

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE part one

The **Florence Baptistery**, also known as the **Baptistery of Saint John** stands in front of Florence Cathedral and Giotto's bell tower. The octagonal Baptistry is one of the oldest buildings in the city, constructed between 1059 and 1128 in the Florentine Romanesque style. Its influence was decisive for the subsequent development of architecture, as it formed the basis from which Francesco **Talenti**, Leon **Alberti**, Filippo **Brunelleschi**, and other master architects of their time created Renaissance architecture.



The Baptistery is renowned for its three sets of artistically important bronze doors with relief sculptures. The south doors were created by Andrea **Pisano** and the north and east doors by Lorenzo **Ghiberti**. Michelangelo called the east doors the *Gates of Paradise*.

The Italian poet Danti Alighieri and many other notable Renaissance figures, including members of the Medici family, were baptized in this baptistery.



Pisano, Transport of the Body of St. John and Jesus Baptising His Disciples

As recommended by Giotto, Andrea Pisano was awarded the commission to design the first set of doors in 1329. The **south doors** were originally installed on the east side, facing the Duomo, and were transferred to their present location in 1452. These proto-Renaissance doors consist of 28 quatrefoil panels, with the twenty top panels depicting scenes from the life of St. John the Baptist. The eight lower panels depict the eight virtues of hope, faith, charity, humility, fortitude, temperance, justice and prudence. The moulded reliefs in the doorcase were added by Ghiberti in 1452.

In 1401, a competition was announced by the *Arte di Calimala* (Cloth Importers Guild) to design doors which would eventually be placed on the north side of the baptistery. (The original location for these doors was the east side of the baptistery, but the doors were moved to the north side of the baptistery after Ghiberti completed his second commission, known as the *Gates of Paradise*.



Ghiberti's and Brunelleschi's panels depicting The Sacrifice of Isaac

These north doors would serve as a votive offering to celebrate the sparing of Florence from relatively recent scourges such as the Black Death in 1348. Many artists competed for this commission and a jury selected seven semi-finalists, which included Ghiberti, Brunelleschi and Donatello, with 21-year-old Ghiberti winning the commission. At the time of judging, only Ghiberti and Brunelleschi were finalists, and when the judges could not decide, they were assigned to work together on them. Brunelleschi's pride got in the way, and he went to Rome to study architecture leaving Ghiberti to work on the doors himself. Ghiberti's autobiography, however, claimed that he had won, "without a single dissenting voice." The original designs of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* by Ghiberti and Brunelleschi are on display in the museum of the Bargello.

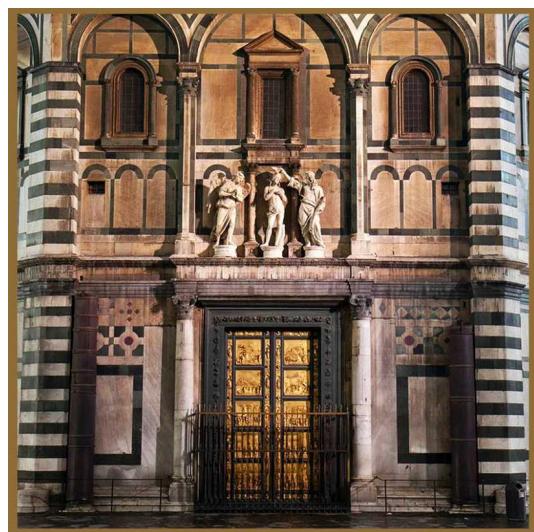
Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378 – 1455), is best known as the creator of the two sets of bronze doors for the Florence Baptistry. Trained as a goldsmith and sculptor, he established an important workshop for sculpture in metal. His book of *Commentarii* contains important writing on art, as well as what may be the earliest surviving autobiography by any artist.



It took Ghiberti 21 years to complete the doors. These gilded bronze doors consist of twenty-eight panels, with twenty panels depicting the life of Christ from the New Testament. The eight lower panels show the four evangelists and the Church Fathers Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome, Saint Gregory and Saint Augustine. The panels are surrounded by a framework of foliage in the door case and gilded busts of prophets and sibyls at the intersections of the panels. Originally installed on the east side, in place of Pisano's doors, they were later moved to the north side. They are described by the art historian Antonio Paolucci as "the most important event in the history of Florentine art in the first quarter of the 15th century".

Ghiberti was now widely recognized as a celebrity and the chief artist in this field. He was showered with commissions, even from the pope. In 1425 he was awarded a commission, for the east doors of the baptistery, on which he and his workshop toiled for 27 years, excelling the quality and design of his first set of doors. The doors, consisting of ten panels depicting scenes from the Old Testament, were in turn installed on the east side facing the facade of the cathedral. The panels are large rectangles and are no longer embedded in the traditional Gothic quatrefoil, as in the previous doors. Ghiberti employed the recently discovered principles of perspective to give depth to his compositions. Each panel depicts several episodes of a story.

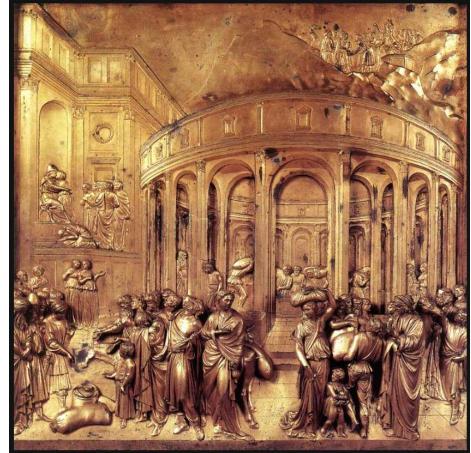
The panels are included in a richly decorated gilt framework of foliage and fruit, many statuettes of prophets and 24 busts. The two central busts are portraits of the artist and of his father, Bartolomeo Ghiberti.



Michaelangelo referred to these doors as fit to be the *Gates of Paradise* (*Porte del Paradiso*), and they are still invariably referred to by this name. Giorgio Vasari described them a century later as "undeniably perfect in every way and must rank as the finest masterpiece ever created". Ghiberti himself said they were "the most singular work that I have ever made".

The *Gates of Paradise* are surmounted by a (copy of a) group of statues portraying the *Baptism of Christ* by Andrea Sansovino. The originals are in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. He left them unfinished to work on a new commission in Rome. Work on these statues was continued much later in 1569 by **Vincenzo Danti**, a sculptor from the school of Michelangelo. At his death in 1576 the group was almost finished. The group was finally completed with the addition of an angel by **Innocenzo Spinazzi** in 1792.

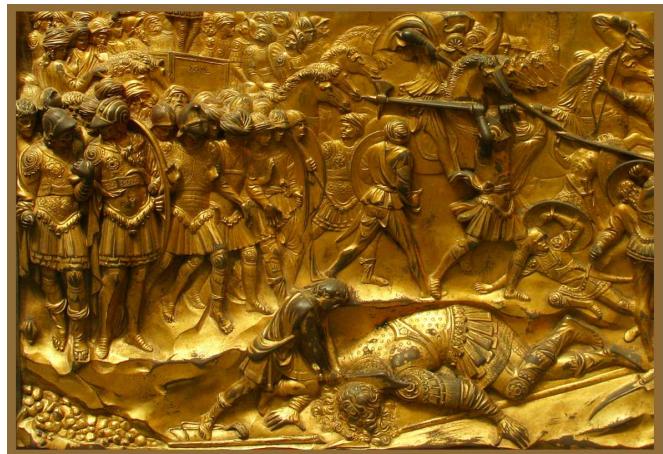
The Story of Joseph portrays the narrative scheme of *Joseph Cast by His Brethren into the Well*, *Joseph Sold to the Merchants*, *The merchants delivering Joseph to the pharaoh*, *Joseph Interpreting the Pharaoh's dream*, *The Pharaoh Paying him Honour*, *Jacob Sends His Sons to Egypt* and *Joseph Recognizes His Brothers and Returns Home*. According to Vasari's *Lives* this panel was the most difficult and also the most beautiful. The figures are distributed in very low relief in a perspective space (a technique invented by Donatello and called *rilievo schiacciato*, meaning literally "flattened relief".) Ghiberti uses different sculptural techniques, from incised lines to almost free-standing figure sculpture, within the panels, further accentuating the sense of space.



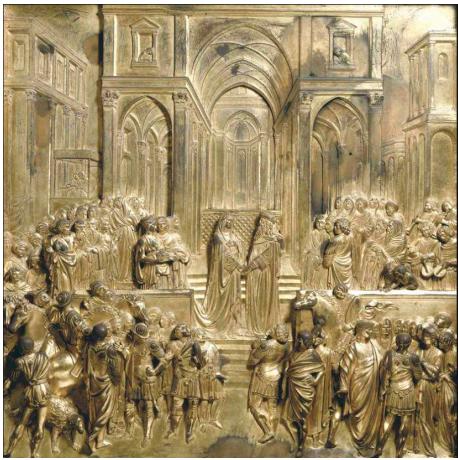
A comparison of this representation of **The Story of Isaac** with Ghiberti's prizewinning panel for his first set of doors shows the great advance in pictorial storytelling. The figures are moved out into a spacial landscape, and the act of sacrifice, halted by the angel flying out of the sky, is thrust into the distance. In the earlier panel Isaac was shown as a Classical Roman athlete, nobly accepting his fate, in this version he is cringing head bowed from the blow to be delivered by his father. A great sense of depth is achieved by the progression of high relief in the foreground to shallow in the background. An innovation that Ghiberti brought to sculptural relief.



This detail of Ghiberti's *Sacrifice of Isaac* from his competition panel for the second set of doors shows the highly refined skill with which he represented the anatomy, the curls of the hair, the fall and folds of the drapery, and the intricate patterning on the hem and the altar. The face of Abraham is a realistic and psychological portrait on which can be seen the play of emotions, and determination to carry out the will of God.



In this detail of the lower section of **The Story of David** David, as armour bearer for King Saul, and destined to succeed him, as prophesied by Samuel, is shown cutting off the head of Goliath with his sword. His sling, cast aside by his feet, indicates the previous episode of the story. The war between Israel and Egypt rages in the background, animating the scene and creating a sense of frenzied movement throughout the whole picture. Amidst the soldiers and figures at the left some remarkable individual 'portraits' can be seen.

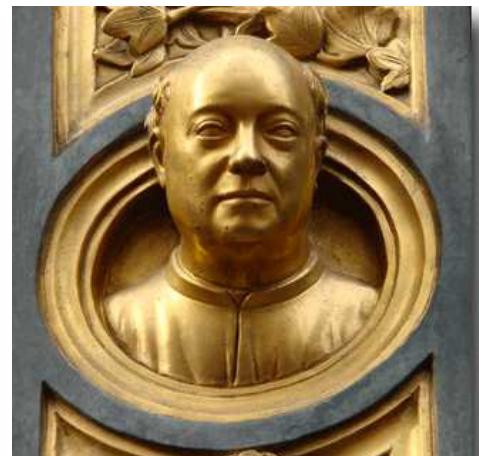


The architect, Brunelleschi, is generally credited as the first person to describe a precise system of linear perspective. In this panel depicting the meeting of **Solomon and the Queen of Sheba**, Ghiberti shows a mastery of the art, creating a sense of recession into deep space from the foreground figures in high relief, through the flattening and diminishing sizes of the figures in the middle distance, to the shallow relief of the architecture.

The subject was rarely depicted in this period, and has led to speculation that it was included deliberately to represent the union of the Eastern and Western churches, which was announced on the steps of Florence's Duomo on July 9, 1439.

Virtually the entire Byzantine court, including the Emperor of Byzantium, John VIII Paleologus, had travelled from Constantinople to participate in this council. The Eastern Church is metaphorically represented by Sheba, the queen who came to Solomon from the East, while the Western Church is represented by Solomon. The figures in the mid-ground, separated by parapets, align in formal, diagonal rows at either side of Solomon and Sheba, enhancing the sense of spatial recession. The figures in the foreground jostle for glimpses of the meeting.

Solomon, the son of David, is renowned for his wisdom, as exemplified by the story of two mothers who both claimed parentage over a boy. He said that the boy should be cut in half, he then awarded him to the woman that relinquished her claim, rather than see him die.



Ghiberti's *Self Portrait* from the doorframe of the *Gates of Paradise*

Donatello (1386 – 1466), was born in Florence. He developed a complete Renaissance style in sculpture, and with periods spent in Rome, Padua and Siena introduced it to other parts of Italy during a long and productive career. He worked with stone, bronze, wood, clay, stucco and wax, and had several assistants, with four perhaps being a typical number. Though his best-known works were mostly statues in the round, he developed a new, very shallow, type of bas-relief for small works, and a good deal of his output was larger architectural reliefs.

A good deal is known about Donatello's life and career, but little is known about his character and personality, and what is known is not wholly reliable. He never married and he seems to have been a man of simple tastes. Patrons often found him hard to deal with in a day when artists' working conditions were regulated by guild rules. Donatello seemingly demanded a measure of artistic freedom. Although he knew a number of Humanists well, the artist was not a cultured intellectual. His Humanist friends attest that he was a connoisseur of ancient art.



In Florence, Donatello assisted Ghiberti with the statues of prophets for the north door of the Baptistry of Florence Cathedral. In 1409–1411 he executed the colossal seated figure of **Saint John the Evangelist**, which until 1588 occupied a niche of the old cathedral façade, and is now replaced by a copy. This work marks a decisive step forward from late Gothic Mannerism in the search for naturalism and the rendering of human feelings. The face, the shoulders and the bust are still idealized, while the hands and the fold of cloth over the legs are more realistic.

He had a more detailed and wide-ranging knowledge of ancient sculpture than any other artist of his day. His work was inspired by ancient visual examples, which he often daringly transformed. Though he was traditionally viewed as essentially a realist, later research indicates he was much more.

The full power of Donatello's naturalism first appeared in two marble statues, **St. Mark** and **St. George** (both completed c. 1415), for niches on the exterior of **Or San Michele**, the church of Florentine guilds. Here, for the first time since classical antiquity and in striking contrast to medieval art, the human body is rendered as a self-activating, functional organism, and the human personality is shown with a confidence in its own worth. St. Mark stands in a natural (contrapposto) pose, with the weight on his right foot; the raised veins of the hand supporting the text on his hip showing his skill in descriptive representation.



The elegant *St. George and the Dragon* relief on the statue's base, executed in schiacciato (a very low bas-relief) is one of the first examples of one point, linear perspective in sculpture.

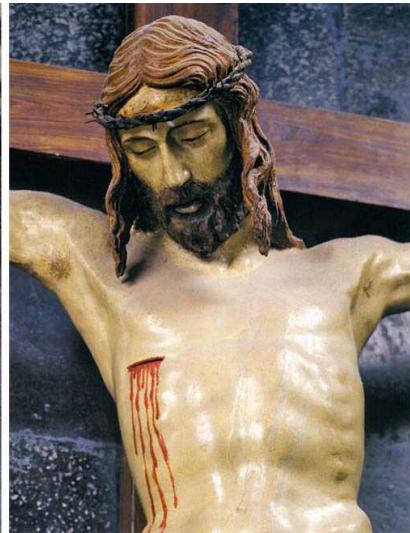
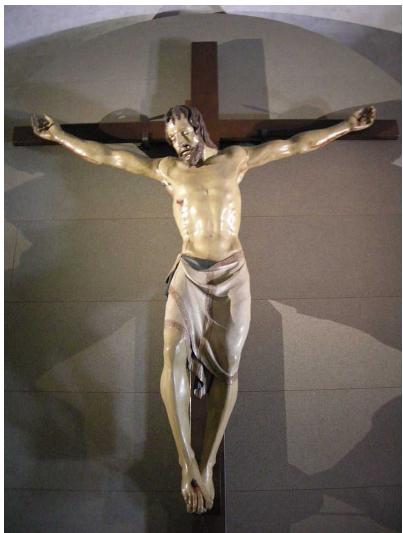
The same qualities of naturalism came increasingly to the fore in a series of five prophet statues that Donatello did beginning in 1416 for the niches of the campanile, the bell tower of the cathedral (all replaced by copies, the originals are now in the Museo dell' Opera del Duomo). The statues were of a beardless and a bearded prophet, and a group of Abraham and Isaac (1416-21) for the eastern niches; and later for the western niches a Jeremiah and the so-called Zuccone ("pumpkin," because of its bald head).



The **Zuccone** and the **Jeremiah** (1427-35), in their postures, and highly individual features inspired by ancient Roman portrait busts, suggests classical orators of singular expressive force. The statues differ such from the traditional remote images of Old Testament prophets in their individual characterisation and are more like portrait statues.



The Zuccone, is deservedly famous as the finest if the campanile statues and one of the artist's masterpieces. Although somewhat 'archaic' in style the head betrays psychological insight into the character of the elderly prophet.

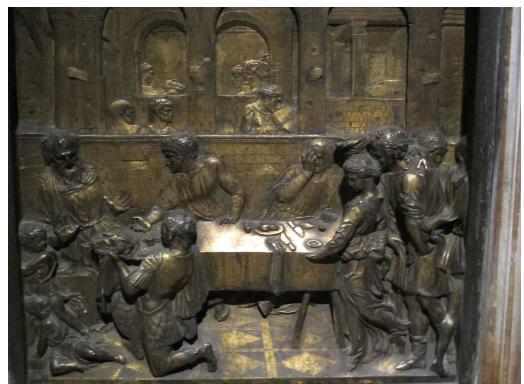


Donatello, Santa Croce Crucifix Brunelleschi, Santa Maria Novella Crucifix

The young (20 year old) Donatello, back from his sojourn in Rome, where he had gone with his friend Brunelleschi to study the architecture and sculpture of Classical Rome, made this polychromed wooden sculpture, the **Santa Croce Crucifix** (c.1406-1408). According to Vasari, in his (not entirely reliable) *Lives of the Artists* (1550) when he saw it Brunelleschi declared that his friend had not made a Christ representing the beauty of the son of God, but had crucified a plowman. Donatello challenged him to do better. After some months of working on his version the two friends met in the market. Brunelleschi invited Donatello to dinner, and bought eggs and cheese, placing them in the latter's apron, with the instruction to take them to his house, where he would meet him later as he had some business to conduct elsewhere in town. On entering Brunelleschi's house Donatello saw the finished sculpture and opening his arms in wonder at the beauty of it let the eggs, cheese and everything else fall from his apron. When he came in Filippo said "what are we to have for dinner, you have broken everything?" To which Donato replied that he had had his share for this morning and "if you want yours take it. But enough, it is your work to make Christ and mine to make ploughmen."

Donatello's Crucifix is different from other effigies of Christ for many reasons but the most striking is His face. His barely open eyes and mouth show a realistic interpretation of His death. His hair is messy, hanging on his forehead and around his face, as opposed to the neat, beautifully parted and wavy hair in other depictions. Christ's stomach is concave, and his chest pronounced as he hangs low from the bloody hand wounds connecting the lifelike detail of his face with that of his body. The new realism of Christ was a drastic change in the many depictions that had been seen to date, and while this rendition was widely criticized for its unidealised representation of Christ, it was also popularly venerated as a religious effigy and tool for worship.

In 1423, Donatello received one of his first important commissions from outside Florence. He was asked to contribute to the work on the font in the Siena Baptistry, comprising a relief showing **Herod's Banquet**. A total of six reliefs by different artists, including Lorenzo Ghiberti and Jacopo della Quercia, were to decorate the font. Donatello's reliefs demonstrate a masterly ability to draw his spectators into the events being portrayed. The border of the relief is extremely simple and acts as a passe-partout. There is nothing else separating the observer from the scene depicted, which is seen as if through a window. At first glance there is an impression of a perfect illusion of spatial depth. The scene aligned to a central vanishing point, and includes several masterly examples of foreshortening, also taking into account that the observer would be looking at the relief from above.



When looked at more closely a number of breaks that are subtly incorporated into the illusion of

reality are detectable. To tell the story several events that occurred in succession are depicted as happening at the same time. In the shallow relief of the background is a soldier bearing the head of John the Baptist, which is simultaneously at the front being presented to Herod, who is shrinking back in shock. A musician in the central area of the relief is a reference to the dance of Salome, which she used to beguile her stepfather into having the Baptist killed. Despite the arrangement of the space along central perspective lines, the relief differs noticeably from the centralized composition typical of the Renaissance, the main figures being weighted to the sides.



Donatello made two statues of *David*. The first an early work in marble of a clothed figure (1408–09), carved to top one of the buttresses of Florence Cathedral, though never placed there, and the more famous bronze figure that is nude except for helmet and boots, and dates to the 1440s or around 1460.

The marble *David* is Donatello's earliest known important commission. It is a work closely tied to tradition, giving few signs of the innovative approach to representation that the artist would develop as he matured. Although there is a hint of classical contrapposto, the figure stands in an elegant Gothic sway that may derive from Lorenzo Ghiberti. The face is curiously blank (typical of the International Gothic style), and David seems almost unaware of the head of his vanquished foe that rests between his feet. Some scholars have seen an element of personality – a kind of cockiness – suggested by the twist of the torso and the akimbo placement of the left arm, but overall the effect of the figure is rather bland. The head of Goliath, lying at David's feet, "is carved with great assurance and reveals the young sculptor's genuinely Renaissance interest in an ancient Roman type of mature, bearded head."

It is certain that Cosimo de' Medici, the foremost art patron of his era, commissioned the bronze *David* for the court of his Palazzo Medici. This is the first known free-standing nude statue produced since antiquity. Conceived fully in the round, independent of any architectural surroundings, and largely representing an allegory of the civic virtues triumphing over brutality and irrationality, it is arguably the first major work of Renaissance sculpture. The political meaning has been a matter of considerable debate among scholars.



David is depicted with an enigmatic smile, posed with his foot on Goliath's severed head naked, apart from a laurel-topped hat and boots, and bearing the sword of Goliath.

The iconography of the bronze *David* follows that of the marble *David*: a young hero stands with sword in hand, the severed head of his enemy at his feet. Visually, however, this statue is startlingly different. David is both physically delicate and remarkably effeminate. The head has been said to have been inspired by classical sculptures of Antinous renowned for his beauty, and a favourite of Hadrian. The statue's physique, contrasted with the large sword in hand, shows that David has overcome Goliath not by physical prowess, but through the intervention of God. The boy's nakedness further implies the idea of the presence of God, contrasting the youth with the heavily-armoured giant. David is presented uncircumcised, which is customary for male nudes in Italian Renaissance art.



The figure has been interpreted in a variety of ways. One has been to suggest that Donatello was homosexual and that he was expressing that sexual attitude through this statue. A second is to suggest that the work refers to homosocial values in Florentine society without expressing Donatello's personal tendencies. However, during the Renaissance sodomy was illegal, and over 14,000 men had been tried in Florence for this crime. So this homosexual implication would have been dangerous. A third interpretation is that *David* represents Donatello's effort to create a unique version of the male nude, to exercise artistic license rather than copy the classical models that had thus far been the sources for the depiction of the male nude in Renaissance art.



In 1434, Donatello signed a contract to carve the frieze for the marble pulpit designed by **Michelozzo** on the facade of Prato Cathedral. This work, a passionate, pagan, rhythmically conceived bacchanalian dance of half-nude putti, was the forerunner of the great *Cantoria*, or singing tribune, at the Duomo in Florence on which Donatello worked intermittently from 1433 to 1440 and was inspired by ancient sarcophagi and Byzantine ivory chests.



The **Annunciation** in Santa Croce is the first work to reflect Donatello's new tendencies following his stay in Rome.



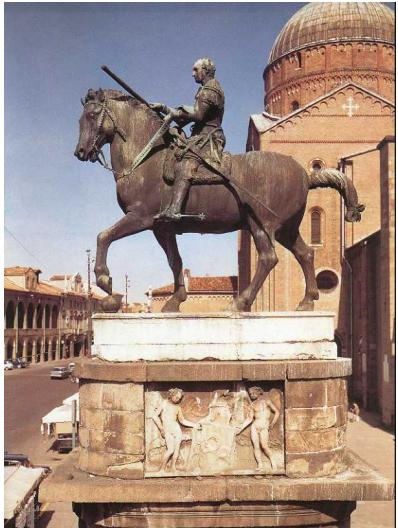
The *Annunciation* was one of the most popular themes of early Renaissance artists. Carved in high relief on gilded stone, Donatello's version (1435) is a stark contrast to its contemporaries, being an example of the introduction of classical (Roman) principles during an age where Gothic influence prevailed.

The folds of the drapery, which suggest the form of the body underneath, are a nod to classical art. The setting of the work is rich in classical iconography: the gold-gilded pilasters and podium bearing classical motif are evidence to this. The greatest of Donatello's achievements in this work is its strong realism and compelling psychological narrative. The Virgin, startled by the angel Gabriel, looks as if she is fleeing from the frame. Yet her face maintains a humble reverence and exquisite grace. It is a complex emotional reaction, and one that Donatello captures with great sincerity. Mary holds a book, still open in her hands that she must have been reading before being interrupted. It is a private, human moment in which Mary is not portrayed as Divine but as an ordinary woman receiving extraordinary news.

"It was put near the altar of the Cavalcanti Chapel. For this he made an ornament in the grotesque style, with a base of varied and intertwined work, surmounted by a quartercircle, and with six putti; these garlanded putti have their arms round each other as if they are afraid of the height and are trying to steady themselves. Donatello's ingenuity and skill are specially apparent in the figure of the Virgin herself: frightened by the unexpected appearance of the angel she makes a modest reverence with a charming, timid movement, turning with exquisite grace towards him as he makes his salutation. The Virgin's movement and expression reveal both her humility and the gratitude appropriate to an unexpected gift, particularly a gift as great as this. Moreover, Donatello created a masterly flow of folds and curves in the draperies of the Madonna and angel, suggesting the form of the nude figures and showing how he was striving to recover the beauty of the ancients, which had been lost for so many years. He displayed such skill and facility that, in short, no one could have bettered his design, his judgment, his use of the chisel, or his execution of the work." (Vasari).

The **St John the Baptist** in the **Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari** is the only statue by Donatello in Venice. A restoration finished in 1973 revealed Donatello's original concept that had been covered over by two re-paintings; his signature and the date of 1438 were also rediscovered.

It is a striking example of the wide range of styles that Donatello produced during the late 1430s, creating works with widely varying characteristics and employing nearly all kinds of sculptural techniques. It can be said that Donatello, in realising this sculpture, sacrificed form for expression, a significant example of the new Renaissance culture. Mortified by penance and dressed in a shaggy animal skin and mantle thrown over his shoulders, the saint holds a scroll, between his tapering fingers, which states: "Ecce Agnus Dei". The admonishing power of the Baptist is conserved in his animated look and raised arm.



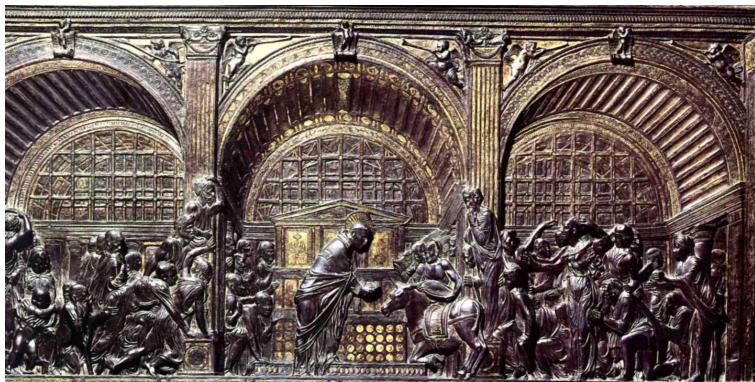
In 1443, Donatello was called to Padua by the heirs of the famous condottiere Erasmo da Narni (better known as the *Gattamelata*, or "Honey-Cat"), who had died that year. Completed in 1450 and placed in the square facing the Basilica of St. Anthony his **Equestrian Monument of Gattamelata** was the first example of such a monument since ancient times. (Other equestrian statues, from the 14th century, had not been executed in bronze and had been placed over tombs rather than erected independently, in a public place.) This work became the prototype for other equestrian monuments executed in Italy and Europe in the following centuries.

The statue sits on a pedestal, and both the condottiere and his horse are portrayed in life size. Instead of portraying the soldier as larger-than-life, as in the classical Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius in Rome, where a hierarchy of size demonstrates the subject's power, Donatello used emotion, position, and symbolism to convey the same message. Thus, Donatello makes a statement of the power of the real-life individual; he does not need to embellish or make grander whom Gattamelata was – the simple depiction of the real man is enough to convey his power.

For the **Basilica of St. Anthony, Padua**, Donatello created, most famously, the bronze **Crucifix** of 1444–47 and additional statues for the choir, including a **Madonna With Child** and six saints, constituting a **Sacra Conversazione** (Holy Conversation), a genre developed in the Italian Renaissance depicting the Virgin and Child amidst a group of saints in a relatively informal grouping, as opposed to the more rigid and hierarchical compositions of earlier periods. Donor portraits may also be included, generally kneeling, often their patron saint is presenting them to the Virgin, with angels frequently in attendance.



The group called the **Altare del Santo**, which Donatello executed about 1447-50, for the Basilica of St. Anthony, is composed altogether of twenty-nine pieces of sculpture. Seven free-standing bronze statues, four bas-reliefs in bronze with the miracles of St Anthony (*Miracle of the Ass*, *Miracle of the New-born Child*, *Miracle of the Repentant Son*, *Miracle of the Avaricious Man's Heart*); four bas-reliefs in bronze with the symbols of the Evangelists, another bas-relief of the Dead Christ supported by two putti, twelve reliefs with Musician Angels, and finally a relief in Nanto stone depicting the Entombment.



In the four low relief panels showing the Miracles of St Anthony set around the altar, Donatello demonstrates a high degree of skill in representing the architecture in perspective, creating an illusion of deep space. In the **Miracle of the Ass** a succession of arched spaces are depicted behind the grill; while the ass kneels to receive benediction from the saint.

Many figures crowd through from the arched anti rooms to the main space, expressing in agitated wonderment their astonishment at the **Miracle of the New Born Child**. The eye level is set at ground level so that the closest figures are much larger, and those in the background quite small, suggesting that the room has some depth, and increasing the dramatic effect. Although, closer inspection reveals some discrepancy in the relative sizes and the anatomical proportions of the figures, (eg. The distant figure at the far left which has disproportionately short legs) indicating that Donatello was more interested in the expressive possibilities of the human form than in accurate representation; a consideration that would emerge again in 20th century Expressionist art.



Judith and Holofernes (1457–1464) depicts the beheading of the Assyrian general Holofernes by Judith and is remarkable for being one of the first Renaissance sculptures to be conceived in the round, with its four distinct faces. It was placed on the Piazza della Signorina in front of the Palazzo Vecchio but is now replaced by a copy, the original being in the Palazzo Vecchio.

Judith is considered the symbol of liberty, virtue and victory of the weak over the strong in a just cause. Christian symbolism of

Judith reveals her actions over Holofernes to be a victory of virtue, particularly concerning self-control, chastity and humility, as opposed to promiscuity and pride. Her story in the Power of Women topos depicts the weak overcoming the assumed victor in an effort to protect her home. This is symbolic of the city of Florence, who fought to protect their Republic from foreign powers and to the Medici specifically upholding their pride in the city.

The subject, depicting the climax of the story in the Book of Judith, was a common subject in art and is associated with the Power of Women topos (theme).



15th-century aquamanile (jug) with Phyllis riding Aristotle

The "Power of Women" is a medieval and Renaissance artistic and literary *topos*, (theme) showing "heroic or wise men dominated by women", presenting "an admonitory and often humorous inversion of the male-dominated sexual hierarchy". It was defined by Susan L. Smith as "the representational practice of bringing together at least two, but usually more, well-known figures from the Bible, ancient history, or romance to exemplify a cluster of interrelated themes that include the wiles of women, the power of love, and the trials of marriage". Smith argues that the *topos* is not simply a "straightforward manifestation of medieval antifeminism"; rather, it is "a site of contest through which conflicting ideas about gender roles could be expressed".

Smith argues the *topos* originates in classical literature and finds it in medieval texts such as the *Consolation of Philosophy*, the *Roman de la Rose*, and the *Canterbury Tales*. The *topos* was attacked by Christine de Pizan around 1400, who argued that if women wrote these accounts their interpretations would be different from those of men.

In the visual arts, images are found in various media, mainly from the 14th century onwards, and becoming increasingly popular in the 15th century. By then the frequently recurring subjects include Judith beheading Holofernes, Phyllis riding Aristotle, Samson and Delilah, Salome and her mother Herodias, Jae killing Sisera, Bathsheba bathing in sight of David, the idolatry of Solomon, Virgil in his basket, as well as many depictions of witches, and genre images of wives dominating their husbands. The last group came to be called the **battle for the trousers**. Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Lot and his Daughters were somewhat late joiners to the group, but increasingly popular later



The **Penitent Magdalene**, probably commissioned for the Baptistry of Florence, is a wooden sculpture of Mary Magdalene created around 1453–1455. It is the last of Donatello's most important pieces and was received with astonishment for its unprecedented realism.

Though the Penitent Magdalene was the usual depiction for the many single figures of Mary Magdalene in art, Donatello's gaunt, emaciated figure differs greatly from most depictions, which show a beautiful young woman in nearly perfect health. The Magdalene Penitent is famous for the detailed and very realistic carvings on the statue. Medieval

hagiography in the Western church had conflated the figure of Mary Magdalene, already conflated with Mary of Bethany and the un-named sinner in the Anointing of Jesus, with that of Saint Mary of Egypt, a popular figure in the Eastern churches, who had been a prostitute before spending thirty years repenting in the desert. Donatello's depiction is similar to, and very probably influenced by, Eastern Orthodox icons of Mary of Egypt, which show a similar emaciated figure. He thus ignored the Western legends by which Mary was daily fed by angels in the desert.

Gentile da Fabriano (1370–1427) worked in various places in central Italy, mostly in Tuscany. His best-known works are his *Adoration of the Magi* from the *Strozzi Altarpiece* (1423), considered his finest work, and which has been described as "the culminating work of the International Gothic style, and the *Flight into Egypt*.

The work shows both the international and Sienese schools' influences on Gentile's art, combined with the Renaissance novelties he knew in Florence. The panel portrays the path of the three Magi in several scenes which start from the upper left corner (the voyage and the entrance into Bethlehem) and continue clockwise, to the larger meeting



with the Virgin Mary and the newborn Jesus which occupies the lowest part of the picture. All the figures wear splendid Renaissance costumes, brocades richly decorated with real gold and precious stones inserted in the panel. Gentile's typical attention for detail is also evident in the exotic animals, such as a leopard, a dromedary, some apes and a lion, as well as the magnificent horses and a hound. The frame is also a work of art, characterized by three cusps with tondos portraying Christ Blessing (centre) and the Annunciation (with the Archangel Gabriel on the left and the Madonna on the right). The predella has three rectangular paintings with scenes of Jesus' childhood: the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt and the Presentation at the temple.

Masaccio 1401 – 28), born **Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone**, was a Florentine artist who is regarded as the first great Italian painter of the Quattrocento period of the Italian Renaissance. According to Vasari, Masaccio was the best painter of his generation because of his skill at imitating nature, recreating lifelike figures and movements as well as a convincing sense of three-dimensionality. He employed nudes and foreshortening in his figures. This had seldom been done before him.

The name Masaccio is a humorous version of Maso (short for Tommaso), meaning "clumsy" or "messy" Tom. The name may have been created to distinguish him from his principal collaborator, also called Maso, who came to be known as Masolino ("little/delicate Tom").

Despite his brief career, he had a profound influence on other artists, and is considered to have started the Early Italian Renaissance in painting with his works in the mid- and late-1420s. In a short working life he introduced a revolution in the portrayal of figures in a landscape setting that would determine the direction of Western Art for the next six hundred years. He was one of the first to use linear perspective in his painting, employing techniques such as a vanishing point in art for the first time. He moved away from the International Gothic style and elaborate ornamentation of artists such as Gentile da Fabriano to a more naturalistic mode that employed perspective and chiaroscuro for greater realism.

Masaccio died at the age of twenty-six and little is known about the exact circumstances of his death. Upon hearing of Masaccio's death, Filippo Brunelleschi said: "We have suffered a great loss."



The **San Giovenale Triptych** (1422) was discovered in 1961 in a state of poor preservation in the loft of a house adjacent to the small chapel of San Giovenale two kilometers from Cascia near Florence. It had allegedly been hidden there before the Second World War to prevent the occupying German army from removing it from the chapel. It is probably the first original work by Masaccio.

The central panel shows the Madonna enthroned with two angels and the child Jesus eating some vine, as a symbol of the Eucharist. The halo of the Madonna bears the *Shahada* written backwards. The left side panel depicts Saint Bartholomew and Saint Blaise, and the right panel depicts Saint Anthony and Saint Juvenal. The left and right panels show a marked influence of 14th century models, while the complex perspective of the centre panel would have been something new for its time. Also, the use of three-dimensional solidity makes the painting revolutionary for its time.

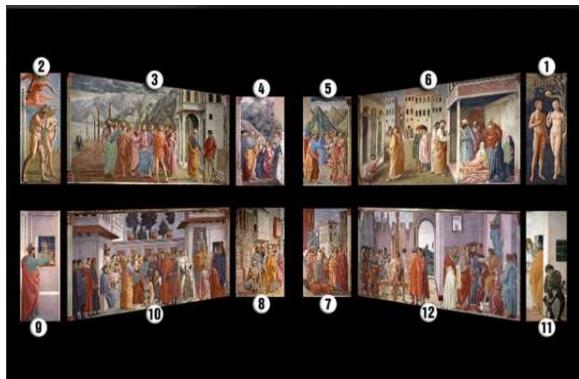
The **Shahada** "the testimony") is an Islamic creed, one of the Five Pillars of Islam and part of the Adhan (the call to prayer), declaring belief in the oneness (*tawhid*) of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's messenger. The Shahada appears as an architectural element in Islamic buildings around the world, such as those in Jerusalem, Cairo and Istanbul. Late Medieval and Renaissance European art displays a fascination with Middle Eastern motifs in general and the Arabic script in particular, as indicated by its use, without concern for its content, in painting, architecture and book illustrations. In his *San Giovenale Triptych*, Masaccio copied the full Shahada, written backwards, on the halo of the Madonna.

The **Madonna and Child with Saint Anne**, (c.1424) was painted by Masaccio, probably in collaboration with Masolino (c.1383 – c.1447). With its powerful volume and solid grasp of space by means of the assured perspectival structure, it is one of the earliest works credited to Masaccio. The Saint Anne and the angels, except for one, are by Masolino being very delicate and tender in their forms and pale, gentle colouring, and more Gothic in expression. The angel in the upper right hand curve reveals the hand of Masaccio. The figure of Saint Anne is much worn and hence to be judged with difficulty, but her left hand, which seems to explore the depth of the picture-space, may well be an invention of Masaccio, whose work shows the influence of Donatello in its soft, rounded forms and realistic texture.

The figure of Christ is that of a young child, a realistic presence, rather than a gothic cherub. This is also one of the first paintings to display the effect of true natural light on the figure; it is this invention which imparts the modelling of form so characteristic of Masaccio, and which would have a profound influence on the development of painting of the Italian Renaissance.



In 1424, the "duo preciso e noto" ("well and known duo") of Masaccio and Masolino was commissioned by the powerful and wealthy Felice Brancacci to execute a cycle of frescoes for the **Brancacci Chapel** in the church of **Santa Maria del Carmine** in Florence. With the two artists probably working simultaneously, the painting began around 1425, but for unknown reasons the chapel was left unfinished, and was completed by Filippino Lippi in the 1480s. The iconography of the fresco decoration is somewhat unusual; while the majority of the frescoes represent the life of Saint Peter, two scenes, on either side of the threshold of the chapel space, depict the temptation and expulsion of Adam and Eve. As a whole, the frescoes recount the life of Saint Peter as if it were the story of salvation. The style of Masaccio's scenes shows the influence of Giotto especially. Figures are large, heavy, and solid; emotions are expressed through faces and gestures; and there is a strong impression of naturalism throughout the paintings. Unlike Giotto, however, Masaccio uses linear and atmospheric perspective, directional light, and *chiaroscuro*: the representation of form through light and colour without outlines. As a result, his frescoes are even more convincingly lifelike than those of his trecento predecessor.



During the painting Masolino left for Hungary, where he was painter to the king. By the time he returned he was learning from his talented former student, 18 years his junior. However, Masaccio was called to Rome before he could finish the chapel, and died in there at the age of 27. Portions of the chapel were completed fifty years later by Filippino Lippi.

The frescoes in supposed order of painting:

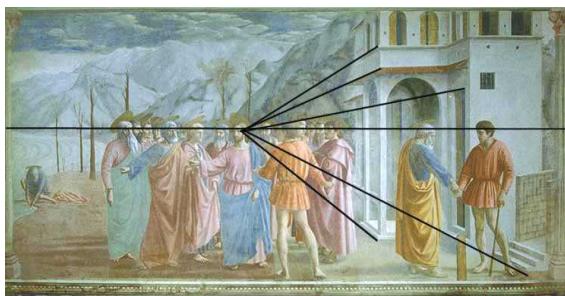
- 1 ***The Temptation of Adam and Eve*** (Masolino)
- 3 ***The Tribute Money*** (Masaccio)
- 4 ***St. Peter Preaching*** (Masolino)
- 5 ***Baptism of the Neophytes*** (Masaccio)
- 6 ***Healing of the Cripple and Raising of Tabitha*** (Masolino)
- 7 ***The Distribution of Alms and Death of Ananias*** (Masaccio)
- 8 ***St Peter Healing the Sick with His Shadow*** (Masaccio)
- 9 ***St Paul Visiting St Peter in Prison*** (Filippino Lippi, unrestored)
- 10 ***Raising of the Son of Theophilus and St Peter Enthroned*** (Masaccio and Filippino Lippi)
- 11 ***St Peter Being Freed from Prison*** (Filippino Lippi)
- 12 ***Disputation with Simon Magus and Crucifixion of St Peter*** (Filippino Lippi)

In his frescos, Masaccio made a radical break from the Medieval pictorial tradition, by adhering to the new Renaissance perspectival conception of space. Thus, perspective and light create deep spaces where volumetrically constructed figures may move about in a strongly individualised human dimension. Masaccio therefore continues on Giotto's path, detaching himself from a symbolic vision of man and propounding a greater realistic painting.

The Tribute Money, widely considered among Masaccio's best work, and a vital part of the development of renaissance art, describes a scene from the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus directs Peter to find a coin in the mouth of a fish in order to pay the temple tax. Its importance relates to its revolutionary use of perspective and chiaroscuro.



The story is told in three parts. The central scene shows the tax collector demanding the tribute. The eyes of the spectator are drawn to the head of Christ, at the centre on the vanishing point of the painting. Both Christ and Peter then point to the left hand part of the painting, where the next scene takes place in the middle background: Peter taking the money out of the mouth of the fish. The final scene – where Peter pays the tax collector – is at the right, set apart by the framework of an architectural structure.



This work is considered of high importance in the history of art, as it is widely believed to be the first painting, since the fall of Rome (ca. 476 AD), to use Scientific Linear One Point Perspective; that is, all the lines at right angles to the picture plane point to one vanishing point, in this case, behind the head of Christ. Also, it is one of the first paintings that does away with the use of a head-cluster, a technique employed by earlier Proto-Renaissance artists, such as Giotto or Duccio to suggest crowds. The figures are

correctly placed in a measurable space so that the spectator could walk into the painting, around Jesus Christ, in the semicircle created, and back out of the painting again with ease.

Christ and the disciples are placed in a semicircle, reflecting the shape of the chapel's apse. The tax collector, on the other hand, stands outside the holy space. While the disciples are dressed almost entirely in robes of pastel pink and blue, the official wears a shorter tunic of a striking vermilion, adding to the audacity expressed through his gestures. Contrast is also achieved – both in the central scene and on the right – by the tax collector's postures which closely reflect in reverse those of Peter, adding a three-dimensional quality to the figures.

Donatello and Brunelleschi, as pioneers of the renaissance had used single-point perspective, however, a technique unique to Masaccio, was the use of atmospheric, or aerial perspective. Both the mountains in the background, and the figure of Peter on the left are dimmer and paler than the objects in the foreground, creating an illusion of depth. This technique was known in ancient Rome, but was considered lost until reinvented by Masaccio.

Masaccio's use of light was also revolutionary. While earlier artists like Giotto had applied a flat, neutral light from an unidentifiable source, Masaccio's light emanated from a specific location outside the picture, casting the figures in light and shadow, creating an effect of sculpting the bodies into three-dimensional shapes, as may be noted in ***The Distribution of Alms and Death of Ananias***.



In the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles*, each Christian, after selling their own possessions, would bring the proceeds to the apostles, who distributed to everyone according to need. Only Ananias "kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet." Reprimanded by Peter, he fell to the ground and died. The composition concentrates on the moment in which Ananias lies on the ground, whilst the woman with child receives alms from Peter, accompanied by John. The compositional structure is quite tight and emotional, involving the viewer in the heart of the event.



from prison, with Saint Paul's assistance, Saint Peter resuscitates Theophilus's son, who had died fourteen years before, for which he is revered and a new church erected to him, where he is enthroned on the right and prayed to by all.

However, the true meaning of this fresco rests with the politics of the time: that is, in the conflict between Florence and the Duchy of Milan. St Peter's presence symbolizes the mediating role of the Church in the person of Pope Martin V, to sedate the conflict between Milan and Florence. At the extreme right, a group of four bystanders are thought to personify Masolino (the shortest one) Masaccio (looking towards the viewer), Leon Battista Alberti and Filippo Brunelleschi in the foreground. The frequent use of portraiture makes the imaginary world of painting and the viewer's personal experience converge. For Masaccio's contemporaries it should have been easier to read this scene as a reflection of themselves and their own social realities. The fresco's figures populate a dilated space of their own world and have a natural demeanour: they stretch their necks to see better, they look over their neighbour's shoulder, gesticulate, observe and gossip the event with the next bystander.



The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden depicts a distressed Adam and Eve, who lets out a howl of pain, chased from the garden by a threatening angel. Adam covers his entire face to express his shame, while Eve's shame requires her to cover certain areas of her body. The fresco had a huge influence on Michelangelo.

Three centuries after the fresco was painted, Cosimo III de'Medici, in line with contemporary ideas of decorum, ordered that fig leaves be added to conceal the genitals of the figures. These were eventually removed in the 1980s when the painting was fully restored and cleaned.



Many possible sources of inspiration have been pointed out that Masaccio may have drawn from. For Adam, possible references include numerous sculptures of Marsyas (from Greek Mythology) and certain crucifixes by Donatello.

For Eve, art analysts usually point to different versions of *Venus Pudica* such as *Prudence* by Giovani Pisano.

Marsyas, Greek 3rd c BC, and Praxiteles' **Aphrodite of Knidos** 4th c BC



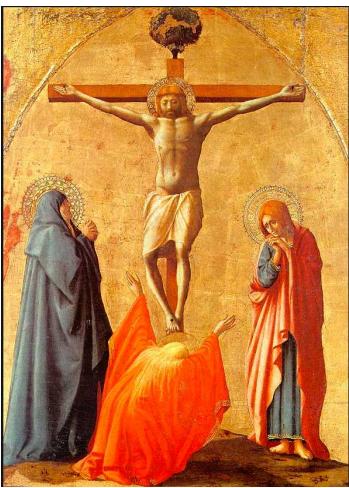
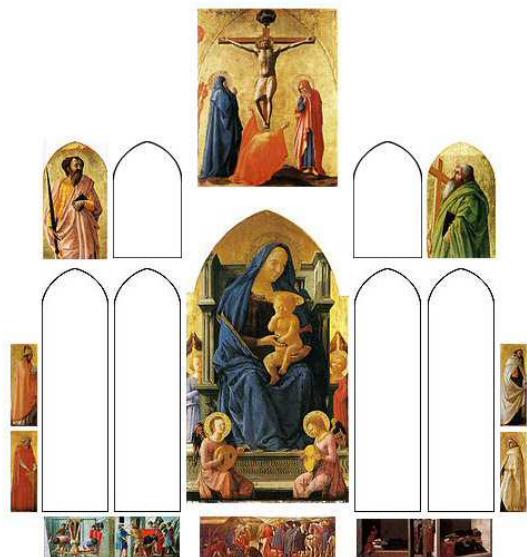
The cycle begins with this painting of ***The Temptation of Adam and Eve*** by Masolino. In contrast with Masaccio's *Expulsion*, opposite, this is a serene and innocent figuration.

These scenes are the premises to the story narrated in the frescos, showing the moment in which man severed his attachment to God, later reconciled by Christ with Peter's mediation.

The painting shows Adam standing near Eve: they look at each other with measured postures, as she prepares to bite on the apple, just offered to her by the serpent near her arm around the tree. The much idealised snake has a head with thick blond hair. The scene is courtly in its presentation, with gestures and style conveying tones of late International Gothic. Light, which models the figures without sharp angles, is soft and embracing; the dark background makes the bodies stand out in their sensual plasticity, as if suspended in space.

The **Pisa Altarpiece** was a large multi-panelled altarpiece produced by Masaccio for the church of Santa Maria del Carmen in Pisa. The altarpiece was dismantled and dispersed to various collections and museums in the 18th century, but an attempted reconstruction was made possible due to a detailed description of the work by Vasari in 1568.

Painted in tempera with a gold ground on a wood panel, it originally had at least five compartments organised in two registers, making ten main panels, of which only four are known to have survived. Another four side panels and three predella panels are now in the Gemaldegalerie, Berlin. The altarpiece's central panel, ***Madonna and Child with Angels***, produced in collaboration with Masaccio's brother Giovanni and with Andrea di Gusto, is now in the National Gallery, London.



The *Crucifixion* was placed above the central panel of the altarpiece, underlining the sacrificial (Eucharistic) nature of the central panel. Although the panel un-naturalistically represents the narrative against a gold background (a medieval formula for representing sacred scenes), Masaccio creates an effect of reality by depicting the event from below, as the viewer standing before the altar truly saw it. In this way, he attempts to involve the worshipper in the scene, making the sacred accessible to the ordinary Christian.

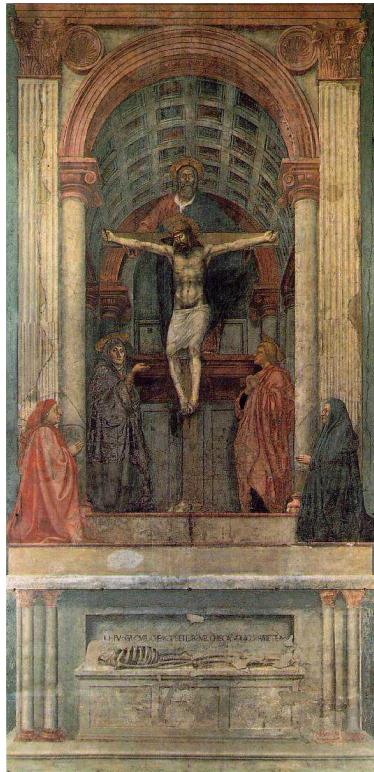
In the altarpiece's central panel, *Madonna and Child with Angels*, the larger centre figure signifies her importance. A childlike Christ (in comparison to the more 'adult' representations of Christ in preceding altarpieces) sits on her knees. A sorrowful

Madonna, aware of her son's fate, offers him grapes, representing the wine which was drunk at the Last Supper, symbolising his blood and indicating Christ's awareness of his eventual death.

The style of the painting is in some respects traditional, with an enlarged central figure and gold background, but in general Masaccio has created a more realistic approach to the subject: modelling the forms with a clearly visible light source coming from the left of the painting; the



unidealised faces; creating depth by overlapping and the placing of two angels in the foreground and two behind the throne, and with the use of linear perspective in the throne.



Vasari described *The Holy Trinity, with the Virgin and Saint John and Donors* as "a barrel vault drawn in perspective, and divided into squares with rosettes that diminish and are foreshortened so well that there seems to be a hole in the wall."

The fresco is painted on a side wall of the church of **Santa Maria Novella, Florence**. The trompe l'oeil effect is achieved through a masterly use of linear perspective and the organising of light and shade in conformity with the lighting inside the church, so that the parishioners would be astonished to see the Holy personages so realistic portrayed, as if appearing in a niche in their church.

To achieve this convincing image Masaccio had to solve a difficult problem: In 'reality' the donors, kneeling in our space, slightly lower and on 'our' side of the painted pilasters, would appear larger, while God, set within the deep space of the alcove, would appear much smaller. To overcome this and maintain the traditional hierarchy of size he makes the donors kneel, reducing their apparent size and makes the figures of Christ and the Father the same and only marginally larger than the figures of Mary and John; thus making the differences in size not immediately apparent, while magnifying their importance. A further problem is that in order to prevent God from appearing to float in air as he stands behind and above Christ, Masaccio stands him on a ledge on the back wall of the alcove. This has the effect of at once 'grounding' him in the real world and

bringing him forward to support the cross with his hands – so attesting to the doctrine of the divine presence existing both in the world of man and in the eternal; in all places at all times.

The horizon line of the perspective projection is the floor where the donors are kneeling, set at the approximate eye level of the observer. Below this, ie. beneath the divine story and 'below ground', is a painted sarcophagus, with a skeleton and inscription which reads "IO FU[I] G[I]A QUEL CHE VOI S[I]JETE E QUEL CH[I] I[O] SONO VO[I] A[N]CO[R] SARETE" (I once was what you are and what I am you also will be).