

The Strange Art of 16th -century Italy

Some thoughts before we start.

This course is going to use a seminar format. Each of you will be responsible for an artist. You will be giving reports on-site as we progress, in as close to chronological order as logistics permit. At the end of the course each of you will do a Power Point presentation which will cover the works you treated on-site by fitting them into the rest of the artist's oeuvre and the historical context.

The readings: You will take home a Frederick Hartt textbook, History of Italian Renaissance Art. For the first part of the course this will be your main background source. For sculpture you will have photocopies of some chapters from Roberta Olsen's book on Italian Renaissance sculpture. I had you buy Walter Friedlaender's Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting, first published in 1925. While recent scholarship does not agree with his whole thesis, many of his observations are still valid about the main changes at the beginning and the end of the 16th century. In addition there will be some articles copied from art history periodicals and a few provided in digital format which you can read on the computer. Each of you will be doing other reading on your individual artists.

A major goal of the course will be to see how sixteenth-century art depends on Raphael and Michelangelo, and to a lesser extent on Leonardo. Art seems to develop in cycles. What happens after a moment of great innovations? Vasari, in his Lives of the Artists, seems to ask "where do we go from here?" If Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo were perfect, how does one carry on? The same thing occurred after Giotto and Duccio in the early Trecento. For a century artists worked on one aspect of another of their innovative styles. In the early Quattrocento Masaccio, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti and Donatello came along, as Alberti tells us in the introduction to his Della Pittura, and moved towards a new naturalism based on scientific observations and a revival of the antique. By the end of the 1400's their innovations were exhausted and Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo invented a new, more monumental, emotionally moving style. The painters who followed them, Andrea del Sarto, Jacopo Pontormo, Rosso Fiorentino, Parmagianino, seemed to pick up on the least classic, the least harmonious aspects of their works and, instead, created some irrational, strange, bizarre paintings.

Many explanations have been given for the peculiar trend in this period, which lasted from about 1512 to 1530. Some art historians attributed it to foreign invasions (the French, the Spanish, the Germans), to a series of plagues, to the Sack of Rome in 1527, to the advent of spiritualist and Protestant revolt against the Roman church. They propose that it affected the individual artists' psyches. Venice, which did not suffer invasions or a political change was pretty much immune to these changes towards the rarefied and weird. This would give some credence to the political explanation. We shall also see that Roman art of the 16th century is quite different from the art produced in Florence. Certainly the end of the Florentine Republic and the beginning of the Medici duchy in the late 1530s fostered another change in style, characterized by a much more courtly sophistication.

What are the principle characteristics of this new phenomenon? First there was a move away from naturalism and using live models. Either one used other artists' works as models or one had a series of drawings, which one then combined to make a work "better and more beautiful" than anything in nature. This is a neo-platonic concept, that the ideal in the artist's mind is better than the accidents of nature. By picking beautiful parts from many models one improves on the real world. Sometimes the results are very beautiful, sometimes they are rather absurd. Influenced by treatises on how to write poetry and prose, which encouraged much rhetorical embellishment, esoteric quotations and elaborate figures of speech, painters tried to find a parallel for their art, which meant that complicated compositions and poses of figures and a proliferation of details became the norm. You need a sophisticated audience to "get" this art, one which likes to play mental games.

For Italians "il bello" is synonymous with "good". "Il bello" was taken to extremes in this period. Figures became elongated and sinuous to make them appear more elegant. Females, even religious personages, verged on the erotic. Males, to live up to Michelangelo's standards, had to be muscular and if possible rigorously nude. This produced an art which no longer was concerned with conveying a didactic, religious or narrative message. What counted was "style" but not a period styles so much as an individual style that

everyone could recognize. The artists who worked in Florence during this period were Bronzino, Salviati, Vasari, Cellini, Bandinelli, Ammannati.

Would this “art for art’s sake” have exhausted itself without the Counter Reformation? Towards the end of the sixteenth century there were already signs of a change back to a more “natural” treatment of religious subjects. We will see how the edicts issued by the Council of Trent demanded art with clear messages, less complication in composition and more naturalistic treatment of figures. And above all they wanted no more nudes, no more erotic overtones and more decorum in religious art. The end of the course will look at this transition out of “maniera” by looking at Giambologna and Bernini in sculpture and at Barocci, Cigoli, Santi di Tito, Caravaggio and the Carracci in painting.

Possible research topics:

1. Michelangelo, also his relationship with Sebastiano del Piombo and Pontormo
2. Michelangelo’s architecture
3. Andrea del Sarto
4. Pontormo
5. Rosso Fiorentino
6. Bronzino
7. Salviati and Vasari
8. Bandeinelli
9. Cellini
10. Ammannati
11. Giambologna
12. Bernini
13. Barocci, Caravaggio, Carracci

You will write a paper early in the course, which will compare the end of the 1400s with the beginnings of the new style. Towards the middle of the course there will be a paper on Michelangelo’s influence in the sixteenth century. At the end there will be an exam which will include a few slide comparisons and an essay. The rest of your grade will be based on your on-site reports and your Power Point presentation. You need to get started early and to make up a clear game plan so that you are not rushed at the end of the semester. I will give each of you some images to get you started. Your job will be to enrich this beginning with new material, comparisons, explanatory captions and images. Buon Lavoro !

On-site reports: These will be presented as works by your artist come up during our on-site visits.

1. Read the material on your subject
2. in your presentation tell us about:
 - the type of commission and the patron
 - where the work fits into the career of your artist
 - the iconography
 - stylistic characteristics
3. you can prepare and photocopy a handout if you think it would be helpful
4. ask questions so that you can get the class to respond and participate.

Classes will usually meet on Tuesdays 2:00 to 3:45 and Thursdays from 11:15 to 1:00

Most classes will be on-site and this means that you need to figure out how to get there in advance, so that you will not be late. Remember that we have fixed appointments for museums and we cannot wait for late arrivals. If you do not enter with the group you will be responsible for paying for your own entrance.

Reading: Books: they will be listed in this font on the syllabus

- Benvenuto Cellini, Autobiography
- W. Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, N.Y. 1965 (You bought this and brought it with you)
- Richard Turner, The Renaissance in Florence, London, 1997 (Ed Burke suggested that you buy it. It you did not there are copies on the reserve table at school)
- Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art, various editions (the large text book we are lending you)

Many of your readings are the photocopied articles and chapters from books which are being lent to you. They are arranged in the plastic box in the order you will be reading them and there is an index on the top of the pile. The readings in the plastic box are in the same font as the syllabus. *A few readings you can access on Istor and are distinguished by this font. I will also put digital copies on the computers at school.* Be sure to take some notes on the readings, as you go through the course, because you will be asked to refer to them on the final exam.

September:

Mon. 7 Casa Buonarrotti

- Read: Olsen, Italian Renaissance Sculpture, chap. 9 “Michelangelo”, London, 1992

Mon. 14 Sta. Maria Novella: to look at frescoes by Masaccio, Ghirlandaio and Filippino Lippi

Wed. 23 Discuss Benvenuto Cellini’s Autobiography

Week I

Tue. Sept. 29 Meet in the classroom for an over-view

- Read: Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art, chap. 9 “The Heritage of Masaccio and the Second Renaissance Style” and chap. 11 “The Painting of the Second Renaissance Style”.

Thur. Oct. 1

Meet at the reserved entrance to the Uffizi to look at Quattrocento painting

- Read: Richard Turner, “The world seen through a window”, from The Renaissance in Florence, London, 1997
- Frederick Hartt, History of Italian Renaissance Art, chap. 13 “Science, Poetry and Prose

Week II

Tue. Oct. 6

Meet in the classroom Lecture on Rome in the early 16th Century

- Read: Hartt, chap. 16 “The High Renaissance in Florence” and chap. 17 “The High Renaissance in Rome”

Thur. Oct. 8

Meet at San Michele Visdomini (corner of via dei Pucci and via dei Servi, just north of the Duomo), then go to SS Annunziata

- W. Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, N.Y. 1965 first part “The Anti-Classical Style”
- David Franklin, “A document for Pontormo’s San Michele Visdomini altar-piece”, Burlington Magazine, July 1990, vol. 132, pp. 487-489
- Graham Smith, “Pontormo’s Visdomini Altar and Durer’s Small woodcut Passion”, Paragone, 25, 1974, 293, pp. 82-88

Paper due

Week III

Tues. Oct. 10

Meet in the Piazza Unità at 9:00 to go to the charter house of the Certosa to see Pontormo's Passion cycle and then on the way back stop at Sta. Felicità to see his Capponi chapel paintings.

- Read: Suzanne Myer's paper – "Past Innovation, Present Rejection, Future Sensibility: Pontormo's Fresco Cycle for the Certosa"
- *Laura M. Giles, "Christ before Pilate": A Major Composition Study by Pontormo, Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies, Vol. 17, No. 1 (access on your college Jstor or copy from the computers at school)*

Thur. Oct. 15

Meet in front of San Marco to go see the Chiostro del Scalzo.

- Serena Padovani, Andrea del Sarto, the section on the Cloister of *Lo Scalzo*, Firenze 1986
- Eve Borsook,, catalogue entry on the Cloister of the Scalzo from The Mural Painters of Tuscany, Oxford, 1980

Break

Week IV

Tue. Oct. 27

Meet in front of the Pitti Palace Galleria Palatina

- Read: Hartt, in chap. 18 the section on Andrea del Sarto

Thur. Oct. 29

Meet in front at the entrance to the Medici chapels (behind San Lorenzo), Bandinelli's monument to Giovanni delle Bande Nere and Bronzino's Martyrdom of San Lawrence

- Read: Erwin Panofsky, from his Tomb Sculpture, pp. 90-91 on the Medici chapel in San Lorenzo
- David Franklin, "Rosso Fiorentino's Betrothal of the Virgin: Patronage and Interpretation", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, 1992, vol 55, pp. 180-192
- *Janet Cox-Rearick, "Pontormo', Bronzino, Allori and the lost 'Deluge' at S. Lorenzo", Burlington Magazine, vol. 134, 1992, pp. 239-248 (access on Jstor or copy from computers at school)*

Week V

Tue. Nov. 3 Meet in the classroom. Discussion on Michelangelo's influence

- Read: Paragone material
- Cammy Brothers, excerpts from chapter 1 "Drawing, Memory, and Invention", from Michelangelo, Drawing and the Invention of Architecture, Yale Univ. Press, 2008

Thur. Nov. 5

Meet at the David in the Pza Signoria Uffizi

- Read: Olsen, chap. 10 "The Sixteenth Century and the Legacy of Michelangelo"

Fri Nov. 6

Meet at the Bargello

- Read: Giorgio Vasari's Life of the sculpture Rustici from his Lives of the Artists

Rome: Read: Friedlaender, the second part on the Anti-Mannerist style

Week VI

Thur. Nov. 12

Meet in front of the Palazzo Vecchio

- Read: John Paoletti, Gary Radke, "Florence under Cosimo I (1537-74)", Art in Renaissance Italy, London, 1997, pp. 395-401

Week VII

Tue. Nov. 17 Meet at the Uffizi

- Graham Smith, "Moses and the Daughters of Jethro by Rosso Fiorentino"

Thur. Nov. 19 Meet in the classroom Lecture on art outside of Florence and "Maniera as an aesthetic ideal"

- Read: Hartt, chap. 18 - the part on artists outside of Florence and chap. 19 "High Renaissance in Venice and the Mainland"

Paper due on Michelangelo's influence

Week VIII

Tue. Nov. 24

Meet at the Accademia:

- discuss the second part of Friedlaender on Anti-Mannerism

Thur. Nov. 26 Meet at Sta. Croce to look at Vasari's renovation of the church and the altarpieces commissioned under his supervision.

- Read: Marcia B. Hall "The Operation of Vasari's Workshop and the Designs for S. Maria Novella and S. Croce", The Burlington Magazine, Vol. 115, No. 841 (Apr., 1973), pp. 204-209 (Istor or computers)

Week IX

Tue. Dec 1 Reports: del Sarto, Pontormo, Rosso, Bandinelli, Michelangelo

- Read: Christopher Fulton, "Present at the Inception: Donatello and the Origins of Sixteenth-Century Mannerism" Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte, 60 Bd., H. 2 (1997), pp. 166-199 (Istor or computers)

Thur. Dec. 3 Reports: Parmagianino, Bronzino, Salviati, Vasari, Ammannati, Cellini

- Read: Fredrika H. Jacobs "An Assessment of Contour Line: Vasari, Cellini and the "Paragone", Artibus et Historiae, Vol. 9, No. 18 (1988), pp. 139-150 (Istor or computers)

Week X

Tue. Dec. 8 Reports: Giambologna, Santi di Tito and Cigoli, Bernini, Barocci and Caravaggio

Thur. Dec. 7 Exam

Assignments

1. Quattrocento Paper 20 %
2. Michelangelo's influence 20 %
3. On-site reports and Power Point 30 %
4. Exam 30 %