court were being translated to a new capital.

Though Mantegna was employed in Mantua primarily by a local patron, he would have recognized that the competition in court centers for work by the best artists in other cities, coupled with the increasing market throughout Italy for Netherlandish painting, had contributed to a need to make pictures more portable. For

all of their beauty, panels were unwieldy, especially when they needed to be transported in ships or over unpaved roads. This is one reason why canvas gradually replaced wood as the favored support for paintings in Italy. We have already come across a few paintings on canvas: the 1446 triptych for the Scuola della Carità in Venice (see fig. 6.37) is a very early example. Particularly in Venice, moreover, patrons sometimes asked for canvasses where their counterparts in other cities would have sought not panels but frescoes: canvasses had virtually no size limits, and they held up better than plaster in wet air. The major attraction of a painting on canvas, however, was that it was thin and lightweight; provided it was not primed too heavily, it could even be rolled or folded.

Painters were not the only artists experimenting with media that could be taken from place to place. Recognizing the monopoly that Verrocchio managed to maintain on monumental bronze projects in Florence (see figs. 9.14–9.15), his chief competitor, the goldsmith and painter Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1431/2–1496), began producing metalwork on a smaller scale. The statuette was still a relatively new kind of art object – the earliest datable examples are two equestrian bronzes that Filarete produced in Rome in 1456 and 1465 – and its appearance signals the emergence of a market of collectors who were interested in acquiring objects of artistic value, as opposed to images that served devotion and family commemoration. Filarete had written in his *Trattato* of how Piero de' Medici enjoyed “images in bronze, gold and silver.” These gave pleasure not only because of the subjects represented but on account of “the noble mastery of those ancient angelic spirits who with their sublime intellects made such ordinary things as bronze, marble and similar materials acquire great price.” Some of Filarete’s readers may have found it strange to see bronze described as an “ordinary thing,” but his point was that the value of metals “become even greater through their mastery.” And though he was writing primarily about ancient works, there was increasingly a sense that products by modern craftsmen could be appreciated in the same way.



RIGHT ABOVE

10.2

Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar: The Statue Bearers*, c. 1490. Distemper (?) on canvas, 8'7" x 9' (2.66 x 2.78 m). Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Hampton Court, Surrey

RIGHT BELOW

10.3

Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar: The Corselet Bearers*, c. 1500. Distemper (?) on canvas, 8'7" x 9' (2.68 x 2.78 m). Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Hampton Court, Surrey



ABOVE LEFT

10.4

Bertoldo di Giovanni,
Pegasus and Bellerophon,
c. 1480. Bronze,
originally with gilding,
height 12⁷/₈" (32.5 cm).
Kunsthistorisches Museum,
Vienna

This transformation of a taste for ancient collectables into a demand for modern ones is evident in the Florentine bronzes of the 1480s. A *Pegasus and Bellerophon* (fig. 10.4) by Bertoldo di Giovanni (1420–1491), for example, derives largely from the marble fragments of the *Dioscuri*, or “horse tamers,” on the Quirinal Hill in Rome, but it also fills in the then missing pieces and adds some new ones, turning the ancient horse tamers into an image of a Greek hero using a golden bridle to domesticate a winged mount. (The original work would probably have been gilded, making the hero’s bridle all the more real and making bronze seem like an especially appropriate material in which to re-create the subject.) The most technically accomplished example of the new form, though, was Pollaiuolo’s *Hercules and Antaeus* (fig. 10.5), perhaps datable to the early 1480s, though there is no documentation regarding the work’s original owner or location. What we can say with certainty is that Pollaiuolo made the bronze for the private and domestic context described by Filarete in his *Trattato*: like Bertoldo’s group, its subject matter embodies the principles of ancient heroic virtue that educated Italians sought in their reading of classical literature, and it would have responded to an owner’s interest in the originality and ingenuity, or “virtue,” of its maker.

The work epitomizes the incipient violence of many late fifteenth-century Florentine works centered on the human body, as if the artist’s knowledge of human anat-



ABOVE RIGHT

10.5

Antonio Pollaiuolo,
Hercules and Antaeus,
before 1484. Bronze, height
18" (45.8 cm with base).
Museo Nazionale del
Bargello, Florence

omy and motion could be most fully revealed when a figure was subjected to extremes of emotional or physical duress. Hercules’s slaying of the earth-born Antaeus, who was immortal only as long as he maintained contact with the earth, provided the occasion for confronting a technical challenge. In crushing Antaeus, Hercules lifted him from the ground; Pollaiuolo needed to balance the bronze so that the asymmetric composition would not tip over. The interaction of two figures, one bracing itself to hoist and squeeze another who flails his limbs and arches his back in agony, affords possibilities for a rich variety of points of view. The triangular base – an idea derived, perhaps, from Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* (see fig. 6.25) – invites the viewer to regard the statue from three principal sides, even to rotate it on a table. The head of the tormented Antaeus, at the apex of the group, is dominant in each of its aspects. His mouth is open as Hercules literally squeezes the life from him; a contemporary would have understood that Antaeus’s “vital spirit” was issuing forth.

For all of their sophisticated use of materials, these bronzes by Bertoldo and Pollaiuolo were much simpler to produce than large statues, such as Verrocchio’s *St. Thomas* (see fig. 9.14). The artist did not need to go to the trouble of creating a wax sheath around a clay core; he could cast the clay model directly by pressing it into a mold, removing it, then filling the hollowed impression with molten metal. Still, Pollaiuolo appears

to have produced only a handful of statues, and *Hercules and Antaeus* is the only one with two figures. The output by other Florentine sculptors in the later fifteenth century remained similarly small, and it may be significant that Bertoldo's *Bellerophon* appears documented for the first time in Padua, the major early Italian center for the medium. The city where Donatello had made his great bronze *Gattamelata* (see fig. 7.25) had become known not only for collectable figures but also for bronze bells, lamps, candlesticks, inkwells, and other vessels, all adorned with mythological creatures and grotesque ornament. By the 1490s in Mantua the sculptor Antico (c. 1460–1528) began the more economical process of casting his figures in pieces with reusable molds.

Engravings and Drawings

Pollaiuolo also tried his hand at another new form of portable art: engraving. This, like the bronze statuette, required real skills in metalworking. The artist or an assistant would begin by hammering out a thin sheet

of metal (usually copper), cut a design into it with a sharp instrument called a burin, then ink the grooves and print the image on paper. One attraction of the medium, made newly possible by the arrival of the printing press in Italy in the mid 1460s, was its capacity to generate inexpensive multiples, so that designs could be disseminated to a wider public. Engraving also allowed designers to think outside the range of subjects most commonly associated with commissioned paintings and sculptures. Pollaiuolo's own single engraving, the so-called *Battle of the Nudes* (fig. 10.6), has no discernible literary source or even clearly identifiable characters. The interest, rather, is in showing frenzied bodies in violent action from many different points of view. The dating of the work is disputed – specialists have placed it anywhere from the late 1460s to around 1490 – but it is not surprising that it comes from the hand of a sculptor. A few of the characters in the print, including the two central ones, seem to have been generated by rotating a three-dimensional model and drawing it from different angles.

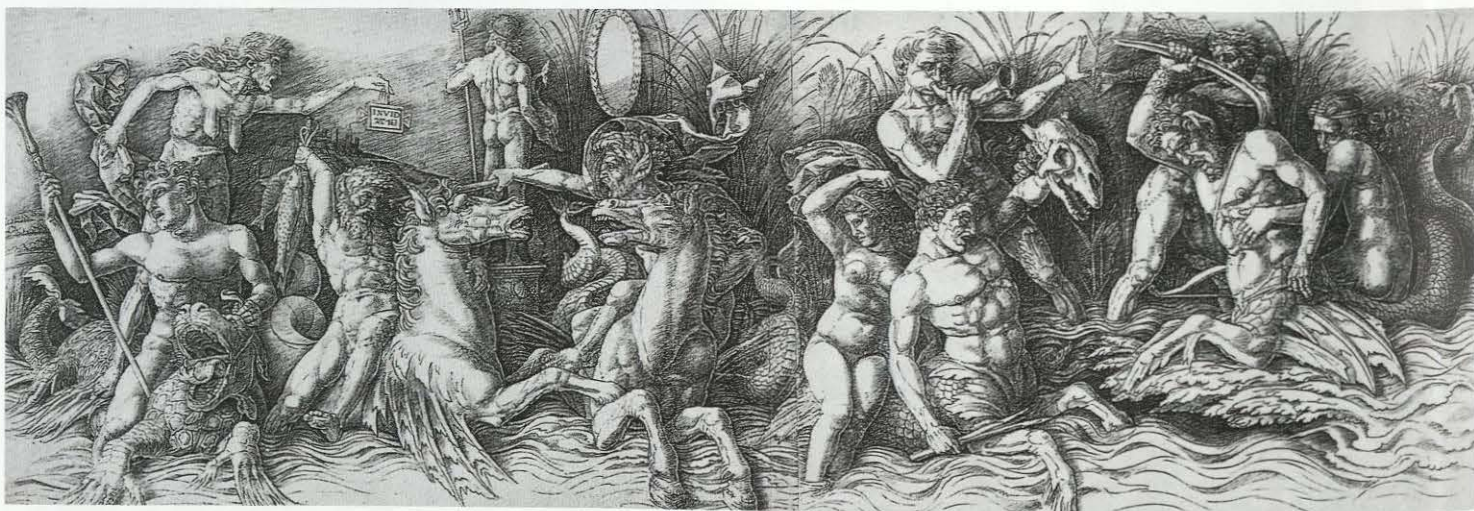
10.6

Antonio Pollaiuolo, *Battle of the Nudes*, before 1470. Engraving, 16 1/4 x 24" (42.4 x 60.9 cm). Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland



10.7

Andrea Mantegna,
Entombment of Christ,
c. 1475. Engraving and
drypoint, 11³/₄ x 17³/₈" (29.9
x 44.2 cm). Washington
Patrons' Permanent Fund,
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.



10.8

Mantegna, *Battle of the Sea
Gods*, c. 1475. Engraving
and drypoint, 11¹/₈ x 32⁵/₈"
(28.3 x 82.6 cm). Duke of
Devonshire Collection,
Chatsworth

Pollaiuolo's approach to engraving differs in this respect from that of Mantegna, another artist who thought seriously about the new medium's possibilities. The engravings that go under Mantegna's name remain even more disputed than the one made by Pollaiuolo. Scholars have assigned them dates ranging from the 1460s to the 1490s; some have speculated that Mantegna, like Pollaiuolo, may have been responsible for the cutting of the plate as well as for the design, though a document of 1475 indicates that Mantegna provided a goldsmith named Gian Marco Cavalli with drawings to be engraved, which casts doubt on this possibility. Unlike Pollaiuolo, Mantegna had no background in metalworking, so it seems more likely that he subcontracted another master to carry out all of the burin work and printing to his specifications. What is certain is that Mantegna

produced many more designs for prints than Pollaiuolo, nearly half of them on pagan and other secular themes. One adapts an ancient relief showing the burial of the Greek hero Meleager into an *Entombment of Christ* (fig. 10.7). Another, a print known as *Battle of the Sea Gods* (fig. 10.8), involved a design so large that it stretched across two plates and required two sheets to print. Its mythological subject matter, informed by several ancient sources but not corresponding to any single one, has no counterpart in Mantegna's paintings before the 1490s.

The rise of engraving as a medium reflects the widening availability of paper. It is thus not surprising that the most common form of portable art by 1490 was the drawing. When Pisanello, in the first half of the century, made drawings on location in the out-of-doors, he had little company. By the time of Mantegna and Pollaiuolo,



10.9
Leonardo da Vinci, *A Rider on a Rearing Horse*, not before 1481. Metalpoint reinforced with pen and brown ink on a pinkish prepared surface, $5\frac{3}{8} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ " (14.1 x 11.9 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

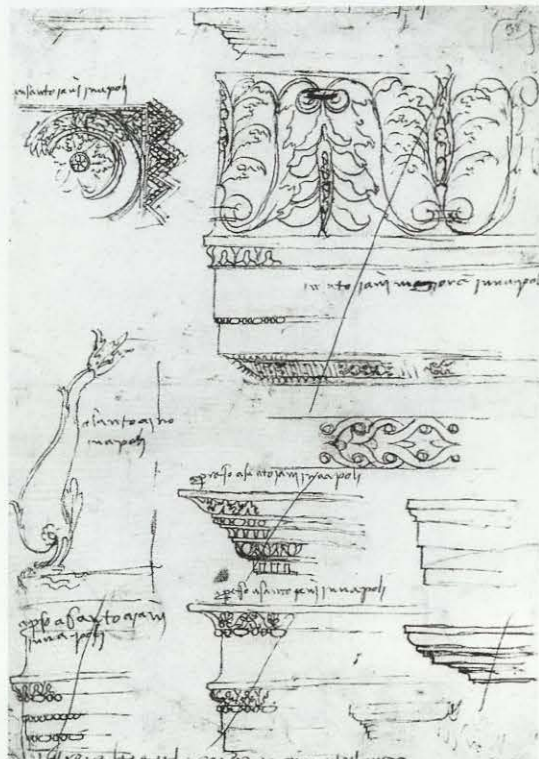


10.10
Leonardo da Vinci, *Two Horsemen*, after 1481. Metalpoint, reinforced with pen and brown ink, on a pinkish prepared surface, $5\frac{3}{8} \times 5$ " (14.3 x 12.8 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge

RIGHT

10.11

Francesco di Giorgio Martini, sketches of antique architectural and decorative parts of reliefs observed during a visit to Naples. 333Ar, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi Gallery, Florence



FAR RIGHT

10.12

Giuliano da Sangallo, drawing of the Basilica Emilia, c. 1480. Pen and ink on parchment. Codex Barberiano, fol. 26r., 18 x 15 7/8" (4.6 x 3.89 cm). Biblioteca Comunale, Siena



however, many artists were making studies on paper, often in places they could not easily have taken the materials that their predecessors had used. Leonardo da Vinci may have filled a whole sketchbook just with drawings of horses (figs. 10.9–10.10). But architects, too, found such *taccuini* useful for making records of buildings or ruins they saw while visiting other cities, or for documenting their own projects (figs. 10.11–10.12).

Artists on the Move

As art patrons, the merchant elite of Florence usually showed a preference for home-grown talent. Throughout the rest of Italy, those with money to spend on art saw it as a mark of prestige to attract distinguished artists from elsewhere. Sometimes this allowed potentates to use commissions to gain political and diplomatic advantage: Mantegna's Gonzaga employers in Mantua kept a check on who actually received his works, but they also arranged the artist's 1488 voyage to Rome to decorate a chapel in the Vatican Palace for Pope Innocent VIII. The Sforza rulers of Milan, similarly, sent the locally born goldsmith and medallist Caradosso (c. 1452–1526) to work for the King of Hungary in 1489–90, even as they recruited Florentine architects and sculptors to their own court. Most cosmopolitan of all were the Aragonese rulers of Naples. They owned works by the best Netherlandish

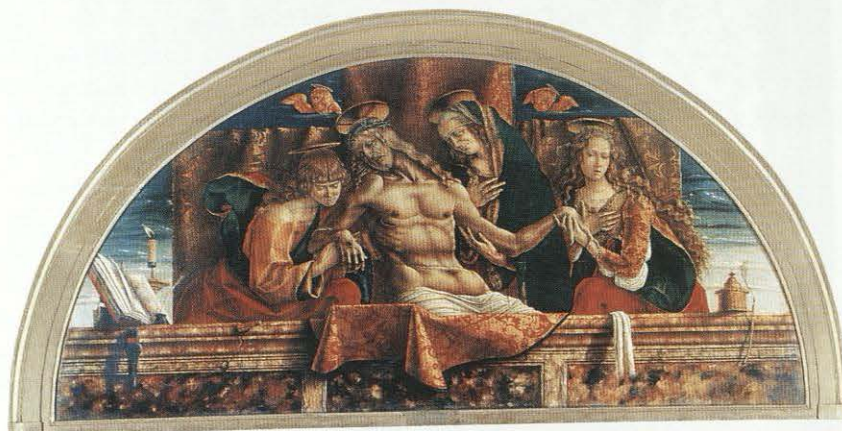
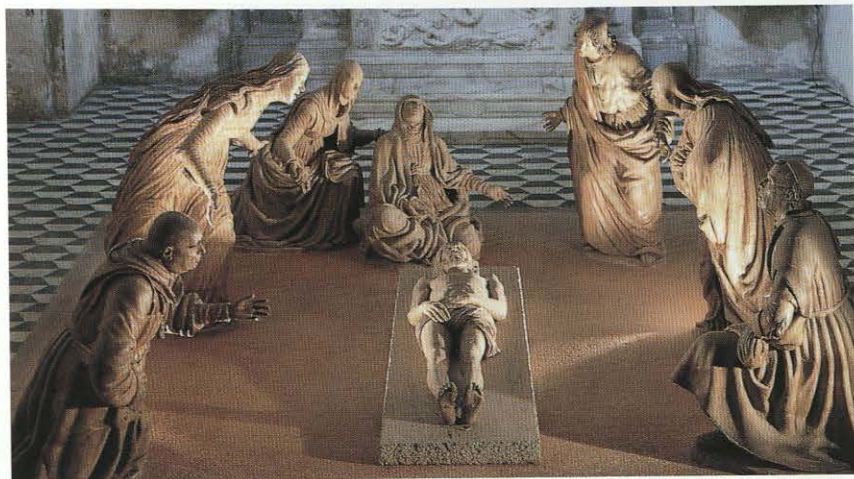
artists. In the mid 1480s, the future King Alfonso II persuaded Giuliano da Maiano (c. 1432–1490), then head of the Florence Cathedral works and one of the best architects in Italy, to move to his court. The king also showed a noteworthy appreciation of contemporary Siense art, hiring the theorist, designer, and engineer Francesco di Giorgio Martini and, in 1488, ordering work from the painter Matteo di Giovanni (c. 1430–1495). A few years later, in 1492, Alfonso would commission the most spectacular terracotta group in Europe from the Modenese sculptor Guido Mazzoni (1445–1518; fig. 10.13).

Venetian painters and sculptors commanded the widest reach in terms of the demand for their works. The workshops of the Vivarini family (see fig. 6.37) sent an altarpiece to Bologna in 1450 and another as far afield as Bari in southern Italy in 1465, while Giovanni Bellini, as we have seen, supplied the city of Pesaro with a great *Coronation* altarpiece around 1476 (see fig. 9.10). With its long tradition of marble carving in the brilliant local Istrian stone, Venice was also the setting for a rich artistic exchange between local sculptors, Florentine expatriates trained under Donatello, and a group of talented carvers from the Dalmatian coast, in what is now Croatia. Such artists as Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, Giovanni Dalmata, Giorgio da Sebenico, and Francesco Laurana (see fig. 9.27) all produced their own inventive responses to the sculpture of Donatello and of antiquity, which they carried to Italian centers like Urbino, Ancona, Rome, and

Naples, as well as eastward to Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Zara (Zagreb), and Traù (Trogir).

The extent of these exchanges mirrored the expanse of the Venetian cultural sphere, which extended down the Istrian and Dalmatian coast as far as Crete and well into the Italian peninsula. The opportunities this could present are illustrated by the prolific Venetian painter Carlo Crivelli (c. 1435–c. 1495), who produced paintings for a clientele of merchants, feudal nobility, religious orders, and confraternities stretching from the Appenines to the Adriatic and the borders of the kingdom of Naples. The artist had trained in Padua alongside Mantegna, but he later spent extended periods in cities of the Adriatic rim: Zara in Dalmatia; Fermo; and finally in Ascoli. Crivelli's motives for spending most of his career outside his native city may have to do with his being imprisoned for adultery there in 1457, but it is also the case that the busy trading centers across the region offered lucrative opportunities for fame and success. His output consisted almost exclusively of altarpieces (usually polyptychs), which dazzle the eye in their combination of splendid surfaces abounding in pattern and ornament, illusionistic tricks, and a strongly marked sense of three-dimensional space and volume. He sometimes worked up details of costume and the attributes of saints fully in three dimensions, using *pastiglia* to an extent that other artists would never have dared, and he recreated the texture of sumptuous fabrics with pointed tools and stamps.

Links with such Venetian contemporaries as the Bellini are not conspicuous – if anything, Crivelli offered an alternative to the dominant workshops of the Veneto, creating a regional art with a widespread appeal through sophisticated, modern adaptations of the gold-ground painting his public favored. He was aware of the ongoing prestige of the region's most famous painter, Gentile da Fabriano, and in 1490, he produced a *Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 10.14) for the Franciscan church



ABOVE RIGHT

10.13

Guido Mazzoni,
Lamentation, 1492–94.
Terracotta. Santa Anna dei
Lombardi, Naples

RIGHT

10.14

Carlo Crivelli, *Coronation
of the Virgin*, c. 1490.
Tempera on panel, 8'4"
x 7'4½" (2.55 x 2.25 m).
Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

10.15

Gentile Bellini, *The Sultan Mehmed II*, 1480. Oil on canvas, 27½ x 20½" (69.9 x 52.1 cm). National Gallery, London

in Fabriano itself. Crivelli ignored Bellini's Pesaro *Coronation* (see fig. 9.10), which he could easily have seen. Instead, he modeled his work on Gentile's own 1414 *Coronation* for the nearby town of Valle Romita (see fig. 3.12), revising and updating the older painting. Crivelli's altarpiece, like Bellini's, is now a *pala* rather than a polyptych. It eliminates Gentile's gold ground but reminds viewers of that tradition by including a gold cloth, illusionistically gathered into folds behind the main characters. Equally magnificent luxury textiles enhance the figures' three-dimensional solidity. Whereas Gentile's Virgin and Christ hover in a flaming sunburst, Crivelli's solidly occupy an elaborately carved and gilded marble throne, adorned with two huge classical horns of plenty filled with apples, pears, and cherries. And whereas Gentile's God the Father sits magisterially behind the couple, presenting them to us, Crivelli's surges forward from what looks like a hole in the sky to place crowns on the heads of both the Virgin and Christ. Crivelli's Heaven is a place of material and sensual splendor. It no longer mirrors the private world of a prince (Pesaro's Chiavelli rulers had been exterminated following an uprising in 1435), though the artist's concept of dignity and honor remains inseparable from the idea of the court. His signature only enhances this dimension of the picture, referring to *Carolus Crivellus Venetus miles* ("Carlo Crivelli of Venice, Knight"). It is not known which ruler bestowed Crivelli's knighthood, but in the year he painted the *Coronation* he received the additional princely recognition of being appointed "familiar" to Prince Ferdinand of Capua.

Italy and the Ottomans

Gentile Bellini (c. 1429–1507) – himself named after the great painter of Fabriano, who had trained his father Jacopo – illustrates the international prestige of Venetian art in a particularly dramatic way. For sixteen years, the Republic had been fighting to save its overseas possessions in the eastern Mediterranean from the Ottoman Turks, but in 1479, the two empires concluded a peace treaty. The Ottoman Sultan in Constantinople, Mehmed II, asked the Venetian Senate to provide him with the services of a painter and sculptor; he would soon ask in addition for an architect and for a bronze caster. The painter that the Senate decided to send was Gentile, who was working at the time on a highly prestigious state commission, a series of history paintings for the Hall of the Great Council in the Doge's Palace. (Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello had worked earlier on the same series, which was completely destroyed in 1577.)

A contemporary record noted that the Sultan wanted "a good painter who knew how to make portraits." Gentile produced at least one painted portrait of Mehmed,



probably the small picture now in London (fig. 10.15), and he supervised the making of a portrait medal. The London portrait, damaged and heavily restored, shows how Gentile responded to the demand to make a demonstration of Western painting "from life." He employed a device, sometimes featured in royal portraiture, of an illusionistic parapet and arch to enhance the sense of the panel as a window onto a virtual space, while placing the person of the ruler at a dignified remove. A jeweled cloth demonstrates the potential of oil to describe the physical world, and in this case to reproduce the splendor of crafts more costly than painting.

Other sources refer to Gentile portraying a wide range of subjects "from life" at Mehmed's request. An exquisite watercolor of a seated scribe may have been part of this series of works (fig. 10.16). Although its attribution to Gentile is sometimes doubted, an inscription added in Persian by a later collector refers to its author "son of mu'azzin" as "among the well-known masters of Europe." This suggests that it was regarded as an epitome of Western representational interests, even while the technique and a certain abstraction of the style show the artist responding to Ottoman and Persian art, especially book illumination: the near absence of shadow, the neutral background, and the gilt pattern on the blue robe give a linear and two-dimensional cast to a figure that otherwise reads as solidly three dimensional. A group of

OPPOSITE

10.16

Gentile Bellini, *Seated Scribe*, 1480. Pen and brown ink with water colour and gold on paper, 7¼ x 5½" (18.2 x 14 cm). Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston



THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK IN THE AGE OF PRINTING

The manuscripts acquired by Duke Federico da Montefeltro (see fig. 9.6) and other elite collectors were usually supplied by dealers who employed teams of scribes, illuminators, and binders for work on particular projects. In the closing decades of the century, the producers of manuscripts were forced to take account of a revolutionary development in the manufacture of books, the recent German invention of printing with moveable type. In 1465, at Subiaco near Rome, the partnership of Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz began to produce editions of Cicero's *De oratore*, the grammar of Donatus, Augustine's *City of God*, and other texts in high demand among students and clergy (fig. 10.17). The initial venture was not a commercial success, but the invention spread rapidly and took particular hold in Venice, where close to one hundred printing houses were active by 1500, many of them established by former dealers in manuscripts and by scribes. Though considerably less costly than the hand-copied texts that had served readers for centuries, printed books were still expensive and beyond the means of most students and clerics. Publishers sought to enhance the appeal to elite customers by employing traditional methods of decoration. They had scribes execute decorative initials, and, if the client required, they provided books with fully illuminated frontispieces that could contain all the components from the traditional manuscript: an author portrait in an initial, a decorative border, and often an elaborate "bas-de-page" (literally "bottom of page") painting where the client's coat of arms was presented by putti or by centaurs, frequently surrounded by cavorting animals or mythological creatures.

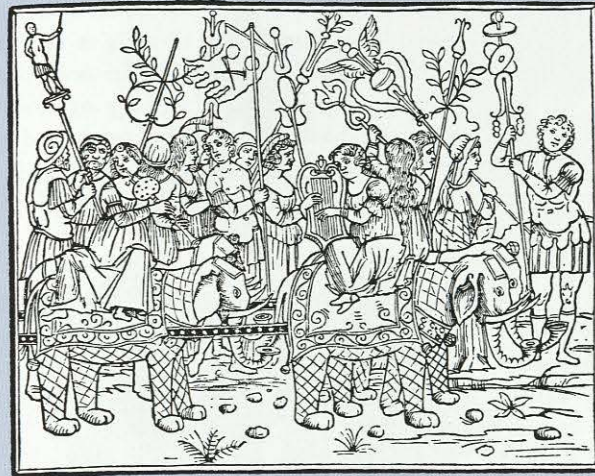
The type in these early books emulated the clear Roman characters employed by humanist scribes, and designers accordingly framed the blocks of printed text with elaborate classical structures that pursued startling illusionistic effects (for instance, the text might take the form of a frayed parchment sheet suspended in space with figures moving in front and behind).



10.17

Livy, *Roman History*, Third Decade. Printed in Rome, 1469, by Sweynheym and Pannartz. Illumination by

the Master of the Putti, Venice 1469. Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna, 2587



ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT

10.18

Woodcut illustrations
from Francesco Colonna,
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.
Venice, Aldus Manutius, 1499

By around 1490, publishers began to respond to the appearance of cheaper illustrated books from Germany, with inserted woodcuts: the Venetian firm of Benalius and Capcasa printed an edition of Dante's *Commedia* in 1490 with three full-page woodcuts – one for each part of the poem – which clearly imitated the form of hand-illuminated frontispieces. A range of different kinds of texts – lives of saints and of other famous men and women, medical handbooks, guidebooks for pilgrims, Bibles, Books of Hours – now began to feature woodcut illustrations. Authors, publishers, and artists, in turn, sought collaboratively to exploit the new possibilities for reproducing texts with images.

In 1499, the publishing house of Aldus Manutius in Venice produced one of the most extraordinary experiments in the history of the illustrated book: *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (*Polifilo's Dream of Amorous Turmoil*; fig. 10.18), a romance of amorous longing, erotic adventure, and antiquarian erudition loosely modeled on Dante's *Commedia* and written in a challenging hybrid of Veneto dialect with Latin and Greek. The story concerns a lovesick young man called Polifilo who dreams of a journey through a strange land and describes – with a learned architectural vocabulary drawn from Vitruvius – a series of colossal ruins and marvelous statues. He also encounters nymphs, ancient divinities, triumphal processions, and exotic pagan rituals. Following the

protagonist's adventures, the reader realizes that he or she is in a predicament similar to that of Polifilo, who struggles to make sense of strange spectacles and numerous cryptic inscriptions – most of them not merely described but actually presented to the reader in the woodcut illustrations – by drawing upon his classical learning (some of the original copies indicate that early readers annotated the text as they solved the various conundrums for themselves), and by vainly striving to prevent his prudent judgment being undermined by curiosity and erotic distraction. Although the work had a long afterlife and was translated into French and English (the illustrations carefully copied), it probably did not make a return on the publisher's investment, and the only subsequent illustrated books that come close in terms of the quantity and quality of illustrations are the architectural treatises of Sebastiano Serlio, Andrea Palladio, and their followers, who could count on a much wider appeal among professionals, gentlemen builders, and learned amateurs.



ABOVE

10.19

Gentile Bellini, *A Turkish Woman*, 1480. $8\frac{1}{2} \times 7"$ (21.4 x 17.6 cm). British Museum, London

ABOVE RIGHT

10.20 and 10.21

Bertoldo di Giovanni, medal of Mehmed II, obverse (top), and reverse (bottom), c. 1480. Diameter $3\frac{3}{4}"$ (9.4 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

seven ink drawings of figures in local costume are among the most vividly descriptive life drawings produced in the fifteenth century (fig. 10.19), and among the earliest ethnographic studies produced by a European artist. Gentile seems to have prepared these as modelbook figures for paintings with an oriental setting, and within a few years they were known to other artists in Italy. He returned to Venice in 1481 with the titles of “knight” and “palace companion,” along with a collar of gold.

Western-style portraiture would have been a novelty at the Ottoman court. Mehmed, who had conquered Constantinople in 1453, saw himself at the center of an expanding world empire encompassing Europe and Asia. His interest in Italian art, as well as sacred objects and relics, points to a desire to possess the distinctive achievements of the culture over which he aspired to rule. He had intervened to prevent the destruction of Byzantine mosaics when his forces took control of the city, and, in addition to paintings, he appears to have owned a collection of Florentine and Ferrarese prints,



several giving prominence to the naked human figure – a *St. Sebastian*, a group of dancing nudes, *Cupids with a Winepress*, a *Hercules and the Hydra* after Pollaiuolo. Mehmed’s importation of art and artists from elsewhere, moreover, bears comparison to the practice of Italian rulers: it enhanced his own prestige, but it also had a diplomatic aspect, creating links with other powers. In 1480 he asked the Florentines to send him woodcarvers and sculptors. A medal that Bertoldo di Giovanni produced in Florence that same year (figs. 10.20–10.21) shows that Western artists were ready to reinforce the sultan’s self-image as a universal conqueror. His portrait is inscribed “Mehmed, emperor of Asia and Trebizond and Greater Greece.” The reverse shows an allegorical triumph in the classical style, with a nude male figure astride a chariot holding aloft a figure of Victory: three bound captives behind represent the three divisions of Mehmed’s empire.

Florence and Venice were all too aware that Mehmed’s inclination to conduct foreign relations through the

peaceful exchange of art and diplomatic honors could dissolve. King Ferrante of Naples had sent the sculptor Costanzo de Moysis (c. 1450–c. 1524) to Constantinople to make portrait medals in 1478, yet once Mehmed had secured peace with Venice the following year, he turned against his former ally. A Turkish fleet seized the southern town of Otranto on the heel of Italy in 1480, and although the Duke of Calabria finally expelled the invaders in a “crusade” the following year, the garrison of Otranto, having refused to embrace Islam, had by then been executed. Matteo di Giovanni’s *Massacre of the Innocents* (fig. 10.22) attests to King Ferrante’s fondness for Siense art, but it may also have served as a memorial to the “martyrs of Otranto.”

Florentine Bronze Sculptors in Venice and Rome

Verocchio, Leonardo, and the Equestrian Monument

Florence had long understood the diplomatic value of art, particularly the small bronzes and plaquettes regularly sent abroad as gifts. Its most prestigious artistic capital, however, was its sculptors, and foreign patrons sought out Florentines for two highly prestigious commissions – both of them bronze equestrian monuments – in Venice and Milan. In 1484 Ludovico Sforza consulted with Lorenzo de’ Medici on the availability of bronze



10.22

Matteo di Giovanni,
Massacre of the Innocents,
c. 1480. Oil on panel.
Capodimonte Museum,
Naples



ABOVE
10.23
 Andrea del Verrocchio,
 equestrian monument of
 Bartolomeo Colleoni,
 c. 1481–95. Bronze,
 height approx. 13' (4 m)
 without base. Campo Santi
 Giovanni e Paolo, Venice

RIGHT
10.24
 Leonardo da Vinci, design
 for the Sforza monument,
 c. 1488. Metalpoint on
 blue prepared paper, $4\frac{5}{8}$ x
 4" (11.6 x 10.3 cm). Royal
 Library, Windsor Castle

technicians who could cast a colossal mounted statue of his father, the warlord Duke Francesco Sforza, in Milan. Meanwhile, Venice needed a sculptor for an equestrian monument, also in bronze, to the *condottiere* Bartolomeo Colleoni, a captain of the Venetian forces who had died in 1475 (see p. 121).

Colleoni had amassed substantial property, and his testament allowed this to go to the Venetian government on condition that a “metal horse” be erected in his memory in the Piazza San Marco; the Senate consented to the statue, but in a less prominent location outside the center, the piazza before the confraternity of San Marco. By 1483, Andrea del Verrocchio had won the commission, submitting a lifesize model of the horse in wax, and he moved to Venice in 1486 to begin work on the monument (fig. 10.23). The sculptor regarded the undertaking as a chance to compete with his predecessor Donatello’s *Gattamelata* (see fig. 7.25) in nearby Padua. He was also mindful that his work would be compared with the famous bronze horses that adorned the facade of the basilica of San Marco (spoils of an inglorious attack on Constantinople in 1204), as well as with the definitive Marcus Aurelius statue in front of the Lateran Palace in Rome. Verrocchio signaled his own mastery of the medium by balancing the massive bulk of the horse and rider on three points – a challenge that the *Marcus Aurelius* had posed and that even Donatello’s *Gattamelata* had been unable to match. One early drawing by Leonardo (fig. 10.24), a proposal for the equestrian monument that Ludovico Sforza desired, shows a rearing horse, ostensibly now on only two legs but in fact propped up by a fallen victim below. Imagining such a drawing carried out in three dimensions helps us to see how calculations of weight and equilibrium let artists in these years try to outdo one another as engineers and not just as designers of figures.

Still, it is in the expressive character of the group that Verrocchio’s sculpture distinguishes itself from its



predecessors. Many late fifteenth-century Florentine treatments of the male body focused on virile force and aggression, and these qualities must have seemed particularly appropriate for Colleoni, who sometimes spelled his name Cogliani (“testicles”) and proudly made its meaning apparent in his coat of arms. Verrocchio called attention to the figure’s character and expression, his bearing, gesture, and movement. Like other Florentine sculptors, the artist attempted to give his military subject a sense of liveliness, conceiving the body as a container for a violent and even disfiguring emotion that moved and distended the figure from within, as if seeking release. A furious energy has rendered the body of the mounted captain rigid; Colleoni pushes himself upright in his stirrups. The twist of the body on its axis creates tension in the neck, shoulders, and waist, while the elbow of the arm with the baton juts outward. The face has been pulled so taut that his eyes bulge forth in their sockets. To get this effect, Verrocchio worked up the relief of his bronze, deeply drilling the pupils so that they could be read easily from the piazza below; the figure borders on the horrifying, and was intended to. The final details of the work were the responsibility of a local casting master, Alessandro Leopardi, who oversaw the completion of the figures after Verrocchio died in 1488. Leopardi, a goldsmith by training, was proud enough of pulling it off that he had his own name inscribed on the belly of the horse – as if he alone had made it.

Pollaiuolo and the Papal Tomb

Leopardi’s involvement in the Verrocchio project helps show the new opportunities that arose for goldsmiths in these years. Perhaps the greatest professional advantage that the format of the small bronze offered to an artist like Pollaiuolo was that it advertised his preparedness to produce much more ambitious works. In 1484, a year after Verrocchio secured the Colleoni commission, Pollaiuolo moved to Rome, where one of his former Florentine patrons had secured him a commission from Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, the future Pope Julius II. One of the richest men in the city, Giuliano had resolved to honor his lately deceased uncle, Pope Sixtus IV, with a tomb in a suitably magnificent style (fig. 10.25): a massive work completely of bronze, it was equally without precedent in its format and its intellectual program. Most of Sixtus’s predecessors had been interred in marble wall tombs, which normally included an effigy of the deceased lying in state surmounted by an apparition of God the Father or the Virgin Mary, sometimes with saints Peter and Paul, who signified the heavenly reception of the Pope’s soul. Sixtus’s memorial, by contrast, is a floor tomb that originally occupied the center of the Chapel



10.25
Antonio del Pollaiuolo,
tomb of Pope Sixtus IV,
1484–93. Bronze, length
14'7" (4.45 m). Museo
Storico Artistico, St Peter’s,
Rome



10.26
Antonio Pollaiuolo, tomb
of Pope Sixtus IV, detail:
Effigy

of the Canons in St. Peter’s. Sixtus was a Franciscan, and the decision to place the tomb on the floor was probably a gesture toward the humility that order espoused. This, at least, is the theme of the dedicatory inscription: “To Pope Sixtus IV of the Franciscan Order prince of all memory for his learning and greatness of spirit. He kept the Turks away from Italy, increased papal authority, endowed Rome with churches, a bridge, forum, streets, opened the Vatican Library to the public, celebrated the Jubilee and freed Liguria from servitude. Since he had given orders to be buried modestly and on level ground, Cardinal Giuliano erected [this] with more piety than expense.”

Still, modesty hardly describes the impression made by the tomb, which rises above the floor in several tiers, with the Pope at its summit (fig. 10.25), effectively

dominating the space around it. It seems to be borne upward by a kind of vegetal growth, on swelling scrolls of acanthus leaves and monstrous lion paws. In the portrait of Sixtus IV, Pollaiuolo dwells unequivocally on the facts of death: the face is flaccid and sagging, the breath of life has clearly left this body (fig. 10.26). Yet the Pope is surrounded by signs of teeming life – in the *spiritelli* that bear his coats of arms, in the foliate ornament, and in the remarkable series of female personifications ranked in two tiers around the body. These allegorical figures supplement the highly individualized likeness of the Pope by presenting his moral and intellectual qualities, albeit in generic terms. The inner series shows the seven Virtues,

10.27

Antonio Pollaiuolo, tomb
of Pope Sixtus IV, detail:
Dialectic



10.28

Antonio Pollaiuolo, tomb
of Pope Sixtus IV, detail:
Theology



while the sides present a series of larger figures in higher relief designating Liberal Arts: to the canonical series of Grammar, Dialectic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Philosophy, and Astrology are added Geometry, Theology, and, most remarkably, Perspective. The choice of “arts” to include would not have been Pollaiuolo’s, but the fact that a technique the sculptor relied on in his reliefs had risen to the status of Philosophy or Dialectic indicated how the labors of a craftsman like Pollaiuolo could have won him particular distinction among the intellectuals of the papal court.

The Liberal Arts, unusual in a papal tomb, refer to Sixtus’s earlier academic career as professor of theology and philosophy as well as to his promotion of learning through the reorganization of the Vatican Library. The papal tiara, too, reads as a celebration of Sixtus’s accomplishments: the insignia one might expect if the reference were primarily to the papal office are completely absent, and there is indeed no overtly Christian imagery here at all. To be sure, Cardinal Giuliano made certain that the more traditional elements of papal commemoration were provided for at the site, and the chapel had an apse with frescoes by Pietro Perugino, portraying Sixtus in prayer before the Virgin. The dissociation of this imagery from the tomb itself, though, allowed Pollaiuolo’s monument to be read in terms of the more secularizing ideals of fame. With its celebration of rhetoric on the side, it was all but a three-dimensional oration in praise of Sixtus, conventional in its ticking off of the standard spiritual and intellectual endowments of a good prince, but deeply

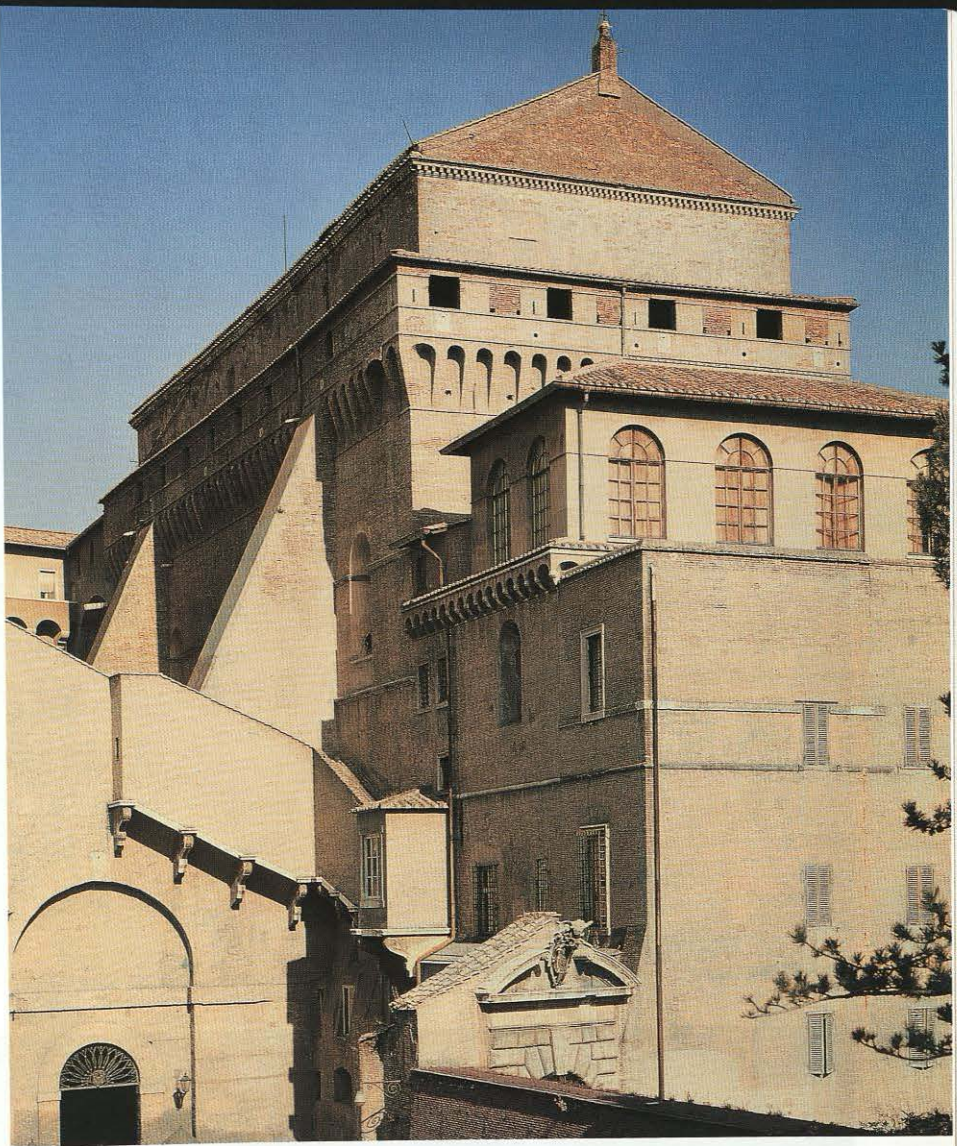
original in its manner of visualizing and embodying these generic aspects in the imagery of the human figure.

In the rendering of the Liberal Arts, Pollaiuolo showed his ability to give visible and even sensuous bodily form to abstract ideas. The figure of Dialectic (fig. 10.27), frowning in concentration, portrays in her very posture – the right leg placed over the left, the upper body turned toward the right – the principle of dialectic itself, which seeks to resolve contradiction by confronting opposed principles in argument. Pollaiuolo modified Dialectic's traditional attributes: normally the scorpion in her left hand would be balanced by a flowering branch (the poison of one is opposed to the honey yielded by the other): here the branch is the oak, emblem of the Della Rovere family. The panel showing Theology (fig. 10.28) is perhaps the most surprising of all. This is the only motif in the monument to display Christian symbolism: an angel carries a book with the opening of the Old and New Testaments, and the figure of Theology turns away from the book to look directly at its source, the three-personed God, who appears in a sunburst. Yet playing the role of the personification herself here is the pagan divinity Diana, the virgin huntress and goddess of the moon, who is represented as a nude. Her mythological character is crucial to the meaning of the work: we are shown how the science of Theology draws its light directly from God, just as the moon draws its light from the sun.

Florentine Painters in Rome: The Sistine Chapel Frescoes

While Florentine sculpture held a wide appeal for foreign patrons, the city's painters do not seem to have commanded the same interest in other parts of Italy as did the work of the Bellini siblings or their brother-in-law Mantegna. Around 1480 the profession was dominated in Florence by former students of Verrocchio – Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445–1510), Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494), and Pietro Perugino (1446–1524) – all of them in their mid thirties and without a significant reputation abroad. Through the diplomacy of Lorenzo de' Medici, however, Botticelli and Perugino, among others, commandeered the most prestigious pictorial commission of the later fifteenth century, the decoration of Sixtus IV's new chapel in the Vatican.

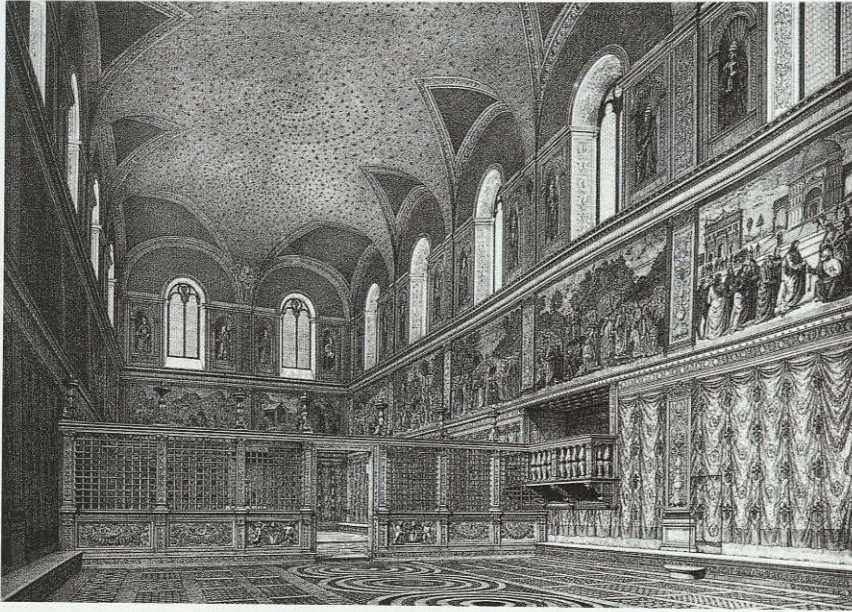
The Sistine Chapel was constructed rapidly in 1479–81, on a site between St. Peter's basilica and the Vatican Palace. It was meant to serve as a court chapel for the papal household and the College of Cardinals: one of its functions was to house the conclave that gathered to elect a new Pope. It was also a space for preaching, where sermons were increasingly being styled as classical Latin



orations that celebrated particular feast days and saints but also the Pope himself. The very structure and decoration of the chapel were rhetorical in conception: its aim was to promote the identity of Rome as a New Jerusalem, and to proclaim the descent of the papacy, through Christ and St. Peter, from Moses and Aaron, the priestly rulers of the ancient Israelites. The design for the structure (fig. 10.29), traditionally (but by no means securely) attributed to the military engineer Baccio Pontelli, provided for an exterior in the form of a plain, fortified box, one that nevertheless imitated Florence Cathedral and other Quattrocento holy spaces in reproducing the proportions of Solomon's Temple. The single element of classical architecture visible in the interior is a cornice that separates the windows from the murals below: the cornice also bears *tituli*, or captions for the frescoes in Roman epigraphic capitals. Between the windows, Botticelli and his workshop painted a series of portraits of sainted popes from St. Peter onward (fig. 10.30): the larger murals below confront scenes from the life of Christ with corresponding episodes in the life of Moses across the chapel.

10.29

Baccio Pontelli (?), Sistine Chapel, 1477–81. Exterior view. Vatican



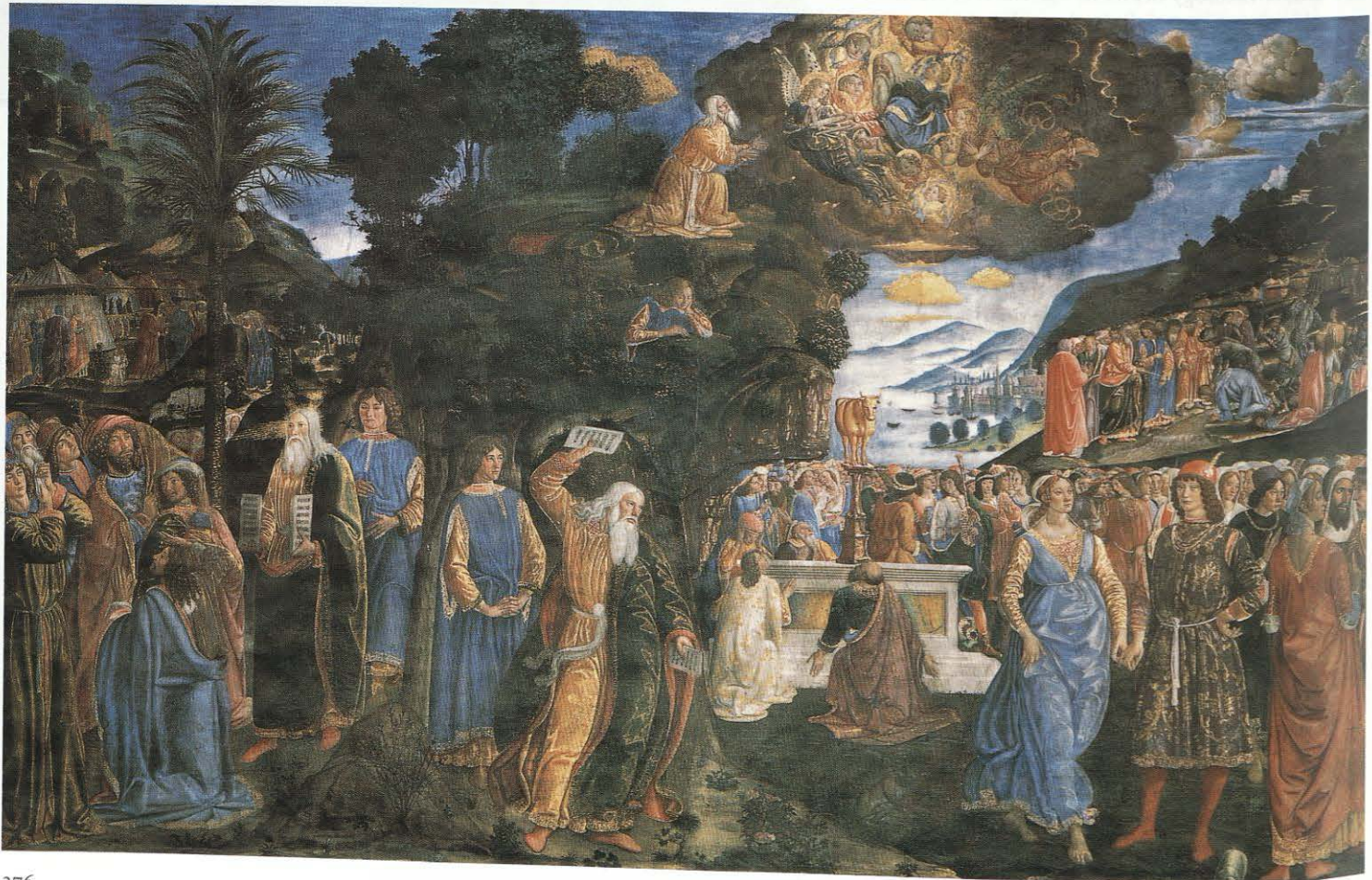
10.30

Gustavo Tognetti, imagined reconstruction from 1899 of the appearance of the Sistine Chapel c. 1483.

10.31

Cosimo Rosselli, *The Adoration of the Golden Calf*, 1481–82. Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican

Fifteenth-century Christians understood the histories of the Jews in the Old Testament in typological terms; they took every significant event in the Jewish Bible as a prophecy of an event in the life of Christ. This way of reading helped determine the arrangement of paintings with Old Testament narratives in the Early Christian churches of Rome. Following their model, the two narratives in the Sistine Chapel run in parallel on opposite walls; each incident from the life of Moses corresponds to a Gospel episode that simultaneously repeats and overturns it. A pair carried out by Cosimo Rosselli (1439–1506) offers one of the more straightforward examples of the way this worked. At the center top of his mural on the south wall, Rosselli shows Moses receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai (fig. 10.31); below, the divinely sanctioned legislator angrily breaks the tablets he has just received, having descended from the mountain and witnessed the Israelites dancing around a golden calf. Moses's people, shown here as contemporary Europeans, have violated one of God's first laws: "Thou shalt not have strange gods before me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth." In the background right is the punishment that awaits idola-





ters. The corresponding Gospel picture on the north wall is *Christ's Sermon on the Mount* (fig. 10.32) which began with the words "I am come not to destroy but to fulfill," and proceeded to a kind of critical commentary on the commandments that Moses had received. The similar landscape in the two pictures invites the viewer to compare them, and the listeners shown kneeling in attitudes of prayer suggest that Christ occupies the role given not only to Moses but also to the idol in the other wall.

Rosselli's paintings are of interest because they show that the themes of the Sistine Chapel bore on the topic of image-making per se. The form of his idol – a statue on a column – recalls the way that Donatello had installed his own Old Testament figures, such as Judith (see fig. 6.25) and David (see fig. 6.24). Its placement on what looks like a modern altar table, meanwhile, indicates that Christian images, particularly altarpieces, both borrowed from and corrected the functions of ancient art. The broadest theme the pair introduces is an antithesis between the "written law" Moses received from God and the "evangelical" law instituted by Christ; this opposition runs through the chapel as a whole, bearing equally on the frescoes executed by more talented painters.

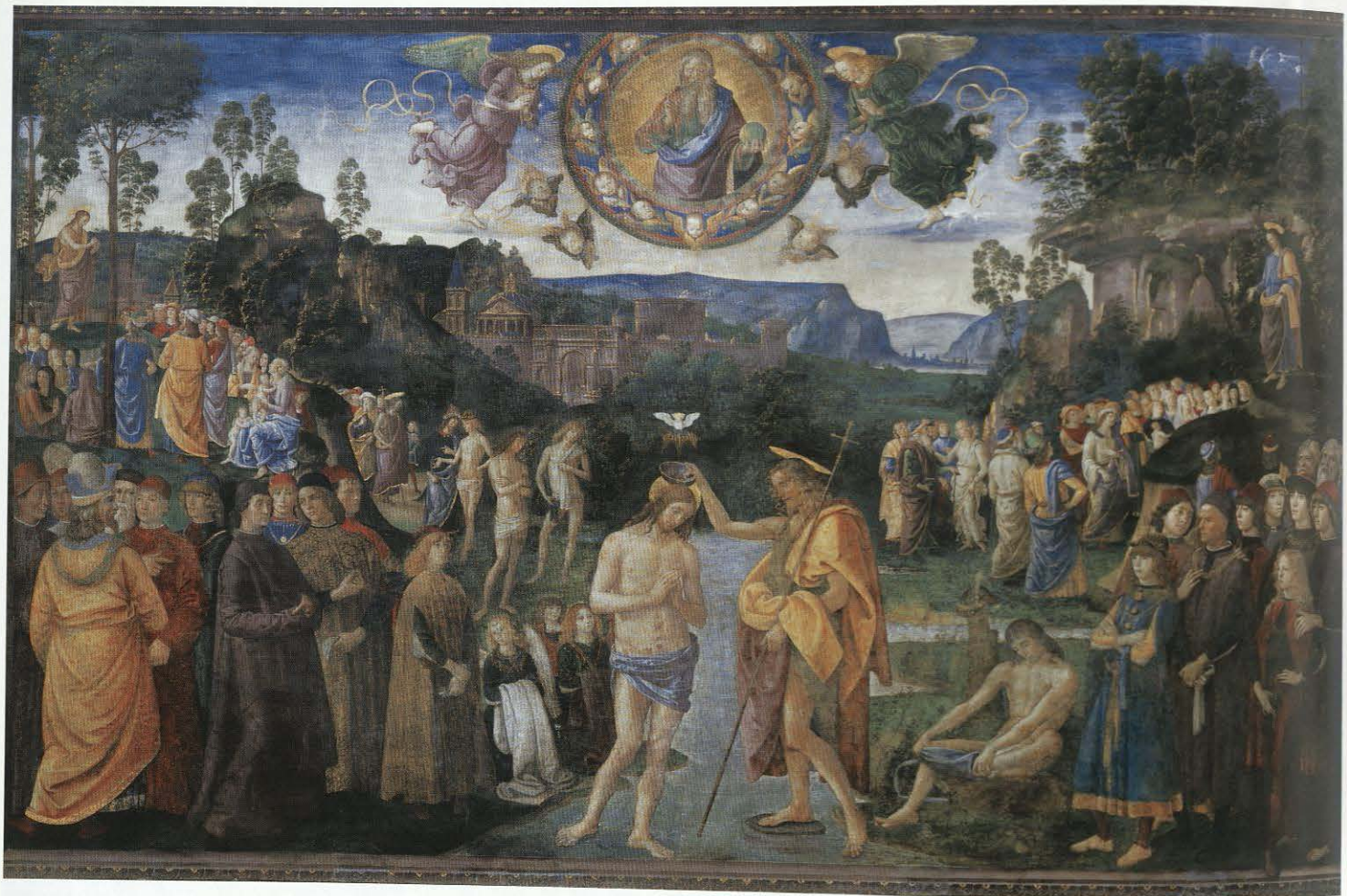
Thus, an early episode from the Christ cycle shows the institution of Baptism at the historical moment when Christ encountered St. John (fig. 10.33). In a composition that he would repeat throughout his career, Perugino

depicted the moment in which the divine nature of Christ was first revealed (he appears in an axial alignment with God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit). The scene possesses the formal order and balance of a religious ritual. Alongside the historical figures from the Gospel, a group of people in contemporary Italian dress, along with one whose costume designates him as a Byzantine Greek, appear to witness and discuss the new rite of purification and initiation. This emphasis on witnessing and discussing, apparent in Rosselli's *Sermon on the Mount* as well (see fig. 10.32), shifts attention from the historical event to its trans-historical meaning: the inclusion of a Greek signifies the importance of consensus between members of different religious traditions.

The facing fresco (fig. 10.34), also painted by Perugino in 1481–82, depicts a prefigurative moment in the life of Moses (Exodus IV:24–26) that occurred during his return to Egypt with his wife Zipporah and family to deliver the Israelites from captivity. God had earlier instituted the covenant of circumcision, distinguishing the Israelites from other peoples, yet Moses had not performed this on his own son. Confronted by an angel with a sword, Moses is saved only by Zipporah's timely intervention: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband

10.32

Cosimo Rosselli, *Christ's Sermon on the Mount*, 1481–82. Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican





OPPOSITE, ABOVE

10.33

Pietro Perugino, *The Baptism of Christ*, 1481–82. Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican

OPPOSITE, BELOW

10.34

Pietro Perugino, *The Circumcision of the Son of Moses*, 1481–82. Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican

art thou to me. So he [God] let him go.” Again, the event is witnessed by a circle of male figures distinguished by fifteenth-century costume and by their strongly particularized facial features. The Exodus episode, unusual in Christian art, foregrounds an element of violence and punitive justice that echoes the Rosselli scene and stands in marked contrast to the serenity of the Gospel scene. The frescoes show a newly militant papacy modeling its authority after the figure of Moses, lawgiver and leader of the Jews, yet also proclaiming its eclipse of that authority, even the redundancy of Judaism itself.

Perugino’s *Charge to Peter* (fig. 10.35) from 1481–82, an icon of Renaissance utopian idealism in its sublime symmetry and monumental architecture, illustrates

Christ’s words from Matthew: “You are Peter, the Rock, and on this rock I will build my church.... I will give you the keys to the kingdom of Heaven.” The scene, traditionally used to justify the authority of the popes as the successors to Peter, is staged against a centrally planned, domed church that looked like no modern building in Italy, flanked by two triumphal arches. It is opposite Botticelli’s *Punishment of Corah and the Sons of Aaron* (fig. 10.36), a rarely depicted story of religious transgression from the Book of Numbers. That painting, which like the artist’s earlier *Primavera* (see fig. 9.23) comprises three episodes and reads from right to left, begins with Corah inciting the Levites to rise up and challenge Moses and Aaron. Moses responds by proposing that he and Corah offer competing offerings to God, to see how the Lord responds. At the left, the earth opens and swallows the Levites, and Moses’ gesture indicates that it was through him, with God’s backing, that they were cast down. The whole drama takes place in front of a crumbling triumphal arch, a ruin that is itself a counter-image to Perugino’s perfect city across the way. The inscription on it – “no one can assume the honor unless he is called by God, as Aaron was” – provides the explicit link to Perugino’s scene of Peter’s “calling,” but also serves as a reminder that the whole cycle amounts to an argument,

10.35

Pietro Perugino, *The Charge to Peter*, 1481–82. Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican



10.36
Sandro Botticelli, *The Punishment of Corah and the Sons of Aaron*, 1481–82.
Fresco. Sistine Chapel, Vatican

presenting the basis of papal authority. The cycle constructs Judaism not only as the precursor and origin of Christianity, but also as its other.

Leonardo Goes to Milan

One artist trained by Verrocchio is conspicuously absent from the team of painters who worked for Sixtus IV in 1481–82. Leonardo da Vinci had set up his own workshop in 1477. When, in 1478, Antonio Pollaiuolo turned down a commission from the government of Florence – a large altarpiece for the Chapel of St. Bernard in the Palazzo dei Priori – the job passed to Leonardo. His failure to complete a commission of such prestige and visibility may explain why the patrons passed him over for the Sistine Chapel undertaking. The next commission we hear Leonardo accepting could hardly have been more lacking in prestige: an altarpiece for a provincial Augustinian friary, provided for in the will of an obscure saddle maker, depicting *The Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 10.37). What survives of this commission is a panel now in the Uffizi bearing underpainting that is not only incomplete but

unresolved as a final design. The panel also seems to have been reworked by a later artist, and not everything on it may be Leonardo's, but one thing is clear: it resembles no other known treatment of the *Adoration of the Magi*. It also marks a complete departure from the conventions of the altarpiece.

It is difficult to imagine what the finished altarpiece would have looked like. Leonardo seems to have begun with a scheme where the event would be depicted in an architectural structure carefully worked out in perspective. This initial conception survives in a series of preparatory drawings and in the ruined vaulted structure in the background of the painting. At a certain point, though, Leonardo apparently became dissatisfied with the capacity of mathematical perspective to represent the range of phenomena that the human eye could register in the act of seeing. As he added figures to his composition, he constructed them as a single relief-like mass of light and shadow. In the throng of figures and horses around the Virgin and Child in the foreground, he does not precisely render the limits of individual bodies, and it is far from clear how this obscure twilight world relates to the broad daylight of the buildings and landscape beyond. Leonardo

sought to pursue two possibilities at once: a traditional but precisely drafted Florentine perspective composition, and a painting built up from tonal effects of relief. In attempting to render as many different kinds of visible phenomena as possible, he pushed two different modes of pictorial naturalism to the point that their incompatibility finally became clear. This experimentalism was certainly part of the culture of the Verrocchio workshop, with its commitment to technical problem solving, but Leonardo alone in his generation seems to have pursued it at the level of painterly practice. It was certainly not an effective way of completing a commission in a timely manner.

The ultimate consequence of this experiment with pictorial effects was an utter transformation of the scene's emotional character. Earlier treatments of the subject (Gentile da Fabriano's version, for example; *see* fig. 4.3)

had emphasized its pageantry and its ceremonial character. Leonardo gives an expressive urgency to the shadowy retinue surrounding the Virgin and Child, with their grasping hands and bearded, grimacing, skeletal faces. In addition to exploring conditions in which shadow-drenched figures become less immediately available to vision, Leonardo confronted the psychology of religious devotion itself. Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio had already treated emotion as an inner force that manifested itself in compulsive bodily actions, but no artist before Leonardo had applied this principle to the theme of Christ's incarnation. By comparison with the architectural utopias and pastoral landscapes of the Sistine Chapel, which characterize Christian civilization in terms of beauty, clarity, and order, Leonardo's conception of the coming of Christ is a traumatic and cataclysmic event.



10.37

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1481–82. Oil on panel, 8'1 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 8' (2.46 x 2.43 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence



10.38
Ambrogio and Evangelista
Preda, angels from
the altarpiece of the
Immaculate Conception,
1483–90. Oil on panel.
National Gallery, London

Leonardo left Florence in 1482 and spent the next eighteen years in Milan. While he probably accompanied an official embassy on behalf of the Florentine government, he hoped for an appointment at the court of Ludovico Sforza, who co-ruled Milan with his young nephew, the hereditary duke. In a letter addressed to Ludovico, Leonardo described his expertise as an engineer and a designer of artillery and catapults; he listed painting and sculpture last among the many things he insisted he could offer, but it is likely that Leonardo, even though apparently unproven as a sculptor in bronze, had set his sights on the commission for the equestrian monument to Francesco Sforza: “I would undertake the work of the bronze horse, which shall endue with immortal glory and eternal honor the auspicious memory of the Prince your father and of the illustrious house of Sforza.”

It was several years before Leonardo became a salaried member of the Sforza court. He was thus forced to fall back on the contract-based commissions that he had probably hoped to avoid when he left Florence. In 1483 he formed a partnership with two brothers, Ambrogio and Evangelista da Preda, to collaborate on an altarpiece for the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception at the Milanese church of San Francesco Grande. The contract prescribed an elaborate wooden polyptych comprising carved figures and ornaments

as well as painted panels. In addition to decorating the wooden structure with colors, the painters were supposed to deliver an image of “Our Lady and her Son,” along with paintings of angels (fig. 10.38) and two prophets. Leonardo completed his *Virgin of the Rocks* (fig. 10.39) by 1490, but did not in the end hand it over to the Confraternity. The painting became the subject of a lengthy legal dispute following the artists’ demand for a larger payment, and Leonardo ultimately helped produce an alternative version in 1508.

Leonardo’s handling of light gives the painting an air of mystery. The Virgin, the Christ Child, a large angel, and the infant St. John all appear to emerge from deep shadows. Such effects enhance their three-dimensional presence, as Leonardo describes different intensities of light across the curved volumes of faces and bodies, but the shadowy countenances also reinforce the sense of deep contemplative absorption, of inner reserves of thought and feeling. Their lifelikeness, in other words, depends on a sense that each figure has a private or hidden dimension, which Leonardo calls upon the viewer to recreate or imagine. Yet “mystery” is also at the heart of the particular devotion that the image was designed to serve. Some of the painting’s unusual features may make reference to the doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception” recently approved by Pope Sixtus IV. The controversial doctrine held that the Virgin’s mother had conceived her without sin, and that this miraculous purification provided an absolute prerequisite for the salvation that Christians sought to obtain through the sacrament of Baptism (alluded to here through St. John) and through the Incarnation of Christ. The Office of the Immaculate Conception contains a text from the Biblical Book of Proverbs (8:22–25): “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills were brought forth.” The scriptural text was taken by Franciscan theologians as a reference to the Virgin’s primordial purity, pre-dating the earth with its “depths,” its hills and rocks, and viewers disposed to look for similar metaphors in paintings could have found them here in the cavernous imagery of the landscape in the painting. It is also possible that a confraternity devoted to a newly approved cult simply welcomed Leonardo’s initiative in making an image of the Virgin and Child with St. John that looked like no other. The painting could have proclaimed the newly legitimated cult of the Immaculate Conception, that is, simply by its striking differences from other altarpieces with the Virgin, yet without employing any hidden symbols particular to that cult.

10.39

Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin of the Rocks* (altarpiece of the Immaculate Conception), 1483–90. Oil on panel, 6' 6 1/2" x 4' (1.99 x 1.22 m), Musée du Louvre, Paris. A second version of the painting, made by Leonardo and the Milanese workshop many years later (1508), is now in the National Gallery, London.





I 490—1500

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11

1490–1500

From the Margins to the Center

A Fugitive Boundary

FAR RIGHT

11.1

Andrea Riccio, *Satyr*,
c. 1500. Bronze. Frick
Collection, New York

11.2

Fra Bartolomeo, *A Farm on
the Slope of a Hill*, c. 1500.
Pen and brown ink on
paper, 8³/₄ x 11³/₈" (22.25
x 29.4 cm). Cleveland
Museum of Art, Cleveland

Much of what looks truly new in late fifteenth-century art expands on what had previously been minor elements of artistic practice. Artists had, for example, been embellishing religious paintings with background landscapes and cityscapes for decades, but by the end of the century, the Florentine painter Baccio della Porta (1472–1517) – known as “Fra Bartolomeo” (brother Bartholomew) after he joined the Dominican order – began to make independent drawings of outdoor vistas (fig. 11.2). These extend Leonardo’s practice of studying the observable world (*see* fig. 10.39), but they also show that painters were beginning to regard such material as interesting in its own right. In the same years, Venetians like Gentile Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio would increasingly depict architectural and natural spaces that dwarf and envelop the sacred subject.

As we shall see, portraiture in these years underwent a comparable shift: although images of the patron and elements of his or her world had frequently made appearances in religious painting, now that world and its contemporary inhabitants become the actual set-



ting for the Biblical episode or saint’s life being depicted. Similarly, themes from pagan mythology migrate from painted furniture and from the borders of manuscripts to become the subjects of panel paintings and sculptures. Andrea Mantegna and Antonio del Pollaiuolo had already treated similar secular and profane subjects in their engravings (*see* figs. 10.8 and 10.6), where the possibilities for experiment had a lot to do with the fact that printmaking was still a marginal rather than mainstream practice. Both artists, though, also began treating related material in other media, setting examples for their immediate followers. When the humanist scholar Pomponius Gauricus complained in a 1502 Latin treatise on sculpture that the artists in his native Padua were wasting their time in the trivial production of “little satyrs, hydras, and monsters, the likes of which no one has ever seen,” instead of devoting “mind and hand” to the representation of the human figure, he must have been thinking of the sort of object that the “collectable” bronzes of Pollaiuolo, and before him Filarete, had inspired: Bertoldo di Giovanni in Florence, Antico in Mantua, and Andrea Briosco, known as “Riccio,” in Padua all served a rising market for intimately scaled and fanciful bronze statuettes with which wealthy Italians adorned their homes (fig. 11.1).

In these years, interest in “the antique” largely manifested itself in images of hybrid mythological creatures. Some of the patrons who displayed them must have been following trends in fashion and taste, though at their most sophisticated, such creatures could also represent an endorsement of art based on poetic invention. Owners who used them to ornament domestic spaces demonstrated their cultivation and learning, though increasingly such images crept into more public and more sacred arenas as well. Around 1489 to 1492, the Venetian sculptor Tullio Lombardo (1460–1532) and his workshop commenced work on a monumental tomb for Doge Andrea Vendramin (fig. 11.3). Although the design was modified when the tomb was moved to its present location in the nineteenth century, the overall conception followed standards by now long in place, with an effigy of the deceased lying on a bier and Virtues below (see figs. 4.1, 4.2, 10.25). Tullio expanded this basic sculptural program with elements derived from a Roman triumphal arch, as well as with an *Annunciation* that frames a lunette showing St. Mark presenting Vendramin to the Virgin. What claims the most attention, however, is the startlingly prominent classical and mythological imagery. A younger and an older warrior stand guard, with expressions doleful and severe. *Tondi* showing passionate and violent pagan scenes (one of them apparently an abduction), reminiscent of those in Mantegna’s San Zeno altarpiece (see fig. 8.18), appear over their heads; below, little cupid-like sprites cavort with a sea-horse and a sea-goat. A beautiful marble Adam (removed in the nineteenth century and now in New York) does not suggest the fallen sinner so much as a nude hero from the ancient past. Crowning the entire structure is a *clypeus* of the blessing Christ Child, supported by two marine monsters in the form of voluptuous winged Sirens. Tullio’s particularly “Venetian” version of classical antiquity gave mythical sea creatures an understandable but still surprising prominence.

The *Studiolo* of Isabella d’Este and Mythological Painting

Isabella d’Este, the wife of the lord of Mantua, created a celebrated suite of rooms to house her collection of antiquities and modern art and to serve as a *studiolo*: functionally a private space, but also a showpiece that proclaimed the marchioness’s literary interests and good taste to members of the court and privileged visitors. Like much of the art these rooms contained – which included several small bronzes by Antico – the *studiolo* was self-consciously marginal, detached from the serious business of ruling a state and the formality of life at court. Isabella



and her contemporaries regarded it as a room for reading and meditation, necessary to heal the spirit from the cares and perturbations of everyday life; in many ways the *studiolo* represented a “profane” version of a private chapel or oratory.

The emergence of such spaces coincided with a parallel change in the workshops of artists, as painters and sculptors, too, began to organize their homes so as to include a dedicated area (sometimes a furnished room, sometimes nothing more than a desk) where they could read, draw, and think through new inventions in solitude. When Isabella resolved in 1496 to decorate the walls of her *studiolo*, she turned to Mantegna among others; he is documented to have had two *studioli* himself.

11.3
Tullio Lombardo,
tomb of Doge Andrea
Vendramin, c. 1490–1505.
Santi Giovanni e Paolo
(originally installed in
Santa Maria della Vita),
Venice

11.4

Andrea Mantegna, *Mars and Venus* (“Parnassus”), 1497. Tempera on canvas, 5'3½ x 6'3⅞" (1.59 x 1.92 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris



Though artists outside of Mantua received detailed sets of instructions from the marchioness for the “fable” that she wanted to have painted, Mantegna – already known from his print designs as an inventor of mythological imagery – probably went to his books and devised his own subjects.

Viewers may have recognized the various protagonists of Mantegna’s mythological paintings, but understanding the unfamiliar and often ambiguous compositions required an unusual level of engagement and reflection: the paintings demanded, in essence, to be read as poems. Thus, in the so-called *Parnassus* from 1497 (fig. 11.4), the viewer would have recognized Apollo and the nine Muses – the latter a common theme of *studiolo* painting. Yet unlike Cosmè Tura (see fig. 8.3), who rendered his Muses as enthroned goddesses, Mantegna turns his into dancers, in a form more reminiscent of the maenads or nymphs of classical relief and more comparable to the figures in Sandro Botticelli’s *Primavera* (see fig. 9.23). They represent one of the artist’s most inventive essays in recapturing what he saw as the spirit of antique art: clearly, he was most impressed by that art’s evocation

of graceful and rhythmic motion. In the lower right of the painting, Mercury, the god of eloquence, stands with the winged horse Pegasus, who taps his hoof to make the inspiring waters of the Hippocrene flow. Decades earlier, Leon Battista Alberti in *On Painting* had encouraged artists to include in their *historie* a character that “admonishes and instructs us on what is happening”: Mercury and Pegasus (i.e. eloquence and poetry) would have alerted the beholder that the painting is not only a new composition based on familiar poetic themes, but also a commentary on such compositions. This is not just a painted poem, but a poem about poetry.

At the top of the picture, the lovers Mars and Venus stand defiantly on top of a rocky “triumphal arch” while to their right Venus’s cuckolded husband, the blacksmith god Vulcan, rages (and prepares revenge) in his forge. What is this most profane of Homer’s pagan tales doing at the center of such a self-reflective work? A number of writers, both ancient and contemporary, had pointed to the trio as an example of gods behaving improperly and had used the example of their actions to discredit the art of poetry altogether. One Bolognese humanist, for

example, tried first to find symbolic value in the union of Venus and Mars, only to reject the effort, concluding that Homer's purpose had been nothing more than an attempt at bawdy humor. Similarly, the fiery Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola (whose importance is addressed later in this chapter) complained that young girls in Florence knew more about the love of Mars and Venus than they did about scripture. Mantegna's inclusion of the three gods may make an ironic nod to such critics, though he, Isabella, and most other readers must have had a less conflicted attitude toward the subject. Mars and Venus crown Mantegna's Parnassus because love and its complications were the main matter of art and the basis of its appeal.

Isabella undertook a series of negotiations with the leading artists of the time, including Giovanni Bellini,

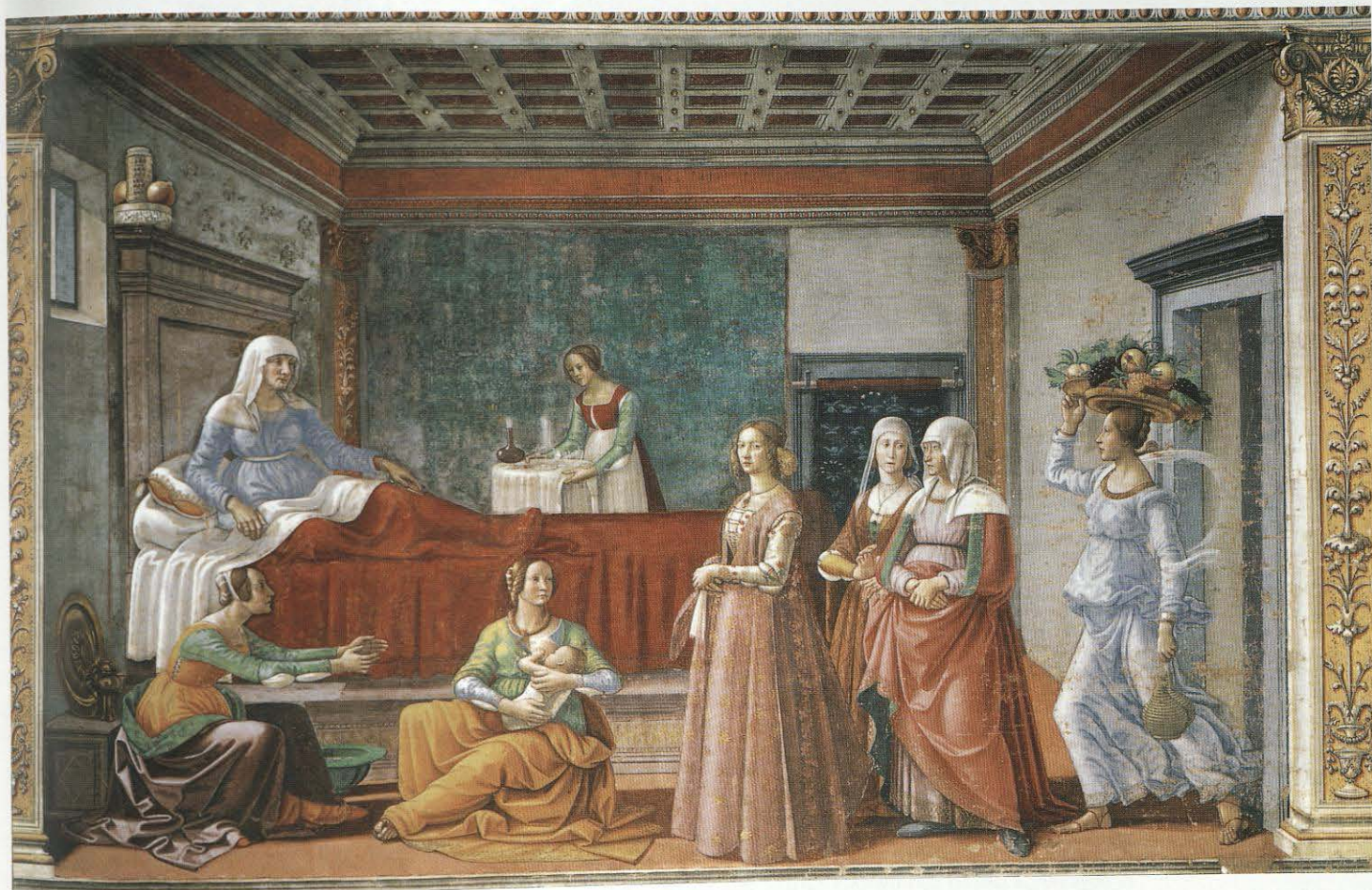
Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Perugino, to produce additional paintings for the series. These were mainly unsuccessful, though Mantegna did make her a second picture as well (fig. 11.5). Here, another of the artist's kinetic *all'antica* heroines, the goddess Minerva (or Pallas), on a mission to rescue Wisdom (the mother of the Virtues), scatters a swarm of mythological creatures and other monstrous beings labeled as Vices from a stone vault (a scroll with words acts as a "speech bubble" to indicate her cry for help). In visualizing the centaurs, male and female satyrs, and other creatures of ancient art, together with the maiden turned into a tree and the clouds assuming the form of human profiles, Mantegna displayed his inventive prowess to the full. The satyr mother with her children evoked the Roman Pliny the Elder's description of a celebrated lost work by the

11.5

Andrea Mantegna, *Pallas Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, before 1503. Tempera on canvas, 5'3¹/₄" x 6'3⁷/₈" (1.6 x 1.9 m). Musée du Louvre, Paris







painter Zeuxis showing a centaur family, but Mantegna, professing invention, paints satyrs instead. At the same time, the painting presents a warning about the dangers of artistic fantasy, suggesting that it may take one on the path of unreason and delusion. It counsels prudence, personified by Pallas.

Corporate Devotion

Ghirlandaio's Tornabuoni Chapel

In religious works of the 1490s, elements from the contemporary world increasingly overwhelm the rest of the image. Emblematic is the chapel (fig. 11.6) that Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494) unveiled three days before Christmas in 1490 in the Florentine church of Santa Maria Novella. Covering every surface of wall and ceiling in the large choir zone, Ghirlandaio's team had spent five years producing frescoes, an altarpiece, and even stained glass. The result can have left little doubt that Ghirlandaio fulfilled the requirements of his contract, which required him to make “noble, worthy, exquisite” images.

The chapel's patron, Giovanni Tornabuoni, stated that he had commissioned the fresco cycle to show his piety and to enhance the church, one of the most prestigious in the city, as well as for “the exaltation of his house and family.” Ghirlandaio's works give an indication of just what “house and family” might include. The chapel had two dedications, to the Virgin (the patron of the church) and John the Baptist (Giovanni's own name saint), but although John's prominence in the decorations and the space's function as Giovanni's burial site both singled out the patron's distinctive role in its origin, most of the decorations emphasize the collective over the individual. The *Birth of John the Baptist* (fig. 11.7) takes place in what looks like a modern Florentine interior, with a coffered ceiling and ornamented pilasters in the corners. The women attending St. John's mother, Elizabeth, include a nursemaid of the kind that Renaissance Italians entrusted with the care of their newborns. All the women wear contemporary fashions, and the three standing right of center are portraits, with Tornabuoni's sister Lucrezia, in her most expensive finery, staring out at the viewer.

Giovanni did not instruct Ghirlandaio to include this portrait merely out of sibling affection. Lucrezia was the

11.7

Domenico Ghirlandaio,
Birth of John the Baptist,
1489–90. Fresco.

Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa
Maria Novella, Florence

OPPOSITE

11.6

Domenico Ghirlandaio,
Tornabuoni Chapel,
1489–90. Santa Maria
Novella, Florence



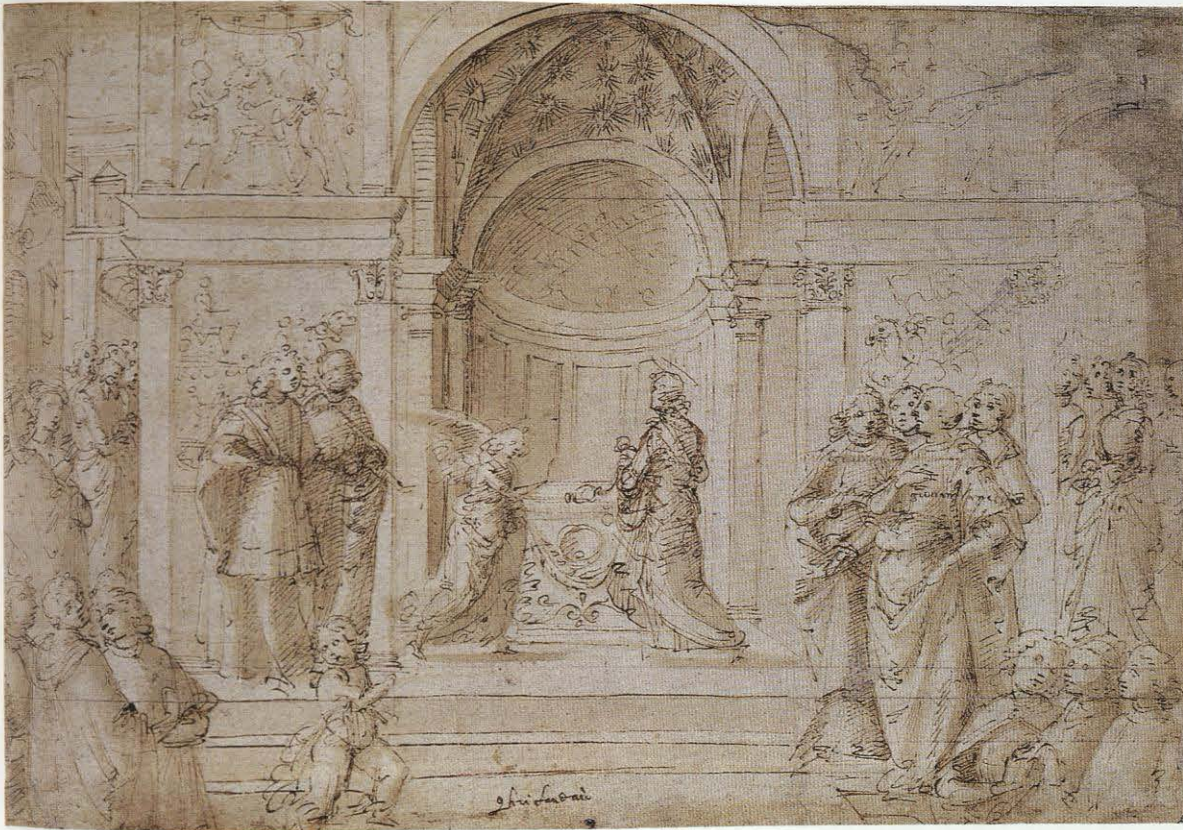
11.8
Domenico Ghirlandaio,
*Annunciation to
Zacchariah*, 1490. Fresco.
Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa
Maria Novella, Florence

wife of Piero de' Medici and the mother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and she thus represented the most important Tornabuoni tie to the city's most powerful family. Giovanni himself worked as a manager in the Medici bank, and he could not have obtained the right to decorate such a prominent location without Medici support. (In fact, the Sassetti family, whose chapel Ghirlandaio had also recently decorated, had tried and failed to lay claim to this very chapel a few years earlier.) In other frescoes, Giovanni makes his membership in the Medici entourage unmistakable. At eye level on the right-hand wall of the chapel, an angel announces to Zacchariah (fig. 11.8), Elizabeth's husband, that his wife has miraculously become pregnant. The setting could be taken for an Italian church, were it not for the shell and garlands on the altar and the pagan reliefs on the walls. Flanking the episode, if not exactly witnessing it, are several groups of Florentine men, including male Tornabuoni relatives on the right and several of the most prominent Medici literati – the philosopher Marsilio Ficino, the translator and commentator Cristoforo Landino, the poet and philologist Agnolo Poliziano – at the lower left. A surviving drawing by Ghirlandaio (fig. 11.9) labels a number of the figures in the scene, making it clear that these inclusions were not mere pictorial novelties, and that the patron wished to approve the design in advance. Giovanni

wanted his chapel to be the one in the most prestigious position, adjacent to the high altar of the church, but he had no desire to flaunt this honor on his own. His status in the city and even his career depended on family connections and the relationships they allowed, and he welcomed company in his space of prayer. Ghirlandaio's paintings are sacred images, but they are also political works, and the role they give to portraiture underscores the degree to which Florence was a culture of networks. Not everyone, as we shall see, found this harnessing of religious art to the ends of negotiating social status to be acceptable or legitimate.

Bellini's Paintings for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista

Structurally, Ghirlandaio's images eliminated the careful demarcation between the space that the kneeling donor had long occupied at the edge of the *sacra conversazione* and the center of the picture's action. It is instructive to compare the combinations of portraiture and history emerging in Venice around the same time. Gentile Bellini had returned from Constantinople in 1481, and he spent much of the next decade repainting the (subsequently destroyed) Great Council Hall pictures in the Ducal Palace. By the early 1490s, he was at work on a large cycle of



11.9

Domenico Ghirlandaio,
study for *the Angel
Appearing to Zacchariah*,
1489–90. Pen and brown
ink with wash over
metalpoint, stylus, and
black chalk on paper, 10¹/₈
x 14³/₄" (25.7 x 37.4 cm).
Graphische Sammlung
Albertina, Vienna

decorations for another common space, the “Hall of the Cross” in the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista. The Venetian *scuole*, as we saw in chapter 6 (see p. 159), were the devotional confraternities to which most members of the city’s patriciate belonged: the word *scuola* can refer both to the group and, as in this case, to the architectural space where that group conducted its activities. The confraternity dedicated to John the Evangelist counted among the largest and wealthiest in the city, and its members had the clout to convene the city’s best painters, including not just Bellini but also his young protégé Vittore Carpaccio.

If Ghirlandaio’s frescoes showed the bonds that extended from an individual patron, Bellini’s canvasses emerged as more direct expressions of collective interests. The painter did not merely insert contemporary faces as witnesses or participants into historical scenes but began with group portraits, then activated these around narrative episodes, all of them having to do with the Scuola’s prize relic. The Scuola owned what it took to be a piece of the “True Cross,” the wood on which Christ had died; this was the only miracle-working relic owned by any of the large Venetian confraternities, and the picture cycle documented its powers. Bellini’s 1496 *Procession with the Relic of the True Cross* (fig. 11.10) shows a ritual performance that took place annually on the Feast Day of

St. Mark, when citizens would gather to watch the men parade before the saint’s eponymous basilica. Arrayed in the near foreground, in white robes with red crosses, are the members of the Scuola di San Giovanni. At the picture’s center, nearly on axis with the main portal of the basilica, is the confraternity’s reliquary, borne beneath a baldachin. There is a documentary quality to the scene, which includes little that residents could not witness personally in the piazza year after year on this day – it so emphasizes the typical, in fact, that the uninitiated viewer of the painting would miss the miraculous event at hand if it were not brought to his or her attention. A Brescian merchant named Jacopo de’ Salis, who had learned the previous evening that a skull fracture had left his son in critical condition, kneels down just behind the confraternity members at center right, praying for his son’s recovery. Immediately afterward, though “offstage,” his son’s injury will vanish. The canvas is enormous, twelve feet high and more than twenty-four feet wide. All viewers must have recognized that only an event of great civic import could justify a picture on this scale. For the members of the confraternity, however, seeing this in their headquarters, the picture would have contributed to a sense of group identity.

Bellini’s second picture for the cycle, the *Miracle of the True Cross at the Ponte San Lorenzo* (fig. 11.11), takes a



ABOVE

11.10

Gentile Bellini, *Procession with the Relic of the True Cross*, 1496. Oil and tempera on canvas, 12' x 24'5" (3.67 x 7.45 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice

RIGHT

11.11

Gentile Bellini, *The Miracle of the True Cross at the Ponte San Lorenzo*, 1500. Oil on canvas, 10'7" x 14'1" (3.23 x 4.3 m). Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice



different approach. This time the artist moves the members of the Scuola to the background, positioning them as spectators. The arrangement allows the painter to depict his patrons frontally, and thus again to portray specific individuals, but it also puts the confraternity in the role of directing attention to the main event taking place in the water below. During another procession, the Scuola's reliquary fell into a canal. Onlookers dove into the water to try to save it, but whenever one approached, the Cross fled his grasp. Only when Andrea Vendramin, Grand Guardian of the Scuola (and ancestor of the recently deceased doge of the same name), threw himself into the canal did the holy object allow itself to be rescued.

Occupying the foreground this time is a strange stage-like platform that bears no relationship to anything at the actual site and serves only to support the figures who kneel in profile at the sides. These, too, must be portraits, and though it is uncertain just whom they represent, they take over the parts typically played by the donors in devotional rather than narrative images (compare, e.g., fig. 9.7). In giving less pictorial space to the confraternity and more to the kneeling citizens in their finery, the novel image of corporate devotion shifts back toward a more traditional assertion of family precedence. It is as though Bellini has used the miraculous event as a pretext for a scene that transcends history altogether, as though he has made a *sacra conversazione* but substituted the True Cross relic for the Madonna and Child. Or perhaps we should put things the other way around: Bellini has found an appropriate holy episode that could accommodate the members of the confraternity as spectators.

The World Ends

As earlier chapters of this book have shown, fifteenth-century images were nearly always conventional in subject, yet they were also often “customized” to acknowledge their patrons; painters had long added incident from the world around them to scenes that did not come from that world. With Bellini and Ghirlandaio, however, something different seems to be happening. Their pictures present themselves as “paintings of modern life,” as though the lived world had elevated itself sufficiently to become a primary topic of monumental art. We might note that the most significant architectural change to the Piazza San Marco in the decade Bellini painted it was the addition of an enormous clock tower to the north-west side (fig. 11.12). Its face included not only the twenty-four hours, but also a rotating group of zodiacal signs and a disk indicating the phases of the planets; above, arabic numerals would change every five minutes. At the top of the tower, Cain and Abel struck a bell once every hour;

twice yearly, Magi and an angel emerged to pay homage to the statue of the Madonna. The astronomical data the clock provided allowed consideration not only of the hour but also of the characteristics of any particular day. The skillful viewer would be able to “read” the stars as well as the time. The venerable basilica and the ritual activities that the piazza hosted lent the square a strong connection to the past, but this technological marvel – occupied by the engineers charged to maintain it – made the space seem modern, a product of the present, as well.

Other contemporary productions probably had more of a far-reaching impact on the way both artists and patrons regarded the moment in which they were living. In 1498, the German painter and printmaker Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), who had himself returned from Venice only a short time before, put out the first ever “artist’s book”: the earliest bound and printed volume conceived and executed by an artist rather than a publisher. It was issued in a Latin as well as in a German version, for Dürer sought an international audience. The book, comprising a series of fifteen woodcuts, brought to life the prophecies regarding the end of the world (or Apocalypse) that John the Evangelist had recorded in the Book of Revelations.



11.12

Mauro Codussi, Torre dell'Orologio (clock tower), 1496–99. Piazza San Marco, Venice



11.13
Albrecht Dürer, *The Whore of Babylon*, 1496–98.
Woodcut from
The Apocalypse

Through the pictures, terrifying conquerors on horseback ride over the dead, the sun turns black, angels stop the wind from blowing, blaring trumpets cause hail and blood to fall from the sky. In the penultimate plate, “The Whore of Babylon” (fig. 11.13), a group dressed in contemporary German garb looks at a woman seated upon a seven-headed monster and holding up the cup that John describes as being “full of the abomination and filthiness of her fornication.” The woman, too – John’s “harlot who sitteth upon many waters” – wears a modern costume, though in her case that costume is Venetian.

The reliance on images rather than text to convey John’s predictions ensured that even Italians into whose hands the book fell would have little trouble comprehending its topic. Many would have noticed not only Dürer’s use of Italian fashion to embody the Whore of

Babylon’s vanities but also his dependence on Mantegna’s mythological prints for his inventive approach. They would certainly have found the subject matter of the book topical, for in Italy, no less than in Germany, the approach of the year 1500 brought fears that Apocalypse might be just over the horizon, that the end of the century would also be the end of time.

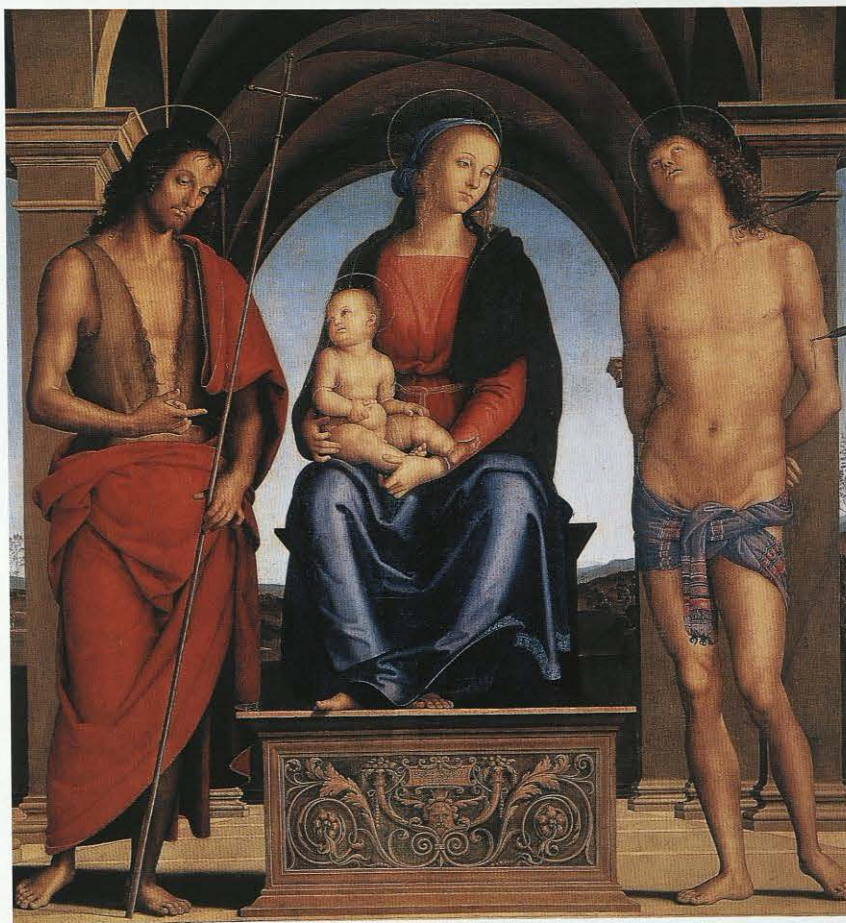
Savonarolan Florence

In Tuscany, the charismatic Ferrarese preacher Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498) had ascended through the ranks of the Observant Dominican Order. Made prior of Florence’s convent of San Marco in 1491, he persuaded the Pope to allow him to reorganize the local system of religious houses according to a severe regimen that involved self-mortification and the renunciation of worldly goods. Savonarola’s sermons, which frequently focused on the Apocalypse, drew ever larger crowds; he attacked both the traditional clergy and the Medici, and his followers took him to be a prophet. When the French army defeated the Florentine forces in 1494, the city expelled the Medici and declared Christ to be “King” of a new theocratic government, with Savonarola transmitting Christ’s will.

The political and religious transformation of the city under Savonarola’s influence included “bonfires of the vanities” during the carnival season: in place of traditional annual amusements, citizens publicly burned their fancy clothes, secular books, musical instruments, and works of art. Savonarola also made artists a target in some of his sermons against luxury. In many ways, his denunciation sounds familiar, recalling the attack on curiosity and worldliness in the writings of an earlier prior of San Marco, Fra Antonino (see p. 132). Savonarola’s oratorical skills added force to his charges, though, and he went further in his account of abuses: he deplored the fact that rich Florentines who would donate only the smallest of sums for the relief of the poor would invest lavishly on chapels. “You would do it only in order to place your coat of arms there,” he berated them, “and you would do it for your own honor, and not for the honor of God.” He complained that painters would sometimes include portraits of contemporaries under the guise of saints in religious painting, and the young would go around saying to this girl and that, “She is the Magdalene, that other girl St. John.” He disparaged the sensual and elegant depictions of the Virgin Mary that the Medici and other wealthy patrons had sought from such artists as Botticelli and Filippino Lippi: “Do you believe the Virgin Mary went dressed this way, as you paint her? I tell you she went dressed as a poor woman, simply, and so covered that her face could hardly be seen, and likewise St. Elizabeth. You would do well to obliterate these figures

that are painted so unchastely, where you make the Virgin Mary seem dressed like a prostitute.”

Some painters appear to have responded to Savonarola, and would work in a more sober style for patrons who were close to the friar. Such is the case with the son of the painter Fra Filippo Lippi, Filippino Lippi (1457–1504), who painted an altarpiece for Francesco Valori in 1498 (fig. 11.15) that adopted an archaic gold ground format and included the emaciated penitential figures of St. John and the Magdalene, which stand in marked contrast to the exquisitely refined figures in Botticelli’s or even Ghirlandaio’s work. Yet Savonarola’s call for a new pious simplicity in religious images was also part of a wider tendency in the late 1400s. Perugino, for example, already worked in a “devout” style in which Savonarola would have found nothing of which to disapprove. His serene and contemplative *Virgin with St. Sebastian and St. John* from the mid 1490s (fig. 11.14) was commissioned by Cornelia Salviati for San Domenico at Fiesole, an Observant Dominican foundation strongly linked to San Marco.



Savonarola’s impact on the arts is immediately visible at the monumental heart of the city. Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* (see fig. 6.25) took on new meaning when Florentines raided the palace where the Medici had formerly lived, removed the statue from its garden, and erected it in front of the old Palazzo dei Priori, where it became both an image of God’s agent striking down the overindulgent and a physical trophy of victory over Medici tyranny. The building itself became a new focus of patronage, too, with the construction of a spacious room (fig. 11.16) to seat the large and now truly empowered “great council.” The architects Antonio da Sangallo (c. 1453–1534) and Simone del Pollaiuolo (1457–1508, called “Il Cronaca”) designed a chamber like the one on which Bellini had worked in Venice: anxious to extirpate every trace of Medici oligarchic rule, Savonarola had directed the Florentines to take the Venetian Republican government as their model. The woodcarver Baccio d’Agnolo (1462–1553) added balustrades, paneling, a frame for a large altarpiece commissioned from Filippino Lippi, and a loggia for the council’s officers. Successive occupants continued to work on the room for decades afterwards.

ABOVE

11.14

Perugino, *Virgin with St. Sebastian and St. John*, c. 1492. Oil on panel, 5'10" x 5'4 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (1.78 x 1.64 m). Uffizi Gallery, Florence

LEFT

11.15

Filippino Lippi, *St. John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene*, from the Valori altarpiece, 1498. Oil on panel, each 53 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 22" (136 x 56 cm). Accademia, Florence. The panels originally framed a *Crucifixion*, now destroyed.



ABOVE
11.16
 The Hall of the Great Council, Palazzo dei Priori, Florence. The present appearance of the hall, begun in 1494, reflects its late sixteenth-century restructuring and redecoration.

RIGHT
11.17
 Fra Bartolomeo, *Portrait of Fra Girolamo Savonarola*, 1498. Oil on panel, 18 x 12⁷/₈" (45.5 x 32.5 cm). Museo di San Marco, Florence

Ultimately, the great square overlooked by the Palazzo dei Priori proved to be the site of Savonarola's end. The preacher's close association with the Republican council and his open support of French military intervention aroused the ire of Pope Alexander VI, who forbade him from preaching. The friar not only defied the order, but attacked the the Pope's luxurious lifestyle and abuse of his office. Alexander responded with excommunication, a sentence that Savonarola claimed to be fraudulent: he continued to distribute Communion. Meanwhile, the local tide turned against Savonarola as Florentines tired of the rigors of his moral crusade and grew skeptical of his mystical claims. Medici partisans were quick to capitalize on the discontent. Eventually, the Pope found enough support to have the Dominican friar arrested, tried, and hanged by the Florentines, who burned his body in the Piazza della Signoria, a few steps from Donatello's *Judith*.

None of this dissuaded Savonarola's most ardent followers; in their eyes, on the contrary, it only made him a martyr. In fact, the impact that Savonarola had on Florentine visual culture may show itself most strongly in the paintings made just after his death. These include a haunting portrait (fig. 11.17) that Fra Bartolomeo painted



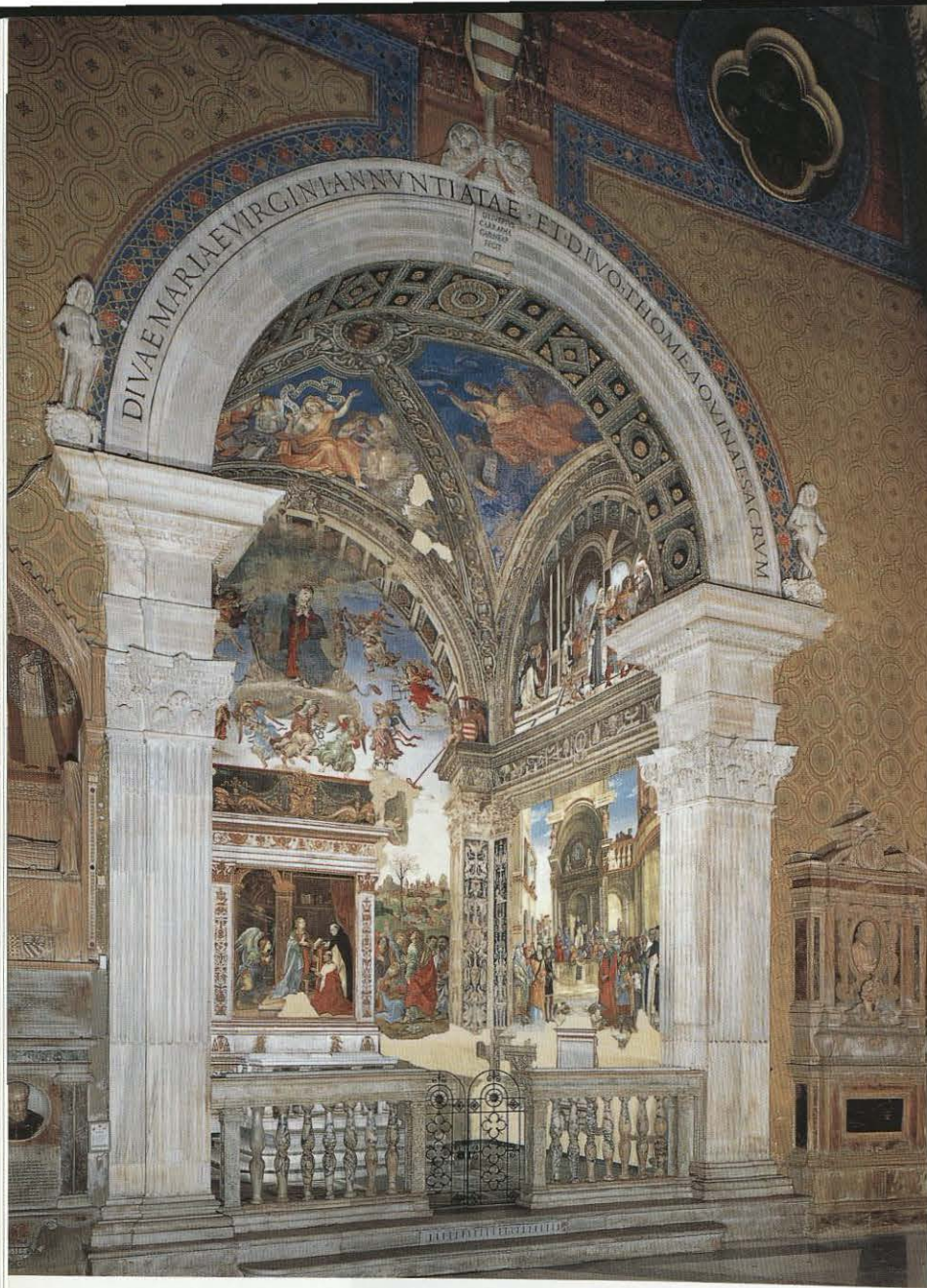


11.18

Sandro Botticelli, *Mystic Nativity*, c. 1499. Tempera on canvas, 42 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (108.6 x 74.9 cm). National Gallery, London

after he joined the monastery where Savonarola had lived. The profile format lends the image an old-fashioned air, rejecting the plasticity and the effects of "presence" that Leonardo and other locals had pioneered more than two decades earlier (see fig. 9.20), as though these were frills inappropriate for an ascetic. With his wide-eyed stare, Savonarola appears almost to be in a trance. The inscription at the bottom of the picture, "Girolamo of Ferrara, the image of the prophet sent by God," affirms the visionary powers the preacher claimed.

Roughly contemporary with the portrait of Savonarola is a devotional painting by Botticelli that goes by the name of the *Mystic Nativity* (fig. 11.18). At its center is a motif comparable to the one Fra Filippo Lippi painted for the private palace chapel of the Medici (see fig. 8.30), with the Virgin looking down at the Child laid out on the ground. Little else in the picture, though, is expected. A strange architectural hybrid of primitive hut and natural cave provides cover to the Holy Family while also separating two groups who kneel at the sides in devotion.



11.19
Carafa Chapel, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome, with frescoes by Filippino Lippi dating from 1488 to 1493.

OPPOSITE
11.20
Filippino Lippi, *St. Thomas before the Crucifix*; *St. Thomas in Triumph over the Heretics*. Fresco. Carafa Chapel, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome

It is as though the artist has transformed the landscapes that had recently become settings for such scenes (see fig. 8.30) back into a kind of late medieval triptych. At the bottom of the picture, three pairs of angels embrace, and above, angels in a ring hold olive branches beneath a gaping golden sky. These figures relate to imagery propagated by Savonarola in his sermons – one sermon the friar delivered seven years earlier interpreted the advent of Christ as the birth of Truth into the world and imagined a nativity in which “Righteousness looked down from the sky” – though they follow the practice Botticelli had adopted in his earlier mythological paintings, of composing a new subject rather than illustrating a single text.

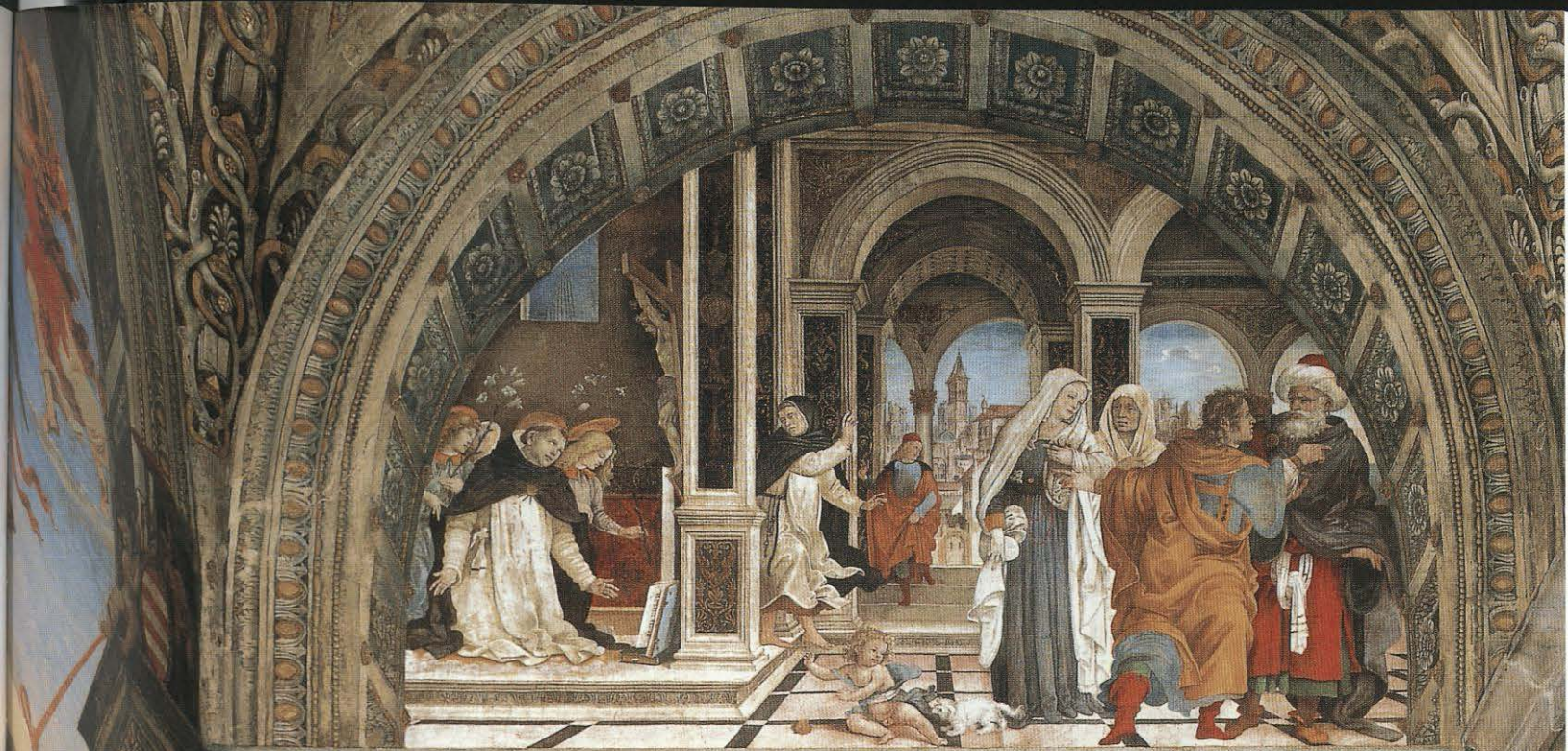
An inscription at the top of the painting that announces itself to be in Botticelli’s own hand dates the image to 1500, “in the half time after the time according to the eleventh chapter of St. John in the second woe of

the Apocalypse.” This suggests that Botticelli was among those who believed that the turn of the century he was witnessing fulfilled one of the prophecies in Revelations. His choice to add this comment in Greek might remind us of the humanist circle around Lorenzo the Magnificent, of which Botticelli had been an important member. By the late 1490s, though, the painter seems to have embraced the message of the man who sought to destroy everything that Lorenzo represented.

Filippino Lippi between Rome and Florence

Filippino Lippi, on the other hand, tended to adapt his style according to whether the patron employing him was a follower of Savonarola – as in the case of Francesco Valori – or of the old Medici oligarchy. The most powerful family in the precinct around Santa Maria Novella was the Strozzi, and in 1487, the banker Filippo Strozzi had commissioned Filippino to decorate in the church a chapel that could serve as his place of burial. The painter began work two years later, then broke off the project almost immediately to go to Rome, where he was sent by Lorenzo the Magnificent to work on a burial chapel (fig. 11.19) for Cardinal Oliviero Carafa. The Roman space, extravagant for a man of Carafa’s rank, set painted stages into an elaborate illusionistic framework, including a fictional marble arch on the rear wall. The image on the right side celebrates St. Thomas Aquinas’s triumph over heresy (fig. 11.20). Carafa, a man of real learning with a taste for novelty, saw no inconsistency in celebrating the notion of religious orthodoxy while embracing the legacy of the pagan past. Surrounding the Aquinas scene are Christianized versions of the decorations recently discovered in the ancient palace, known as the “Golden House,” of the Roman emperor Nero. That site’s explorers at first thought that the “house,” discovered underground, was a cave, or “grotto,” and decorations of this sort – featuring animals, plants, humans, architecture, and hybrids of these – came to be called “grotesques.” Their appeal would be enormous, and they would eventually stand as a byword for “invention,” allowing artists to demonstrate both their power of imagination and their acquaintance with a genuine ancient art form.

Filippino finished the project and returned to Florence in 1493, where he discovered that things had changed. To begin with, Filippo Strozzi had died, leaving the painter to fulfill the commission under the supervision of the banker’s heirs. With the expulsion of the Medici, moreover, Lippi found himself working on the city’s most monumental Dominican commission at the height of Savonarola’s sway. Presumably following the wishes of both the Strozzi and the friars, he dedicated the facing side walls of the chapel (fig. 11.21) to two







11.22

Filippino Lippi, *Raising of Drusiana*, 1493–1502. Fresco. Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence

saints: Philip, his patron's name saint as well as his own, and John, the author of Revelations. The main fresco on the south wall (fig. 11.22) shows John encountering a funeral procession for a woman named Drusiana on his return from the exile during which he wrote his Revelations. The deceased was a Christian, but her people, led by a priest with a woman on his arm, take her to be buried before a city filled with exotic pagan buildings. John raises her from the dead, implicitly promising a similar boon to those who show the right faith.

But there is a twist: the miracle occurs before a temple of the moon goddess Diana, which is adorned with a crescent. The crescent moon was the central feature of

the Strozzi family coat of arms, which is itself displayed in the chapel with a prominence that would have outraged Savonarola. The fresco cycle starts with a story that confronts the true faith of the Christian missionary with the false belief of the pagan, but it also hints at the kind of knowledge, preserved in pagan imagery, that so fascinated Lorenzo the Magnificent and the humanist circle around him. Filippino presents Drusiana's people as doomed and fallen predecessors to Christianity, but it is that alien world that most allows the painter's imagination to run free, to the point that we might ask whether the scene really rejects the pagan world at all.

OPPOSITE

11.21

Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, with frescoes by Filippino Lippi dating from 1493 to 1502. The crescent moon at the top of the window refers to the Strozzi coat of arms.

Across from this scene Filippino depicted another confrontation between pagans and Christians (fig. 11.23). The Apostle Philip, captured by people who wished him to worship the demonically animated statue of Mars on their altar, instead causes the demon, in the form of a dragon, to break out of the bottom of the statue and slay the pagan priest's son. Philip has his back to us, just as a Catholic priest would at Mass in every church; the groups on either side lament the death of the boy or hold their noses at the dragon's sickening odor. The altar itself is a fantastical assemblage, though it resembles no real ancient building so much as the altar zone of a Christian church, as though Filippino had taken a familiar architectural form and rendered it exotic and

strange. Behind the statue, an accumulation of vases, weapons, banners, and other objects top the architrave and crowd the ledges behind the statue. The “bad” devotion imagined here involves the dedication of objects to the worshiped god, just as Catholics would have left *ex-votos* at their own altar. The statue, for its part, would have had its own strong local associations; not only did Florentines believe that their own baptistery had originated as a temple dedicated to Mars, but an inscription on the city's most central bridge, the Ponte Vecchio, also recorded a statue of Mars that had led the city into idolatry. Philip's expulsion of the dragon is thus also a kind of exorcism directed at Florence more widely. As a counterweight to the idol, Lippi added in the border of the

11.23

Filippino Lippi, *St. Philip and the Demon*, 1493.

Fresco. Strozzi Chapel,
Santa Maria Novella,
Florence





fresco the “Veronica” – the true image of Christ produced miraculously when a woman of that name wiped his face during the Passion.

Before the expulsion of the Medici and the rise of Savonarola, it would have been hard to imagine any patron or painter associating the physical remains of antiquity, even ornament itself, so magnificently and menacingly with the demonic. And indeed, the chapel of the Strozzi – long-time Medici rivals, even if Filippo himself had built bridges with the family – represents a radical departure both from the neighboring Tornabuoni project of a few years before and from the chapel Filippo had recently painted in Rome. There are no portraits here, no assertions of mundane political ties, just the marvelous and slightly frightening works of God on earth, uneasily associated with the compelling splendors of a lost pagan antiquity. The preaching of Savonarola and his brethren only exacerbated the conflict felt by many Christians between the wisdom and beauty of the ancient world and the demands of orthodox belief and morality,

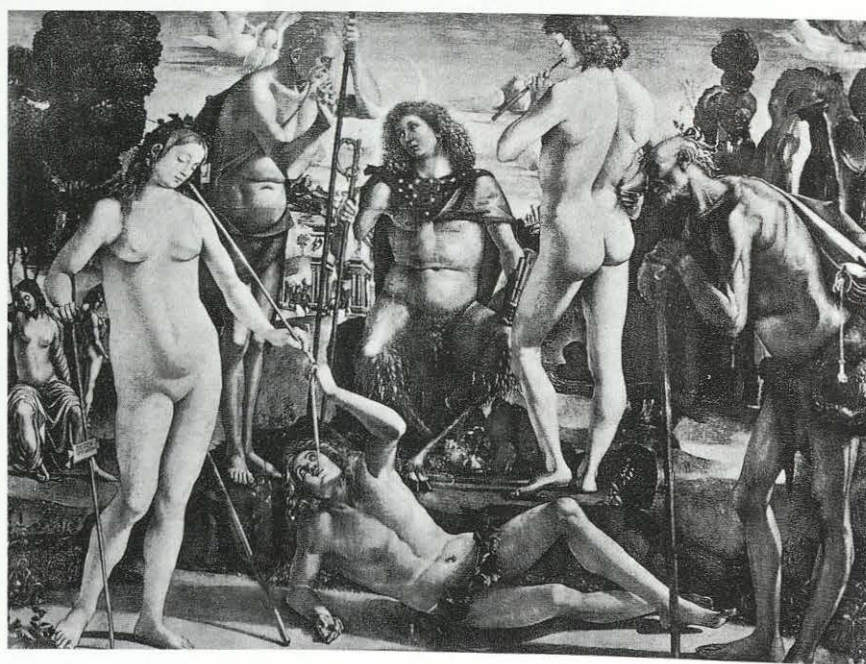
and it is hard to know where in the end the painter himself stood. The pictures bring a completely unrestrained vision of pagan culture to the center of the stage, but to what end?

Judgment Day in Orvieto, “Last Things” in Bologna

Filippino Lippi’s chapel in Santa Maria Novella is not explicitly apocalyptic. It imagines false religion and dwells on themes of death and resurrection, but it sets all of these in a distant past. More terrifying must have been a chapel that Filippo’s near contemporary, Luca Signorelli (*c.* 1445–1523), painted to the south of Florence in the cathedral of Orvieto (fig. 11.24). Signorelli came from Cortona, a small town subject to Florentine dominion. In the 1480s he had painted alongside Botticelli and Perugino in the Sistine Chapel in Rome, and around 1492 he had produced a monumental panel on a pagan

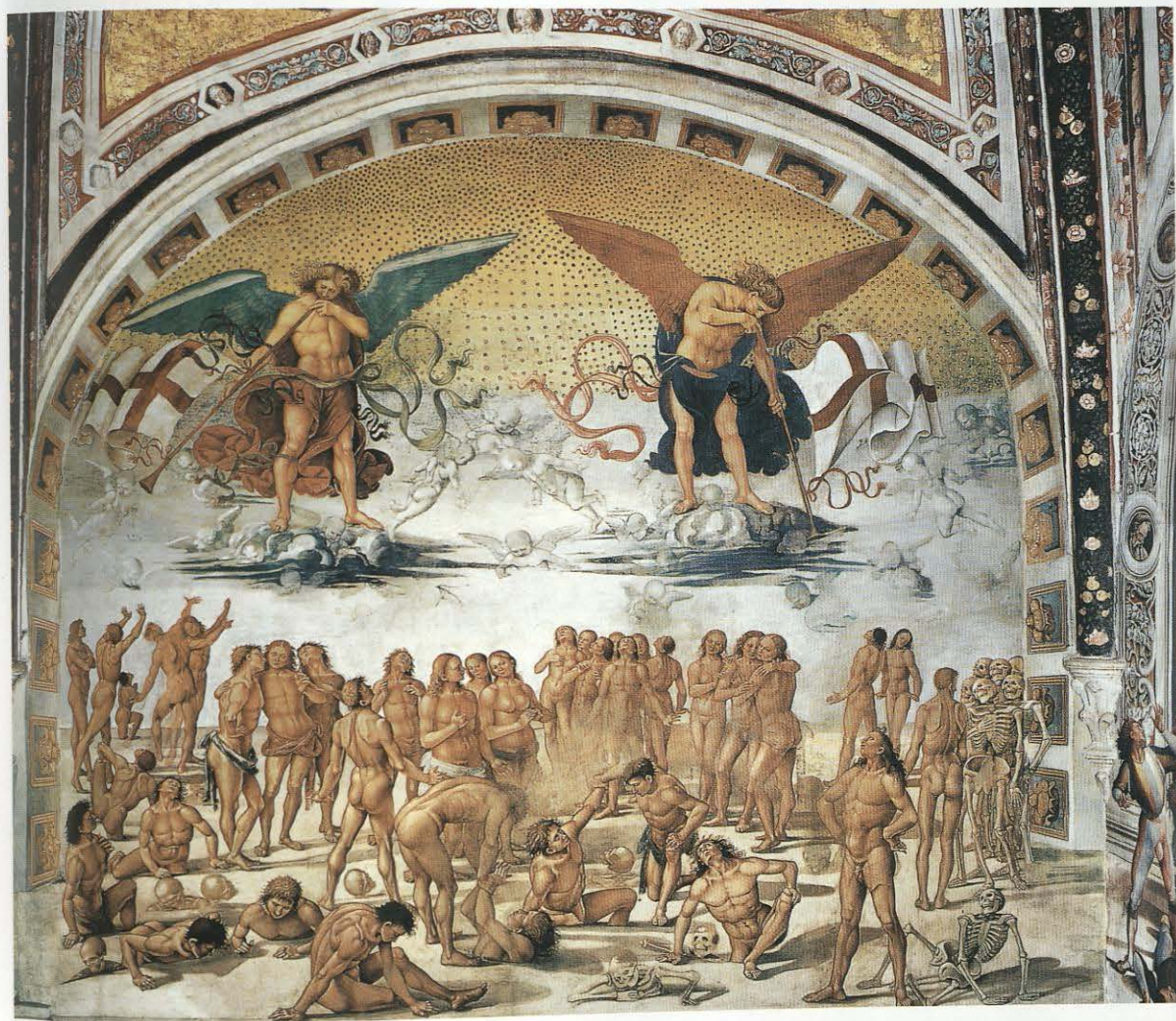
11.24

Cappella Nuova (San Brizio Chapel), Orvieto Cathedral. The frescoes in the altar end of the vault are by Fra Angelico; those on the walls by Luca Signorelli.



LEFT
11.26
Luca Signorelli, *Court of Pan*, c. 1492. Panel, 6'4½" x 8'5" (1.95 x 2.56 m).
Formerly Berlin, destroyed 1945

ABOVE
11.25
Luca Signorelli, *Last Judgment*, 1499–1502.
San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto Cathedral



11.27

Luca Signorelli, *The "Plain of Dry Bones,"* 1499–1502.
Fresco. San Brizio Chapel,
Orvieto Cathedral

theme, the *Court of Pan*, for Lorenzo the Magnificent: that extraordinary work (fig. 11.26), destroyed during the Second World War, showed the god Pan flanked by nude shepherds, nymphs, and rustic divinities in a manner that deliberately recalled the standard Christian theme of the Virgin surrounded by saints. Early in the decade, at least, Signorelli seems to have been able to suggest that Christianity and the ancient fables that preceded it both pointed to a common truth.

Signorelli had been outside of Florence during Savonarola's rise to power, and he may never have heard the friar preach. Nevertheless, he showed himself even more capable than Botticelli of pivoting from the production of secular art for a humanist elite to visualizing how the world might end. Signorelli's point of departure in Orvieto was a group of figures that Fra Angelico and Benozzo Gozzoli had painted on the ceiling of the chapel in the 1440s, showing prophets and, in a mandorla over the south-east windows, a seated Christ, his right arm raised, his left hand on a globe. Signorelli used

the figure of the Savior as the fulcrum for a *Last Judgment* (fig. 11.25), which he added to the wall below. On the left, angels play music and direct the elect upward to the heavenly realm they will join; in the foreground, before a fictive arch and seemingly in the space of the chapel itself, a man kneels in wonder and adoration. On the right, the naked damned flee and wail and a devil leads the way to a point of embarkation, where a demonic boatman will ferry them to the Underworld. Two archangels look down from above, ready with drawn swords to prevent anyone below from trying to pass upward.

This was already a fairly unusual subject for the altar wall of a chapel. More extraordinary still, though, are Signorelli's other murals. On the side walls of the first bay, he extended his depictions of the saved and damned. The elect now grow to a crowd of nudes striking graceful poses as they enjoy an angelic concert and the sight of Christ. The damned, opposite them, are a tumultuous pile, twisted into tortured poses by demons, whose weirdly

Luca Signorelli, *Deeds of the Antichrist*, 1499–1502.
Fresco, San Brizio Chapel,
Orvieto Cathedral



colored bodies create a visual cacophony that represents the very opposite of the harmony across the way. Next to these scenes, on the larger walls that first confront the entering viewer, are two prophetic visions. That on the right (fig. 11.27) derives from the description in Ezekiel 37 of the “plain full of dry bones” that hear the word of God: “I will send spirit into you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to grow over you, and will cover you with skin: and I will give you spirit and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord.” In Signorelli’s version, a mix of skeletons and fully recomposed bodies climb out of the ground; nude men and skeletons look at one another, taking stock of their different conditions. The image heralds the Resurrection initiated by Christ on the altar wall. At the same time, no subject could better offer the opportunity to push one of Alberti’s compositional principles to its logical extreme. In book 2 of *On Painting*, Alberti recommended that painters “first sketch the bones... then add the sinews and muscles, and finally clothe the bones and muscles with flesh and skin.” He conceived this as a practical way of ensuring anatomical accuracy when experimenting with the body’s various possible poses, but Signorelli aligned

the technique with the divine, as though to suggest that God himself would create an Albertian picture at the end of time.

Opposite the image of the “plain of dry bones” is the densest painting in the chapel, *Deeds of the Antichrist* (fig. 11.28). Its protagonist is a Christ-like figure who stands on an ancient rostrum and speaks to an assembled crowd. His words and even his body, though, do not appear to be his own, and a devilish creature emerges from his own form and speaks into his ear. This must be the creature that Revelations describes as the “second beast,” who “had two horns, like a lamb” but who “spoke as a dragon.” The followers of this Antichrist have heaped gifts at his feet, not unlike the pagan ex-votos in Filippino Lippi’s *St. Philip* (see fig. 11.23), and one prominent listener appears to receive (or borrow) money from a Jew (identifiable by his swarthy complexion and yellow robe). In the background, a false saint appears to raise the dead from a bier, suggesting that even scenes like Lippi’s *Dru-siana* (see fig. 11.22), encountered during the Antichrist’s reign, are not to be trusted. The left middle ground promises the eventual casting down of the false prophet

and the killing of his followers. In the foreground left, beside a scene of murder, walk two men in black. They may be the “two witnesses” of which John writes in Revelations 11:3, though some have also taken them for portraits of Signorelli himself and his dead artistic predecessor Fra Angelico. Would Signorelli be in a position to suggest that the whole event was something he himself had somehow “seen”?

Such a conceit could simply suggest that the episodes he shows unfold according to his own imagining, that he and Fra Angelico had witnessed what they painted in their own heads before rendering it on the wall. Signorelli, who may or may not have been following a brief approved by his patrons, here staged bold claims about the visionary power of poetry, and the identification of painters with visionary poets. In roundels in the lower zone of one wall, he showed the circumstances according to which the poet Dante claimed to have written the *Inferno* (fig. 11.29): the ancient Roman poet Virgil, Dante’s key predecessor, guided the Italian through the



11.29

Luca Signorelli, *Scenes from Dante's Inferno*, 1499–1502.
San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto Cathedral



11.30

Luca Signorelli, *The Apocalypse*, 1499–1502.
Orvieto Cathedral

11.31

Lorenzo Costa, *Triumph of Fame*, 1488–92. Fresco.
Bentivoglio Chapel,
San Giacomo Maggiore,
Bologna



Underworld, revealing to him the sights that the *Divine Comedy* would then describe. It is as if Signorelli now wished to present himself as a new Dante: just as Virgil led the poet through the *Inferno* he would describe in verse, so Fra Angelico accompanies him on a tour of the world he would paint. Another possibility is that Signorelli wished to connect the events of the Second Coming to other things he had personally observed. The friars

that stand in the group behind the orator on the rostrum wear Dominican robes: they are members of Savonarola's Order. In the years after the preacher's death, his defenders and enemies debated whether he had been a true prophet, as he claimed, or a false one, like the Antichrist himself. Did Signorelli mean to suggest that recent history in Florence had fulfilled the Bible's own prophecies of how things would end?



11.32

Lorenzo Costa, *Triumph of Death*, 1488–92. Fresco, Bentivoglio Chapel, San Giacomo Maggiore, Bologna

Whatever the case, the image he gave to viewers leaving the chapel was the most ominous of all (fig. 11.30). To the right of the passage leading back into the cathedral proper, a prophet in a turban and a sibyl with a book foretell the destruction of the world, and what they describe unfolds behind them, as buildings crumble, the sky darkens, and the moon and sun go into eclipse. To the left, demons breathe fiery rays onto a helpless crowd,

which collapses toward the front of the picture plane. If Dürer and Savonarola brought the Apocalypse into the viewer's time, Signorelli brought it into their space.

In Bologna a decade earlier, between 1488 and 1491, the Ferrarese painter Lorenzo Costa (1460–1535) decorated a chapel for the leader of the city's dominant faction, Giovanni II Bentivoglio (1443–1508), which also gave visual form to "last things." Costa, like Signorelli,



ABOVE
11.33
 Lorenzo Costa the Elder, *Virgin and Child with Giovanni II Bentivoglio and His Family*, 1488. Oil on canvas. San Giacomo Maggiore, Bologna

RIGHT
11.34
 Leonardo da Vinci, *Study of the Principal Organs and the Arterial System of a Female Figure*, c. 1508–10. Pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, over black chalk, 16⁷/₈ x 13" (47 x 32.8 cm). Royal Library, Windsor

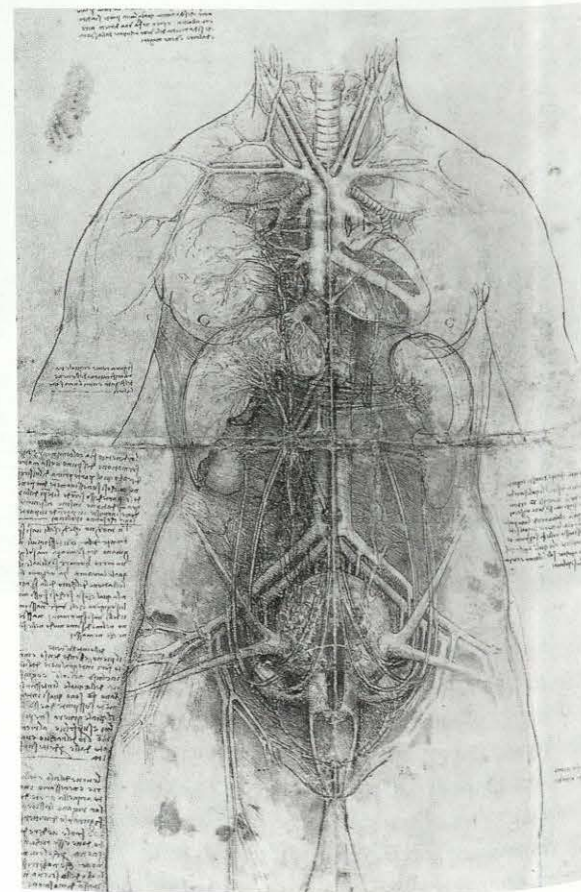
drew on Italian poetry, but in this case the poetic material has assumed monumental form, and there is no trace of the terrifying imagery of the Book of Revelation. Costa's frescoes, like Lo Scheggia's childbirth tray from half a century earlier (see figs. 6.27–6.28), took as its starting point the *Triumphs of Petrarch*, a poem describing a dream vision in which a series of allegories passes the poet in a spectacular procession. Its vivid images had been popular subjects for domestic decorations, but the appearance of the *Triumph of Fame* and *Triumph of Death* in a chapel is unprecedented. The two paintings (figs. 11.31 and 11.32) are larger than the chapel's altarpiece, a *Virgin and Child with Saints* by the painter Francesco Francia (1450–1517), and correspond in scale to another, equally extraordinary image by Costa, the *Virgin and Child* (fig. 11.33), this time accompanied by portraits of Giovanni, his wife Ginevra Sforza, and their sons and daughters.

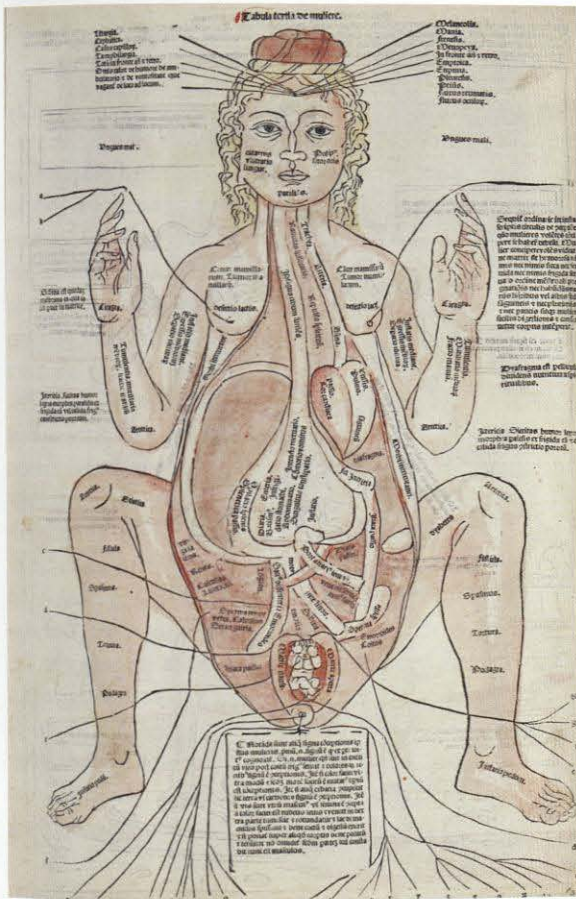
The innovative character of the Bentivoglio Chapel's decoration is indicative of the improvisatory character of Giovanni's regime. He was not the legitimate prince or lord of Bologna, but his patronage and ceremonial style imitated the rulers of Mantua, Ferrara, and Milan, with whom he cultivated ties of marriage and friendship, as he did with the Medici. Yet the support of such powers, and his very public attempts at emulating princely style, could not save the regime, which was swept away by the conquering Pope Julius II in 1506.

Leonardo in Sforza Milan

The enormous amount of wall space that Signorelli, Costa, and Lippi gave over to poetical fiction and antiquarian fantasy helps explain why Savonarola and others might have felt that sacred narrative was under threat. And as Leonardo's work from the 1490s shows, competition came not just from secular poetry but also from the new investigations into the natural world, as well as from the expectations of a courtly audience.

During Leonardo's first decade in Milan, where we left him at the end of the last chapter, his patron Ludovico Sforza employed him primarily in the production of entertainments. The painter staged plays, conceived ephemeral wedding decorations, and helped to organize tournaments. He invented emblems and heraldic devices. He wrote fables and satires. He composed *paragoni*, witty reflections on the nobility of painting relative to other arts such as sculpture, music, and poetry. Most of all, he drew. The description of Leonardo's volumes as "notebooks" and his famous backwards writing can give the impression that these were private affairs, research that served no end but the advancement of his own knowledge. Still, just as many of the problems that occupied Leonardo took their start in painting or engineering





FAR LEFT

11.35

Johannes de Ketham,
*Anatomy of a Pregnant
Woman*, woodcut
illustration from
Fasciculus medicinae, 1491.
Fondazione Giorgio Cini,
Venice



LEFT

11.36

Leonardo da Vinci, study
of a human skull, c. 1489.
Pen and dark brown ink
with leadpoint (?) on paper.
Royal Library, Windsor,
19058r

assignments, so must many of his drawings presume an audience. Throughout his later career he would produce drawings (fig. 11.34) that imitated and corrected the anatomical studies he encountered in this period, such as the woodcut illustrations in the small book Johannes de Ketham published in 1491 (fig. 11.35). The carefully ruled blocks of text accompanying the skull drawings (fig. 11.36) now in Windsor Castle imitate the tidy organization of illuminated manuscripts meant for preservation and distribution, and other notes suggest that Leonardo, too, considered publishing a book on the human body.

Other drawings on poetic and allegorical themes aimed at delight no less than at science. A sheet now in Oxford, for example (fig. 11.37), shows the artist experimenting with ways to represent “Envy” in pictorial form. As the elaborate inscriptions explain, the female personification on the left rides a figure of Death to show that envy never dies. An arrow of laurel and myrtle, symbols of virtue, strikes her ear, indicating that the envious are offended by good deeds. With her left hand, Envy makes an obscene gesture toward God. On the right, a male figure of virtue discovers Envy as a kind of Siamese twin, for “as soon as virtue is born, it gives birth to envy against itself” and because “one would sooner find a body without a shadow than virtue without envy.” He pokes an olive branch into her eye, showing that the very sight of virtue hurts her. Explaining the meaning of such pictures



11.37

Leonardo da Vinci, *Two
Allegories of Envy*, c. 1483–85.
Pen and brown ink, traces of red
chalk, 8¹/₄ x 11³/₈" (21 x 28.9 cm).
Christ Church, Oxford

11.38

Leonardo da Vinci, *Group of Five Grotesque Heads*, c. 1494. Pen and brown ink, 10¹/₄ x 8" (26 x 20.5 cm). Royal Library, Windsor



would have functioned as a kind of courtly game, though the drawings also point in the direction of Leonardo's *paragoni*: "Painting is a poem that is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting that is heard and not seen." "If you call painting mechanical because at first it is manual, the hands figure what is found in the imagination, and you writers draw what you find in your minds manually with the pen."

A series of grotesque heads may reflect Leonardo's role as a purveyor of wonders for the Milanese courtly elite (fig. 11.38). Today it is tempting to dwell on the disturbing humor in the drawings, the curiosity about human deformity that they attest. Leonardo, however, probably had at least partly a more serious purpose. Some of the drawings appear to be caricatures of pompous courtiers, lascivious monks, delirious old people, and other types Leonardo would have seen around him in Milan, though they also testify to his increasing interests in the relation between the mind (or soul) and the body. He observed on several occasions in his writings that the human soul, which established an individual's character and guided his movements, also left a permanent imprint on his physical form. The viewer supposedly knows what the people in such drawings are like simply from the way they look.

It is in the spirit of these interests – Leonardo's study of human nature and his courtly audience's fascination with the wonders of art – that we should approach Leonardo's portrait of Cecilia Gallerani (fig. 11.39), which probably dates from around 1490. The correlative to

Leonardo's fascination with extreme human deformity was his ability to generate absolute and alluring beauty – a capacity that for Leonardo demonstrated the power of art itself. The sitter, a Milanese noblewoman, was also the favorite of Duke Ludovico. Like Ginevra de' Benci, whom Leonardo had painted in Florence around 1478–80 (see fig. 9.20), Cecilia was famous in her day as a poet, writing in both Italian and Latin. She had a dominant position in courtly life, especially before Ludovico's marriage to an Este princess and her own to another man in 1491. The ermine she holds alludes to the duke himself, as the animal had featured in one of Ludovico's *impres*e. It also flatters the sitter, however, for writers had long associated the white creature with purity and moderation. The portrait thus belongs in the emblematic tradition to which Leonardo had already contributed while living in Florence, in that it incorporates elements taken from nature that also symbolize the sitter. As earlier portraitists had done, the painter idealizes the sitter's features to such a degree that it may have been difficult to identify her. This, too, helps explain the inclusion of the animal, which puns on her name: *galee*, the Greek word for ermine, is nearly the root of "Gallerani." The joke is itself flattering, for only one of Cecilia's learning would have caught it.

Another of Ludovico's courtiers, the poet Bernardo Bellincioni, wrote a sonnet in praise of Leonardo's picture, rhapsodizing that the painter had made Gallerani's eyes so beautiful as to obscure the sun, that he had made it difficult to distinguish nature from art, that he made her "appear to listen." He cast the artist's achievement as one of attributing a psychology to his figure, suggesting that Cecilia seemed to look, to hear, not merely to be the subject of an adoring gaze. However conventional the verse may be, it draws attention to the difference between Leonardo's conception of the portrait and the almost subjectless profile views that had not yet gone out of vogue (compare, for example, fig. 9.26). The conceit also conforms with Leonardo's own research interests; in his anatomical studies, Leonardo had been attempting, among other things, to find the location of the soul inside the body.

Leonardo's new mode of portraiture evidently appealed to Italy's courtly elites. Isabella d'Este, the marchioness of Mantua, sought to borrow the Gallerani portrait in 1498; her attempts to have Leonardo paint her own portrait after the fall of the Sforza a few years later never got further than a profile drawing, which suggests that she wanted the portrait to conform with the princely idiom of the portrait medal (fig. 11.40). No one has yet managed to identify the woman portrayed in the so-called "*Belle Ferronnière*" (fig. 11.41), but she was certainly a person of distinction. The turning of her body almost into profile, her sober expression, and the fictive

OPPOSITE

11.39

Leonardo da Vinci, *Lady with an Ermine (Cecilia Gallerani)*, before 1490. Oil on panel, 21³/₄ x 15³/₄" (54 x 40 cm). Czartoryski Museum, Cracow



RIGHT

11.40

Leonardo da Vinci, *Isabella d'Este*, 1500. Black, red, and white chalk, and yellow pastel (?) over leadpoint, on paper prepared with a bone-colour dry pigment, 24⁷/₈ x 18¹/₈" (63 x 46 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris



FAR RIGHT

11.41

Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a Lady* ("La Belle Ferroniere"), c. 1495–99. Oil on panel, 24³/₄ x 17³/₄" (63 x 45 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris



11.42

Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, *Idealized Portrait of Girolamo Casio*, 1490s. Oil on panel, 16³/₄ x 11¹/₈" (42.5 x 28.3 cm). The Duke of Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth



balustrade separating her from the viewer all give the portrait a formality that distances it from the Gallerani picture. This may have seemed more appropriate for a married woman of high status, or it may simply indicate that Leonardo completed the painting in collaboration with a less gifted assistant. Both possibilities would suggest that Leonardo had become a commodity of limited availability for which prospective patrons would have to compete. This, as much as the inherent appeal of his manner, must account for the rise in these years of a circle of "Leonardesque" painters in Milan, including some, like Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (1446/7–1516), who specialized in portraits. In paintings like the one now in Chatsworth (fig. 11.42), Boltraffio captured the hallmarks of Leonardo's Milanese style – black background, *sfumato* to soften the face, expressive gesture of the hand – but he dulls the expression and avoids the time-consuming and intellectually challenging task of unifying tones, favoring a more Flemish attention to surface and texture.

Leonardo and Sacred Painting

Was Leonardo's way of painting appropriate for all tasks? Ludovico Sforza is documented as having commissioned only one altarpiece, the *Pala Sforzesca* (fig. 11.43) made for the church of Sant' Ambrogio ad Nemos in Milan and now in the Brera Gallery. Scholars have yet to provide a convincing attribution for the piece: it

was certainly made by an artist familiar with Leonardo's painting, though what is striking is the degree to which it rejects that example. The squirming Christ Child suggests knowledge of Leonardo's experimentation with compositions that would link the infant to the Virgin in novel ways, but compared to a work like the *Virgin of the Rocks* (see fig. 10.39), the picture is quite conservative in conception, placing all the characters in perfect symmetry. Though the gestures indicate that the saints in the back advocate for the donors in the front, every figure seems drawn into itself; Mary in particular sits in a kind of meditative trance; she interacts neither with her child nor with her worshipers nor with the beholder. The black background and the treatment of the Virgin's drapery – up-modeling the blue and down-modeling the red – pick up devices from Leonardo, but the fierce expressions, the hardness of the forms, the fantastic classicizing furniture, and the profusion of ornament rather follow the manner of Andrea Mantegna. Did the duke favor a different pictorial mode for ritual settings?

Certainly Leonardo himself in these years also sought to take on larger projects connected to the Church. In 1490, he competed for (and lost) the commission to design the spire of Milan Cathedral. Two years later, he helped create a new square before the cathedral of Vigevano (fig. 11.44), a small town south-west of Milan: this, along with the cathedral square in Pienza, was among the first planned *piazze* of the Renaissance. One year after that, Leonardo was again thinking about Milan Cathedral, and contributing decorations for the wedding of Ludovico's niece. Leonardo's most important work in these years, however, turned out to be for the refectory, or dining hall, of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

Ludovico had chosen this as his burial site and had consequently commissioned the painter-architect Donato



ABOVE

11.43

Master of the Pala Sforzesca, *Pala Sforzesca*, 1490s. Tempera on panel, 7'6⁷/₈ x 5'5¹/₈" (2.3 x 1.65 m). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

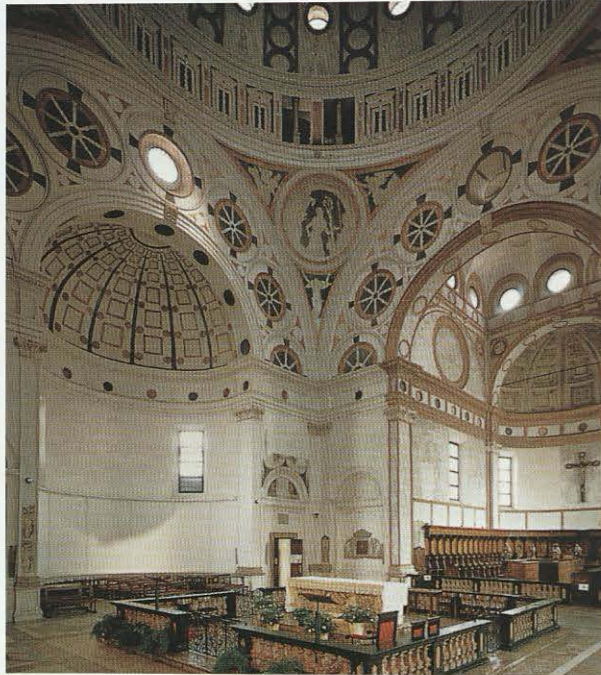
LEFT

11.44

Arcaded square in Vigevano, with Ludovico Sforza's ducal palace behind. The renovations, carried out in the 1490s, are sometimes attributed to Leonardo.

11.45

Crossing and choir by
Bramante at Santa Maria
delle Grazie, Milan



BELOW

11.46

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last
Supper*, 1494–98. Mural.
Refectory of Santa Maria
delle Grazie, Milan



Bramante (1444–1514) to add a huge domed crossing to the church and a choir extending behind the high altar (fig. 11.45). Leonardo may have had an unofficial role here too: he seems to have exchanged ideas for centralized, domed structures with Bramante, a friend who would take the theme to new heights at St. Peter's in Rome a decade later. The duke envisioned the new choir as a setting for his own tomb; the site is comparable in position to the tomb chapel that Ghirlandaio's patron Giovanni Tornabuoni had unveiled just a few years before (see fig. 11.6), though in scale the duke's vision sooner rivaled Pope Nicholas V's unexecuted project for St. Peter's from nearly half a century earlier (see p. 179).

Leonardo, meanwhile, focused on the church's refectory. *The Last Supper* (fig. 11.46) belonged to a larger cycle of decorations, including a *Crucifixion* on the opposite wall with a portrait of Ludovico and his family. Above the scene with Christ and the Apostles, Leonardo painted monumental images of the Sforza family arms, giving its members a presence in that history, too, and a letter from Ludovico states that he additionally planned to



have Leonardo paint a third wall of the room. *The Last Supper* was a conventional subject for painted refectories, especially in Florence, where Leonardo trained. The duke chose a subject that corresponded to the function of the room, though he also wished to turn the space into something more personal than a monastic dining hall. The imaginary room in which the Apostles eat extends

the upper level of the space in which the duke himself sometimes came for meals.

The Florentine convention, as we saw earlier with Andrea del Castagno (*see* fig. 6.16), was to place all the dining Apostles except the traitor Judas on the far side of a long table. Leonardo, too, adopted an arrangement that allowed all his characters to face the beholder; but here even Judas joins the rest of the company. This approach made it easier for the painter to use the assignment, the largest work he would ever complete, as an opportunity to translate experiments he had undertaken in other media. Leonardo treated each of the figures as an individual problem of human expression, a topic that had fascinated him at least from the beginning of the decade, as we saw with the grotesque heads. One intense ink and **metalpoint** drawing on blue paper (fig. 11.48), for example, imagines St. Peter as a scowling character who turns and raises his arm as though in response to something taking place outside the picture field. Peter's physiognomy centers on a furrowed brow that in turn implies a mind in motion. In the mural itself (fig. 11.47), Peter directs the same brow and the same grotesque nose toward Christ, providing contrast both with Judas, who leans away from Christ, and with John, whose youthful sweetness (entirely conventional in *Last Supper* imagery) distinguishes his expression from Peter's anger.

Confrontations like this reveal the artificial, staged quality of the composition. On the whole, though, Leonardo resisted supernatural effects. At the rear of the space are three windows looking out onto a landscape. The illumination these provide, and particularly the

11.47

Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*, detail of central group. Mural. Refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan

LEFT

11.48

Leonardo da Vinci, *Bearded Old Man in Half-Length, Three-quarter View Facing to the Right (St. Peter)*. Metalpoint, reworked with pen and brown ink, on blue prepared paper, 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (14.5 x 11.3 cm). Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna



central one before which Christ sits, frames the heads of the holy personages in a way that suggests a radiating aura; the windows in this way take over the traditional role of haloes. And in the hope of achieving the same kinds of atmospheric effects he had developed in his panel paintings, Leonardo worked not in true *fresco*, but in an experimental oil-based medium. Surely he knew the risks this involved, though he must also have been reluctant to work with the speed and regularity a more traditional approach would have required. A writer at the court, Matteo Bandello, reports that Leonardo:

used to climb the scaffolding early in the morning...and from the rising of the sun until its setting, not once let the brush leave his hand, forgetting to eat and drink and painting continuously. Then there would be two, three, or four days when he would not set his hand to the picture, but would remain in front of it, and for one or two hours a day just contemplate, consider, and, examining them together, judge his figures.... I have also seen him come directly to the church and, having ascended the scaffolding, take the brush, apply one or two strokes to a figure, then leave.

Ultimately, Leonardo's approach had disastrous effects, as the paint did not bind to the surface as true *fresco* would have; a writer in 1560 reports that the picture by that time

was already in ruinous condition. The wrecked state of the wall invited subsequent users of the room to treat it badly. The monks cut a door into the mural in 1652, its eighteenth-century caretakers had the scene extensively repainted, and Napoleon's troops used the painting for target practice. Despite a careful recent restoration, the traces of Leonardo's own hand no longer let themselves be easily read.

In a sense, moreover, the work's illegibility is not merely a matter of its condition. The "response" of the sitter in the Cecilia Gallerani portrait (see fig. 11.39), along with Leonardo's physiognomic drawings and a number of his theoretical statements, encourage us to see the mural in terms of internally motivated actions and interactions, bodies whose gestures reveal a specific purpose. But just what is Christ, at the very center of the picture, doing? In John 13, Christ announces at the meal that one of his disciples will betray him; "the disciples therefore looked one upon another, doubting of whom he spoke." When asked, Christ replied only: "He it is to whom I shall reach bread dipped." Is Leonardo, then, showing the Apostles responding in confusion and dismay to Christ's words, as he gestures toward the bread and reaches for the wine in which he will dip it? Perhaps, but here as throughout this book, it becomes clear that paintings do not simply illustrate texts. In Matthew 26, which tells a variation on the same story, the episode concludes with Christ taking bread, blessing and breaking it, giving it to his disciples, and saying: "Take ye, and eat. This is my body." Catholics took this act to institute the ceremony of Communion. If the viewer understood Christ's hand to be indicating the bread he tells his troubled followers to eat, it would lend a ritual aspect to every meal that the monks in the refectory took before the painting. With the end of the century on the horizon and Ludovico's French enemies already threatening his territory, the image of Christ blessing the assembly may have appealed to him as well.

11.49

Michelangelo, *Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs*,
c. 1492. Marble, 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ "
(84.5 x 89.2 cm).
Casa Buonarroti, Florence



Michelangelo: Early Works in Marble

Florence

Some artists, as we have seen, were deeply taken by Savonarola's sermons in Florence. For others, however, it must have been the fall of the Medici as much as the rise of the Dominican that most affected them. Lorenzo the Magnificent had earlier invited the young Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564), then a teenage apprentice to Ghirlandaio and perhaps an assistant on the Tornabuoni Chapel (see fig. 11.6), to join his household in Florence. It was probably Michelangelo's interest in ancient sculpture, more than his precocity with the brush, that attracted the

patron's attention. Beginning in 1489, the fourteen-year-old had kept company with a group of young artists who worked and studied in the garden of a Medici property in the northern part of the city, little more than a block from where Savonarola would live and preach – indeed, one early biographer reports that Michelangelo taught himself to sculpt after borrowing the tools of a mason working at the church of San Marco. The head of the garden clique was the aged Bertoldo di Giovanni, whose works included not only small statuettes like the *Pegasus* group (see fig. 10.4), but also at least one bronze relief on a classical theme. Among Michelangelo's earliest surviving works is a marble in a similar format (fig. 11.49), showing a mythical fight between a group of centaurs and the human tribe of Lapiths who had invited them to a wedding.

The episode, known from the Roman poet Ovid, was one whose significance the humanist Poliziano is reported to have explained. Michelangelo's interest in the subject thus points to his connection with the philologists and other literary figures who surrounded Lorenzo the Magnificent; in this respect, it is as close conceptually to Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (see fig. 9.25) as it is to anything from the 1490s. The actual story Michelangelo shows, nevertheless, is difficult to decipher. In contrast to Donatello, whose influential reliefs depended on the use of perspective to create illusionistic depth, Michelangelo simply filled up the available space with a tangle of bodies, covering the field from bottom to top in the manner of a Roman sarcophagus or a pulpit by Giovanni Pisano (see fig. 1.40). Nor are the identities of the characters Michelangelo depicts entirely clear. At the bottom of the scene, just left of center, is the haunch of a centaur, and elsewhere we get glimpses of a horse's leg or a tail, but it is not always easy to say which characters are centaurs and which are human. Other artists sometimes characterized the centaurs as enemies of civilization, giving their opponents modern weapons as the hybrid beasts fought with debris from the banquet, but the most prominent fighting instruments in Michelangelo's version are the large rocks wielded by the figures to the left, and these appear to be Lapiths.

Michelangelo may have modified the story to bring it closer to his own intellectual concerns. The choice to explore the expressive potential of the nude male body, even at the expense of legible narrative, reflected the lessons Michelangelo had learned from studying antiquities. What distinguished his work from the creations of other workshops of his day, however, even those with similar interests in the ancient past, was his devotion to a narrow range of media, the properties of which he made into objects of reflection in their own right. Across the top of the *Centaur* relief is a wide band of partially worked marble, scored with a claw chisel, the tool that a marble sculptor would use to rough out compositions before



proceeding to smaller chisels and files. The passage contrasts dramatically with the highly polished torsos of the central characters; the whole work draws attention to the process by which it was made, the degrees of finish a slab would pass through as the sculptor used finer and finer instruments. That large depicted stones should be put on such prominent display reminds the viewer that they are Michelangelo's own instruments no less than his characters' and suggest that he conceived his own art as a kind of battle. This is a conceit that would return in his *David* – another hero who uses a stone to fight – a decade later.

Lorenzo the Magnificent died in 1492, and the Medici household now headed by Lorenzo's son Piero seems not to have held the same appeal for the artist. In 1494, Michelangelo began traveling, first to Venice and then to Bologna, where he carved three small stone figures for a shrine. By the time he returned to Florence in 1495, the Medici had been expelled. The artist remained only briefly in the city, producing a marble *Cupid* so persuasively similar to an ancient work of art that an acquaintance allegedly managed to pass it off as an actual antiquity to Raffaele Riario, a cardinal living in Rome. Riario invited Michelangelo to the papal city, where he would complete his two most important early marbles.

ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT

11.50

Michelangelo, *Bacchus*,
1496–98. Marble, height
6'7½" (2 m). Museo
Nazionale del Bargello,
Florence

Rome

The first, which Michelangelo started in 1496 and completed in 1498 while living with Riario, was a marble *Bacchus* (fig. 11.50). This lifesized mythological work seems to have been intended from the outset for display in a sculpture garden, like the one owned by the Medici in Florence where the artist had begun his career: it is hard to imagine any other context that could accommodate such a blatantly pagan and sensual image. Riario himself had a sculpture garden, as did the banker Jacopo Galli, whom Giorgio Vasari names as the work's patron. Carved in the round, the statue invites the viewer to circle it: only from the side and the back do we get a proper view of the little satyr that accompanies the wine god. Bacchus literally needs the second figure to stay on his feet. The question of whether he will stand or topple, on the other hand, is also central to the work's theme. From the time of Donatello, sculptors who conceived free-standing figures in imitation of the antique tended to

show a shift of weight from one foot onto the other. This seemed to be a principle to which the ancients had all adhered, and it gave the figure itself a graceful form. Michelangelo, however, pushes this to an absurd extreme, hinting that Bacchus leans back and to the side – onto the satyr – because he is staggering drunk. Whereas Leonardo explored the possibility of bringing depicted people to life by showing not just a surface appearance but some kind of interiority, Michelangelo carved a figure that seemed to be inhabited by spirits of a different kind. As the satyr chomps into a grape, Bacchus tries to steady his cup to prevent his drink from spilling.

The *Bacchus*, though displayed from the beginning in a private setting, must have attracted much attention in the city, for shortly thereafter, the French Cardinal Jean Villiers de La Grolais asked Michelangelo to carve a *Pietà* (fig. 11.51) for a chapel dedicated to the Virgin on the side of St. Peter's. The space itself, circular in plan, was unusual, and its subsequent destruction makes it difficult to say with certainty just how the work was originally displayed. It may have functioned as an altarpiece, with the Virgin presenting Christ's flesh to the celebrant at the altar

BELOW LEFT

11.51

Michelangelo, *Pietà*,
1498–99. Marble, height
5'8¼" (1.74 m).
St. Peter's, Rome

BELOW RIGHT

11.52

Baccio da Montelupo,
Crucifix, 1496. Polychrome
wood, 5'6½" (1.7 m)
(Christ); 11'6½" x 6'4" (3.5
x 1.95 m) (Cross). San
Marco, Florence



table, or it may have rested directly on the ground as a tomb marker – Villiers, already in his late sixties, intended the chapel to serve as his place of burial, no doubt in emulation of the burial sites that counterparts like Cardinal Carafa were beginning to construct (see fig. 11.19).

Lifesize sculpted images of Christ were quite common in Michelangelo's day, though most were *Crucifixions*, done in wood: the workshop of Baccio da Montelupo (1469–c. 1523), a sculptor who had studied alongside Michelangelo in the Medici garden, turned out nearly two dozen of these. Baccio was a devout follower of Savonarola, who seems especially to have liked what the sculptor made: in 1496, the year Michelangelo began his *Bacchus*, the preacher had Baccio produce a lifesize Crucifix (fig. 11.52) for the church of San Marco in Florence. The sculptor employed a more vivid polychromy than Donatello and Brunelleschi had in their analogous works of the early fifteenth century: red blood pours from disturbingly real-looking nails and thorns across the flesh-colored body of Baccio's Christ. The sacral quality of the roughly hewn wooden cross may have seemed all the more insistent at a moment when sculptors were regularly responding to marbles of the pagan past. Against such a tradition, Michelangelo's *Pietà* group could not have looked more alien.

The white Carrara marble in which Michelangelo carved may have seemed especially suitable for the representation of deathly pallor; it also lent his figures an unreal beauty. The artist does not really treat them as living presences: like the increasingly well-known pagan statues of the ancients, the pair seem to belong to another time and place. Michelangelo opted for a version of the *Pietà* theme that centered not on Christ presented iconically by attendant angels (compare fig. 9.8), but rather on the Virgin's grief at her son's death. Her monumental drapery, itself a tour de force, adds mass and helps unify the horizontal male body with her own; this disguises the work's narrative disjunctiveness. Michelangelo gave Mary the face not of a woman who could be the mother of a thirty-three-year-old man, but of a teenage girl. He breaks with historical plausibility to elicit our sympathy, but also to show the Virgin in what contemporaries would have regarded as her most perfect state.

Ironically enough, Michelangelo's signature hinted at the work's *imperfection*. The inscription in the band that runs across the Virgin's chest (fig. 11.53) reads "Michelangelo Buonarroti of Florence was making this," using the Latin imperfect "faciebat" rather than the more common "fecit" ("he made this"), again to draw attention to the process and duration of the carving. Little of what is visible here, by comparison with his *Lapiths and Centaurs* (see fig. 11.49), could be said to be unfinished, even if the pair sit on a distinctly rocky base, but



the fact that Michelangelo wanted viewers in 1499 to think about his labors in connection with a devotional act suggests that he, too, may have had some trepidation about the century to come. Later in life, Michelangelo is said to have remarked that he could still hear the voice of Savonarola thundering in his head. With the exception of a historical bust and the sculptures that originated in other tomb projects, he would never again sculpt a work like the *Bacchus*, nor any other marble on an explicitly pagan theme.

11-53
Michelangelo, *Pietà*, detail.
St. Peter's, Rome



1500–1510

Human Nature

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12

1500—1510

Human Nature

The Heroic Body and Its Alternatives

If art in the years leading up to 1500 returned repeatedly to images of catastrophe and the end of history, this corresponded with a lived experience of rupture with the past. In 1499, the French invaded the region for the second time in a decade, toppling Duke Ludovico Sforza in Milan. Naples, which had had four kings in six years, fell to France the following year. Venice, newly at war with the Ottoman empire, lost several major sea battles, the first in a series of military misfortunes that before the end of the decade would leave the city not only weakened on the water but also stripped of much of its huge territorial state in northern Italy. Florence, following the overthrow of the Medici and the revolt against Savonarola, entered the new century as a reborn republic, without the Medici pulling the strings. Pope Alexander VI was encouraging his son, the *condottiere* Cesare Borgia, to seize territory in central Italy, ousting the Malatesta in Rimini and the Montefeltro from Urbino, among others. Alexander himself would die after a violent illness in 1503, leaving his successor, Julius II, as the head of a militarized papal state, aimed at the domination of central Italy.

Many Italians in these years, seeing all of this through the lens of the prophecies and astrological predictions that the half-millennium had inspired, feared that worse disasters were yet to come. Some, however, maintained a sense of possibility, even of optimism.

The Florentine civil servants Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini, both of them political thinkers and historians, were among those who set aside the idea that history revealed the unfolding of a divine plan, with apocalypse or salvation as its climax; these men looked to history as a guide, wondering whether events that took place in the past provide reassurance of an orderly and positive outcome for the unsettled present. Did history teach us that outcomes could be shaped by the inspired actions of heroic human beings? Or, more pessimistically, did history reveal no more order than the random growth and decay visible in the natural world, in which human beings acted out of instincts hardly more rational or noble than those of other living creatures, and probably less so?

Michelangelo's *David* from 1504 (see fig. 12.3) seems to answer the first of these questions in the affirmative; while Piero di Cosimo's (c. 1462–1521) contemporaneous *Stories of Primitive Man* series corresponds to the latter

12.1

Piero di Cosimo, *Hunting Scene*, c. 1500. Oil and tempera on panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (70.5 x 169.5 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York





point of view. Piero's *Hunting Scene* (fig. 12.1) and *Return from the Hunt* (fig. 12.2) are believed to have been painted for the house of the wealthy anti-Medicean Francesco Pugliese. Like Botticelli's *Primavera* (see fig. 9.23), they were *spalliere*, and they drew their imagery from ancient poetry. The subject matter here, however, is not the idealized world of the ancient gods and heroes, the "Golden Age" described by the poet Ovid when the gods dwelt upon the earth. Piero's human figures, not to mention the half-human hybrids that appear in one of the panels, seem in addition worlds away from the delicate beings who populate the paintings of Andrea Mantegna and Filippino Lippi (see figs. 11.4–11.5 and 11.20–11.23), and the physical world they inhabit is distinctly harsher. Piero was a skilled landscape painter; he had been taught by Cosimo Rosselli, who was probably also the teacher of the pioneering draftsman Fra Bartolomeo (see fig. 11.2). Piero used landscape, however, to envision the most basic conditions of human life within the natural world. The series created an explicit alternative to the Golden Age mythologies of the Medici era, as if these were no more than lies that had sustained the rule of tyrants. Piero presents a far from idealizing view of the origins of man, reminding the viewer of the instinctual and violent creatures that the first human beings actually were. He drew freely upon the great philosophical poem *On the Nature of Things* by the first-century BCE Roman writer Lucretius. Lucretius was a "materialist," that is, he believed that there was no reality beyond the physical universe, which obeyed its own laws without divine intervention, and that human beings possessed no immortal souls. All natural phenomena, Lucretius maintained, could be explained through the movement of atoms. Gods did not inter-

vene in terrestrial affairs; what people called gods were mere metaphors for natural processes: Venus for sexual compulsion and the desire to reproduce, Mars for rage and aggression, and so on. History began with humanity's desperate struggle for survival in a world for which it was ill prepared, and to which it had to adapt by mastering tools and weapons and by harnessing the element of fire.

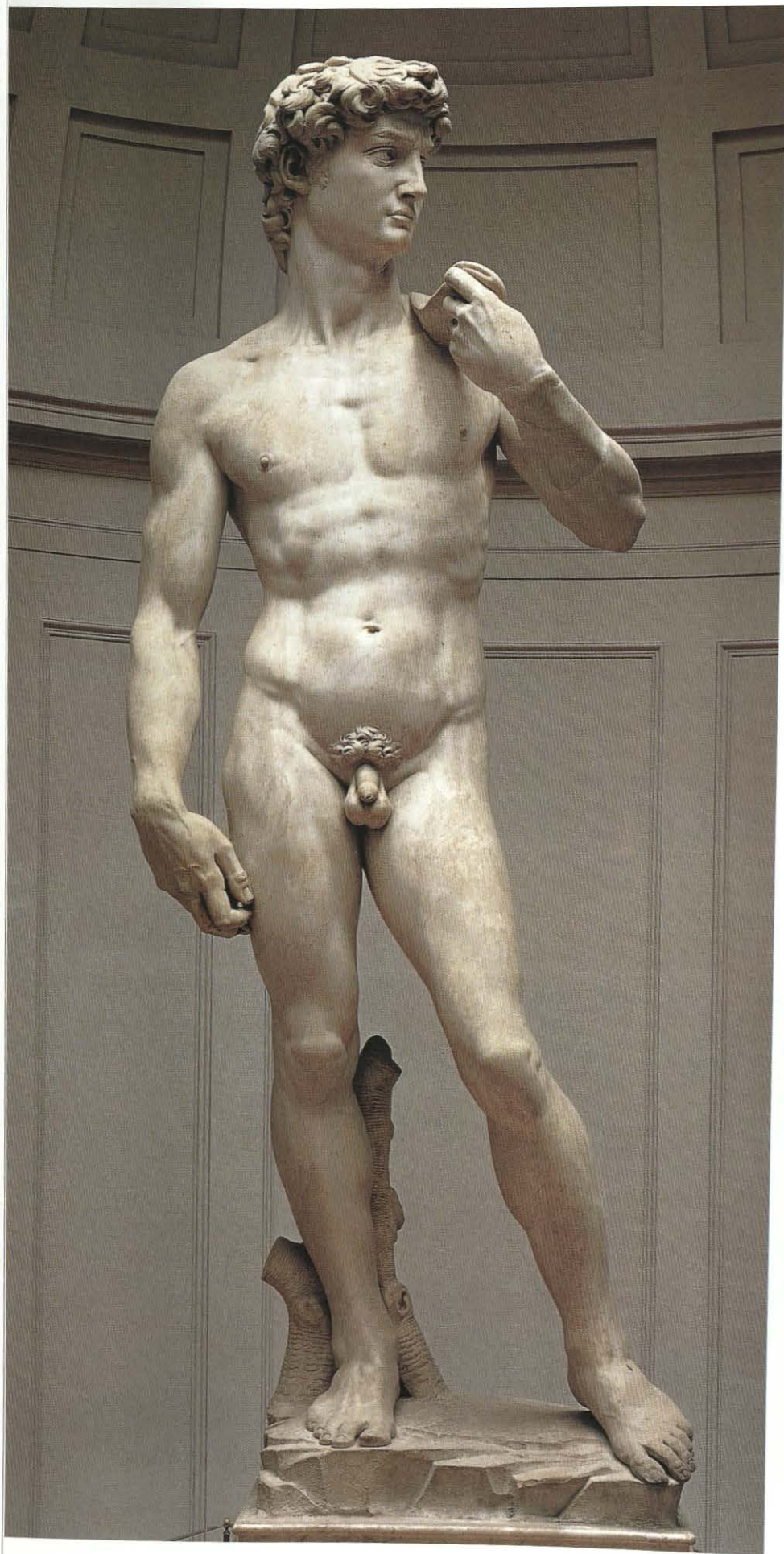
Italian humanists had rediscovered Lucretius' poem in 1415, but its shockingly un-Christian view of human nature prevented it from having much impact until its publication in Venice in 1495 and 1500, when it began to become the model for a new genre of scientific and didactic poetry. By that point, the Lucretian view of human nature corresponded with the "realist" historical and political analyses of Machiavelli, who as a youth had copied out Lucretius by hand.

Michelangelo's *David*

In this respect, both Lucretius and Machiavelli represented something completely at odds with the idealizing attitude behind Michelangelo's *David* (figs. 12.3 and 12.4). The very perfection of the hero's muscular body, his gigantic scale, and even the exaggerated proportions of his head and hands show that his actions manifest the will and power of God. The boy-warrior David had long been established as a symbol of the Florentine Republic, as we have seen in sculptures by Donatello and Verrocchio (see figs. 2.24 and 9.15). The revival of that symbol, in the commission given to Michelangelo (1475–1564), co-incided with the revival of a long-suspended project for Florence Cathedral: an assignment that Agostino di

12.2

Piero di Cosimo, *The Return from the Hunt*, c. 1500. Oil and tempera on panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 66 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (70.5 x 168.9 cm). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



LEFT

12.3
Michelangelo, *David*,
1501–04. Marble, height
(incl. base) 13'5½" (4.1 m).
Accademia di Belle Arti,
Florence. The statue stood
for centuries to the left of the
main entrance to the Palazzo
dei Priori, where a copy can
be seen today.

ABOVE

12.4
Michelangelo, sheet with
verses and studies for a
David, 1501. Pen and ink
on paper, 10 x 7½" (28 x
17.8 cm). Musée du Louvre,
Paris

Duccio (1418–c. 1481) had begun and abandoned in the 1460s, to replace Donatello's marble *David* of 1416, which had ended up in the Palazzo dei Priori. Michelangelo received Agostino's decades-old block with the elements of a figure, including the pose and the proportions, already roughed out, limiting the possibilities for dramatic revision; what Michelangelo produced, in fact, is only really successful from the front and from the right.

We know from a document that Michelangelo had studied Donatello's bronze *David* (see fig. 6.23), and his awareness of that figure is reflected in a surviving drawing (see fig. 12.4). There is nothing retrospective or backward-looking about the figure itself, however, except perhaps in Michelangelo's self-conscious bid to outdo his Florentine predecessors. Beyond the exponential increase in scale, Michelangelo's *David* differs most strikingly from the previous versions in the action it depicts. The

sculptor needed to include some element on the base to brace the marble leg, and the obvious choice would have been the head of Goliath, a standard feature in such statues. Instead, Michelangelo included a cut-off tree, perhaps an allusion to fallen leaders and the prospect of renewal – and thus a symbol in the spirit of the “Golden Age” myths that Piero di Cosimo rejected. This David has no sword, nor even, more surprisingly, a rock. Staring into the distance, he is either preparing for his battle or, more likely, surveying what he has just accomplished. The conceit of the boy looking at what must, proportionally, be a truly towering Goliath on the horizon, seems to have carried particular symbolic weight for the artist. On the Louvre sheet, he wrote “David with his sling and I with my bow – Michelangelo” (see fig. 12.4). The “bow” to which the artist refers is probably the tool sculptors used to turn a drill when cutting marble, but the point is that Michelangelo saw his own task as one that bore direct comparison to his hero’s.

The idea that David and Michelangelo alike were looking at giants is a reminder of the stunning size of the figure, and of the single block from which the sculptor carved it: nothing like this had ever been seen in Florence. Many would immediately have recognized that Michelangelo was vying with sculptors of antiquity. Rome, where he had been working in the years preceding 1501, preserved two famous examples of the colossal male nude in the *Horse Trainers* on the Quirinal Hill, and David’s massive head and hands would have recalled the great fragments (also a head and hands) of the colossus of Constantine on the Capitol. Florentines were also aware that Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), who had returned to Florence in 1500, had tried and failed to complete a colossal bronze statue in Milan. Michelangelo’s success may have marked the beginning of a public rivalry with Leonardo.

At the completion of Michelangelo’s *David*, the Florentine government balked at the prospect of hoisting the colossal marble up onto the cathedral’s exterior and consulted with artists and other experts (including Leonardo, Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, and Piero di Cosimo) on an alternative placement. Then, contrary to the advice of most of the artists, the Signoria had it erected outside the Town Hall. This was a highly charged location: everyone knew (and the recorded discussion indicates) that here it would replace Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* (see fig. 6.25) and compensate for perceived inadequacies in Donatello’s bronze *David*, then in the courtyard immediately behind. According to the Florentine official overseeing the meeting, it was “not considered proper that a woman should be shown cutting off the head of a man,” and the statue had been “erected under an evil star” that had led to Florentine setbacks in the war against Pisa. Regarding the bronze *David*, the official is more laconic – the criticism of

it had something to do with the appearance, from behind, of one of the legs.

Michelangelo’s *David* sent all the right messages: the figure was not only male, as opposed to the threateningly female *Judith*, but also swaggeringly masculine and physically powerful, unlike Donatello’s androgynous and still childlike figure. The location to the side of the entrance to the seat of government had one further effect: it activated David’s frowning gaze, which he turns on an enemy to the south, coming from the direction of Rome: that is where the exiled Medici had established themselves in readiness for their planned repossession of Florence.

Leonardo and Michelangelo in Florence

Depicting the Holy Family

Leonardo’s work on his return to Florence in 1500 also responded to the appetite for the new and the

12.5

Leonardo da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with St. John and St. Anne*, 1507–08. Black and white chalk on tinted paper, 4’8” x 3’5¼” (1.42 x 1.05 m). National Gallery, London



12.6

The Muse Terpsichore,
Roman, second century.
Marble, height 19³/₄" (50
cm). Museo del Prado,
Madrid



FAR RIGHT

12.7

Leonardo da Vinci,
Vitruvian Man, 1492. 13¹/₂
x 9⁵/₈" (34.3 x 24.5 cm).
Galleria dell'Accademia,
Venice

“marvelous.” Receiving a commission for the high altarpiece of Santissima Annunziata in early 1501, Leonardo made a full-scale drawing for the painting, which characteristically he would never complete. However, the *Virgin and Child with St. John and St. Anne* had an impact scarcely less dramatic than Michelangelo’s *David* would three years later. The drawing was one of the first works of art we know of to be placed on public exhibition. For two days, according to Giorgio Vasari, everyone came to “gaze at the marvels of Leonardo, which caused all those people to be amazed.” The cartoon now in London (fig. 12.5) is not the one displayed by Leonardo on that occasion, but it is a closely related version and conveys something of what must have impressed the Florentines.

Vasari singled out Leonardo’s ability to represent inner character, such as the modesty of the Virgin, as well as fleeting effects of emotion: the Virgin’s joy in seeing the beauty of her son, St. Anne’s happiness in “beholding her earthly progeny becoming divine.” What Vasari, a

Medici adherent, did not mention was that Anne was an important patron saint of the Florentine Republic, one associated with the defeat of tyrants ever since the regime of the Duke of Athens collapsed on her feast day in 1348; Anne was also the subject of the altarpiece that the new republic had commissioned Filippino Lippi to make for its council hall in 1498. Leonardo’s design, that is, was more than a generic, contemplative image of the Virgin and Child and the Holy Family, because it conveys a series of emotional states as ephemeral as the play of muted light and transparent shadow that reveals the powerful forms, or the fluid movement of the limbs of these intimately intertwined figures. Its historical theme, like that of Leonardo’s *Adoration* twenty years before (see fig. 10.37), is the incarnation of God in human form as a momentous historical turning point. Anne’s heavenward pointing gesture signals her understanding of the union of the human with the divine. The genealogy of Anne, Mary, and Christ – the ascent from human to divine – is figured in the curious fusion of the three bodies, the sense that together three separate individuals form a mysterious whole.

The effect is quite different from that produced through the use of voids and linking gazes in the grouping of figures in the *Virgin of the Rocks* (see fig. 10.39). There is more of a sense of a unified whole, one that reflects Leonardo’s engagement with sculpture over the preceding decade. Following the abortive eques-



trian statue project in Milan and the collapse of the Sforza, Leonardo had gone briefly to Rome. His notebooks record a visit to Rome and to the nearby hillside town of Tivoli in March 1501, where he would have seen the sculptures of Hadrian's Villa, among them a group of lifesized Muses, seated female figures with powerful bodies, their laps covered with richly carved cascades of drapery (fig. 12.6). As is the case with Michelangelo's *David*, ancient Roman sculpture is here a key element of the "modern" style being developed for Republican Florence.

Classical sculpture defines the body as a normative ideal, a fixed canon of proportions. But when a Renaissance artist depicted the body he also had to demonstrate an empirical knowledge grounded in life drawing and in dissection. Leonardo's earlier drawing of the "Vitruvian Man" (fig. 12.7) showed, for the younger artist, that the normative and the empirical approaches entailed no necessary contradiction. Just as all the forms of nature itself were variations on the fundamental geometric forms of the sphere, the cube, the pyramid, so – following the Roman writer and architect Vitruvius – the human body could express an ideal geometry, even though the individual bodies that an artist measured and dissected might fail to correspond to this. Yet Leonardo's anatomical studies in the 1500s (see fig. 11.34), which consumed his interest far more than painting did, would become more absorbed in the process of growth, ageing, and physical decay than in Vitruvian norms. For all of Leonardo's interest in classical sculpture, it is by no means apparent that the figures in the London cartoon (see fig. 12.5) would manifest ideal proportions if they were to stand on their feet. One consequence of the effect of unity achieved by Leonardo is that we do not notice right away that the Virgin is prodigiously tall, and that her head is small relative to her body. Just as the interlocking of figures suggests a composite single figure, so too each body seems hybrid in character, as if each limb had been designed individually before being merged with the larger whole.

Michelangelo, despite evoking an ancient colossus with his *David* (see fig. 12.3), also maintained a non-Vitruvian and subjective approach to human proportion: later in his career he would state that an artist needed no other compasses than his own eyes. As is the case with Leonardo, the bodies in Michelangelo's art, while reminiscent of antiquity and of drawing from the model, are something else again: they are imaginary constructions, more beautiful and powerful than bodies in everyday life. It is as if both artists studied the natural body in the form of human models and dissected cadavers in order to surpass nature. In a similar manner, Michelangelo's study of antique sculpture paradoxically distanced him from the ideal proportions of the ancients.



The *Virgin and Child* he carved between 1503 and 1506 (fig. 12.8) illustrates the extraordinary license he was willing to adopt. Though the Virgin is a variation on the figure of the Rome *Pietà* from the previous decade (see fig. 11.51), the child who seems to slip from her lap combines the proportions of a nursing infant (especially in the ratio of head to body) with the physical dimensions of an older child. Clearly, Michelangelo understands his figures to belong to a reality above ordinary experience.

12.8
Michelangelo, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1503–06.
Marble, height (incl. base)
48" (1.2 m). Onze Lieve
Vrouwekerk, Bruges

12.9

Michelangelo, *The Holy Family* ("Doni Tondo"), c. 1506. Wood panel, diameter 47 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (120 cm). Uffizi Gallery, Florence



The artist's allusion to his own *Pietà* seems deliberate: the gravity of the mother and child here, combined with the sense that Christ is stepping away from the Virgin, makes the pair into an intensely dramatic anticipation of his future death and of her sorrow. In its solemn character, the work contrasts markedly with the quiet rapture of Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with St. John and St. Anne* (see fig. 12.5). The marble may originally have been intended for the monumental tomb of Pope Pius III in Siena, but by 1503 a Flemish cloth merchant had taken over the commission; he transported it to Bruges, where it can still be seen in the church of Notre Dame.

Very different in character is the *tondo* made for the wool merchant Agnolo Doni around 1506, which shows Michelangelo adapting the heroic and powerful bodies that appeared in his sculptures to the world of private devotional painting (fig. 12.9). Even when the format was large (in this case just under four feet in diameter), images

of the Holy Family for people's homes usually project quiet, unassertive intimacy. Far from being static and contemplative, however, Michelangelo's figures manifest dynamic energy to an almost athletic degree. The artist had closely studied Leonardo's project for the Annunziata altarpiece (a drawing marked "lenardo" survives in his hand), observing both the harmonious integration of monumental bodies and the psychological interaction of the figures. In his composition, however, Michelangelo has rethought the principles according to which the bodies are combined with each other, and produced a new way of dealing with the *tondo* format.

The powerful figure of Mary, seated upon the ground, turns her shoulders and waist as she receives the child from the lap of St. Joseph, whose imposing body seems to cradle hers. The rotation of her upper and lower limbs in contrary directions establishes a great circular arc and harmonizes with the round form of the

painting. Although the motion is complex, entailing a supreme artistic mastery of foreshortening, the effect is majestic and heroic. Using just the motions of the body, Michelangelo conveys how the Virgin invests her whole being in her historical role as bearer of the incarnate God. By placing her on the ground, Michelangelo recalls the traditional theme of the “Virgin of Humility,” characterizing Mary as obedient to historical destiny. In his version, though, the Virgin is far from passive. The grouping of Mary, Joseph, and Christ, in other words, is traditional, but Michelangelo re-stages it as an action and an event, one invested with momentous importance.

What did Michelangelo intend with the array of naked young men who gather on the low ledge in the background, or the child Baptist who, turning his back on them, looks toward the Holy Family? Perhaps Michelangelo, whose art itself depends on the symbolic richness of the human body, wanted to allow for multiple associations, leaving it to the viewer to determine their meaning. The nudes could signify the world of pagan antiquity before the coming of Christ and of Christ’s predecessor St. John the Baptist, or they could represent Christian initiates disrobed in order to receive the sacrament of baptism from the young saint. Whatever their iconographic role, they also function as a kind of artistic signature of Michelangelo, who was now celebrated for his mastery of the male nude. We have seen that images of the well-formed adolescent male body were in any case an established part of Florentine visual culture, a phenomenon that no one seems to have felt the need to justify: they could evoke the virtue and vigor of the Republic, or its fertility and prosperity, or the pride the city took in its actual handsome young citizens. So, too, the masculinity of the Virgin here (and of many of Michelangelo’s female figures) reflects a common association between *virtue* and the virile body. Galen – the ancient medical writer whose books were central to the teaching of medicine – regarded the female body as an underdeveloped male, formed when an embryo lacked sufficient heat. The androgynous female in Michelangelo’s art shows the artist seeking to restore to certain heroic women, like the Virgin, a measure of the perfection that they merited but physically lacked.

Leonardo vs. Michelangelo: Battle Paintings for the Great Council Hall

The idea of the vigorous male body as a symbol of the Republic operates in Michelangelo’s next important project for the city of Florence as well, a fresco painting that placed him in open competition with Leonardo. By 1498 construction on the Great Council Hall in the Palazzo dei Priori had proceeded far enough that the

sculptor Baccio d’Agnolo could begin working on a framework for the monumental altarpiece that was to go at one end of the room, as well as on a *loggia* (gallery), inlaid paneling, and balustrades. Filippino Lippi was to paint the altarpiece, and Andrea Sansovino was to make a sculpture of the Resurrected Christ to go opposite this. The walls of the room were to be adorned with battle scenes, again following the example of the council hall in the Doge’s Palace in Venice. Among the paintings commissioned for the hall, only the altarpiece would be taken to an advanced stage of completion. After the death of Filippino in 1504 it was given to Fra Bartolomeo, but abandoned incomplete in 1512 (fig. 12.10). The friar had been to Venice, and, drawing from the example of

12.10

Fra Bartolomeo, *Virgin and Child with St. Anne*, 1510–13. Oil on panel, 4’6½” x 3’5” (1.4 x 1.04 m). Museo di San Marco, Florence





12.11
Aristotile da Sangallo, copy
of Michelangelo's *Battle
of Cascina*, c. 1542. Oil on
panel, 30 x 52" (76 x 132
cm). Leicester Collection,
Holkham Hall, Norfolk

Giovanni Bellini, he designed a tall rectangular painting with a vertical composition of figures in a lofty architectural setting, which stands in marked contrast to Leonardo's cartoon (see fig. 12.5). St. Anne looks ecstatically toward the Trinity and the Scriptures emanating from heaven, while the infant St. John and other patron saints of the city and its government are arranged below.

In 1503, Leonardo received the commission to paint one of the murals, and by early 1504 the government had decided to have Michelangelo do another. The paintings, conceived on a colossal scale, were to depict two historical battles in which the Florentine Republic had been victorious against its enemies: Leonardo was assigned the *Battle of Anghiari*, in which Florentine forces had defeated Milan in 1440, and Michelangelo the *Battle of Cascina*, an episode from a 1364 war against Pisa. The commission was a way for the Republic to create a patriotic yet also post-Medicean vision of its past, aligning itself with republican imagery from other places. The particular episodes selected by the Florentines reflected a priority of the new Republic, representing the heroic achievement of Florentine citizens acting in a body against the enemies of the state. This was a principle advocated by the chancellor – at that time Machiavelli – who argued pas-

sionately that Florence's own citizens should defend their city as soldiers, obviating the need for notoriously untrustworthy mercenary companies.

In the event, neither work got very far. Leonardo, perhaps as yet unaware of the quickly deteriorating condition of his recently completed *Last Supper* in Milan (see fig. 11.47), began to paint with a medium of linseed oil. Unable to get this to dry, he undertook extraordinary experiments, at one point going so far as to light a fire under what he had painted. After completing a small portion on the wall, he abandoned the project and returned to Milan. The mural he left was enclosed in a frame a few years later, and at mid century it still drew tourists, but Vasari then either destroyed or covered over whatever remained when he oversaw the redecorating of the room. Michelangelo's design, for its part, did not progress beyond the cartoon stage before he too left the city. Both projects are now known only from preparatory drawings that the artists made and from sixteenth-century copies after their designs, all of which record only portions of the overall compositions. The copies themselves, however, attest to the enormous influence that both works, though unfinished, ultimately had. The goldsmith Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571) recalled half a century later that Michelangelo's cartoon had been "the school of the

world,” the memorization of which had become an essential part of the education of younger Florentine artists. It appears, in fact, that the cartoon actually disintegrated from excessive handling. Some of the figures Leonardo invented for the wall, for their part, became illustrations in his posthumously assembled *Treatise on Painting*, one of the most widely studied theoretical writings on art of the later Renaissance.

The Florentine head of state who presided in the room had the title of *gonfaloniere* (standard-bearer), and the two battle scenes were related in theme: Leonardo’s central event was a group of men on horses trying to retain or take possession of a standard; Michelangelo’s seems to have included, in the back center, a man attempting to raise a flagpost. This implies that the two artists received at least some instruction as to what they were expected to feature. At the same time, the two frescoes had the character of competing manifestos, as if each artist had decided to emphasize the principles that most distinguished him from the other. Michelangelo designed a relief-like composition of muscular naked figures, which he spread across and above the surface rather than setting within pictorial depth. The crisp barren landscape provides nothing that would distract from the figures, each studied independently, and a body of drawings in a variety of graphic media provides a better indication than Aristotile da Sangallo’s (1481–1551) painted copy of how the original cartoon might actually have looked (figs. 12.11–12.12). As false news of an impending attack interrupts their swimming, Michelangelo’s soldiers rush to clothe and arm themselves – though the episode may well have appealed to the artist for just the opposite reason, the opportunity it presented to strip his figures down and show them as nudes and near nudes in a variety of poses. Throughout, he employed the most difficult foreshortenings, and figures thrust themselves into or out of the picture plane: notice the extreme torsion of the neck and waist of the seated figure at center, whose pose works formally to tie both halves of the composition together. It is difficult to imagine how any real person could have held these poses, and this may be part of the point: Michelangelo implies that he did not need live studio models. He worked on his cartoon in the Hospital of San Onofrio, where the prior provided him with cadavers for dissection. Figures like those in the *Battle of Cascina* draw attention to Michelangelo’s power to move from a deep knowledge of human anatomy into a process of invention: as he fragments mortal and decaying bodies to understand their structure, he also constructs superior bodies in his imagination and in his art.

The various copies (for example fig. 12.13) give us only a partial impression of Leonardo’s composition. Here, Florentine cavalry troops battle furiously to

protect their flag from the Milanese forces led by the mercenary captain Niccolò Piccinino. The subject may have been assigned to Leonardo in part because of his undisputed expertise in the representation of horses, but the composition also shows his continuing interest in the rendering of extreme psychological states. His faces (fig. 12.14), largely unlike Michelangelo’s, reveal inner



12.12
Michelangelo, study for
Battle of Cascina, 1504. 16^{5/8}
x 11^{1/4}" (42.1 x 28.7 cm).
British Museum, London

12.13

Peter Paul Rubens (?), early seventeenth-century copy after the central section of Leonardo da Vinci's *Battle of Anghiari*. Pen, ink, and chalk on paper, 17³/₄ x 25¹/₄" (45 x 64 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

This drawing is often considered the best surviving record of Leonardo's original painting, although it must be a copy of a copy, since Leonardo's work was no longer visible at the time Rubens arrived in Florence.



12.14

Leonardo da Vinci, study of a head for the *Battle of Anghiari*, 1503. Red chalk on paper, 9 x 7³/₈" (22.6 x 18.6 cm). Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest



character, here bordering on outright savagery. The Florentine tradition of equestrian mercenary portraits – Hawkwood (see fig. 5.12), Gattamelata (see fig. 7.25), Colleoni (see fig. 10.23) – stands behind his characterization of the murderously violent horsemen. Drawings hint

that the setting for the picture would have included an elaborate river landscape: the most extraordinary aspect of the fresco might have been the range of coloristic and atmospheric effects that Leonardo planned. In his notebooks he wrote of a battlefield where the air was thick with smoke and dust, and where the predominant colors in the dusky light were the fiery red of the torches and of human blood pounded into mud. All of this would have been rendered through films of transparent paint that would have unified the figures and integrated them with their landscape. The effect of this emphasis on setting and atmosphere could not be more different from that planned by Michelangelo, whose sculptural figures were to be clearly visible, painted in the bright colors of true fresco.

Leonardo adorned both his Florentines and his mercenaries with fantastical armor that imitates the body parts of animals. The analogy between the human and animal condition appears to have particularly engaged him here, where horses fight vigorously alongside the warriors. In his notebooks, however, Leonardo expresses greater sympathy for the innocence of animals and disgust at human beings' barbarous appetite for destroying themselves and other living creatures. In his eyes, human beings were devourers of their fellow men:

[There is a] supreme form of wickedness that hardly exists among the animals, among whom are none

that devour their own species except for lack of reason (for there are insane among them as among human beings though not in such great numbers). Nor does this happen except among the voracious animals as in the lion species and among leopards, panthers, lynxes, cats and creatures like these, which sometimes eat their young. But not only do you eat your children, but you eat father, mother, brothers and friends; and this even not sufficing, you make raids on foreign lands and capture men of other races and then after mutilating them in a shameful manner you fatten them up and cram them down your gullet.

Leonardo's de-idealizing view of human nature corresponds with that of Machiavelli, who was managing Florentine diplomatic relations with Cesare Borgia in these years.

Motions of the Body and Motions of the Mind: *Leda and Mona Lisa*

Two other works made by Leonardo in this decade were destined for an extraordinary afterlife. One, *Leda and the Swan*, which was lost or destroyed after the artist's death, is only known through copies (fig. 12.15) and through preliminary drawings (fig. 12.16). The mythological tale of the god Jupiter taking on the form of a swan to seduce a mortal woman, and of the birth of their offspring (who included Helen of Troy and the twins Castor and Pollux) from eggs, probably appealed to Leonardo for its mingling of the animal, the human, and the divine. His image popularized a kind of extreme pose (one that Cosmè Tura had already used for the pagan gods in his *Annunciation* for Ferrara Cathedral; see fig. 8.7) that would come to be known as the *figura serpentinata*: this was because the upward-spiraling twist of the figure, who bends her hips while rotating her shoulder, resembles the fluid motion of a serpent. It was left to Michelangelo and Raphael to explore the full potential of such a figure – Michelangelo was already quoting the *Leda* in one of the nudes of the *Doni Tondo* (see fig. 12.9).

The other work is the portrait now generally known as *Mona Lisa* (fig. 12.17). The painting has become a byword for the romantic cult of enigma around the persona of Leonardo da Vinci, but the main historical problem with the work is less the figure's "mysterious smile" than her historical identity. The painting was first noted in France in 1517 as "a certain Florentine lady, made from nature at the instigation of the late magnificent Giuliano de' Medici," Vasari, who in 1550 discussed the portrait without ever having seen it, declared her to be the wife of Bartolomeo del Giocondo, a silk merchant involved not with the Medici but with the Republican government



ABOVE

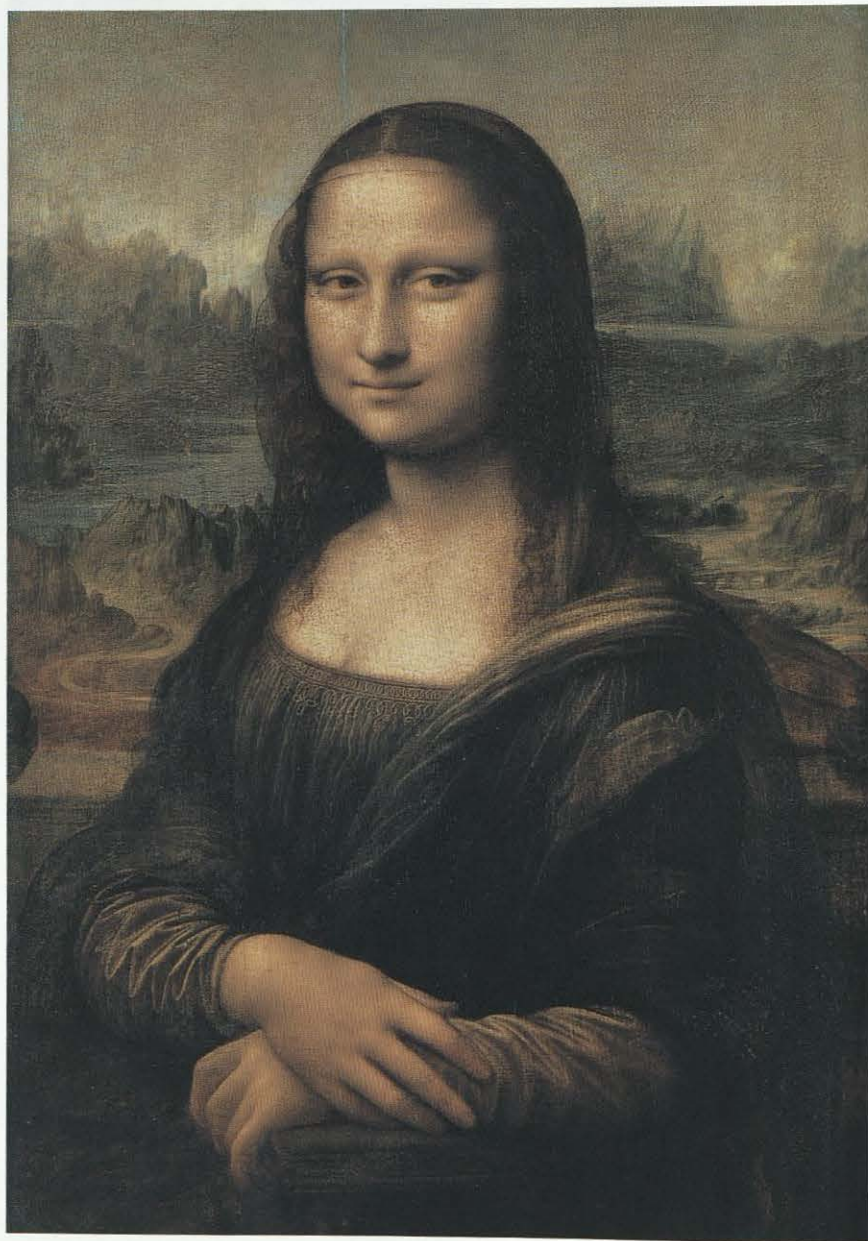
12.15

Cesare da Sesto after
Leonardo da Vinci, *Leda*,
1504–09. Oil on panel,
38 x 29" (96.4 x 73.6 cm).
Pembroke Collection,
Wilton House, Salisbury

LEFT

12.16

Leonardo da Vinci, study
for the head of Leda,
1505–10. 6³/₈ x 5⁷/₈" (17.7
x 14.7 cm). Royal Library,
Windsor



12.17
Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503. Oil on panel,
30³/₈ x 20⁷/₈" (77 x 53 cm).
Musée du Louvre, Paris

that had kept them in exile. Vasari's identification is now generally accepted, and other sources reveal that Giocondo's wife "Monna Lisa" (i.e. Madonna, or Lady Lisa) was named Lisa Gherardini: she was still alive when Vasari wrote his account. In 1503, the year in which Giocondo and his family moved into a new house in Florence, the twenty-four-year-old Lisa gave birth to their fourth child, a boy: either of these circumstances could have led to the commissioning of a portrait, and by Giocondo himself rather than by Giuliano de' Medici. By mid century there were thus two traditions of identifying the sitter – one Medicean and one anti-Medicean – a division that points to the fundamental dilemma of Florentine identity in the 1500s.

The question of identity may finally be irrelevant, since instead of delivering the portrait to a client, Leonardo kept it in his possession, displaying it in his studio until the end of his life as a demonstration of his art. If earlier portraits had relied on emblematic imagery – a symbolic juniper bush, for example, or an ermine – to identify and characterize the sitter, here Leonardo added nothing more than a landscape, one that relates more to his notebooks and to the studies he made on his travels than to the historical Lisa Gherardini. The brownish tonality that suffuses the scene was probably not what Leonardo left: over the centuries the picture was revarnished more than once, and the Louvre promises that it will never be "cleaned." Yet it is clear that Leonardo was aiming to shroud his figure with transparent layers in a way that he had never done in his previous portraits, as if the veil through which we see the top of her forehead and her hair were a double for the films of atmosphere through which we see the distant mountains, or the thin shadows that model her face. Leonardo seems even to extend the idea of semi-transparency to expression itself. If, when preparing his *Last Supper* (see fig. 11.46), he was writing of how the painter could reveal the "motions of the mind" through countenance and gesture, here he gives us an unprecedented sense of the interior person, even as it is hard to specify just what is happening in this woman's head. It is as though Leonardo wanted the central experience of seeing the picture to be that of knowing that one is being looked at by another thinking being. How far this is from the unresponsive, idealized profiles that had predominated in Florence just three decades earlier!

Raphael's Beginnings

In 1504, an enterprising young painter from Urbino arrived in Florence. Although only twenty-one years old, Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio; 1483–1520) was already well established as a maker of altarpieces and small devotional pictures. Trained initially by his father, a painter to the Urbino court who had died in 1494, Raphael formed an occasional association with Perugino, an artist much in demand not only in Florence but also in his native Perugia. The *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig. 12.18), which Raphael painted for the Albizzini family chapel in San Francesco in Città di Castello (a city near Urbino) in 1504, shows the apocryphal story according to which a group of suitors to the Virgin brought rods to the temple priest; Joseph's staff flowered, indicating his divine selection. The painting catered to a market that Perugino had established, and with it Raphael aimed to surpass the older painter in the very area in which he excelled. He not only draws on Perugino's rich and glowing color, but also employs

12.18

Raphael, *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1504. Oil on panel, 67 x 46½" (1.7 x 1.17 m). Pinoteca di Brera, Milan



RIGHT

12.19

Raphael, *Agnolo Doni*,
c. 1506. Oil on panel, 24½ x
17¼" (63 x 45 cm), Galleria
Palatina, Palazzo Pitti,
Florence

FAR RIGHT

12.20

Raphael, *Maddalena Strozzi
Doni*, c. 1506. Oil on panel,
24½ x 17¼" (63 x 45 cm).
Galleria Palatina, Palazzo
Pitti, Florence



the compositional formula Perugino had first used in his Sistine Chapel *Charge to St. Peter* (see fig. 10.35), with its horizontal frieze of figures arranged in front of a vast paved piazza, in the midst of which rises a centralized temple with a dome. It would be easy to mistake some of Raphael's figures for Perugino's, and Raphael followed the older artist in his habit of repeating elements within a single picture: note the resemblance between the face and placid expression of the man in a black robe looking out at the viewer's right and that of the woman behind the Virgin to the left. But whereas in Perugino's group of figures there is little to disturb the sense of symmetry, Raphael has introduced an element of carefully planned disarray. Readers of Alberti's *On Painting*, who certainly included Raphael, would have recognized the young artist's concern with *varietà* (variety), which Alberti had considered essential to good painting. The priest's head is slightly off the central axis; one of the rejected male suitors to the right departs from the static assembly to balance on one leg and break a staff over his raised knee.

It was probably through Perugino that Raphael became acquainted with the leading artists of Florence, Leonardo among them, as well as with a group of wealthy clients that included Agnolo Doni, the same wool merchant who ordered the *tondo* from Michelangelo (see fig. 12.9). The marriage portraits that Raphael painted for Agnolo and his wife Maddalena around 1506 (figs. 12.19–12.20) show the earliest impact of the *Mona Lisa* (see fig.

12.17) on traditional portraiture. Raphael paid particular attention to the role of the hands in Leonardo's painting, exploring the possibility of using hands not just to create formal variety but to enrich the sense of interaction with the beholder. While Agnolo regards us calmly, his hands seem to fidget restlessly, imparting a slight sense of unease; this again invites speculation about the thoughts betrayed by the face, with its furrowed brow. Maddalena rests one hand on top of the other, self-consciously and even self-protectively. Where Raphael departed from Leonardo's example, perhaps at the patron's request, was in his simultaneous use of the hands to display the wealth and status of the family, in the form of their jeweled rings. The need to render precious objects like this, or like the enormous, eye-catching pearl that hangs around Maddalena's neck, is one reason why Raphael resisted Leonardo's *chiaroscuro* and his *sfumatura*, which would have excessively subdued the color needed to convey the preciousness of what Raphael was depicting. Far more than the *Mona Lisa*, the portrait of Maddalena conveys social meanings. This extended to the sitter's beauty, a valued attribute of young women of Maddalena's class. To make Maddalena appear more comely, Raphael relied on a process of abstraction: the contours of the shoulders and breast assume a highly artificial oval appearance, and so does the head onto which her large features are somewhat uncomfortably imposed.

Raphael quickly learned to absorb all that was new and most valued in recent Florentine art. His study of

Leonardo is evident not just in the Maddalena Doni portrait, but also in a drawing he made after Leonardo's *Leda*. The paintings most characteristic of Raphael's Florentine years were a series of private devotional images of the Virgin and Child, several also including the infant St. John, in which he responded to Leonardo's *Virgin and Child with St. John and St. Anne* (see fig. 12.5). In 1505–06, Raphael painted the so-called *Madonna of the Meadow* (fig. 12.22) for Taddeo Taddei, a merchant of refined literary and artistic tastes with connections at the court of Urbino. Here Raphael modeled the Virgin on her counterpart in Leonardo's cartoon, adapting especially his treatment of the head and expression; although the downcast eyes of Raphael's figure establish a more wistful mood, as if she realized that Christ's gesture, grasping the prophet John's cruciform staff, hinted at her child's impending death. The three figures interlock to form a unity that could be circumscribed by a pyramid, in accordance with the two artists' common interest in uncovering the underlying geometric logic in nature. Raphael, though, has again taken this even further than Leonardo, abstracting the Virgin's shoulders and breasts into a spheroid form, and extending the figure's right leg across the front of her body. Anatomical distortion does not impair a sense of harmony, of things fitting together; nor do abstraction and idealization undermine the emotional tenor of the work, which, with its caressing hands and soft infant flesh, solicits sentiments of tenderness from the beholder.



Activating the Altarpiece: The Perugia *Entombment of Christ*

While working in Florence, Raphael received only one altarpiece commission from a local client, and he never completed it. He did continue, nevertheless, to supply such works for other centers outside Florence, including Siena, Urbino, and Perugia, and it was for this last city in 1507 that he executed the first altarpiece to draw on the new art he was seeing, an *Entombment of Christ* (fig. 12.21) that he made for a chapel of the Baglioni family in the church of San Francesco al Prato in Perugia. The patron, Atalanta Baglioni, commissioned the painting in atonement for violent feuding among the male members of her family, mainly instigated by her own son, who had himself been killed after he had murdered various relatives. The patron's experience would have lent special meaning to the subject of the Virgin's farewell to the dead Christ. The commission elevated Atalanta's personal history, the events that shaped her identity, to a level of universal significance, articulating them through one of the great narratives of the Gospels. Recognizing this, Raphael made the unprecedented decision to treat the altarpiece as an *istoria*, a scene of figures performing an action, rather than as a static, iconic subject.

Early designs for the altarpiece show a Lamentation group very close to treatments of the subject by Perugino, with the figure of the dead Christ laid out on the ground

12.21

Raphael, *Entombment of Christ*, 1507. 6' x 5'9" (1.84 x 1.76 m). Pinacoteca, Vatican

LEFT

12.22

Raphael, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1505–06. Oil on panel, 44½ x 34¼" (113 x 87 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

and surrounded by quietly sorrowing figures. The compositional idea changed, however, when Raphael began thinking more carefully about Mantegna's great engraving of the *Entombment* (see fig. 10.7). Raphael's father Giovanni Santi had been an admirer of Mantegna, and he would certainly have trained his son to study the Paduan artist's prints. The death of Mantegna the previous year, furthermore, may have led Raphael to conceive the work as something of a homage. The reference to the print is unmistakable: fellow artists and even non-artists would have spotted it. They would have noted in particular how Raphael transformed Mantegna's design, making it his own. Mantegna provided the idea of the composition in two episodes: the Virgin faints and her attendants support her; two bearers, accompanied by the sorrowing Magdalene, take the body of Christ to the sepulcher. Off in the left background, the cross from which the body came is visible on a hill. Raphael does not repeat a single figure from Mantegna; the closest is the man bearing Christ's upper body. Instead, he introduces a series of adaptations of figures from works by Michelangelo: the dead Christ is close to the Christ in the *St. Peter's Pietà* (see fig. 11.51), the woman who turns to support the Virgin is a variation on the turning Virgin in the *Doni Tondo* (see fig. 12.9), and the young man in profile recalls drawings made by Raphael after Michelangelo's *David* (see fig. 12.3), where he modified the proportions of the head and the hands and altered the pose so as to give

more flowing elegance to the line. The one thing that remains from Perugino's treatment is the color; just as Raphael had earlier avoided Leonardo's desaturated *chiaroscuro*, so here does he avoid the shrill, metallic hues of the *Doni Tondo*, with their white highlights and dark shadows.

That he took a narrative print as the basis for an altarpiece suggests Raphael had absorbed the compositional procedure that Alberti had laid out in *On Painting*. This text was not yet easily accessible to all, since it circulated in these years only in manuscript, but Raphael's practice leaves little doubt that he knew it well. Alberti had demanded that artists pay particular attention to the convincing representation of the dead, citing the very Meleager relief that Mantegna had probably used as a model for his own print. He had also written that the ideal number of figures in an *istoria* was ten, exactly the number Raphael includes. Finally, Alberti had advocated the method of composing bodies that we saw to be of particular interest to Luca Signorelli (see figs. 11.25–11.30), one that would have acquired a new resonance at a time when Leonardo and Michelangelo were known to practice human dissection, first sketching in the bones, then adding the sinews and muscles, flesh and skin. In conceiving the figure of the fainting Virgin, Raphael did precisely this, using a skeleton for his first studies (fig. 12.23).

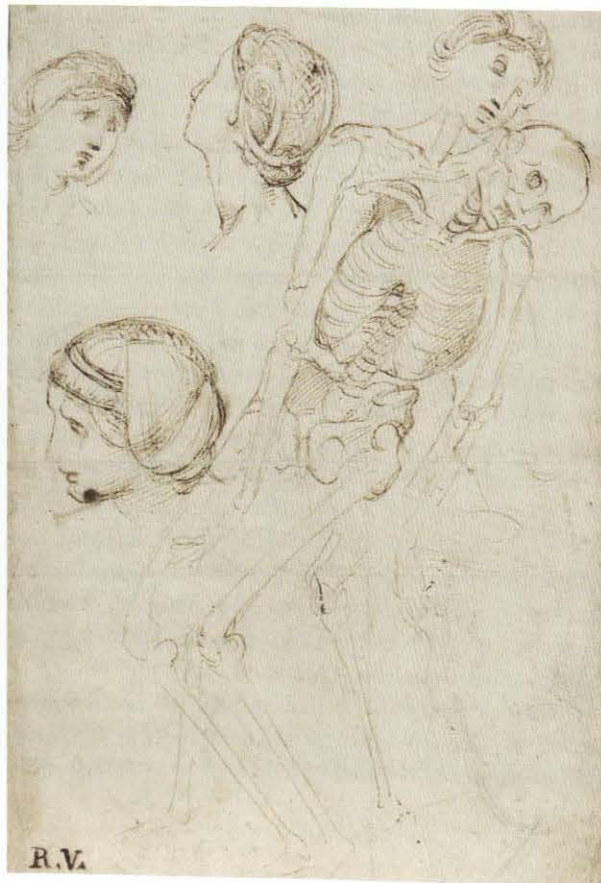
Rome: A New Architectural Language

The temple in the background of Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin* (see fig. 12.18) points to the artist's close connection with another expatriate (perhaps even a relative) from Urbino, the painter-architect Donato Bramante (1444–1514). Raphael may have known something of Bramante's dialogue with Leonardo at the court of Milan, but he would have been even more aware of the new architectural language Bramante developed after his move to Rome in 1499.

At first, Bramante supported himself there by working for Pope Alexander VI, though few of the things he produced in these years survive intact. In 1502, however, through agents of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, he gained an opportunity to translate his Milanese experiments with centralized architecture to a remarkable new purpose. His "Tempietto," or "little temple," is a miniature church, really a free-standing chapel, designed to mark the alleged site of St. Peter's crucifixion in the monastery complex of San Pietro in Montorio (fig. 12.24). The building combined the most basic geometric elements (two cylinders with a hemisphere) in the simplest proportions (the ratio of the cylinders is 1:2) to make a work that is monumentally self-sufficient despite its small

12.23

Raphael, study for *The Entombment*, c. 1507. Ink on paper, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (20.9 x 32 cm). British Museum, London



scale. The Tempietto draws on ancient building types – there were several small Roman temples where a peristyle or ring of columns surrounded a cylindrical chamber – but the two-storey design is Bramante’s invention and shows his modernity, his adaptation and translation of antiquity. The more pronounced verticality that results gives the building a heavenward orientation, providing a symbolic axis that links the site of the saint’s death – the chapel preserved the hole in which Peter’s cross was set – with the place of his immortal existence. As originally designed, the building was supposed to occupy the center of a round courtyard framed by another ring of columns: this indicates that Bramante, like Leonardo, had studied the remains of Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli near Rome, where the so-called Marine Theater also consists of a round structure encircled by an outer peristyle. Combined with the three shallow steps, Bramante’s completed design would have conveyed the impression of a building extending its supremely refined form outward in space. Particularly influential was his exemplary use of one of the Roman orders: in this case, the Doric. Bramante was motivated by a concern to express the nature of the saint: writers on architecture regarded the Doric order as having masculine characteristics – robust proportions, relative plainness of ornament. Like Leonardo, Bramante would have held the conviction that the forms of ancient architecture in their geometric purity bore a fundamental relation to the perfectly proportioned human body.

The entablature, carefully scaled to the columns, signals once more the extent to which the Tempietto set out to be a model of Christianized antiquity: the **triglyphs** (the beveled, grooved sections of the frieze) align with the columns, as they should according to Vitruvian rules, but the **metopes** (the square panels between these) are adorned with images of liturgical objects.

The New St. Peter’s

The Tempietto was scarcely begun in 1503, the year in which Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, the nephew of Sixtus IV, became Pope, calling himself Julius II. The name, which everyone recognized as having more to do with Julius Caesar than with an early Pope named Julius, reveals political ambitions on an imperial scale. Giuliano’s papal commissions recognized no difference between the public and private: ostentatious works dedicated to the glory of the papacy and the Church were also monuments of self-celebration, with no expense spared. Even large-scale, public projects for the city would bear his personal stamp: an example is the new street that was laid out to link the Ponte Sisto with the Ponte Sant’Angelo, named the Via Giulia after the Pope himself.

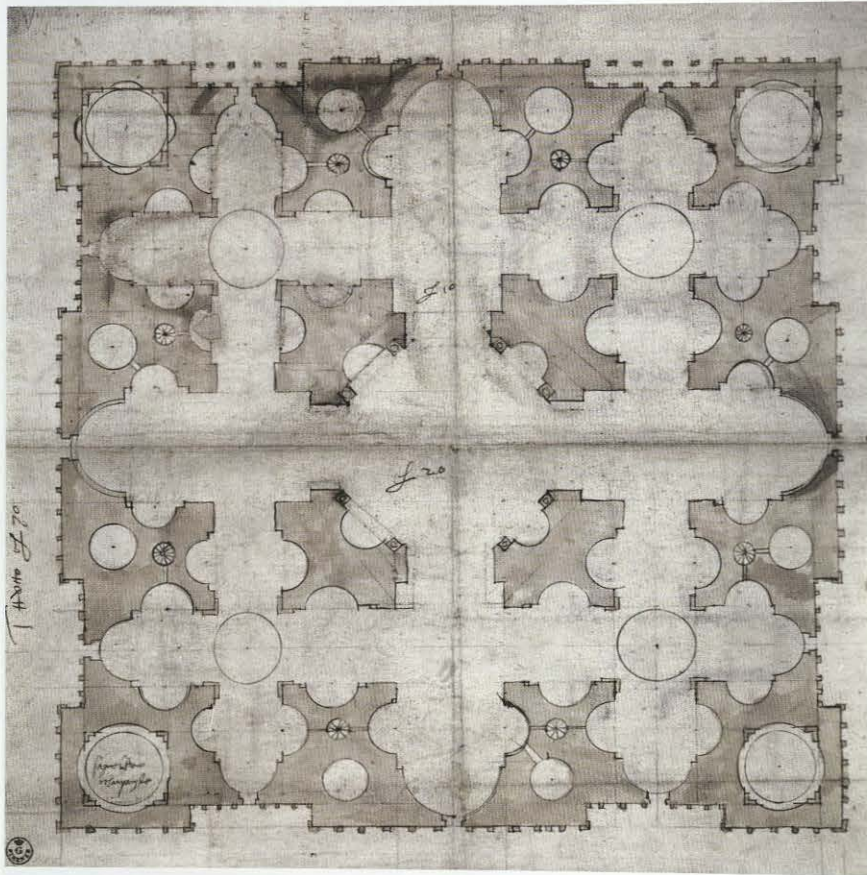


The two most celebrated works of the pontificate of Julius II in many ways owe their existence to a third project that was never completed as he planned. Just as Julius, in the days when he was still a cardinal, had overseen the commissioning of Antonio del Pollaiuolo’s bronze memorial for Sixtus IV (*see fig. 10.25*), so now in March 1505, scarcely two years after becoming Pope, he enlisted Michelangelo to design for him an even grander marble tomb.

According to Michelangelo’s early biographers, the tomb was originally conceived as a gargantuan, multi-storey, free-standing structure, with more than forty larger than lifesize marble statues. It was to be installed, like the tombs of Sixtus and most other popes, in St. Peter’s basilica. But the scale of Michelangelo’s plan soon led to doubts that the great basilica would be adequate to contain it while still allowing for its other ceremonial and religious functions. At first, Julius considered an extension of the building along the lines proposed the previous century by popes Nicholas V and Paul II, but by the summer of 1505 he had begun to contemplate a more drastic alternative: the complete demolition and rebuilding of the church. Old St. Peter’s, which had been built in

12.24

Donato Bramante,
“Tempietto,” cloister of San
Pietro in Montorio, Rome,
begun 1502



the fourth century over a venerated cemetery, was a focal point of European pilgrimage; most of the Christian world regarded its very fabric as sacred. Members of the Curia (papal court) were appalled at the Pope's idea, but Julius dismissed their protests with the insistence that the ancient building was in a serious state of disrepair. A line of defense taken up by the Pope's secretary, the humanist Sigismondo de' Conti, is particularly significant, and shows that the new sense of history entailed no uncritical reverence for the past. Conti argued that the old building, however grand and majestic, was aesthetically unworthy, having been built in an age that "had no idea of beauty and refinement in architecture." He regarded the present in which Julius and his court lived, in other words, as a time of renewal and of progress, a moment that reversed a long period of decline dating back to late antiquity.

LEFT

12.25

Giuliano da Sangallo,
proposed plan for New
St. Peter's, 1505. Ink and
wash on paper, 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
(41 x 39.7 cm). Gabinetto
Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi
Gallery, Florence

RIGHT

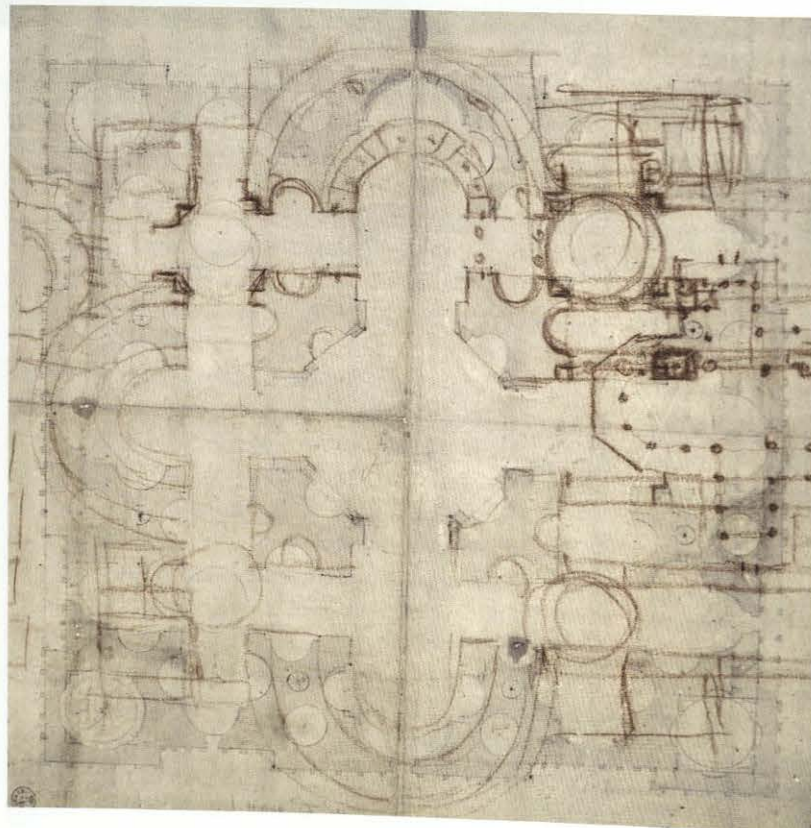
12.26

Donato Bramante, project
drawings for New St.
Peter's, 1505. 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ "
(41 x 39.7 cm). Gabinetto
Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi
Gallery, Florence. The
drawing on the other side
of the page (fig. 12.25) is
visible through the paper,
and Bramante seems to
have used that as a
starting point for the
chalk sketches here.

FAR RIGHT

12.27

Donato Bramante,
"Parchment Plan" for
New St. Peter's, 1505.
Gabinetto Disegni e
Stampe, Uffizi Gallery,
Florence



A letter bearing Raphael's name would make the same argument about art's decay in antiquity still more forcefully in a letter to the Pope a few years later, and Vasari, around mid century, would give the idea of art's revival in modern times – a version of the myth of the “Renaissance” – its most influential form.

The most radical early suggestion for the new basilica seems to have come from Giuliano da Sangallo (c. 1443–1516), an architect who had been in Julius's service for more than a decade. (Sangallo, who had supervised the movement and installation of Michelangelo's *David*, came from a family of Florentine artists that would include his nephew, the painter Aristotile; see fig. 12.11). A drawing preserved in the Uffizi appears to show Sangallo reacting to the kinds of centrally planned designs that had appeared in paintings like Perugino's and Raphael's and that Bramante, with his *Tempietto*, had been the first to realize in three dimensions (fig. 12.25). It proposes a perfectly square new church, conceived as a series of interlocking Greek crosses with towers in the four corners. The large piers indicate that the roof Sangallo envisioned would have been much heavier than the wooden trusses that the columns and walls in the original church supported – presumably a group of masonry domes, connected by barrel vaults. Most remarkable is that the north and south halves of the design are not only mirror images of one another, but also identical

with the east and west halves: the drawing's multiple inscriptions add to the impression that it has no “correct” orientation.

Somehow the drawing fell into Bramante's hands, and his reaction to it was as surprising as it was forceful. Turning the sheet over, he traced Sangallo's proposal in a rough sketch. He then proceeded to transform the drawing in ways that provided both a critique and a new suggestion of his own (fig. 12.26). Where Sangallo had largely flat walls on all four exteriors, Bramante punched through these, creating what would have looked more like a traditional apse on the west end of the building and two siblings to this on the north and south sides. At the east end (the right side of the illustration), he rejected Sangallo's enclosure altogether, and extended three of his predecessor's Greek-cross forms to the edge of the sheet, essentially transforming them into a more traditional nave and side aisles. Remarkably, the architect whose name would in 1505 have been virtually synonymous with the centrally planned Christian building in Rome seems to have taken a stand against it when it came to St. Peter's.

Bramante pursued further experiments: in one of these, the so-called “graph-paper plan,” he juxtaposed the plans of Old St. Peter's, the Nicholas V extension, and his own Sangallo adaptation, in an apparent attempt to reconcile features of the old basilica with the new design

BELOW LEFT

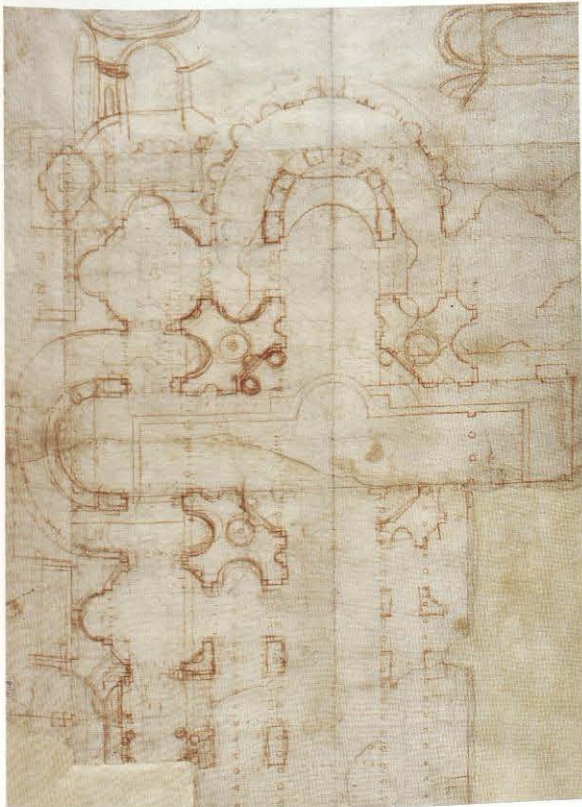
12.28

Donato Bramante, “Graph-paper plan” for New St. Peter's, 1505. Ink on paper, 27 x 18½" (68.4 x 47 cm). Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

BELOW RIGHT

12.29

Caradosso, portrait medal of Julius II: reverse, showing project for New St. Peter's, 1506. Diameter 2¼" (5.6 cm). Civiche Raccolte Archeologiche e Numismatiche, Milan



(fig. 12.28). Finally, in a drawing now known as Uffizi 1, he arrived at a simpler, more consolidated, and generally bolder idea (fig. 12.27); that he rendered this final idea with particular care on expensive parchment suggests that this was for presentation directly to the Pope. Flanking a great choir are two spaces in the form of Greek crosses – Bramante has now reconciled himself at least with these motifs, even if he minimized the masonry to provide for airier spaces. For one standing inside, the walls would barely have resembled walls at all, as they broke into a series of stepped indentations, recessed into niches, or opened into other areas. The massing indicates that they would have supported domes, much like those shown on Caradosso's foundation medal from the same year (fig. 12.29), and there is enough at the bottom of the drawing to hint that the central feature of the basilica would have been a much larger dome rising over the crossing. What Bramante does not tell us with this drawing – or rather, what he did not tell the Pope – was whether the building, when completed to the east, would be a mirror image of the portion represented in the plan, or whether the result would have a nave and look like a more traditional basilica. Perhaps he was hedging his bets here. Or perhaps he realized that this did not need to be decided in order for work to proceed. Demolition could start at the apse of Old St. Peter's, builders could begin construction on the choir, and Bramante could let his followers worry about what to do next.

Another reason why Bramante may have concentrated his proposal on the choir is because this is where Michelangelo's new tomb of Julius II was to go, on axis with the tomb of St. Peter himself to the east. Michelangelo, preparing for this project, spent much of 1505 in Carrara, supervising the quarrying of marble for the sepulcher. This was itself a hugely costly enterprise, since the marble had to be transported by river and by roads, some of which had to be newly built. One entire shipload of material was lost in the Tiber. Then, on returning to Rome in 1506, the sculptor learned that the tomb project had been cancelled. This probably resulted from the need to divert funds to Julius's wars, but Michelangelo, believing that Bramante had conspired against him, went back to Florence in disgust. Alarmed at the consequences of angering the Pope, the Florentine government sent him to plead for forgiveness at Bologna, which Julius II had conquered in 1506. The artist traveled north, was reconciled with the Pope, and then executed a colossal bronze portrait of Julius to commemorate his triumph over the subjected city – a work that the Bolognese would destroy when they regained their independence. Back in Rome in late 1508, Michelangelo found no revival of interest in the tomb he had started. Instead, the Pope had decided to encumber him with a

project for which the artist professed no enthusiasm: the redecoration of the vault of the chapel built in the 1480s by Julius's uncle, Pope Sixtus IV.

The Sistine Ceiling

The Sistine Chapel, no less than St. Peter's, was an already completed work when Pope Julius II turned his attention to it (see figs. 10.30–10.36). In addition to the murals on the walls, it had been furnished with a vault decorated to signify the cosmos above, with gold stars on a blue ground. In 1504, a large crack had appeared in the vault, providing an occasion for repainting and – in the eyes of Julius – an opportunity for modernization. Julius at first wanted a scheme with twelve Apostles, and one of Michelangelo's first drawings for the project showed a seated figure in a spandrel between two of the vaults, with smaller, geometrically regular fields above for less significant images. Early sources also indicate that the ceiling was to feature panels of grotesques, but Michelangelo, reconciling himself to several years of work on the fresco, persuaded the Pope to allow him to try something more ambitious. The result was the astonishing composition that Michelangelo finally completed in 1512. As Vasari later put it, the painter "used no rule

RIGHT

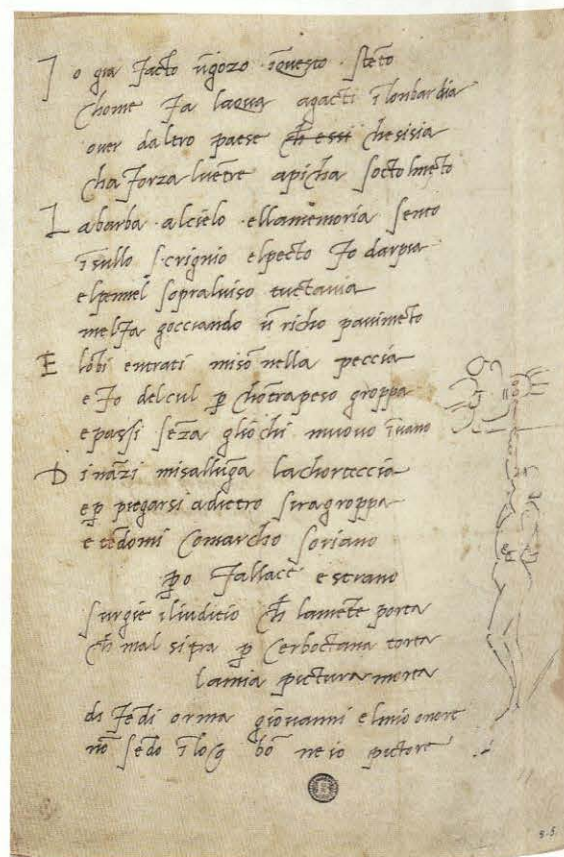
12.30

Michelangelo, sonnet
with caricature, 1509–10.
11 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (28.3 x 20
cm). Biblioteca Medicea
Laurenziana, San Lorenzo,
Florence

OPPOSITE

12.31

Sistine Ceiling, general
view with vault frescoes
by Michelangelo, 1508–12.
Vatican





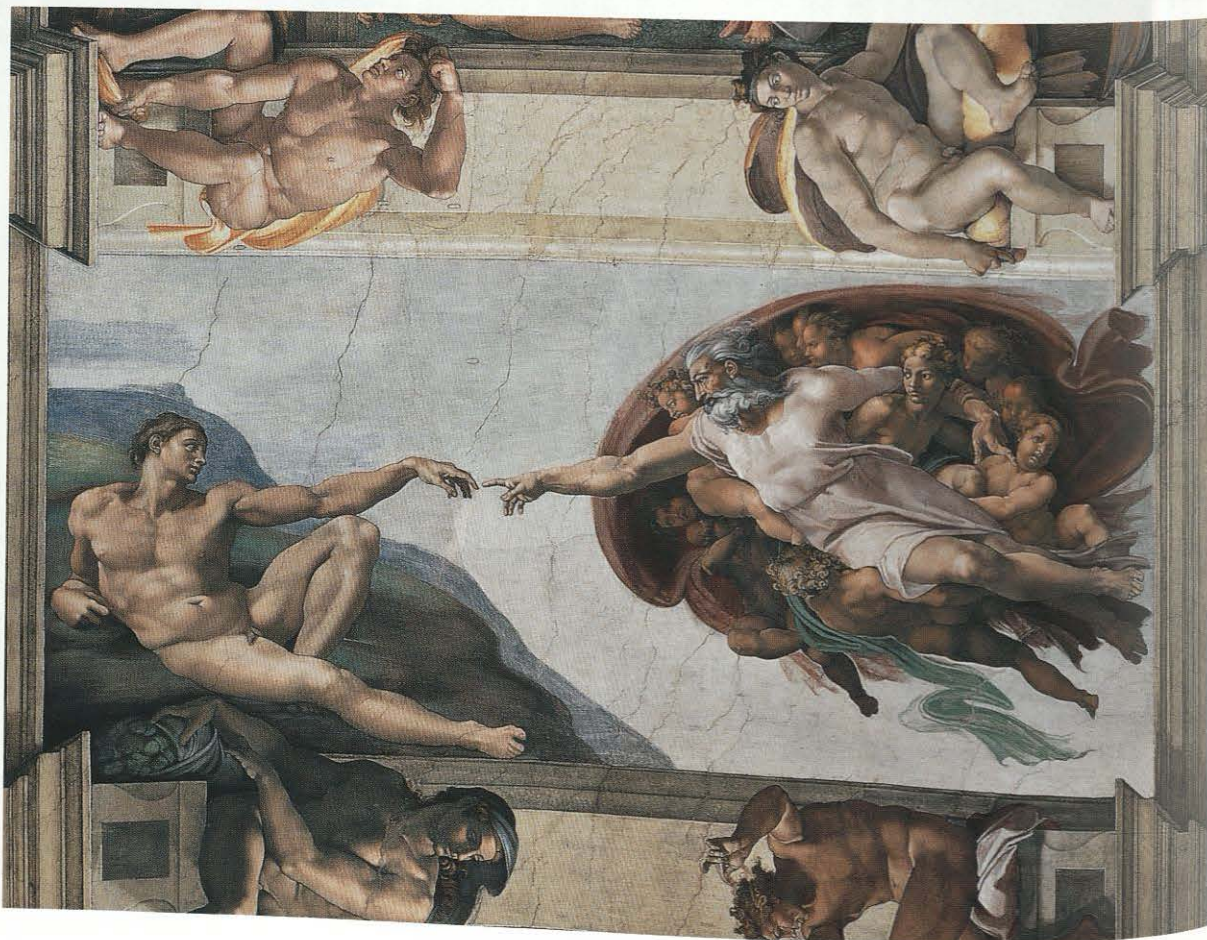
of perspectives in foreshortening, nor is there any fixed point of view, but he accommodated the compartments to the figures rather than the figures to the compartments.” In other words, Michelangelo abandoned the conception of the picture as something figures occupy, and instead made the figure the primary structural unit, such that the bodies in Michelangelo’s ceiling seem at once to be in as well as on the partly fictive, partly real architecture. The frequent shifts in orientation, level of illusion, and scale – including, for example, nudes that appear at once to sit gravely on pedestals and to defy the gravity of the vault over our heads, and that hold medallions bigger than the fictive marble figures below them – are dizzying. To see everything that is happening, the viewer has to turn constantly, even as he proceeds down the nave.

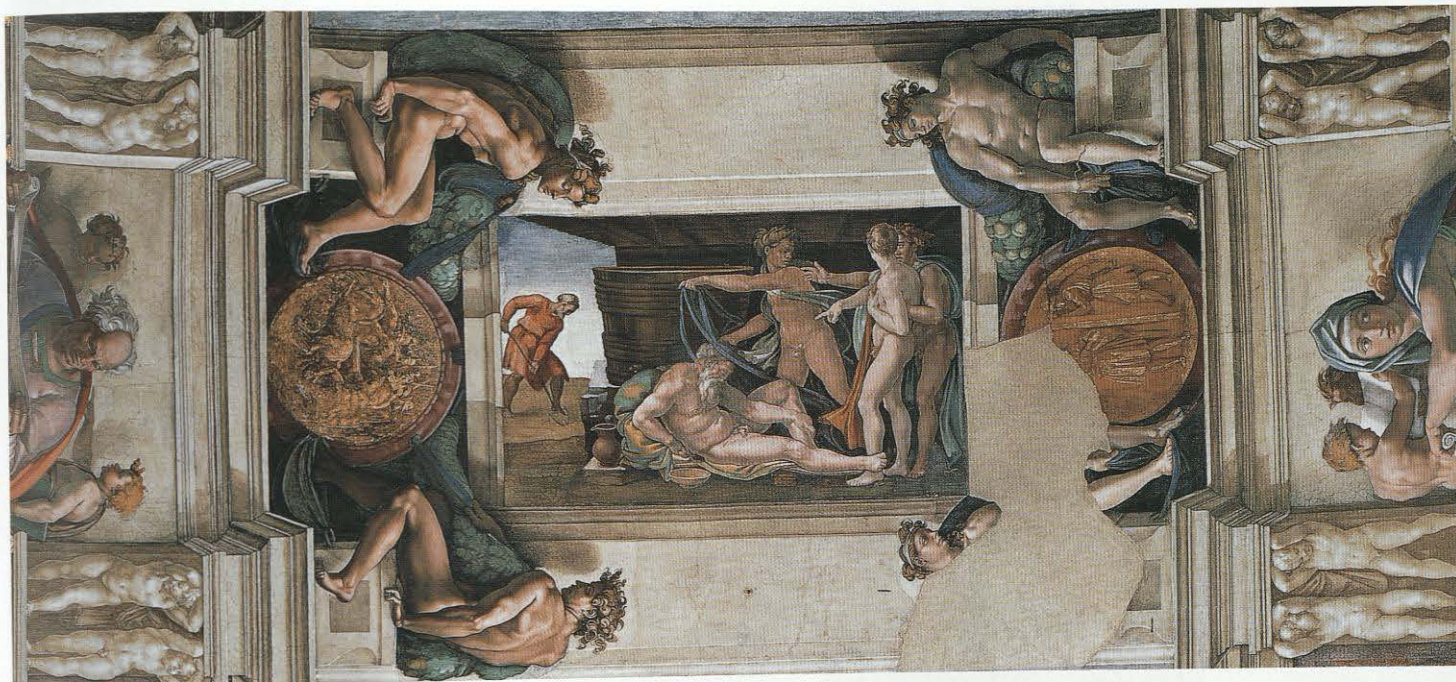
In painting the ceiling, Michelangelo could not have seen anything like what the viewer sees looking up at it from the floor below: he had to remain elevated on an elaborately constructed scaffolding, bending over backward and painting figures that were often much, much larger than his own body, but which he could only see face-to-face. He wrote about the hardships in a poem, describing how, with his beard pointed up to heaven, his

body became uncomfortably distorted and paint dripped down on his face. In this condition, he went on, he could not properly judge what he was doing: “the thoughts that arise in my mind are false and strange, for one shoots badly through a crooked barrel.” Besides, he wrote, he was not even really a painter. In the margin of the poem, Michelangelo drew an image of himself in a tortured pose, slashing a monstrous creature onto the ceiling above him (fig. 12.30). The gesture the painter makes there evokes that of the God who creates the world in Michelangelo’s Genesis scenes; what this twisted artist renders, however, bears little resemblance to the beauties Michelangelo in fact produced. This owes much to his extensive use of cartoons, full-scale drawings that let him work out each of his figures on paper, then transfer them to the plaster surface. These show, among other things, that Michelangelo conceived even his draped figures initially as nudes, and that he studied male bodies to render female ones – two reasons why all of the bodies he included seem so powerful.

This is not to say that the paintings in the Pope’s chapel were just about their painter. In the Sistine frescoes, Michelangelo aimed to demonstrate art’s capacity to represent and even reveal Christian principles. This was

12.32
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *The Creation
of Adam*. Fresco. Sistine
Chapel, Vatican





possible because of a rare confluence of interests between the artistic and theological cultures of the papal court, especially concerning human nature and the human body. The preachers in the Sistine Chapel delivered sermons in elegant Latin modeled on the Roman orator Cicero, extolling the dignity of man as the image of God and the glorification of human flesh in Christ's incarnation. This was a significant departure from a long-established tradition, one that went back to the early Christian "Church Fathers," vilifying the body as a prison of the soul. St. Augustine (354–430 CE), in particular, had taught that the body, designed by God as the soul's instrument, became mortal, imperfect, and irrational through the sin of Adam and Eve, which led the soul to sin and damnation. Christian humanists around 1500, by contrast, began to see the body's beauty as a mirror to the soul's perfection. One or more of these learned men from the papal court would have advised Michelangelo on what scenes and figures to include, and how to interpret them, although the artist, a reader of Dante's poetry, probably had a good layman's grasp of scriptural interpretation.

Like the scenes from the 1480s on the walls below, Michelangelo's images all come from the Bible, but rather than simply illustrating episodes from Genesis, Kings, and Maccabees, the ceiling frescoes reconcile Jewish Scriptures with Christian teaching. On the ceiling's central axis, a series of nine narrative scenes shows events from the Book of Genesis (fig. 12.31). These begin over the altar with God separating light from darkness, creating the sun and moon, and separating sea and sky. They continue with a triad of scenes treating the creation of Adam



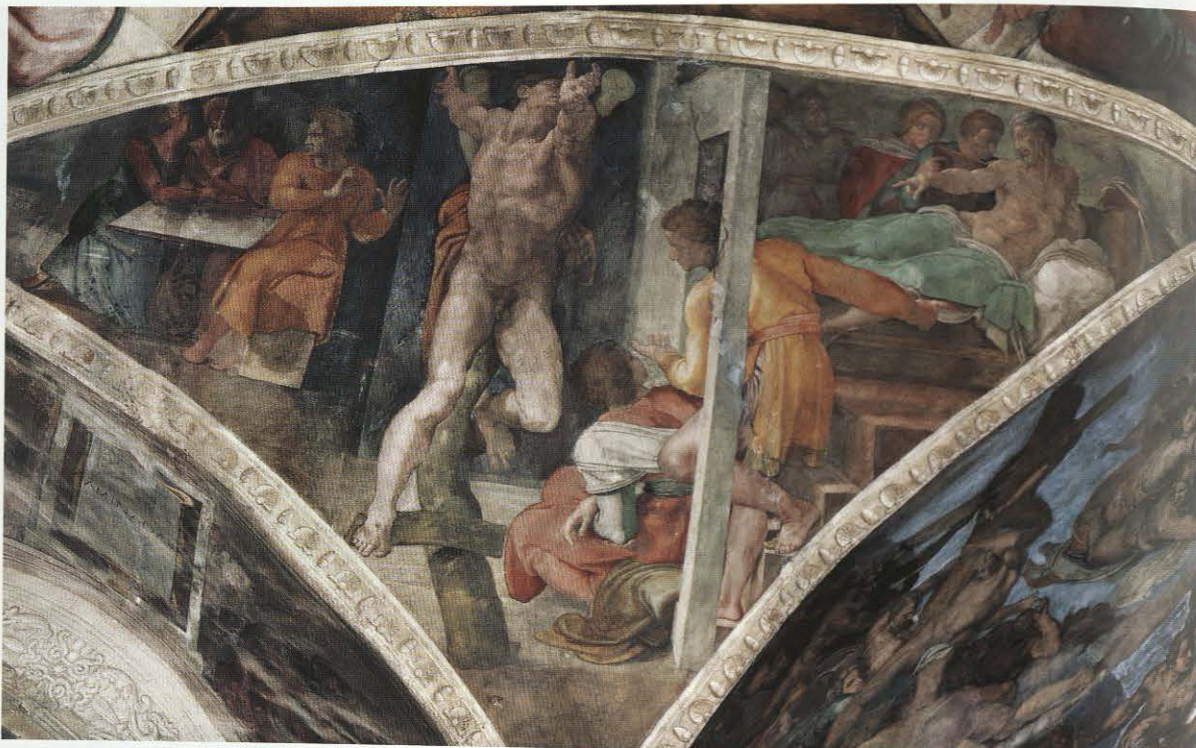
(fig. 12.32) and Eve, their temptation and disobedience, and their exile from Paradise, and conclude with three episodes representing the tragic and violent course of history after the Fall of Man. Though the Jews worship God with animal sacrifice, an angered Lord nonetheless sends the deluge that destroys all of humanity except the pious Noah and his family, who protect other living species in the ark. The final scene shows the Drunkenness of Noah, mocked by one of his sons, who will in turn be punished for his transgression (fig. 12.33). In the four corners of the ceiling, Michelangelo depicted episodes from the history of the Jewish people, all of them dealing with themes of violence and retribution. In *The Brazen Serpent*, God punishes his people by sending a plague of serpents

TOP
12.33
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *The
Drunkenness of Noah*

ABOVE
12.34
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *The Brazen
Serpent*

12.35

Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *The
Crucifixion of Haman*



(fig. 12.34); they are healed only when Moses, commanded by God, raises a bronze effigy of a snake upon a staff. Two well-known Biblical heroes, David and Judith, appear here as instruments of justice over the enemies of the chosen people. Finally, Esther, the Jewish wife of King Xerxes of Persia, intervenes to secure the punishment by crucifixion of Haman, who had conspired to have the Jews of Persia exterminated (fig. 12.35).

12.36

Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *Ancestor
Group (Ozias, Ioatham,
Achaz)*



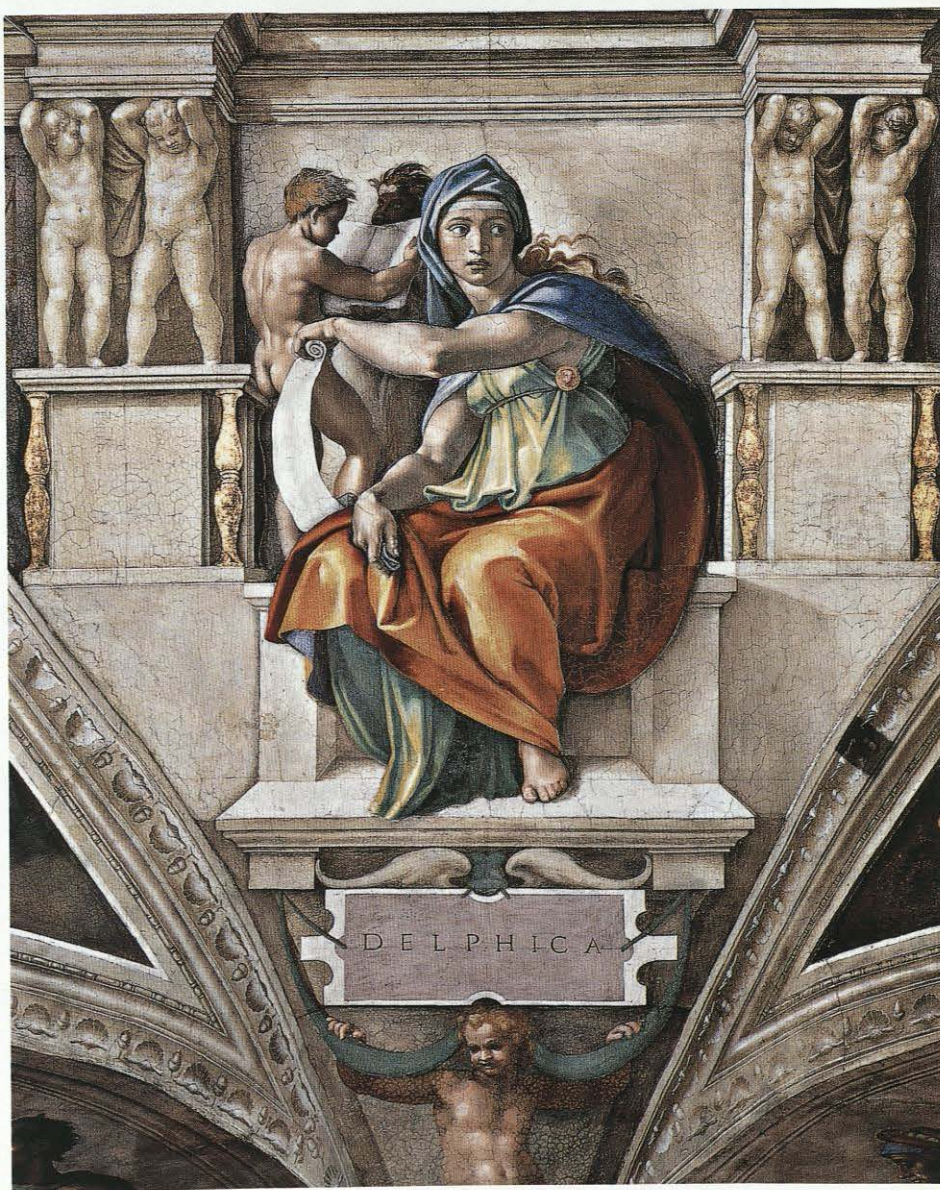
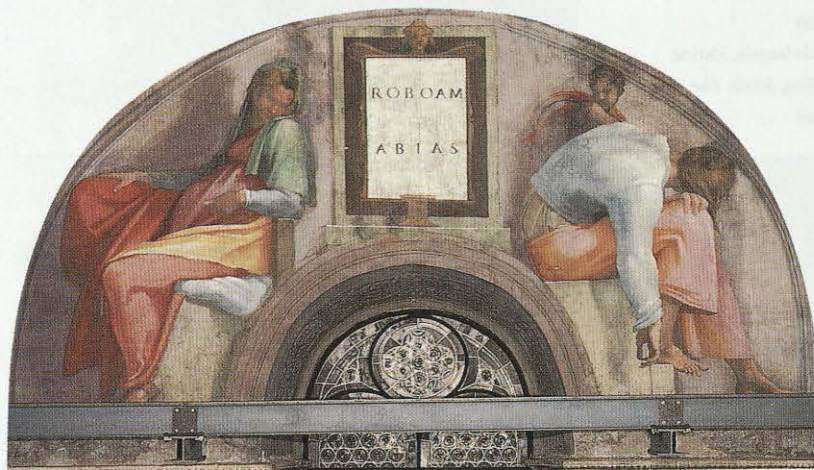
As with the earlier Moses and Christ cycles below, the coherence of which depend on the Christian reading of the Old Testament as a collection of “typological” predictions related to the coming of the Virgin, Christ, and the Church, so here do the frescoes refer forward in

time: each is a type, at once the likeness and the antithesis of the “antitype” that would come after it. All four corner pendentives are antitypes of Christ and the Virgin: Haman, crucified for the good of the chosen people, is the precursor of Christ’s Crucifixion, which offers redemption to everyone; so too is the brazen serpent. The same relationship explains the prominence of Michelangelo’s Tree of Knowledge, the instrument of man’s damnation; it, too, prefigures the Crucifixion, the instrument of his salvation. The newly created and sinless Adam (see fig. 12.32) is echoed in Noah, the figure of fallen mankind (see fig. 12.33). The fact that Noah’s ark looks like a modern building – indeed, like the Sistine Chapel itself – implies that the salvation Michelangelo represented was like that which the Christian would find when entering a space like this one.

The need to link the time of the Old Testament with the time of Christ (and after him, the popes) explains the eventual decision not to include Apostles in the spandrels and instead to show characters who would more clearly announce a great historical transition. In the lunettes above the windows, Michelangelo painted the passing generations before the coming of Christ; in the eight pendentives above the lunettes, the ancestors of Jesus Christ (fig. 12.36 and 12.37). Michelangelo’s depictions of family groups here are a tour de force: it is as though he has realized that Leonardo and Raphael had both regarded variations upon the Holy Family theme as a kind of test of their inventive powers, and showed

that he could outdo them with a sequence that avoids any repetition. Still, when compared to the Holy Family group of Michelangelo's own *Doni Tondo* (see fig. 12.9), the pendentive figures have a brooding and melancholy character, devoid of the flow of energy that linked his Holy Family both emotionally and formally. The theme of listless waiting, of unconsciousness to historical destiny, of preoccupation in mundane tasks or in outright personal folly, is manifest even more in the family pairings of the lunettes, where couples are so absorbed in themselves that they seem oblivious to each other. Such, the ceiling implies, is the condition of the Jewish people as they wait for the Messiah.

In sharp contrast with the melancholy ancestors of Christ are the impressive enthroned men and women, who effectively dominate the entire design from illusionistic niches that seem to protrude into the space of the chapel. These are seven of the male Hebrew prophets, representing the books of the Bible that bore their names, and five of the female prophets, known as Sibyls, from the world of pagan antiquity. The prophecies of the sibyls, forged in late antiquity and passed down through early Christian writers, had provided the theological basis for Christian readings of the Old Testament as anticipations of events fulfilled in the Church's own time. Traditionally, Christian art showed the prophets and sibyls with scrolls bearing extracts from their writings. Michelangelo, remarkably, has almost entirely eliminated the written word from his portrayals, as if the poses and gestures of the figures were sufficiently eloquent to convey the import of their prophecies. These figures, much like the prophets that Nanni di Banco (see fig. 2.23) and Donatello had made for Florence Cathedral a century before, channel the word of God, which now manifests itself as an animating energy or spirit. While Zechariah, the furthest from the altar, merely mulls over his book, *spiritelli* rouse Joel and Isaiah, together with the Delphic and Erythraean sibyls, to a state of ecstatic inspiration. Spirits also take the form of breath – this is particularly evident in the figure of the Delphic sibyl (fig. 12.38), whose blond hair flutters in the air as she opens her mouth to speak. A passage in Joel's own prophecy seems to provide the foundational text for Michelangelo's



TOP RIGHT

12.37

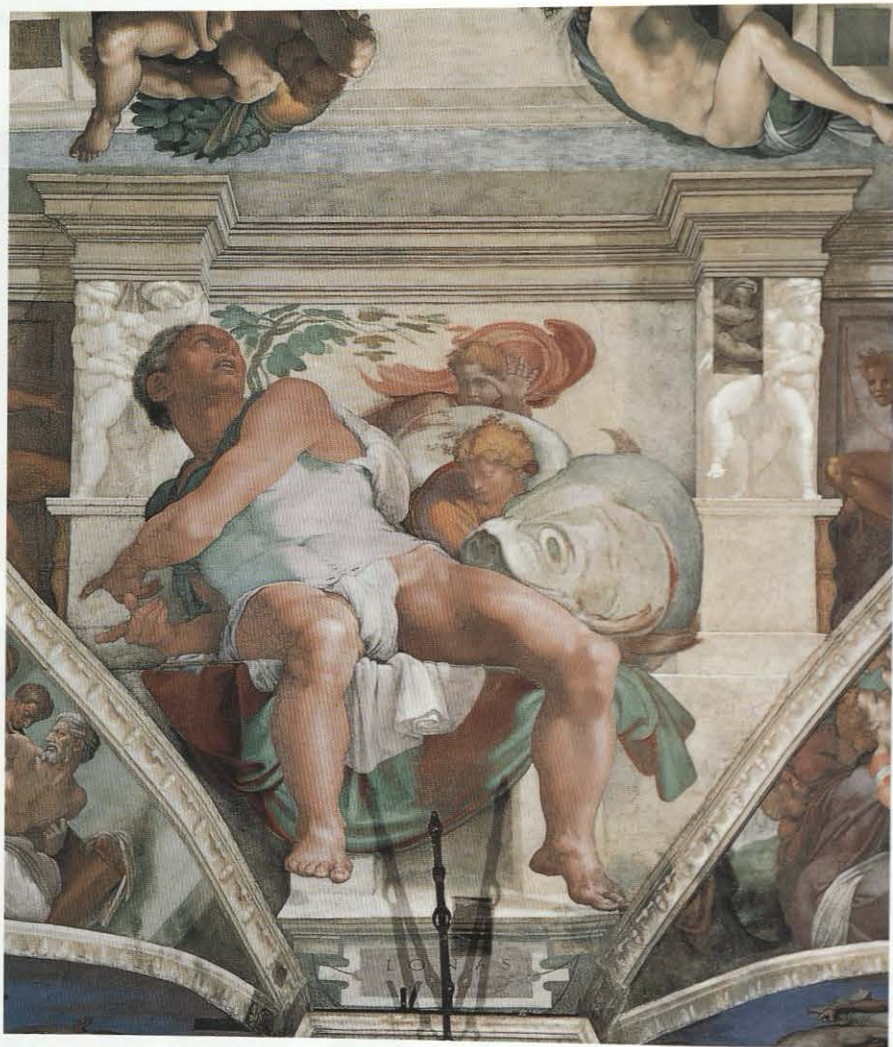
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *Ancestor*
Group: *Roboam, Abias*

RIGHT

12.38

Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *Delphic Sibyl*

12.39
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *The Prophet
Jonah*



OPPOSITE, TOP LEFT
12.40
Michelangelo, Sistine
Ceiling, detail: *Libyan Sibyl*

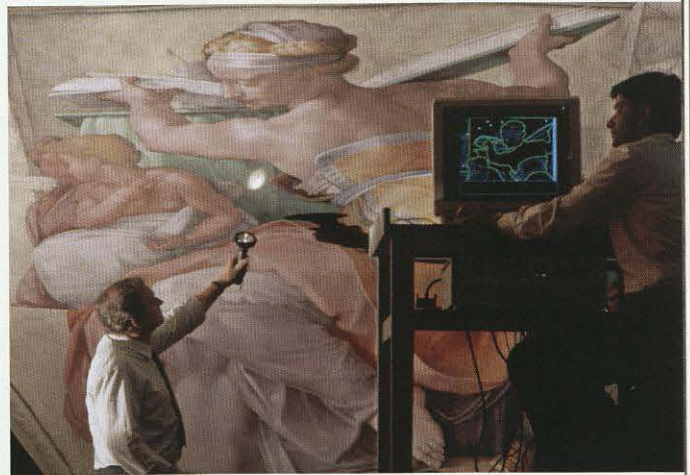
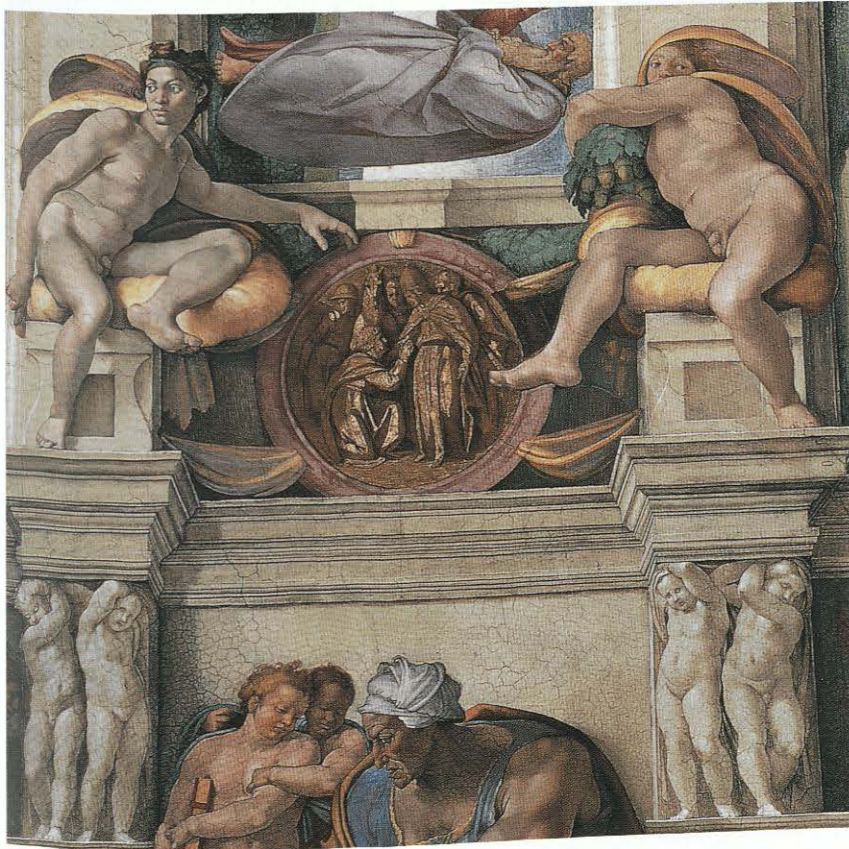
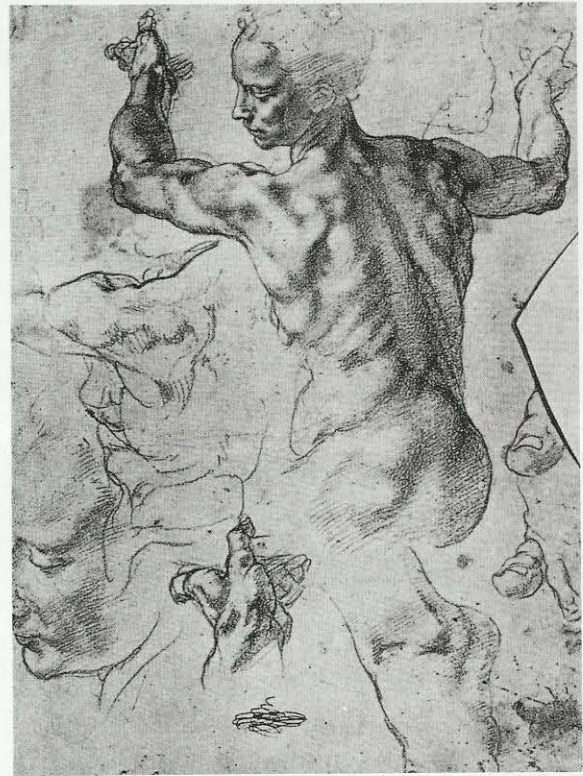
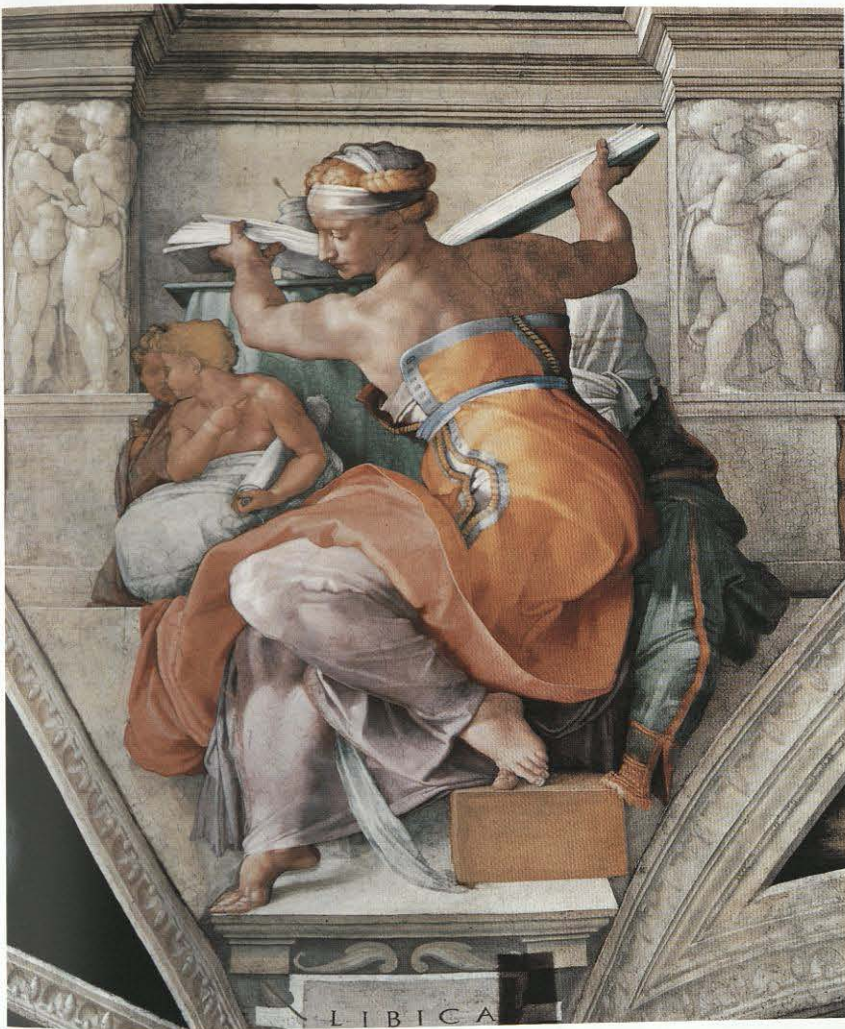
OPPOSITE, TOP RIGHT
12.41
Michelangelo, study for
Libyan Sibyl, c. 1511.
Red chalk on paper, 11 $\frac{1}{8}$
x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (28.9 x 21.4 cm).
Metropolitan Museum of
Art, New York

interpretation of these figures (Joel 2:28–29): “And it shall come to pass after this, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy: your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Moreover upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit.”

The poses of these visionary men and women become more elaborate as they get closer to the altar wall. The colors also become less natural, more brilliant, more self-consciously artificial and ornamental. Instead of modeling forms by changing the tone of a given hue, Michelangelo now produces a sense of light and shade by juxtaposing contrasting colors: a green turns red in the shadows, a red becomes orange in the highlights. The poses, too, suggest the transcendence of nature and the physical limitations of the wall surface: the body of Jonah (fig. 12.39), the most technically difficult of the figures, recedes in space as the vault curves outward. He himself looks up ecstatically at the image of God separating Light and Darkness on the vault above. The Libyan sibyl (figs. 12.40–12.42) is a variant of the *Doni Madonna* (see fig. 12.9): she exerts herself with her massive book, her body a counterpoint of turning shoulders, hips, and knees. The pose is quite impossible,

but then this figure is more than human, and the energy that transfigures her came to be identified as a property of Michelangelo's own art. When Vasari wrote that these figures “appear truly divine to whoever studies their attitudes and expressions,” he was referring to a quality of superhuman inspiration available not only to the prophets but also to the painter himself. Within a few years after his completion of the ceiling, the artist would commonly be referred to as the “divine Michelangelo.”

All the imagery in the ceiling is organized around the principles of divine energy or inspiration on one hand and inertia or unconsciousness on the other; Michelangelo generates meaning from different conditions of the heroic male body. The vigorous spiraling movement of God at one end of the series of narratives contrasts with the figure of Noah at the other, who has collapsed into a drunken slumber. In the almost central scene of the Creation of Adam (see fig. 12.32), the figure of the first man, “made in God's image,” provides a more youthful variant of Noah – Michelangelo has given them similar poses and asks us to compare them. Instead of slipping, like Noah, toward sleep, Adam raises himself to consciousness, receiving an animating energy from God's



LEFT

12.43

Michelangelo, Sistine Ceiling,
detail: Nude male figures above
Cumaean Sibyl

ABOVE

12.42

Restorers at work on the
Libyan Sibyl. The photo
illustrates the scale and
challenging angles at which
Michelangelo worked.

12.44

Roman or Hellenistic, Belvedere Torso, mid-first century BCE. Parian marble, height 62³/₈" (159 cm). Museo Pio-Clementino, Sala delle Muse, Vatican

right hand. (God's other hand caresses a child, the future Christ: theologians understood Adam to prefigure Christ and referred to Christ as the "New Adam," since his incarnation promised a redemption that would restore human beings to the perfect state that preceded the Fall.) The contrast between Noah and Adam expresses that between human perfection before the Fall and moral corruption afterward.

Other episodes from the Jewish Bible appear in feigned bronze reliefs. Holding these in place is a series of figures who stand as among Michelangelo's most extraordinary and influential creations – all nude, all male, some quietly pondering, others once again in states of animation and elation that tend to gain in intensity toward the altar. Sometimes they enter into an almost athletic degree of hyperactivity. Like the nudes of the *Battle of Cascina* cartoon (see fig. 12.12), they assume poses that could not be sustained for more than a few moments, if at all, by any human being (fig. 12.43). The model here, in fact, was not a living being at all, but an actual piece of sculpture in the collection of Julius II – a colossal seated nude, bereft of arms, legs, and head, known as the Belvedere Torso (fig. 12.44). The twenty nude figures are a set of variations on this single ancient model. They are demonstrations of the artist's resourcefulness but also affirmations that the pagan image of the body could find a new place in modern Christian art, assertions of the beauty of man, made in God's image.

12.45

Belvedere, Vatican, looking south. The view planned by Bramante was obstructed by a wing of the Vatican Library added in 1587–89; this photograph shows an additional transverse wing, the Braccio Nuovo, added in 1816–22.



The Vatican Palace

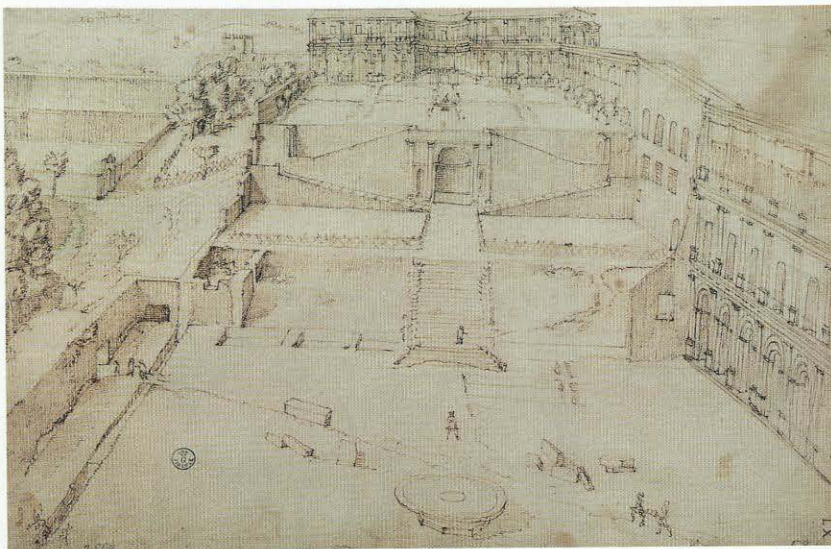
While Michelangelo was painting the Sistine Ceiling, Bramante was giving the Vatican Palace a magnificent new form. On a hillside to the west of St. Peter's and the palace complex was a papal summer retreat known as the Villa Belvedere. Bramante conceived a scheme to join the villa to the main body of the residence with two great galleries, which would gradually diminish from three tiers to one as the ground rises (see figs. 12.45–46). What Bramante aimed to do, in effect, was to subject an entire irregular landscape to the order and symmetry of architecture. Triple corridors were to enclose a series of terraces outfitted with gardens and a theater, as well as an arena for tournaments and equestrian events. At once showing his own study of ancient Roman remains and underscoring the dimension of spectacle, Bramante ornamented the facades of the raised corridors with repeating bays of arches and engaged columns or pilasters he based on the arcades at Rome's Colosseum.

The climax was to be a remodeled Villa Belvedere. Since the original villa angled away from the palace and the gigantic courtyard, Bramante designed for it a new

RIGHT

12.46

Giovanni Antonio Dosio,
the Vatican Belvedere
courtyards under
construction, looking
north, c. 1558–61. Pen and
brown ink with traces of
chalk on paper, 8⁵/₈ x 13"
(21.9 x 33.2 cm). Biblioteca
Vaticana, Rome



BELOW

12.47

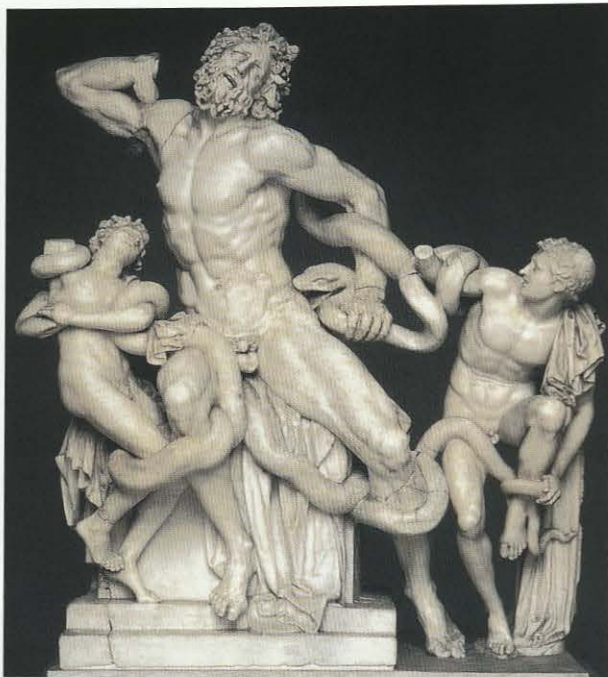
Belvedere, Vatican:
Bramante's spiral staircase



12.48

Roman or Hellenistic, *Laocoön*. Marble, height 8' (2.4 m). Vatican Museums, Rome.

The statue, discovered in 1506, may be an early first-century BCE marble by the Hellenistic sculptors Hagesandros, Athenodoros, and Ploydoros, or it may be a second-century CE Roman reconstruction.



facade at right angles to the corridors, incorporating a huge niche. (The facade was built only later in the century, by which time a new gallery housing the Vatican Library had partitioned the courtyard.) Within the Belvedere itself, moreover, he introduced a pair of spiral staircases (fig. 12.47) that, once again, ran through the succession of architectural orders: ascending the spiral stairs, Doric gives way to Ionic and then to Corinthian. The highlight of the building, however, was what it housed, the increasingly impressive papal collection of ancient sculptures. It was this site that gave its name to the famous torso that Michelangelo was studying (see fig. 12.44), as well as to the magnificent lifesize marble, discovered in the late fifteenth century, known henceforth as the “Apollo Belvedere.” The work that had made news the year Bramante went to work on the building, however, the one that occasioned exchanges of letters and bursts of poetry, was the *Laocoön* (fig. 12.48).

In 1506, a Roman curious about a sealed-up chamber in his vineyard discovered the marble, which showed a Trojan priest and his two sons devoured by snakes in divine retribution for his having warned his countrymen about the treachery of the Greeks. The depicted episode would have been familiar to all readers of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, beloved at the papal court for its account of the foundation of Rome. More significantly, however, Pliny the Elder had described what the discoverers took to be this very marble in his *Natural History* (c. 77–79 CE), in which he not only reported that the emperor Titus had kept the statue in his house but also attested that it was greater than all other ancient paintings or sculptures.

Artists wishing to measure themselves against the antique now had before them a nearly intact group of figures that ancient Rome’s most distinguished historian of art himself assured them had no compare.

Eloquent Bodies: Raphael and the Stanza della Segnatura

Among the most enthusiastic young students of the *Laocoön* was Raphael, who, within a year of completing the Baglioni altarpiece (see fig. 12.21) had himself transferred to Rome; he would eventually respond to the ancient sculpture in drawings, prints, and paintings. Bramante seems to have been an advocate and something of a protector of his fellow artist from Urbino. Like Michelangelo, Raphael would avail himself of the Pope’s incomparable resources to bring previously unthinkable projects into being: unlike Michelangelo, he managed to avoid the cross-purposes and clashes of ego that would lead to years of frustration for the older artist. Raphael stayed close to Bramante, who was forty years his senior and understood how to direct the Pope’s often erratic impulses as a patron.

In 1508, the same year that Michelangelo started work on the Sistine Ceiling, Julius commissioned Raphael to decorate the rooms he intended to use as his official apartment. Overlooking Bramante’s courtyard, in the structure known as the Borgia Tower (after the recent Pope, Rodrigo Borgia, or Alexander VI), these included the room that came to be called the Stanza della Segnatura – well after Raphael’s time, the chamber housed the papal tribunal known as the “segnatura,” the activity of which involved the signing of official documents. In Julius’s own day, the space served as a papal library, with books arrayed on sloping shelves below large frescoes. (The shelves are now gone, and the frescoes in the lower zone of the room are later additions.) Raphael’s paintings on each wall, along with the corresponding section of vault above (fig. 12.49), visualized the four major areas of learning represented: Theology, Philosophy, Poetry, and Law. Earlier libraries and studies had sometimes been decorated with figures of Muses or Allegories of the Liberal Arts, often including imaginary portraits of their most famous historical practitioners. What was most radical about Raphael’s scheme was its separation of the allegorical figures from the portraits, so that the portraits now dominate the invention. It is as though the authors of the room’s books have come to life on its walls.

In designing his ceiling, Raphael must have been aware of Michelangelo’s early designs for the Sistine Ceiling, for although Raphael conceived his ceiling as a series of fictive mosaics, the arrangement of the compartments is close in conception to the scheme Michelangelo

OPPOSITE

12.49

Raphael, vault fresco with (counter-clockwise from bottom) allegories of Poetry, Philosophy, Justice, Philosophy, 1508–10. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican. The hexagon in the center is the work of Sodoma, who collaborated with Raphael on this part of the decoration.

