THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

By Jane Dillenberger

Byzantine art was being created in Sicily, Italy, and the eastern Mediterranean, at the same time when Romanesque art was being created in western Europe. After the Romanesque period we find a differentiation between the style of the Mediterranean and the northern countries. But while the subsequent Gothic style and imagery continued in the north of Europe throughout the fifteenth century and later, Italian art, after the time of Giotto, moved in another direction.

Vasari, one of the first biographers of artists and himself a painter and contemporary of Michelangelo, tells an interesting story about the youthful Giotto. He relates how Cimabue, one of the great artists of his own day, came upon the boy Giotto

who, while his sheep were grazing, was drawing one of them from life with a roughly pointed pieced of stone upon a smooth surface of rock, although he had never had any master but Nature. . . . [After this and] assisted by his native talent and taught by Cimabue, the boy not only equaled his master's style in a short time, but became such a good imitator of Nature that he entirely abandoned the rude Byzantine manner and revived the modern and good style of painting.

Vasari's statement may seem puzzling today since we do not consider the Byzantine manner rude, and we shall be disappointed if we search for the " imitation of nature" in Giotto's paintings. Yet Vasari's statement had a kind of truth to it. Though Giotto's genius is grounded in the tradition he inherited from both Gothic sculpture and monumental Byzantine art, we look upon him as the first painter of the modern epoch. A coherent line of development runs from his paintings through the art of the succeeding centuries until Manet and the impressionists of the nineteenth century. In a very special sense this coherent development has to do with "the imitation of nature." Giotto's technical developments and his contributions to composition and design were of the first order of importance. We shall explore Giotto's style by examining several of his frescoes which are in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy.

THE ART OF GIOTTO

In the small university town of Padua in northern Italy Giotto began work about 1304 on a series of frescoes for the Arena Chapel which was to become a milestone in the history of Christian art. Giotto was born in 1266, about the time of the creation of the Orleans Madonna and Child  . By 1300 he had already carried out several important commissions, one for the papacy at Rome, and a series of frescoes in the great basilica dedicated to St. Francis at Assisi. It is probable that Giotto left Rome in 1303 for Padua, and that he was commissioned soon thereafter by the notorious Enrico Scrovegni to decorate the walls of the chapel which Enrico had had reconstructed at the behest of the church. Enrico was the son of Reginaldo Scrovegni, whom Dante consigned to the seventh circle of his Inferno as a usurer. Since usury was a mortal sin, Reginaldo was debarred from confession while living, from burial in consecrated

ground when dead, and his son lost the right to inherit his estate. Enrico, however, worked out a compromise with the authorities, part of the terms being his promise to renovate the Arena Chapel at his own expense. Since the chapel was on the site of an ancient Roman amphitheater it was called the Arena Chapel, but it is now referred to also as the Scrovegni Chapel.

Within easy walking distance of the chapel is the University of Padua, and it is probable that Dante strolled from there over to the chapel as his friend Giotto painted its walls with luminous frescoes. Dante and Giotto had been in Rome for the Jubilee of 1300, and the friendship which may have started then probably continued in Padua, where each was creatively employed. Certain of Giotto's innovations may have been discussed with Dante.

Before talking of Giotto's technical innovations, we must note the qualities which make his art not only great but imaginatively and emotionally gripping. It is appropriate that he is the first individual artist in this study. Certainly Le Beau Dieu  was also made by an individual sculptor, and the Cefalu Christ  was the creation of one artist's vision and draftsmanship. Yet in a sense each of these works of art was a corporate production, a masterpiece created by an age and a people and a faith. There is a kind of impersonal detachment and objectivity about each of these works of art which cause our questions about each to center on the age and its faith rather than upon the individual artist who created the masterpiece. This is not the case with Giotto's paintings. We sense, and delight in, the personality of the man who created them. Deft touches of humor, imaginative storytelling additions, intensely dramatic confrontations---all the range of human emotions and human relationships are depicted in his art. We savor the wit, the insights, the skill of the artist. His style if first unique for him as an individual artist, and only after that representative of his age. We have referred to early Christian art, Byzantine art, and Gothic art, but from now on we shall speak of the art of Giotto, Leonardo, Michelangelo, El Greco. Giotto was one of the first of the great individual geniuses whose vision shaped the course of Christian art.

If we were to single out one characteristic which distinguishes all of Giotto's religious art, it would be his emphasis on human relationships. Whereas the Byzantine Nativity  shows each of the participants isolated and staring out at us, Giotto in representing the same  scene shows Mary lying upon a bed, raising herself on her elbow as the midwife puts the child into her arms. She peers into his face tenderly, entirely unaware of our presence as spectators, or of those near her. The tenderness and the solemnity of the moment as the mother for the first time contemplates the newborn child are touchingly depicted by Giotto. Yet the epic significance of her role as the instrument of the divine will is present too. The welding together of the human and the divine dimensions of the Gospel events in a dramatic unity is Giotto's great gift to Christian art.

The Arena Chapel was dedicated to Mary of the Annunciation, and the subjects chosen by Giotto range from the apocryphal stories of Mary's early life, through the Annunciation and infancy episodes, the ministry of Jesus, and finally to the Passion and

the Last Judgment. When contrasted with the Berthold Missal's Last Supper  , Giotto's Last Supper  shows us his new viewpoint and objective. The most dramatic difference between the two is in their depiction of space. The artist of the Missal has as his objective the clarity of each person and detail. He is also governed by the medieval art the highest place is the most important; thus Christ surmounts the whole composition and other figures are lower than his. These considerations therefore determine the spatial arrangement in the manuscript painting.

But Giotto has asked himself how a group of people seated about a table in a room actually look. He has observed how a side wall recedes, meeting the back wall at an angle. There are still odd inconsistencies in Giotto's observations which jolt our sense of naturalness; for example, the spindly column at the right and the overly light roof. There are some problems which he is still incapable of solving and with which he deals quite arbitrarily. These astonish us; for example, the way in which the column at the right ceases to exist at the point where it would cover the head of the lower apostle, and the way in which the column at the right ceases to exist at the point where it would cover the head of the lower apostle, and the way in which the halos are placed in front of the faces of the apostles who are seated directly in front of us, with their backs to us. Nonetheless, other problems are solved by Giotto with daring. The way he places the focal area of the entire scene at the extreme left  shows an originality and imaginative grasp of his subject matter which makes this a memorable interpretation of the event. The heavy, repeated accents formed by the bodies and halos of the apostles move our eyes slowly to the point where a cluster of three noble heads form a foil to the fourth which is turned away from us. The fourth is Judas. Giotto has used Matthew's account of the Last Supper rather than John's Gospel, the latter having been used by the artist of the Berthold Missal. It is in the Gospel of Matthew that we read: "And as they were eating, he said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' And they were sorrowful, and began to say to him one after another, 'Is it I, Lord?' He answered, 'He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.'"

The elderly Peter, the Christ at the age of thirty-three, and the young John represent three different ages of man. Though Giotto's depiction of the group may see far from the naturalism of Botticelli and of Michelangelo, still one has the impression of a human being. The darkened area beneath the eyes and on the cheeks is achieved by shading (a gradual darkening of the color) rather than by the successive geometric lines of Byzantine art. But more important than the technical elements is the suggestion of inner psychic life in the faces of Peter and Jesus. Peter's strong elderly features are worn by toil, and now seem drawn by anxiety and expressive of foreboding. Jesus' face shows a complexity of expression that still communicates to us that he knows and accepts the events of the hours to come.

The Lamentation Over the Dead Christ  is one of the most profoundly moving of the entire group of frescoes. Giotto has depicted the moment after the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross and returned to the arms of his mother. Mary here holds his

body across her knees as she bends forward in anguish, peering into his face. With a poignant and beautiful gesture one of the other Marys leans over him lifting his lifeless hands in hers. Mary Magdalene is seated, clasping gently his wounded feet, perhaps recalling how she had washed them and dried them with her own hair. In Christian art Mary Magdalene became a compound of several of the women mentioned in the different Gospel narratives. One of these was Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, who, when Jesus dine with, "took a pound of costly ointment of pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair."

Giotto depicts the Magdalene with the long flowing hair and the scarlet cloak with, together with the alabaster ointment jar, are her attributes in Christian art.

With a movement of overpowering beauty John the beloved disciple leans forward, his arms wingspread behind him, as he beholds the face of his Master. The dignified observer at the right is Nicodemus, "who had first come to him by night, [and now] came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes" for the anointing of the body of Jesus. Giotto depicts him in readiness with the shroud about his shoulders and across one arm.

The two figures seated with their backs to us, between us and the central group, are entirely anonymous persons whose function is to define the space between the beholder and the central group. Their heavy, massive bodies provide an effective psychological barrier also, lest we come too near the central group.

Certain characteristics of Giotto's art are sometimes disconcerting to those who meet them for the first time. The massive and sometimes graceless forms do not woo the eye of the beholder as Botticelli's figures do. Yet after studying the paintings for some time we become accustomed to Giotto's ponderous figures, and their expressiveness speaks to us.

Since Giotto was venturing into a new realm of expression, he tried some innovations which did not quite come off. Sometimes he seems bound by the restrictions of the past yet is uneasy with them; at other times he is very tentative in his exploration of new ways. In the Lamentation Over the Dead Christ it will be noted that most of the faces are seen either in profile or in fullface. The slight turning of the head from the profile position exhibited by the faces of Mary and Jesus is a very tentative innovation. Giotto is typically and understandably more courageous in using unusual angles and foreshortenings when depicting the minor figures. In the group standing at the left note the face of the woman between the open hand and the halo of the unveiled woman above Jesus. This face is turned obliquely down and away from us. In the sleeping soldiers of the Noli Me Tangere

similar foreshortenings are explored with varying success. But even the unsuccessful attempts (the word "unsuccessful" is used here in regard to perspective rendering, not in regard to aesthetic worth) have a candor, an honesty, and an earnestness which make them touching and even expressive in their awkwardness.

The type of physiognomy Giotto uses is derived from ancient types. Even the women

have mannish profiles reminiscent of the Apollo of Olympia, with his long straight nose and full, rounded chin line. The expression of grief on most of the faces derives from late classical sculpture. But this drawing back of the corners of the mouth is not the cliche' that most of us are inclined to think. We base our notions of what a suffering face looks like on movie and television close-ups. But news photos taken as human beings experience the extremes of grief and pain show that the classical expression of grief is nearer actuality than the movie and television stimulation. In the face of the dead Christ Giotto has achieved an image of pathos. Though the features seem based on sculptural form rather than on a living model, the half-open mouth and the eyes which are open yet sightless communicate an impression of death's finality.

The form or composition of the fresco is masterful. The entire design focuses about the point at the lower left where the heads of the mother and son meet and their halos intersect. Since every person in the scene is looking at these two, the beholder's eyes also are compelled to this point. But there are technical as well as psychological ways in which Giotto compels our eyes; the rocks ledge behind the group rushes downhill, pointing our gaze to mother and son. The persons at the right, the two Marys and John, direct us to the Christ by their impetuous movements. The solid group of mourners behind Mary and Christ halt our gaze and keep it fixed in this area.

The persons in Giotto's paintings are represented on a narrow shelf of earth behind which a rocky ledge ascends sharply to the right. The figures have a sense of breadth and of volume totally lacking in Byzantine art. It is this characteristic which must have seemed most startling and original to Giotto's contemporaries. It was not until over a hundred years later that painters achieved the effect of a figure surrounded by space. But Giotto's relief-like figures give a sense of monumentality and massiveness which makes them "real" in one sense.

Giotto's greatness as a religious artist lies in the profound understanding of the events which he depicts and in his inventiveness in expressing this understanding. With breathtaking originality he invents the gesture of John, which is as beautiful as it is expressive of unutterable grief. The posture of Mary, with her arms entwined about her son's shoulders, her fingers caressing his throat, seems almost an inevitable expression of her anguish.

The grandeur of the painting is like the climax of one of Bach's great Passion oratorios. A cosmic and universal disaster has taken place. The intense passions of the participants are depicted and yet contained by the grandeur and dignity of the art form. Bach and Giotto both show us events through the hearts and minds of the followers and witnesses of the event, rather than by focusing our attention solely upon the sacrificial victim. By identifying ourselves with the followers and witnesses, we imaginatively experience the events.

Equally moving, but in another emotional range, is the fresco known as Noli Me Tangere  or the appearance of Christ to Mary Magdalene.
 John's Gospel tells of Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb early Easter morning.

And she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and on at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." 

Giotto shows us the tomb and an angel in white "sitting where the body of Jesus had lain." And what a solid substantial angel this is, its body like a great sack of meal! We also see the sleeping soldiers in front of the tomb. And here Giotto's wrestling with the problem of foreshortening is conspicuous because he simply hasn't managed it successfully. The two soldiers who lean back against the tomb with their chins in the air are not convincing. And the soldier who lies in the foreground is like a department store dummy, lacking life or organic unity. But there is a seriousness of intent in the depiction of the soldiers and angel which gives them nobility despite the technical oddities.

The climax of the composition is the encounter of the two figures at the right. It is the moment when Jesus makes himself known to Mary Magdalene, and she, having fallen on her knees before him, reaches out to him with a gesture of impetuous yearning. Giotto expresses this through the gaze of the two, and perhaps even more by the three beautiful hands---the hand of Jesus with its wound evident, outstretched in a motion of gentle withdrawal, and Mary's two hands directly below his. Hers are open and searching, with the gesture of a blind person who would see and know with her hands. The absolute simplicity of Mary's posture adds to the expressiveness of her profile and hands. Her body makes an almost perfect equilateral triangle, and the line of her draperies falls in a severe unbroken vertical from which the arms and hands emerge beseechingly. She "out of whom he had cast seven devils" tremulously greets her Master.

Roger Fry remarked that this fresco shows a power possessed by Giotto more than by any other Italian artist, and more indeed than by any other artist except Rembrandt---"the power of making perceptible the flash of mutual recognition which passes between two souls at a moment of sudden illumination." 

Although Dante and Giotto were friends, there is little evidence in the art of Giotto of the theology of the Dominican who influenced Dante, Thomas Aquinas. Giotto was far more influenced by the thought and the life of another great Christian leader, Francis of Assisi. Francis died in 1226, less than fifty years before the birth of Giotto. So great was his influence and the gratitude of the people that within twenty-five years of his death a great church had been build in his honor at Assisi. It was decorated with incidents from the life of Francis, and we know that Giotto was commissioned to create many of these frescoes, some of which were

painted by his assistants. Assisi had been the home of Francis and later the location of the first Franciscan monastery. Living there while working on the frescoes, Giotto must have seen the very places where Francis had renounced all his wealth and espoused his "Lady Poverty," where he had preached to the birds, where he had converted the wild wolf of Gubbio, where he had received the stigmata, or wounds of Christ, upon his own body.

The followers of Francis brought out the human and poetical significance of the New Testament. It is these aspects of the New Testament stories that are emphasized in Giotto's art. He brings out the drama and the pathos of each of the events depicted in the Arena Chapel frescoes. Yet the humanization of the events is never at the expense of their ultimate significance. The human Jesus of Nazareth, who loved the young disciple John who "was lying close to the breast of Jesus," is also the Christ, "the lamb slain before the foundations of the world."

Giotto was born at Colle, but most of his artistic life was spent in Florence. He, like several other Renaissance artists, was an architect as well as a painter. Visitors to Florence are familiar with his famous bell tower that stands near the cathedral and baptistery in the heart of the city. Florence, as Berenson once said, was to continental Europe what Athens had been to the ancient world. Florence was to the fifteenth century what Paris was to the nineteenth century, and what New York is today to the intellectual and cultural world of the West. Indeed, all artists of whom we shall speak in this chapter except Piero della Francesca counted themselves Florentines.

For many decades after Giotto's death the art of Florence moved along the paths Giotto had first trodden. A little more than a hundred years after Giotto completed his Arena Chapel frescoes, a devout Dominican monk, known affectionately as Il Beato Angelico, painted a series of New Testament subjects on the walls of his convent, San Marco in Florence.

FRA ANGELICO'S FRESCOES AT SAN MARCO, FLORENCE

San Marco had been recently rebuilt under the direction of the Florentine architect, Michelozzo, in a style which must have seemed strikingly modern to the eyes of his contemporaries. Rather than being massive and fortress-like, the new buildings were light in structure and appearance. The inner court of San Marco, with its curving, springing arches sustained by slender columns, was the expression of a new style of architecture. While it was in harmony with the classical architecture of the past and used the Roman architectural orders, it employed these elements with a freedom of design which heralded a new chapter in he history of architecture.

Over the lintels of the doors, in the corridors, on the refectory walls, and on the walls of the small closet-like cells, each used by a monk as a bedroom and study, Fra Angelico and his assistants painted scenes from the life and passion of Jesus Christ.
Representative of this cycle of early Renaissance paintings is The Transfiguration  .
Mark's gospel relates how

Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them, and his garments became glistening, intensely white, as no fuller on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. . . . And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." 

Luke's Gospel says that Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep. And Mark relates that "Peter did not know what to say, for they were exceeding afraid." These accounts provide the information we need regarding the subject matter of Fra Angelico's majestic painting. Angelico represents Christ with his arms outstretched as if he was already upon the cross, and the Gospel account supports this allusion too, since we read that as they came down the mountain Jesus spoke of his coming death.

Luke's Gospel reports that at the moment of the Transfiguration Jesus' countenance was altered, and Matthew's account says that his face shone like the sun. Fra Angelico translates these verbal descriptions into visual image by highlighting the forehead and nose of Jesus' face, by placing a great sunlike, golden nimbus behind the head of Jesus and a white aureole of light about his entire body. Furthermore, he used the same means to denote transcendence that had been used by the Byzantine artist  ---though the Byzantine style as a whole was quite different from that of Fra Angelico. The frontal pose of the body and the frontal position of the head give a commanding stillness and dignity to the figure. The features are exactly the same on either side of the face, lacking the idiosyncrasies and imbalance that make for individually; the hair and the beard both parted in the middle are details which come into Renaissance art from earlier Byzantine art.

The frontal stillness and majesty of Jesus' face is underscored by its contrast with all of the others. Peter, John, and James, who are physically involved in the event, are caught at a moment of spontaneous and troubled movement. Peter, the spokesman for the group, is seen in the lower left with both arms raised in distress, his brows knit together, his face the only other one seen frontally, but differing from Jesus in that his head is at an angle. Note also that if Peter and the other apostles were to stand they would be somewhat smaller in size than Jesus.

At either side of Jesus, Moses and Elijah are represented as literally bodiless. We see only their heads and a wraithlike cloud about their shoulders. Moses is identifiable by the shafts of light  emanating from his head. Elijah is represented with a long slender nose, a flowing beard, and bald head---a type similar to that associated with Paul. The two figures kneeling at either side are not intended to be interpreted as members of the dramatis personae. Mary the Mother of Jesus kneels at the left and St. Dominic at the right. They are in the position often occupied by the donor, who frequently is pictured in late medieval and Renaissance art.

 Though in one sense in the scene, the donor or devotional figures like these are never involved in the scene or action. They appear to meditate, unaware of their surroundings, their

eyes dreamily fixed upon an inward vision.

Turning now from the iconography to the composition of this work of art, we note first that the full, overarching curve which encloses the upper part of the painting provides a basic harmonious shape which centers and accentuates the figure of Jesus. The shape is repeated in the ellipse that encircles his body, and it is again repeated in the more compressed shape of the circular halo or nimbus. Within this nimbus we find the compressed shape of the second major compositional theme, the cross which forms a triangle that is repeated in the body of the Christ. We note also the strong vertical accent of Jesus' body as opposed to the horizontal of his arms and the horizontal of the mountain edge which is continued by the tops of the heads of two of the apostles. These elliptical and triangular shapes, and these horizontal and vertical lines, form the basic structure which unifies all of the elements in the picture. Yet they also unerringly bring out attention back to the central figure and the altered countenance of Jesus which "shone like the sun."

Turning back, for the moment, to the Ravenna mosaic of Christ Blessing the Loaves and Fishes  , let us compare its composition with The Transfiguration. It is at once apparent that Fra Angelico's composition has a more consciously wrought structure, that he intended the head of Jesus as the focal point of his composition and used a diversity of means to direct out eyes to it. The unknown artist of the mosaic achieves a similar end but by more direct and less subtle means. Here we are not distinguishing between the excellence of effectiveness of the two designs. Both are masterpieces. But in order to underscore the new and typically Renaissance preoccupation with complex and consciously ordered designs, the contrast with the less sophisticated composition of the Ravenna mosaic is helpful.

Not only the Ravenna Christ but all the earlier representations we have seen thus far seem less "natural" than Fra Angelico's depiction. We might say that a very tall man could pose in the position of Fra Angelico's Christ, and with skillful lighting and some retouching a somewhat similar picture could be recorded by a camera. This is not to say that the photographer could create the masterpiece Fra Angelico has put before our eyes! It is an analogy given merely to point to the fact that for the first time in our study we encounter an artist who consciously bases his work on the data of his own visual experience.

Look closely at the garments of the transfigured Christ; they fall with a succession of natural, graceful folds about the figure. Not only in overall effect do they seem "natural," that is, in accord with our own visual experience, but also in many little details. Note the way the garment over Jesus' left foot breaks as it touches the ground. This is the kind of detail which gives evidence that the artist had made studies of actual drapery rather than having studied how artists of the past had depicted it. The shift from the artist's use of other earlier art as a prototype or model to his study of actual persons and things as he experiences them visually is one of the most pervasive and significant of all the driving forces within Renaissance art. Giotto began dealing with the problems of this kind. Fra Angelico more than a hundred years later carried

forward what Gombrich termed the Renaissance "conquest of realty."

Having examined the subject matter and the composition of Fra Angelico's Transfiguration, we now have some information which provides a basis for answering our last question: What did the artist wish to communicate through this painting? We noted that, for the most part, he represented the figures naturalistically. Can we conclude that he intended to re-create the event, placing it before our eyes as it might have appeared to us, had we been present? We can imagine ourselves looking through an arched opening and witnessing the scene. The position of Peter, who is turned toward us as if his gesture of fright were on our behalf, would seem to support this suggestion. But the presence of Mary and St. Dominic in the scene suggests another interpretation. If we return to the New Testament, we shall find a passage in the Second Epistle of Peter where the author meditates on the event of the Transfiguration and writes:

> *We were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.* 

The author of these words is concerned, not with the description of the event as we find it recorded in the Gospels, but with the meaning of the event for himself and his contemporaries; that he had been an eyewitness of the event when God affirmed that Jesus of Nazareth was his son.

Fra Angelico describes the event, as do the Gospels, but also provides an interpretation of the meaning of the event in visual terms. The passive figures of Mary and St. Dominic kneeling in the attitude of prayer are present in the scene only symbolically. Mary is not mentioned in any of the Gospel narratives as being present at the Transfiguration. St. Dominic, of course, lived long after the event. Both of these figures are shown with no visible means of support, suspended in midair. Since they were not historically present, they can be imaginatively identified with us. They, like ourselves and the artist Fra Angelico were not eyewitnesses. But they, like Fra Angelico, accepted the affirmations of the eyewitnesses. The admonition of the author of the Epistle, "You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts," might well have been words spoken by the artist as he put down his brushes at the completion of the painting of The Transfiguration.

This fresco, like all of Fra Angelico's paintings, radiates a serene affirmation of faith. To him painting was an act of worship. One of his biographers attributes to him the statement, "To paint the things of Christ, one must live as Christ," and Vasari, writing in the sixteenth century and using legends still current in his day about Beato Angelico, says,

Fra Giovanni was a simple man and most holy in his habits. . . . He was most gentle and temperate, living chastely, removed from the cares of the world. He would often say that whoever practiced art needed a quiet life and freedom from care, and that he who occupies himself with the things of Christ ought always to be with Christ. 

THE ART OF THE LATER FIFTEENTH CENTURY

The serenity which characterizes the art of Fra Angelico is present in much of the art of the first decades of the Renaissance. But as the driving forces within the cultural upsurge which we term the Renaissance move forward, the conflicts within the culture emerge and find expression within the art. Historians, philosophers, and theologians find the sources of these conflicts in the basic incompatibility of the two strongest elements in Renaissance culture, classicism and Christianity.

We speak of the rediscovery of antiquity in this period. We tend to think of it as being akin to Picasso's discovery and use of African masks, or the recent interest in Zen Buddhism. There is no parallel here. Classical sculpture and architecture surrounded the Renaissance artist. There had been revivals of interest in classical art periodically during the two thousand years between the creation of the Olympian Apollo and Michelangelo's youthful works. They were revivals, however, not a renaissance. A revival appropriates a part of that which is rediscovered. In art such reappropriations usually consisted of iconographic motifs or formal attributes such as gestures, postures, or groupings of figures.

Only when the spirit or the content of a previous culture is made a part of the present culture is it a rebirth or renaissance. That was precisely what happened in Italy in the fifteenth century. We can understand the shock of recognition Michelangelo must have experienced when he first laid eyes on the Greco-Roman Belvedere Torso, unearthed in his day,  if we can imagine our own response were we to find that one of the planets is indeed inhabited with beings like ourselves who have their own Bach, Shakespeare, and Michelangelo. Let us further imagine that we ourselves live in a society whose structure is based upon the church. If the human beings on the supposed planet know nothing of Christianity yet possess highly developed art forms, their culture would present a powerful and perhaps frightening challenge to our own. This was something of the effect which reborn classic art had upon the Renaissance artists and their culture. Tensions and a somber mood are to be seen in much of the art of the latter part of the fifteenth century.

Piero della Francesca's Resurrection  is one of these works. In this fresco the somber Christ has known agony, but is not beyond feeling pain as he looks out at us with his darkened, intense, yet unfocused gaze.

Another work of art from the latter part of the century which expresses the depths of psychic and physical suffering is Donatello's Penitent Magdalene  . This extraordinary sculptured figure

had a startling modernity. When we recall the Magdalene of Giotto, with her supremely simple kneeling posture and beseeching hands, this gaunt ascetic with tangled hair and sunken eyes shocks the sensibilities. What has she to do with the "Mary, called Magdalene" of whom the Gospel of Luke tell us:

> *And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wash his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."* 

There continues to be scholarly debate about the identity of Mary Magdalene. The question is whether there are three different persons referred to in the Gospels---one in the Martha, Mary, and Lazarus episodes, one in the anointing of Jesus' feet quoted above, and one the Mary "from whom, seven demons had gone out." Or are they all references to one person? This point has been argued since the days of the early church fathers by Augustine, Gregory, and Clement, Origen and Chrysostom. But for Christian art the argument is irrelevant, for the conclusion was reached long ago. Christian art drew together not only these three women, but also the woman taken in adultery. This Mary epitomizes the sinner who, through forgiveness and awakened faith, becomes the saint.

Her recognition of Jesus, and her anointing of him, and her self-giving ablution---"she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair"---present the image of a woman of passionate and sensitive nature. In Christian art she has been depicted with long flowing hair, often red or golden red. She and Mary the Mother of Jesus often appear in the scenes of the Crucifixion and Passion, an they represent two contrasting aspects of grieving womanhood. The Magdalene usually wears a flame-red cloak, whereas the red used for Mary the Mother of Jesus is usually a softer cherry red. The Magdalene's gestures and attitudes are always more passionate in their expression of grief whereas Mary the Mother's grief is usually more contained and more inward.

Mark's account of the supper in Simon's house differs somewhat from Luke's, and tells

of "an alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard, very costly." When she anointed Jesus she was rebuked because of the waste, but Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for burying."  Deriving from this passage, the alabaster jar in art became the symbolic attribute of Mary Magdalene. The fact that the ointment had been costly suggested that she was wealthy to the corporate folk-imagination which shaped the early iconography, and thus she is often dressed in elaborate and richly embroidered garments.

Legend further related that she, Martha, and Lazarus came of aristocratic parentage, and that after the Ascension of Jesus heathens caught the three together with the blind man who Jesus had healed and put them in a rudderless boat which, divinely guided, landed in what is now Marseilles, France. Lazarus became the first bishop of Marseilles, and Mary Magdalene preached there. Soon after this, the legend tells, Mary became an anchorite and "sought a right sharp desert," and there she lived as a penitent for thirty years in vigil, prayer, and fasting.

Donatello has re-created for us the penitent sinner consumed by fasting and abstinence. Confronting the statue, one experiences a shock of surprise. This Magdalene could be exhibited in a gallery with modern sculpture. The furrowed form and emaciated limbs would be harmonious with Rodin's late sculpture and some of the reduced and attenuated sculptures of our own day.

There would, however, be significant differences---and it is these differences which make it a typically Renaissance work. This Magdalene had once been a very beautiful woman. No mere prettiness was hers, but aristocratic and classic beauty. Nowhere is this more evident than in her hands, which are still exquisite in proportion as they are held tremulously in the attitude of prayer. Though The Penitent Magdalene stirs intense emotional responses in us, its impact is achieved not through distortion but from a kind of fiery fidelity to nature. Beneath the angular, drawn lines of the facial flesh, one feels the hardness and sees the contours of the skull. The thin arms show a masterly knowledge of anatomy. Bone and muscles are knit together, giving the illusion of incipient movement. Even in their thin and flaccid state, one sees the lineaments in the arms of what had been beauty.

The posture of the Magdalene is interesting. There is a touching uncertainty, almost a hesitation, about the way she steps forward on uneven ground. But what the Magdalene lacks in physical force is more than balanced by the spiritual power of her ravaged face and tender hands. She might have been a woman of Dachau or Buchenwald, and there we could have found her twentieth-century antetype, but having said that, we are again arrested by the profundity of her essential being. The Magdalene embodies infinitely more than a courageous and noble endurance of suffering. With incredible sensitivity the artist shaped her hands to express both pleading and acceptance, the central Christian experience of faith and grace. This Magdalene, though physically emaciated, was spiritually ravished.

Donatello's Penitent Magdalene is prophetic of the religious fervor which was to sweep Florence at the end of the century. Stirred by the preaching of the fiery reformer, Savonarola, the sophisticated and luxury-loving people of Florence repented of their excesses and extravagances. For a time they submitted to the leadership of the Dominican monk in civic as well as in moral and religious matters. Savonarola's sermons thundered from the pulpit of the Cathedral of Florence, were heard by two of Florence's most gifted artists, Botticelli and Michelangelo. Both artists were influenced in their own way by Savonarola's cry for repentance and amendment of life. Michelangelo was a young man of twenty-two in 1497, when Savonarola was virtually dictator of Florence. Botticelli, then fifty-two, was already famous. He had painted decorations for the town hall of Florence and frescoes for the villa of Lorenzo the Magnificent and for the Sistine Chapel in Rome. He had also painted a great altarpiece for San Marco in Florence, the convent where Fra Angelico had lived and painted some fifty years earlier. In one of the cells of San Marco with a fresco by the gentle Beato Angelico on its walls, the monk Savonarola lived during the turbulent years of his leadership.

Vasari, in his biographical essay on Botticelli, wrote that the artist was a follower of Savonarola.  Other early sources say that Botticelli threw some of his own paintings into the bonfires of worldly goods and "vanities" which Savonarola's followers started in the streets of Florence. Present-day scholars question Vasari's statement and minimize the influence of Savonarola on Botticelli. However, it is apparent to those who study the development of Botticelli's art that he must have experienced a profound spiritual crisis in the latter 1480's. In his younger years Botticelli depicted the classical myths with lyric grace, poetry, and a sense of nostalgia. Many religious subjects, too, were painted at this early period of his life, but these emanate a different spirit from the later works. The early religious works are either of winsome Madonnas holding a plump Christ Child, or of large religious spectacles, such as the Adoration of the Magi where the grandeur of the kings and their retinue, and the elegance of the assembled crowd, somewhat diminish the true focus of the work of art on the Madonna and Child.

Botticelli's later works show a dramatic intensity and breathtaking religious fervor. His Annunciation is believed to have been painted about 1490, at a time when Savonarola's influence in Florence was powerful. In this painting  we see the ecstatic line and compressed intensity which characterize Botticelli's later art. Botticelli depicts the moment when the angel Gabriel's words are fulfilled:

And the angel said to her,
"The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
therefore the child to be born will be called holy,
the Son of God." 

Botticelli vividly contrasts the assured urgency of the angel's forward movement with the yielding, trancelike bending of Mary. The hands, too, suggest the contrasted roles

of the angel and the Virgin---the angel's hand erect and commanding, Mary's hands yielding, receiving. Mary's hips sway to one side as her head tilts forward like a flower on a wind-bent stem. The angel's garments are a complicated mass of folds and involuted contours, whereas Mary's garments are more sinuous, described with lines which are more slow-moving and by areas which are larger and less complicated.

The fact that the symbols depicted by the artist are naturalistically rendered as part of the scene is a Renaissance characteristic. The details which have symbolic meanings do not claim our attention as symbols only, but seem plausible as a part of the setting. The stalk of white lilies which the angel holds is botanically correct and is in the proper scale in relation to the figures. The white lily is one of the symbolic attributes of Mary, and it is a reference to her purity and virginity. It is a symbol often seen in paintings of the Annunciation. But at the time of the Renaissance the symbols are naturalistically incorporated into the pictured scenes, losing their signlike character. The signlike use of symbols can be seen in earlier works of art, such as the Vezelay tympanum  , where Peter is identified by the two key he holds; they are enormous in relation to his body and their function is clearly to identify him.

Botticelli's room opens upon a terrace and beyond it is an enclosed garden with a single slender tree rising gracefully from the center of the walled-in area. Here again, although this scene  can be enjoyed in itself as a poetic background setting, it can also be interpreted symbolically. The closed garden is a traditional symbol of Mary's virginity and the tree rises in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall rise up out of his root."


Ambrose interpreted this beautiful poetic image: the root as meaning the family of the Jews, the stem as Mary, and the flower as Christ. The tree received an additional meaning in medieval and Renaissance times. Not only did it recall the genealogical tree of which Christ was the flower, but also the means of his death. In the book of Acts Paul speaks of Christ "whom they slew and hanged on a tree."  The tree thus became a symbol for the cross. Here, at the joyous moment of the Incarnation, Botticelli reminds us of the sacrificial death to come.

Once the imagination is quickened by this kind of symbolic reference, it tends to expand the possible interpretations. The little vista beyond the garden suggests further meanings. We see a river undulating along sloping banks, with a sailing ship afloat and reflected in its calm waters; we see crenellated city walls which terminate at the arched river bridge, and a Mary-towered edifice at the left. This complex of buildings crowned by many spires and set amid rock pinnacles is behind Gabriel and could refer to the heavenly Jerusalem, whereas the darker, more solid, walled city at the right might refer to the earthly Jerusalem. Gabriel, the heavenly representative, and the heavenly Jerusalem are then at our left; Mary, the earthly handmaiden of the Lord, and the earthly Jerusalem are at the right.

The event of the angel's announcement takes place in a room which is empty except for

a lectern. Botticelli has constructed this room with great skill and accuracy in terms of depth perspective. The tiled floor provides our eyes with a kind of template for determining exact relationships within space. The awkwardness in regard to depth which we observed in Giotto's painting is absent from this carefully constructed painting. Botticelli, like his contemporaries, had achieved an understanding of the rules governing mechanical perspective, and he used his knowledge with skill and consistency. His command of space relationships is interestingly demonstrated in the way in which he depicts the halos. The Madonna's head is seen in three-quarter view and slightly bowed, and her halo is depicted as being at exactly the same angle as the head. The angel's halo is seen in profile, as is his face. If we return to Giotto's Last Supper  , it is apparent that he intended a similar relationship between halo and head but was not quite able to master the perspective problems.

Today the rules for mechanical perspective are so well known that art students now can achieve effects that would have dazzled Giotto, Fra Angelico, and Botticelli. But the winning of the knowledge that permits an artist to render convincingly a depth dimension on a flat surface was a slow process. Though we tend to think of mechanical perspective as a mere tool used principally in academic or advertising art, for the Renaissance artist the rules of perspective served as the spelling out of the natural harmony of the laws of perception. Vasari recounts how Paolo Uccello, a contemporary of Fra Angelico,

> *being endowed by Nature with a sophistical and subtle disposition, took pleasure in nothing except the investigation of difficult and impossible questions of perspective. . . .When engaged upon these matters Paolo would remain alone, like a hermit, with hardly any intercourse, for weeks and months, not allowing himself to be seen.* 

Such intensive devotion to the study of laws and principles is typical of the artist of the Italian Renaissance. The sculptor Ghiberti wrote a treatise on the scientific study of optics; the architect Alberti wrote a treatise on the representation of reality in painting through the scientific study of vision. Piero della Francesca wrote Of the Perspective of Painting, and Leonardo da Vinci also contributed to the literature on the subject. Two characteristics pervade all of these writings: first, their air of discovery and intense intellectual excitement; second, their use, sometimes tentative and sometimes skillful, of what we now call the scientific method of investigation. The facts or data of vision were studied with as much objectivity as the artist or writer was capable of using, and hypotheses were formed on the basis of the observations made.

This striving for the definition of principles is a characteristic of the Italian Renaissance artist as opposed to his contemporary in the north of Europe. There, too, perspective was being investigated but through the scrupulous examination and recording of the artist's optical experience. The little painting, the Annunciation  by Jan van Eyck, shows how exceedingly skillful the northern artist was in his representation of space. But his procedure and the results are quite different. Botticelli constructed his room first, and then placed his figures in it. His figures are integrally related in size and placement to the architecture. In Van Eyck's panel the amount of exquisite detail may

obscure for us a fact which is nonetheless true. The figures and objects in the foreground would have to be immense in size and the nave of the church would have to be tiny in order for us to see these relationships as Van Eyck has painted them. The northern artist focuses first on the individual details of persons, places, and things.

This is true of the way in which the human body is depicted also. An Italian artist like Botticelli conceives of the body as an organic structure which posses the potentiality for movement. The urgent movement and gesture of his angel contrasts with the quiet, static posture of Van Eyck's angel. We are in no doubt about the position of Botticelli's angel beneath its complicated garments, but the body of the Van Eyck angel is difficult to discern. Is Van Eyck's angel kneeling or standing? The posture of his Mary is even more ambiguous. The textures of the ample robes of Van Eyck's figures have been the focus of interest for the artist rather than the body's position beneath these garments. But Botticelli is interested in the human body as an organic unity capable of movement, and in his painting the garments accentuate rather than conceal the postures of Mary and Gabriel.

Botticelli's Mary and Gabriel have an ease of posture which is typical of the later Italian Renaissance as a whole. Peculiarly a characteristic of all of Botticelli's painting is the ballet-like grace of gesture of these figures. But the austerity of the empty room, the nervous intensity of the angel, and the exaggerated movement of Mary are characteristics of Botticelli's late works, created after a spiritual crisis which we cannot document but can hypothesize.

CONCLUSION

The works by Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Donatello, and Botticelli all have certain characteristics in common. They show an increasing interest in naturalistic means for depicting persons, places, and things. The artists looked at the world about them and endeavored to represent it on a two-dimensional surface with a convincing illusion of the depth dimension. Each artist made studies of anatomy, of the movements of the human body, and of the fall of draperies---details of the panorama presented to his eyes by the world about him. These drawings from nature were the basis for the images which he later used in his paintings. This constant study sharpened his eye and trained his hand for the representation of the visible world.

In contrast to this, the procedure of the Byzantine and Romanesque artist had been to use concepts about things and other earlier art as his point of reference, rather than trying to represent a visual counterpart of things. Each method of working is equally fruitful and valid, but whereas the Byzantine method leads toward abstraction, the Renaissance method leads toward naturalism. The general implications of the two different methods for religious art are that whereas conceptual, non-naturalistic abstract art emphasizes the otherwordly character of Christ and the biblical figures, naturalistic art emphasizes the this-worldly, human aspects of Jesus and of the biblical persons and events.

The Renaissance artist does not present an awesome Christ who is ruler of the world as the Byzantine artist did, nor the ecstatic-demonic Christ of the Vezelay tympanum. His Christ is the God-man depicted by Fra Angelico  in The Transfiguration, or the Christ who has known spiritual and physical suffering depicted by Piero della Francesca
 . Botticelli's Virgin Mary
 has the wistfulness and nostalgia of expression which the Venus of his earlier paintings had. But she does not possess the Paradise Garden ethereal tenderness of the Gothic Madonna
 .

The Renaissance artist was interested in the dramatic climax of the event he depicted in paint, stone, wood, or bronze. To this end he usually observed the unity of time, place, and action typical of classical drama; that is, he usually depicted only one action occurring at one time in one place. There are exceptions to this practice in later fifteenth-century art in Italy, but generally speaking the development is toward this kind of unity. Thus, although earlier paintings of the Resurrection show Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus in the background, Piero della Francesca, like the later Renaissance artists, eliminated everything which did not contribute to the essential communication of his painting.

The symbolism of Renaissance paintings, as well as the persons and settings, is more naturalistic. It has been noted that Botticelli's symbols---the white lilies and the tree---are accurate in size relationships, and that the nearby flowers are painted in botanically accurate detail. Similarly, the symbol of the flag of victory held by Christ in Piero's Resurrection is naturalistically rendered. Paradoxically, for modern eyes this means the symbols are "hidden" inasmuch as our knowledge of the symbolic elements of the Christian heritage is so meager. But the Renaissance artists and laymen were still alive to the language of allusion and affirmation inherent in symbols, and they "naturalized" the symbols of their medieval and Byzantine heritage with great skill and inventiveness.

They also added another dimension to symbolic expression. We noted the way in which Piero depicted the trees in The Resurrection. On the immobile side of Christ which is still within the tomb we see two barren trees; on the side with the emerging leg of Christ and the awakening soldier we see trees in full leaf. The returning life seen in the major figures is mirrored in nature, giving an analogy of rebirth. This too is symbolism. But it is more profound than that used by the medieval artist, to whom a symbol was often mainly a label for identifying a person or an event.

In looking back to the work of Fra Angelico, we see that the serenity and assurance which characterize his depiction of Christian subject matter contrasts with the somber work of Piero della Francesca and the intense creations of Donatello and Botticelli. The tensions inherent in the developing Renaissance style were briefly resolved in the period that is known as the High Renaissance. For about twenty years, from 1500 to about 1520, the developing naturalism flowered. Many of the popularly known masterpieces of religious art were created during this period. Leonardo da Vinci,

Michelangelo, and Raphael created works of art during the last years of the fifteenth century and during the High Renaissance.

The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1927), I, 66.

Matt. 26:21-23.

John 12:3.

John 19:39.

The words of Christ to Mary Magdalene are given in Latin in some translations of the New Testament. "Touch me not," or "Do not hold me" are translations in common use today.

John 20:12-17.

Vision and Design (New York:Peter Smith, 1947), p. 109.

Mark 9:2-4, 7.

This being a reminder to us that "when Moses came down from Mount Sinai...his face shown because he had been talking with God" (Exod. 34:29).

The donor is the person who paid for the work of art.

II Pet. 1:16-19.

The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, I, 342

This torso, now in the Vatican Museum, influenced Michelangelo, particularly when he was working on his sculptures for the Medici Chapel, Florence.

Luke 7:37-48.

Mark 14:6-8.

"Of this sect he was an adherent, and this led him to abandon painting, and, as he had no income, it involved him in the most serious trouble." The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects, II, 87.

Luke 1:35.

Isa. 11:1. Douay Version.

Acts 10:39 KJV.

The Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, I, 232.

Giotto di Bondone 1276-1336

Giotto di Bondone was born in Vespignano. According to the legend, when tending his flock, Giotto was accustomed to draw on the large, flat stones, and while thus employed, Cimabue came upon him, was filled with admiration of his work, and obtained the consent of his father to his taking him to be his pupil. Though this is probably merely a story, it is entirely possible that Giotto did study with Cimabue in Florence. Giotto became a painter, sculptor, and architect. Giotto drew his inspiration from nature, and he is generally regarded as the father of modern painting. His principal works were his fresco paintings, the masterpiece of which is the series of paintings in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Giotto's ideas of space and perspective in architectural backgrounds, his placement of figures and use of gesture, all served to lead art in Italy from the Byzantine world into the western Gothic period. At the time of his death, Giotto had been architect and master of Santa Maria del Fiore two years. He was buried there, and afterwards a monument was erected to him upon which his portrait was carved by Benedetto da Maiano.

Michelangelo Buonarroti 1475-1564

Michelangelo Buonarroti, who was born at Castel' Caprese near Arezzo in Tuscany, and was one of the world-masters of painting. He is distinguished as sculptor, painter, and architect, as well as engineer and poet. He studied in the workshop of Ghirlandaio. He soon distinguished himself from the other pupils of Ghirlandaio, and attracted the notice of that great patron of art, Lorenzo de' Medici, who gave him a home in his own palace and commissioned him to execute several pieces of sculpture. Here Michelangelo lived for four years, and was brought into contact with many of the greatest and most intellectual men of that time in Italy. The worth of such influence to the young man's life must have been incalculable. He became a diligent student of Masaccio's great frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel and also of the remains of ancient art in Florence. He gave himself up to study of anatomy more like a devotee than an ordinary student. Until 1503 Michelangelo is known (with the exception of a few small pictures) exclusively as a sculptor, but in this year he received the commission to enter the lists as a painter with Leonardo da Vinci. The cartoon made at this time brought him so much fame, that soon after he was summed by the order of Pope Julius II to execute the decoration of the vault in the Sistine Chapel, but eventually the project grew into the great series of frescoes which monumental undertaking became the master's most famous achievement. He was then so diffident of his own powers as a painter that, having consented, with great reluctance, to undertake the work, he sent for some of his old Florentine companions to paint the frescoes from his cartoons. Not satisfied with their work, however, he destroyed it all and painted the whole with his own hand. He loved sculpture best but it was the fresco paintings which gave him sufficient space for the representation of his mighty conceptions. In these, however, his is the painter-sculptor, not alone the painter, for his frescoes are full of sculptural qualities.

Characteristics.-- First of all, we must notice the greatness and essential poetry of his conception and style. His compositions differ from those of other masters in that each part seems complete in itself. He has placed magnificent figures side by side, and they have to do with each other yet the relative action is not in the least necessary to the full force of expression of the figures. He discarded draperies almost wholly, having had a passion for the representation of the nude human figure. Until the recent cleaning of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, art historians were divided between the opinion that Michelangelo was weak as a colorist, and that he deliberately used dull tones to emulate sculpture. The full, dazzling display of brilliant colors which the cleaning revealed has left both views untenable, and make necessary a new assessment of Michelangelo as a colorist. As a sculptor, Michelangelo's poetry and power are monumental. His great works of sculpture include his famous "David" (Florence), the exquisite "Pieta" for St. Peter's in Rome, the "Bacchus" (Florence), the "Slaves" (Louvre), and the "Moses." His painted works, in addition to the Sistine Chapel, include the "Doni Tondo" (Holy Family), (Uffizi), and the frescoes in Pope Paul III's chapel in the Vatican, including the "Conversion of St. Paul" and the "Crucifixion of St. Peter." In addition to his paintings and sculptures, Michelangelo left a number of drawings and architectural works in St. Peter's, the Farnese Palace, and the Church of S. Giovanni dei Fiorentini. From the unveiling of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, Michelangelo was considered the greatest living artist. Strangely, or perhaps due to his monumental greatness, he had no pupils or

school, though his creative innovations were adapted into the work of his contemporaries. He stands like a colossus, as monumental an artist as was the nature of his work.

Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519

Leonardo da Vinci was born in Vinci, in the Val d'Arno, below Florence, and is considered to be one of the greatest masters in the history of painting. He was a pupil of Andrea del Verrocchio. Leonardo has been well called a "universal genius." He was painter, sculptor, architect, and engineer. He had a thorough knowledge of anatomy, mathematics, astronomy, and botany, and also was a poet and musician. It was his greatest delight to study the growth of plant life, the hidden laws that govern the mineral world, the movement of planets in the heavens, -- and this love for the deep things of nature he carried into his study of art. It is said that he always wore a sketchbook attached to his girdle, and would wander through the streets of Florence looking for some especially picturesque figure or some face possessing unusual subtlety of expression. He would excite the mirth of peasants so that he could study the line of their laughing faces. It is also said that he even followed criminals to their painful death so that he might gain some new experience that would aid his art. In this way he laid the foundation for the most eminent characteristics of his work. Yet, from the study of Leonardo's life, we must judge that he enjoyed more this study in and for itself than for its results, for he was never satisfied with his experiences when included them into one of his pictures. He was a most devoted and happy student and a most dissatisfied painter. Over and over again would he paint and then destroy his work. It is to this characteristic that the small number of his existing pictures is due. When Leonardo was about thirty, he went to Milan, where he worked, both in sculpture and painting, in the service of the reigning duke. He became master of the Milanese or Lombard school of painting. After many years of work he returned to Florence, and there, at one time, entered into a competition with Michelangelo in the decoration of the two end walls of the great Hall of the Council Palazzo Vechio. Leonardo chose for his subject "The Defeat of the Milanese by the Florentines at Anghiari"; Michelangelo chose "Pisan Soldiers Called Suddenly to Arms While Bathing in the Arno." The cartoons produced by the two masters mark an important epoch in Italian art. In them we find for the first time the human figure treated with all the truth and splendid fulness of expression of the High Renaissance. Neither picture was completed. A part of Leonardo's cartoon, called "The Battle of the Standard", is now known by an engraving after a copy by Rubens.

Characteristics.--In the latter half of the fifteenth century all the great principles which underlie the art of representation had been mastered. Each great preceding painter had made some important contribution to the general knowledge, until the artist found himself fully equipped for his work. Leonardo's greatest gift to painting was a perfected chiaroscuro. His treatment of this was a revelation to his contemporaries and followers, with his melting and mysterious shadows, and the bewitching way he illuminates his work with light. He used to say to his pupils, "Be as careful for the light in your picture as you would be of a rare jewel". His work shows how well he followed his own precept. His composition, seen at its best in the "Last Supper" was unsurpassed. His drawing is done extremely carefully, and his lines express wonderfully the subtlety of form. His color is clear and silvery, but has suffered very much from his habit of experimenting with technique. He used oils and painted and repainted, touched and retouched infinitely. His backgrounds show a mannerism that seems to have followed him from the studio of his master, Verrocchio: rocks and dark

trees and running water, with diffused twilight mark nearly every one of his works. His ideal woman's face has dark eyes and hair, a long, slender nose, and a somewhat pointed chin, and is marked by a peculiar, languid, subtle smile, as is shown in his masterpiece, the "Mona Lisa".

Pablo Ruiz Picasso 1881-1973

Pablo Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain in 1881 to middle-class parents. His father was a painter who taught at the School of Fine Arts in Malaga first, then in La Corona at the elementary school. In 1895, Picasso's family relocated to Barcelona where Picasso began to receive formal training in the arts. Picasso was influenced early on by Art Nouveau and the early Impressionists Toulouse-Lautrec and Steinlen. Picasso met El Greco, Surbarian and others in Paris, and by the age of nineteen, Picasso held his first exhibition under the dealer Ambroise Vollard.

The period of 1901-1904 is known as his "Blue Period", when he painted beggars, prostitutes, the poor people and people who were ill in varying shades of blue. Examples of this period are "The Couple" (1904), "Life" (1903), and "Woman with a Crow" (1904). Following this period, Picasso entered his "Rose Period", where his designs became more subtle, his tones clearer, and pinks and grays predominated his coloring. Clowns, acrobats, actors and others of the circus world, as well as young girls, were the mainstay of his subject matter during 1904-06. "Mountebanks" (1905), "Toilette" (1906) and "Family of Acrobats with Monkey" (1905) are all examples of the Rose Period work.

With the portrait of writer Gertrude Stein in 1906, Picasso moved out of the Rose Period toward a more primitive and simple style, influenced by Cezanne and ancient Iberian art, as well as African Negro sculptures. It was during this period that Picasso (1907-14) and Braque each made important contributions to the evolution of Cubism as a style. His "Portrait of Fernande Olivier (1909), "Girl with a Mandolin" (1910), and "Aficionado" (1912) are all good examples of the Cubism style which revolutionized the art world more than anything had since the Renaissance. Picasso never stayed with one style for extremely long periods of time. By 1920, the Classical influences of Greek and Roman art show in his paintings, for example, "Three Women at the Fountain" (1921). He then began to paint his fine still lifes, and in 1925, once again his art showed its unique style in the first examples of Expressionism, with some teasing of Surrealism as well, as shown in "Seated Woman" (1926-7). During this time period, Picasso's marriage was not doing well, and his anger shown on canvas and in his writings seems to be entirely directed at women. However, in 1932, he met a young woman, Marie-Therese Walter, and her relationship with him brought him back to a more calm style of painting. Between 1930 and 1934 Picasso turned to sculpture as his main art form. "Woman Lying Down" (1932) seems to have been inspired by Matisse, and "Construction" (1931), was completed of semi-abstract and surreal shapes of refuse with the help of his friend Julio Gonzalez. At the end of this period, Picasso once again turned to Classical influences, as shown in his engravings for the Latin poet Ovid's "Metamorphoses" (1930). The next period shows Picasso depicting Spanish bullfights and scenes. In 1936 his most famous painting, "Guernica" was completed as the war broke out in Europe. Picasso's strong feelings at the devastation caused by the war are evident in "Night Fishing at Antibes" (1939), among others.After the war, Picasso finally relaxed his style once more. "Charnier" (1944-5) was his last sad work of that time. He had met a woman named Francoise Gilot in 1945. She bore him two children and his peace in that relationship is reflected in his works such as "Mother and Child with Orange" (1951). This prolific artist produced more variety in his works than any painter before or since. His powerful paintings and sculptures were full of his

own feelings and left a legacy unmatched in the world of art. Pablo Picasso died in Mougins, France at the age of ninety-two in 1973.

Angelica, Fra Giovanni da Fiesole 1400-1456 ca

Fra Angelico, often called Il Beato (The Blessed) by the Italians, was for about thirty years a monk in the monastery of San Marco, Florence. His name owes its high rank (among the painters of his time) to the religious sentiment of his work. Today, however, his innovative style, influenced by Masaccio, and his welcoming of the new ideas of the Renaissance are recognized as most important and influential on the course of Italian painting.

Characteristics.--His most frequent subjects represent the lowliness of soul of God's servants and the devout beauty of angels. His figures are peculiarly quiet; many have passive, folded hands. The motion of his angels, dancing in Paradise, is a most gentle motion, which in no way disturbs the draperies. His execution is elaborate, sometimes almost miniature-like in delicacy. His coloring is most pure and simple and has been little affected by time. His latest works in Orvieto and Rome show the influence of the dawning Renaissance in a better drawing of the figure.

Piero della Francesca 1416-1492 ca.

Piero della Francesca was born in Borgo San Sepolcro at the beginning of the Quattrocento, and was one of the greatest Italian painters of that century. He is distinguished for having advanced the study of perspective. He began his career assisting Domenico Veneziano with the frescoes in the Church of S. Egidio in Florence (now almost completely lost, and his early work shows strongly an affinity with Masaccio. His masterpiece is the fresco in the Choir of the church of S. Francesco in Arezzo depicting the "Legend of the True Cross," in which he blended the human presence into precise perspective backgrounds, an accomplishment of supreme importance for painting in Italy. He is famous as a writer on higher mathematics and the laws of perspective as well as painter. He was one of the artists invited to Rome by Pope Nicholas V., whose works in the Vatican were destroyed in order to make room for the frescoes of Raphael.

In addition to the frescoes in S. Francesco, one of the monuments of the Italian Renaissance, Piero's major works include the altarpiece "Our Lady of Mercy with Saints" with the "Annunciation" and the Crucifixion" (Borgo, Pin.), "Flagellation of Christ (Urbino, G.N.), the great "Diptych of the Duke of Urbino" (Uffizi). Piero della Francesca's new vision of volume in space, perspective and light would influence many contemporary artists as well as those to follow, including Perugino, Raphael, Antonello da Messina and Giovanni Bellini.

Donatello di Betto Bardi 1386-1466 ca.

Donatello (Donato di Betto Bardi) began his career assisting Ghiberti with the bronze doors for the Florentine Baptistry.. This sculptor was a close imitator of nature. He seemed careless of mere beauty, and his works are striking for their marked difference from those of his predecessors, especially in that he defined the forms beneath his draperies, made it possible to believe that the folds concealed the human figure. His work contained a powerful sense of movement, as in his marble statue of "St. George," and he became famous for the technique of "relievo schiaceiato" (flat relief) which he developed. Donatello was a giant among sculptors in Florence during the Quattrocento, and his influence on the early Renaissance in Italy is undisputed. Individualistic and dedicated, he invested his work with an overpowering sense of life and driving spirit. Donatello was buried in the Church of San Lorenzo with great pomp. His resting-place was near that of Cosimo de' Medici, so that, as he said, "his body might be near him when dead, as his spirit had ever been near him when in life."

Alessandro Botticelli 1444-1510 ca.

Alessandro Botticelli called Botticelli from the name of a goldsmith to whose service he was bound when a boy, was a pupil of Fra Filippo Lippi, and is one of the most important among the fifteenth-century painters. Botticelli was closely associated with the Medici and his fortune paralleled theirs. The death of Lorenzo ended the world in which Botticelli had found honors and fame. Before him the old masters had drawn the inspiration for their works from the Bible; the great mass of pictures had been painted in the service of the church. Botticelli's nature was imaginative: he delighted in myths, fables, and poetry, and freely introduced into his painting all kinds of fanciful creations. Others were beginning to widen the field of art a little, but Botticelli was the first to step boldly forth and make his painting a means for the delight of the secular as well as the religious world. He was a leader in the great movement in the history of art in Florence that led to the protest by Savonarola against the "corrupting influence" as he called it and "of profane pictures". He became an ardent disciple of this great prophet. When Savonarola demanded that bonfires should be made of these "profane" works of art, Botticelli contributed many of his pictures to the burning pile.

Characteristics.--While Masaccio had taken a long step in advance of former artists by making humanity rather than events the chief center of interest in his works, Botticelli pictured not merely humanity, but also human feelings. We see this particularly in his sad-faced Madonnas, whose expressions seem born of a prophetic sorrow, sometimes further denoted by the introduction of the crown of thorns into the picture; it is also seen in the eager, sympathetic countenances of those who surround her. He created a type of face and figure that is most easily recognizable. His figures are unusually tall and graceful, often shown through almost transparent garments; the limbs are slender, the hands long and nervous. His faces are long and thin, with prominent, round chins and very full lips. His style of painting shows early training in the goldsmith's shop; he loved to elaborate with gold-painted embroideries and jewelry, and even gilded the lights upon the heavy locks of hair. His representation of figures in motion is far beyond anything that preceded him and has never been excelled.

Paolo di Dono Uccello 1397-1475

Paolo was called Uccello on account of his love for birds and was at one time chiefly famous for his mastery of the science of linear perspective. His devotion to this study was so great that Vasari says he would often neither eat nor sleep, and when remonstrated with by his wife would only reply, "Oh! this delightful perspective!" The knowledge gained and put into practice by him was a great help to contemporary artists. Modern criticism however, emphasizes his gift for fresco, mosaic and other decorative work, and it is believed today that his preoccupation with perspective is apocryphal. Major works include the series of frescoes of the "Creation" in Florence S. Maria Novella, the "Flood" and the "Battle of San Romano", (Louvre, Uffizi and London, N.G.), His works were marked by such stiffness and exact drawing of detail, and by figures so designed that they exhibited to the fullest extent his knowledge of mathematical foreshortening.

Jan van Eyck 1399-1441 ca.

John van Eyck and his brother, Hubert (1366-1426), are traditionally given the credit of being the inventors of oil painting, though the medium certainly existed earlier. They are said to have invented an excellent varnish, which gave to oil colors a fresh brilliance and caused them to dry quickly, thus greatly facilitating their use, and the technique developed by Jan of overlaying transparent layers of color caused the use of oils advance greatly.

Characteristics of van Eyck Painting.-- In composition, van Eyck's work remained in the Gothic tradition, rather than in the Early Renaissance of contemporary Italian painting, with which he was familiar. The figures, portrait-like in character, were represented with a somewhat rigid attitude and with little attempt at foreshortening. They were rather tall and slender, well modelled, and were clothed with the richest, most lavishly decorated garments. Indeed, spiritual radiance is expressed by gorgeous raiment and glittering jewels. The coloring was applied with full body and rich medium, and was so blended that no marks of the brush are visible. Flesh tints were very warm and detail minutely finished. Each precious stone seems to invite one to lift it from the robe or crown; and each golden thread of embroidery was as carefully painted as the face of the garment's wearer. Landscapes were always a feature in the works of Jan van Eyck. These were small in size, many of them being seen through an open window in the background, utterly faithful to nature in drawing, in aerial perspective, and in atmosphere. It is difficult to discern the work of Hubert from that of his brother Jan, and few works are attributed to him with any certainty, specifically the large altar-piece, the "Adoration of the Lamb", which was painted by both brothers for the church of St. Bavon, Ghent. It was probably designed by Hubert. After the death of Hubert, the altarpiece was finished by Jan, and the majority f the work is his. That great work is now divided and scattered. Only one panel, the central one, containing the Lamb, surrounded by worshippers, is now in St. Bavon, Ghent.

Raphael (Raffaello) Santi da Urbino 1493-1520

Raphael or Raffaello Santi was born in Urbino. His first instructor was his father, Giovanni Santi, who was probably a pupil of Melozzo da Forli, and who was an excellent painter. Giovanni Santi's importance in this school has only been lately recognized. After his father's death, he entered the school of Perugino in Perugia, where he remained for several years. Raphael visited Florence in 1504, remaining four years, where he was brought into contact with the greatest art workers and masters of Italy. There his work took on the classicism of Leonardo, the young Michelangelo, and Fra Bartolommeo. The development of his mature style places him as one of the greatest painters of the Italian High Renaissance. In 1508 he settled in Rome, having gone there at the request of Pope Julius II, and lived and painted in that city until his early death. In studying the life and work of Raphael, we cannot separate the work from the man himself. He seems to have been from his childhood a seeker. All the individual traits of intellectual and moral life were admirably balanced in him. Although he may well be called an "Apostle of Beauty", the beauty he portrays seldom approaches the sensuous; it is a noble, intellectual, moral, spiritual beauty. From each of those great masters whose works he studied, he assimilated that which was highest and best, and thus formed a style peculiar to himself, expressed in serenity and balance. His works include grand decorative compositions, religious subjects and portraiture, and in each he is always the great master, ever struggling to attain his high ideal -- the perfection of beauty and truth.

Characteristics.-- We often hear the art of Raphael compared with that of Michelangelo, but there can be no real comparison between the two because they are so essentially opposed one to the other. The chief element of Michelangelo's painting is the portrayal of strength, of power; with Raphael, as with Greek art, the whole endeavor is to render a serene, harmonious beauty. Through Michelangelo's art we see the master's own prodigious personality; in Raphael's we feel the sum of all the highest influences to which he had been subjected. In Raphael's work the treatment was subordinate to the conception. He painted in three great styles: The first, Peruginesque, in which he imitated Perugino very closely; the second, Florentine, used very soon after he went to Florence while engaged in the study of Florentine art; and the third, Roman, used after he had been brought into close contact in Rome with Michelangelo. By far the larger number and the most important of his works are painted in the Roman Style. It is difficult to designate the special characteristics of Raphael's style, because it was so full of diverse influences. He gathered up all the elements of the High Renaissance and embodied them in himself. His work is marked by noble subjects, expressive composition, serene landscape backgrounds, clear drawing, true perspective, grace and naturalness of the human figure, beauty and gentleness of expression. His major works include the "Sistine Madonna" (Dresden), the "Virgin with the Fish" (Prado), and the great "Transfiguration" in the Vatican. Also in the Vatican are the series of rooms decorated by Raphael and his assistants, which include "Disputation of the Blessed Sacrament" and the "School of Athens."

Cenni di Pepo Cimabue 1240-1301 ca.

Cenni di Pepo Cimabue was born in Florence between 1240 and 1250. It is believed that Cimabue may have been Giotto's teacher, but little is known of Cimabue's training, except that he did go to Rome in 1272 and was influenced by the classical style painters like Cavallini. There is only one work of Cimabue's which is known to be his for certain. The mosaic in the apse of Pisa Cathedral and most especially, the figure of St. John the Baptist (1302), has been documented as being Cimabue's. Cimabue was influenced by the Florentine painters such as Marcovaldo, as can be seen in a work generally attributed to Cimabue, the large "Maesta", which was originally done for the church of Saint Trinita in Florence and now housed at the Uffizi in Florence. Other works attributed to Cimabue include "Madonna of St. Francis", which is now in the Lower Church at Assisi and which has been repainted; frescos in the Upper Church in Assisi which have been partially destroyed and include "Crucifixions" and scenes from the "Life of the Virgin"; and the Crucifixes in San Domenico, Arezzo and St. Croce in Florence. The crucifixes resemble Coppo di Marcovaldo's work. Cimabue was expert at showing the feeling on his figure's faces and injected much passion into the works believed to be his. It is usually considered that Cimabue paved the way for modern art. Cimabue died in about 1302 in Pisa.

Melozzo da Forli 1438-1494

Melozzo da Forli was born in Forli, near Bologna. His real name was Michelozzo degli Ambrogi. He was trained by Piero della Francesca, and spent most of his career in Loretto, Urbino and Rome. His great contribution to painting was the technique called "extreme foreshortening" or "sotto in su". Melozzo painted frescos in the church of San Marco in Rome (1465--1470); "Redeemer", "St. Mark and the Pope", and "St. Mark the Evangelist" were some of the frescos completed there. Many of Melozzo's works have only survived as fragments, and the dome of San Biagio at Forli (1493--1494 ca.), was destroyed during World War II. "Sixtus IV Founding the Vatican Library" (1474, the Vatican, Rome) is considered one of Melozzo's masterpieces. Another famous work is "Ascension" (1478-80), most of which has been destroyed. Melozzo died in Forli.

El Greco 1541-1614

El Greco's given name was Domenico Theotokopuli. He was born in Candia on the island of Crete. Little is known of his early years, but El Greco may have been a pupil of Titian in Venice. If so, he may have been one of Titian's last pupils. Tintoretto's influence is much more evident in his work. Jacopo Bassano was another early influence on El Greco during the years in Venice. In 1570, El Greco travelled to Rome, where it is believed he may have collaborated with Titian on some of the latter's works there. Another artist whose influence is obvious is Michelangelo. El Greco painted in the Mannerist style and is considered to be the best of the Spanish Mannerists, even though he was trained and spent much time in Italy. Between 1576 and 1577 El Greco went to Madrid and Toledo, where he was commissioned to do his first major work, the High Altar and two other altars at the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo. The High Altar no longer exists in one piece but the two transept altars still remain. "The Trinity" and the "Assumption" (ten and sixteen feet high respectively) are two of the pieces of the High Altar. The transept altar pieces are "Holy Face" and "St. John the Baptist". El Greco was justifiably proud of hard won commissions by King Phillip II, including "Adoration of the Name of Jesus" (more commonly known as the "Dream of Phillip") and the "Martyrdom of St. Maurice" (1580). Unfortunately, King Phillip was displeased with the latter picture. However, this experience did turn out well for El Greco; he was forced to put his efforts into painting in Toledo, where he received much admiration. One of El Greco's last works was done for the church of San Tome in Toledo. It was called the "Burial of the Count of Orgaz" (1586). This painting is still in its original location. El Greco also painted three altarpieces for the chapel of San Jose in Toledo (the National Gallery, Washington, D.C.). El Greco was an extremely prolific artist with a truly unique an individual style. Elongated figures painted in cold tones were a typical device, yet were easily able to convey the intended emotion. El Greco's paintings reflected his own spirituality as well as the religious fervor of his time. Today, El Greco's reputation is secure as one of the most original of the great Masters of Manerist painting, yet, his work was largely forgotten for two hundred years. His works can be seen in Madrid and Toledo, Spain; however, he is well represented in many museums around the world.

Savonarola, Girolamo 1452-98
Savonarola was an Italian monk, reformer and martyr.

Vasari, Giorgio 1511-74
Vasari was an Italian painter, architect and art historian.

Dante, (Dante Alighieri) 1265-1321
Dante was and Italian poet and author of the *Divine Comedy*.

Francis of Assisi, Saint (Giovanni Francesco Bernardone), 1182?-1226
Italian friar: founder of the Franciscan order.

Aquinas, Saint Thomas 1225?-74
Italian scholastic philosopher: a major theologian of the Roman Catholic Church.
"The Angelic Doctor."

Edouard Manet 1832-1883

Born in Paris to aristocratic parents, Manet wanted to be a painter from an early age. However, his father opposed this career choice and insisted he join the Navy. After failing the entrance examination two times, Manet finally convinced his parents to let him enroll in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He studied under Thomas Couture, but their relationship a stormy one, so that Manet finally left in 1856 to study at the Louvre. Manet's first major painting, "Absinthe Drinker", was turned down for exhibition, even though Eugene Delacroix supported his efforts. However, a few years later, the Paris Salon awarded him an honorable mention for his painting, "Portrait of Monsieur and Madame Auguste Manet" (1860). By 1862, Manet had established his reputation as a painter with a unique and creative talent. 1863 saw Manet's paintings exhibited along with Cezanne, Whistler and others at the Salon des Refuses. When Manet's painting "le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe" or "Luncheon on the Grass" caused a scandal, the young artists (and future impressionists) of his time, became his devoted followers. Manet continued to exhibit and cause scandal from time to time. At one point, he became so disillusioned with the Paris critics that he left for Spain, where he studied Velazquez and Goya (1865). Upon return to France the following year, Manet's paintings were once again rejected by the Salons, and it wasn't until 1868 that his work was shown, that being the "Portrait of Emile Zola". Manet became friends with many of the French writers of the period including Baudelaire, Zola, Mallarme and others. As time went on, Manet went through periods of acceptance and periods of rejection by the Parisian art community. His portrait of the famous engraver Emile Ellot (1873) was received with huge success; while his "Nana" was refused in 1877. It was in 1879 that Manet first began to become ill, most likely with locomotor atxia, the disease which finally killed him. However, he kept painting in between treatments and showing as often as he could. Manet was one of the most controversial of artists during his lifetime. Much of his work was inspired by the old Masters like Raphael and Titian; however, his gift was that he created a style which was the beginning of Impressionism: clean lines, clear contrasting darks and whites, and easy flowing brush movements. Edouard Manet died near Paris in 1883.

Bach, Johan Sebastian 1685-1750
German organist and composer.

Shakespeare, William 1564-1616
English poet and dramatist.

Lorenzo di Bartolo Ghiberti 1378-1455

Lorenzo di Bartolo Ghiberti was born in Florence. A goldsmith and sculptor, he also painted some pictures at Rimini, where he fled from the plague in 1398. He is best known by his bronze gates to the Baptistery of Florence, which Michelangelo thought "worthy to be the gate of Paradise," which is known by that name and have never been surpassed in some respects. There was much controversy as to who should obtain the honor of making these gates, and after Ghiberti received it, he spent twenty years on the first, and as much more time on the last. It is easy to see in them the marks of the goldsmith's minute and finished manner, but Ghiberti introduced a new feature in bas-relief when he attempted to represent distance in background. In beautiful ornamentation, and perfect form and finish of all minor parts, he has never been surpassed. Ghiberti also made three statues for the Church of Orsanmichele; two bas-reliefs for the Cathedral of Siena, and the Sarcophagus of Saint Zenobius, in Santa Maria del Fiore, of Florence. He was a leading figure in Florence for fifty years, establishing a formative workshop.

Alberti, Leon Battista 1404-72
Italian architect, artist, musician and poet.