

Unit 1: Apse Mosaics of Justinian and Theodora, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, 546-556

These two mosaic panels face each other across the sanctuary of the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, located on the northeast coast of Italy. After the fall of Rome in 476, Italy came under the rule of the Ostrogoths, led by Theodoric, who believed in Arianism, a heresy that taught that Christ the Son was lesser than and subordinate to God the Father. When the Byzantine Emperor Justinian reconquered Ravenna in 540, he not only restored imperial rule, but also the one true faith according to the Nicene creed. These lavish mosaics, added to the recently completed church, depict that united political and religious authority.

On one side, Emperor Justinian appears wearing a crown, a halo, and robes of imperial purple, a color made from the shells of thousands of crushed sea snails, so expensive that only emperors were permitted to wear it. He is flanked by clergy dressed in vestments, including Bishop Maximian of Ravenna, named in an inscription above his head, soldiers whose shields bear the Chi-Rho monogram (the first two Greek letters of "Christ") and officials whose status is indicated by the purple stripe on their robes. These figures carry a censer, a liturgical book, a jeweled cross, and Justinian himself carries a large ciborium bowl, symbolically joining his earthly rule to Christ's authority. Notice that the faces of the soldiers are similar, generic faces, while the bishop, emperor, and other officials look more like portraits of specific individuals.

On the opposite wall, Empress Theodora appears in equally splendid purple robes, a halo, and a crown dripping with pearls, rubies, emeralds, and sapphires, offering a large chalice and attended by ladies of the court and clergy.

Between the two panels, in the central apse, Christ sits enthroned on an orb of the world, dressed in the same imperial purple as Justinian and Theodora, symbolizing His universal dominion. He offers the crown of martyrdom to Saint Vitalis, the church's patron saint, but the gesture also extends downward toward Justinian, implying that the emperor rules as Christ's representative on earth. Neither Justinian nor Theodora ever actually came to Ravenna; these mosaics are not records of a historical event in the church, but carefully constructed propaganda, reminding everyone who saw them that the emperor ruled by God's authority, and that disloyalty to Justinian was disloyalty to God himself.

The mosaics themselves are made of colored glass and of gold leaf sandwiched between two layers of glass, with the individual tesserae (mosaic tiles) deliberately set into the wall plaster at slightly uneven angles so that flickering candlelight would catch them from different directions, making the whole wall shimmer and giving the impression of a glimpse of heaven.

Unit 2: Alfred Jewel, Anglo-Saxon, late 800s

This small object, only about 2.5 inches long, is made of gold, enamel, and polished rock crystal, and is believed to be the decorative end of a pointer once used to follow along the lines of text in a large manuscript. The base is shaped like an animal's head; its open mouth originally gripped the pointer, likely a thin wooden rod. Around its edge runs an Old English inscription: "AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN," meaning "Alfred ordered me to be made." The enameled figure is believed to represent either Christ in Majesty or a personification of Sight. The Alfred Jewel was discovered by a ploughman in 1693 in Somerset, England, just eight miles from Athelney, where King Alfred had founded a monastery after hiding out in the marshes there during a Viking invasion.

Scholars believe the jewel was the handle of one of the costly "aestels," or pointer staffs, that Alfred the Great, King of Wessex, sent out to every bishopric in his kingdom, along with copies of his own English translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. In his preface to that book, Alfred wrote that he was sending a copy to every bishop's see in his realm, each one paired with an aestel worth fifty mancuses (a mancus was a gold coin roughly equivalent to thirty silver pennies, making this a very valuable gift indeed), and ordered in God's name that no one separate the staff from the book, or the book from the church. Alfred is remembered as one of the only English monarchs given the title "the Great," largely for defending Wessex against Viking invasion and for his efforts to revive learning and literacy after years of war had devastated English monasteries and schools.

Unit 3: San Damiano Crucifix, Italian, c. 1100

In 1206, the man who would become St. Francis of Assisi was a wealthy young cloth merchant's son from Assisi who had recently abandoned a comfortable future in his father's business. He was wandering the countryside trying to discern God's will for his life, though he had not yet founded any religious order or taken vows. He was praying before this large painted wooden cross in the chapel of San Damiano just outside Assisi, when he heard a voice say, "Francis, rebuild my church." At first, he took the instruction literally, setting about repairing the crumbling little stone chapel with his own hands, before later understanding the instruction to be a call to renew the whole Church.

The cross is typical of the Romanesque style of the early medieval period. It is known as an "icon cross" because, rather than showing only the crucified Christ, it's crowded with additional small scenes meant to teach the Gospel story to worshippers who couldn't read. Above the crucified Christ, we see Christ depicted ascending into heaven, surrounded by angels and receiving the Father's blessing, represented by a hand reaching down from above. Just above His head is the empty tomb, flanked by two angels. On Christ's left side stand Mary, Saint John, and the Roman centurion who pierced His side with a lance; on His right, Mary Magdalene, another Mary, and a mocking Pharisee. Near His knee on the right, a rooster crows, recalling Peter's three denials, while a row of small apostles looks up from the base of the cross toward the risen Christ above.

The cross remains associated with the Franciscan order today; a copy hangs in Franciscan churches throughout the world, and the original is now kept in the Basilica of Saint Clare in Assisi.

Unit 4: Becket Casket, French (Limoges), 1180-1190

Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered inside his own cathedral in 1170 by four knights of the court of King Henry II of England. Years of escalating conflict and power struggles between church and crown had led the king to cry out in frustration, "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Four of his knights, hearing this, took him at his word. They rode to Canterbury and murdered the bishop. The sacrilegious act shocked all of Europe; Canterbury instantly became a major pilgrimage site, and Thomas was formally canonized as a saint just three years later, in 1173.

This casket is the largest and most elaborate of more than forty surviving reliquaries made to hold relics of Saint Thomas. Its wooden core is covered in gilt copper and vivid Limoges enamel (a French enameling technique famous throughout medieval Europe, using powdered colored glass fused onto copper). It depicts St. Thomas's murder at the altar on one side and his funeral procession above it. The opposite side shows Christ enthroned on a rainbow, flanked by four saints; the end panel, now lost, may once have shown Saint Peter, and the casket's base and the relic it originally held have also disappeared over the centuries. The shrine of Saint Thomas at Canterbury itself was utterly destroyed in 1538 on the order of King Henry VIII, who was disinclined to allow the veneration of a saint famous for defying the authority of another King Henry in defense of the Church.

Unit 5: Giotto di Bondone, *The Lamentation*, Scrovegni Chapel Frescoes, c. 1305

The Scrovegni Chapel, also called the Arena Chapel because it was built on the site of an old Roman arena in Padua, was commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni, a wealthy banker who had made his fortune lending money and charging interest, a practice widely viewed at the time as sinful (usury was condemned by the medieval Church, in part on the basis of Old Testament prohibitions against charging interest to fellow believers). Scrovegni seems to have built and decorated the chapel at least partly to atone for that guilt.

He hired Giotto to cover the walls with an enormous cycle of frescoes, paintings made by applying pigment onto wet plaster so the color becomes part of the wall itself as it dries, the same technique later used for the Fra Angelico's Annunciation (AH I, Unit 7) and the Sistine Chapel (AH I, Unit 16 and AH II, Unit 17). Like most master painters of his day, Giotto didn't work entirely alone; he directed a workshop of roughly forty assistants who helped carry out his designs.

Giotto is often credited as one of the first artists to break away from the flat, stylized International Gothic tradition and move toward the more naturalistic innovations that would flower into the Renaissance. *The Lamentation* captures the moment right after Christ's body is taken down from the cross, as Mary cradles Him in her arms, in a composition that deliberately echoes the way she once held Him as an infant in the chapel's nearby Nativity scene. Rather than lining his figures up flatly across the wall (for example, the San Vitale mosaics, AH II, Unit 1), Giotto arranges them to create a real sense of three-dimensional space and narrative action, drawing the eye toward Mary and Christ at the center. Two figures even turn their backs to the viewer, seeming to occupy the same physical space as the audience standing in the chapel. Giotto also gave his figures real physical bulk and weight for the first time in centuries, modeling their draped robes with visible light and shadow so that bodies seem to press outward against the cloth, rather than floating inside flat, decorative patterns as in earlier Byzantine-influenced painting. He set this weighty, believable humanity against a simple, understated landscape, a rocky outcropping and a single bare tree, placing the scene inside the natural world, unlike the gold backgrounds of earlier art. Even the angels swirling overhead twist and grieve with individual, almost violent emotion, rather than hovering in the calm, uniform poses typical of earlier medieval angels. Each figure, human or angelic, shows a distinct, individual emotional response to the scene, from quiet grief to open despair, a striking departure from the more uniform, symbolic figures of earlier medieval art.

Unit 6: *The Wilton Diptych*, English or French, c. 1395-1399

A diptych (from Greek, "two-folded") is a pair of hinged panels meant to open and close like a book, usually for private prayer. The Wilton Diptych, each panel measuring about 21 by 15 inches, is one of the finest surviving examples of the elegant International Gothic style. The left panel shows King Richard II of England kneeling in prayer, presented to the Virgin Mary on the opposite panel by three saintly figures: King Edmund the Martyr, King Edward the Confessor, and Saint John the Baptist, each identifiable by their traditional attribute (respectively an arrow, a ring, and the Lamb of God). Saint John wears a garment of camel skin; its shaggy tail is tucked into his belt and the animal's head visible near his own leg.

The panels are painted in tempera, pigment bound with egg yolk, on wood panels, with backgrounds of gold leaf stamped with decorative punchmarks. The deep blue of the Virgin's and angels' robes comes from ultramarine, a pigment ground from lapis lazuli, a semiprecious stone imported all the way from Afghanistan; the grinding and purifying process was so labor intensive that the finished pigment cost as much as gold itself. King Richard's own robe is painted in another costly color, vermillion. Several colors have faded over the centuries; the roses in the angels' hair were once a much brighter pink, and the green painted on the diptych's reverse side has faded to a dull shade.

The right panel shows the Virgin Mary surrounded by eleven angels. She is holding the Christ Child, who reaches out to bless King Richard and gestures toward a small pennant bearing the flag of England, a sign of divine approval and protection. Atop the pennant's staff sits a tiny golden orb, painted with a miniature map of a wooded island crowned by a white tower, surrounded by a sea painted in silver leaf that has since tarnished to black.

Richard is identifiable by his personal badge, a white hart (a mature male deer) resting on the ground with a gold chain around its neck; the attending angels wear the same badge, though the king's version has pearl tipped antlers and a bed of emerald grass. His robe is patterned with more harts and encircled by seed pods from the broom plant, whose Latin name, *planta genista*, gave the House of Plantagenet its name, while sprigs of rosemary woven through the design honor his wife, Anne of Bohemia, (rosemary was her personal emblem). Richard's birthday fell on January 6, the feast of the Epiphany, and this painting deliberately echoes the traditional image of the three kings adoring the infant Christ, with Saint John the Baptist standing in for the shepherds of the Nativity story.

Some scholars believe William Shakespeare may have been familiar with this image. In his play *Richard II*, the king declares that heaven keeps "a glorious angel" in Richard's service, and gives the dying John of Gaunt a famous speech describing England as "this precious stone

set in the silver sea," a phrase that seems to echo the tiny silver painted island glimpsed on the orb in this very painting.

Unit 7: Robert Campin, *The Merode Altarpiece*, 1427-1432

This triptych, a set of three hinged panels painted in oil on oak board, was, like the Wilton Diptych, created as a private devotional image, the kind of small, personal picture a wealthy family might keep at home for daily prayer. There is a reference in *The Wool Pack* (7/8th grade Book List) to a similar devotional painting that Nicholas's father gave to his mother.

The central panel shows the annunciation, when Gabriel came to tell Mary that she would be the Mother of the Messiah. It is set inside a cozy, cluttered fifteenth century Flemish home rather than a distant biblical Holy Land, with a view through the window of the real city of Liège in what is now Belgium. On the left panel, the donors who commissioned the work kneel in prayer just outside the door; on the right, Saint Joseph works quietly in his carpentry shop. A coat of arms in the window identifies the donors as Peter Engelbrecht, whose surname roughly translates to "angel brings," and his wife Margarete Scrynmakers, whose surname means "cabinet maker," which might explain why the central scene shows an angel's visit, and the side panel shows a carpenter at his bench; the whole altarpiece may be a subtle, punning tribute to their names.

Stylistically, the painting sits right at the hinge point between the late Gothic and the early Netherlandish Renaissance. Campin uses perspective to suggest depth, but not always consistently; the table between Mary and the angel looks distinctly unstable, and both figures seem to float slightly above the floor rather than sit firmly within the room. The donors kneel just outside an open door that, oddly, has no matching doorway on the interior side, and the view of the town seen from inside doesn't line up with the view seen from outside.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is implied by a faint puff of smoke from a candle that has just been blown out, while a tiny figure of Christ, already carrying his cross, descends toward Mary along a beam of light streaming through the window. The room is full of symbolism: a basin of water and a clean towel, along with a white lily in a vase, all point to Mary's purity, while an open book (modern) and scroll (traditional) on the table represent the Old and New Testaments. Mary herself sits positioned directly in front of the fireplace, symbolically blocking the gate of Hell. Outside, near the donors, a goldfinch perches on a rosebush; because goldfinches eat thistleseed, they became associated in medieval symbolism with Christ's crown of thorns, while the rose itself recalls Mary's traditional title *rosa sine spina*, "the rose without a thorn." In his workshop, Saint Joseph builds a small mousetrap, a detail drawn from the writings of Saint Augustine, who described the cross itself as a kind of trap set to catch the devil.

Unit 8: Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434

This full-length double portrait, painted in oil on oak board, depicts Giovanni Arnolfini, a wealthy Italian merchant living in Bruges, and his wife, believed to be Costanza Trenta. It appears to be set in early summer, since ripe fruit hangs on the cherry tree visible through the open window. Their wealth is on display everywhere in the picture: an imported oriental carpet from the Middle East, exotic and therefore costly oranges, not grown in northern Europe, resting casually on the windowsill, richly carved furniture, an elaborate brass chandelier, and heavy red bed hangings. The pale shoes near the front of the composition are pattens, wooden overshoes worn to protect fine leather shoes from the mud of medieval streets; another pair, in red, sits discarded between the couple.

The detail in this painting is extraordinary. The small convex mirror hanging on the back wall reflects the entire room in astonishing miniature detail, including the backs of the couple themselves, and reveals two additional figures standing in the doorway who aren't visible anywhere else in the painting, one dressed in red, one in blue. The figure in red is often identified as the artist himself, even though he isn't shown in the act of painting. Around the little mirror is a ring of tiny painted scenes from the Passion of Christ. Above the mirror, elegant calligraphy reads "Johannes de Eyck fuit hic," Latin for "Jan van Eyck made this," along with the date, almost like a witness's signature on a legal document.

Exactly what moment this painting captures remains debated. The couple's clasped hands and the man's raised right hand, as though taking an oath or offering a blessing, have led some scholars to interpret the scene as a wedding or betrothal. Although the wife appears to be pregnant, art historians generally agree this reflects a fashionable style of dress at the time, with yards of heavy fabric deliberately gathered at the front. One intriguing theory holds that the painting may commemorate the wife after her death; only one candle burns in the chandelier, on the husband's side, while the candle above the wife has already gone out, and the tiny scenes framing the mirror show Christ's earthly life on his side but His death and resurrection on hers. The carved figure on the headboard, shown with a small dragon at her feet, is Saint Margaret, patron saint of childbirth and safe delivery. The small dog standing between them may simply be a beloved pet, another sign of the couple's fashionable wealth, or may symbolize marital loyalty and fidelity.

Unit 9: Piero della Francesca, *The Flagellation of Christ*, c. 1455-1460

This small panel, only about two feet wide, has been called both "the greatest small painting in the world" and "an enigmatic little painting," and it has puzzled art historians for centuries. Its central subject is easy enough to identify: the flagellation of Christ. Stripped and bound, Christ is whipped at a column inside a grand classical portico, watched over by a seated figure believed to be Pontius Pilate.

The artist signed his own work in Latin, carved into the base beneath the seated figure's chair: "OPUS PETRI DE BURGO SANCTI SEPULCRI," meaning "the work of Piero of Borgo Santo Sepolcro," his hometown. Della Francesca used strict linear perspective to divide the panel cleanly in two, showing the flagellation taking place in a shadowed interior space at left, while three mysterious figures stand talking together in the open air at right, closer to the viewer. Strangely, the flagellation scene appears to be lit from the right, while the outdoor scene is lit from the left, as though the two halves belong to entirely different moments or worlds.

The identity of the three figures on the right is uncertain. Many theories have been proposed over the centuries: a symbolic depiction of the past, present, and future; the three ages of man (youth, maturity, old age); a specific reference to the victims of a real political murder in Piero's own hometown in 1444; or even a scene of reconciliation between representatives of the Latin and Greek Churches, echoing the same hopes for Christian reunion reflected in his Baptism of Christ. The painting was originally framed with an inscription reading "CONVENERUNT IN UNUM," "they came together," a phrase drawn from Acts 4:26, referring there to Pilate, Herod, and the leaders of Israel conspiring against Christ. The painting seems to be drawing some deliberate parallel between that ancient betrayal and events closer to Piero's own time, but exactly what that parallel means has never been conclusively solved.

Unit 10: Sandro Botticelli, *La Primavera* (Spring), c. 1482

La Primavera is an elaborate allegory of Spring's abundance. Scholars have long tried to connect its imagery to the Neoplatonic philosophy fashionable among Florentine humanists at the time. As in the *Birth of Venus* by the same artist, every figure is drawn from classical mythology, though no single ancient myth brings all these particular characters together in one story.

Reading from right to left: Zephyrus, the biting wind of early spring, seizes and transforms the nymph Chloris into the next figure in line, Flora, goddess of spring, who scatters flowers from the folds of her dress, a transformation shown quite literally by flowers spilling from Chloris's mouth. Her name comes from the Greek word for "green," the same root behind English words like "chlorophyll." At the center stands Venus, though here she appears in her role as goddess of marriage rather than of romantic love, modestly dressed with her hair covered, as was proper for a married woman of the time. The trees behind her curve inward to form a kind of halo or *mandorla* (an almond shaped full body halo; the word comes from the Italian word for almond). Venus meets the viewer's gaze directly and raises one hand in a gesture resembling a blessing. To her right, the Three Graces, usually identified as Beauty, Chastity, and Love, dance together, while a blindfolded Cupid aims his arrow at the Grace representing Chastity, standing in the middle of the group. Finally, at the far left, Mercury raises his caduceus (herald's staff) to wave away a small patch of dark clouds gathering above the trees, though at first glance he almost looks like he's simply reaching up to pick fruit.

The figures are arranged in a single level row, their heads all aligned at roughly the same height, a compositional technique known as isocephalic, which also appears in the *Birth of Venus* and, in a very different context, in the Justinian and Theodora mosaics and the *Wilton Diptych*. Compare this simple, frieze-like composition to the more complex, layered grouping of figures in Leonardo's *Madonna of the Rocks*. The scene unfolds in a grove of orange trees; this may be an allusion to the Medici family's coat of arms, which was decorated with five red balls. It also recalls the mythical Garden of the Hesperides, home of the golden apples awarded to Venus in the Judgment of Paris (ancient Greek writers sometimes identified those golden apples as a kind of citrus fruit).

The meadow beneath the figures' feet is scattered with an extraordinary variety of flowers. At least 46 distinct species have been identified by botanists, including cornflower, iris, wild strawberry, rose, and hyacinth. Several of the trees are laurels, likely a visual pun on the name of the painting's probable patron, Lorenzo de' Medici, and the small flame patterns on the robes of both Mercury and Venus were also a traditional attribute of Saint Lawrence, another pun connecting the painting back to the Medici name, which itself derives from the Italian word for

"doctor," perhaps explaining the inclusion of Mercury, who in classical mythology also served as a god associated with medicine.

Unit 11: Leonardo da Vinci, *Madonna of the Rocks*, 1483-1486

This is one of two versions Leonardo painted of the same subject. This version hangs in the Louvre in Paris; the other hangs in the National Gallery in London. The work was commissioned by the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception for their chapel in the church of San Francesco Grande in Milan. The doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception, the belief that she herself was conceived free from original sin, had been hotly debated throughout medieval Europe, and Pope Sixtus IV had only just formally established a feast day honoring it in 1476. Less than a decade later, in 1483, the confraternity commissioned this painting to celebrate the doctrine. It was not completed to the patrons' satisfaction until 1508, twenty-five years later, following a long and bitter dispute over payment; Leonardo may have quietly sold this first version to a private buyer at some point along the way, and subsequently painted the London version afterward to finally fulfill the original commission.

Both versions were painted in oil on wood panel, though the Paris version was later transferred onto canvas for conservation reasons. Both depict the Virgin Mary, the infant Jesus, the infant John the Baptist, and the angel Uriel gathered together in a rocky grotto. According to medieval legend, John the Baptist's family had also fled toward Egypt around the same time as the Holy Family, to escape King Herod's massacre of the innocents, and the two families were said to have crossed paths along the way. The moody, mysterious landscape recalls the misty backgrounds of other Leonardo paintings, including the *Mona Lisa*, and shows off his mastery of *sfumato*, Italian for "smoked" or "hazy," a technique of blending colors and forms so gradually that no hard outlines are visible anywhere in the painting.

Leonardo was fascinated by aerial perspective, the observed phenomenon that distant objects appear paler, bluer, and less distinct than nearby ones, and used that knowledge here to build a convincing sense of depth. The painting equally showcases his skill with *chiaroscuro* (Italian for "light and dark"), the dramatic contrast of illuminated and shadowed surfaces used to model three-dimensional form on a flat panel.

Some scholars interpret the strange, brooding landscape as an allusion to the world as it existed at the very moment of Creation, before sin had entered it, fitting imagery for a painting celebrating Mary's own sinless conception. The dramatic rock formations reflect Leonardo's genuine, lifelong fascination with geology, though the many flowers and plants scattered through the scene appear, on close botanical inspection, to be largely invented rather than accurate depictions of real species.

Unit 12: Leonardo da Vinci, *Vitruvian Man*, c. 1490

This famous pen and ink drawing, only about 13 by 10 inches, shows a male figure in two superimposed positions, arms and legs outstretched, inscribed within both a circle and a square. Leonardo was illustrating the writings of the Roman architect Vitruvius, who had written, over 1,400 years earlier, that a well-proportioned human body should fit perfectly within these two basic geometric shapes, since the navel marks the exact center of a circle drawn around the body, while the outstretched arms and legs together form a perfect square.

The drawing is accompanied by notes in Leonardo's distinctive mirror writing, which could only be read by holding the page up to a mirror, in which he records the ideal mathematical ratios of the human body: for instance, that the length of the outstretched arms should equal a person's height, and that the length of the hand should equal one tenth of that same height. Leonardo was fascinated throughout his life by anatomy, mathematics, and the idea that the human body itself reflected a deeper, divinely ordered harmony found throughout the natural world, a very Renaissance blending of scientific observation and philosophical meaning. The original drawing is extremely fragile and is kept in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice, where it is rarely put on public display in order to protect it from light damage. Today the image has become one of the most widely recognized symbols of the Renaissance itself and is often used as an emblem of the balance between art and science.

Unit 13: Giovanni Bellini, *Portrait of Doge Leonardo Loredan*, 1501

This portrait shows Leonardo Loredan, who served as Doge, or elected head of state, of the Republic of Venice from 1501 until his death in 1521. It is painted in oil on wood panel, likely soon after his election in 1501. The Doge appears in strict profile-adjacent, three-quarter view against a plain blue background, dressed in the elaborate, gold-patterned robes and distinctive horned cap, called a *corno ducale*, that marked his office. Venice's Doge was elected for life by the city's aristocracy and functioned less like a king and more like a highly restricted head of state, bound by an elaborate set of laws and oversight committees specifically designed to prevent any one man from seizing too much power.

Bellini was already an elderly, celebrated painter by the time he made this portrait. It is considered one of the finest official state portraits of the Venetian Renaissance. The rich, glowing color and careful attention to the texture of Loredan's brocaded robe reflect the influence of oil painting techniques that had spread south to Venice from the technique's original development in Northern Europe; Venetian painters, working in a humid coastal climate poorly suited to fresco, embraced oil paint on canvas and panel earlier and more fully than artists in drier central Italian cities like Florence and Rome.

The portrait's calm, dignified stillness, and its unusually direct, almost sculptural realism, made it enormously influential for later Venetian portraiture. The painting has hung in London's National Gallery since 1844 and remains one of Bellini's most admired late works.

Unit 14: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *David*, 1501-1504

In 1476, the sculptor Agostino di Duccio began work on an enormous block of marble as part of a planned series of statues intended to line the roofline of Florence's cathedral, or Duomo, depicting Old Testament figures. Agostino roughed out only the legs and some drapery before abandoning the project, and the huge block sat neglected in the cathedral workshop for over twenty-five years, considered too difficult for any other sculptor to attempt.

By 1501, the cathedral's overseers, decided to try again. They invited proposals from sculptors willing to take on the awkward, already partly carved block, and the twenty-six-year-old Michelangelo, fresh off the success of his *Pietà* in Rome, convinced them he could finish it. He worked in secrecy and spent about two years carving the statue almost entirely alone. It was decided that the finished statue should go in the Piazza della Signoria, the city's main civic square, transforming David into an immediate, larger-than-life civic symbol. The subject of David held special meaning for the city of Florence, which liked to see itself as a small but righteous underdog - like the young shepherd David - bravely defending its republican liberty against larger, more powerful rival states such as the Papal States, Milan, and the Republic of Venice.

Unlike earlier depictions of David triumphant, standing victorious over Goliath's severed head, Michelangelo instead shows David in a quiet, tense moment before the fight even begins, his brow furrowed and his gaze fixed intently on his unseen opponent. It was the first colossal freestanding statue carved in Europe since antiquity, and it displays masterful contrapposto, an Italian term meaning "counterpose," the illusion of a figure's weight shifting naturally onto one leg. David's right leg bears his full weight and is tensed, while his left leg is relaxed, causing a slight tilt in his hips that is echoed by an opposite tilt in his shoulders, producing the graceful, subtly curving "S" shaped posture that became a hallmark of Renaissance sculpture. In the same pattern, his left arm, like his left leg, is bent but tensed, while his right arm, like his right leg, hangs straight but relaxed.

The finished statue stands over 17 feet tall. Once completed, it took four full days to transport the statue just half a mile from the cathedral workshop to the Piazza della Signoria, Florence's main civic square, using a specially built wooden sledge and rollers. A guard had to be posted to protect the statue from vandalism by jealous rival artists who had wanted the commission for themselves, and damage from thrown stones is still visible on the statue's back today. Originally, David's sling and the tree stump supporting his leg were gilded in gold, and he wore a gilded bronze wreath; a gilded loin garment, was added for a time to satisfy concerns about public nudity, though it was later removed.

A full-size plaster cast of the statue was made in the 19th century for the sculpture court of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, with the addition of a detachable plaster fig leaf to make the statue more modest for when Queen Victoria visited.

Unit 15: Albrecht Dürer, *Saint Jerome in His Study*, 1514

Dürer's famous print of a rhinoceros (AH I, Unit 12) is a woodcut, made by carving an image into a block of wood, inking the raised surface, and pressing it onto paper. *Saint Jerome in His Study* is a copper engraving, a different printmaking technique in which the artist cuts, or incises, the design directly into a thin sheet of relatively soft copper using a sharp steel tool called a burin. A woodcut is a relief print, meaning the printed image stands raised above the surrounding surface, with the background carved away, while a copper engraving is an intaglio print, meaning the image is cut down into the plate itself; ink fills those incised lines while the flat surface is wiped clean, so that only the recessed lines transfer ink onto the paper.

The print shows Saint Jerome, the fourth century scholar famous for translating the Bible into Latin, working peacefully in a cozy, distinctly sixteenth-century German study, an intentional anachronism. Jerome is traditionally shown accompanied by a lion, shown here sleeping contentedly on the study floor, since legend held that Jerome once removed a painful thorn from a lion's paw in the desert, winning the animal's lifelong loyalty, a story similar to the ancient Roman tale of Androcles and the Lion. C.S. Lewis borrowed a version of this same motif in *The Silver Chair*, in which the boy Eustace is instructed to drive a thorn into the great lion Aslan's paw to draw a drop of blood that revives a dying prince. A dog, another traditional symbol of faithfulness, naps beside the lion. Jerome's red cardinal's hat, a broad brimmed *galero* trimmed with fifteen tassels, hangs on the wall behind him, though this too is a deliberate anachronism, since cardinals only began wearing these hats starting in 1245, many centuries after Jerome's own lifetime. The custom of wearing the *galero* was formally ended by the Church in 1969, though the older tradition of hanging a deceased cardinal's *galero* above his tomb, left to slowly disintegrate as a solemn reminder that earthly honors eventually pass away, is still sometimes observed. Four such *galeros* still hang from the ceiling of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in New York, and another hangs at Fordham University's church; the *galero* also survives today as part of a cardinal's official coat of arms, used in place of the helmet or crest that would have been considered too warlike for a clergyman.

An hourglass sits on the wall behind Jerome, a quiet reminder that earthly time is limited; if a line was drawn from the saint's bowed head to the human skull resting on the windowsill (a traditional *memento mori*, or reminder of death), it would pass directly through the small crucifix standing on his desk, a subtle visual reminder that Christ's own death gives Christian believers hope in the face of their own mortality. Dürer signed the print discreetly on a small hanging plaque near the lion's tail.

Unit 16: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Sir Thomas More*, 1527

This portrait, painted in oil on oak panel, depicts Sir Thomas More, the English lawyer, scholar, and statesman who would go on to serve as Lord Chancellor of England under King Henry VIII. It was painted at the height of his career and influence. More is shown seated, dressed in the heavy fur trimmed robes and gold chain of office befitting a senior royal official, his expression thoughtful and composed.

Hans Holbein the Younger, a German born painter, was introduced to More by the great Renaissance humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus, a close friend of More's. When Holbein traveled to England seeking work and patronage, Erasmus supplied him with letters of introduction to English humanist circles. More welcomed the young artist into his own household for a time, and this portrait, along with a larger group portrait of More's entire family that Holbein also began (now known only through later copies and a surviving preparatory sketch), helped establish Holbein's reputation in England and eventually led to his appointment as court painter to King Henry VIII himself.

More was famous even in his own lifetime as the author of *Utopia*, a work of political philosophy describing an imaginary ideal society, and as one of the most learned men in Europe. Just eight years after this portrait was painted, More was executed in 1535 on Henry VIII's orders, for refusing to acknowledge the king as Supreme Head of the Church in England or to recognize the annulment of Henry's first marriage to Katherine of Aragon. More was canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church in 1935, and is remembered as one of the great martyrs of the English Reformation and patron saint of lawyers. Holbein's calm, dignified portrait, painted while More was still at the peak of royal favor, offers little hint of the dramatic reversal of fortune that lay ahead for its subject.

Unit 17: Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Last Judgment*, 1536-1541

More than two decades after painting the Sistine Chapel ceiling (AH I, Unit 16), Michelangelo returned to the same chapel in his sixties to paint an enormous fresco covering the entire altar wall, depicting the Last Judgment, the moment described in Scripture when Christ returns in glory to judge every soul who has ever lived. Michelangelo was commissioned to undertake the project by Pope Clement VII, though Clement died before work began, and it was completed under his successor, Pope Paul III. By the time he began the *Last Judgment*, Michelangelo was painting in a very different climate from his earlier work on the ceiling, both artistically and politically; the traumatic Sack of Rome in 1527, in which mutinous imperial troops looted the city and terrorized its people, had shaken Italy's confidence in the ordered, harmonious world of the earlier High Renaissance. Michelangelo's swirling, angsty figures reflect the more emotionally charged, unsettled style known as Mannerism that emerged in its aftermath.

At the center of the composition, a powerful, youthful Christ raises his arm in a gesture of judgment, surrounded by the Virgin Mary and a great crowd of saints and martyrs, many identifiable by the instruments of their own suffering: Saint Bartholomew holds his own flayed skin (the sagging, distorted face on that empty skin is allegedly a self-portrait of Michelangelo himself). Below, the dead rise from their graves and are sorted into the blessed, who ascend toward heaven on the left, and the damned, dragged down toward hell on the right. The boatman Charon, a figure from classical mythology, not Scripture, ferries condemned souls across to their punishment, an image Michelangelo adapted from Dante's *Inferno*.

The fresco caused controversy almost as soon as it was unveiled, largely because of its bold display of nude, muscular bodies covering the walls of the pope's own private chapel. Critics at the Council of Trent, meeting not long afterward as part of the Catholic Church's broader Counter-Reformation reforms, objected strongly to the nudity, and shortly after Michelangelo's death, the painter Daniele da Volterra was commissioned to paint discreet draperies over many of the figures' bodies, earning him the somewhat unflattering nickname *il Braghettone*, "the breeches maker." Some of these added draperies were later removed during a major restoration completed in 1994, though others remain in place today, a visible record of the fresco's turbulent reception. The Last Judgment remains the single largest fresco of the entire Italian Renaissance. The Sistine Chapel thus summarizes the entire salvation cycle within one room: Creation and Fall on the ceiling; Redemption (the life of Christ) on the walls, and Judgment, on the altar wall.

As a younger, less established painter, Michelangelo had paid for his own paints for the Sistine Chapel ceiling, but by the 1530s he could negotiate a better contract; the pope was

responsible for the cost of the paints for the *Last Judgment* – possibly explaining the generous use of the very expensive ultramarine blue, made from lapis lazuli.

Unit 18: Andreas Vesalius, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* ("On the Fabric of the Human Body"), Basel, 1543

Though not a painting or sculpture, this landmark illustrated book is an important landmark of Renaissance art, since its detailed anatomical woodcuts represent one of the great achievements of Renaissance visual culture, the blending of careful scientific observation with genuine artistic skill. Its author, Andreas Vesalius, was a young Flemish physician teaching anatomy at the University of Padua. The book, published when he was only twenty-eight years old, overturned more than a thousand years of accepted medical teaching, much of it based on the ancient Roman physician Galen, whose anatomical descriptions, based largely on dissections of animals rather than humans, had gone essentially unchallenged since antiquity.

Vesalius insisted on performing his own detailed human dissections rather than simply repeating traditional texts, and commissioned a remarkable series of large, dramatically posed woodcut illustrations to accompany his findings, showing flayed and skeletal figures often set against lush Italian landscapes, as though the figures themselves were simply pausing mid stride to display their own muscles or bones for the reader's benefit.

The book's famous title page shows Vesalius himself presiding over a crowded public dissection, surrounded by eager students, a scene that dramatized his central argument: that true anatomical knowledge could only come from careful, direct, firsthand observation of the human body itself, not from unquestioning trust in ancient authority. The *Fabrica* is widely considered one of the most influential scientific books ever published, and it helped establish anatomy as a modern observational science, a shift that paralleled, in the world of medicine, the same renewed attention to the natural, observed world that defined Renaissance painting and sculpture more broadly.

The copy of the *Fabrica* shown here is the so-called Haskell Norman copy, named for the twentieth century book collector Dr. Haskell F. Norman; it is the only known copy of the first edition fully hand-colored throughout. It is bound in imperial purple velvet, and rare book scholars believe it is very likely the actual presentation copy Vesalius gave to Emperor Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, to whom the book was formally dedicated. This gift may have helped Vesalius land his subsequent position as the emperor's own court physician! The colored frontispiece shows Vesalius conducting a public dissection, framed above by two small cherubs holding his family's coat of arms, three weasels - a visual pun on his surname. This volume sold at auction in 1998 for over 1.6 million dollars.