

Mannerism

Where High Renaissance art emphasizes proportion, balance, and ideal beauty, Mannerism exaggerates such qualities, often resulting in compositions that are asymmetrical or unnaturally elegant. Mannerism is notable for its intellectual sophistication as well as its artificial (as opposed to naturalistic) qualities. Mannerism favours compositional tension and instability rather than the balance and clarity of earlier Renaissance painting. Mannerism in literature and music is notable for its highly florid style and intellectual sophistication.



Maniera artists looked to their older contemporary Michelangelo as their principal model; theirs was an art imitating art, rather than an art imitating nature. As this *'ignudi'* from the Sistine ceiling (1505-12) shows: the exaggerated and distorted, unnatural pose, and the emphatic depiction of the musculature of one of the 'ignudi' is clearly mannered, and an influence on later generations of artists.

Tintoretto's *Christ at the Sea of Galilee* (c. 1575-80) depicts a seascape which in atmosphere and colour is a pure 'invention'. The figures, waves and clouds are highly exaggerated and unreal.



Tintoretto's work, which differed greatly from his predecessors, had been criticized by Vasari for its, "fantastical, extravagant, bizarre style." Within his work, Tintoretto adopted Mannerist elements that have distanced him from the classical notion of Venetian painting, as he often created artworks which contained elements of fantasy. Other unique elements of Tintoretto's work include his attention to colour through the regular utilization of rough brushstrokes and experimentation with pigment to create illusion.

Origin and development

By the end of the High Renaissance, young artists experienced a crisis: it seemed that everything that could be achieved was already achieved. No more difficulties, technical or otherwise, remained to be solved. The detailed knowledge of anatomy, light, physiognomy and the way in which humans register emotion in expression and gesture, the innovative use of the human form in figurative composition, the use of the subtle gradation of tone, all had reached near perfection. The young artists needed to find a new goal, and they sought new approaches. At this point Mannerism started to emerge. The new style developed between 1510 and 1520 either in Florence, or in Rome, or in both cities simultaneously.

Early mannerism

The early Mannerists in Florence—especially the students of Andrea del Sarto: Jacopo da Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino—are notable for elongated forms, precariously balanced poses, a collapsed perspective, irrational settings, and theatrical lighting. Parmigianino (a student of Correggio) and Giulio Romano (Raphael's head assistant) were moving in similarly stylized aesthetic directions in Rome. These artists had matured under the influence of the High Renaissance, and their style has been characterized as a reaction or exaggerated extension of it. Instead of studying nature directly, younger artists began studying Hellenistic sculpture and paintings of masters past.

The spread of mannerism

The cities Rome, Florence, and Mantua were Mannerist centers in Italy. Venetian painting pursued a different course, represented by Titian in his long career. A number of the earliest Mannerist artists who had been working in Rome during the 1520s fled the city after the Sack of Rome in 1527. As they spread out across the continent in search of employment, their style was disseminated throughout Italy and Northern Europe. The result was the first international artistic style since the Gothic. Other parts of Northern Europe did not have the advantage of such direct contact with Italian artists, but the Mannerist style made its presence felt through prints and illustrated books. Francis I of France, for example, was presented with Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*. The style waned in Italy after 1580, as a new generation of artists, including the Carracci brothers, Caravaggio and Cigoli, revived naturalism.

Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489-1534) usually known just as **Correggio** was the foremost painter of the Parma school of the High Italian Renaissance, who was responsible for some of the most vigorous and sensuous works of the 16th century. In his use of dynamic composition, illusionistic perspective and dramatic foreshortening, Correggio prefigured the Baroque art of the 17th century and the Rococo art of the 18th century. He is considered a master of chiaroscuro.



Noli me tangere (1520-40) ('touch me not') is the Latin version of a phrase spoken, according to John 20:17, by Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognized him after his resurrection. The biblical scene gave birth to a long series of depictions in Christian art from Late Antiquity to the present. The original Koine Greek phrase is better represented in translation as "cease holding on to me" or "stop clinging to me", i.e. an ongoing action, not one done in a single moment.

Correggio's version is divided diagonally in two with a dramatic sweep of the arms, leaving the figures to occupy a substantial part of the lower right with a soft green, blue landscape taking up the remainder of the upper left half. The tree is perhaps symbolic both of the Tree of Knowledge, from which Adam took the fruit, and thus starting the human story, and the tree from which the cross of the crucifixion was made, signifying the end of the pagan age and the beginning of the new age of Christianity.

The scene depicted in ***Venus with Mercury and Cupid***, also known as ***The School of Love*** or ***The Education of Cupid*** (c.1525) takes place in a leafy glade. A young family enjoys a tender moment in the sunshine. Venus, goddess of love, holds her son Cupid's bow as his father Mercury, god of wisdom, teaches him to read. Mercury looks down fondly at his child but Venus, leaning on a broken tree trunk, gazes dreamily towards us and smiles. Her gaze is both alluring and elusive, not quite meeting our eye.

Unusually, Venus is shown with wings like her son. Her pose resembles the stance of *Venus Pudica* from classical statues, in which the goddess demurely conceals her private parts. Her weight is shifted onto one leg, accentuating the curve of her hip; her spot-lit breasts are pushed up by the sweep of her right arm that directs our attention down to Cupid.

The relationship of the figures to one another appears completely effortless and natural but is actually very sophisticated. The composition is based on a series of criss-crossing diagonals that run through the figures' limbs and the tree trunks behind them. Venus' and Mars' hands and lower legs echo each other in pose and position, and the line of their arms creates a graceful heart shape that ties the group together. Cupid, with the wings of a little bird (the colours of which are those of the painting – blue, white and gold), stands on the central vertical axis of the composition between his parents at the foot of the tree, the splintered wood at the top of the painting recalling his golden curls. Correggio has created a wonderful rhythm of soft, sunlit skin against the darkness from which the figures emerge, the careful balance of the composition with his soft, smoky brushwork evoking a deep sense of harmony. The painting was designed as one of a pair with *Venus and Cupid with a Satyr* (Louvre, Paris), which shows Venus and Cupid lying fast asleep on the ground in a leafy glade. The Louvre's picture represents earthly Venus and the National Gallery's picture represents celestial Venus, and they were meant to hang together. *The School of Love* was always a very famous painting – elements from it have been copied by Titian, Annibale Carracci and Rubens.



The relationship of the figures to one another appears completely effortless and natural but is actually very sophisticated. The composition is based on a series of criss-crossing diagonals that run through the figures' limbs and the tree trunks behind them. Venus' and Mars' hands and lower legs echo each other in pose and position, and the line of their arms creates a graceful heart shape that ties the group together. Cupid, with the wings of a little bird (the colours of which are those of the painting – blue, white and gold), stands on the central vertical axis of the composition between his parents at the foot of the tree, the splintered wood at the top of the painting recalling his golden curls. Correggio has created a wonderful rhythm of soft, sunlit skin against the darkness from which the figures emerge, the careful balance of the composition with his soft, smoky brushwork evoking a deep sense of harmony. The painting was designed as one of a pair with *Venus and Cupid with a Satyr* (Louvre, Paris), which shows Venus and Cupid lying fast asleep on the ground in a leafy glade. The Louvre's picture represents earthly Venus and the National Gallery's picture represents celestial Venus, and they were meant to hang together. *The School of Love* was always a very famous painting – elements from it have been copied by Titian, Annibale Carracci and Rubens.

Venus and Cupid With a Satyr (c.1528) depicts Venus sleeping with her son Cupid (Eros in Greek mythology). Behind them, a satyr is caught in the act of discovering the goddess. Venus lies in a forest

glade with her infant son, the winged Cupid, beside her. She is identified by a bow in her left hand and a fur covered quiver behind her. She is discovered lying in a sinuous and provocative pose on a blue drape by the Satyr (sometimes identified as Jupiter in disguise), who pulls it back to reveal her body, and at the same time to cover his erect genitals. Cupid (meaning "passionate desire") is the god of desire, erotic love attraction and affection, is sleeping, his face turned to his mother's womb, unaware of the flaming torch between their feet.

The scene of **Jupiter and Io** (c.1532-33) is inspired by Ovid's classic *Metamorphoses*. Io, daughter of Inachus, the first king of Argos, is seduced by Jupiter, who hides behind the dunes to avoid hurting the jealous Juno. Jupiter was often tempted by other women and took on various disguises in order to cover his various escapades, one time taking the form of a swan, another time of an eagle, and in this painting he is not becoming something else so much as enveloping himself in a dark cloud, even though it is bright daylight. He is embracing the nymph, his face barely visible above hers. She is pulling Jupiter's vague, smoky hand towards herself with barely contained sensuality; this is a sensual painting, depicting one of the many loves of the god.

Noteworthy is the contrast between the evanescent figure of the immaterial Jupiter, and the sensual substance of Io's body, shown lost in an erotic rapture which anticipates the works of Bernini and Rubens.



The artist, following the trail blazed by a number of celebrated works by Titian, in his **Nativity** of c.1529-30 interpreted a scene that is fully 'à la chandell' ("of the candle") and produced an outstanding result in the chiaroscuro treatment of light. This work pointed the way toward the future Lombard investigation of luministic effects, and was used as a model by such painters as Guido Reni.

Correggio was remembered by his contemporaries as a shadowy, melancholic and introverted character. An enigmatic and eclectic artist, he appears to have emerged from no major apprenticeship. In addition to the influence of Costa, there are echoes of Mantegna's style in his work as well as a response to Leonardo da Vinci. Correggio had little immediate influence in terms of apprenticed successors, but his works are now considered to have been revolutionary and influential on subsequent artists. A half-century after his death Correggio's work was well known to Vasari, who felt that he had not had enough "Roman" exposure to make

him a better painter. In the 18th and 19th centuries, his works were often noted in the diaries of foreign visitors to Italy, which led to a reevaluation of his art during the period of Romanticism.

Correggio's illusionistic experiments, in which imaginary spaces replace the natural reality, seem to prefigure many elements of Mannerist, Baroque and Rococo stylistic approaches. He appears to have fostered artistic grandchildren, for example, Giovannino di Pomponio Allegri (1521–1593). Correggio had no direct disciples outside of Parma, where he was influential on the work of Parmigianino amongst others.

Jacopo Carucci(1494-1557) known as **Jacopo da Pontormo** or simply **Pontormo**, after his place of birth was an orphan. Vasari relates how the boy, "young, melancholy, and lonely", was shuttled around as a young apprentice:

Jacopo had not been many months in Florence before Bernardo Vettori sent him to stay with Leonardo da Vinci, and then with Mariotto Albertinelli, Piero di Cosimo and finally, in 1512, with Andrea del Sarto, with whom he did not remain long, for after he had done the cartoons for the arch of the Servites, it does not seem that Andrea bore him any good will, whatever the cause may have been.

Pontormo's *Joseph in Egypt* (1515-18) features what would in the Renaissance have been considered incongruous colours and an incoherent handling of time and space. Haunted faces and elongated bodies are characteristic of his work, which represents a profound stylistic shift from the calm perspectival regularity that characterized the art of the Florentine Renaissance. He is famous for his use of twining poses, coupled with ambiguous perspective; his figures often seem to float in an uncertain environment, unhampered by the forces of gravity. In a surreal dream-like scene a curved staircase, which appears to have no architectural support, curves up to an indeterminate space. His figures are out of scale with the setting and with each other.



Supper at Emmaus (1525) is one of the smallest works signed and dated by the artist, in this case on the abandoned scroll in the foreground. The work's chiaroscuro, high light-source, realism and freeze-frame composition proved an important precedent for Caravaggio, Velázquez and Francisco de Zurbarán.

It was originally commissioned by prior Leonardo Buonafede for the forestry refectory or the dispensary at the Certosa del Galluzzo near Florence, both places intended for welcoming and feeding guests, hence its subject.

The composition is based on a print from Albrecht Dürer, particularly in Christ's pose and the large tricorne hat worn by Cleophas, the right-hand disciple, one of the two disciples who in Saint Luke's Gospel, encountered Christ on the road to Emmaus, after the crucifixion. Both works represent Christ blessing the bread, his last act before

disappearing from the disciples according to the Gospel of Luke. At the top is an eye in a triangle, alluding to the Holy Trinity and the risen Christ's divine nature. It also appears in a copy of Pontormo's work and so it is thought to have been added to the original work to mask its three-faced symbol of the Trinity, a symbol banned by the Counter Reformation. In the background are portraits of five of the Certosa's monks at the time the work was produced, including (far left) Buonafede himself, with his left hand raised in a gesture echoing Christ's. Its realism in showing everyday details such as the dog and two cats at bottom left, the shining metal plate, the linen tablecloth and the transparent glass bottle owes much to Northern European art of the same era. The high light-source also refers to paintings of the Ascension and the lamp of truth, whilst the tonality and treatment of colour is typical of Pontormo.

The viewer of *The Visitation* (1528) is brought almost uncomfortably close to the Virgin and Saint Elizabeth, who drift toward each other in clouds of drapery. Moreover, the clear, carefully constructed architectural setting that appears in an earlier version of 1514-16 has been abandoned in favour of a peculiar nondescript, ambiguous urban setting with little suggestion of sunlight and shade. The figures are elongated, characteristic of Mannerist painting, and the robes are without pattern or decoration and painted in bright flat colours, with the minimum of tonal variation to suggest the folds and fall of light from the left.



The large altarpiece canvas portraying *The Deposition from the Cross* (1528), is considered by many Pontormo's surviving masterpiece. The figures, with their sharply modelled forms and brilliant colours are united in an enormously complex, swirling ovular composition, housed by a shallow, somewhat flattened space comprising a sculptural congregation of brightly demarcated colours. The vortex of the composition droops down towards the limp body of Jesus off centre in the left. Those lowering Christ appear to demand our help in sustaining both the weight of his body (and the burden of sin Christ took on) and their grief.



Although commonly known as *The Deposition from the Cross*, there is no actual cross in the picture; the natural world itself also appears to have nearly vanished: a lonely cloud and a shadowed patch of ground with a crumpled sheet provide sky and stratum for the mourners. If the sky and earth have lost colour, the mourners have not; bright swathes of pink and blue envelop the pallid, limp Christ. The scene might more properly be called a *Lamentation* or *Bearing the Body of Christ*. Those who are lowering (or supporting) Christ appear as anguished as the mourners. Though they are bearing the weight of a full-grown man, they barely seem to be touching the ground; the lower figure in particular balances delicately and implausibly on his front two toes. These two boys have sometimes been interpreted as angels, carrying Christ in his journey to Heaven. In this case, the subject of the picture would be more akin to an *Entombment*, though the lack of any discernible tomb disrupts that theory, just as the lack of cross poses a problem for the *Deposition* interpretation. Finally, it has also been noted that the positions of Christ and the Virgin seem to echo those of Michelangelo's *Pietà* in Rome, though here in the *Deposition* mother and son have been separated. Thus in addition to elements of a *Lamentation* and *Entombment*, this picture carries hints of a *Pietà*. It has been

speculated that the bearded figure in the background at the far right is a self-portrait of Pontormo as Joseph of Arimathea. Another unique feature of this particular *Deposition* is the empty space occupying the central pictorial plane as all the Biblical personages seem to fall back from this point. It has been suggested that this emptiness may be a physical representation of the Virgin Mary's emotional emptiness at the prospect of losing her son.

Pontormo's undulating mannerist contortions have been interpreted as intending to express apoplectic and uncontrolled spasms of melancholy. The Virgin, larger than her counterparts, swoons sideways inviting the support of those behind her; the Swoon of the Virgin was a controversial moment at the time. The assembly looks completely interlocked, as if architecturally integrated. But ultimately, the most compelling and empathic figure is the crouching man in the foreground, whose expression mixes the weight of the cadaver and the weight of melancholy.

Agnolo Bronzino 1503-72 mainly a portraitist but also painted many religious subjects, and a few allegorical subjects, which include what is probably his best known work, *Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time*. He trained with Pontormo, the leading Florentine painter of the first generation of Mannerism, to whom he was apprenticed at the age of 14, and his style was greatly influenced by him, but his elegant and somewhat elongated figures always appear calm and somewhat reserved, lacking the agitation and emotion of those by his teacher. They have often been found cold and artificial, and his reputation suffered from the general critical disfavour attached to Mannerism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Recent decades have been more appreciative of his art.



The *Young Man with a Book* (c.1530-39) probably depicts a literary friend of the artist holding open a collection of poetry. In addition to being a painter Bronzino was also a poet, and his most personal portraits are perhaps those of other literary figures such as that of his friend the poet Laura Battiferi.

His portrait figures—often read as static, elegant, and stylish exemplars of unemotional haughtiness and assurance—influenced the course of European court portraiture for a century, and exist in many workshop versions and copies.

Mannerist portraits by Agnolo Bronzino are distinguished by a serene elegance and meticulous attention to detail. As a result, Bronzino's sitters have been said to project an aloofness and marked emotional distance from the viewer. There is also a virtuosic concentration on capturing the precise pattern and sheen of rich textiles.

Bronzino's best known works comprise the series of the duke and duchess, Cosimo and Eleonora de

Medici and figures of their court. These paintings, especially those of the duchess, are known for their minute attention to the detail of her costume, which almost takes on a personality of its own.



In his portrait of *Eleonora di Toledo with her child, Giovanni* (1544-5) the Duchess is pictured with her second son Giovanni, who died of malaria in 1562, along with his mother; however it is the sumptuous fabric of the dress that takes up more space on the canvas than either of the sitters. Indeed, the dress itself has been the object of some scholarly debate. The elaborate gown has been rumoured to be so beloved by the duchess that she was ultimately buried in it; when this myth was debunked, others suggested that perhaps the garment never existed at all and Bronzino invented the entire thing, perhaps working only from a fabric swatch. This picture was reproduced over and over by Bronzino and his shop, becoming one of the most iconic images of the duchess. The version pictured here is in the Uffizi Gallery, and is one of the finest surviving examples.

In addition to images of the Florentine elite, Bronzino also painted idealized portraits of the poets Dante and Petrarch.

Bronzino's so-called "allegorical portraits", such as the *Portrait of Andrea Doria as Neptune* (c.1530's or 40's), are less typical but possibly even more fascinating due to the peculiarity of placing a publicly recognized personality in the nude as a mythical figure.

Andrea Doria, a Renaissance *condottiero* and admiral from Genoa, and the effective ruler of the city-state, was around sixty when the portrait was painted (the date is somewhat disputed); either way his physique hardly reflects his age at the time.

He chose to be depicted nude, and although naked, he is not fragile or frail. He is depicted as the "God of the Sea", as a powerful virile man, showing masculine spirit, strength, vigour, and power. He is stern and resolute, looking calmly over all that he surveys, yet also refined and mannered. The picture was meant to symbolize Doria's power, success, and fame as a celebrated admiral of his time. His beard is lengthy, flowing like the waves on the sea, and tufts of hair on his head recall the Roman emperors. Although his body is aged, his skin is still supple. He originally held a squared oar, a symbol of his command over his own fleet, but a trident head – described by art critic Camille Paglia as "cartoonish" – was painted over it by an unknown artist. The outline of the original oar is still faintly visible. The same individual probably added Doria's name. Doria is holding a piece of sailcloth which barely covers his genitals and exposes some of his pubic hair. Paglia asserts that his taut, yet somewhat portly, stomach appears to direct its strength into Doria's covered penis. She finds the innuendo of an erection in the stiff wood of the trident and mast. Jonathan Jones of *The Guardian* describes the painting as "consciously equat[ing] naval and sexual prowess".



Doria stands on the deck of his ship, as Neptune would upon his chariot. Behind him is a black, "oppressive" sky, but he is highlighted as if by a full moon or the lightning of an approaching storm. He stands in a strained manner, his head facing to the right but his thighs and buttocks remaining in profile. Through the allegory to Neptune, Doria – "a conqueror of the forces of Nature" – is connected to the mythological powers. He becomes Neptune, ruler of the oceans.

The eroticized nature of these virile nude male portraits, as well as homoerotic references in his poetry, have led scholars to believe that Bronzino was homosexual.

In the posthumous *Portrait of Bia de' Medici* (c.1545) Bronzino shows the child half-length and sitting on a chair - a rigid official pose offset by some hints of hand movement, as if the character was about to get up, along with an intense but emotionless gaze straight at the viewer. The face is lit and highlighted by the blue background, whilst

the cold light and absence of any strong chiaroscuro effect accentuates the smoothness of the subject's complexion and idealises her features. Her complexion is a pale white because Bronzino painted the portrait using her death mask as a model.

Bia has her hair parted in the middle of her forehead and a falling bob, with two carefully tied braids framing the face. She wears pearl earrings, a gold chain with a pendant or medallion with her father's profile on it, emphasizing her bond with her father. She also wears a sumptuous dress, made of blue satin with puffy sleeves, produced in the silk factories Cosimo was setting up in Florence at the time. With her right hand she is fiddling with the end or tassel of a golden chain or belt around her waist.

It was not an official state portrait, but would have hung in the family's private rooms as a reminder to them of the dead child and an inspiration and guide on the path to salvation. As art historian Gabrielle Langdon argues, Bronzino painted the child with a halo effect, in "light-emitting white satin and pearls" as a metaphor for both her name "Bianca," which means "white" and her childish innocence. "Like (Petrarch's) 'Laura,' the posthumous *Bia* is a riveting emanation from Heaven who bestows purifying grace on the beholder."

This masterly portrayal of the ***Deposition from the Cross*** (1545), although it depicts all the characters typically shown when Jesus is being taken down from the cross, more correctly should be characterized as a *Lamentation* and is an excellent example of late Mannerism or Maniera.

In the centre foreground is a Pietá portraying the body of Jesus being cradled in his mother Mary's arms. The Apostle John supports his back and is modelled on a youth holding up the body of Christ in a *Deposition* painted by Bronzino's teacher, Pontormo. Mary Magdalene kneels on the right and supports the feet of Jesus. Her jar of ointment is shown in the far right foreground. Four holy women mourn on the left and another dressed in green peers over the Virgin's shoulder and stands out prominently because of her hand gesture and location in the centre of the panel. Two of the three men in the background are the followers who took Jesus down from the cross and prepared his body for burial. Nicodemus is depicted on the left holding a large ewer filled with embalming spices. On the right, Joseph of Arimathea holds the nails of the Crucifixion as well as the pincers used to remove them.



In addition to the nails held by Joseph, other Arma Christi (instruments of the Passion) are presented throughout the painting. The angels floating above the scene hold the column where Jesus was whipped, the sponge, the lance, and the cross. The crown of thorns is lying in the dirt at John's feet.

The principal figures are attended by two angels, one bearing a chalice and the other lifting a transparent veil. Both of these objects are symbols of the Eucharist.



Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time is an allegorical painting of about 1545, now in the National Gallery, London. The erotic imagery would have appealed to the tastes prevalent in both the Medici and French courts at this time.

Crowded into the claustrophobic foreground of the painting are several figures whose identities have been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. At times it has also been called *A Triumph of Venus*. Its meaning, however, remains elusive. Cupid, along with his mother (Venus) and the nude putto, to the right, are all posed in a typical Mannerist *figura serpentina* form.

The two central figures are recognisable as Venus and Cupid. For example, she holds the golden apple she won in the Judgement of Paris, while he sports the characteristic wings and quiver. Both figures are nude, illuminated in a radiant white light. Cupid fondles his mother's bare breast and kisses her lips. The putto to the right of Cupid and Venus, preparing to shower them with rose petals, is often identified as Folly. On closer inspection his right foot can be seen pierced by large rose thorn pieces—an event that has no bearing on his expression, which seems engrossed in the pleasure of the moment.

The bearded, bald figure to the upper right of the scene is believed to be Time, in view of the hourglass behind him. He sweeps his arm forcefully out to his right. Again, it is difficult to interpret his gesture with any certainty; it could be to prevent the figure at the far left of the picture from shielding the incestuous transgressions of Venus and the adolescent Cupid with the billowing blue fabric that provides a screen between the figures in the fore and background. Many scholars believe that his gesture seems to say "Time is fleeting, and you never know when it may be all over." The figure opposite Time, and also grasping at the drapery, is usually called Oblivion because of the lack of substance to his form—eyeless sockets and mask-like head. The mask-like face of this figure is echoed by the image of two actual masks in the lower right-hand corner.



The identity of the remaining figures is even more ambiguous. The old woman rending her hair has been called Jealousy - though some believe her to represent the ravaging effects of syphilis. The creature at the right-hand side behind the innocent-looking putto, with a girl's face and a concealed sphinx-like body, her head twisted at an unnatural angle, her hands reversed, extending a honeycomb with her right hand, and hiding behind her back a scorpion's barb at the end of her long serpentine tail, may represent Pleasure and Fraud. There is, however, no consensus on these identifications.

Parmigianino "the little one from Parma" (1503-40)

Parmigianino's work is characterized by a "refined sensuality" and often elongation of forms and includes *Vision of Saint Jerome* (1527) and the iconic if somewhat untypical *Madonna with the Long Neck* (1534), and he remains the best known artist of the first generation whose whole careers fall into the Mannerist period. His prodigious and individual talent has always been recognised, but his career was disrupted by war, especially the Sack of Rome in 1527, three years after he moved there, and then ended by his death at only 37. He produced outstanding drawings, and was one of the first Italian painters to experiment with printmaking himself. He painted a number of important portraits, leading a trend in Italy towards the three-quarters or full-length figure, previously mostly reserved for royalty.

Vasari relates that the **Self Portrait in a convex Mirror**



(c1524) was created by Parmigianino as an example to showcase his talent to potential customers. The painting depicts the young artist (then twenty one) in the middle of a room, distorted by the use of a convex mirror. The hand in the foreground is greatly elongated and distorted by the mirror. The work was painted on a specially prepared convex panel in order to mimic the curve of the mirror used.



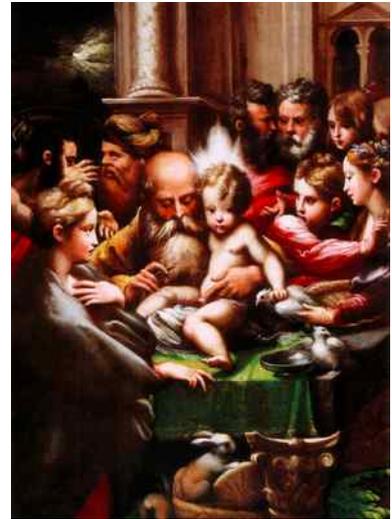
their virginity to him.

The **Bardi Altarpiece** (1521) depicts the mystical marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, set in a fake niche with a colonnade surmounting the background curved wall. (The mystical marriage is a vision of the saint where she goes through a wedding ceremony with Christ, in the presence of the Virgin Mary, consecrating themselves and

The scheme is that of the *sacra conversazione* (Holy Conversation). In the middle is the Virgin sitting on a tall throne, above a historiated section of column (decorated with a barely visible putto), giving the Child to St. Catherine, on the left, who receives the symbolic marriage ring. At the sides are two saints, St. John the Evangelist (with a chalice full of snakes, a hint to his alleged miraculous discovery and healing of a poisoned drink) and St. John the Baptist, who holds his typical attributed, a tall and slim cross. Catherine's attributed are shown in the low foreground, including a broken wheel and the martyrdom palm.

The ***Circumcision of Christ***, painted c.1523, shows the circumcision of Jesus as described in the Gospel of Luke the two sacrifice doves refer to the connected act of the purification of Mary. The young Jesus, well illuminated, is the child Jesus, surrounded by a crowd of characters. At the left is a very young Madonna, with blonde hair. Also on the left, behind her, are two characters confabulating on a background with the rising sun.

At the right are two rows of figures, as well as the priest who holds Jesus on the altar and, in the other hand, the ritual knife. Below, between the offers, are two small rabbits.



The upper torso of ***Antea (Portrait of a Young Woman)*** (1524-27) is greatly exaggerated and broadened in order to emphasise the variety and richness of the fabrics, and, perhaps to demonstrate the artist's consummate technique in representing the texture and pattern of different materials; likewise the head is reduced in proportion to monumentalise the statuesque body. In this parallels can be made with modern paintings of the figure, such as Matisse's distortions of the form in order to emphasize pattern and texture.

Studies of the woman's garments, a mix of luxury and popular elements, led to the hypothesis that she could be either a daughter, a lover or a servant of Parmigianino, if not Pellegrina Rossi di San Secondo or another unknown noblewoman of Parma.

As was common practice among artists during this period, Parmigianino later returned to the piece to borrow elements for re-use in later works. In particular, the face of *Antea* reappears as one of the angels accompanying the central figure group in the unfinished *Madonna of the Long Neck*.

The ***Madonna with the Long Neck*** (1535-40) depicts the Virgin Mary seated on a high pedestal in luxurious robes, holding a large baby Jesus on her lap. Six angels crowded together on the Madonna's right adore the Christ-child.

In the lower right-hand corner of the painting is an enigmatic scene, with a row of marble columns and the emaciated figure of Saint Jerome as required by the commissioner because of the saint's connection with the adoration of the Virgin Mary.

The painting is popularly called *Madonna of the Long Neck* because "the painter, in his eagerness to make the Holy Virgin look graceful and elegant, has given her a neck like that of a swan." On the unusual arrangement of figures art historian E. H. Gombrich writes:



"Instead of distributing his figures in equal pairs on both sides of the Madonna, he crammed a jostling crowd of angels into a narrow corner, and left the other side wide open to show the tall figure of the prophet, so reduced in size through the distance that he hardly reaches the Madonna's knee. There can be no doubt, then, that if this be madness there is method in it. The painter wanted to be unorthodox. He wanted to show that the classical solution of perfect harmony is not the only solution conceivable ... Parmigianino and all the artists of his time who deliberately sought to create something new and unexpected, even at the expense of the 'natural' beauty established by the great masters, were perhaps the first 'modern' artists."

Parmigianino has distorted nature for his own artistic purposes, creating a typical Mannerist *figura serpentinata*. Jesus is also extremely large for a baby, and he lies precariously on Mary's lap as if about to fall at any moment. The Madonna herself is of hardly human proportions—she is almost twice the size of the angels to her right. Her right foot rests on cushions that appear to be only a few inches away from the picture plane, but the foot itself seems to project beyond it, and is thus on "our" side of the canvas, breaking the conventions of a framed picture. Her slender hands and long fingers have also led the Italian medical scientist Vito Franco of the University of Palermo to diagnose that Parmigianino's model had the genetic disorder Marfan syndrome affecting her connective tissue.



Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71) was an Italian goldsmith, sculptor, draughtsman, and artist who also wrote poetry and a famous autobiography. He was one of the most important artists of Mannerism. He is remembered for his skill, in such pieces as the *Salt Cellar* and *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*.

This intricate 26-cm.-high sculpture, of a value conservatively estimated at 58,000,000 schilling, was commissioned by Francis I. Originally a goldsmith, Cellini's famous gold and enamel **Salt Cellar** (1543) was his first sculpture, and shows his talent at its best. Featuring Poseidon, a naked sea god, and Amphitrite (water and earth) sitting opposite each other with legs entwined, and with elongated proportions symbolically representing the planet Earth, it is considered a masterpiece of Mannerist sculpture.

The subject matter of *Perseus With the Head of Medusa* (1545) is the mythological story of Perseus beheading Medusa, a Gorgon whose hair had been turned to snakes; anyone who looked at her was turned to stone. Perseus stands naked except for a sash and winged sandals, triumphant on top of the body of Medusa with her head, crowned with writhing snakes, in his raised hand. Blood spews from Medusa's severed neck. The bronze sculpture, in which Medusa's head turns men to stone, is appropriately surrounded by three huge marble statues of men: Hercules, David, and later Neptune. Cellini's use of bronze in Perseus and the head of Medusa, and the motifs he used to respond to the previous sculpture in the piazza, were highly innovative.



The sculpture is thought to be the first statue since the classical age where the base included a figurative sculpture forming an integral part of the work.

At the time the sculpture was created, bronze had not been used in almost half a century for a monumental work of art. Cellini made the conscious decision to work in this medium because by pouring molten metal into his cast, he was vivifying the sculpture with life-giving blood. The most difficult part would be completing the entire cast all at once. It was to be placed in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence near to Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, which had been cast in bronze, but in several sections joined together. Cellini was competing against monumental works of marble sculpture such as Michelangelo's *David*. As a great self publicist a self-portrait on the back of Perseus' helmet reveals Cellini's wish to make a statement for himself and his genius and that of his patron, Cosimo I.

Michael Cole specifically draws attention to the process of casting the *Perseus*. Citing Cellini's *Life* Cole notes how Cellini's assistants let the metal clot, and had Cellini not been present the work would have been destroyed. Cole then asserts that Cellini goes beyond reviving the work but raised the dead, in which he means that Cellini's salvation was remelting the bronze. Cellini also invokes Christ and by doing so he breathes life into the sculpture.

Perseus was one of Cellini's crowning works, completed with two different ideas in mind. He wanted to respond to the sculpture already placed within the piazza, which he did with the subject matter of Medusa reducing men to stone. Secondly, the Medici were represented by *Perseus*, both in the round sculpture and the relief below. Moreover, in that respect, Cellini also made a statement for himself in

the actual casting of *Perseus*. Cellini breathed life into his new sculpture through his use of bronze and he asserted Medici control over the Florentine people through the Perseus motif.

In his famous Autobiography Cellini's described the casting of Perseus. He also wrote in a complacent way of how he contemplated his murders before carrying them out. He writes of his time in Paris: "When certain decisions of the court were sent me by those lawyers, and I perceived that my cause had been unjustly lost, I had recourse for my defense to a great dagger I carried; for I have always taken pleasure in keeping fine weapons. The first man I attacked was a plaintiff who had sued me; and one evening I wounded him in the legs and arms so severely, taking care, however, not to kill him, that I deprived him of the use of both his legs. Then I sought out the other fellow who had brought the suit, and used him also such wise that he dropped it."

Giulio Romano (1499 –1546), also known by his real name of **Giulio Pippi**, was an Italian painter and architect. He was a pupil of Raphael, and his stylistic deviations from High Renaissance classicism help define the 16th-century style known as Mannerism. While collaborating on the decoration of the ceiling of the Villa Farnesina and other works of Raphael, he increasingly became the master's right-hand man, despite his relative youth.



Portrait of Doña Isabel de Requesens y Enríquez de Cardona-Anglesola (c.1518) has been variously ascribed to Raphael, or the school of Raphael; it is now usually taken to have been executed by Giulio Romano based on a sketch by Raphael and then altered by Raphael. Her loose hair, the red garments (the colour of love for Petrarch), and her meeting the viewer's gaze are all sensuous details; further, the portrait is innovative in including her knees, which in addition are visibly parted, and in not having her hands chaste together as a barrier. Accurate portrayal of the proportions and anatomy of the subject is subservient to the demands of composition and expression. The shoulder of the left arm is disproportionately wide and the arm unnaturally long. The right arm seems detached from the body, or with an immensely long upper arm to place the elbow at such a distance from the torso to allow the short forearm to bend back in a gesture which is anatomically impossible. This allows the wide expanse of red gown to fill a large area of the picture. One is put in

mind of Matisse's reply when someone commented that the arm of the woman in one of his portraits was too long: "Madame, you are mistaken, that is not a woman it is a painting."

A very similar portrait of Isabella of Naples, also attributed to Raphael and Romano, is so close in design that it is speculated that the same cartoon was used for both. Owing to their similarity to the *Gioconda* (*Mona Lisa*) of Leonardo, they are referred to as *Giocondae* portraits. Both feature carved cats on the right which resemble lions, a punning allusion to Leonardo.

Originally attributed to Raphael until the mid-nineteenth century and only later to Giulio Romano



The Woman with a Mirror (c.1520) depicts a young woman sitting half-length with her shoulders and breasts uncovered and with one hand raised and the other resting on her chest while holding a transparent veil that covers her belly and legs, up to her knees. Next to the woman is depicted a dressing table with a mirror and other objects for daily care, inside a building where in the background it is possible to glimpse a servant.



The model of the painting has been variously identified as Lucrezia Borgia, illegitimate daughter of the Spanish cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI, and as a copy of *La Fornarina*, lover and model of Raphael, with which it shares some characteristic details: the posture of the three-quarter length woman, the bare breasts and shoulders with the veil that the woman holds in her right hand, the silk turban. striped on the head and the cuff on the arm.

Romano's masterpiece is the illusionistic frescos in the Palazzo del Té in Mantua. In one of rooms of palazzo, the *Sala dei Giganti*, Giulio Romano had depicted the **Gigantomachy**, (1532-34) based on *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, depicting Jupiter defeating the Giants with his lightning. The subject was very popular in the fine arts of the Cinquecento, because of its inherent possibilities for effective aesthetic design, and on the other hand because this myth was important for the self-image of a patron of that time expressing religious, moral, political ideas.

In other rooms of the Palazzo Romano had created scenes of erotic abandon and pastoral calm but in *the Sala dei Giganti* the viewer is confronted with scenes of chaos and violence, and the endeavour to give the viewer a total illusion conveying that he is involved in the action. The room forms a kind of round panorama; containing a single, thematically uniform painting without beginning or end. According to Vasari, it was Romano's intention to depict mountains and buildings collapsing, heavy clouds driven by the winds and the faces of the Giant's distorted by horror.



Francesco Primaticcio (1504 – 1570) was an Italian Mannerist painter, architect and sculptor. Born in Bologna he trained under Giulio Romano in Mantua and spent most of his career in France. Together with Rosso Fiorentino he was one of the leading artists to work at the Chateau Fontainebleau (where he is grouped with the so-called "First School of Fontainebleau") spending much of his life there. His masterpiece, the *Salle d'Hercule* at Fontainebleau, occupied him and his team from the 1530s to 1559.

Primaticcio's crowded Mannerist compositions and his long-legged canon of beauty influenced French art for the rest of the century, as this stucco over a door at Fontainebleau (1530/40s) demonstrates.

Giovanni Battista di Jacopo known as **Rosso Fiorentino** (1494-1550) was born in Florence with red hair that gave him his nickname, Rosso first trained in the studio of Andrea del Sarto alongside his contemporary, Pontormo. Fleeing Rome after the Sacking of 1527, Rosso eventually went to France where he secured a position at the court of Francis I in 1530, remaining there until his death. Together with Primaticcio, Rosso was one of the leading artists to work at the Chateau Fontainebleau as part of the "First School of Fontainebleau", spending much of his life there.

Rosso's reputation, along those of other stylized late Renaissance Florentines, was long out of favour in comparison to other more naturalistic and graceful contemporaries, but has revived considerably in recent decades. That his masterpiece is in a small city, away from the tourist track, was a factor in this, especially before the arrival of photography. His poses are certainly contorted, and his figures often appear haggard and thin, but his work has considerable power.





The ***Deposition from the Cross***, painted in oil on wood, and completed in 1521, is broadly considered to be Rosso's masterpiece. It has often been compared to Pontormo's near contemporary (1528) treatment of the same subject in his *Deposition* canvas.

Unlike Pontormo's bright coloration and unitary collection of billowing figures, the Florentino depiction has two arenas: above is an Escher-like geometric struggle of labourers on ladders, removing the crucified Christ, while below, the women and men are subsumed in grief. Mary, pale and downcast, collapses in the arms of two women. Mary Magdalen, in bright red, swoons to hug the Madonna's legs. A grief-stricken apostle turns his face away. The somber landscape is virtually barren. One reviewer describes the scene as "violent suffering ...rendered by extreme expression, the concatenation of angular bodies, and the dazzling light that sharply draws clear folds on the clothing." Another states that this is the prototype of early-Mannerism, with "no logical spatial connection between the figures, the cross and ladders; the size of the figures appears arbitrarily chosen, and their elongated bodies and small heads" distort classical proportions.

Rosso would go on to paint a second, darker and more crowded *Deposition* for the church of San Lorenzo, in Sansepolcro.

Giorgio Vasari (1511 – 74) was an Italian painter, architect, writer, and historian, most famous today for his *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, considered the ideological foundation of art-historical writing, which is considered "perhaps the most famous, and even today the most-read work of the older literature of art", "some of the Italian Renaissance's most influential writing on art", and "the first important book on "art history". It is the basis for biographies of several Renaissance artists. Based on Vasari's text about Giotto's new manner of painting, Jules Michelet suggested for the first time the term *Renaissance* in his *Histoire de France* (1835), a term adopted by historiography and still in use today.

The ***Self Portrait*** (c.1571) shows a rather dour face. The somewhat exaggerated length of the torso is emblematic of late Renaissance Mannerism.



The ***Vasari Corridor*** is a long, raised passageway designed and built in 1564 by Vasari (in just 6 months!) to allow Cosimo de' Medici and other Florentine elite to walk safely through the city, from the seat of power in Palazzo Vecchio to their private residence, Palazzo Pitti. It passes through and along some of Florence's most important landmarks, over the Ponte Vecchio and ends in the Boboli Gardens.

The passageway contains over 1000 paintings, dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, including the largest and very important collection of self-portraits by some of the most famous masters of painting from the 16th to the 20th century, including Filippo Lippi, Rembrandt, Velazquez, Delacroix and Ensor.



Vasari also designed the *Tomb of Michelangelo* in the Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence, completed in 1578.

In this group portrait, ***Six Tuscan Poets*** (c1544), six distinguished poets and philosophers of the 13th and 14th centuries are shown as if engaged in a literary conversation. Each was revered for his role in the development of lyric poetry, which helped establish the Tuscan dialect as the standard language in Italy. As Vasari himself declared, in the *Lives*, "Tuscan genius has ever been raised high above all others."

The central figure, seated on a Savonarola chair and shown in his distinct, aquiline profile, is Dante Alighieri (1265-1321),

author of the *Divine Comedy*. Facing him is Guido Cavalcanti (about 1255-1300), acclaimed for his love sonnets, who in the image can be seen pointing to the book in Dante's hand. The standing figure in clerical garb is the humanist and classical scholar Francesco Petrarca (1304-74) holding in his hand a copy of his own *Scattered Rhymes*, identifiable by the cameo of Laura on its cover; to his right is Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), author of the *Decameron*. All four wear laurel wreaths, symbolic of literary achievement. The objects on the table represent various scholarly disciplines. The solar quadrant and celestial globe denote astronomy and astrology; the compass and terrestrial globe, geometry and geography; the books, grammar and rhetoric.

According to Vasari the figures at the far left are Cino da Pistoia (1270 – 1336/37) an Italian jurist and poet, and a literary friend of Petrarca; and Guittone d'Arezzo (1235 – 1294) a Tuscan poet and the founder of the Tuscan School. These may have been replaced in later copies on the request of the commissioner by the humanist and man of letters Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and the platonic philosopher Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498/1504), two authoritative commentators on the works of the poets.

Vasari's painting was thus art acting as intellectual history. Made in dialogue with the scholarship of its day, the image was a vignette that gave Vasari's history of Italian literature in a single glance. It was a powerful story and one that has had great influence. Dante now is widely recognised as the great Italian vernacular poet. Likewise, Vasari's comparative demotion of Boccaccio, who stands passive in the background of the fevered discussion, has been so enduring that Martin Eisner has recently felt the need to devote an entire book to the attempt to rehabilitate him. The painting thus provided, in and of itself, a programme for understanding the history of the nascent Italian literature; a curriculum and a canon.

The representation of a "Lamentation over the Dead Christ" or ***Deposition from the Cross*** (c.1550) with the Virgin in Pietà – receiving the dead Christ in her lap – surrounded by Biblical figures commonly accepted in this scene, according to the rules of Christian iconography (visible cross, Roman soldier, stony ground of Golgotha, dark sky of Good Friday).



Mary Magdalene, in red, is kneeling holding the feet of Christ while Saint John supports the body, the crown of thorns lies on the ground. In the background, on the left, Joseph of Arimathea carries a vase of ointments to be used for embalming; in the background on the right, next to the last of the Three Marys, a Roman soldier wearing a helmet, identified as Longinus the spear bearer, having pierced the right flank of Christ. The body of Christ, with pale grey coloured flesh, contrasts with the livelier colours of the other participants. A landscape of bluish mountains under a darkened sky is in the background.

The idealization of the faces and the gestures link the painting to the mannerist second generation of Florence.



Giambologna (1529 – 1608) a Flemish sculptor and architect based in Italy, is celebrated for his marble and bronze statuary in a late Renaissance or Mannerist style.

The ***Rape of the Sabine Women*** (1579-83) is a large, complex marble statue composed in the *figura serpentina* (*S-curve*) style and an upward snakelike spiral movement. It was conceived without a dominant viewpoint; that is, the work gives a different view depending on which angle it is seen from, designed with eight angles of view. It was carved from a single block of white marble, the largest ever transported to Florence. It is ostensibly based on the incident of the rape (or abduction) of the Sabine Women from the early history of Rome, when the city contained relatively few women, leading to their men to commit *raptio* (large-scale abduction; the word is rendered in archaic or literary English as *rape*) of young women from nearby towns and cities.

It was not given a title until after it was completed. Giambologna was typically non-committal about the subject matter of his work, and in this instance wanted to produce a large, monumental sculpture that would

display his virtuosity. Around the time it was finished, and before it was installed at the Loggia dei Lanzi, Vincenzo Borghini suggested the title *The Rape of the Sabines*, and thus a bronze relief was added to the pedestal to link it with the Roman myth.

At 410 cm in height, the statue is larger than life-sized, adding to its monumental impact. It depicts three nude figures: an old man crouching at the end, a young man in the centre who lifts a young woman above his head. The woman, who reaches her right hand outwards grasping for help, is in a life-threatening struggle to free herself from her captor. The old man appears to be defeated and in despair. Only half of his body is visible and from some angles this is evidently because the younger man's feet and knees are violently pushing and keeping him down. The three figures' heads are at opposites regardless of view point; in particular the old man seems is always turned away from the younger woman, as he realises he has lost her to the aggressor, and thus his facial contortions are probably to be read as from shame.



Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526/7-93) is chiefly known for his portraits contrived from still life objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish and books, carefully constructed by his imagination. Besides, when he assembled objects in one portrait, he never used random objects. Each object was related by characterisation. In the portrait now represented by several copies called *The Librarian* (1562) Arcimboldo used objects that signified the book culture at that time, such as the curtain that created individual study rooms in a library. The subject is a caricature of a librarian shaped from a stack of books. The animal tails, which became the beard of the portrait, were used as dusters.

Art historians have suggested that the painting is based on Wolfgang Lazius, the historian of Emperor Ferdinand I. This composite head can be interpreted as both a celebration of scholarship and a satirical critique of academic culture

Some scholars, who had a close relationship with the book culture at that time, argued that the portrait *The Librarian* ridiculed their scholarship. In fact, Arcimboldo criticised rich people's misbehaviour and showed others what happened at that time through his art. In *The Librarian*, although the painting might have appeared ridiculous, it also contained a criticism of wealthy people who collected books only to own them, rather than to read them.

The painting of *The Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and Family* (c1563) is a copy by Arcimboldo after an original executed in 1553-54 by an unknown artist who based his work on full-figure portraits by Jacob Seisenegger and Anthonis Mor. Portrayed next to Archduke Maximilian II is his wife Maria of Spain and three of their children. In front is the oldest daughter, Anna, the later wife of Philip II of Spain, behind are the sons Rudolf, later Emperor Rudolf II and in the cradle Archduke Ernst.

It is painted in a precise style which, although making the figures look stiff and doll-like, and perhaps a bit comic, nonetheless gives them character and a certain nobleness of poise. The repetition of slight diagonals running in parallel across the picture imparts a sense of dynamic movement in contrast to the stiffness of the poses.



This composite head is a portrait of *Rudolf II, Holy Roman Emperor as Vertumnous, the Roman god of vegetation and the Seasons* (c.1590/1). The portrait features a collection of fruits, flowers, and vegetables: luxurious fruits like cherries, plums, and olives to signify Rudolf II's wealth. During his 29-year reign, Rudolf II was a prominent patron of the arts and a champion of Arcimboldo's unique style.

By using everyday objects, the portraits were decoration and still-life paintings at the same time. His works showed not only nature and human beings, but also how closely they were related.

The Four Seasons (1563) is a set of paintings representing the seasons through portraits. Each composite head is in profile and made of natural elements associated with each season. *Spring* features 80 different varieties of flowers and plants that form the shape of a woman. *Summer* depicts a woman made from assorted fruits and vegetables. *Autumn* shows a man with an apple for a cheek, a mushroom for an ear, and a pomegranate for a chin. *Winter* features an old man with skin of a knotted tree trunk and a beard of tangled branches.

This late painting from c.1590 depicts **The Four Seasons in One Head**.



Air (c1560) from **The Four Elements** series displays a cornucopia of small birds that combined to create a slender male face. The majority of the birds are only partially visible which allow the artist to create the face and hair. The body is formed by a peacock; the goatee is a tail of a pheasant, and a duck forms the eyelids. The eagle and peacock are references to the Habsburg dynasty. Giuseppe included this reference to please his patrons and form a permanent bond between the painting and the Habsburgs.



The Vegetable Gardener (1587–90) is an oil-on-panel painting, one of Arcimboldo's clever "reversibles," or paintings that change when turned upside down. With one side turned upwards, this painting shows a still life of a bowl of vegetables. With the other side turned upwards, the painting becomes a grinning face—possibly Priapus, the Greek god of fertility and gardens.



Doménikos Theotokópoulos (1541-1614), known as **El Greco** due to his origins in Crete, expressed religious emotion with exaggerated traits. After the realistic depiction of the human form and the mastery of perspective achieved in high Renaissance Classicism, some artists started to deliberately distort proportions in disjointed, irrational space for emotional and artistic effect. El Greco today is regarded as a deeply original artist, characterized by modern scholars as an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school. Key aspects of Mannerism in El Greco include the jarring "acid" palette, elongated and tortured anatomy, irrational perspective and light, and obscure and troubling iconography.

El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was met with puzzlement by his contemporaries but found appreciation by the 20th century. El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism, but has been characterized by modern scholars as an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school. He is best known for tortuously elongated figures and often fantastic or phantasmagorical pigmentation, marrying Byzantine traditions with those of Western Painting.

The primacy of imagination and intuition over the subjective character of creation was a fundamental principle of El Greco's style, he discarded classicist criteria such as measure and proportion and believed that grace is the supreme quest of art, but the painter achieves grace only by managing to solve the most complex problems with ease. El Greco regarded colour as the most important and the most ungovernable element of painting, and declared that colour had primacy over form.

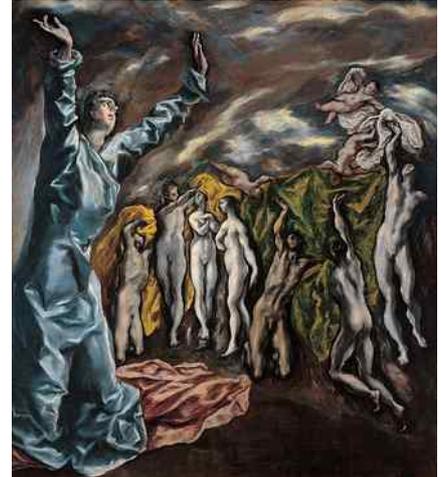
Art historian Max Dvořák was the first scholar to connect El Greco's art with Mannerism and Antinaturalism. Modern scholars characterize El Greco's theory as "typically Mannerist" and pinpoint its sources in the Neoplatonism of the Renaissance.



Extreme distortion of body characterizes the **Adoration of the Shepherds** (c.1612-14) like all the last paintings of El Greco. The infant Christ seems to emit a light which plays off the faces of the barefoot shepherds who have gathered to pay homage to his miraculous birth. A rhythmic energy animates the painting, expressed in the dance-like motions of the figures. Striking contrasts between light and dark passages heighten the sense of drama. The group of angels which hovers over the scene may resemble the missing section of *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*.

The subject of **The Opening of the Fifth Seal: The Vision of Saint John** (1608-14) is taken from the *Book of Revelations*, where the souls of martyrs cry out to God for justice upon their persecutors on Earth. The ecstatic figure of St. John dominates the canvas, while behind him naked souls writhe in a chaotic storm of emotion as they

receive white robes of salvation.



The upper portion of the painting was destroyed in 1880. It is believed that the lost portion may have depicted the sacrificial lamb opening the Fifth Seal. The lost upper painting may have also resembled another piece by El Greco, *Concert of Angels*. Many believe that the surviving portion depicts profane love, while the missing upper portion depicts divine love.



This of two versions of the **Baptism of Christ** (1608-14) was started in Toledo towards the end of El Greco's life and completed by his son Jorge Manuel Theotocópuli.

Jesus appears kneeling while Saint John the Baptist at right pours water onto his head from a conch. In the upper section God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit are painted in a tumbling waterfall of creamy whites to unite with Christ into the figures of the Holy Trinity. The strong lighting recalls the work of Michelangelo. A green robed angel on the left thrusts an arm in the air in a manner recalling Saint John in the previous painting. Greens, reds, blues and yellows float in a soup of rich browns and expressive greys.

The figures are highly distorted into unnatural proportions and poses, and occupy an unreal space. The left leg of Christ is bent back in a manner that is barely readable as a part of human anatomy. The body of Saint John is elongated expressively and his legs out of proportion with his arms. The feet of the figure in red (an angel without wings?) seem detached below the folds of the robe. These 'anomalies' are not ascribable to technical deficiencies but reveal El Greco's method of sublimating realism to the demands of his expressionist vision. The picture is a turbulent maelstrom of figures and abstracted shapes.

Joachim Wtewael (1566-1638) was a Dutch Mannerist painter and draughtsman, as well as a highly successful flax merchant, and town councillor of Utrecht. Wtewael was one of the leading Dutch exponents of Northern Mannerism, and his distinctive and attractive style remained largely untouched by the naturalistic developments happening around him, "characterized by masterfully drawn, highly polished figures often set in capricious poses". His **Self Portrait** of 1601 portrays himself as a confident well to do gentleman of the merchant class.

He continued to paint in a Northern Mannerist style until the end of his life, ignoring the arrival of the Baroque, and making him perhaps the last significant Mannerist artist still to be working. His subjects included large scenes with still life in the manner of Pieter Aertsen, and mythological



scenes, many small cabinet paintings beautifully executed on copper, and most featuring nudity.



Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan (1605) is a small painting (20.3x15.5 cm) on copper. In the *Metamorphoses*, the Roman author Ovid tells the story of how the lovers Venus and Mars were surprised by Venus's husband, the blacksmith Vulcan, who made an invisible bronze net, which he secretly attached to Mars's bed. Vulcan stands upon Mars's armour, discarded at the right, while Cupid and Apollo hover above, drawing back the green canopy to reveal the astonished lovers in an embrace. Other gods and goddesses also gather to witness and mock the adulterous couple. In a scene beyond the bed, Vulcan hammers his net at the forge.

Exaggerated poses and brilliant, jewel-like colour emphasize the dramatic intensity of the scene. The hard, metallic surface of the copper lends itself to highly finished and detailed pictures. Because of the erotic subject matter, the painting's early owners may have concealed the painting behind a curtain or in a drawer, which preserved its lustrous appearance.

The eroticism of his mythological works was daring for the time, and some of the small paintings were probably not displayed publicly, by their original collectors. Two of the preparatory drawings for different painted versions of *Mars and Venus Surprised* were mutilated by later owners to remove parts of the lovers' bodies, one version was not displayed in the 1920s in order "to protect an immature public from itself".

His treatments are not without realist elements; the furniture, metalware, and other props are often carefully depicted versions of the luxury products of his own day, and the faces of his Olympians often un-idealised and very Dutch-looking, so that the viewer "often has the sense of seeing flesh and blood figures in bizarre circumstances rather than fantasies tinged by observations from life".

He combined in a single picture the two "pictorial modes" of dutch painting: 'realist' depiction (from the life) and 'ideal' imitation (from the spirit or intellect).

Some works by Wtewael have been changed by overpainting to hide erotic anatomical details. Wtewael had other means of creating a sensuous atmosphere, such as the suggestive pink mouths of large shells that often lie on the ground below nude females, as in the National Gallery *Judgement of Paris* and the ***Perseus and Andromeda*** (1616), a large painting in which a life-size Andromeda stretches and twists herself seductively, her left foot balanced on a conch shell, towards her rescuer who is descending from the sky seated on a horse to slay the dragon.

In Greek mythology **Andromeda** is the daughter of Cepheus the king of Aethiopia, and his wife, Cassiopeia. When Cassiopeia boasts that she is more beautiful than the Neriads, Poseidon sends the sea monster Cetus to ravage the coast of Aethiopia as divine punishment. Andromeda is chained to a rock as a sacrifice to sate the monster, but is saved from death by Perseus, who marries her and takes her to Greece to reign as his queen.



As a subject, Andromeda has been popular in art since classical times; it is one of several Greek myths of a Greek hero's rescue of the intended victim of an archaic sacred marriage, giving rise to the "princess and dragon" motif. From the Renaissance, interest revived in the original story, typically as derived from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The subject of the *Judgement of Paris*, giving prominence to the nude female figure from various angles, was popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In addition to Wtewael's there are two later versions in the National Gallery's collection by Paul Rubens; one was probably made 1632-35 and the other about 1597-99. They are in a more realist style, without Wtewael's love of detailed opulence and fantasy.



Wtewael's sumptuous *Judgement of Paris* (1615), full of soft, subtle colour, shows the precursor to the mythological Trojan War. Jupiter, ruler of the gods, has sent Eris (the personification of strife) to provoke a quarrel about which goddess is the most beautiful: Minerva, goddess of war, with her helmet and spear and her owl hovering overhead; Juno, Jupiter's wife, her peacock in the trees above her; or Venus, goddess of love, with pearls in her hair. In the background, among the trees, a wedding party of naked nymphs and satyrs is halted, frozen like white statues beneath the commanding arm of Eris.

The shepherd Paris, in reality a Trojan prince, was chosen to be the judge; bemused, he hands

Venus the golden apple marked 'To the Fairest'. The goddesses had each offered Paris a bribe. Minerva offered him unlimited power, Juno offered him untold riches and Venus offered him Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta and the most beautiful woman in the world, thereby sowing the seeds of the war.

Above her head cherubs prepare to crown Venus with laurels. Cupid, her son and god of erotic love, takes aim at Paris with his bow and arrow; Paris – and the world – is lost.

But for the moment, Paris' flock and his dog lie down in the midst of peace and plenty, with a friendly camel nearby. A nymph and a satyr flirt among flowers. Fur nestles against flesh, silk against petals, luscious shells among feathery grasses – but the wedding party look up in terror at Eris, their poses contorted and dramatic.

Wtewael painted the elongated forms and contrived, if graceful, poses of the three goddesses in the typically exaggerated Mannerist style, yet they are human and, with their glances, seemingly aware. Juno looks directly out at us, hand on hip, as if asking who could possibly agree with the verdict. Minerva's softly curved position is hardly warlike, although she gazes across at Venus with a knowing stare. Venus reaches across her body to take the prize, her eyes slightly unfocused as if her mind is already elsewhere. Paris' pose is designed to show off his muscular legs and gold sandals (and, incidentally, Wtewael's skill in painting them).

At this exuberant outdoor celebration of *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* (1612), a trumpeting messenger announces the marriage of the mortal Peleus, hero of Thessaly, and the sea nymph Thetis. Hermes, at centre, serves the conversing bride and groom while Apollo, at right, serenades them with his lyre. Winged babies flutter above wedding guests, servants, satyrs, and river gods who eat, drink, and amorously embrace. In the sky above,



Eris, the goddess of discord, who among all of the gods, hadn't been invited, is annoyed at this slight, and begins wreaking havoc by tossing into the crowd an apple inscribed "for the fairest." Juno, Venus, and Minerva would compete for the prize, setting in motion the events that led to the Trojan War.

Viewers educated in Greek myth would have perceived Eris's presence as a warning against earthly excess and immorality. Painted during a moment of peace and prosperity in Dutch history, this work may also have cautioned against the dangers of political conflict.

Wtewael filled his small (36.5 x 42 cm.) copperplate with dozens of cavorting deities and putti who revel in the merriment of the occasion, oblivious to the looming clouds. The crowded, complex scene invites the viewer to look closely and discover a veritable who's who of ancient mythology.