

This course is an eclectic wander through art history. It consists of twenty two-hour talks starting in September 2018 and the topics are largely taken from exhibitions held in London during 2018. The aim is not to provide a guide to the exhibition but to use it as a starting point to discuss the topics raised and to show the major art works. An exhibition often contains 100 to 200 art works but in each two-hour talk I will focus on the 20 to 30 major works and I will often add works not shown in the exhibition to illustrate a point.

### **References and Copyright**

- The talks are given to a small group of people and all the proceeds, after the cost of the hall is deducted, are given to charity.
- The notes are based on information found on the public websites of Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
- If a talk uses information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are based on an exhibition use the booklets and book associated with the exhibition.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under

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**Art History Revealed – Wednesday 26 September, half-term 31 October – 5 December, Wednesday 9 January – 13 March (no half-term)**

**Exhibitions in Start Date Order**

1. Impressionism in London, Tate Britain, 2 November 2017 – 7 May 2018
2. Modigliani, Tate Modern, 23 November 2017 – 2 April 2018
3. Charles I: King and Collector, Royal Academy, 27 January – 15 April 2018
4. All Too Human Bacon, Freud and a century of painting life, Tate Britain, 28 February – 27 August 2018
5. Victorian Giants: The Birth of Art Photography, National Portrait Gallery, 1 March – 20 May 2018
6. Picasso 1932 - Love, Fame, Tragedy, Tate Modern, March 8 to September 9, 2018
7. Monet & Architecture, National Gallery, 9 April – 29 July 2018
8. Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece, British Museum, 26 April – 29 July 2018
9. Aftermath Art in the Wake of World War One, Tate Britain, 5 June – 16 September 2018
10. The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, 12 June 2018 – 19 August 2018
- 11. Mantegna and Bellini, National Gallery 1 October 2018 – 27 January 2019**

12. Burne-Jones, Tate Britain, 24 October 2018 – 24 February 2019
13. Klimt/Schiele, Drawings from the Albertina Museum, Vienna, Royal Academy, 4 November 2018 – 3 February 2019
14. Lorenzo Lotto Portraits, 5 November 2018 – 10 February 2019
15. Gainsborough's Family Album, National Portrait Gallery, 22 November 2018 - 3 February 2019
16. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Tate Britain, March 2019. Van Gogh and Britain will be the first exhibition to take a new look at the artist through his relationship with Britain. It will explore how Van Gogh was inspired by British art, literature and culture throughout his career and how he in turn inspired British artists, from Walter Sickert to Francis Bacon.

### **Ideas**

- Gothic Revival, based on an Andrew Graham Dixon TV programme but without the references to the literature of the period
- The Invention of Antiquity – refers to ideas in Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classical Art from Greece to Rome*, Oxford History of Art Series, 2001, Nigel Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture: Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings*, 1997 and John Boardman, *Greek Art*, Thames & Hudson, 1996
- The Painting War: Michelangelo versus Leonardo – described in the novel *Oil and Marble*, released on 5 July, 2018, and *The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance*
- The Turner Prize

### **London Galleries**

Wallace  
 British Museum  
 Hayward  
 National Gallery  
 National Portrait Gallery  
 White Cube  
 Serpentine  
 Tate Britain  
 Tate Modern  
 Royal Academy  
 Estorick



Week 12: based on 'Mantegna and Bellini, National Gallery 1 October 2018 – 27 January 2019'

- This and subsequent talks were prepared in advance of the exhibitions and therefore are based on the pre-exhibition publicity and the general literature. This talk compares the lives of the two artists and their relationship as described in the literature and in Alistair Smith, *Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini* (1975, Themes and Painters in the National Gallery, Number 12). Central to the exhibition are two historic juxtapositions of Mantegna's and Bellini's depictions of '*The Agony in the Garden*', and two versions of '*The Presentation at the Temple*' – Mantegna's from the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin and Bellini's from the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice.
- **Summary of the National Gallery Exhibition**
- An 18 minute film begins the exhibition.
- Bellini was born in to the leading family of artists in Venice. His father Jacopo Bellini was a leading figure and an innovative artist. Mantegna was born outside Padua to a poor family, his father was a carpenter. He demonstrated his artistic abilities at an early age and Jacopo Bellini got to hear of his talent and arranged for

him to marry his daughter Nicolosia in 1453 when Mantegna was 21. He therefore became brother-in-law to Bellini at an early stage of his career. Venice was one of the great centres of the world in the fifteenth century both in terms of its wealth through trade and as the spiritual centre through its links to the old Byzantine Empire. The Bellini family painted mostly religious pictures and portraits of wealthy, conservative patrons. Although poor Mantegna grew up in a city with ancient classical associations, a Roman city which had one of the leading universities in Europe. Padua university lectures were conducted in Latin and it was famous for its teaching of medicine and the human body. Bellini was younger than Mantegna and early on was very impressed by his brother-in-law's skill. Bellini's early drawing of the crucifixion shows elongated figures and is Mantegnesque in style.

- Comparing early drawing by both artists of the pieta shows Bellini's nervous, emotional line compared with Mantegna's firm, bold and strong line. Comparing *Agony in the Garden* shows Mantegna's concentration on the architecture. In the distance we see Rome, with the Coliseum, Trajan's column and what look like an Islamic crescent. His foreshortening is a tour-de-force. Bellini's was painted later and is superficially similar but with a greater feeling for landscape and light to convey emotion but his foreshortening is weaker.
- In 1460 Mantegna left Padua for Mantua and his defining work is the Camera degli Sposi in the Ducal Palace. It includes a self-portrait in the grotesque work and elements of humour such as the putti seen from below. It is 'Baroque' almost 200 years before the baroque period started.
- Bellini spent his life in Venice and his masterpiece is the altarpiece in S. Zaccaria. Its colour, light and harmony sums up his life and his ability to create a divine but believable world we can enter. His paintings of Venice define the way we now see Venice but before Bellini no painted it in this way.
- When Mantegna died he left his commission at the Cornaro Palace in Venice unfinished. Bellini agreed to finish his brother-in-law's work and although they were rivals and competitors all their lives he went out of his way to emulate his brother-in-law's style. In the end he was family and an artist to be honoured.
- Room 1 – Beginnings
  - *Presentation of Christ in the Garden* was first painted by Mantegna and two decades later by Bellini who traced the original and added two figures. One of the additional figures on the right is a man looking out at us who may be a member of the family.
  - Mantegna, *St. Jerome*, 1448-51
  - Bellini, *St. Jerome*, 1453-55, one of his earliest known works.
  - Mantegna, *St. Mark the Evangelist* 1448, one of his earliest known paintings.
- Room 2 – Coming Together, Growing Apart

- Mantegna, *Saint Sebastian*, 1149-60
- Bellini, *Christ's Descent into Limbo*, 1475-80. Based on a Mantegna invention and his drawing of 1465-70 of the same scene. Mantegna produced a different painting of the Descent in 1492.
- Bellini, *Virgin and Child, Davis Madonna*
- Mantegna and Bellini, *Crucifixion*, Mantegna 1465-69, Bellini 1465
- *The Agony in the Garden*, Mantegna 1455-56, Bellini 1448-60. The first version of this subject in Western art.
- Room 3 – The Pieta
  - *Drawing Mantegna 1455-65, Bellini 1465-70*
  - Donatello, *Dead Christ Attended by Angels*, 1430-35
- Room 4 – Antiquity
  - No artist tried as hard to recreate the ancient world as Mantegna especially once he arrived in the Gonzaga Ducal Palace in Mantua where classical learning was prized. However, Mantegna did not actually visit Rome until 1488. The *Triumph* panels are from 1490 after he had returned from Rome.
  - Mantegna, three panels from the *Triumph of Caesar*
  - Bellini, *Contenance of Scipio*, 1506-08
  - Mantegna, *The Introduction of the Cult of Cybele at Rome*, 1505-06, NG
  - Bellini, *Feast of the Gods*
  - Bellini, *Drunkenness of Noah*. To Renaissance minds the events of the Old testament were a historic record that described events in the classical world. The work shows Bellini's continued inventiveness in old age.
- Room 5 – Landscape
  - Landscape painting was new in Italy and was inspired by Jacopo and by Northern European artists such as van Eyck. Landscape provides both a sense of place and a range of emotions.
  - Bellini, *Assassination of St. Peter Martyr*, 1505-06, recently restored.
  - Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*, 1500-05, NG. The black bird in the tree is a motif we find in Mantegna's *Agony in the Garden*.
  - Bellini, *Ressurrection of Christ*, 1475-79
  - Mantegna, *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, 1500-02. The complex iconography was specified by Isabella d'Este his most demanding patron at Mantua.
- Room 6 – Portraits and Private Devotion
  - Bellini, *Doge Leonardo Loredan*. Who was both a magistrate and the Doge and the lighting suggest the brightly lit, stern face of justice and the shadowy, softer face of mercy. It was a private commission so Bellini had more freedom than usual. The painting looks tight but there is a great freedom of brushwork used to create the fabric.
  - Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1495-05
  - Bellini, *Portrait of Fra Teodoro of Urbino as Saint Dominic*, 1515

- Bellini, *Virgin and Child with Sts. Catherine and Mary Magdalene*, 1490
- Bellini, *Portrait of a Humanist*, It has been speculated that it is a portrait of Mantegna.
- Mantegna, *Cardinal Ludovico Trevisan*, 1459-60. One of the first three-quarters view in Western art.
- Mantegna, *Virgin and Child, Simon Madonna*, 1465. Shows that Mantegna was capable of great tenderness, not the fingers of the Christ child.





Giovanni Bellini (circa 1430 –1516), *Self-Portrait*, c. 1500, 34 × 26 cm, Capitoline Museums

Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, probably a self-portrait of Mantegna, 1465-1466, 86 × 67 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

- **Giovanni Bellini** (c. 1430-1516, aged 86) **a restrained person who produced emotional art.**
  - Bellini was **content to follow the style of his father Jacopo** and later Mantegna yet his later work is uniquely his own. He is deeply and emotionally affected by the **Christian message** and his images of the Madonna and of Christ are designed to have a **direct emotional impact**. When he makes reference to the **antique it is unconvincing and virtually meaningless** as it means nothing to him. In many of his pictures he removes all traces of narrative in order to make a bold emotional statement that is not tainted by any intellectual discourse. He does not try to persuade by logic but overcome by emotion. Bellini was a **modest, reticent character** and his images of the infant Christ show a passive, relaxed child but Mantegna's infant Christ is strong, self-sufficient and engaged. **Bellini was happy to remain in Venice all his life, in peace,**

painting in its churches and running the family business. He was happy to allow his elder brother Gentile to become the main artist in the public's eye.

- **Andrea Mantegna** (c. 1432-1506, aged 74) **an emotional person who produced restrained art.**
  - Mantegna was gifted from an early age and was **precocious** and intellectually self-sufficient. He studied archaeology and took a deep interest in the classical. His work was always extremely detailed and can be examined with a magnifying glass and the brushstrokes cannot be seen. Despite the **apparent lack of emotion in his art** he was an extremely emotional. One observer noted in 1474 that “**There is not a single person in the vicinity with whom he agrees**”. He was famously for his **ferocious vocabulary and his aggression** sometimes went beyond verbal abuse. The Pope criticized him for insisting on payments due and Federigo Gonzaga described him as ‘**capricious**’. He was an ‘**angry young man**’, very sure of himself and followed no one **yet his painting** belie this aggression with their **cool, intellectual, careful and controlled style**. His intellectual approach combined a detailed knowledge of antiquity with a rational yet expressive approach to Christianity. He was always looking for **new styles** and experiences and **travelled all over Italy** to meet new artists and find new techniques.

### **Bio: Bellini**

- Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516) was born in **Venice** and lived and worked there **all his long life**. He became one of the **most influential Venetian artists alongside his pupils Giorgione and Titian** and is considered the **father of the Venetian Renaissance** with its emphasis on **colour and emotion**.
- He was the son of the famous Venetian artist **Jacopo Bellini** (c. 1400- c. 1470) and brother of **Gentile**. Jacopo was a pupil of Gentile de Fabriano a leading artist of the early 15<sup>th</sup> century and Jacopo introduced the techniques of the Florentine school to Venice. Giovanni's earliest paintings were influenced by his father's graceful style and the severe Paduan style of his brother-in-law Andrea Mantegna. They include a ***Madonna and Child, Dead Christ Supported by Angels***, four triptychs in the Venice Accademia, and two Pietàs in Milan. His early work is well exemplified in two beautiful paintings, ***The Blood of the Redeemer*** and ***The Agony in the Garden***.
- Bellini was brought up in his father house where he lived and worked closely with his brother Gentile. His father, Jacopo was one of the founders of the Renaissance style of painting in Venice. Giovanni's early work is in egg tempera and all of his work has a depth of religious feeling and sentiment. A prime example of his early work is ***St. Jerome in the Desert*** which is still very similar to his father's and his brother's work. Like Mantegna he started to employ foreshortening as he

experimented with the possibilities of unusual perspective views and their emotional impact.

- His Madonnas exhibit a sweetness derived from his father's work but he adds a decorative richness drawn from nature. His work is mainly linear, that is forms are created using lines rather than by defining mass which is derived from the Florentine tradition and from Mantegna. However, his line is less obvious than in Mantegna's work and his forms are softer.
- In 1470 he received a commission to paint a major work in the Scuola di San Marco but this and other early works have not survived. After 1479–1480 much of Giovanni's time was taken by his duties as conservator of the paintings in the great hall of the Doge's Palace. He was commissioned to paint six or seven new works but they did not survive the fire of 1577. However, many of his altarpieces and other devotional works have survived. These works show him gradually moving **away from the old style of his father and exploiting the exciting possibilities of oil paint** which were first introduced into Venice by **Antonello da Messina in 1473**. Antonello da Messina was a Sicilian artist who had worked in Northern Europe where he learned the use of oil painting **from Jan van Eyck** and others. Bellini's keen eye for colour and light found its medium in the new oil paints which allowed his work to blossom.
- Towards the mid-1470s he painted the composite altarpiece of Saints Giovanni e Paolo in Venice which shows that his style had changed little over the previous ten years. Shortly after he took a trip down the Adriatic and his *Coronation of the Virgin* at Pesaro shows the influence of Piero della Francesca. At this time he also met Antonello da Messina who travelled to Venice in 1475 and his change in style from his earlier Mantegnesque style is seen in the **San Giobbe altarpiece** (now in the Accademia Gallery in Venice).
- His **brother Gentile** was chosen by the Venetian government to paint the great historical scenes in the **Great Council room in Venice**. At the time Gentile was considered the greater painter but when Gentile was sent on a mission to Constantinople Giovanni took his place. The six or seven new canvases he painted in 1479-80 were his greatest work but they were destroyed by fire in 1577.
- For the first twenty years he devoted himself to Madonnas, Pietas and Crucifixions but towards the end of the century he painted a wider range of subjects and **became one of the greatest landscape painters**. His study of outdoor light means that one can deduce the season and even the time of day.
- For the ***St. Francis in Ecstasy*** of the Frick Collection or the ***St. Jerome at His Meditations***, painted for the high altar of Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Venice, the details of the earth are studied as carefully as the human figures. The purpose of his naturalism is to achieve a realism that adds strength to the idealism of the religious subject. In the landscape ***Sacred Allegory***, now in the Uffizi, he created the first of the dreamy enigmatic scenes for which **Giorgione**, his pupil, was to become famous. The same quality of idealism is to be found in his portraiture. His

**Doge Leonardo Loredan** in the National Gallery, London, has all the wise and kindly firmness of the perfect head of state, and his **Portrait of a Young Man** (c. 1505; thought to be a likeness of the Venetian writer and humanist Pietro Bembo) in the British royal collection portrays all the sensitivity of a poet.

- A comparison of the San Giobbe Altarpiece and the San Zaccaria Altarpiece painted many years later shows how his style developed over the years. The early work appears harsh and in high contrast compared to the softer later work. His use of oil colours has matured in San Zaccaria and the figures appear suspended in a still, rarefied atmosphere.
- **Albrecht Dürer**, visiting Venice for a second time in 1506, describes Giovanni Bellini as **still the best painter in the city**, and as full of all courtesy and generosity towards foreign brethren of the brush.
- **Bellini painted actively up until his death** at the age of almost 90 in 1516. During the last fifteen years of his life, he was **inundated with commissions** to paint altarpieces, portraits and mythologies - all with careful attention to landscape detail. Although considered the master painter of Venice at the time he was always interested in learning new techniques and styles from younger painters. Many of his later works are secular images of mythology and landscapes rather than the religious works of his youth and he experimented with a more atmospheric style. His skill is shown in the life-like image of **Doge Leonardo Loredan** with its shimmering silk clothing and austere appearance.
- **Giovanni Bellini's life was successful, serene and prosperous and his school of painting dominated Venetian art.** Two of his pupils, Giorgione and Titian surpassed their master in world fame. We know little of what he was like as a man except from a letter written by Albrecht Dürer, "Everyone tells me what an upright man he is, so that I am really fond of him. He is very old, and still he is the best painter of them all."

### Bio:Mantegna

- **Andrea Mantegna** (c. 1431-1506) was an Italian painter, a student of Roman archaeology, and **son-in-law of Jacopo Bellini**. Like other artists of the time, Mantegna **experimented with perspective**, e.g. by lowering the horizon in order to create a sense of greater monumentality and he was the first to create a total painted environment. His **hard, metallic landscapes and stony figures** demonstrate his **sculptural approach to painting**. He also led a workshop that was the leading producer of prints in Venice before 1500.
- He was **born near Padua**, the son of a carpenter. He became an apprentice painter when he was eleven to the leading artist **Francesco Squarcione** (c.1395-1468), founder of the Paduan school. Mantegna's innate ability led to him being formally adopted by Squarcione but Mantegna set up his own workshop when he was just 17 complaining that Squarcione had not compensated him sufficiently. His ability is demonstrated by a commission to paint an altarpiece for the church in **Santa Sofia**

the same year (1448), **now lost**.

- **Mantegna lived in Padua from the age of 10 to the age of 30** and the city exerted a strong influence on his life and work. **Padua University was founded in 1222** and was one of the first and most important universities in Europe and it offered a wider range of subjects than any other university. The city was **multicultural** as it attracted scholars from all over Europe and there was a widespread and intense **interest in antiquity**. At this time most artists were considered to be **craftsmen** but Mantegna mixed with the **humanists, antiquarians and professors** and was therefore one of the first artists to **elevate the profession** to the highest levels of academic status. Mantegna pursued a thorough understanding of the Roman world including Roman architecture and sculpture as well as the political realities of the harsh totalitarian regime and its cultural clash with the new Christian religion centred on the salvation of the individual.
- In this period Italy was not a unified country but a collection of competing city states. In the art world **Padua was 'ruled' by Squarcione and Venice by the Bellini family**. In 1453 Mantegna married **Nicolosia**, daughter of **Jacopo Bellini** and sister of Giovanni and Gentile Bellini. It is likely that Jacopo Bellini saw the marriage as a way of weakening Padua's control of the arts and strengthening that of Venice. However, Mantegna did not join the Bellini workshop but used the dowry to establish his own powerful artistic centre in Padua. Mantegna may have been influenced by the sculptural power of the Florentine sculpture Donatello who had completed the high altar of San Antonio, Padua, by 1450. Until the 1490s Mantegna's painting reflected the hard, grey surfaces of sculpture in many of his human forms.
- In 1459 Mantegna painted the **San Zeno altarpiece in Verona**. The same year he **lost his independence** by entering the service of **Ludovico Gonzaga in Mantua** although he was allowed to travel to Florence and Pisa in 1466-67. The patronage guaranteed a fixed income (although he was sometimes not paid) and the opportunity to create one of his best known works, the **Camera degli Sposi** in the **Palazzo Ducale in Mantua**. Previously painters had created a rectangular area containing a imaginary space behind the frame. Mantegna created a convincing three-dimensional environment that encloses the viewer on all sides and transforms the small room into an elegant open-air pavilion containing the characters that must have also occupied the real space of the room, the Gonzaga court. The flat ceiling appears concave and contains what appears to be a circular oculus opening onto a blue sky. Around the oculus is a balustrade on and over which we see foreshortened putti, women, birds and plants. This became the most influential *di sotto in su* ceiling decoration of the early Renaissance although many of his ideas were not fully taken up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Mantegna had a uniquely close relationship with Ludovico Gonzaga who rescued him from disputes with his neighbours suggesting a contentious or arrogant personality.
- In 1478 **Ludovico died** followed shortly after by Mantegna's son who had been

expected to continue the family tradition. By 1484 **Mantegna's financial situation was so bad** he was forced to ask for help from Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence. Mantegna thought of moving to Florence but Ludovico's son died and with the accession of **Francesco II in 1484 his financial situation improved**. Many of his works for Francesco are now lost but one that does survive is the ***Triumph of Caesar*** at **Hampton Court, begun about 1486**. It may be because of this demonstration of his ability to recreate the splendour and ancient Rome that Pope Innocent VIII commissioned him to decorate his private chapel in the Belvedere Palace in Rome (destroyed 1780) which he worked on from 1488 to 1490.

- In the 1490s he continued to work hard despite ill health and completed many works including the ***Madonna of the Victory (1496)*** to commemorate his supposed victory at the Battle of Fornovo, ***Parnassus (1497)***, a picture celebrating the marriage of Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga in 1490, and ***Wisdom Overcoming the Vices (1502)*** for Isabella's studiolo (a small room in the Gonzaga palace at Mantua).



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), *St. James led to His Execution*, 1453-55, formerly Padua, destroyed in 1944 by bombing, showing his mastery of *di sotto in su* (from below to above) perspective and his understanding of Roman architecture

- **Andrea Mantegna** (c. 1431-1506) was born near Padua and grew up there. In 1453 he married into the famous Bellini family of Venice. In 1460, **Mantegna moved to Mantua** where he became court painter to the ruling **Gonzaga family** until his death in 1506. **Giovanni Bellini** (c. 1430-1516), who was about the same age **spent his entire career in Republican Venice**. Despite the distance between them, their work provides evidence of a continuing artistic exchange that continued for all their long lives.
- Giovanni Bellini's **father was Jacopo Bellini**, his **brother was Gentile Bellini** (who was more highly regarded than Giovanni during his lifetime, although the reverse is true today), and, as mentioned, his **brother-in-law was Andrea Mantegna**. He is considered to be the founder of the Venetian school of painting with its emphasis on colour rather than line. Through the use of clear, slow-drying oil paints, Giovanni created deep, rich tints and detailed shadings. His sumptuous colouring and fluent, atmospheric landscapes had a great effect on the Venetian painting school, especially on his pupils Giorgione and Titian.

- We can begin by considering a description of Mantegna's work by John Ruskin, "... give ten minutes [to it] quietly, and examine it with a magnifying glass of considerable power ... You cannot see more wonderful work, in minute drawing with the point of the brush ; the virtue of it being that not only every touch is microscopically minute, but that, in this minuteness, **every touch is considered and every touch right. It is to be regarded, however, only as a piece of workmanship. It is wholly without sentiment**".
- We can see Ruskin's prejudice immediately but as we shall see there is considerable sentiment of Mantegna's work but it is held within a rigorous control and precision. His brushstrokes cannot be seen and every detail is clearly delineated, every pebble and every leaf. He also explores the possibilities of the new discovery of perspective by adopting exciting viewpoints as we see here. His interest and love of the classical period can be seen in much of his work and he combines it with his representation of Christian subjects.

### References

- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Andrea-Mantegna#ref99706>





Andrea Mantegna (c. 1430-1506), *The Agony in the Garden*, 1458-60, tempera on wood, 62.9 x 80 cm, National Gallery

- Mantegna's painting is **harsh, hard-edged with dark contrasts of strong colours**.
- "Angels bearing the Instruments of the Passion appear to Christ at prayer. The disciples sleep. In the background Judas comes with soldiers to arrest Christ. The dead tree and vulture may indicate death. New growth and the pelicans are perhaps hopeful signs for the future. Jerusalem (which is represented here as a walled city), and which was then under Roman rule, includes an equestrian statue, a column with relief sculpture, and a theatre like the Colosseum, all inspired by monuments surviving in Rome. The other version of this picture by Mantegna is in Tours (Musée des Beaux-Arts) and is firmly dated to 1457-9, although the composition is in reverse, and the disciples differently arranged. The National Gallery picture is probably a little later in date. It is more fluent as a composition and more dramatic in presentation, with a more effective relationship between figures and landscape. The picture may be related to a drawing by Jacopo Bellini (London, British Museum). There is also a version (in the National Gallery Collection, 'The Agony in the Garden') by Giovanni Bellini which is influenced by Mantegna's picture." (National Gallery)

- **The vulture in the tree is symbolic of death and we will see again in the last painting today by Bellini.**

### Notes

- *The Agony in the Garden* refers to the events in the life of Jesus between the Last Supper and Jesus' arrest. According to all four Gospels, immediately after the Last Supper, Jesus took a walk to pray (John 18:1). Matthew and Mark identify this place of prayer as Gethsemane. Jesus was accompanied by **St. Peter, St. John and St. James the Greater**, whom he asked to stay awake and pray. He moved "a stone's throw away" from them, where he felt overwhelming sadness and anguish, and said "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by. Nevertheless, let it be as you, not I, would have it." Then, a little while later, He said, "If this cup cannot pass by, but I must drink it, your will be done!" (Matthew 26:42). He said this prayer three times, checking on the three apostles, between each prayer and **finding them asleep**. He comments: "**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**". An angel came from heaven to strengthen him.
- The **rabbit is a symbol of rebirth and resurrection** and this ancient symbolism explains the connection between Easter, the resurrection of Christ and the **Easter Bunny**. Three hares together is a symbol of **the Trinity** and is found in Albrecht Dürer's woodcut, *The Holy Family with the Three Hares* (1497) although it might also refer to the three apostles that accompany Jesus, St. Peter, St. John and St. James the Greater.



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *The Agony in the Garden*, about 1465, 81.3 x 127 cm, National Gallery

- Bellini's version of **softer and more human**. The forms are **modelled by light and their edges softened** by atmosphere. This style was to become the basis of what we call the venetian style.
- Bellini may have been the first artist to capture dawn in a painting. It's treatment gives the painting a unearthly, magical atmosphere.
- We see him experimenting with foreshortening to provide impact and verisimilitude.
- The horizon is high creating a deep wide landscape that works with the figures to create the atmosphere. The dawn light fills the landscape which is the first of the great Venetian landscapes that were to develop over the next century or more.
- "Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane while three of his disciples – Peter, James. and John – sleep. An angel reveals a cup and a paten, symbols of his impending sacrifice. In the background, Judas approaches with the Roman soldiers who will arrest Jesus (New Testament, Mark 14: 32-43). This painting is closely related to *The Agony in the Garden* (probably slightly earlier in date, by Bellini's

brother-in-law, Andrea Mantegna, which is also in the collection). The two pictures both probably derive from a drawing by Giovanni's father, Jacopo Bellini. In Giovanni Bellini's version, the treatment of the dawn light is particularly noteworthy." (National Gallery)

### **Notes**

- The painting was owned by Consul Smith in Venice and was bought by William Beckford at the Joshua Reynolds sale in 1796 for £5. Beckford sold it and later bought it back along with the Mantegna version for £52 10s. The national Gallery bought it in 1863 for £630, by then a low price.



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506), *Presentation at the Temple*, c. 1455, 68.9 x 86.3 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Andrea Mantegna (c. 1431-1506), *Presentation at the Temple*, c. 1455, 68.9 x 86.3 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

- The date of the painting is unknown, but it belongs to the painter's youth in Padua. Date ranges from 1453, when Mantegna married Nicolosia Bellini, daughter Jacapo Bellini painter and the sister of Giovanni and Gentile, both painters as their father, and **1460 when he left for Mantua**. Bellini's *Presentation at the Temple*, explicitly inspired by Mantegna's, dates to around the latter year.
- The scene is set **within a marble frame**. The **cushion** on which the Child lies stands on it and **partially juts out**.
- The Virgin Mary, in the foreground, is holding the Child while a **bearded priest** is near her. At the centre, in the shade, is **Joseph with a halo**. Also in the background, at the sides, **two spectators** without haloes have been identified as **possibly Mantegna's self-portrait and a portrait of his wife**.





Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Presentation at the Temple*, c. 1460, tempera on panel, 80 x 105 cm, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice

- This is an early work by **Giovanni Bellini** (c. 1430-1516) and is interesting as it can be compared with a similar early work of the same subject by Andrea Mantegna.
- The dating of the work is uncertain, though it is usually considered to be **later than** *Presentation at the Temple* by Andrea Mantegna (Berlin, c. 1455), from which Bellini took a very similar placement of the figures.
- The commission of the two works is unknown, as well as if the figures, as is sometimes suggested, portrayed members of the Mantegna and Bellini families.
- The main characters are nearly the same as those in Mantegna's work: the Virgin is holding the Child, whose feet are lying on a cushion, while the **bearded figure of Simeon** is coming to take him. In the **front is Saint Joseph**, which, according to some scholars, would be a portrait of **Bellini's father, Jacopo**. On the sides the painter added two further figures, which make the picture rather crowded. Apart his father, other identifications include **the author's self-portrait and Mantegna** (or his brother Gentile Bellini) for the **two men on the right**; and **Nicolosia**, sister of Giovanni and Gentile, and **wife of Mantegna**, together with their **mother Anna** for the **women on the left**.

- Bellini also replaced Mantegna's bronze frame with a parapet, making the characters nearer to the observer, and omitted their haloes.



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Madonna della Vittoria*, 1495-96, tempera on canvas, 280 × 166 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris

- An altarpiece in **Mantegna's mature style**.
- When Francesco II Gonzaga, Marquess of Mantua, was away fighting Daniele da Norsa, a Jewish banker, bought a house and replaced an image of the Virgin Mary with his own coat of arms. The citizens of Mantua were incensed and destroyed his house. When Francesco returned he forced Norsa to fund a chapel and this devotional painting executed by the Mantuan court painter Mantegna. The work was placed in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, which had been constructed over the ruins of Daniele da Norsa's house. Later, this painting was one of the works looted by the French during the Napoleonic invasion of Italy, and by 1798 was being exhibited in the Louvre. The painting was never returned; the given excuse was that its large size made the transport difficult.
- The characters are:
  - On the left foreground, Francesco Gonzaga paying homage to Mary who sits on a high throne with Jesus on her lap.
  - The child standing to her left is John the Baptist holding a sign saying, translated, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the



- world”.
- Further right and kneeling is his mother, St. Elizabeth, protector of Isabella d'Este, wife of Francesco Gonzaga. The choice of St. Elizabeth in the place of a patron may have been chosen as a message of judgement to the Norsa who were made to pay for the work as a penalty for removing an image of the Madonna from their home. Unlike the Norsa, St. Elizabeth who is represented as a Jewess in a yellow turban, was said to be the first to recognize the sanctity of Mary.
  - On the left in the front is the archangel St. Michael with a sword and on the right St. Longinus with a broken spear.
  - On the left at the back is St. Andrew, patron saint of Mantua, with a long stick with the cross and on the right St. George with a helmet and a long red lance.

### **Notes**

- The medallion below the throne reads, translated, “Queen of heaven, rejoice, Alleluia”.
- There is red coral hanging above the Virgin Mary. In Italy and Northern Europe during the Middle Ages red coral was believed to have magical powers and was seen to represent Christ’s blood shed to redeem mankind and its hardness and tree-like shape symbolised the tree of life and so made it a symbol of life, rebirth and immortality.
- Longinus is the name given in Christian mythology to the unnamed Roman soldier who pierced Jesus in his side with a lance and who in medieval and some modern Christian traditions is described as a convert to Christianity.



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *San Giobbe (Saint Job) Altarpiece*, c. 1487, 471 × 258 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

- **Painted using oils** rather than tempera provides richer colour and tone. The rich colours of his mature style laid the foundations of the Venetian school.
- One of the masterpieces of **Bellini's mature style**. The date is uncertain as some associate it with the plague year 1487 and others refer to the statement by Jacopo Sansovino in 1581 that it was his first use of oil painting which place it in the 1470s. The altarpiece remained in the church until 1814-18 and is now in the Accademia in Venice.
- It is an example of a *Sacre Conversazione* (Sacred Conversation). Mary sits on an altar suggestive of the throne of Solomon holding the Christ child. Below them are three musicians and on the left Sts. Francis, John the Baptist and Job and on the right Sts. Dominic, Sebastian and Louis of Toulouse (known for feeding the poor and neglecting his own needs). The pillars are copies of the real ones of the original altar and in the half cupola is a gold mosaic in the Venetian style.

### Disegno (design or drawing) and Colorito (colour)

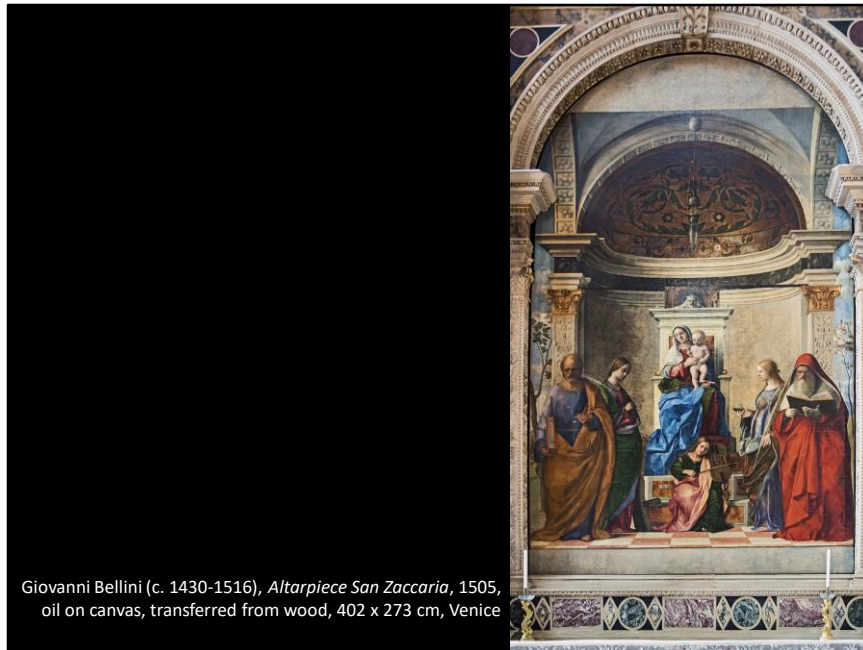
- During the Renaissance many debates took place comparing one medium or style

with another. These were known as *paragoni* or comparisons. One such *paragoni* was the debate about whether sculpture or painting was the higher art. Another debate concerned the two rival aesthetic approaches to painting, referred to as *colore* or *colorito* (colour) and *disegno* (design or drawing).

- The Florentine school of art taught drawing as the key central skill. Good draftsmanship was regarded as essential to seeing the world accurately and truthfully and as the beginning of good painting. By drawing apprentices learned anatomy and perspective and drawings themselves were increasingly regarded as valuable records for pattern books and the source of creative ideas. Drawings became valued in their own right and were collected as they were thought to show the inner workings of the artist's mind. Leonardo even exhibited his drawing of *Virgin and Child with St Anne* to admiring crowds in Florence in 1501. In a finished painting this approach to art can be seen in terms of a well defined form constrained by line. Drawing was regarded as the intellectual, rational approach to painting which linked it to other intellectual activities and to classical studies.
- Venice was a city that was associated with San Marco and its brilliant mosaics in richly coloured marbles. The watery and often foggy atmosphere of Venice combines with these rich colours to enhance their effect through the cities often reflected, diffused or hazy light. The humid atmosphere made fresco painting impractical as the plaster deteriorated and so Venetian artists quickly embraced oil painting when it arrived. Oil paintings are durable and oil paints provide rich colours and allow naturalistic effects. As oil dries slowly, unlike tempera, it is much more flexible and this allows changes and spontaneous composition whereas fresco and tempera require careful preparation. Some Venetian artists, such as Titian, painted directly on the canvas with very little underdrawing. The effect is bright, sensuous colours and spontaneity. **Bellini was the founder of the Venetian colour tradition.**
- The overall debate is similar to the eighteenth century debate between sense and sensibility although in the Renaissance the relationship with classical antiquity was more important. The debate was therefore also between a more classical and intellectual approach and a more sensuous, naturalistic and emotional approach.
- The debate continued into the seventeenth century with the contrast between the drawing style of the Carracci family, particularly Annibale and the *colorito* of Caravaggio and later between the classical lines of Nicolas Poussin and the painterly style of Peter Paul Rubens.

## References

- <http://www.oxfordartonline.com/page/Renaissance-Paragone-Disegno-and-Colore>

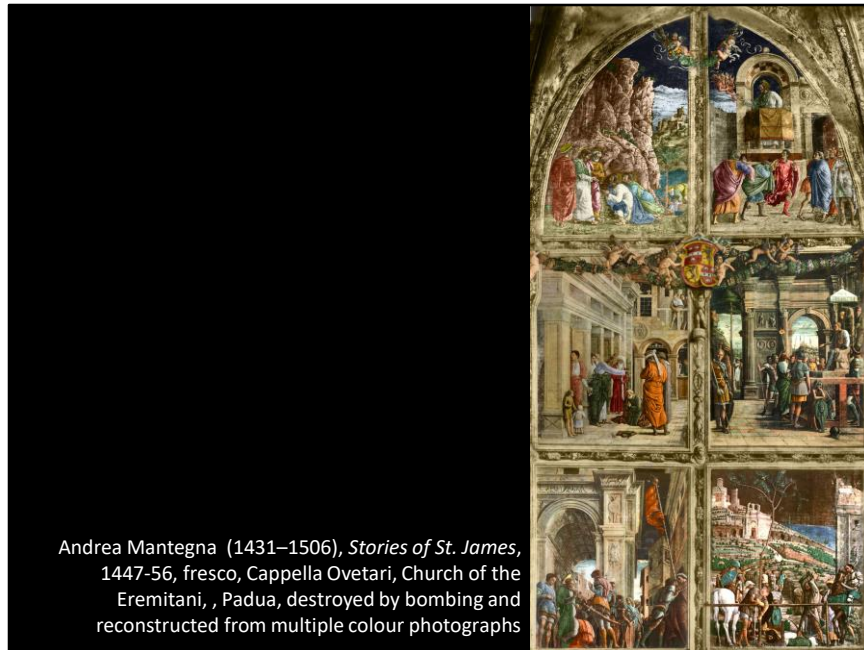


Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Altarpiece San Zaccaria*, 1505, oil on canvas, transferred from wood, 402 x 273 cm, Venice

Sacred conversation by Giovanni Bellini, first figure from the left is Saint Peter with his attributes key and book, first figure from the right is Saint Jerome; left from Saint Mary is Saint Catherine from Alexandria with the palm of martyrdom and the broken wheel.

- This is an example of Bellini's mature style.
- **According to Simon Schema his finest work** and the only work he mentioned in his discussion on colour and **Bellini as the founder of the Venetian colour tradition.**





Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Stories of St. James*, 1447-56, fresco, Cappella Ovetari, Church of the Eremitani, , Padua, destroyed by bombing and reconstructed from multiple colour photographs

- The illusionistic frame appears to exist in our world and it creates a link between our space and that of the space depicted.
- The fresco cycle was in the Ovetari Chapel in Padua but was destroyed by Allied bombing in 1944, only two scenes and fragments survive which have been restored in 2006. The fresco is known from black and white photographs.
- Antonio Ovetari was a Paduan notary who, on his death, left a large sum for the decoration of the family chapel in the Eremitani Church. In 1448, his widow commissioned Mantegna, who was then only 17, and three other artists to decorate the chapel. Mantegna was accused of arguing and interfering and in due course halted work. Between 1453 and 1456/7 Mantegna returned to complete the work and the other artists had died or moved on. On completion the widow sued Mantegna for only painting eight apostles instead of twelve but two independent artists were called in and justified Mantegna's decision due to lack of space. In 1880 two scenes were removed the wall and stored separately so they avoided being damaged by the bombing.

- The chapel was dedicated to saints James and Christopher. The six scenes on the northern wall were painted entirely by Mantegna. They are,
  - Vocation of the Saints James and John
  - St. James Preaching
  - St. James Baptizes Hermogenes
  - Judgement of St. James
  - Miracle of St. James
  - Martyrdom of St. James



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1456, 40 x 55.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

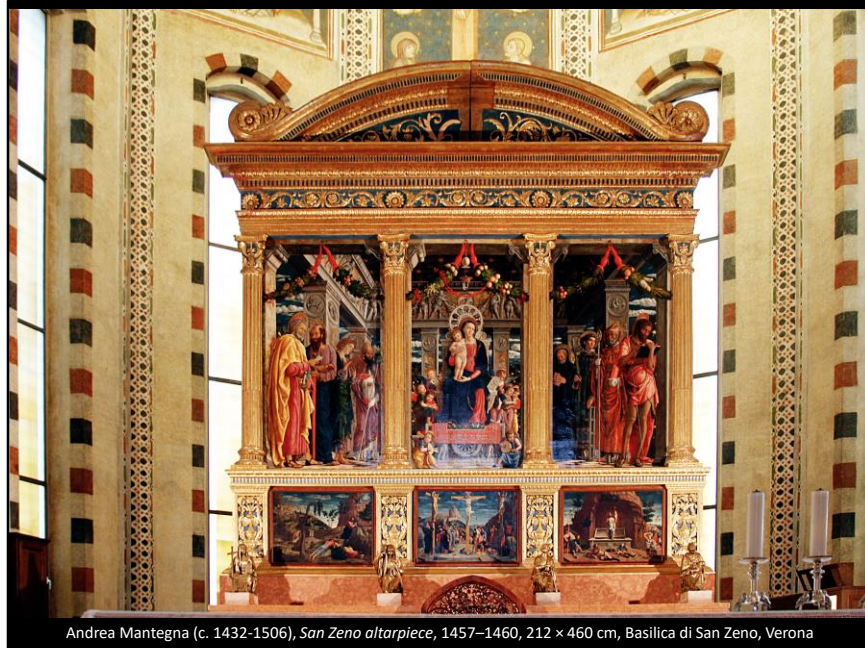
Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), *Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1456, 40 x 55.6 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- “Painted when the artist was probably in his **early twenties**, the picture is notable for its **exquisite detail**. It may have been commissioned by Borso d'Este, the duke of Ferrara, and its style seems to be a response to the **vogue there for Netherlandish painting**. Although transferred from wood to canvas, the painting is in excellent condition.” (The Met)
- Generally attributed to his youth. The work was originally on panel and was moved to canvas at an unknown date.
- The scene is set in an open space, with the Madonna in the middle, adoring the Child while kneeling on a stone step, while to her right St. Joseph is sleeping, and to her left two shepherds pray. St. Joseph's sleep may hint at his role as mere guardian of the Virgin and the Child. The blasted tree on which he leans has born fruit on a single branch; the usual interpretation of this traditional feature is of the mystic renewal of Nature under the new dispensation. Jesus' three-quarters depiction is typical of Mantegna's production.
- On the far left is a fenced orchard, symbolizing Mary's virginity. Also depicted are boards of the ruinous stable in which traditionally Jesus was born. On the right is a



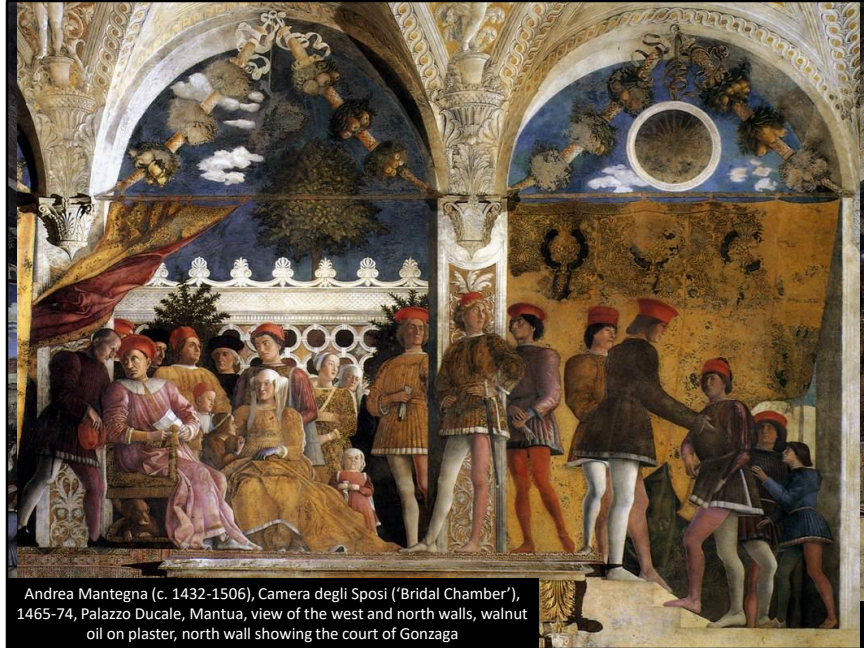
wide landscape, framed by two steep mountains. Two other shepherds are represented in the right background, together with a big tree somewhat resembling the Calvary Cross, a presage of Jesus' Passion. There is also an ox, a traditional mute witness of the Nativity.

- Several flaws in the perspective have induced scholars to assign this work to a date near that of the first frescoes executed by Mantegna in the Ovetari Chapel, in particular to the first scenes of the Life of St. James (1448-1450). The attention to detail has been explained by the influence of the Flemish School, which Mantegna could study in the Este family collection, perhaps through a direct knowledge of Rogier van der Weyden. The grotesque portraits of the shepherds, such as their wrinkles and other realistic details, show the influence of northern European examples.



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), *San Zeno altarpiece*, 1457–1460, tempera on panel, 212 × 460 cm, Basilica di San Zeno, Verona

- The three predellas, stripped by the French in 1797 along with the main picture (restored to Verona in 1815), are now replaced by copies. The originals are in the Louvre (Crucifixion) and in the Museum of Tours. The work was commissioned by the Abbot Gregorio Correr. In the centre is the Madonna enthroned with the Child, portrayed according to the Byzantine iconography of the Victorious Madonna and surrounded by chanting angels. Eight saints are placed at the sides, according to the commissioner's preferences: on the left are Peter, Paul, John the Evangelist and Zeno; on the right, Benedict, Lawrence, Gregory and John the Baptist. The entire composition is full of detail referring to classical Antiquity and it is the first example of good Renaissance art in Verona.



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), Camera degli Sposi ('Bridal Chamber'), 1465-74, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, view of the west and north walls, walnut oil on plaster, north wall showing the court of Gonzaga

- Commissioned by Ludivico Gonzaga noted for its illusionistic detail and its *di dotto in sù* ('seen from below') ceiling. It shows his skill with perspective and as a portraitist. It took nearly ten years to complete and was his most importance commission. It shows the Marchese and his consort, Barbara of Brandenburg, together with their children, friends, courtiers and animals engaged in professional and leisurely pursuits, illustrating the present successes and alluding to the future ambitions of the Gonzaga dynasty.
- This **Court Scene** on the north wall shows Ludovico Gonzaga, dressed informally, with his wife Barbara of Brandenburg. They are seated with their relatives, while a group of courtiers fill the rest of the wall. The Marchese is shown in conversation with his secretary, Marsilio Andreasi, while his dog Rubino rests comfortably under his chair.
- The identity of some of the portraits has been clarified based on existing documents. The girls beside the marchesa are her two daughters Paola and

Barbara. Ludovico Gonzaga is seated on a chair by the left pilaster. He turns to the side to speak with a man who has just entered from the left. To Gonzaga's right sits his wife, Barbara von Hohenzollern-Brandenburg, surrounded by her sons and daughters, a nurse, and a female dwarf. Beneath the right arcade, which is closed by a curtain that is drawn aside only slightly at the outside corner, stand a number of noblemen in elegant and colourful costumes. This procession of courtiers, identified by the colours of their leggings as adherents of the Gonzaga, is led by a young blond man who, like the presumed secretary at the left edge of the picture, stands in front of the painted pilaster. He is flanked by associates who are in part obscured by the same pilaster. The blond youth with a dagger at his waist was identified as Rodolfo Gonzaga.



Andrea Mantegna (c. 1432-1506), Camera degli Sposi, 1465-74, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, view of the west wall, *The Meeting*, walnut oil on plaster  
 Detail, possibly Frederick III of Hapsburg and Christian I of Denmark (detail, possibly self-portrait Mantegna, right, and Leon Battista Alberti, left)

- On the north wall is the **Meeting scene**. This fresco shows Ludovico in official robes in an ideal meeting with his son cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III and Christian I of Denmark. Although it has historically been regarded as representing a particular historic event recent scholarship has pointed out the lack of evidence and has suggested it is a generic scene. The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III never visited Mantua, and Christian I, King of Denmark and brother-in-law of Barbara of Brandenburg, did not visit until 1474 and we know from a report that this wall was finished in 1470.
- “Above the doorway the putti hold an inscribed stone slab in which Mantegna dedicated ‘this slight work’ (OPVS HOC TENVE) to Ludovico and Barbara. It is dated 1474. Despite the proclaimed modesty, Mantegna was doubtless counting on the viewer’s awareness that ‘tenuē’ could also mean ‘subtle’ or ‘fine.’” (The Grove Dictionary of Art)

**References**

<http://www.travelingintuscany.com/art/andreamantegna/cameradegliposi.htm>





Camera degli Sposi, 1465-74, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, ceiling oculus, walnut oil on plaster

- Mantegna's playful **ceiling** presents an oculus that illusionistically opens into a blue sky, with foreshortened putti playfully frolicking around a balustrade. This was one of the earliest di sotto in sù ceiling paintings.
- The ceiling is a brilliant tour de force that engages every viewer. The potted plant balanced on a thin wooden support looks ready to fall and the putti look precariously balanced.



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, c. 1490, tempera on canvas, 68 x 81 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera

- This view of Christ was daringly original as it shows corpse with the heroism and nobleness normally associated with representations Christ absent. It is a dead body on a mortuary slab with a pair of feet thrust towards us. We are trapped with him in a small, tomb-like space with three mourners pressing into the corner of the picture. The limited palette he used suggest death and the darkness of a tomb.
- The date of the painting is debated and dates from c. 1457 to 1501 have been suggested. The work was kept by Mantegna in his studio and shown at the head of his coffin when he died.
- “Mantegna's realism prevails over any aesthetic indulgence that might result from an over-refined lingering over the material aspects of his subject. His realism is in turn dominated by an exalted poetic feeling for suffering and Christian resignation. Mantegna's creative power lies in his own interpretation of the "historic," his feeling for spectacle on a small as well as a large scale. Beyond his apparent coldness and studied detachment, Mantegna's feelings are those of a historian, and like all great historians he is full of humanity. He has a tragic sense of the history and destiny of man, and of the problems of good and evil, life and death.”



(Web Gallery of Art)



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene*, c. 1495, 139.1 x 116.8 cm, National Gallery

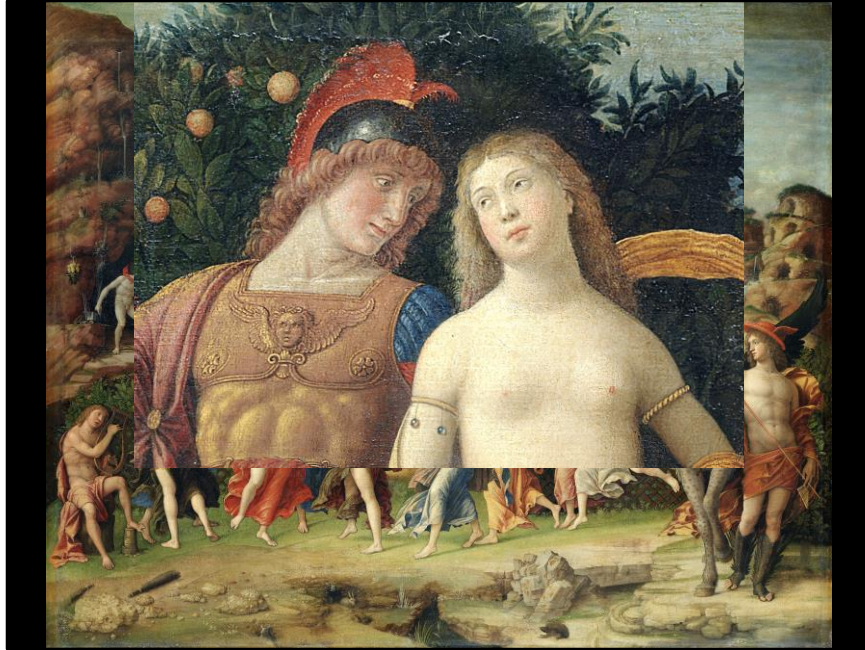
Acquired 1855

Apollo Belvedere, after Leochares, c. 120–140; copy of bronze original of c. 350–325 BC, white marble, 224 cm, Vatican Museums

- It may be wondered how Mantegna and the scholars of the period equated their love of pagan antiquity with Christianity. The gods and goddesses of the ancient world were never considered as a religious alternative but they provided a rich source of exciting, sexual and illuminating myths. Knowledge of antiquity was the province of the few who were wealthy enough to afford a classical education or mix in circles where such things were admired. It was to some extent a fashion but one associated with new ideas in philosophy and practical knowledge. The rediscovery of the power and beauty of ancient Rome also provided an intellectual underpinning to the political aims and ambitions of the rules of the Renaissance city states.
- “It is not known for which church this altarpiece was made. Since it is on canvas it could easily have been sent from Mantua, where Mantegna was court artist, to a church elsewhere, and is in fact first recorded in Milan. The scroll of the Baptist,

around his cross, is inscribed with the familiar Latin text, partially visible, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world'. On the other side of the scroll is the artist's name '**Andreas Mantinia C.P.F...**' - the F for fecit (made this) and the C.P. perhaps for Comes Palatinus, a knighthood given to Mantegna in 1469." (National Gallery website)

- In this work Mantegna brings a new treatment to the figure of baby Jesus. The difficulty of combining the form of a baby with the attributes of God has already been mentioned. Jesus raises his hand in benediction, an adult gesture. His wistful expression conveys a great maturity and his strong legs provide a balance that is devoid of strain. The subtle twist of the infant's body was new to Mantegna's work and derives from classical statues including the ***Apollo Belvedere*** which was unearthed in 1490. The weight is placed on one leg, the other leg is slightly raised with the toe touching the ground and the hips and upper body are twisted away from the weight-bearing leg. The pose is now known as contrapposto from the Italian meaning 'place against' or 'counterpoise' and it gives the figure both a more dynamic and a more relaxed appearance. Mantegna has made the figures of the saints less dynamic by positioning their upper body in line with their weight-bearing leg although Mary Magdalene's head is turned away.
- The *Apollo Belvedere*, so called because it was displayed in the Belvedere courtyard of the Vatican, caused a sensation when it was discovered and was regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world. By the eighteenth century it was regarded as the greatest ancient sculpture. The link between his representation of Christ and the *Apollo Belvedere* would have been clear to contemporaries. Apollo was the son of Zeus and was the god of the sun as well as being associated with health, music, truth and prophecy. Mantegna is fusing Christ and Apollo and rather than oppose Christianity and pagan antiquity he combines them and shows Christ as heir to the classical tradition.



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Parnassus* also known as *Mars and Venus*, 1496-1497, tempera on canvas, 159 × 192 cm, Louvre Museum

- The Parnassus was the first picture painted by Mantegna for Isabella d'Este's studiolo (cabinet) in the Ducal Palace of Mantua.
- The theme was suggested by the court poet Paride da Ceresara. After Mantegna's death in 1506, the work was partially repainted to update it to the oil technique which had become predominant.
- Together with the other paintings in the studiolo, it was given to Cardinal Richelieu by Duke Charles I of Mantua in 1627, entering the royal collections with Louis XIV of France. Later it became part of the Louvre Museum.
- “The traditional interpretation of the work is based on a late 15th-century poem by Battista Fiera, which identified it as a representation of Mount Parnassus, culminating in the allegory of Isabella as Venus and Francesco II Gonzaga as Mars.
- The two gods are shown on a natural arch of rocks in front a symbolic bed; in the background the vegetation has many fruits in the right part (the male one) and only one in the left (female) part, symbolizing the fecundation. The posture of Venus derives from the ancient sculpture. They are accompanied by Anteros (the

heavenly love), opposed to the carnal one. The latter is still holding the arch, and has a blowpipe which aims at the genitals of Vulcan, Venus' husband, portrayed in his workshop in a grotto. Behind him is the grape, perhaps a symbol of the drunk's intemperance.

- In a clearing under the arch is Apollo playing a lyre. Nine Muses are dancing, in an allegory of universal harmony. According to ancient mythology, her chant could generate earthquakes and other catastrophes, symbolized by the crumbling mountains in the upper left. Such disasters could be cured by Pegasus' hoof: the horse indeed appears in the right foreground. The touch of his hoof could also generate the spring which fed the falls of Mount Helicon, which can be seen in the background. The Muses danced traditionally in wood of this mount, and thus the traditional naming of Mount Parnassus is wrong.
- Near Pegasus is Mercury, with his traditional winged hat, caduceus (the winged staff with entwined snakes), and messenger shoes. He is present to protect the two adulterers." (Wikipedia)
- "The fashion of studioli, or private studies, small rooms reserved for intellectual activities, spread in the 15th century in the Italian courts, bathed in Humanist culture. Isabella d'Este, who married Francesco II in 1490, rapidly decided to create a studiolo in a tower of the old Castello di San Giorgio. The work on this project lasted more than twenty years.
- She entrusted Mantegna with the first two canvases of the cycle, *Parnassus* (1497) and *Minerva* (1502), but considering his work out-of-date, she turned to the most famous painters of the new generation. In vain she solicited Giovanni Bellini, Leonardo da Vinci and Francesco Francia but, in 1505, she obtained only the disappointing painting by Perugino. Lorenzo Costa, appointed court painter at Mantegna's death (1506), completed the decoration with two canvases delivered between 1506 and 1511.
- The *Parnassus* and *Minerva* were painted by Mantegna to be placed opposite each other, as demonstrated by the fact that the light comes from the left in the first painting and from the right in the second.
- A year after her husband's death (1519), Isabella transferred her studiolo to the ground floor of the Corte Vecchia. In her new apartment, she added two *Allegories* executed circa 1530 by Correggio to the old series of paintings.
- **Mantegna and the themes of the Studiolo**
- The five canvases of the first Studiolo, in the Castello di San Giorgio, all treat the theme of the Victory of Virtues over Vices, but we ignore whether they were part of a general iconographical program fixed from the beginning.
- The first picture, commissioned by the Marchesa and completed in 1497, already contains in embryonic form the themes to be developed in the other paintings, namely the triumph of spiritual over earthly love and the celebration of the Arts at

the Court of Mantua. The evocation of the amorous relationship of Mars and Venus could be interpreted as an allusion to the couple formed by Francesco II and Isabella, patron and protector of the Muses.

- The fact that the second painting, *Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue*, completed in 1502, contains ideas and motifs that had obsessed the artist from his beginnings, nonetheless leads one to consider that the artist played a determining role in its conception: the theme of Ignorance as enemy of Virtue, numerous inscriptions in different alphabets, clouds and a tree in human form, or the grotesque personifications of the Vices, chased by the dynamic and majestic warrior goddess.” (The Louvre)



Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Triumph of the Virtues or Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue or Wisdom Overcoming the Vices*, 1502, tempera on canvas, 160 × 192 cm, Louvre, Paris

Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *Triumph of the Virtues or Minerva Expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue or Wisdom Overcoming the Vices*, 1502, tempera on canvas, 160 × 192 cm, Louvre, Paris

- The triumph was the second picture painted by Mantegna for Isabella d'Este's studiolo (cabinet), after the Parnassus of 1497. It portrays a marsh enclosed by a tall fence, ruled over by the Vices, portrayed as hideous figures and identified by scrolls in a typically medieval way. **Idleness** is chased by Minerva, who is also **rescuing Diana, goddess of chastity**, from being **raped by a Centaur**, symbol of concupiscence. Next to Minerva is a tree with human features. High in the sky are the three primary moral virtues required to perfect the appetitive powers: **Justice, Temperance and Fortitude**.





Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), *The Introduction of the Cult of Cybele at Rome*, 1505-6, 76.5 x 273 cm, National Gallery, purchased 1873

Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1429–1498) and Piero del Pollaiuolo (1443–1496), *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1475, 292 × 203 cm, National Gallery

- This work by Mantegna in the National Gallery might easily be overlooked as its colours are drab and the event appears obscure. However, there is an important early Renaissance dialogue embedded in the forms. Let us start with this seemingly unconnected painting by the brother Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo. It is *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* and what I want to discuss are the poses of the archers around the saint. Notice that there are three pairs of poses, the pair behind, the outside pair and the inner pair. Each pair shows the same pose from the front and the back, or at the back from one side and then the other. Even the white horses in the background show front and back views. The overall effect, however, is a loss of fluidity. The figures appear staged and rigid and their motion frozen.
- In contrast, thirty years later Mantegna is much more subtle. The figures are shown in the round but without losing their sense of movement. The large piece, over nine foot long and probably longer originally, takes a cameo form with a



restricted palette simulating stone. Like a Roman cameo the foreground layer of stone is a different colour from the background and the background shows the mottling effect of the underlying layer of stone. The figure on the left carrying a branch of laurel has his left leg and right arm forward whereas the Asian eunuch at the head of the litter has his right leg and left arm forward. The next figure to the right mirrors the pose of the laurel bearer and his pose links to the excited figure welcoming the bust of the goddess Cybele (the mother of the gods). There are then three standing figures each standing in contrapposto with one foot gracefully on tip-toe. The effect is dynamic with one figure appearing to slowly revolve into the next.

- These subtle relationship between the forms of the figures supports and enhances the subject matter of the painting. It was probably commissioned by Francesco Cornaro and like many wealthy Renaissance families they wished to link their name back to a famous Roman hero. In this case the Roman family of the Cornelli who played a role in the transportation of the image of Cybele from Crete to its temple in Rome. The temple steps are seen on the right and the trumpet suggest that the painting has been cut short at this point. Ovid tells us that the male priests of the cult of Cybele entered an hysterical trance and castrated themselves in emulation of Cybele's lover Attis. Attis castrated himself and died when he first saw Cybele but she took pity on him and his body never decayed.
- The organiser is the figure clasping his toga at the shoulder a gesture signifying a civic orator. The four figures on the left are the emotional Eastern devotees and the figures on the right are the cool, rational Roman citizens exemplifying Western thought and philosophy.
- The bust of Cybele is on a litter draped with a carpet decorated with a labyrinth containing a confusing tangle of impossible special constructions that defy Western logical thought.
- Mantegna has invoked the distant past and brought it to life with dynamic movement while preserving a respectful distance by the use of a monochrome style that invokes a sculptural relief. He has created ghosts of the past that appear to come to life and link the past with the present.
- The ancient world was known for its sculpture and a debate raged during the Renaissance about what was the most important art form, painting or sculpture. One of the things in the sculptors favour was that the viewer could walk round the work and see it from many angles whereas painting was a single view. Michelangelo wrote in 1540, "It seems to me that the nearer painting approaches sculpture the better it is".
- "In 204 BC the Romans brought the cult of Cybele, the eastern goddess of victory, from Pessina, Asia Minor, to Rome. Mantegna has combined the accounts of Ovid, Livy and Appian. Cybele is represented by her sacred stone - 'she fell to earth as a

meteor' - and as a bust with a mural crown (associating her with a city state). According to Juvenal, Cornelius Scipio (probably in profile gesturing with his right hand) was the most worthy Roman citizen to receive Cybele. This is one of four pictures commissioned in 1505 by Francesco Cornaro a Venetian nobleman, who claimed descent from the ancient Cornelii family (prominent in the picture). Mantegna only completed one before his death and Bellini supplied another (Washington, National Gallery)." (National Gallery)

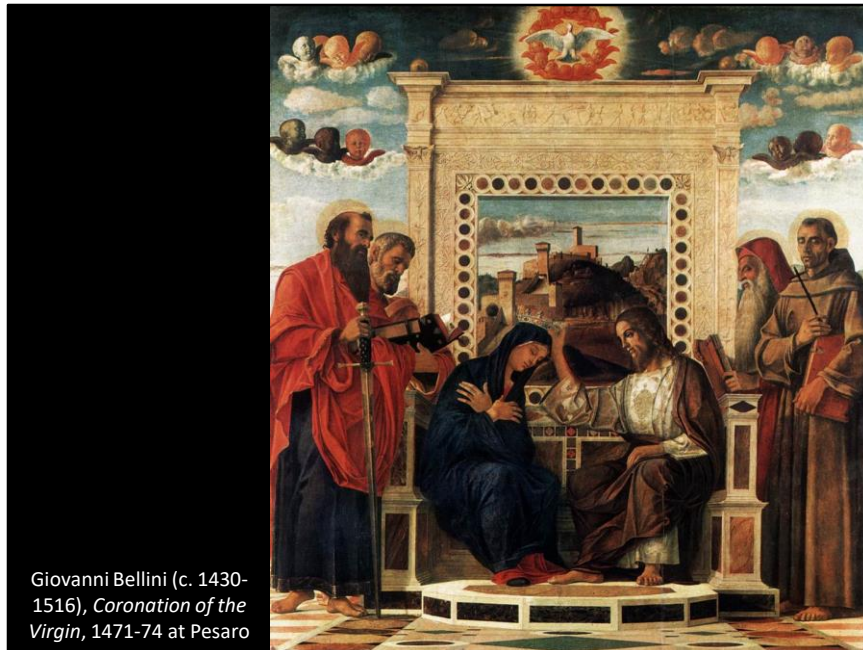


GIOVANNI BELLINI



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Madonna Adoring the Sleeping Child*, early 1460s, tempera on panel, 72 x 46 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (not currently on view)

- “This is an important early work by Giovanni Bellini, the greatest painter of fifteenth-century Venice and one of the key figures of European painting. Datable to the mid-1460s, its hard, linear quality is indebted to the example of Bellini’s brother-in-law, Andrea Mantegna, as well as to the sculpture of Donatello, which Bellini studied in Padua. The sleeping child is a reminder of Christ’s death and sacrifice. The picture has suffered from a strong, abrasive cleaning.” (Met)
- Why don’t babies look realistic? The artist is struggling to combine a realistic baby with the representation of God on earth.



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1471-74 at Pesaro

Bellini's great ***Coronation of the Virgin (1471-74)*** at Pesaro, for example, might have reflected some of the compositional elements of Piero's lost *Coronation of the Virgin*, painted as the central panel of a polyptych. Christ's crowning of his mother beneath the effulgence of the Holy Ghost is a solemn act of consecration, and the four saints who stand witness beside the throne are characterized by their deep humanity. Every quality of their forms is fully realized: every aspect of their bodies, the textures of their garments, and the objects that they hold. As with work by Masaccio and Piero della Francesca, the perspective of pavement and throne helps to establish the group in space, and the space is enlarged by the great hills behind and rendered infinite by the luminosity of the sky, which envelops the scene and gathers all the forms together into one.

"The Pesaro Altarpiece, depicting the *Coronation of the Virgin*, is one of the artist's masterpieces and a pivotal work of his mature years. The painting does lack a precise chronological reference, and about this, and the closely linked and equally unresolved question of its commissioning, critics are particularly intransigent, arriving at controversial and far from conclusive results.

The altarpiece certainly has a politico-religious value which is impressed in and in some way determines the composition. On the one hand it celebrates the profession of Franciscan faith (an Order linked to the Sforza family, then lords of Pesaro, by strong bonds of devotion and protection) through the presence, at the sides of the throne and in the left and right-hand pilasters, of saints whose cult was particularly venerated and fostered by the friars in Pesaro and in the territory of the signoria. But, on the other hand, they are particularly significant by virtue of a symbolic meaning attributed to their presence: George, the knightly saint so dear to the noble courts, and Terence, saint of Pesaro represented as an ancient "miles", occupy the compartments at the base of the pilasters, where heraldic insignia were usually placed, and thus represent the civil and military power of the Sforza. Behind Terence, on the left, a Roman memorial tablet with a bust and an inscription extolling the emperor Augustus completes the celebratory reference to the 'potestas' of the ducal family.

The occasion for the execution of the altarpiece is also a matter of uncertainty and controversy. It might have been ordered to celebrate the taking of Gradara, the Riminese fortress conquered by Pesaro in 1463: the many-towered and fortified landscape in the background of the Coronation would in this case refer to the representation of Gradara. Alternatively, we might consider the marriage between the lord of Pesaro and Camilla of Aragon in 1474.

Stylistically, the Pesaro Altarpiece marks the achievement of a new balance. The lesson of Mantegna appears to have been sublimated in the light of that of Piero della Francesca, thus opening the way to yet another issue: where and when, in other words, had Bellini been able to contemplate and become so well acquainted with the art of Piero della Francesca. Probably the Pesaro Altarpiece itself constituted for him the occasion of a journey from Venice to the Marches, which was among other things his mother's birthplace, and therefore the possibility of a direct appreciation of the works of Piero della Francesca.

The typically Venetian architecture of the altarpiece recalls that of some contemporary funerary monuments, primarily that of the Doge Pasquale Malipiero, erected by Pietro Lombardo in the church of St John and St Paul. However, the typology of a frame that is integral with the painting, in the interests of an inseparable perspective and spatial continuity, is fundamentally new (even if it drew on various precedents, such as Mantegna's San Zeno Polyptych). The idea of the throne's open back-piece, a veritable painting within a painting, serves precisely to resume and further articulate this new structural and compositional definition. In the great altarpiece that followed, that of San Giobbe (c. 1487) and in the altarpieces to come this intuition would develop and mature until it reached a total, and also

optical, indivisibility of the painting from its frame, which constitutes the only real access to it, the starting point of the vision itself.” (Web Gallery of Art)



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *St Francis in Ecstasy*, 1480-85, 120 x 137 cm, Frick Collection, New York

- St. Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226), founder of the Franciscan order, is believed to have received the stigmata — the wounds of Christ's Crucifixion — in 1224 during a retreat on Mount Alverna in the Apennines. This may be the event portrayed but it has also been suggested that the quivering tree in the upper left parallels the burning bush Moses's saw on Mount Horeb when he communed with God. Moses was seen by the Franciscans as their spiritual ancestor.
- There are many symbols in the painting that would have been understood at the time such as the water trickling from the spout on the left reflects the miraculous fountain Moses brought forth from the rocks on Mount Horeb. The empty sandals behind the barefoot saint recall God's command to Moses to "put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."
- Bellini has combined nature with town and imbued it all with a radiant glow that gives the painting a magical feeling of a special event taking place in the midst of the ordinary.

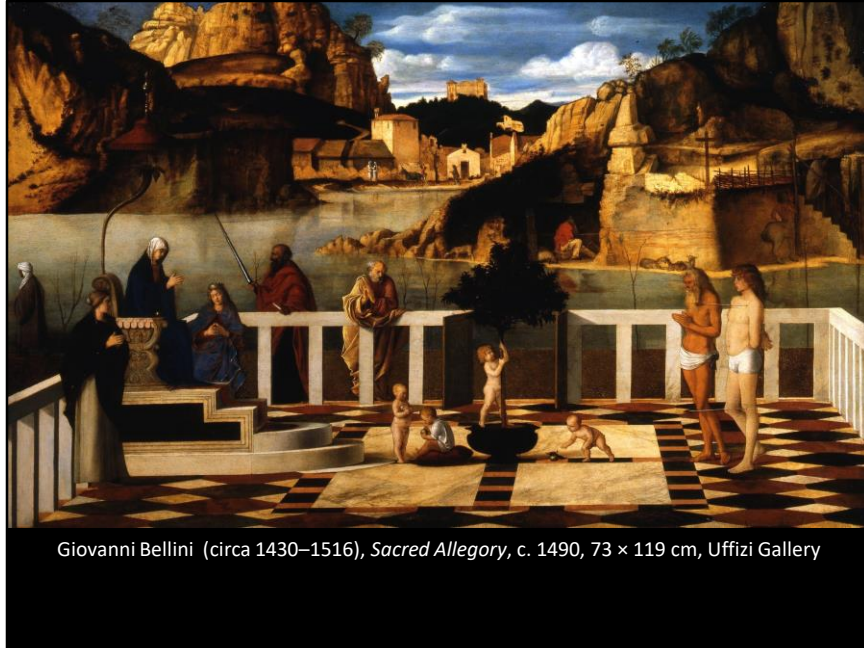
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<https://collections.frick.org/objects/39/st-francis-in-the-desert>



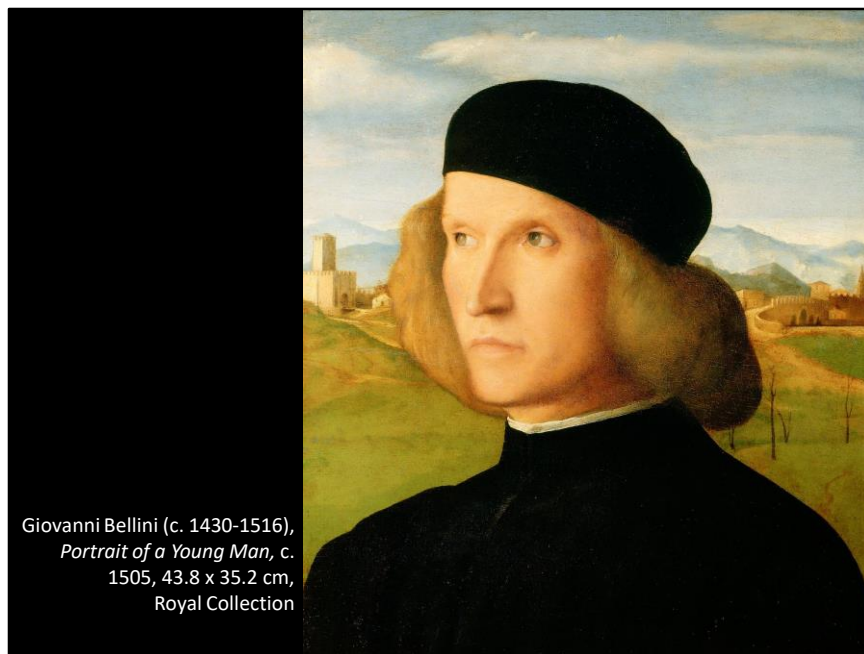
Giovanni Bellini (circa 1430–1516), *Sacred Allegory*, c. 1490, 73 × 119 cm, Uffizi Gallery

Giovanni Bellini (circa 1430–1516), *Sacred Allegory*, c. 1490, 73 × 119 cm, Uffizi Gallery

- The painting was originally attributed to Giorgione and today some believe it was by Marco Basaiti.
- There is a wide terrace overlooking a lake. On the left is Mary enthroned under a baldachin with four steps. On the side is the myth of Marsyas interpreted as a symbol of Christ's passion. There are two female figures near Mary who could be saints or virtues. One appears to be floating but this might be because the colour of her legs and feet has been lost. In the middle of the scene are four children playing with a small tree and its silver fruits, perhaps a symbol of the knowledge tree, a symbol of life and wisdom. On the right are Job and St. Sebastian. Outside the parapet, are St. Joseph (or St. Peter) and St. Paul, the latter with his attribute of a sword. He is advancing to the left, where a man with a turban perhaps symbolizes an infidel. In the background, beyond a large lake, is a landscape with rocky spurs with men and animals. On the shores are a shepherd in a grotto, and a centaur.
- The exact meaning is not known but several interpretations have been put forward. According to one interpretation the painting represents the ideal path of

the purification of the soul as described in a 14<sup>th</sup> century French poem *Le Pèlerinage de l'Âme* (English: *The Pilgrimage of the Soul*). The hermit shepherd in the cave opposite would be St. Anthony, descending from his hermitage on the spiritual path inspired to the first hermit, St. Paul, and overcoming several obstacles including the centaur which waits for him at the end of the staircase. The terrace would represent the Paradise Garden, where the souls in Purgatory, symbolized by the children, wait before they are admitted to heaven. Mary, advocate of the men before God, judges the souls with the help of the crowned Justice. The two saints standing on the left would be the patrons, perhaps connected to the works' commissioners, while the two behind the parapet would be Peter and Paul, who guard the gate of Paradise. The river in the background would be Lethe, which surrounds Paradise. The animals would represent the hermits' virtue: the mule for the patience, and the sheep for humility.

- According to other scholars, the painting would represent a common holy conversation or a vision of the Paradise. Some see Jesus in the children on the cushion, giving to the work the meaning of a meditation about incarnation and redemption.

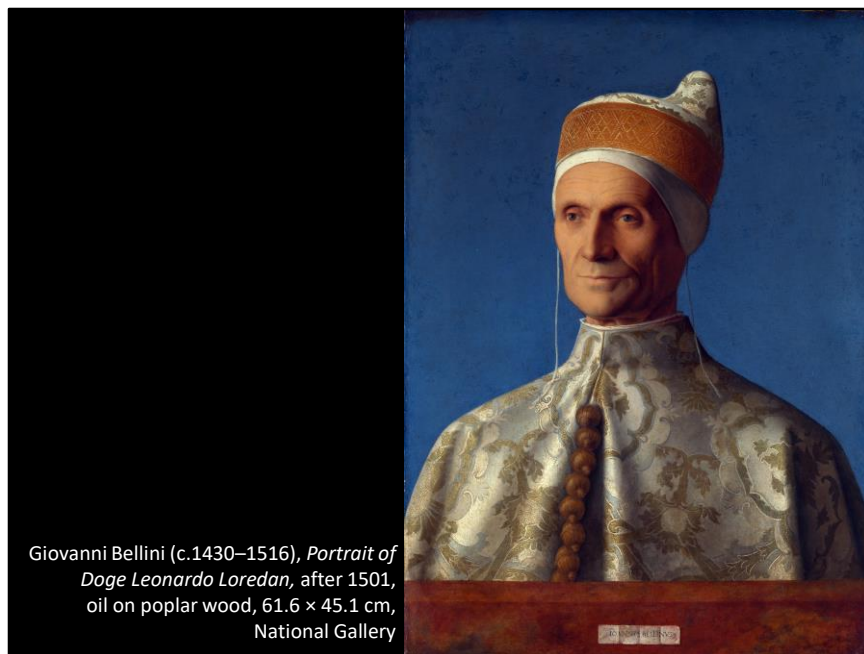


Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Portrait of a Young Man*, c. 1505, oil on panel, 43.8 x 35.2 cm, Royal Collection

- The subject wears the black biretta and robe of a Venetian cittadino, the social group below the patrician class. It has been suggested that he may be the Venetian writer and humanist Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). Bembo was born in Venice but lived at the courts of Urbino, Ferrara and Rome, where he became Papal Secretary in 1513 and Cardinal in 1538. The date of this picture (c.1505) means that Pietro Bembo would here be aged about 35, which is plausible.
- This is Bellini's last surviving portrait and the only one with a landscape background. Bellini followed the example of Netherlandish portraits which increasingly persuaded him to abandon egg tempera in favour of oils.
- After 1500 Bellini gradually developed a broader, simplified style, losing the need to specify details. Here sitter and landscape are painted as a unity, both lit by a soft golden light, outlines blurred. Infra-red reflectography reveals very little underdrawing, which is typical of Bellini's late technique. The modelling of the man's face is extremely subtle and in places insubstantial so that the shadow where his lips press together is created by one underdrawn line.

## References

<https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405761/portrait-of-a-young-man>



Giovanni Bellini (c.1430–1516), *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan*, after 1501, oil on poplar wood, 61.4 × 44.5 cm, National Gallery

- “Leonardo Loredan was the Doge of Venice from 1501-21. He is shown here wearing his robes of state for this formal portrait. The hat and ornate buttons are part of the official wardrobe. The sitter can be identified as Doge Loredan by comparing his features with portrait medals of him. The shape of the hat comes from the hood of a doublet. It is called a 'corno' and was worn over a linen cap.
- Venice had a tradition of painting formal portraits of its rulers dressed in state robes. This work is painted in the style of the sculpted portrait busts popular at the time. These were often inspired by Roman sculpture. Bellini signed his name in its Latin form on the cartellino, or 'small paper', on the parapet. He was famous for his portraiture and helped make this art form especially popular in Venice.” (National Gallery website)
- Bellini signed his name in its Latin form, IOANNES BELLINVS on the *cartellino*, or "small paper", on the parapet. He was famous for his portraiture and helped make this art form especially popular in Venice.
- The painting was originally in **Venice** but **looted by Napoleon**, then **bought by Thomas Beckford** for 13 guineas in 1807 and **sold to the National Gallery** in 1844

for £630.



Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430-1516), *Madonna of the Meadow*, c. 1500, 67.3 x 86.4 cm, National Gallery  
Acquired 1858

- “‘The Madonna of the Meadow’ shows Jesus sleeping in the Virgin’s lap. It is a natural pose yet anticipates the Pietà, in which his dead body is laid across his mother’s lap. The landscape shows the farmland and fortified hills of the mainland provinces of Venice. To the left of the Virgin a wading bird, possibly a crane, attacks a snake. This may be intended to symbolise the struggle of good and evil. The **vulture in the tree may be symbolic of death**. The painting has been transferred from panel to canvas and is damaged in places.” (National Gallery website)
- A divine light fills the painting and an emphasis is placed on the natural landscape. This emphasis reflected the teachings of the Franciscans who taught that all of nature is sacred. The mother and child are separate from the landscape rather than being part of it.

### References

- <https://www.sapienzatravel.com/travel-articles/post/the-art-of-looking-giovanni-bellini-s-madonna-of-the-meadow/>





**Art History Revealed – Wednesday 26 September, half-term 31 October – 5 December, Wednesday 9 January – 13 March (no half-term)**

#### **Exhibitions in Start Date Order**

1. Impressionism in London, Tate Britain, 2 November 2017 – 7 May 2018
2. Modigliani, Tate Modern, 23 November 2017 – 2 April 2018
3. Charles I: King and Collector, Royal Academy, 27 January – 15 April 2018
4. All Too Human Bacon, Freud and a century of painting life, Tate Britain, 28 February – 27 August 2018
5. Victorian Giants: The Birth of Art Photography, National Portrait Gallery, 1 March – 20 May 2018
6. Picasso 1932 - Love, Fame, Tragedy, Tate Modern, March 8 to September 9, 2018
7. Monet & Architecture, National Gallery, 9 April – 29 July 2018
8. Rodin and the Art of Ancient Greece, British Museum, 26 April – 29 July 2018
9. Aftermath Art in the Wake of World War One, Tate Britain, 5 June – 16 September 2018
10. The Great Spectacle: 250 Years of the Summer Exhibition, Royal Academy, 12 June 2018 – 19 August 2018
11. Mantegna and Bellini, National Gallery 1 October 2018 – 27 January 2019

**12. Burne-Jones, Tate Britain, 24 October 2018 – 24 February 2019**

13. Klimt/Schiele, Drawings from the Albertina Museum, Vienna, Royal Academy, 4 November 2018 – 3 February 2019
14. Lorenzo Lotto Portraits, 5 November 2018 – 10 February 2019
15. Gainsborough's Family Album, National Portrait Gallery, 22 November 2018 - 3 February 2019
16. Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Tate Britain, March 2019. Van Gogh and Britain will be the first exhibition to take a new look at the artist through his relationship with Britain. It will explore how Van Gogh was inspired by British art, literature and culture throughout his career and how he in turn inspired British artists, from Walter Sickert to Francis Bacon.

**Ideas**

- Gothic Revival, based on an Andrew Graham Dixon TV programme but without the references to the literature of the period
- The Invention of Antiquity – refers to ideas in Mary Beard and John Henderson, *Classical Art from Greece to Rome*, Oxford History of Art Series, 2001, Nigel Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture: Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings*, 1997 and John Boardman, *Greek Art*, Thames & Hudson, 1996
- The Painting War: Michelangelo versus Leonardo – described in the novel *Oil and Marble*, released on 5 July, 2018, and *The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance*
- The Turner Prize

**London Galleries**

Wallace  
British Museum  
Hayward  
National Gallery  
National Portrait Gallery  
White Cube  
Serpentine  
Tate Britain  
Tate Modern  
Royal Academy  
Estorics