The Late Renaissance and Mannerism in Sixteenth-Century Italy

From the moment that Martin Luther posted his challenge to the Roman Catholic Church in Wittenberg in 1517, the political and cultural landscape of Europe began to change. Europe’s ostensible religious unity was fractured as entire regions left the Catholic fold. The great powers of France, Spain, and Germany warred with each other on the Italian peninsula, even as the Turkish expansion into Europe threatened all. The spiritual challenge of the Reformation and the rise of powerful courts affected Italian artists in this period by changing the climate in which they worked and the nature of their patronage. No single style dominated the sixteenth century in Italy, though all the artists working in what is conventionally called the Late Renaissance were profoundly affected by the achievements of the High Renaissance.

The authority of the generation of the High Renaissance would both challenge and nourish later generations of artists. In the works of Leonardo, Raphael, Bramante, and Giorgione, younger artists could observe their elders’ skillful rendering of chiaroscuro, perspective, and sfumato, as well as the elder generation’s veneration of antiquity. The new generations imitated their technical expertise, their compositions, and their themes. At the same time, the artists of the High Renaissance continued to seek new ways to solve visual problems. Indeed, two of the key figures of the older generation lived to transform their styles: Michelangelo was active until 1564, and Titian until 1576.

The notion of the artist as an especially creative figure was passed on to later generations, yet much had changed. International interventions in Italy came to a head in 1527 when Rome itself was invaded and sacked by imperial troops of the Habsburgs; three years later, Charles V was crowned Holy Roman emperor in Bologna. His presence in Italy had important repercussions: In 1530, he overthrew the reestablished Republic of Florence and restored the Medici to power. Cosimo I de’ Medici became duke of Florence in 1537 and grand duke of Tuscany in 1569. Charles also promoted the rule of the Gonzaga of Mantua and awarded a knighthood to Titian. He and his successors became avid patrons of Titian, spreading the influence and prestige of Italian Renaissance style throughout Europe.

The Protestant movement spread quickly through northern Europe, as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and other theologians rejected papal authority and redefined Christian doctrine. Some of the reformers urged their followers to destroy religious images as idolatrous, leading to widespread destruction of images, stained glass, and other religious art. Italy itself, home of the Roman Catholic Church, resisted the new faiths. Nonetheless, through the first half of the sixteenth century, pressures for reform within the Catholic Church grew. The Roman Church had traditionally approved the role of images as tools for teaching and for encouraging piety, and through the efforts of reformers, this was now affirmed as official Church policy. (See www.myartslab.com.) But with its authority threatened by the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church asserted even more control over the content and style of images to assure doctrinal correctness. As it sought to define itself against the Protestant Reformation, religious imagery became increasingly standardized.
Artists responded to all these phenomena. The Sack of Rome in 1527 scattered Roman-based artists throughout Italy and Europe (map 17.1). Commissions came mostly from the princely courts, so artists’ works reflected the taste and concerns of this powerful elite. The connections among the courts helped to spread a new style, usually labeled Mannerist, which lasted through much of the century. The style was typically used for paintings and sculptures, though some works of architecture exhibit Mannerist tendencies.

The term derived from the word maniera, meaning manner or style, which was used approvingly by contemporaries. Building on the achievements of Raphael and Michelangelo, above all, artists of the 1520s and later developed a style that emphasized technical virtuosity, erudite subject matter, beautiful figures, and deliberately complex compositions that would appeal to sophisticated tastes. Mannerism became a style of utmost refinement, which emphasized grace, variety, and virtuoso display instead of clarity and unity. Mannerist artists self-consciously explored new definitions of beauty: Rather than repeat ancient forms, they experimented with proportions, ideal figure types, and unusual compositions. Like the artists of the High Renaissance, they aimed for originality and personal expression, which they considered their due as privileged creators.

Just what Mannerism represented continues to spark debate. Some have argued that it signified a decline, because it rejected the standards of the High Renaissance. (These critics, of course, prefer the “classical” works of the High Renaissance.) But the reasons that artists rejected the stability, assurance, and ideal forms of the High Renaissance are not well understood. Perhaps the new generation was attempting to define itself as different from its elders. Or, Mannerism may be seen as an expression of cultural crisis. Some scholars relate it to the spiritual crises brought on by the Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, while others see Mannerism as the product of an elite class’s identity and taste. Even as scholars debate its origins and meanings, it is clear that Mannerism’s earliest products appear in Florence in the 1520s, which was very different from the Florence of 1505.
LATE RENAISSANCE FLORENCE: 
THE CHURCH, THE COURT, 
AND MANNERISM

Under Medici rule, from 1512 to 1527, Florentine artists absorbed the innovations of the High Renaissance. Pope Leo X sent Michelangelo from Rome to Florence to work on projects for the Medici. The artistic descendants of Raphael came to the city as well. Having contributed so much to the development of the Early and High Renaissance, Florentine artists now developed a new style that seems to reject the serenity and confidence of High Renaissance art. Using the techniques of naturalism, chiaroscuro, and figural composition learned from Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael, this generation of artists made images that are less balanced and more expressive than those of the earlier generation. In works of the 1520s, a group of Florentine artists created images of deep spiritual power in this new style. This spiritual resurgence may be a reaction to the challenges of the Reformation, or it may be due to the legacy of the fiery preacher Savonarola, who had preached repentance in Florence in the 1490s.

Florentine Religious Painting in the 1520s

An early expression of the new style appears in The Descent from the Cross (fig. 17.1) by Rosso Fiorentino (1495–1540), whose style is very idiosyncratic. A religious society of flagellants, Catholics whose penitential rituals included whipping themselves to express penitence, hired Rosso to paint this altarpiece in 1521. The Company of the Cross of the Day in the Tuscan city of Volterra chose the theme of the lowering of the body of Christ from the Cross, the subject of Rogier van der Weyden’s painting of 1438 (see fig. 14.15). To reference the name of the sponsoring group, Rosso has given a great deal of emphasis to the Cross itself. While the composition looks back in part to Early Renaissance art, such as Masaccio’s Trinity fresco (see fig. 15.23), the composition is much less stable than the triangle used by Masaccio. Instead of moving slowly and carefully back into space, the forms all appear on the same plane. The muscular bodies of the agitated figures recall Michelangelo, but the draperies have brittle, sharp-edged planes. The low horizon line sets the figures against a dark sky, creating a disquieting effect. The colors are not primaries but sharply contrasting, and the brilliant light seems to fall on the bodies irrationally. Unlike the orderly calm and deep space of Leonardo’s The Last Supper (see fig. 16.6), Rosso creates an unstable composition within a compressed space staffed by figures that move frantically to lower the body of Christ. Only Christ’s figure appears serene in the midst of this emotionally charged image. The Mannerist rejection of High Renaissance ideals allows Rosso to create in The Descent from the Cross a work that was especially appropriate to the piety of the confraternity members who commissioned it. Rosso himself left central Italy after the Sack of Rome in 1527 by Charles V, ultimately being lured to France to work for Francis I at his palace of Fontainebleau (see map 17.1 and Chapter 18).

Rosso’s friend and contemporary Jacopo da Pontormo (1494–1556) developed his own version of the Mannerist style. The Capponi family hired Pontormo to transform their family chapel in the church of Santa Felicita in Florence (fig. 17.2). The architecture of the chapel, built around 1420, is Brunelleschian in its simplicity, consisting of a dome over a square room, as in the Old Sacristy at San Lorenzo (see fig. 15.6). When Ludovico di Gino Capponi acquired its patronage in 1525, to be used as
may have been inspired by the colors of the Sistine Chapel ceiling (see fig. 16.19). Although they seem to act together, the mourners are lost in a grief too personal to share with one another. In this hushed atmosphere, anguish is transformed into a lyrical expression of exquisite sensitivity. The entire scene is as haunted as Pontormo’s self-portrait just to the right of the swooning Madonna. The body of Christ is held up for a viewer, much as the host is during the Mass, the image conveying to believers a sense of the tragic scale of Christ’s sacrifice, which the Eucharist reenacts. Originally, the dome above the altarpiece depicted God the Father, to whom the body would be offered. Pontormo may have rejected the values of the High Renaissance, but he endows this image with deeply felt emotion.

a funerary chapel, he changed its dedication to the Pietà. He commissioned Pontormo to paint the altarpiece (fig. 17.3) and frescoes on the walls and dome. The altarpiece, completed by 1528, remains in its original location in the chapel.

Pontormo’s painting contrasts sharply with Rosso’s The Descent from the Cross. It lacks a cross or any other indications of a specific narrative, so its subject is unclear, although the chapel’s dedication points to the Pietà. The Virgin swoons as two androgynous figures hold up the body of Christ for a viewer’s contemplation. Unlike Rosso’s elongated forms, Pontormo’s figures display an ideal beauty and sculptural solidity inspired by Michelangelo, yet Pontormo has squeezed them into an implausibly confined space.

In Pontormo’s painting, everything is subordinated to the play of graceful rhythms created by the tightly interlocking forms. The colors are desaturated: pale blues, pinks, oranges, and greens that
The Medici in Florence: From Dynasty to Duchy

In the chaos after the Sack of Rome of 1527, the Medici were again ousted from Florence and the Republic of Florence was reinstated. But the restoration of relations between the pope and the Holy Roman emperor allowed the Medici to return to power by 1530. The Medici pope Clement VII (r. 1523–1534) promoted his family’s interests, and worked to enhance their power as the rulers of Florence. Although he was an ardent republican, Michelangelo was continually employed by this court, executing works intended to glorify the Medici dynasty in Florence.

The New Sacristy of San Lorenzo

Michelangelo’s activities centered on the Medici church of San Lorenzo. A century after Brunelleschi’s design for the sacristy of this church (see fig. 15.6), which held the tombs of an earlier generation of Medici, Pope Leo X decided to build a matching structure, the New Sacristy. It was to house the tombs of Leo X’s father, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Lorenzo’s brother Giuliano, and two younger members of the family, also named Lorenzo and Giuliano. Aided by numerous assistants, Michelangelo worked on the project from 1519 to 1534 and managed to complete the architecture and two of the tombs, those for the later Lorenzo and Giuliano (fig. 17.4); these tombs are nearly mirror images of each other. Michelangelo conceived of the New Sacristy as an architectural-sculptural ensemble.

Michelangelo’s chapel starts from Brunelleschi’s design for a square space covered by a dome, though he inserted another story above the architrave and below the supports for the dome. This gives the chapel greater verticality and brings in more light. The wall scheme also follows Brunelleschi, although the pietra serena pilasters and entablatures are bolder and taller than Brunelleschi’s. Between the pilasters Michelangelo inserted blind windows.

17.4 Michelangelo, New Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence. 1519–34
of verticals and horizontals hold the triangle of statues in place; their slender, sharp-edged forms contrast with the roundness and weight of the sculpture.

The design shows some kinship with such Early Renaissance tombs as Rossellino’s tomb for Leonardo Bruni (see fig. 15.18), but the differences are marked. There is no outright Christian imagery, no inscription, and the effigy has been replaced by two allegorical figures—Day on the right and Night on the left. Some lines penned on one of Michelangelo’s drawings suggest what these figures mean: “Day and Night speak, and say: We with our swift course have brought the Duke Giuliano to death…. It is only just that the Duke takes revenge [for] he has taken the light from us; and with his closed eyes has locked ours shut, which no longer shine on earth.” The reclining figures, themselves derived from ancient river-gods, contrast in mood: Day, whose face was left deliberately unfinished, seems to brood, while Night appears restless. Giuliano, the ideal image of the prince, wears classical military garb and bears no resemblance to the deceased. (“A thousand years from now, nobody will know what he looked like,”

17.5 Michelangelo. Tomb of Giuliano de’ Medici. 1519–34. Marble, height of central figure 5’11” (1.81 m). New Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence

17.6 Michelangelo and Bartolommeo Ammanati. Vestibule of the Laurentian Library, Florence. Begun 1523; stairway designed 1558–59
Michelangelo is said to have remarked.) His beautifully proportioned figure seems ready for action, as he fidgets with his baton. His gaze was to be directed at the never-completed tomb of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Instead of a commemorative monument that looks retrospectively at the accomplishments of the deceased, the tomb of Giuliano and the New Sacristy as a whole were to express the triumph of the Medici family over time.

Michelangelo’s reimagining of Brunelleschi at the New Sacristy inspired Vasari to write that “all artists are under a great and permanent obligation to Michelangelo, seeing that he broke the bonds and chains that had previously confined them to the creation of traditional forms.” However, Michelangelo’s full powers as a creator of architectural forms are only really displayed for the first time in the vestibule to the Laurentian Library, which adjoins San Lorenzo.

**THE LAURENTIAN LIBRARY**  Clement VII commissioned this library (fig. 17.6) in 1523 to house, for the public, the huge collection of books and manuscripts belonging to the Medici family. Such projects display the Medici beneficence to the city and their encouragement of learning. The Laurentian Library is a long narrow hall that is preceded by the imposing vestibule, begun in 1523 but not completed until much later.

Judged by the standards of Bramante or Vitruvius, everything in the vestibule is wrong. The pediment above the door is broken. The pilasters defining the blank niches taper downward, and the columns belong to no recognizable order. The scroll brackets sustain nothing. Most paradoxical of all are the recessed columns. This feature flies in the face of convention. In the classical post-and-lintel system, the columns (or pilasters) and entablature must project from the wall in order to stress their separate identities, as they do in the Roman Temple of Portunus (see fig. 7.2). Michelangelo dared to defy the classical system by inserting columns into the wall. In the confined space of the entryway, the columns give the wall a monumental dignity without intruding into the vestibule. The grand staircase, designed later by Michelangelo and built by Bartolommeo Ammanati, activates the space through its cascading forms.

**THE UFFIZI, PALAZZO PITTI AND BOBOLI GARDENS**  In concentrating their patronage at San Lorenzo, this generation of Medici followed the patterns of the fifteenth century. But the Medici dukes were not content to live in the Palazzo Medici built by Michelozzo. The family of Cosimo I de’ Medici moved into the Palazzo della Signoria in the center of the city in 1540 (see fig. 13.15). Where earlier generations of Medici rulers separated their private residence from the seat of government, the new Medici dukes did what they could to unite them. Consequently, they had the interior of the former town hall remodeled to create a residential space, and they built new areas for both court and government.

To this end, Cosimo I de’ Medici commissioned a new building to house the bureaucracies of his court in 1559. This project was assigned to Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), the painter, historian, and architect. The building of the Uffizi, finished around 1580, consists of two long wings that face each other across a narrow court and are linked at one end by a loggia (fig. 17.7). Situated between the Palazzo della Signoria and the Arno River, it served to restructure both the city space and the widely dispersed Florentine ministries. Numerous windows and architectural moldings enliven the façades. Colonnades interrupted by piers at
regular intervals define the long façade at left; these units define
spaces allotted for different bureaucracies. Although strongly
marked by Michelangelo’s architecture at San Lorenzo, the court-
yard also makes reference to the Roman Forum and thus links
Cosimo to Roman emperors.

In their search for appropriate settings for the court, the
Medici acquired the Palazzo Pitti, across the Arno River from the
Uffizi, which had been built in the fifteenth century. The sculptor
Bartolommeo Ammanati (1511–1592) enlarged the fifteenth-
century palazzo with a courtyard between 1558 and 1570 (fig.
17.8). Like Michelozzo’s Medici palace (see fig. 15.32), this cour-
tyard enframes a space that is both utilitarian and ceremonial; but
where the fifteenth-century palace seems ornate and delicate, this
courtyard has a fortresslike character. The three-story scheme of
superimposed orders, derived from the Roman Colosseum (fig.
7.20), has been overlaid with an extravagant pattern of rustication
that “imprisons” the columns and reduces them to a passive role,
despite the display of muscularity. The creative combination of a
classical vocabulary with the unorthodox treatment of the rusti-
cation creates a raw expression of power. The Palazzo Pitti
functions today as a museum displaying many of the works
collected by the Medici family.

In addition to the new palace, the ducal family purchased
a large area around it that they transformed into a carefully
landscaped park, called the Boboli Gardens (fig. 17.9). Begun around 1549, this continued to grow and change down to the nineteenth century. The architect Nicolo Triboli (1500–1550) laid out the original plan; he imposed a regular geometry on an uneven site, including long walkways lined by foliage, fountains and pools of water, and artificial grottoes. Later in the century, other artists, including Vasari and Ammanati, adjusted and altered the design. The dukes commissioned numerous sculptures for the gardens, too, often of mythological beings or Greek gods. The gardens provided scenic vistas for the residents of the palace, but also a grand stage setting for ducal events.

**PORTRAITURE AND ALLEGORY** The Medici court had refined tastes and a good sense of how to use the visual arts to express their new status. As in the fifteenth century, the new generation of Medici patrons used portraiture as a means to this end. The *Portrait of Eleanora of Toledo and Her Son Giovanni de’ Medici* (fig. 17.10) by Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) exemplifies a new type of court portrait. This is a highly idealized painting of the wife of Cosimo I, who actually had blond hair (here darkened) and whose features have been perfected in the portrait. The portrait presents her as an ideal of beauty, just as her husband was admired for his virile good looks and courage.

![17.10 Agnolo Bronzino, Portrait of Eleanora of Toledo and Her Son Giovanni de’ Medici. ca. 1550. Oil on panel, 45\(\frac{1}{4}\) × 37\(\frac{3}{4}\) (115 × 96 cm). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence](image)

An important message of the work is the continuity of the Medici dynasty, as Eleanora’s arm enframes the male heir, Giovanni (born in 1543), who, however, would not outlive her. (She bore 11 children, including eight sons, before her death from tuberculosis in 1562 at about the age of 43.) This dynastic message is delivered by means of the formality of the portrait, with its frozen poses and aloof glances. Eleanora sits rigidly, with her arm resting on her silent, staring child; she wears a complicated brocaded dress and jewelry that demonstrates her wealth and status. Bronzino depicts the pair almost like a Madonna and Child, subtly comparing Eleanora to the Virgin: This reference may account for the lightening of the blue background around Eleanora’s face that suggests a halo. The image contains a complex set of allusions as flattering as the improvements to her looks. Bronzino’s painting describes the sitter as a member of an exalted social class, not as an individual personality. This kind of formal, distant, and allusive court portrait quickly became the ideal of court portraiture throughout Europe. (See, for example, fig. 18.26.)

Bronsino was Eleanora’s preferred painter and held a court appointment. His passion for drawing and his gift for poetry came together in many of his works. Nowhere is this better seen than in his *Allegory of Venus* (fig. 17.11), which Duke Cosimo presented to Francis I of France. From these different sources,
Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571)

From The Autobiography

The Florentine sculptor wrote his autobiography between 1558 and 1566. Cellini’s book retells the story of his early life, training, and artistic triumphs. It was not published until the eighteenth century. This excerpt focuses on the design and reception of the saltcellar of Francis I (see fig. 17.12). Cellini took the advice of several courtiers in approaching the project, but ultimately made his own decision about what to render in the model.

I made an oval shape the size of more than half an arm’s length—in fact, almost two thirds of an arm’s length—and on it, as if to show the Sea embracing the Land, I placed two nicely executed figures larger than a palm in size, seated with their legs intertwined in the same fashion as certain long-branching arms of the sea can be seen running into the land; and in the hand of the male figure of the Sea I placed a lavishly wrought ship, within which a great deal of salt could easily and well be accommodated; underneath this figure I placed four seahorses, and in the hand of this figure of the Sea I placed his

Trident. The Land I had represented as a woman whose beautiful figure was as full of as much loveliness and grace as I was able and knew how to produce, in whose hand I had placed a rich and lavishly decorated temple which rested upon the ground, and she was leaning on it with her hand; I had created the temple in order to hold the Pepper. I had placed a Horn of Plenty adorned with all the beautiful things I knew to exist in the world. Under this goddess and in the part that portrayed the earth, I had arranged all the most beautiful animals that the earth produces. Under the part devoted to the sea god I represented all the beautiful kinds of fishes and small snails that tiny space could contain; in the widest part of the oval space I created many extremely rich decorations. ... I uncovered the model [before the King], and, amazed, the King said: “This is something a hundred times more divine than anything I might have imagined. This is a magnificent piece of work by this man. He should never stop working.” Then he turned to me with an expression full of delight, and told me that this was a work that pleased him enormously and that he wanted me to execute it in gold.

Source: Benvenuto Cellini, My Life (Vita), tr. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002)

Bronzino creates a complex allegory whose meanings art historians are still probing.

Into a narrow plane close to the surface of the painting, Bronzino crowds a number of figures who have been identified only tentatively: The bald Father Time tears back the curtain from Fraud, the figure in the upper left-hand corner, to reveal Venus and Cupid in an incestuous embrace, much to the delight of the child Folly, who is armed with roses, and to the dismay of a figure tearing his hair, who has been identified as either Jealousy or Pain; on the right, Pleasure, half woman and half snake, offers a honeycomb. The moral of Bronzino’s image may be that folly and pleasure blind one to the jealousy and fraud of sensual love, which time reveals.

With its extreme stylization, Bronzino’s painting proclaims a refined erotic ideal that reduces passion to a genteel exchange of gestures between figures as polished and rigid as marble. The literary quality of the allegory reflects Bronzino’s skill as a poet. The complexity of the conceit matches the multiplicity of the composition; the high quality of the technique matches the cleverness of the content. In Bronzino, the Medici found an artist whose technical virtuosity, complex imagery, and inventive compositions perfectly accorded with their taste and exemplified the Mannerist style. Cosimo’s gift of a painting of such erudite imagery and accomplished technique to the king of France demonstrated his realm’s achievements in the literary and visual arts.

Such complex and learned treatments occur also in the work of Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), a Florentine goldsmith and sculptor who owes much of his fame to his colorful autobiography. His gold saltcellar (fig. 17.12), made for the same king, Francis I, between 1540 and 1543, is his only important work in precious metal to survive. The main function of this lavish object
is clearly as a conversation piece. Because salt comes from the sea and pepper from the earth, the boat-shaped salt container is protected by Neptune. The pepper, in a tiny triumphal arch, is watched over by a personification of Earth who, in another context, might be the god’s consort Amphitrite. On the base are figures representing the four seasons and the four parts of the day. Such references remind the viewer of the Medici tombs, as does the figure personifying Earth. Cellini wants to impress with his ingenuity and skill. In his autobiography (see Primary Source, page 600), he explained how he came to design the model for the saltcellar and its iconography. He had imagined the figure of the Earth as “a woman whose beautiful figure was as full of as much loveliness and grace as I was able and knew how to produce.” In true Mannerist fashion, the allegorical significance of the design is simply a pretext for this display of virtuosity. Cellini then modestly reports the reaction of Francis I to his design: “This is a magnificent piece of work by this man. He should never stop working.”

**The Accademia del Disegno** One of the aims of the duke was to promote the arts in Tuscany, a goal shared by Giorgio Vasari, who had dedicated his collection of biographies, first published in 1550, to Cosimo I. Cosimo sponsored the establishment of the Accademia del Disegno (Academy of Design) in 1563, intended to improve the training of artists and to enhance the status of the arts. Bronzino and Giorgio Vasari were founding members. Training in the academy stressed drawing and the study of the human figure, which was deepened not only by life drawing but also by dissections. Both nature and the ancients were esteemed, and the art of Michelangelo was held to be the highest achievement of the moderns. The academy emphasized the study of history and literature as well as the skills of the artist. The specifically Tuscan emphasis on drawing (disegno) reflected the allegiances of the founders, who stressed art as an intellectual activity, not mere craft.

To the academy came Jean Bologne (1529–1608), a gifted sculptor from Douai in northern France, who had encountered Italian styles at the court of Francis I. He found employment at the ducal court and, under the Italianized name of Giovanni Bologna, became the most important sculptor in Florence during the last third of the sixteenth century. To demonstrate his skill, he chose to sculpt what seemed to him a most difficult feat: three contrasting figures united in a single action. When creating the group, Bologna had no specific theme in mind, but when it was finished a member of the Florentine academy proposed the title *The Rape of the Sabine Woman* (fig. 17.13), which the artist accepted. The duke admired the work so much he had it installed near the Palazzo della Signoria.

The subject proposed was drawn from the legends of ancient Rome. According to the story, the city’s founders, an adventurous band of men from across the sea, tried in vain to find wives among their neighbors, the Sabines. Finally, they resorted to a trick. Having invited the entire Sabine tribe into Rome for a festival, they attacked them, took the women away by force, and thus

![Giovanni Bologna, The Rape of the Sabine Woman.](image)

Completed 1583. Marble, height 13’6” (4.1 m). Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence
Michelangelo the Poet

Michelangelo’s prodigious creativity was manifested in many different art forms: sculpture, painting, architecture, and poetry. Allusive and dense with imagery, his poems do not explain his works in visual mediums, but they do sometimes treat parallel themes. This poem uses metaphors that appear visually in the Sistine Chapel’s The Last Judgment. It was a gift to his friend and reported lover Tommaso Cavalieri, a Roman nobleman.

The smith when forging iron uses fire
to match the beauty shaped within his mind;
and fire alone will help the artist find
a way so to transmute base metal higher
to turn it gold; the phoenix seeks its pyre
to be reborn; just so I leave mankind
but hope to rise resplendent, new refined,
with souls whom death and time will never tire.
And this transforming fire good fortune brings
by burning out my life to make me new
although among the dead I then be counted.
True to its element the fire wings
its way to heaven, and to me is true
by taking me aloft where love is mounted.


ensured the future of their race. Bologna’s sculpture sanitizes what is an act of raw power and violence as the figures spiral upward in carefully rehearsed movements. Bologna wished to display his virtuosity and saw his task only in formal terms: to carve in marble, on a massive scale, a sculptural composition that was to be seen from all sides. The contrast between form and content that the Mannerist tendency encouraged could not be clearer.

ROME REFORMED

While the Medici were consolidating their power in Florence, in Rome, popes Julius II and Leo X sought to join their religious authority with secular power. Naturally, conflicts arose between the papacy and the princes of Europe: The contest between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire resulted in the Sack of Rome in 1527 by Habsburg troops. Pope Leo X’s cousin Clement VII fled, and much destruction ensued. Despite this shock to both the dignity of the city and the papacy, Clement ultimately crowned Charles V as emperor, and returned, once again, to his project of promoting the Medici family. When Clement died in 1534, the cardinals turned to a reform-minded member of a distinguished Roman family to restore the papacy’s reputation and power. They chose Alessandro Farnese, a childhood friend of Leo X who had been educated in the palace of Lorenzo the Magnificent. As Pope Paul III, he encouraged Charles V’s efforts to bring German princes back to the Roman Church, while at the same time trying to reassure Charles’s enemy, Francis I, that Germany would not overpower France.

Paul III was very concerned by the spiritual crisis presented by the Reformation. Martin Luther had challenged both the doctrine and the authority of the Church, and his reformed version of Christianity had taken wide hold in northern Europe (see Chapter 18). To respond to the challenge of the Protestant Reformation, Paul III called the Council of Trent, which began its work in 1545 and issued its regulations in 1564. The council reaffirmed traditional Catholic doctrine and recommended reforms of liturgy, Church practices, and works of art. (See www.myartslab.com.)

The Catholic Church’s most far-reaching and powerful weapon for combating what it considered heresy was the Inquisition, established in Italy in 1562 to investigate unapproved or suspect religious activities. Those found guilty of engaging in such heresies (deviations from religious orthodoxy) could be imprisoned or executed. To further control the spread of unorthodoxy, the Church compiled an Index of Prohibited Books in 1557. Texts by suspect authors or on subjects deemed unhealthful could be seized or denied publication.

Michelangelo in Rome

Like his predecessors, Paul III saw the value in commissioning large-scale projects from the leading artists of his day. Thus, he recalled Michelangelo to Rome to execute several key projects for him. Rome remained Michelangelo’s home for the rest of his life. The new mood after the Sack of 1527 and during the Catholic Reformation may be reflected in the subject chosen for a major project in the Sistine Chapel. Beginning in 1534, Michelangelo painted for Paul III a powerful vision of The Last Judgment (fig. 17.14). It took six years to complete the fresco, which was unveiled in 1541.

To represent the theme of the Last Judgment (Matthew 24:29–31) on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo had to remove not only the fifteenth-century frescoes commissioned by Sixtus IV but also parts of his own ceiling program in the upper lunettes. Traditional representations such as Giotto’s at the Arena Chapel in Padua (see fig. 13.18) depict Hell as a place of physical torment. In envisioning his fresco, Michelangelo must have looked partly to Luca Signorelli’s work at Orvieto Cathedral (see fig. 15.56), with its vigorous muscular nudes. Michelangelo replaces physical torments with spiritual agony expressed through violent contortions of the human body within a turbulent atmosphere. As angelic trumpeters signal the end of time, the figure of Christ sits at the fulcrum of a wheel of action: As he raises his arm, the dead rise from the earth at the lower left to yearn toward Heaven where the assembly of saints crowds about him. The damned plunge from Heaven toward Charon,
parallel ideas and metaphors may be seen in a poem he composed around 1532. (See Primary Source, page 603.)

These concerns also appear in a new version of the Pietà, begun around 1546 (fig. 17.16). Here Michelangelo used his own features again, this time for the hooded figure—probably Nicodemus, who holds the broken body of Christ. He intended this sculptural group for his own tomb. By casting himself as a disciple tending the body of Christ, Michelangelo gives form to a conception of personal, unmediated access to the divine. The Catholic Church may have found such an idea threatening during the Catholic Reformation, when the authority of the Roman Church was being reaffirmed as Protestantism spread throughout Europe. For whatever reason, Michelangelo smashed the statue in 1555, and left it unfinished. Compared with his 1499 Pietà...
(see fig. 16.12), this work is more expressive than conventionally beautiful, as though the ideals of his youth had been replaced by a greater seriousness of spiritual purpose. Many of Michelangelo’s last sculptures remained unfinished as his efforts turned to architecture.

Reshaping the Campidoglio While in Rome during the last 30 years of his life, Michelangelo’s main pursuit was architecture. Among his activities were several public works projects. In 1537–39, he received the most ambitious commission of his career: to reshape the Campidoglio, the top of Rome’s Capitoline Hill, into a piazza and frame it with a monumental architectural ensemble worthy of the site, which once had been the symbolic center of the ancient city. This was an opportunity to plan on a grand scale. Pope Paul III worked with the civil authorities in Rome (the Conservators) to renovate this site and made Michelangelo its designer. Although not completed until long after his death, the project was carried out essentially as Michelangelo designed it. The Campidoglio has since served as a model for many other civic centers. Pope Paul III transferred the equestrian monument of Marcus Aurelius (see fig. 7.33) from the Lateran Palace to the Campidoglio and had it installed on a base that Michelangelo designed. Placed at the top of a gently rising oval mound that defines the space, the statue became the focal point of the entire scheme. (The sculpture was recently removed to an interior space to protect it.) Since the sculpted figure was thought to represent Constantine, the first Roman emperor to promote Christianity and the source of the papacy’s claim to temporal power, by placing it at the center of the seat of secular government, the pope asserted papal authority in civic affairs.

Palace façades define three sides of the piazza. An engraving based on Michelangelo’s design (fig. 17.17), conveys the effect, albeit imperfectly, of the space created by the façades. The print shows the symmetry of the scheme and the sense of progression along the main axis toward the Senators’ Palace, opposite the staircase that gives entry to the piazza. However, the shape of the piazza is not a rectangle but a trapezoid, a peculiarity dictated by the site. The Senators’ Palace and the Conservators’ Palace on the right were older buildings that had to be preserved behind new exteriors, but they were placed at an angle of 80 instead of 90 degrees. Michelangelo turned this problem into an asset. By adding the “New Palace” on the left, which complements the Conservators’ Palace in style and placement, he makes the Senators’ Palace look larger than it is, so that it dominates the piazza.

The whole conception has the appearance of a stage set. All three buildings are long but relatively narrow, like a show front with little behind it. However, these are not shallow screens but three-dimensional structures (fig. 17.18). The “New Palace” and its twin, the Conservators’ Palace, combine voids and solids, horizontals and verticals with a plasticity not found in any piece of architecture since Roman antiquity. The open porticoes in each structure further link the piazza and façades, just as a courtyard is related to the arcades of a cloister.

The columns and beams of the porticoes are contained in a colossal order of pilasters that supports a heavy cornice topped by a balustrade. Alberti had experimented with the colossal order at Sant’Andrea in Mantua (see fig. 15.45), but Michelangelo fully exploited this device. For the Senators’ Palace he used a colossal order and balustrade above a tall base, which emphasizes the massiveness of the building. The single entrance at the top of the double-ramped stairway (see fig. 17.17) seems to gather all the spatial forces set in motion by the oval mound and the flanking structures. It thus provides a dramatic climax to the piazza. Brunelleschi’s design for the façade of the Innocenti in Florence (see fig. 15.4), with its slim Tuscan columns and rhythmic arcade, seems a delicate frame for a piazza compared with the mass and energy of the Campidoglio. Michelangelo’s powerful example of molding urban spaces was important for subsequent city planners throughout Europe.
17.18 Michelangelo. Palazzo dei Conservatori, Campidoglio, Rome. Designed ca. 1545

17.19 Michelangelo. St. Peter’s, Rome, seen from the west. 1546–64; dome completed by Giacomo della Porta, 1590
Michelangelo used the colossal order again on the exterior of St. Peter’s (fig. 17.19). Several architects had taken on the project after Bramante’s death in 1514. Michelangelo took over the design of the church in 1546 upon the death of the previous architect, Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, whose work he completely recast. Returning to a centrally focused plan, he adapted the system of the Conservators’ Palace to the curving contours of the church, but with windows instead of open loggias and an attic instead of the balustrade.

Unlike Bramante’s many-layered elevation (see fig. 16.11), Michelangelo uses a colossal order of pilasters to emphasize the compact body of the structure, thus setting off the dome more dramatically. The same desire for compactness and organic unity led him to simplify the interior spaces (fig. 17.20). He brought the complex spatial sequences of Bramante’s plan (see fig. 16.10) into one cross and square, held in check by the huge piers that support the central dome. He further defined its main axis by modifying the eastern apse and adding a portico to it, although this part of his design was never carried out. The dome, however, reflects Michelangelo’s ideas in every important respect, even though it was built after his death and has a steeper pitch than he intended.

Bramante had planned his dome as a stepped hemisphere above a narrow drum, which would have seemed to press down on the church. Michelangelo’s, in contrast, has a powerful thrust that draws energy upward from the main body of the structure. Michelangelo borrowed not only the double-shell construction but also the Gothic profile from the Florence Cathedral dome (see fig. 15.3 and Materials and Techniques, page 512), yet the effect is very different. The smooth planes of Brunelleschi’s dome give no hint of the internal stresses. Michelangelo, however, gives sculptured shape to these forces and visually links them to the rest of the building. The double columns of the high drum take up the vertical impetus of the colossal pilasters. This upward momentum continues in the ribs and the raised curve of the cupola, and then culminates in the tall lantern. The logic of this design is so persuasive that almost all domes built between 1600 and 1900 were influenced by it.

**The Catholic Reformation and Il Gesù**

Despite its visual logic and powerful design, Michelangelo’s centralized plan at St. Peter’s served as a model for few other churches in the era of the Catholic Reformation. As the Council of Trent finished its deliberations in 1564, the Church reasserted its traditions and reformed its liturgies. The council decreed that believers should see the elevation of the Host at the heart of the Mass, which was best accomplished in the long nave of a basilica with an unencumbered view of the altar. Despite its symbolic attractions, the centralized plan did not achieve this goal.

Another result of the reform movement within the Catholic Church was the establishment of new religious orders. One of the most ambitious and energetic was the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, founded by Ignatius of Loyola and promoted by Pope Paul III. He approved the order in 1540; by 1550, the Jesuits were planning their own church, Il Gesù in Rome. Michelangelo once promised a design for this project, though he apparently never furnished it; the plan that the order adopted came from one of Michelangelo’s assistants, Giacomo Vignola (1507–1573) in 1568. For Vignola’s plan Giacomo della Porta (ca. 1540–1602) designed the façade. It was not completed until 1584. As the mother church of the Jesuits, its design must have been closely supervised so as to conform to the aims of the order. The Jesuits were at once intellectuals, mystics, and missionaries, whose charge was to fight heresy in Europe and spread Christianity to Asia and America. They required churches that adhered to the precepts of the Council of Trent—churches that would have impressive grandeur while avoiding excessive ornament. Il Gesù may be seen as the architectural embodiment of the spirit of the Catholic Reformation.

Il Gesù is a compact basilica dominated by its mighty nave (fig. 17.21). Chapels have replaced side aisles, thus assembling the congregation in one large, hall-like space directly in view of the altar. The attention of the audience is strongly directed toward altar and pulpit, as a representation of the interior shows
(fig. 17.22). (The painting depicts how the church would look from the street if the center part of the façade were removed. For the later decoration of the nave vault, see fig. 19.12.) The painting also depicts a feature that the ground plan cannot show: the dramatic contrast between the dim nave and the amply lighted eastern part of the church, thanks to the large windows in the drum of the dome. Light has been consciously exploited for its expressive possibilities—a novel device, theatrical in the best sense of the term—to give II Gesù a stronger emotional focus than we have as yet found in a church interior.

The façade by Giacomo della Porta (fig. 17.23) is as bold as the plan. It is divided into two stories by a strongly projecting entablature that is supported by paired pilasters that clearly derive from Michelangelo, with whom Della Porta had worked. The same pattern recurs in the upper story on a somewhat smaller scale, with four instead of six pairs of supports. To bridge the difference in width and hide the roof line, Della Porta inserted two scroll-shaped buttresses. This device, taken from the façade of Santa Maria Novella in Florence by Alberti (see fig. 15.9), forms a graceful transition to the large pediment crowning the façade, which retains the classic proportions of Renaissance architecture: The height equals the width.

Della Porta has masterfully integrated all the parts of the façade into a single whole. Both stories share the same vertical rhythm, which even the horizontal members obey. (Note the way the broken entablature responds to the pilasters.) In turn, the
horizontal divisions determine the size of the vertical members, so there is no colossal order. Michelangelo inspired the sculptural treatment of the façade, which places greater emphasis on the main portal. Its double frame—two pediments resting on coupled pilasters and columns—projects beyond the rest of the façade and gives strong focus to the entire design. Not since Gothic architecture has the entrance to a church received such a dramatic concentration of features. This façade, and the freedom to add movement and plastic dimension to it, set an important precedent for church architecture by the Jesuits and others during ensuing centuries.

NORTHERN ITALY: DUCAL COURTS AND URBAN CENTERS

Northern Italy was divided into a number of principalities that were smaller than the Grand Duchy of Tuscany or the Papal States. One of the most stable of these principalities was Mantua, where the Gonzaga family retained the title of marquis into the sixteenth century. Mantua was host to major artists in the fifteenth century, including Alberti and Mantegna. The family’s traditions of patronage extended to women as well as men, as Isabella d’Este, the wife of Francesco II Gonzaga, was one of the most active patrons of the early sixteenth century. Her son, Federico, became marquis in 1519, a title he held until Charles V named him duke in 1530. To impress the emperor, Federico displayed his wealth and taste expressed through the arts.

The Palazzo del Te

As part of his display, Federico II Gonzaga commissioned Giulio Romano (ca. 1499–1546) to design a villa for him outside the city itself, called the Palazzo del Te, where he could house his mistress and receive the emperor. Giulio had been Raphael’s chief assistant in Rome, but came to Mantua to follow in the footsteps of Mantegna and Alberti in 1524.

He designed the Palazzo del Te as a low structure appropriate to the flat landscape. For the courtyard façade (fig. 17.24), Giulio used a vocabulary familiar to patrons of villas and palaces, such as the rusticated blocks and the smooth Tuscan order of engaged columns that support the projecting entablature. As Michelangelo did at the Laurentian Library, Giulio subverts the conventions of traditional classical architecture. The massive keystones of the blank windows appear ready to burst the triangular lintels above them. The only true arch spans the central doorway, but a pediment surmounts it—a violation of the classical canon. The triglyph midway between each pair of columns “slips” downward in defiance of all logic and accepted practice, thereby creating a sense that the frieze might collapse before our eyes. In a Mannerist display, Giulio broke the rules of accepted practice as if to say that the rules did not apply to him, or to his patron.

What is merely a possibility on the exterior of the Palazzo del Te seems to be fully realized in the interior, where Giulio painted a series of rooms with illusionistic frescoes on themes drawn from antiquity. Unlike the frescoes of Raphael in Rome, these are not images of a distant and beautiful Golden Age, but vivid and dramatic expressions of power. In the Sala dei Giganti (Room of the Giants) (fig. 17.25), Giulio painted a fresco of the gods expelling the giants from Mount Olympus as a cataclysm of falling bodies and columns. A viewer seems to see an entire temple collapsing. Figures of the winds in the upper corners of the wall appear to topple architectural elements onto the huge figures of giants, crushing them. As if witnessing the power of the new Olympian gods, a viewer feels transported into the terror

![Image 17.24 Giulio Romano. Courtyard of the Palazzo del Te, Mantua. ca. 1527–34](image-url)
of the event. Of course, the duke himself was imagined as Zeus (Jupiter) in this conceit, so the whole illusion speaks to the power of Duke Federico.

This conceit was also applied to paintings for the same duke’s palace in Mantua, which he commissioned from Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489/94–1534), called Correggio, about the same time. This gifted northern Italian painter, who spent most of his brief career in Parma, absorbed the influences of Leonardo, the Venetians, Michelangelo, and Raphael into a distinctive and sensual style. Duke Federico commissioned a series of the Loves of Jupiter, among which is the Jupiter and Io (fig. 17.26). As Ovid recounts, Jupiter changed his shape numerous times to seduce his lovers; here, the nymph Io, swoons in the embrace of a cloudlike Jupiter. The use of Leonardesque sfumato, combined with a Venetian sense of color and texture, produces a frank sensuality that exceeds even Titian’s Bacchus (see fig. 16.31). Correggio renders the vaporous form of the god with a remarkable degree of illusionism. The eroticism of the image reflects a taste shared by

17.25 Giulio Romano, *Fall of the Giants from Mount Olympus*, from the Sala dei Giganti. ca. 1530–32. Palazzo del Te, Mantua

17.26 Correggio, *Jupiter and Io*. ca. 1532. Oil on canvas, 64\(\frac{1}{4}\) ft \(\times\) 27\(\frac{1}{4}\) ft (163.8 \(\times\) 70.5 cm). Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
many of the courts of Europe, visible in Bronzino’s *Allegory of Venus* (see fig. 17.11) and Titian’s *Rape of Europa* (see fig. 17.36).

PARMA AND CREMONA

The larger political entities in Italy aimed to swallow up the smaller ones. The Papal States expanded to include cities like Bologna and Parma, while the Duchy of Milan gobbled up the city of Cremona. Forms of art and patronage established by courts in Rome, Florence, and Milan were emulated by the citizens of these cities.

Correggio and Parmigianino in Parma

Correggio spent much of his career in the city of Parma, which had recently been absorbed into the Papal States. This new affiliation brought the city new wealth and inspired local patrons of art and architecture; more than once Correggio was the artist chosen for their projects. He put his skills to work in the dome of Parma Cathedral where he painted the fresco of *The Assumption of the Virgin* between 1522 and 1530 (fig. 17.27). The surfaces of the dome are painted away by Correggio’s illusionistic perspective. A viewer standing below the dome is transported into the heavens, as the sky opens to receive the body of the Virgin rising into the light.

17.27 Correggio, *The Assumption of the Virgin*. ca. 1522–30. Fresco, diameter of base of dome 35'10" × 37'11" (10.93 × 11.56 m). Dome of cathedral, Parma, Italy
Correggio here initiates a new kind of visionary representation in which Heaven and earth are joined visually and spiritually through the magic of perspective and the artist’s skill. Not since Mantegna’s Camera Picta in Mantua (see fig. 15.50) has a ceiling been so totally replaced by a painted illusion; the concept would reverberate in the works of other artists in the seventeenth century, when ceilings would disappear through illusionistic devices, as can be seen in the work of Pietro da Cortona (see fig. 19.11) and Giovanni Battista Gaulli (see fig. 19.12). Correggio also gave the figures themselves the ability to move with such exhilarating ease that the force of gravity seems not to exist for them, and they frankly delight in their weightless condition. Reflecting the influence of Titian, these are healthy, energetic beings of flesh and blood, which makes the Assumption appear that much more miraculous.

Parma was the birthplace of yet another gifted painter, Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola (1503–1540), known as Parmigianino. Precocious and intelligent, Parmigianino had made his reputation as a painter in Rome, Florence, and elsewhere before returning to Parma in 1530. His Self-Portrait (fig. 17.28), done as a demonstration piece, suggests his self-confidence. The artist’s appearance is bland and well groomed. The features, painted with Raphael’s smooth perfection, are veiled by a delicate sfumato. The picture records what Parmigianino saw as he gazed at his reflection in a convex mirror, including the fishbowl distortions in his hand. Parmigianino substitutes his painting for the mirror itself, even using a specially prepared convex panel. The painting demonstrates his skill at recording what the eye sees, yet at the same time it shows off his learning by a subtle allusion to the myth of Narcissus, who, according to Greek legend, looked in a pool of water and fell in love with his own reflection.

Parmigianino’s skill is evident in his most famous work, The Madonna with the Long Neck (fig. 17.29), commissioned in 1535 by a noblewoman of Parma for a family chapel in the church of Santa Maria dei Servi. Despite his deep study of Raphael and Correggio, Parmigianino has a different ideal of beauty, which he establishes with the large amphora offered by the figure at the left. In his painting, the perfect oval of Mary’s head rests on a swanlike neck, while her body swells only to taper to her feet, which mimics the shape of the amphora. By contrast, Raphael’s La Belle Jardinière (see fig. 16.22) seems all circles and cubes, and her features are sweet rather than haughty. Nor does Parmigianino attempt to replicate Raphael’s stable compositions. Here, the
sleeping Christ Child balances precariously on the Madonna’s lap, as she lifts a boneless hand to her breast. The composition is as unbalanced as the postures: heavily weighted to the left, open and distant to the right. All the figures have elongated limbs and ivory-smooth features, and the space is compressed. In typical Mannerist fashion, these elements draw attention to the artist’s skill and his inversion of Raphael’s ideals.

These choices may reflect the meaning of the image. The large Christ Child in his mother’s lap recalls the theme of the Pietà, which implies that Jesus is already aware of his fate. Nor is the setting as arbitrary as it may seem. The gigantic column is a symbol often associated with the Madonna as the gateway to Heaven and eternal life, as well as the Immaculate Conception. At the same time it may also refer to the column on which Jesus endured the flagellation during the Passion, which the tiny figure of a prophet foretells on his scroll. The Madonna with the Long Neck, with its cold and memorable elegance, offers a vision of unearthly perfection.

**Cremona**

The Mannerist elegance that Correggio and Parmigianino achieved was but one stylistic option that artists and patrons of northern Italy could select. The work of Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625) of Cremona represents a different approach. The daughter of a nobleman in that north Italian city, Sofonisba received her training in painting as a professional. This was a very unusual circumstance, as most women artists of the Renaissance learned their craft at home as the daughters of artists. Sofonisba became famous in Italy as a painter, communicating with artists all over the peninsula, including Michelangelo and Vasari. Her fame was such that Philip II of Spain hired her as his court artist. She moved to Spain in 1559 where she executed mostly portraits of imperial family members. She remained there until she married in 1573 and returned to Italy.

The reasons for her fame become clear in examining her self-portrait of about 1556 (fig. 17.30). Executed as a miniature, the portrait was probably a gift. In the image, the 24-year-old artist represents herself staring out at the spectator wearing sober black costume and with respectfully plaited hair. Sofonisba does not attempt the showy distortions that appear in Parmigianino’s comparable self-portrait, done in 1524 (see fig. 17.28), preferring a straightforward naturalism to Mannerist display. She holds a medallion with a still mysterious monogram. (It may be an anagram of her father’s name, although this is not certain.) Around the medallion she claims the image as a work “by her hand done with the aid of a mirror.” In the miniature, Sofonisba has wittily placed her hands next to the words “by whose hand” (*ipsius manu ex*), so stressing the skill of her hands.

**VENICE: THE SERENE REPUBLIC**

Despite the attacks it endured at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Venice regained much of its territory and wealth by 1529. Its aristocracy reasserted its political and cultural power throughout the century, contributing to a distinctive situation for artists and for patrons. Instead of a court, Venice remained a nominal republic, controlled by ancient families, such as the Loredan, the Vendramin, and the Barbaro. In addition to religious works of art, these families commissioned works for their homes in town and for their villas in the country, so artists had a wide variety of themes to depict. The city itself expressed its status through public works projects commissioned by the civic fathers and intended to beautify the Most Serene Republic (*Serenissima*). One example of this is the refashioning of the heart of the city—the piazzetta between the cathedral of San Marco and the Canal of San Marco—with a pair of buildings in the 1530s.

**Sansovino in Venice**

The Council of Ten, who controlled the city, held a competition in 1535 to design a new home for the state mint (fig. 17.31, left). They selected Jacopo Sansovino (1486–1570), a Florentine sculptor who left Rome for Venice after the Sack of Rome in 1527 and established himself as the city’s chief architect. Not surprisingly, his buildings are sculptural in character. In the spirit of earlier Venetian structures such as the Ca’ d’Oro (see fig. 15.51) and the

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**Figure 17.30** Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait*. c. 1556. Oil on parchment, 3½ x 2½ (8.3 x 6.4 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Emma F. Munroe Fund, 1962. 60.155
Doge’s Palace (see fig. 13.32) nearby, Sansovino composed the façade to have numerous openings formed by arches and huge windows. The supporting arches and columns, however, are given greater stress by means of the rustication used throughout, which adds to the imposing effect of the building. (The top story was added around 1560.)

The Procurators of San Marco then hired Sansovino to build the Library of San Marco (see fig. 17.31, right) as a public library and repository for a rich collection of Greek and Latin manuscripts. Situated next to the mint, the library uses a much more elegant architectural vocabulary. It is a long, two-storied structure, composed as a series of arcades supporting heavy cornices. The street-level arcade is enframed by a Roman Doric order inspired by the Colosseum, while the upper story shows an elaborate treatment of the Ionic order (including triple engaged columns) surmounted by a garlanded entablature. A balustrade caps off the structure, with life-size statues over every column cluster and obelisks at each corner. The extravagant ornamentation of both structures creates an effect of opulence that proclaims the Venetian republic as a new Rome.

Andrea Palladio and Late Renaissance Architecture

Venice built many churches as well as civic buildings. The commission for San Giorgio Maggiore was awarded to one of the most influential architects of the Renaissance, Andrea Palladio (1508–1580), in 1565. Although Palladio’s career centered on his native Vicenza, a town near Venice, his buildings and theoretical writings brought him international renown. Palladio believed that architecture should be governed by reason and by rules exemplified by the buildings of the ancients. He shared Leon Battista Alberti’s faith in the significance of proportion. (See Primary Source, page 616.) The two architects differed in how they related theory to practice, however. With Alberti, the relationship had been flexible, whereas Palladio believed quite literally in practicing what he preached. This view stemmed in part from his earlier career as a stonemason and sculptor before entering the humanist circles of Count Giangiorgio Trissino of Vicenza, where he studied Vitruvius and other ancient authors and was introduced to elite patrons of the Veneto.
His first great project in Venice itself was the Benedictine church of San Giorgio Maggiore (fig. 17.32), begun in 1565. Like his predecessors, Palladio declared that round temples are ideal because the circle is a symbol of uniformity and eternity; yet he and his patrons chose a basilican plan as the only one appropriate for Christian worship. The plan for San Giorgio Maggiore (fig. 17.33) reflects the church’s twofold purpose of serving a Benedictine monastery and a lay congregation. The main body of the church is strongly centralized—the transept is as long as the nave and a dome marks the crossing—but the longitudinal axis reasserts itself in the separate compartments for the main altar and the large choir beyond, where the monks worshiped. On the façade, Palladio wished to express the dignity of the church by using the architectural language of the ancients. He designed a flattened-out temple porch for the entrance on the grounds that “Temples ought to have ample porticos, and with larger columns than other buildings require; and it is proper that they should be great and magnificent…and built with large and beautiful proportions. They must be made of the most excellent and the most precious material, that the divinity may be honored as much as possible.” To achieve this end, Palladio superimposed a tall, narrow temple front on another low, wide one to reflect the different heights of nave and aisles in the basilica itself. The interlocking design is held together by the four gigantic columns, which function as a variant of Alberti’s colossal order.

Much of Palladio’s architecture consists of town houses and country villas. The Villa Rotonda (fig. 17.34), one of Palladio’s finest buildings, exemplifies his interpretation of the ancients. This country residence, built near Vicenza, beginning in 1567, for the humanist cleric Paolo Almerico, consists of a square block surmounted by a dome, with identical porches in the shape of temple fronts on all four sides. Alberti had defined the ideal church as a symmetrical, centralized design of this sort; Palladio adapted the same principles for the ideal country house. He was convinced, on the basis of his reading of Vitruvius and Pliny, that Roman private houses had porticoes like these. (Excavations have since proved him mistaken.) Palladio’s use of the temple front here is more than an expression of his regard for antiquity; he considered this feature both legitimate and essential for decorum—namely, appropriateness, beauty, harmony, and utility—befitting the houses of “great men.” This concept was embedded in the social outlook of the later sixteenth century, which required
Andrea Palladio (1508–1580)

From The Four Books on Architecture

Published in 1570, Palladio’s Four Books on Architecture made an enormous impression on his European contemporaries, providing the basis for much French and English architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

One must describe as suitable a house which will be appropriate to the status of the person who will have to live in it and of which the parts will correspond to the whole and to each other. But above all the architect must observe that (as Vitruvius says in Books I and VI), for great men and especially those in public office, houses with loggias and spacious, ornate halls will be required, so that those waiting to greet the master of the house or to ask him for some help or a favor can spend their time pleasantly in such spaces; similarly, smaller buildings of lesser expense and ornament will be appropriate for men of lower status. One must build in the same way for judges and lawyers … Merchants’ houses should have places for storing their goods which face north and are so arranged that the owners have no fear of burglars. A building will also have decorum, if the parts correspond to the whole …

So we read that when building temples the ancients used every ingenuity to maintain decorum, which is one of the most beautiful aspects of architecture. Therefore, to maintain decorum in the shapes of our temples, we too, who have no false gods, should choose the most perfect and excellent one; and because the round form would be just that, as it alone amongst all the plans is simple, uniform, equal, strong, and capacious, let us build temples round; this form is far and away the most appropriate for them, because it is enclosed by only one boundary in which the beginning and the end … cannot be found … and since at every point the outer edge is equidistant from the center, it is perfectly adapted to demonstrate the unity, the infinite existence, the consistency and the justice of God. … recommended too are churches that are made in the shape of a cross … because … they represent, in the eyes of onlookers, that wood from which our Salvation was hung.


the display of great wealth and taste to assert status. Palladio’s design also takes advantage of the pleasing views offered in every direction by the site. Beautifully correlated with the walls behind and the surrounding vistas, the porches of the Villa Rotonda give the structure an air of serene dignity and festive grace that is enhanced by the sculptures on the façades.
His buildings alone would make Palladio an important figure in the history of art, but his influence extended beyond Italy, indeed beyond Europe, through his publications. Palladio’s most important work in this field was his 1570 work, The Four Books on Architecture (excerpted in the Primary Source, page 616). While several architects, including Alberti, had written treatises in the fifteenth century, sixteenth-century printed books on architecture by Sebastiano Serlio and Palladio became bestsellers. Palladio’s treatise was more practical than Alberti’s, which may account for its great popularity among architects, and his many buildings are linked more directly with his theories. Some have claimed that Palladio designed only what was, in his view, sanctioned by ancient precedent. Indeed, the usual term for both Palladio’s work and theoretical attitude is classicizing. This term denotes a conscious striving for qualities found in ancient art, although the results may not look like ancient works. Whenever later architects sought to express ideas through ancient forms, they consulted Palladio’s Four Books. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, once referred to it as “the bible” and based several of his designs for buildings on its examples (see fig. 24.33). Such treatises, with their rules for designing beautiful buildings, formulas for correct proportion, and extensive drawings, including ground plans and elevations in woodcut, were a treasure trove for architects elsewhere in Europe and later throughout the world.

**Titian**

Titian (1485–1576) dominated painting in Venice throughout the sixteenth century. Like Michelangelo, he lived a long life, and he had numerous pupils to spread his ideas and techniques. His fame was such that by the 1530s his work was sought by the most elite patrons of Europe. For example, in 1538, Titian was commissioned by the duke of Urbino, Guidobaldo II della Rovere, to execute the so-called Venus of Urbino (fig. 17.35). The painting, based on models by Giorgione, depicts a nude young woman lying on a bed in a well-furnished chamber. In the background, two women search in a cassone (or wedding chest) for something, perhaps for a garment. Details such as the presence of the cassone and the little dog have led some scholars to suggest that this may have been an image intended to celebrate a marriage (the dog representing faithfulness). However, the owner referred to the picture only as “the naked woman.” Titian’s use of color records the sensuous textures of the woman’s body, which has been placed on display for a viewer whose gaze she meets. It may have been intended as an erotic image, not a classical theme.

Whether or not this is Venus, the sensuously depicted female nude became a staple product of Titian’s workshop, which was supported by the patronage of other powerful men. For Phillip II of Spain (the son of Charles V), whom he met in 1548, Titian

![Titian, Venus of Urbino](image-url)

17.35 Titian, *Venus of Urbino*. ca. 1538. Oil on canvas, 47 x 65” (119 x 165 cm). Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence
**Oil on Canvas**

For much of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, painters worked either directly on walls or on solid wood supports. Wood panels were formed of planks that had to be attached together, so seams are sometimes visible. While durable, wood is also heavy and susceptible to warping. In the fifteenth century, some artists both in Italy and in northern Europe painted on cloth supports, usually canvas or linen, as a less expensive substitute for wood. Canvas is also lighter, and more easily portable. Painted canvases from Flanders, called *panni dipinti*, were imported in good numbers to Italy.

In the humid climate of Venice, where neither fresco nor wood panels would easily survive, artists preferred to work on canvas supports, especially on large-scale projects. By the middle of the sixteenth century, canvas began to replace wood as the support of choice. By 1600, most patrons, who were not commissioning frescoes, preferred oil on canvas. Once the canvas itself had been stretched on a wooden framework, the artist would cover it with a gluelike material to seal the fibers. Then several priming coats would be applied and allowed to dry before painting commenced.

Working on a large scale also inspired Venetian painters to experiment with the oil medium itself. Instead of building up layers of tinted glazes over large surfaces, artists loaded the brush with more opaque color and laid it on with broad strokes. Sometimes the thick paint looked pastelike, a technique called impasto. In such cases, the surface does not have a mirrorlike smoothness, but is rough and catches the light unevenly. Titian is one of the innovators of this technique. His example was the inspiration for the painterly artists of the Baroque, including Rubens, Rembrandt, and Velázquez.

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**17.36 Titian, Rape of Europa.** 1559-62. Oil on canvas, \(6^1/4 \times 6^8/4\) (185 x 205 cm). Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston
made a series of images of the Loves of Jupiter based on the Roman poet Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. There, Ovid recounted the story of the princess beguiled by Jupiter who had taken the shape of a white bull to avoid his wife’s jealous gaze; this tale inspired Titian’s *Rape of Europa*, finished by 1562 (fig. 17.36). The poet says that the young woman admired the bull, whom she encountered on the seashore. When she climbed onto the beast, the god swam away with her, her veil fluttering behind her as she clung to his horn. Titian’s painting takes up the story at its climax, as the bull moves away from land, leaving Europa’s companions to wave ineffectually on the shore.

In Titian’s painting, Europa can barely hold on to the energetic animal. Titian uses rich colors and swirling movement to heighten the sensuous forms and to create an atmospheric setting for the events. His brushwork is very free, to the point that the forms are barely defined. This effect is enhanced by his use of the impasto technique. (See *Materials and Techniques*, page 618.) The sharp disjunction between foreground and background emphasizes the main figures’ distance from land and adds drama. Such images of sensuous interaction between gods and mortals offered artists like Titian an opportunity to compete with poets. Contemporaries called these images *poesie*, just as they did the works of Giorgione (see page 584).

Titian experimented with many different forms, including prints, but his most enduring innovations were in the technique of painting on canvas. His late works demonstrate his freest brushwork. Titian intended the Pietà (fig. 17.37) for his own tomb in the Franciscan church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari; incomplete at his death in 1576, it was finished by one of his students. Like Michelangelo’s late Pietà (see fig. 17.16), Titian depicts the
From a Session of the Inquisition Tribunal in Venice of Paolo Veronese

Because of the liberal religious atmosphere of Venice, Veronese was never required to make the various changes to his painting of the Last Supper (see fig. 17.38) asked for by the tribunal of the Inquisition in this interrogation. All parties seem to have been satisfied with a mere change of title to The Feast in the House of Levi.

Today, Saturday, the 18th of the month of July, 1573, having been asked by the Holy Office to appear before the Holy Tribunal, Paolo Caliari of Verona questioned about his profession:

A: I paint and compose figures.
Q: Do you know the reason why you have been summoned?
A: No, sir.
Q: Can you imagine it?
A: I can well imagine.
Q: Say what you think the reason is.
A: According to what the Reverend Father, the Prior of the Convent of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, told me, he had been here and Your Lordships had ordered him to have painted [in the picture] a Magdalen in place of a dog. I answered him by saying I would gladly do everything necessary for my honor and for that of my painting, but that I did not understand how a figure of Magdalen would be suitable there.
Q: What picture is this of which you have spoken?
A: This is a picture of the Last Supper that Jesus Christ took with His Apostles in the house of Simon.
Q: At this Supper of Our Lord have you painted other figures?
A: Yes, milords.
Q: Tell us how many people and describe the gestures of each.
A: There is the owner of the inn, Simon; besides this figure I have made a steward, who, I imagined, had come there for his own pleasure to see how things were going at the table. There are many figures there which I cannot recall, as I painted the picture some time ago.
Q: In this Supper which you made for SS. Giovanni e Paolo what is the significance of the man whose nose is bleeding?
A: I intended to represent a servant whose nose was bleeding because of some accident.
Q: What is the significance of those armed men dressed as Germans, each with a halberd in his hand?
A: We painters take the same license the poets and the jesters take and I have represented these two halberdiers, one drinking and the other eating nearby on the stairs. They are placed there so that they might be of service because it seemed to me fitting, according to what I have been told, that the master of the house, who was great and rich, should have such servants.
Q: And that man dressed as a buffoon with a parrot on his wrist, for what purpose did you paint him on that canvas?
A: For ornament, as is customary.
Q: Who are at the table of Our Lord?
A: The Twelve Apostles.
Q: What is St. Peter, the first one, doing?
A: Carving the lamb in order to pass it to the other end of the table.
Q: What is the Apostle next to him doing?
A: He is holding a dish in order to receive what St. Peter will give him.
Q: Tell us what the one next to this one is doing.
A: He has a toothpick and cleans his teeth.
Q: Did anyone commission you to paint Germans, buffoons, and similar things in that picture?
A: No, milords, but I received the commission to decorate the picture as I saw fit. It is large and, it seemed to me, it could hold many figures.
Q: Are not the decorations which you painters are accustomed to add to paintings or pictures supposed to be suitable and proper to the subject and the principal figures or are they for pleasure—simply what comes to your imagination without any discretion or judiciousness?
A: I paint pictures as I see fit and as well as my talent permits.
Q: Does it seem fitting at the Last Supper of the Lord to paint buffoons, drunkards, Germans, dwarfs, and similar vulgarities?
A: No, milords.
Q: Do you not know that in Germany and in other places infected with heresy it is customary with various pictures full of scurrilousness and similar inventions to mock, vituperate, and scorn the things of the Holy Catholic Church in order to teach bad doctrines to foolish and ignorant people?
A: Yes, that is wrong.

After these things had been said, the judges announced that the above named Paolo would be obliged to improve and change his painting within a period of three months from the day of this admonition and that according to the opinion and decision of the Holy Tribunal all the corrections should be made at the expense of the painter and that if he did not correct the picture he would be liable to the penalties imposed by the Holy Tribunal. Thus they decreed in the best manner possible.


body of Christ in his mother’s arms as friends and followers mourn. Moses and a sibyl flank a heavily rusticated niche reminiscent of the façade of Sansovino’s mint (see fig. 17.31). This large canvas owes its power not only to its large scale and dramatic composition, although these are contributing factors, but also to Titian’s technique. The forms emerging from the semidarkness
seem to consist wholly of light and color. The artist applies the color in thick masses of paint, yet despite this heavy impasto, the surfaces have lost every trace of material solidity. The gesture of Mary Magdalen and the sorrow in the features of the Virgin add poignancy to the scene. A kneeling figure, possibly St. Jerome, stands in for Titian himself and reaches over to touch the body of Christ in reverence. The quiet, almost resigned mood is enhanced by the painting’s ethereal forms.

Titian’s Legacy

Titian’s creative output and reputation drew many artists to work in his workshop, but he had a tremendous influence even on those who did not. From the island of Crete (then controlled by Venice), the young Domenikos Theotokopoulos, called El Greco, came to study in Titian’s shop before heading to Spain (see Chapter 18). The two leading painters in Venice after Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, developed in different directions. Where Veronese made images that depended on early Titian works such as the Pesaro Madonna (see fig. 16.32) and aimed for naturalism, Tintoretto exploited the drama and fluid brushwork of Titian’s later work, like the Pietà.

PAOLO VERONESE The paintings of Paolo Cagliari (1528–1588), called Paolo Veronese, who was born and trained in Verona, start from the naturalism inherent in Titian’s style, but add an interest in details of everyday reality, as seen in animals, textiles, and foodstuffs—and in grand architectural frameworks.

In his huge canvas The Feast in the House of Levi (fig. 17.38), Veronese avoids any reference to the mystical. His symmetrical composition harks back to paintings by Leonardo and Raphael, while the festive mood of the scene reflects examples by Titian of the 1520s, so that at first glance the picture looks like a High Renaissance work born 50 years too late. Veronese, however, is less interested than Leonardo in conveying spiritual or psychological depth. Originally commissioned for the refectory of a Dominican monastery, the painting depicts a sumptuous banquet, a true feast for the eyes. As with his contemporaries elsewhere in Italy, Veronese was deliberately vague about which event from the life of Jesus he originally meant to depict. He gave the painting its present title only after he had been summoned by the religious tribunal of the Inquisition on the charge of filling his picture with “buffoons, drunkards, Germans, dwarfs, and similar vulgarities” unsuited to its theme. The account of the trial shows that the tribunal thought any such representation of the Last Supper irreverent. (See Primary Source, page 620.) In the face of their questions, Veronese therefore settled on a different title—The Feast in the House of Levi—which permitted him to leave the offending incidents in place. He argued that they were no more objectionable than the nudity of Jesus and the Heavenly Host in Michelangelo’s Last Judgment. Nevertheless, the tribunal failed to see the analogy, on the grounds that “in the Last Judgment it was not necessary to paint garments, and there is nothing in those figures that is not spiritual.” Like many of his contemporaries, Veronese claimed the privilege to “paint pictures as I see fit.”

17.38 Paolo Veronese, The Feast in the House of Levi. 1573. Oil on canvas, 18’2” × 42’ (5.5 × 12.8 m). Gallerie dell’Accademia, Venice
Tintoretto  Jacopo Robusti (1519–1594), called Tintoretto, took a less worldly attitude. He reportedly wanted “to paint like Titian and to design like Michelangelo.” He did not imitate the High Renaissance phases of those artists’ careers, however, but absorbed their later styles, which are more expressive and less realistic in their effects. In a number of large-scale paintings for Venetian confraternities, groups of laypeople organized for religious activities, he assimilated the visionary effects of Titian’s late paintings and the energetic compositions of the late Michelangelo. Tintoretto’s final major work, The Last Supper, finished in 1594, is spectacular (fig. 17.39). It seems to deny in every possible way the balance and clarity of Leonardo’s version of the theme painted almost exactly a century before (see fig. 16.6), which nonetheless underlies Veronese’s picture. Jesus, to be sure, is at the center of the composition, but his small figure in the middle distance is distinguished mainly by his brilliant halo. Tintoretto barely hints at the human drama of Judas’ betrayal, so important to Leonardo. Judas can be seen isolated on the near side of the table across from Jesus (as Castagno had arranged him in his fresco in Sant’Apollonia, see fig. 15.29), but his role is so insignificant that he could almost be mistaken for an attendant. The table is now placed at a sharp angle to the picture plane in exaggerated perspective. This arrangement had a purpose. Tintoretto designed it to relate the scene to the space of the chancel of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, designed by Palladio (see fig. 17.33), for which it was commissioned. When the Benedictine friars knelt at the altar rail to receive communion, they could see the scene at a less acute angle, as if the painted space continued their own.

Tintoretto gives the event an everyday setting, cluttering the scene with attendants, containers of food and drink, and domestic animals. There are also celestial attendants who converge upon Jesus as he offers his body and blood, in the form of bread and wine, to the disciples. The smoke from the blazing oil lamp miraculously turns into clouds of angels, blurring the distinction between the natural and the supernatural and turning the scene into a magnificently orchestrated vision. The artist’s main concern is to make visible the miracle of the Eucharist—the Transubstantiation of earthly into divine food—in both real and symbolic terms. The central importance of this sacrament to Catholic doctrine was forcefully reasserted during the Catholic Counter-Reformation. The painting was especially appropriate for its location in San Giorgio Maggiore, which played a prominent role in the reform movement that would have broad repercussions for the arts in Europe in subsequent centuries.
The Late Renaissance and Mannerism in Sixteenth-Century Italy

1500

- ca. 1505 Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*

1510

- 1520 Death of Raphael
- 1521 Luther condemned at Diet of Worms

1520

- 1527 Habsburg army sacks Rome; Giulio Romano in Mantua

1530

- 1537 Cosimo I ruler in Florence
- 1540 Ignatius of Loyola founds Society of Jesus (Jesuits)
- 1545 Council of Trent opens; Catholic Reformation begins

1540

1550

1560

- 1563 Founding of Florence’s Accademia del Disegno

1570

- 1571 Venetian and Spanish navies defeat Turkish fleet at Lepanto

1580

- 1582 Pope Gregory XIII reforms the calendar

1590

1600

- 1597 Annibale Carracci in Rome