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HUM120
HISTORY OF
WESTERN ART

INSTRUCTOR
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15TH CENTURY ITALY reveals Renaissance artists exploring the mathematical depiction of receding space, and foreshortening. Linear Perspective is used in numerous works, imbuing them with the realism afforded by depth-in space. Further architectural explorations by Brunelleschi allow for the inspiring dome of the cathedral in Florence, as well as buildings that paid homage to tradition while simultaneously developing a clear Italian Renaissance style of grace and mathematically-inspired harmony (pp598, 599)

1. (p596) *Florence Cathedral*, with its famous dome ingeniously designed by Filippo Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi—a sculptor-turned-architect—was known to be a friend of Donatello. Brunelleschi's design for this dome of Florence Cathedral was at the time a significant technical accomplishment. Brunelleschi's Dome, a Gothic construction based on pointed arch, used ribs to support the vault. The octagonal outer shell connected to the lower inner shell through a system of arches and horizontal sandstone rings. Brunelleschi invented this ingenious structural system with each portion of the dome reinforcing the next as it was built up—layer by layer. The completed dome was self-buttressing and required no external support.

2. (19–2). A view of Florence Cathedral.

3. Compare and contrast: Joern Utzon's *Opera House* in Sydney Australia.

4. *David* (19–10). Florence was birthplace of Italian Renaissance. This *David*, by Donatello is the oldest known European life-sized free standing bronze since antiquity. Originally it stood in the Palace courtyard of the ruling Medici family of Florence. Stood on base inscribed with words extolling Florentine heroism and virtue.

Work draws influence from Praxiteles rendition of heroic nudity but also portrays sensuous adolescence with boots and jaunty hat, which were entirely original.

5. (19–11). *Equestrian statue honoring Venetian general Erasmo da Narni*, nicknames Gattamelata (Honeyed Cat). Sources were two surviving Roman bronze equestrian portraits in Rome that Donatello probably sketched. This was the first large-sized equestrian monument since antiquity.

6. Donatello was known for expressionism in his work. Up close sad, exhausted, sunken cheeks of the warrior suggest an old, worn man.

7. *Trinity Fresco* (19–16 and also see 19–17, p610) is designed with the illusion of a stone funerary monument and altar table set deep in *aedicule* (framed niche in wall). The artist, Maso di Ser Giovanni di Mone Cassai—who went by the nickname: Masaccio (Big Ugly Tom)—created the illusion of a niche through careful rendering of the Renaissance practice of *linear perspective*. Note the vanishing point lies on the horizon at eye level of an adult viewer, just above the base of the cross. Look at p608, "Technique | Renaissance Perspective" and *The Delivery of the Keys to Saint Peter* (note the schematic drawing of vanishing points)

Though Masaccio's career lasted only a decade he was as influential in the direction of Florentine art as Giotto was a century earlier. His *Trinity Fresco* is an example of a major achievement of Italian Renaissance artists to portray a convincing integration of human figures into rational architectural settings.

In the *Trinity Fresco* God holds the cross upon which Jesus hangs while Mary and John the Evangelist stand at the foot of the cross. The Lenzi family of donors kneel in prayer outside the niche. Below, in an open *sarcophagus*, is a skeleton as a grim reminder that death awaits all. It is well-understood the only hope for redemption and life in the hereafter is through Christian belief. The inscription reads: "I was once that which you are and what I am you also will be."

8. Compare and contrast: *Piss Christ*, made in 1987 by Andreas Serrano, created significant controversy when exhibited.

9. Masaccio collaborated with painter known as Masolino on frescos in *Brancacci Chapel* in *Church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence*. *Brancacci Chapel* was originally dedicated to Saint Peter and these frescoes illustrate events in his life.

10. In *The Tribute Money* Masaccio illustrates the incident in which the collector of Jewish temple taxes demands payment from the apostle Peter. Peter is shown in the central group with Jesus and other disciples. The episode depicts the arrival in Capernaum of Jesus and Peter, based on the account in Matthew's Gospel.

Masaccio incorporated the three different components of the story in the same scene: the tax collector's request with Jesus' immediate response indicating to Peter how to find the necessary money is in the centre, Peter catching the fish in Lake Genezareth and extracting the coin is to the left; and to the right Peter hands the tribute money to the tax collector in front of his house. This episode stresses the legitimacy of the tax collector's request, and has been interpreted as reference to the then lively controversy in Florence on proposed tax reform which, after considerable debate, was settled in 1427 with the institution of an official tax register and a much-fairer-than-previous taxation system.

The figures are arranged according to horizontal lines, yet the overall composition is semicircular, a pattern of classical origin (think of Socrates and his disciples), later adopted by early Christian art (Jesus and the Apostles), and interpreted by the first Renaissance artists such as Brunelleschi as the geometric pattern symbolizing perfection in the circle.

The characters are dressed in classical Greek fashion: note the tunics tied at the waist and the cloaks wrapped over the left shoulder, around the back, and clasped at the front below the left forearm. Even Peter's stance as he extracts the coin from the fish's mouth with his right leg bent and his left one outstretched is reminiscent of postures of many Greek statues, reliefs on Etruscan funerary urns and Roman carvings.

11. Botticelli likely painted *Birth of Venus* for Cosimo Di Medici the elder. *Venus* was inspired by a classical statue in the Di Medici collection (19–34).

Venus, the classical goddess of love, was supposedly born of sea foam. She floats to shore on a scallop shell arranging her hands and hair to modestly hide—or enhance, depending on interpretation—her sexuality. Venus was of two natures, according to the Neoplatonic philosophy (which Di Medici favored). One nature was sacred: the ideal, and the second, profane: carnal. Neoplatonic philosophy believed the profane could be overcome by severe denial of the senses, and the celestial Venus was equivalent to the Virgin Mary. The Profane Venus ruled over earthly human love, the Sacred over universal—divine—love.

12. Andrea Mantegna, working in Padua in Northern Italy, absorbed Donatello's system of linear perspective and worked with it to an extreme. His work features radical views with highly foreshortened perspectives.

Camera Picta (Painted Room) was painted for Ludovico Gonzaga, ruler of Mantua. On a vaulted ceiling Gonzaga painted in a viewpoint known in Italian as *di sotto in su* (seen directly from below). This room is decorated with murals featuring members of Gonzaga family.

13. Printmaking emerged in Europe with wider availability of paper and development of the printing press mid-15th century.

The German Johann Gutenberg successfully fashioned moveable type and retooled a wine-making press into a printing press c1450, successfully printing his now famous 42-line Bible. Moveable type and the printing press engendered mass publication and circulation of reading material. The first printing press used a heavy screw to impress an inked printing block onto paper, thus transferring ink to paper and resulting in a full-page printed sheet.

The operator of the press worked a lever to increase and decrease the pressure of the block against the paper. The successful use of the printing press, in turn, set off a social and technological revolution that is still in progress. In fact, Gutenberg was named "man of the millennium" at the year 2000, noting the success of his process. Once developed, printing spread rapidly and began to replace hand-printed texts for a wider audience. During the time of the Incunabula ('rebirth') from 1450 to 1500 it is estimated nine million books were produced, in comparison to the until-1450 existing 50,000 books produced.

Intellectual life soon was no longer the exclusive domain of the Roman Catholic Church and the nobility, and literacy became a requisite of urban existence. The printing press helped to develop intellectual query at the end of the Middle Ages, helping to develop an era of enlightenment. It is said the Protestant Reformation would not have happened were it not for moveable type. This great cultural rebirth was inspired by widespread access to—and appreciation for—classical art and literature, with renewed passion for artistic expression. It has been said the Renaissance may not have happened without moveable type.

In addition to printing words, the printing press allowed for printing multiple images. The techniques of wood block printing and engraving were explored. Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Ten Nudes* (1490–1503) was likely made as a study of Classical human form in motion. This appears to be same model in different poses and is Pollaiuolo's only known print.

14. *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, by Martin Shongauer. Saint Anthony is tempted by spiky demons who lift him. His faith is impenetrable.