ART OF RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE EUROPE (1400–1750)

The thousand years of European history known as the Middle Ages were followed by the period known as the Renaissance (1400–1600). The term means “rebirth,” a reference to a renewed interest in the Classical world of Greece and Rome. The influence of Classical subject matter is evident in the numbers of nudes and mythological figures in Renaissance art. Yet artworks from the Renaissance, even those with Classical subjects, often have a Christian message.

The Renaissance was also marked by an increased interest in education and the natural world. Improved literacy, travel, and books (made possible by the invention of moveable type in the 1400s) expanded the transmission of ideas and artistic developments throughout Europe. Humanism became influential as a philosophical...
approach to life that stressed the intellectual and physical potential of human beings to achieve personal success and to contribute to the betterment of society.

Religion continued to be a large component of people’s lives. The Reformation (beginning in 1517) resulted in Protestants breaking away from the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church’s Counter-Reformation (1545–1648) was an attempt to define further the beliefs of Catholics in opposition to the Protestants. Both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation had a great impact on the way art was made. Generally, Catholic artwork highlighted the power of intermediaries—such as saints and the Church—between Christians and God. Since the Catholic leadership was based in Rome, much of the artwork of the Italian Renaissance reflects Catholic doctrine. By contrast, in northern Europe, artworks inspired by Protestant beliefs were common. Protestantism is based on a more individual and direct relationship with God rather than one strictly guided by and through the Church. As a result, northern Renaissance imagery often includes intimate scenes and intricate details.

Italian artist and historian Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) used the term Renaissance (rinascità) in the first art history book, The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, which was published in 1550 (3.118). Vasari’s text emphasized the intellectual ability required to make paintings, sculptures, and architecture. Around this time artists began to be seen as creative geniuses, even divinely inspired, rather than manual producers of craft products. The art of the Renaissance can be divided into chronological and stylistic periods: early, high, late, and Mannerist, all of which are discussed in this chapter.

The period that followed the Renaissance is known as the Baroque (1600–1750). Like Renaissance, Baroque refers to both a historical period and a style of art. The seventeenth century is noted for an increase in trade, advancements in science, and the permanent division between the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants. Baroque art draws on much of the same subject matter as the Renaissance, but Baroque images tend to include more motion and emotion. The Renaissance and Baroque periods were both marked by constant warfare throughout Europe, and art was often used to memorialize battles or to inspire people to support their rulers. Throughout these centuries, artworks were commissioned by wealthy patrons, often a church or ruling family, who determined such things as the size, subject matter, and even how much of an expensive pigment, such as ultramarine blue, the artist could use.

### The Early Renaissance in Italy

Following the renewed interest in the Classical past and the influence of humanist thought, Italian artists during the early Renaissance were preoccupied with making pictures that their viewers would find entirely believable. The real, however, was balanced by the ideal, especially when the subjects were mythological or religious. Whereas during the Middle Ages, depictions of the nude body had been avoided except to show the weakness and mortality of such sinners as Adam and Eve, during the Renaissance, artists portrayed the idealized nude figure as the embodiment of spiritual and intellectual perfection.

**Renaissance:** a period of cultural and artistic change in Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century  
**Baroque:** European artistic and architectural style of the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, characterized by extravagance and emotional intensity  
**Patron:** an organization or individual who sponsors the creation of works of art  
**Pigment:** the colored material used in paints. Often made from finely ground minerals  
**Ideal:** more beautiful, harmonious, or perfect than reality
Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the works of Giotto created a more believable, human space. They were part of a transition from spiritual Gothic art to the three-dimensional space that became characteristic of the Italian Renaissance. In art, although religious subjects remained popular, the emphasis switched from a belief in faith as the only factor in attaining immortality after death, to a concentration on how human actions could enhance the quality of life on Earth. Mathematics and science, derived from a renewed study of classical Greek and Roman works, encouraged the systematic understanding of the world. Renaissance artists used and refined new systems of perspective (discussed below) to translate their careful observations more consistently into realistic artistic representations. These influences inspired Renaissance artists to combine existing subject matter and techniques with innovative approaches.

The Italian sculptor and architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) is famous for solving an architectural problem in Florence. More than a century after construction started, the cathedral was still unfinished because no one had figured out how to build its enormous 140-foot-diameter dome. In 1419 a competition was held and Brunelleschi’s radical proposals won (3.119). He not only designed the dome but also devised the machinery used to build it, and oversaw the construction itself, thus earning him the right to be called the first Renaissance architect.

The dome was a great technological challenge. Existing construction techniques required temporary wooden scaffolding to form the shape of the dome (170 feet above the ground at its top) until the stonework was finished—which in this case would have been too costly and heavy. The enormous weight of the bricks and stone could not be held up by external stone supports either, because of the existing buildings around the cathedral. Brunelleschi invented equipment to hoist the building materials and came up with an ingenious system that used each stage of the structure to support the next as the dome was built, layer by layer (3.120). The dome’s construction began in 1420 and took sixteen years to complete.
Brunelleschi is also credited with inventing a new method for drawing, known as **linear perspective**, a technique for creating the illusion of three-dimensional space. He shared the process with other Florentine artists, including his close friend, a painter nicknamed Masaccio, or “Big Clumsy Tom” (1401–28). Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) wrote in his treatise *On Painting* (1435) about the theories of perspective that were already being put into practice by Brunelleschi and Masaccio, and the technique spread.

Masaccio applied the rules of linear perspective in several large-scale *fresco* paintings, including *Tribute Money* (3.121). Here, figures, architecture, and landscape are integrated into a believable scene. The buildings in the foreground appear on the same scale as the group of figures standing next to them. As the buildings and people get further away from us, they get smaller, and lead, in a *naturalistic* way, toward a **vanishing point** on the horizon. The focal point converges on Jesus, and the vanishing point lies behind his head, making him the visual and symbolic center of the scene. Masaccio uses **atmospheric perspective** to show the distant landscape, where the mountains fade from greenish to gray.

Innovations in this painting include consistent lighting throughout, a wide range of colors, and the use of **chiaroscuro** (extremes of light and dark) to enhance the illusion of three-dimensional form. *Tribute Money* is one of Masaccio’s most original paintings: it also shows three scenes in a sequence within one setting. While the fresco maintains the medieval tradition of *narrative* painting, the composition deviates from the earlier practice in an important way. Rather than showing each scene on a separate panel, events that take place at different times are shown together in a unified space, or a **continuous narrative**. In the center, the tax collector, with his back to us, demands the Jewish temple tax as the disciples look on. Jesus tells Peter to retrieve the money from the mouth of the first fish he catches. We see Peter doing so in the middle ground on our left. On our right, Peter pays the collector double the amount owed, using the money miraculously obtained from the fish’s mouth. This story from the gospel of Matthew would have been particularly relevant for contemporary Florentines, who were required to pay a tax for military defense in 1427, the same year the painting was made.

Like other Renaissance artists, Masaccio used linear perspective to convince viewers they were looking at reality rather than a symbolic representation. He incorporated an understanding of the movement of the bodies beneath the drapery to increase the sense of **volume**. This series of frescoes, which were
displayed in the Brancacci family chapel, was a major influence on later artists, including Michelangelo (see below), who specifically went to the chapel to study Masaccio’s paintings.

The High Renaissance in Italy

The Italian artists Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo (1475–1564), and Raphael (1483–1520) dominated the art world at the beginning of the sixteenth century. All three of them utilized the rules of perspective and illusionism, but willingly departed from exact mechanical precision in order to create desired visual effects.

Leonardo was the oldest among them. He was known not only as a great painter but also as a scientist and engineer. Leonardo invented a painting technique he called *sfumato*, which consisted of applying a hazy or misty glaze over the painting. In Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, the best-known depiction of Christ sharing a last meal with his disciples before his crucifixion, the artist used an experimental mixture of *media* (3.122).

Leonardo was commissioned by Dominican friars to paint *The Last Supper* for their dining hall in the monastery of Santa Maria della Grazie in Milan, Italy. Leonardo emphasizes Christ as the most important figure in four ways. First, Christ is depicted in the center of the painting. Second, he is shown as a stable and calm triangular form, in contrast with the agitated activity of the other figures. Third, his head is framed by the natural light of the middle of the three windows behind him. Finally, Leonardo arranged the linear perspective of his painting so that the vanishing point is directly behind Christ’s head.

This work is not simply a representation of a meal, however, for Leonardo highlights two important aspects of religious doctrine related to this event: the Eucharist, or communion ceremony, and the betrayal of Judas. Here Leonardo portrays the tradition accepted by Catholics, who believe that the communion bread and wine are the body and blood of Christ. The artist also invites the viewer to locate Judas: by depicting the moment when Christ has just announced, “One of you is
about to betray me” (Matthew 26:21), Leonardo shows, through gesture and facial expression, the individual reaction of each of the disciples. Judas has his elbow on the table and is in the group of three to Christ’s right (our left). The deceiver clutches a money bag in his right hand and has just knocked down a salt dish, which is a bad omen.

The Catholic Church was an important patron of the arts. Like the Dominican friars who hired Leonardo in Milan, Pope Julius II also commissioned important artworks. As part of Julius’s campaign to restore Rome and the Vatican to its ancient grandeur, he had Raphael working on the School of Athens fresco in the Vatican apartments between 1510 and 1511 (see Gateway Box: Raphael, 3.125, p. 382), while Michelangelo was nearby painting the ceiling of the Vatican’s Sistine Chapel. The painting, which took Michelangelo four years to complete, is so believable we could be fooled into thinking the beams, pedestals, and structural elements are real (3.123). Michelangelo preferred stone carving to painting, which perhaps explains why he painted the ceiling with such apparently three-dimensional figures and surrounded them with architectural elements and sculpture.

The nine panels at the ceiling’s center detail the Old Testament stories of Genesis, from the creation of the heavens and earth, to the creation and fall of Adam and Eve, and ending with scenes from the Great Flood. The ceiling is covered with detailed figure studies, Michelangelo’s specialty. In the Creation of Adam panel, for example, human nudity could be associated with the perfection of man.

Michelangelo also worked on another famous commission in the Sistine Chapel almost twenty years later. When the artist was in his sixties, Pope Clement VII requested that Michelangelo paint the Last Judgment on the wall behind the altar (3.124). As during the earlier commission, Michelangelo was forced to delay sculptural...
Self-portrait of Raphael, second from the right, listening to Ptolemy. In a group because he was gregarious. Perhaps representing Apelles.

Plato (great Classical philosopher) modeled after Leonardo da Vinci.

Aristotle holding Nicomachean Ethics and pointing to the ground—the material world.

Pythagoras with a book.

The sky [and Plato pointing to it] as a reference to the heavens as realm of the ideal.

Architecture and coffered ceiling use rules of perspective as a reference to man’s design ability and perhaps dominance over nature.

Athena: goddess of Wisdom.

Diogenes.

Poetic thinkers.

Freedom and independence.

Heraclitus, modeled after Michelangelo, leaning on a block of marble. Shown by himself because he was a solitary person.

Ancient scientists.

Euclid bending with compass and slate, modeled after Bramante.

Ptolemy holding the Celestial Globe.

Aristotle holding Nicomachean Ethics and pointing to the ground—the material world.

Plato (great Classical philosopher) modeled after Leonardo da Vinci.

Apollo: god of music and lyric poetry; made to look like Michelangelo’s Dying Slave.

Socrates, in green, engaging youths in debate, talking to Alexander the Great.

Pythagoras with a book.

Poetic thinkers.

Freedom and independence.

Heraclitus, modeled after Michelangelo, leaning on a block of marble. Shown by himself because he was a solitary person.

Ancient scientists.

Euclid bending with compass and slate, modeled after Bramante.

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Plato (great Classical philosopher) modeled after Leonardo da Vinci.

Apollo: god of music and lyric poetry; made to look like Michelangelo’s Dying Slave.
In *The School of Athens*, Raphael depicts the Classical world within the Renaissance as a rebirth of the physical and mental advancements of the ancients. Raphael links a gathering of great philosophers and scientists from the Classical past—Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Pythagoras, and Ptolemy, for example—to sixteenth-century Italy by using people he knew as models for the figures from ancient Greece and Rome. By using the Renaissance painter Leonardo da Vinci as the model for the honorable figure of the Greek philosopher Plato, Raphael expresses admiration and reverence for Leonardo’s accomplishments. Using the face of Leonardo allows us to see Plato in the flesh as a fully formed, believable individual.

Raphael also pays homage to his contemporary Michelangelo, who is shown sitting by himself on the steps, in the guise of the pessimistic philosopher Heraclitus. This is a reflection of Michelangelo’s solitary, even melancholic personality, which was likely familiar to all who knew him. Raphael also subtly includes a self-portrait of himself as the Greek painter Apelles in the group on the right listening to the mathematician and astronomer Ptolemy (holding a globe), showing himself to be a gregarious, intellectual person. The thinkers on the left represent the Liberal Arts of grammar, arithmetic, and music, while those on the right of center are involved with the scientific pursuits of geometry and astronomy.

The setting for this symposium is a grand Roman building with majestic arches and vaults that open up to the heavens. The Classical past is further invoked through the sculptures of Apollo (on our left) and Athena (on our right) in the niches behind the crowd. Despite its sixteenth-century references, the scene is utterly convincing, with calm, orderly groups of scholars and thinkers from throughout history gathered according to Raphael’s carefully organized plan.

The energetic, whirlpool effect of the judgment scene is much more chaotic and psychologically dark than many other Last Judgment scenes made by previous artists. The nude figures within it, which took the artist eight years to complete, represent blessed and damned souls as they face their last moments on earth. *The Last Judgment* reflects the uncertainty of the late Renaissance and points to the preoccupations of the Baroque era to come.
The Renaissance in Northern Europe

Over time, developments in Italian art were widely admired by artists in the northern European countries we now know as the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Belgium. Throughout the fifteenth century, though, the artists of the Netherlands continued using the traditional methods established in medieval manuscript illumination painting. At that time they had a reputation for producing much of the best art in Europe, and their work influenced the visual arts elsewhere on the Continent. Artists in the northern countries were known for their careful attention to texture and to fine details in their artwork, achieved in part through the

3.127a Jan van Eyck,
*The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434.
Oil on panel, 32 3/8 × 23 5/8".
National Gallery, London

Chandelier is very ornamental and expensive, a clear sign of wealth

Single candle burning in the chandelier: possibly a symbolic reference to Christ; or a unity candle used in a marriage ceremony; or a sign of a legal event

Man stands near the window to show that he is part of the world outside

Woman stands near the elaborate bed to indicate her domestic role and the hope that she will bear children

Fruit on the window: sign of fertility. Indicates wealth (oranges and lemons were expensive because they had to be imported from Spain); also a reference to innocence and purity before humans sinned in the Garden of Eden

Figure carved on the chair: St. Margaret, protector of women in childbirth

Shoes/clogs: given to a woman as a wedding gift; symbol of stability; removed to show that the event taking place here is sacred and makes the ground so, too

Dog: sign of fidelity and wealth

Full-skirted dress: fashion of the day because the current queen was pregnant (the woman in the painting is not pregnant herself, because she never had children)
The widespread use of oil paint (see Box: Pieter Bruegel: A Sampling of Proverbs, p. 386). Many of the everyday objects depicted so convincingly in these paintings also have significant religious symbolism.

The development of oil paint has been attributed to Dutch artist Jan van Eyck (c. 1395–1441), who was born into a family of artists and eventually served as court painter to the Duke of Burgundy. Vasari credits van Eyck with the invention of oil painting, but it was actually used in the Middle Ages to decorate stone, metal, and, occasionally, plaster walls. The technique of glazing, which van Eyck developed with such virtuosity, was widely adopted throughout Europe after 1450.

One of the most important northern Renaissance paintings, The Arnolfini Portrait by Jan van Eyck, has been a source of mystery for scholars (3.127a). Art historians have been trying to identify the people in this painting since at least the 1930s. Scholars have claimed that the portrait depicts Giovanni Arnolfini and his wife. Some have also suggested it could have been some kind of legal document, perhaps certifying their wedding ceremony. An inscription on the wall above the mirror says “Johannes de eyck fuit hic 1434,” or “Jan van Eyck was here 1434,” announcing the painter’s presence at this event and possibly suggesting he was one of two witnesses visible in the convex mirror behind the principal figures (3.127b).

Van Eyck’s painting relies on illusion in several ways. The young couple and the room in which they stand are painted in such detail that viewers feel as if they are looking into a real room with real people. Fifteenth-century viewers would probably have paid careful attention to the mirror, with its circular mini-pictures, or roundels, depicting scenes from the crucifixion of Christ, since such an object would have been very expensive, a truly luxurious possession. The mirror helps extend the illusion of reality by showing in its reflective surface the room in front of them, which is otherwise not in the picture. Numerous other symbols help to reveal the sacramental nature of marriage: the shoes that have been taken off because the ground is considered sacred for the event; the dog, which is a sign of fidelity; the single candle lit in the chandelier, which suggests unity; and the exotic, ripe fruit near the window, which indicates the hope of fertility.

Many northern Renaissance artists also explored explicitly religious subject matter.
Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525/30–69) was an artist from the Netherlands who became famous for his landscapes and humorous scenes of peasant life. His work comments on the beliefs and customs of his day. The painting *Netherlandish Proverbs* depicts recognizable types, such as farmers and townspeople (3.128 and 3.129 a–c). The people are general and universal figures, rather than specific or idealized portraits. The examples shown here identify a selection of the more than one hundred proverbs that Bruegel illustrated in this painting. A few of the proverbs that are still familiar to us include the “world turned upside down”; the man who is “beating his head against a wall”; and the two women gossiping — “one winds the distaff, the other spins it.”
Sometime around 1515 the German artist Matthias Grünewald (c. 1475/80–1528) painted a scene of the crucifixion of Christ on an altarpiece made for the chapel in a hospital that cared for patients with skin diseases, the Abbey of St. Anthony in Isenheim (in what is now northeastern France). The crucifixion scene of the Isenheim Altarpiece, one of the most graphic images of Christ’s crucifixion in the history of art, is visible when the altarpiece is closed (3.130). It is designed to make the viewer empathize with Christ’s suffering and to be thankful for his sacrifice. When patients prayed before this altarpiece they saw the green pallor of Christ’s skin, the thorns that drew blood from his body, and the deformations of his bones caused by hanging on the cross for so long. The altarpiece could be opened to reveal additional scenes inside.

The vivid details offered patients suffering from a variety of serious diseases a way to identify with Christ in his human form, as well as comfort that they were not alone in their own suffering. St. Anthony, shown on the right wing of the altarpiece, was the patron saint of sufferers from skin disease. Indeed, a common disease that caused a swollen stomach, convulsions, gangrene, and boils on the skin was named “St. Anthony’s Fire.”

Christ’s suffering was further emphasized when the altarpiece was opened on certain occasions, such as Easter Sunday. When the left door was swung open, Christ’s arm would look separated from the rest of his body, making him appear to lose his arm. Similarly, opening the left side of the Lamentation scene at the bottom of the altarpiece would make Christ’s legs appear to be cut off. As limbs were often amputated to prevent further spreading of disease, many patients could directly identify with Christ’s experience.

A quarter of a century after Leonardo’s famous painting of the Last Supper, the woodblock print of the same subject made by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) offers a different interpretation. Dürer was a talented draftsman and one of the first painters to work seriously on woodcuts, etchings, engravings, and printed books. Two study trips that he made to see the paintings of Renaissance Italy were deeply influential. They encouraged him to paint Classical subject matter and to

calculate carefully his depictions of the human form and its environment. Like Leonardo, Dürer draws attention to Christ in his composition by placing him centrally and surrounding his head with white light (3.131). Only eleven disciples are there; the absence of Judas tells us that he has already gone out to betray Jesus to the authorities. Dürer’s print reflects the ideas of the Protestant Reformation and, in particular, the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. While Lutherans accepted the Communion ceremony, they insisted it was only a re-enactment of the Last Supper, not a literal receiving of Christ’s body and blood. To emphasize this important doctrinal point, Dürer displays an empty plate in the foreground, signifying that the meal has already taken place.

Late Renaissance and Mannerism

The Sack of Rome by the troops of Charles V of Spain in 1527 brought the high Renaissance to a close. Pope Julius II’s building campaign and patronage of the arts had helped make Rome the center of artistic and intellectual activity in Italy. When Pope Clement VII humilitatingly had to crown Charles as Holy Roman Emperor in 1530, it was further evidence of the end of those days of supremacy and assuredness. The disorder of the period was reflected in its art.

Compared to the art that came before it, the late phase of the Renaissance (c. 1530–1600) tends to feature compositions that are more chaotic and possess greater emotional intensity. The successes of the high Renaissance could not be rivaled: Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo were thought to have achieved perfection in the arts. Artists were faced with the predicament of where to go from there. In reaction, instead of harmony, many artworks stressed dissonance. Imagination often took the place of believable reality. Distortion and disproportion, rather than mathematically precise depictions, were intentionally used to emphasize certain anatomical features and themes. During the late Renaissance period, a style called Mannerism developed, characterized by sophisticated and elegant compositions in which the accepted conventions of poses, proportions, and gestures became exaggerated for emotional effect.

The Italian Mannerist artist Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1532–1625) achieved a level of
success rarely enjoyed by women during the Renaissance. Known primarily for her portraits, she gained an international reputation that led to an official appointment at the court of the queen of Spain. Anguissola emphasized emotion and heightened the realism in her artworks. *Portrait of the Artist’s Sisters Playing Chess (3.132)* shows an everyday scene in the outdoors, as indicated by the tree behind the girls, and the landscape in the distance. Anguissola concentrates on the rich details of the textures of the girls’ clothing, jewelry, and hair. Rather than focusing on creating a unified and mechanically precise scene, Anguissola has emphasized the individuality of each one of her sitters, from the expressions on their faces to the elegant placement of their fingers. As the older sisters play their game, the clear sense of joy in the youngest sister’s face is balanced by the expression of the maid, who looks on with care and concern.

The Last Supper is a traditional biblical subject; Leonardo’s famous version was painted eighty years before the one shown in 3.133. But Paolo Caliari of Verona, known as Veronese (1528–88), took a new and unconventional approach. His painting combines the strict *rhythm* of the prominent, Classical architectural features, especially the three Roman arches that frame and balance the scene, with the chaos and activity common in later Renaissance art. Overall, the composition is formally balanced and detailed in an elegant architectural setting, but the artist has introduced lively and unconventional characters. Along with Christ and the disciples, Veronese includes members of the Venetian elite, and entertainers.
This approach proved controversial with Church officials. They objected that Christ, in this key moment in the gospels, is shown so near such unsavory characters as clowns, dwarves, and dogs. The Inquisition, a religious court that could punish heresy with death, charged Veronese with irreverence. To avoid making painstaking changes to his painting, he re-titled it to portray the Feast in the House of Levi, based on a story in the Bible in which Jesus scandalized the Jewish priests by eating with sinners.

The surge of Protestantism at this time led in its turn to the Counter-Reformation, in which the Catholic Church powerfully reasserted core Catholic values and enforced them through the Inquisition. Catholicism had long believed that images should be used as powerful teaching tools, and this belief now became more apparent in the art of the time. For example, the intensely dramatic quality of *The Last Supper* by the Italian artist Tintoretto (1519–94) highlights the urgency of the Catholic mission to encourage believers to remain in the Church rather than converting to...
Protestantism (3.134). Tintoretto depicts the Last Supper as a glorious and spiritual event. There are many ordinary people busy in service and conversation—we can almost hear the buzz of conversation and clatter of dishes. At the same time, the heavens seem to be opening up to send down angels to witness the event. This scene is a marked change from the symmetry and emotional balance of both Leonardo’s (3.122; see p. 380) and Dürer’s (3.131; see p. 388) versions. But Tintoretto still makes Christ the focal point by placing him in the center with the largest and brightest halo, reaching out with a glass to one of the disciples; Judas is easy to find, too, alone without a halo on the opposite side of the table from Jesus. But Tintoretto’s picture conveys a dynamic—even disturbed—sense of motion and drama, with the table placed at an angle pointing off-center deep into space, dramatic contrasts of lighting, and the theatrical gestures of the characters.

In Jacopo da Pontormo’s (1494–1556) Mannerist painting of the deposition, the arrangement of the group of figures appears to be very unstable (3.135). Pontormo has stacked the figures vertically and placed them in an oddly swirling pattern, almost as if they are supported by the figure at the bottom of the composition, who is crouching unsteadily on tiptoe. Far from being a realistic depiction of observable reality, the figures are overly muscular and the colors are striking. We would expect to see grief and sorrow in a deposition scene, but here the faces show expressions of feeling lost and bewildered. Everything contributes to a sense of anxiety and disorder.

Another Mannerist, Domenikos Theotokopoulos (c.1541–1614), called El Greco (“The Greek”), worked in Venice and Rome before moving to Spain. Laocoön is a subject from Greek mythology (3.136). The Trojan priest Laocoön attempted to warn the inhabitants of Troy that Greek soldiers were trying to infiltrate their fortifications by hiding inside the Trojan Horse, seen in the middle ground at the center of this painting. El Greco shows the priest and his sons being attacked by snakes sent by the god Poseidon (who supported the Greeks) to stop


**Symmetry**: the correspondence in size, form, and arrangement of items on opposite sides of a plane, line, or point that creates direct visual balance

**Balance**: a principle of art in which elements are used to create a symmetrical or asymmetrical sense of visual weight in an artwork

**Deposition**: a scene showing the removal of Christ’s body from the cross
The biblical story of David and Goliath inspired three renowned Renaissance and Baroque sculptors in three centuries. Donatello, Michelangelo, and Bernini each took a different approach to the appearance of the hero, David. Each work displays the characteristic cultural and artistic concerns of their respective eras. In the Bible, David is a young Israelite who battles the giant Goliath. Goliath challenges the Israelites to send a champion to fight in single combat. Only David is brave enough to face him. Armed with just his shepherd’s hook, slingshot, and a handful of stones, he fells Goliath with a single slingshot to the forehead and then uses the giant’s own sword to cut off his head. David’s triumph against a powerful opponent became an emblem for the city of Florence after its forces defeated a much stronger army from Milan in 1428. Our comparison of statues of David considers two sculptures made for Florence and one made in Rome.

Donatello (c. 1386/87–1466) was a skilled sculptor of both bronze and marble. At the time he made David, he was reinvigorating the ancient technique of bronze casting. His David, the first nearly full-scale male nude since antiquity, also reflects the sculptor’s familiarity with and admiration for the Classical ideal depictions of the human body (3.137). Rather than emphasizing the mortal and corruptible nature of the body, as was common during the Middle Ages, Donatello follows the idealized nude model used by Greek and Roman sculptors. Donatello’s statue reveals the artist’s careful observation of physical posture. David stands with his weight on his right leg, leaving the left leg relaxed. His right shoulder is higher and his left lower as a result. Donatello’s understanding of human anatomy makes his David look mobile and lifelike.

Michelangelo’s David was carved from a single block of marble (3.138). It was originally intended to be placed in a high niche of Florence Cathedral as a symbol of the city’s power and (temporary) freedom from the tyranny of the Medici. The sculpture was so popular that on its completion in 1504 it was instead placed near the entrance to the main piazza, or plaza, where it could be viewed by masses of people. Its Classical attributes include athletic musculature and essentially ideal proportions. By presenting David as nude, with a scarcely noticeable slingshot draped over his shoulder—the only reference to his identity—Michelangelo creates a sculpture of a man as well as a hero. David’s facial expression is idealized and calm, but his gaze, which is purposefully directed off to the side, reveals a mood of concentration and intensity.

Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) created his David in the Baroque period. It is a dynamic, three-dimensional sculpture that emphasizes movement and action (3.139). Whereas Donatello’s sculpture shows David as triumphant and Michelangelo’s sculpture shows him as contemplative, Bernini’s sculpture shows David at a moment of dramatic, heightened tension, when he is about to launch the stone. The energy of David’s entire body is focused on the physical movement he is about to make. Even the muscles in his face tighten. Bernini is said to have studied his own reflection to create the perfect facial expression for such an energetic feat. Unlike Michelangelo’s and Donatello’s sculptures, which are meant to be viewed from the front, Bernini’s is intended to be seen and understood in the round.

These three sculptures are clearly different in several ways. Michelangelo’s sculpture is more than twice the size of the other two, in order to allow viewers to see all of the detail had the sculpture been installed in its originally planned location, high above the ground. Donatello’s sculpture is the only one to include weaponry other than a slingshot: his David holds the sword with which he has just beheaded his opponent, whose head lies at his feet. Bernini’s sculpture, like Michelangelo’s, features the slingshot, but it is in action, and a pile of cast-off armor lies beneath. Such a prop was necessary to allow for the wide stance and gesture of the figure, as marble sculptures are prone to snap if their weight is unsupported.
The moment each artist chose to depict has a strong influence on the resulting appearance and effect of their sculptures. Donatello shows a triumphant, boyish David standing in calm repose after the fight. Michelangelo presents David as an adult: the sheer size and mass of his form are much more manlike than Donatello’s slim, youthful figure. Michelangelo’s David stands poised at a moment of anticipation and determined contemplation before the battle; a concentrated expression is visible on his face. Bernini’s David, more mature, is dynamically focused on casting a lethal strike at the giant Goliath—the time of calculation and reflection has passed; now it is time for action.

Religious stories were common subjects for artworks during the Renaissance and Baroque. Instead of having to invent something completely new, these three artists’ David sculptures show their originality in their treatment of the subject.

3.138 (below left) Michelangelo, David, 1501–4. Marble, 14'27⁄8” high. Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence, Italy

3.139 (below right) Gianlorenzo Bernini, David, 1623. Marble, 5’7” high. Galleria Borghese, Rome, Italy

Laocoön’s warning. The landscape in the background is a view of Toledo, Spain, where El Greco lived and made his best-known works late in his life. El Greco combined Mannerist exaggeration, seen in the elongated forms and distorted figures, with his own expressionistic use of color, outlines, and modeling. Like other Mannerist artworks, this intricate composition combines carefully observed factual information with mythological stories according to the dictates of the artist’s imagination.

The Baroque

The Baroque period was a time of exploration, increased trade, and discovery in the sciences. The Western world now accepted the theory of astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus that the Sun, rather than the Earth, was the center of the universe—a theory the Catholic Church had previously rejected. Light, both heavenly and otherwise, became a prominent feature in many Baroque artworks. The seventeenth century was also a time of frequent battles throughout Europe, largely the result of the divisions in the Catholic Church after the Reformation. Baroque artworks give us a sense of this turmoil: their theatrical, dynamic compositions are marked by dramatic movement and light. Some Baroque artists, such as Nicolas Poussin, continued the high Renaissance interest in carefully ordered calmness. Others, such as Gianlorenzo Bernini (see left: Depictions of David), displayed heightened emotion and created figures that seem to be in action, often breaking into the viewer’s personal space.

French artist Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) specialized in paintings of subjects from Classical antiquity. Everything in his paintings was carefully constructed and positioned. He would even arrange miniature figures on a small stage when choreographing the scenes for his landscapes. Yet, though these and his buildings look detailed and realistic, their appearance and placement were always invented from his imagination. The Funeral of Phocion depicts two men carrying the deceased Phocion, an Athenian general, over a winding road that leads away from

In the round: a freestanding sculpted work that can be viewed from all sides

Expressionistic: devoted to representing subjective emotions and experiences instead of objective or external reality

Color: the optical effect caused when reflected white light of the spectrum is divided into a separate wavelength

Outlines: the outermost lines of an object or figure, by which it is defined or bounded

Modeling: the representation of three-dimensional objects in two dimensions so that they appear solid
Gateway to Art: Gentileschi, *Judith Decapitating Holofernes*

The Influence of Caravaggio

*Caravaggio, Judith Decapitating Holofernes, 1599. Oil on canvas, 4'9” × 6'43⁄4”.
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy*

Along with many other artists in Europe in the seventeenth century, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1620) imitated the artistic style of Italian artist Caravaggio (1571–1610). In addition to being an accomplished painter, Caravaggio led a tumultuous existence. By the time he was in his late twenties, Caravaggio's innovative approach to painting had earned him an impressive reputation and he was receiving Church commissions. At the same time, he was involved in numerous brawls; he eventually killed a man in a fight over a tennis match. While on the run from these charges, he died of unknown causes on a beach at the age of 39.

Caravaggio's paintings, although often of religious stories, look like everyday *genre* scenes, filled with people from the lower classes, shown unidealized and wearing unkempt clothes. This naturalistic, down-to-earth approach offended some viewers who believed religious figures in artworks should be presented as idealized individuals to signify their holiness. Caravaggio's talent, however, was also greatly appreciated by many art lovers and patrons, particularly those in the pope's circle. His development of *tenebrism*, the dramatic use of intense darkness and light, was adopted by other painters during his lifetime and by later artists as well.

In Caravaggio's *Judith Decapitating Holofernes* (3.142), a strong beam of light seems to stop time as Judith's knife slices through the general's neck. The light emphasizes the drama of this particular moment and shows the main characteristics of Caravaggio's style. The scene seems to emerge into the light from a darkened background in a way similar to the effect of a modern spotlight. Because the background is so dark, the action takes place in a shallow, stage-like space, again reinforcing dramatic effect. The details Caravaggio has focused on, such as the seventeenth-century clothing, emphasize the ordinary aspects of this biblical event.

Artemisia Gentileschi's style was greatly influenced by Caravaggio's detailed realism and dramatic use of tenebrism. In their paintings on the same subject, Judith decapitating Holofernes (see 3.142 and 3.143), both artists use extreme darks and lights for dramatic effect, emphasize the violence of the scene through spurring blood and blood-stained sheets, and show the female characters performing the murder with a marked strength and resolve that are untypical of conventional ideas about feminine behavior at the time.

Gentileschi also infused her Judith image with active physical strength on the part of the women in a way that allows the viewer to sense the sheer effort required to sever the brute's head. By contrast, Caravaggio's Judith, apart from having powerful forearms, appears quite delicate, and shocked at her deadly deed. Judith's maidservant in Caravaggio's painting is shown as an old woman who appears to take no active part in the murder. The maidservant in Gentileschi's scene, by contrast, physically restrains the Assyrian general as Judith severs his head.
Nicolas Poussin, The Burial of Phocion, 1648. Oil on canvas, 44 1/8" × 68 3/8". National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

the city (3.140). Phocion had been executed after being falsely accused of treason; because he was considered a traitor, he was buried outside the city.

The composition highlights the tragedy of Phocion’s burial as a traitor, when he was in fact a hero who should have been honored. The two figures carrying Phocion’s body, covered with a white sheet, are prominently placed in the foreground. The large tree to the right arches over and creates an implied line from pallbearers through the figures, trees, and buildings that gradually become smaller as they recede into space. The winding road both emphasizes the distance of Phocion’s burial from the city and creates a sense of deep space, skillfully guiding our gaze into the landscape. The carefully structured sense of the landscape continues the Renaissance emphasis on balance and order. Similarly, the classically designed buildings and figures dressed in antique clothing call our attention to the past.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) produced about 2,000 paintings in his lifetime, an impressive output made possible because he operated a large workshop in Antwerp (in modern-day Belgium). His assistants were responsible for producing some of his paintings, but Rubens generally finished works for important clients himself. His Raising of the Cross was one of several paintings commissioned by wealthy merchants to be installed in churches (3.141).
In *The Raising of the Cross*, we can sense the physical exertions of these muscular men to raise Christ on the cross. A dynamic tension is created along the diagonal line of the cross that visually connects the men at its base as they strain to pull Christ up toward the right side of the painting. Although, in fact, Christ would have been tortured and close to death at this point, the artist has painted his flesh as almost immaculate, and lighter than that of those around him. In this way, and by bathing him in light, Rubens makes Christ the focal point and emphasizes his holiness.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) was an extremely popular painter who also had a large workshop at one point in his life. Yet, despite his impressive reputation, he filed for bankruptcy in old age. In *The Night Watch*, the gathering of officers and guardsmen likely commemorates a visit by Queen Maria de’Medici to Amsterdam in 1638 (3.144). The painting was commissioned by the civic militia, and scholars believe that all of those portrayed in this scene contributed financially to the artist’s fee. *The Night Watch* is a fine example of Rembrandt’s innovative approach to a group portrait. His painting is not only convincing but also full of the vitality and energy typical of a group getting ready for an important occasion. The various members of the company are shown busily organizing themselves. This painting came to be known as *The Night Watch* because its dark atmosphere made it look like a night scene. Rembrandt made skillful use of chiaroscuro, tenebrism, and dramatic lighting to enliven his composition, but the impression of night-time was actually created by years of accumulated dirt and layers of varnish. The painting was revealed to be a daytime scene when it was cleaned after World War II.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Find two examples of artworks in this chapter in which linear perspective plays an important part. Point out the parts of the composition that use linear perspective to create the desired illusion. Discuss what the artist wants to communicate by using linear perspective.

2. From this chapter choose a northern Renaissance artwork and an Italian Renaissance work. List the prominent characteristics of each. Include information about both the form and the content of the artworks in your lists.

3. Select three artworks that deal with subject matter from the Bible. Consider how they portray their biblical themes: examine style, medium and technique, content, and any other aspects that the artist emphasizes (1.70, 2.148, 4.163).

4. Select a Renaissance work and a Baroque work from this chapter. List their similarities and differences. Consider their subject matter, style, content, and emotional impact.

5. Select three Renaissance artworks that draw on the artistic and intellectual heritage of Classical Greece and Rome. Make a list of the ways in which they use the Classical past. Make another list of any Renaissance innovations, either in terms of form or of content. You might choose one work from another chapter in this book, for example: 4.133, 4.136.
Images related to 3.6:
Art of Renaissance and Baroque Europe (1400–1750)

0.8 Leonardo da Vinci, 
Mona Lisa, 1503–6, p. 33

1.65 Masaccio, Trinity, 
c. 1425–26, p. 88

1.115 Piero della Francesca, 
The Flagellation, c. 1649, 
p. 119

2.28 Jan van Eyck, The 
Madonna of Chancellor Rolin, 
1430–34, p. 185

4.133 Sandro Botticelli, 
The Birth of Venus, c. 1482–6, 
p. 558

1.70 Andrea Mantegna, The 
Lamentation over the Dead 
Christ, c. 1480, p. 91

2.42 Albrecht Dürer, Four 
Horsemen of the Apocalypse, 
c. 1497–8, p. 193

2.2 Leonardo da Vinci, 
Studies of the foetus in the 
womb, c. 1510–13, p. 167

2.148 Michelangelo, Creation 
of the Sun and the Moon, 
1508–10, p. 264

4.77 Parmigianino, Self- 
portrait in a Convex Mirror, 
c. 1524, p. 511

4.136 Titian, Venus of Urbino, 
1538, p. 560

1.144 Peter Bruegel the 
Elder, Landscape with the Fall 
of Icarus, c. 1555–8, p. 138

1.124 Andrea Palladio, Plan 
and part elevation/section of 
the Villa Rotonda, begun 
1565/6, p. 127

1.52 Caravaggio, The Calling 
of St. Matthew, c. 1599–1600, 
p. 79

4.163 Rembrandt van Rijn, 
Self-portrait with Saskia in the 
Scene of the Prodigal Son at 
the Tavern, c. 1635, p. 580

2.34 Artemisia Gentileschi, 
Self-portrait as the Allegory 
of Painting (La Pittura), 
1638–9, p. 187

2.16 Claude Lorrain, 
The Tiber from Monte Mario 
Looking South, 1640, p. 176

4.29 Gianlorenzo Bernini, 
The Ecstasy of St. Teresa, 
1645–52, p. 475

1.169 Diego de Silva y 
Velázquez, Las Meninas, 
c. 1656, p. 160

4.58 Johannes Vermeer, 
Woman Holding a Balance, 
c. 1664, p. 495