

Renaissance [Fr.: 'rebirth']

David Young Kim

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Term generally used to designate a historical period of cultural revival. In art historical scholarship, the Renaissance refers to the pivotal era of artistic production in creative imitation of classical models and values which began in the late 14th century in Italy and spread over the course of the 16th century throughout Europe and beyond. Historiographically, the concept of the Renaissance has defined itself against the Middle Ages (see Carolingian art, §I) with its negative connotations of ignorance, economic decline, and, in the arts, lack of naturalism and depth. Even so, Romanesque, Gothic, and Byzantine (see Early Christian and Byzantine art) formats, iconography, and styles established in previous centuries continued to provide prototypes for Renaissance artists such that art making in this period can be seen as an act of exchange and interaction with the medieval past. While drawing upon medieval strategies and attitudes towards images and image-making, Renaissance artists placed emphasis on certain modes of composition, aesthetic effect, and self-conception. In addition to the renewed interest in antiquity, these included the formulation of perspective, naturalistic depiction of the human figure and landscape, emphasis on proportional architectural forms, and the growing self-consciousness of artists as prominent creative individuals and intellectuals. More than a hermetically sealed epoch with clearly defined geographic and temporal boundaries, the Renaissance and its art continues to raise questions about the possibilities of representation, art making, and selfhood which confront artists and scholars in the present day: how do images forge a relation with the physical remains of the past, and, by extension, ideas about heritage, political legitimacy, and the state? How do reproducible media impact notions of authorship and originality? What role do works of art and representational strategies play in the individual and collective understanding of the world, in both temporal and spiritual dimensions?

1. The myth of the individual.

The notion that the Renaissance is a distinct historical period is largely indebted to the work of the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt. In *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860) (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1878)), Burckhardt conceived of the Renaissance not simply as a chronology of tumultuous historical events or assembly of facts but rather as a multifaceted cultural force. Among the most powerful of his ideas was the 'Development of the Individual': the conviction that the Renaissance man possessing *virtù* (the quality of virtue and personal agency) could achieve excellence in all spheres of human endeavour regardless of birth, class, or race. Other rubrics in the book, such as 'The State as a Work of Art' and 'The Discovery of the World and of Man', attribute the rise of political institutions and the intellectual occupations of science and

exploration to the exertion of this individual agency. Although Burckhardt did not treat works of art specifically in *Civilization*, his other writings largely conceived painting, sculpture, and architecture as assertions of individualism and independence. In his popular guidebook, *Der Cicerone* (1855), Burckhardt described 16th-century painting as attaining the highest level, 'with a conscious knowledge of its own strength, and free from dependence on any existing types'. His *Geschichte der neueren Baukunst* (1878) (*Architecture of the Italian Renaissance*) linked the dawn of a higher culture in Italy to 'a sense of individuality among patrons and artists' along with a 'strong and modern sense of fame'. Even in his notes on art organized according to genres, Burckhardt associated the development in types of painting to the rise of individualism; the growing presence of portraits of famous men, for instance, marked artistic innovation in allegorical cycles and historical narrative. Burckhardt established a seminal premise for all subsequent studies of the Renaissance, namely the comprehension of art works as reflecting and impacting culturally, geographically, and historically specific values and assumptions.

Subsequent art historical research, particularly approaches interested in questions of gender, social class, and global and environmental art history, have questioned the heroic and Eurocentric individualism implicit in Burckhardt's account of the Renaissance. As opposed to conceiving of the Renaissance as a secular phenomenon, more recent literature has stressed the significance of the Church and devotional practice for the function of images. Patronage studies have revealed the complex interactions between those who commission works of art and their artist clients. The investigation of the role of women in the depiction and production of art has compelled scholars to interrogate how Renaissance art understands the relations between male, female, other genders, and queer sexualities. Transcultural approaches have reframed the Renaissance to recognize the impact of the New World as well as Europe's ties with the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean, the sub-Saharan African coast, and Asia. Approaches concerned with media, materiality, and digital humanities have raised questions about the relationship not only between the three major arts of sculpture, painting, and architecture, but also the role of the book, so-called 'minor' arts, and the reproducible image.

2. Artistic selfhood.

The competition in 1401 for relief panel for the doors of the Baptistery in Florence is the episode often evoked to exemplify this growing sense of artistic consciousness. The two surviving panels submitted by Lorenzo Ghiberti and Filippo Brunelleschi demonstrate distinct narrative and stylistic approaches to the prescribed subject, *Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac* (1401; Florence, Bargello). Whereas Brunelleschi placed emphasis on the moment of high suspense just before Abraham slays his only son, Ghiberti drew attention to Isaac's bare torso to underscore the poignancy of sacrifice. Ghiberti's account of the competition and boastful declaration of victory in his *I Commentarii* (c. 1447) is one of the earliest first-person accounts written by an artist.



Giotto di Bondone: Baroncelli Polyptyc, tempera on panel, 1.85 × 3.23 m, c.1334 (Florence, Baroncelli Chapel of the Basilica of Santa Croce); photo credit: Alinari / Art Resource, NY

More concise though no less significant are artists' signatures. Along with the earlier convention of crediting the creation of the art work to the patron ('me fecit'), increasingly in the 15th and 16th centuries signatures mark authorship, artistic ambition, and interaction with the pictorial narrative. Giotto placed his signature in bold majuscule Gothic script (OPUS MAGISTRI IOCTI) on the *Baroncelli altarpiece* (c. 1330; Florence, Santa Croce) and his other paintings for export declare his place of origin (OPUS MAGISTRI IOCTI DE FLORENTIA). Jan van Eyck's signature ('Jan van Eyck fuit hic') on the portrait of *Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami* (1434; London, N.G.) announces the artist's physical presence as seen in the mirror's reflection (see Eyck, van, (2)). Michelangelo's famous signature in the imperfect tense (FACIEBA[T]) on the Virgin's sash in his *Pietà* (1497–1500; Rome, St Peter's) signals the artist's ardent desire for the sculpture to reach an impossible state of perfection. In Venice the tradition of placing a *cartellino*, a fictive piece of paper with the artist's signature, towards the bottom of compositions was an exercise in both illusionism and authorial declaration. Lorenzo Lotto was one of the many Venetian artists who strategically positioned his signature to indicate authorship and devotion to saints or religious scenes.



Parmagianino (Francesco Mazzola): Self-Portrait of Parmigianino in a convex mirror, oil on wood, diameter 244 m, 1523 (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum); photo credit Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Artists' self-portraits governed by professional, civic, and courtly expectations represent an even more explicit assertion of selfhood. Filarete on the back of his bronze doors of St Peter's (c. 1433–5; Rome, St Peter's) depicts himself alongside his workshop assistants in a buoyant courtly dance. In emulation of ancient Roman coins, a bronze medallion shows the artist and humanist Leon Battista Alberti (see fig.) in profile wearing dignified, classicizing garb (c. 1435; Washington, DC, N.G.A.). Artists also inserted portraits of themselves as part of the chorus populating fresco cycles: Benozzo Gozzoli, Domenico Ghirlandaio (see Ghirlandaio, (1)), and Raphael among others beckon out to the viewer, declaring their position as onlooker and creator. Perhaps the most virtuosic of these self-representations is Parmigianino's portrait of his face and right hand reflected and foreshortened in a convex mirror surface (1524; Vienna, Kthist. Mus.; see fig.). In drawings, prints, and painting, Albrecht Dürer (see Dürer, (1)) repeatedly portrayed himself over the course of his career in any number of guises including as Christ-like creator, patient, or groom. Such was the fame of certain artists, chief among them Michelangelo, that their likenesses were reproduced, circulated, and at

times distorted in the medium of print. Expressions of vaunted artistic selfhood might also assume architectural form. In the design and decoration of their houses (see Artist's house, §1), Andrea Mantegna, Frans Floris I (see Floris, (2)), Giulio Romano, and Giorgio Vasari (see Vasari, (1)) affirmed their standing in a city's society and topographic landscape.

3. Materials, media, and scale.



Francesco Xanto Avelli da Rovigo: Plate (piatto): The story of Aeneas, maiolica (tin-glazed earthenware), 295 mm, 1532 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975, Accession No. 1975.1.1131); courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Although often seeking to distinguish themselves from manual professions, early Renaissance artists could nonetheless be members of guilds, whose numbers might include carpenters and sign painters. The most renowned artists designed and executed works often misleadingly grouped under the heading 'the minor

arts'. Brunelleschi, the architect of the Florentine Duomo, began his training as a goldsmith. Raphael and his school carried out designs for incense burners and perfume containers. Even Michelangelo, the artist most associated with the monumental and colossal, conceived of small-scale objects as his drawings for reliquaries attest. In addition to the supposedly chief media of painting, sculpture, and architecture, other art works such as ceramics, armour, textiles, goldwork, and jewellery shaped Renaissance domestic, civic, and ecclesiastical environments and, consequently, the self-presentation of their inhabitants. Even those artists realizing objects which what might now be considered 'craft' won aristocratic patrons and achieved degrees of prominence. The ceramic artist Francesco Xanto Avelli (see fig.), for instance, produced and signed maiolica ware with esoteric Classical imagery and explanatory captions. Among the most sumptuous and inventive works for palatial and ecclesiastical spaces were tapestries. Raphael's cartoons for the tapestries for the Sistine Chapel, commissioned by Pope Leo X (see Medici, de', (7)), applied the monumental human figure and grand biblical narrative to the textile medium. Metal and metalwork constituted an especially prized material and medium. Such small-scale bronzes as those by Andrea Riccio, Antico, and Severo da Ravenna enabled collectors to grasp fanciful mythological creatures with their hands. Incised and gilded suits of armour, a speciality of workshops in northern Italy and regions north of the Alps, covered the wearer's body with grotesques and other antique ornament. Medals displaying portraits in profile along with personal mottoes communicated likenesses of rulers along with their political and cultural ambitions. Perhaps the most significant media developed in the Renaissance was the print (see Prints). Concurrent with the rise of the printing press and book, reproductive images deploying the technology of woodblocks and metal plates diffused the inventions of artists on an unprecedented scale. Not only Europe but also parts of the Americas and Asia counted among the eventual destinations of prints, treatises, and pattern books, consumed and interpreted by local audiences. Dürer, Marcantonio Raimondi, and Hans Burgkmair I (see Burgkmair, (2)) explored the possibilities of printed lines, hatching, and other marks to produce painterly effects of texture and expression afforded by the compression of ink on the paper medium. Although many prints remained monochrome and autonomous, others were coloured and pasted onto objects and even walls, thus bringing print in dialogue with painting, architecture, and sculpture.

4. Devotion.

However strong the historiographic emphasis on artists' secular presentation of self may be, the vast majority of Renaissance art works served the purpose of Christian devotion. Commissions followed the established typologies of the icon, small-scale devotional image, ex-voto, altarpiece, and cycles featuring episodes from the Old and New Testaments and other sacred narratives. For instance, notwithstanding the illusionistic rendering of Christ's feet on the painting's edge, Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna greca* (c. 1470; Milan, Brera) draws upon the Byzantine pictorial conventions of gold background, inscription, and tightly framed and sombre expressions of the Virgin and Child (see Bellini, (3)). Even so, Renaissance images for private devotion, including both full and half-length representations of Mary, introduce portraits and landscape elements which make strong naturalistic claims. Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Chancellor Rolin* (c. 1430; Paris, Louvre) combines the representation of the seated Virgin and blessing Christ Child with a meticulously rendered portrait of the donor Nicolas Rolin, chancellor to the Dukes of Burgundy. Renaissance altarpieces follow precedent in depicting the Virgin and Child surrounded by an assembly of saints. Fourteenth-century artists such as Giotto or Paolo Veneziano largely adhered to the polyptych format where saints and cult

statues were placed in multiple separate niches. Over the course of the 15th and 16th centuries, however, these pictorial conventions underwent modification. Later painters, such as Domenico Veneziano, integrated protagonists who communicate with one another through glance and gesture in a unified architectural background (see *Sacra conversazione*). Whereas sustained narrative action was once exclusively restricted to predellas beneath the altarpiece, Renaissance altarpieces incorporate storytelling elements in the main pictorial field. Titian's altarpieces, such as that of *Death of St Peter Martyr* (1526–30; destr. 1867, known from copies and prints) imagine their chief protagonists during a specific moment in a hagiographic narrative. This stress on narrative, along with the attendant visual characteristics of bodily motion, emotional expression, and meaningful background, also appears in large-scale pictorial cycles, either in fresco or on canvas. In addition to choreographing figures, artists inserted elements from quotidian life or contemporary settings. In his frescoes for the Brancacci Chapel, Masaccio depicts episodes from the *Life of St Peter* (c. 1424–7; Florence, S Maria del Carmine) against a Florentine urban backdrop. Domenico Ghirlandaio staged the *Birth of St John the Baptist* (1485–90; Florence, S Maria Novella, Cappella Maggiore) in the bedroom of an aristocratic Florentine palazzo. Vittore Carpaccio's narrative cycles for confraternities portray the deeds of saints in urban, domestic, and maritime settings particular to Venice (see Carpaccio, (1)). Key events from the Bible and apocryphal hagiography occur and co-exist with costumes and places from the current day, thus expanding the temporal dimensions of these narratives and underscoring address and relevance for contemporary viewers.

5. Patronage

Renaissance works of art act in a dynamic social network whose other participants include artists, patrons, and communities of viewers. Patrons—those individuals or groups who commission works of art—and artists—those who fulfil these requests according to normative or contractual terms—are partners in the production and reception of art (see Italy, §XIII, 3). A broad range of actors constitute the art historical category of Renaissance patron. In urban centres, associations such as guilds and confraternities might order works of art to demonstrate their prominence in a city's economic life or devotion to a patron saint. The ruling body of a city-state or *comune* might commission murals, banners, and paintings to legitimize governance and the execution of justice. Fresco cycles and *vita* panels for religious orders portray the lives and miraculous deeds of their founders, and by so doing, insert the history of their chapters within the larger history and activity of the Church. Individuals might commission art works as part of a larger ensemble of gifts and donations—sung masses, candlesticks, or the endowment of a chapel—to ensure the salvation of the soul. Renaissance artists also increasingly made works of art with no specific patron in mind, selling them instead on the open market (see Art market, §1). Works of art might also be resold at fairs or at auction.

Renaissance courts—the political entity comprising the person of the prince, duke, or lord along with his family and retinue—have offered fruitful case studies to examine the intersection between patronage, rulership, and politics. It is difficult to speak of a uniform 'courtly style' to characterize courts as different from one another as Mantua (see Mantua, §2), Ferrara (see Ferrara, §2), Urbino (Urbino, §2), or Milan (see Milan, §II, 2). Even so, the representation of the prince underscoring his legitimacy, piety, and dynastic aspirations is an overarching pattern in the artistic production for which artists were engaged. In terms of architectural setting, the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino (begun c. 1454; see Urbino, §4) is an archetype that

demonstrates how the ruler might proclaim his patronage and imbed his presence in the built environment of the Renaissance court. Commissioned by Federigo da Montefeltro (see Montefeltro, (1)) and designed by Francesco Laurana, the Palazzo Ducale combines features from fortification architecture, such as turrets, with loggias and staircases exhibiting classicizing ornament. The light-filled courtyard (c. 1466), with its harmonious arcade and *all'antica* inscription, has often been taken to represent the ideals of proportion and classical learning that Federigo wished to convey. Other representations picture the prince in the act of presiding while surrounded by his household. In the Camera Picta (1465–74; Mantua, Pal. Ducale) executed by the court artist Andrea Mantegna, a curtain is drawn to reveal Ludovico Gonzaga (see Gonzaga, (7)) conducting business in the company of his consort Barbara of Brandenburg, family members, courtiers, and even a dwarf. Other representations of the prince inflect his activities in a cosmic dimension by aligning them with the movement of the heavens. In the Francesco del Cossa's frescoes for the Palazzo Schifanoia (before 1470; see Ferrara, §4(ii)), Duke Borso d'Este (see Este, (4)) undertakes the aristocratic pursuits of hunting and riding beneath the signs of the zodiac that sanction and influence the activities of the prince. Other depictions of the court ruler demonstrate his piety and declare his dynastic succession. The artist of the Pala Sforzesca (1496; Milan, Brera) depicts Ludovico Sforza (see Sforza, (5)), his consort, and sons, legitimate and illegitimate, kneeling in prayer beneath an enthroned Virgin and Child. Still other images fashion the prince as aristocrat, warrior, and learned scholar. A portrait of *Federigo da Montefeltro and his Son Guidobaldo* (c. 1476; Urbino, Pal. Ducale) by Justus of Ghent portrays the famed *condottiere* in a sumptuous suit of armour over which he wears a robe signifying his membership in the prestigious Order of the Garter. Federigo also holds a book, an allusion to his vast manuscript collection. The decoration of Federigo's studiolo also stressed his self-fashioning as both soldier and man of letters. This enclosed intimate space designed for the contemplation of books and small-scale objects was decorated with delightful illusionistic intarsia work featuring military paraphernalia, books, and perspectival schemes.

Court artists were visual impresarios responsible for producing a wide range of work, from the most ephemeral decoration used in festivities and ceremonial to durable marble busts of their patrons. In executing these varied artistic projects for their patrons, court artists played a key role in shaping rulers' political image for both domestic and foreign audiences.

6. Antiquity.

Ever since Petrarch expressed the desire to heal and restore the ruined Roman landscape, artists, along with humanists, antiquarians, and their patrons, sought to study, preserve, and reconstruct the material remains of the Eternal City. *Landscape with Roman Ruins* (1536; Vienna, Pal. Liechtenstein) by Herman Posthumus (1512/14–88) illustrates the vast number of reliefs, sculptural fragments, and architectural ruins imagined to confront Renaissance artists. Correspondingly, artists and antiquarians sought to document, collect, and meditate on the physical remains from the Classical past. The form and content of lapidary inscriptions, however damaged and partially preserved, were gathered in drawing notebooks and orthographic manuals. Sculpture gardens created virtual *all'antica* environments where learned individuals would stage Classical plays and contemplate the passing of time. Other artistic projects involved portraying Rome as an urban centre at the height of the Empire. Leon Battista Alberti devised cartographic techniques to survey and represent the city's principle topographic features. Raphael, on behalf of Pope Leo X, executed a drawing of

ancient Rome, or 'as much as can be seen of it today'. Later mapmakers constructed increasingly detailed and expansive cartographic images of Rome which documented the presence of ruins while highlighting recent architectural endeavours, foremost among them the building of St Peter's. Such images subsumed the material vestiges of the classical past within a triumphal Christian present and future.

The archaeological reconstruction of the Classical past not only entailed the labour of penetrating through layers of earth and history; the categorization and eventual deployment of correct Classical forms involved separating what was considered to be authentically Antique from the maligned Gothic, with which it often co-existed. Brunelleschi, for example, was praised for delineating the differences between the Ionic, Doric, Corinthian, and Tuscan orders. His architectural projects in Florence, such as the Pazzi Chapel (also attributed to Michelozzo di Bartolomeo) or S Lorenzo, reduce Classical architectural forms, ornament, and overall structures to their most essential and pristine features. While Brunelleschi's work displays a marked concern with the re-creation of austere modular and classicizing colonnades, vaults, or façades, the antiquarian engagement of other artists revelled in multifarious *all'antica* forms. In his paintings, drawings, and prints, Mantegna, an avid student of the Antique, drew from gems, cameos, inscriptions, and pieces of sculpture. Indeed, what spurred much Renaissance invention and creativity around the Antique was the partial and ruined state of buildings, sculptures, and other physical remains.



Apollonios of Athens, The Belvedere Torso, marble, h. 1.59 m, 1st century BC (Vatican State, Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican Museums); photo credit: SCALA/Art Resource, NY

The Christian culture of venerating relics along with the philological interest in studying damaged or barely legible inscriptions laid the foundations for the antiquarian passion for correlating parts to the whole. The ruin and fragment by its very incomplete nature encouraged Renaissance artists to develop novel ways of both imitating and emulating antique forms. Artists might create variations on the model of the heroic nude figure provided by famous classical fragments such as the Belvedere Torso (see fig.). From the flotsam of ruins, architects combined elements of architectural ornament into a variety of combinations and permutations. The fanciful amalgamation of animal, vegetal, and figural motifs in *grotteschi* from the Domus Aurea in Rome lent Classical sanction and licence for artists to conceive unorthodox and novel mixtures which, nonetheless, drew upon an *all'antica* vocabulary. In doing so, artists engaged in a competition between the ancients and moderns, with some commentators declaring that artists of their time, while revering the past, surpassed it as well.

Antique works of art also provided models for representing and evoking emotions and mood through the manipulation of bodily posture, gesture, and facial expressions. With depictions of contorted and dancing putti, artists such as Donatello incorporated fanciful, oneiric, and humorous figural elements in their compositions. Sandro Botticelli combined Classical images of full-length female nudes with features such as blonde hair and dark eyes to create sensuous images of women and goddesses. The chance discovery of the Laocöon, a sculptural group known through descriptions in Pliny the elder's *Natural History*, furnished an exemplar for rendering a heroic male nude writhing in agony and a face on the verge of screaming in anguish. Yet if Renaissance artists were interested in deploying the Antique to study and convey liveliness, another challenge posed by Classical texts and images was the representation of utter lifelessness. In a passage of his treatise *On painting*, Alberti praised a sarcophagus relief showing the dead Meleager whose 'hands, fingers, neck ... all combine together to represent death'. In works depicting the subject-matter of the Pietà or Deposition, artists took on the challenge to depict a convincing representation of a body conveying a sense of physical expiration in all of its constituent parts.



Herman Posthumus: *Landscape with Roman Ruins*, oil on canvas, 0.96 × 1.41 m, 1536 (Vienna, Lichtenstein: The Princely Collections); courtesy Lichtenstein: The Princely Collections

Although Rome as *caput mundi* was the chief seat of antiquity that attracted artistic response, artists interpreted the possibilities offered by antique models according to regional stylistic idioms and locally available versions of the Antique. Northern artists such as Jan Gossart and Fran Floris I forged portrayals of nudes and other antique imagery in concert with the antiquarian passion for the ancient Germanic peoples. In Genoa (see Genoa, §2), due to its geographic and political position as a maritime power, the iconography of Neptune and other mythological sea imagery permeated various types of visual production, from ceramics to

monumental painting. As distinct from a Roman past, Florentine art, especially during the rule of the Medici dukes, stressed its ties to Etruscan antiquity in the implementation of the Tuscan order in architectural projects throughout the city. The white marble triumphal arch of King Alfonso I (*see* Aragon, (2)) is inserted between the grey medieval towers of the medieval Castelnuovo which sits directly upon the Bay of Naples, thus evoking triumphal procession on both land and sea. Venice's approach to antiquity emphasized the Republic's long-standing ties to Byzantium and her colonies in the Aegean sea (*see* Venice, §II). Antiquity also provided a powerful lens for Europeans to represent and categorize the peoples and landscape from the New World. As idols from a pagan culture, Incan and Aztec gods were associated with and depicted like mythological divinities, full-length and in contrapposto. This analogy between the New World and Classical antiquity also provided impetus and justification for missionaries' attempt to convert pagan civilizations and diffuse the Catholic faith.

7. Anthropomorphism and the human body.

The body—the vehicle through which humans experience and act in the world—was of paramount significance for Renaissance artists. In secular and sacred art works, representations of gods, or scenes from a saint's martyrdom, the body elicited the bulk of artists' attention. The human figure also served as a principal metaphor to draw analogies between the visual arts and the wider world, between microcosm and macrocosm. One of the most indelible images attesting to this notion is Leonardo da Vinci's 'Vitruvian man' (c. 1490; Venice, Accad.). Inscribed within a circle and a square, the nude male figure furnishes the proportions and measurements of ideal geometric forms for both pictorial and architectural compositions (*see* Human proportion). An underlying component of the image is the central subject-matter of Christian iconography—that of the suffering Christ on the cross; the subjection of the sensate body to a geometric scheme. Both of these modes—the proportional body and the body expressing senses and emotion—inform the subject-matter of Renaissance art in all media.

This anthropomorphic paradigm forms an especially prominent thread in architectural theory and practice. Renaissance architects responded to the ancient Roman architect Vitruvius' dictum that the individual components of a building ought to be proportionate to the whole, just as the limbs are to the entire body. Readers and translators of Vitruvius extended the body metaphor in their writings and built work. Alberti compared the building's surface to a protective skin and the joining of arches and vaults to the complex binding of bones, flesh, and nerves making up human tissue. In a negative example, Vasari compared disproportionate structures from earlier centuries to a deformed, broken body. In contrast to Gothic cathedrals that soar above the viewer, the architecture of Brunelleschi and Giuliano da Sangallo (*see* Sangallo, da, (1)) is built on a human scale, with the parts, such as column shafts, corresponding to or proportional to the body's size. Ornament as well, be it in the form of volutes evoking the hair of maidens or column shafts alluding to drapery folds, further conveys this anthropomorphic analogy to the beholder, if only intuitively.

Pictorial representations emphasized in varying degrees the myriad aspects of the human body, be it the skeletal framework, limbs, shape of musculature, or skin texture. As recommended by treatises, artists' study of the body began with the skeleton given that it provided the foundation for the figure's mass and contour. Like their counterparts in anatomy theatres, artists engaged in dissections of the human body to understand and represent its inner workings and outer appearance. Leonardo da Vinci's many drawings based upon his

dissections attest to his sustained interest in not only the form, but the mechanics and systems responsible in action and failure, life and death. Leonardo's engagement with the human body, however, was not exclusively anatomical. His portrait of *La Gioconda* (c. 1503–19; Paris, Louvre), better known as the *Mona Lisa*, connects the sitter's figure and physiognomic features with the landscape in the background, and by extension, to the wider world. By blurring the edges and contours via subtle gradations of light and shade (*sfumato*, see under *Chiaroscuro*), Leonardo merged figures with one another and their surroundings. In compelling the viewer to discern forms seemingly cloaked in shadow, Leonardo also lent a temporal dimension to the experience of looking.



Titian (Tiziano Vecellio); *The Flaying of Marsyas*, oil on canvas, c. 1575 (Kromeriz, Archbishops Gallery); Archbishops Gallery, Kromeriz, Czech Republic, photo © Mondadori Electa / Bridgeman Images

Renaissance approaches to the bodily depiction also favored clarity of form and discernible geometric schemes. Raphael, in the *School of Athens* (1509–11; Rome, Vatican, Stanza della Segnatura), placed philosophers and ancient thinkers in figural groups circumscribed within rectangular, circular, and triangular forms. The figures' energetic gesticulations and expressive faces, however, appear far from rigid, conveying instead an atmosphere of debate and sudden intellectual discovery. Michelangelo, above all other artists, explored the colossal monumentality of the human form in sculpture and painting. His *ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling explore the variations inherent in the flexible nude torso. Whereas central Italian artists tended to rely on contour to define the human figure, northern Italian artists made use of colour and the oil medium in their representations of the body (see *Disegno e colore*). Venetian artists in particular examined the lyric potential of figural depiction in paintings of characters absorbed in silent contemplation. Deploying the delicate chromatic transitions possible in the oil medium, Giovanni Bellini in his portraits and many images of the Virgin and Child carefully delineated facial expressions to create works of psychological insight. The paintings of Giorgione and early works by Titian focus on figures taken up in tranquil contemplation. In the *Concert champêtre* (c. 1509; Paris, Louvre), variously attributed to either or both of these artists, the faces of the protagonists are cast in shadow, enhancing the sense of enigmatic intimacy, while the shape of the female nudes follow the undulating curves of the landscape background. In his multiple versions of the female reclining nude, Titian exploited the effects of oil paint on rough canvas ground to emphasize the texture of skin, flesh, and cloth. This accent placed on the haptic would attain horrifying realization in his painting of the *Flaying of Marsyas* (c. 1570–76, Kroměříž Castle). In this depiction of a suffering body, Titian dramatized the interaction between medium and ground to impart the tactile sensation of fur, flayed skin, and exposed tissue.

8. Perspective and narrative.

The backdrops and settings in which these bodies appear and move elicited no less investigation and commentary by Renaissance artists. One-point Perspective—its variations, realization, and theoretical articulation—is intimately bound up with the visual principles of Renaissance art. Artists rendered a convincing illusionistic representation of three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface through the systematic placement of orthogonals converging to a central vanishing point. The perspectival system also extended the viewpoint of the observer, such that the viewer is viscerally involved and drawn into the composition. Alberti, Piero della Francesca, and Dürer among others prescribed the procedures to execute and apply one-point linear perspective to portray spatial recession, bodies, and objects in pictorial compositions. Notwithstanding its theoretical formulation in both printed books and privately circulated manuscripts, perspective did not remain ensconced in the realm of esoteric geometrical speculation. Prominent works of art, such as Masaccio's *Trinity* (c. 1425–7; Florence, S Maria Novella), were in effect public demonstrations of illusionistic spatial recession applied to the demands of devotional subject-matter.

Perspective and its deployment in the domains of surveying and cartography depended upon artists' deft handling of materials, tools, and instruments. Donatello in his stone relief of *St George and the Dragon* (c. 1417; Florence, Bargello) carved, incised, and undercut the marble surface to render the landscape receding into the background. According to his biographer Antonio Manetti, Brunelleschi performed one of the first demonstrations of perspective using a device composed of painted panels and mirrors. The use of the

compass, ruler, and other surveying instruments permitted artists along with mapmakers, scientists, and engineers to represent discovered lands and new territories in an age of widening knowledge of the world beyond Europe. In a view of an ideal city attributed to Fra Carnevale (c. 1480–84; Baltimore, MD, Walters A. Mus.), a triumphal arch organizes and dramatizes the perspectival scheme, suggesting perspective's association with spatial domination and control.

Perspective counted among the chief modes by which artists designed spatial settings for the representation of *Istoria*, the term used by Renaissance writers on art to designate lofty, expressive, and compositionally complex narrative scenes. In his *Last Supper* (begun c. 1495; Milan, S Maria delle Grazie), Leonardo staged the dramatic announcement of Christ's betrayal in an upper room that is an illusionistic and perspectival extension of refectory wall on which the fresco is located. Artists also deployed perspective to place figures in scenes where narrative might be muted or indistinct. The perspective scheme in Domenico Veneziano's *St Lucy Altarpiece* (mid-1440s; Florence, Uffizi) works with the fall of light to create a unified setting for the Virgin, Christ, and saints, some of whom acknowledge one another and the viewer. Linear perspective could also co-exist with other modes of spatial recession to forge multipart narrative scenes. Masaccio in the *Tribute Money* (c. 1427; Florence, S Maria del Carmine) combined both linear and atmospheric perspective to signal different background components of a continuous narrative. At times, artists implemented perspective to imply presence of the viewer itself. On the ceiling of the Camera degli Sposi (1465–74; Mantua, Pal. Ducale), Mantegna painted an illusionistic oculus where courtly figures lean over the balustrade, directly addressing the onlooker below.

9. The artist in the world.

To facilitate the planning and completion of works of art, Renaissance artists equipped their studios with a variety of implements, from preparatory drawings and pattern books to wax models of the human figure. Artists, however, also ventured out into the wider world, exploring aspects of nature and incorporating their observations into their compositions. In addition to delineating the appearance of flora, fauna, and vegetation, these studies also raised questions concerning how an artist might represent germination, decay, and other dynamic processes underlining the natural world. Leonardo's sketches of plants, landscapes, and storms fluently deploy the medium of red chalk and pen and ink to portray his subjects emanating with life and motion. Fra Bartolommeo's landscape drawings (see fig.), quickly rendered with the quivering strokes of the pen, demonstrate a keen interest in conveying the mutable qualities of light as well as the integration of built architecture in rural settings. Dürer's watercolours, some executed while en route to Italy in the dramatic setting of the Swiss Alps, comprise precise botanical studies in addition to landscape scenes in varying atmospheric, meteorological, and temporal conditions. Artists also deployed images of nature as settings for biblical or mythological narrative, thus inflecting landscape with allegorical significance. Joachim Patinir's panoramas of cliffs and towering mountains provide a formidable backdrop for his representations of saints undertaking penitence in the wilderness. At times the allegorical significance of nature is implicit as in the many drawings of ruins in Rome by Maarten van Heemskerck and Giuliano da Sangallo. These sheets portray antique architectural glories buried in the earth and covered with choking vegetation, attesting to the inevitable subjection of monuments to nature's power and the passage of time.

Artists' exploration of the world often occurred in the course of their travels. Along with merchants, bankers, ambassadors, and pilgrims, artists experienced physical movement and confrontation with the foreign as they travelled on the footpaths and waterways of the European continent and beyond. Be it Leonardo travelling from Florence to Milan, Dürer in Venice, or Titian in Rome, mobility featured largely in the career and biographies of many, if not the majority, of Renaissance artists. Obtainment and execution of commissions demanded artists to relinquish their homelands, as was often the case for artists seeking patronage at a princely court. An interconnected ecclesiastical hierarchy, network of religious orders, and aristocracy bound by ties of marriage and blood constituted a patronage system that promoted the mobility of artists in receiving and fulfilling contracts. At times artists' journeys to execute commissions transpired in the context of other types of mobility. The Venetian artist Gentile Bellini (*see* Bellini, (2)), who travelled to Constantinople in 1479 in response to Sultan Mehmed II's request for a portrait painter, was a member of a larger diplomatic contingent dispatched to the Ottoman court (*see* Ottoman, §II, (1)). Another motivation for artists to undertake often costly and perilous journeys was the opportunity to study the works of both ancient and modern masters. Rome emerged as a meeting point for artists from throughout Europe, with some artists commemorating their time in the Eternal City in self-portraits. One important effect of the travels of artists, patrons, and objects was a heightened awareness of regional styles and, more generally, stylistic difference as it pertained to geography. Northern artists' encounter with antique ruins in Italy spurred interest in representing antique culture specific to their places of origin. The contact between central Italian and Venetian artists and writers on art was fundamental to formulating the aesthetic distinction between line and colour.



Vasco Fernandes, *The Adoration of the Magi*, oil on wood, 1.32 × 0.79 m, 1501–6 (Lisbon, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga); photo credit: SCALA / White Images / Art Resource, NY



Fra Bartolommeo: Two Friars on a Hillside, pen and brown ink on laid paper, overall: 287 × 217 mm; support: 411 × 279 mm, c. 1472–1517 (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection, Accession No. 1959.16.3); courtesy of the National Gallery of Art

The mobility of artists and objects between Europe, the Mediterranean basin, the Atlantic African coast, and the New World constituted one of the most striking of these transcultural encounters. The collections of the Ottoman sultans could include prints and paintings of Christian devotional imagery; conversely Anatolian and Mamluk textiles in addition to metalwork and glass produced in the Levant decorated domestic interiors across the European continent. For the Portuguese and wider European market, artists from Sierra Leone and the kingdom of Benin (*see* Benin, §1) produced exquisite salt-cellars made from local supplies of ivory. Mexican artists created devotional objects and liturgical garments made from New World materials such as mother-of-pearl shells and feathers, whose iridescence correlated with the animate nature of divine light (*see* Mexico, §II). European artists also registered this encounter with otherness. Printmakers such as Hans Burgkmair I and Theodor de Bry (*see* Bry, de, (1)) depicted peoples of the New World, whose bodies, however, drew on the poses and proportions of Classical statuary. In a painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* (1501–2,

Viseu, Mus. Grão Vasco) attributed to the Portuguese artist Vasco Fernandes, a Tupi Indian from Brazil assumes the role of one of the wise men from the East. If the Renaissance as the rebirth of Classical antiquity confronted artists with ruins beneath the ground, the Renaissance as the age of discovery also entailed dialogue with cultures across space.

10. Art literature.

The burgeoning genre of art literature provided a forum where artists and writers on art raised such critical topics of discussion as artists' social standing, mythological and devotional subject-matter, the fitting depiction of human form, spatial illusionism, and unity in time and space in pictorial narrative. Treatises not only described, but often prescribed, urging their audiences to follow recommended approaches towards working, portraying, and behaving. Already in craft manuals such as the *Il libro dell'arte* (c. 1390) penned by Cennino Cennini, artists and writers recommended the employment of specific techniques and characterized the disposition and intellectual formation an artist ought to possess. By the late 15th century art literature became increasingly concerned with the person of the artist himself. Lorenzo Ghiberti in his self-referential *I Commentarii* inserted autobiographical episodes within a larger history of eminent artists, both ancient and modern. Alberti's many writings on painting, sculpture, and architecture with their erudite Classical references and discussions of geometry and proportions likened the visual arts to a humanist discipline. Passages in Pliny the elder's *Natural History* devoted to painting or the *Imagines* by members of the Philostratos family established Classical precedents for Renaissance literary discourse on the visual arts. At the same time, the vocabulary and diction marshalled to describe modern works of art underwent change and elaboration. Renaissance writers on art drew from a wide range of other genres and disciplines such as histories, devotional writings, astrology, natural history, and travel narratives to explicate the creation and import of works of art.

The artist, architect, and court impresario Giorgio Vasari was the most influential Renaissance writer on art, with his *Vite* (1550; 1568) widely recognized as the seminal text for the foundation of art history. This tripartite work, approaching the length of the King James Bible and containing over 160 biographies of artists, instituted the standard monographic approach that understands an artist's oeuvre through key life events—birth, training, princely patronage, travel abroad, and death. Also significant was Vasari's definition of historical eras in terms of certain stylistic characteristics. No less influential was Vasari's focus on central Italy, which to the present day still impacts the geographic orientation of the art historical discipline and research. In recounting the style and emotional impact of these artists' works, Vasari developed a novel approach toward speaking about art. Vasari interspersed his narration of artists' biographies with extended ekphraseis (see Ekphrasis), or vivid descriptions of art works, deploying both colloquial and high rhetorical registers. To characterize and prescribe the aesthetic features of works of art, Vasari formulated a vast range of conceptual terms, such as *disegno* (design and the act of drawing), *maniera* (style), and *licenza* (artistic licence). This ekphrastic prose and lexicon of terms were rendered not in learned Latin but in colloquial Tuscan, thus establishing an important precedent for speaking about works of art in a vernacular dialect. Vasari's bias towards central Italian art, with Michelangelo designated as the central protagonist of the *Vite*, provoked later responses and rebuttals by writers on art, such as the Venetian Ludovico Dolce, or the Bolognese Carlo Cesare Malvasia, who promoted artists from their own regions. Vasari's *Vite* also served as model and foil for art literature beyond the Italian peninsula, such as the Dutch Karel van Mander's *Schilder-*

boeck (see Mander, van, (1)) or the writings of Francisco de Holanda (see Holanda, de, (2)) and Francisco Pacheco from the Iberian peninsula. Claims about the regional and cultural specificity of works of art raised in these subsequent writings encouraged reflection and debate about the role of the artist, art making, and the status of images in a shifting and expanding world.

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