

Print Preview

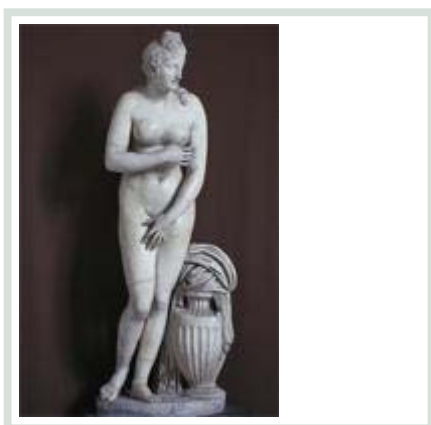
HCC: ALBERTI



Creator	Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472)
Title	Self-Portrait Medallion
Date	c. 1434-1439
Commentary	<p>Leon Battista Alberti, 1404-1472</p> <p>Alberti was an amateur painter, but not a professional one. Instead, he studied law and classical rhetoric and participated in the movement of Renaissance humanism, which looked to the classical tradition of ancient poetry and oratory in order to develop new forms of secular (non-religious) literature, including political speeches, philosophical dialogues, and love poetry. Alberti wrote humanist treatises and dialogues on painting, architecture, the family, law, and cryptography. He was also an architect.</p> <p>This image is a portrait medallion that Alberti made of himself. He was copying ancient practices (coins and medals depicting rulers and famous men).</p>



Creator	Andrea Mantegna
Title	Camera picta (Camera degli sposi): Ludovico Gonzaga, his Family and Court
Date	1465-74
Commentary	<p>The figure at the far left speaking to the Duke of Mantua may be a portrait of Alberti. If so, it represents Alberti as the Renaissance courtier: trained in the arts of public speech and the elegant, graceful, and learned performance of the self. On this theme, Albert said (in an autobiography that he wrote in the third person): "Above all he [Alberti] said that one must apply the greatest artistry in three things: walking in the city, riding a horse, and speaking, for in each of these one must try to please everyone."</p>



Title	Venus Pudica: 'Venus Capitolina.' Total from front center
Date	3rd c. BC
Commentary	<p>This Greek sculpture, created during the 3rd Century BCE, depicts the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite (Venus for the Romans) emerging from her bath. She is called the "Venus Pudica" or "Modest Venus" because she covers her breasts and genitals with her hands. Painting the female nude was very unusual in the Middle Ages. This and similar statues inspired the art work of many Renaissance artists, including Botticelli, whose paintings we will study in the next lecture.</p>



Creator	Brunelleschi, Filippo, Florentine, 1377-1446
Title	Santa Maria del Fiore (Duomo), Florence: dome [exterior]
Date	1420-1436
Commentary	<p>Alberti writes, "Since then, I have been brought back here [to Florence] -- from the long exile in which we Alberti have grown old -- into this our city, adorned above all others. I have come to understand that in many men, but especially in you, Filippo, and in our close friend Donato the sculptor, and in others like Nencio, Luca, and Masaccio, there is a genius for accomplishing every praiseworthy thing." (p.39) "Pippo" is Filippo Brunelleschi, a close friend and teacher of Alberti. Donato = Donatello, a sculptor and very close friend of Brunelleschi. Nencio = Lorenzo Ghiberti, an architect and a sculptor, and a rival, even an enemy, of Brunelleschi. Masaccio = an innovative painter of the period, famous for the three-dimensionality (relief) of his painted figures and the clarity and focus of his story-telling techniques (istoria). IN YOU, FILIPPO: Alberti addresses his book above all to his friend, the architect and master of perspective, Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446). He addresses Brunelleschi as a friend; he calls up a circle of friends joined by their love of painting; and he writes his book in Italian so that painters can understand his text. Brunelleschi's most famous achievement was the Dome or Duomo of Florence. Alberti writes, "Who would ever be hard or envious enough to fail to praise Pippo the architect on seeing here such a large structure, rising above the skies, ample to cover with its shadow all the Tuscan people, and constructed without the aid of centering [internal scaffolding] or great quantity of wood?" (p. 40) The Duomo towered above the Florentine cityscape and became a feature of its skyline. It is proudly depicted in the backgrounds of many paintings of the period.</p>



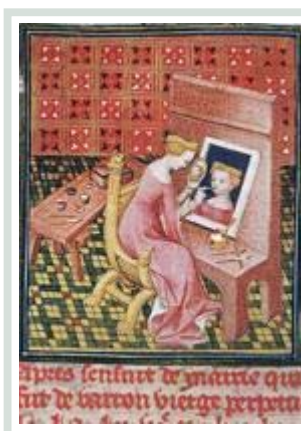
Creator	Agnolo Gaddi
Title	Madonna and Child with Six Angels (Madonna of Humility)
Date	c. last quarter 14th C
Commentary	<p>This is an example of Medieval painting. The subject matter is religious (Mary, the mother of Jesus, with the infant Jesus). Both figures are clothed. The image appears flat; they do not sit in space; there is very little sense of depth. They are circled symmetrically by angels, who are little and also feel flat. Gold is used on the surface of the painting, to make it feel richer and more sublime (but the gold also further flattens the sense of space). There is no background.</p>



Creator	Filippo Lippi
Title	Madonna and Child with Two Angels before a Landscape
Date	c. 1465
Commentary	<p>This is an example of a Renaissance painting, painted by one of Alberti's contemporaries. The figures feel much more three-dimensional. The angels are proportionate to Mary and the baby Jesus. The baby is naked, and he looks more like an infant, less like a tiny adult. There is no gold on the surface of the painting; instead, there is a realistic landscape stretching behind the figures, giving us an extraordinary sense of depth. The painted arm of the chair in the foreground pushes beyond the picture frame into our space (as does the wing of the little angel looking out at us.) The artist, Fra Filippo Lippi, has mastered such difficult tasks as painting transparent material (the veil around Mary's face.) Notice that the subject matter is the same as in the other painting. The Church was still the major patron of art work, and the secular subjects that Alberti imagines for the istorie (stories) of Italian painting have not yet been realized. Artists coming AFTER Alberti -- and reading his book -- will attempt these secular subjects from classical myth and poetry. Who is the "commentator figure" in this painting? What visual evidence would you use to make this argument?</p>



Creator	Leon Battista Alberti
Title	Dialogus inter Microtyrum et Theogenium. whole page Folio #: fol. 079r
Commentary	Alberti was trained as a rhetorician and humanist (scholar and imitator of ancient writings), as seen in this manuscript page of one of his literary dialogues. MY THESIS: In his treatise Of Painting, Alberti uses ideas borrowed from classical rhetoric in order to redefine artistic making from a medieval guild model emphasizing craftsmanship to a humanist model emphasizing the poetic content and organization of paintings.



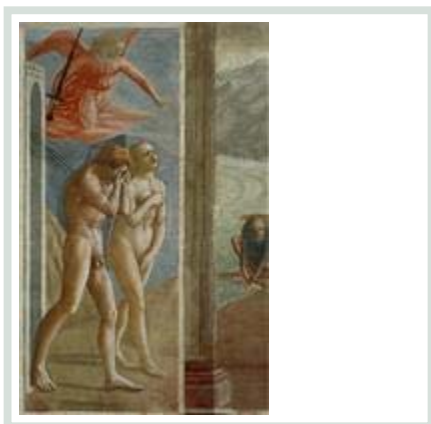
Creator	Coronation Master, fl. 15th cent.
Title	Boccaccio: Des Cleres Femmes: ms. fr. 12420, fol. 101v: Marcia paints her portrait
Date	15th C
Commentary	In the Middle Ages, art was considered a craft, and artists belonged to different guilds or "mysteries," like the Rude Mechanicals in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In the Renaissance, humanist scholars like Alberti, as well as artists who travelled in humanist circles, worked to elevate the arts from the craft system to the liberal arts -- in order to transform painting from a manual occupation to an intellectual profession requiring more learning, and earning its practioners more money, honor, and respect.



Creator	Georg Pencz
Title	Rhetoric La rhétorique
Series Title	The Seven Liberal Arts
Commentary	Rhetoric ("Rhetorica") was one of the Seven Liberal Arts in Medieval and Renaissance universities. Alberti was trained in rhetoric when he studied law at the University of Bologna, the most important law school in Italy. He wrote a rhetoric textbook, and practiced rhetoric in his job as a secretary for the Pope. "Of Painting" is an exercise in Alberti's skills as a rhetorician (he makes an argument about the intellectual value of painting). In this treatise he also applies rhetorical theory to the art of painting by demonstrating how a painting is like a speech (or play). Of Painting Book I associates Painting with Geometry. Of Painting Books II-III associates Painting with Rhetoric.



Creator	Leonardo da Vinci
Title	Study of Babies
Date	1508-1510
Commentary	Alberti divides painting into three parts: CIRCUMSCRIPTION (drawing); COMPOSITION (formal organization of the painting); and COLOR. This is a page of drawings by Leonardo da Vinci.



Creator	Masaccio
Title	Brancacci Chapel: Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden
Date	1424-27
Commentary	Remember logos, ethos, and pathos ...? Logos = argument (Compare to Alberti on istoria as the organizing story of the painting.) Ethos = character of the speaker (Compare to Alberti on the dignity and appropriateness of persons.) Pathos = emotion (Compare to Alberti on the power of gesture, expression, and physical movement to express the movement of the soul.) This painting is by Masaccio, a painter of the early Renaissance whom Alberti praises in his Prologue. How does Masaccio use logos, ethos, and pathos to tell the story of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden?



Creator	Michelangelo
Title	Rome: Sistine Chapel: ceiling frescos: Creation of Adam
Date	1508-1512
Commentary	Alberti divides painting into three parts, circumscription (line), composition (organization of the image), and color (added last in the Italian tradition). COMPOSITION is the area in which Alberti brings in rhetorical principles. ISTORIA (story, plot, narrative) is the content or subject matter of the picture; in a well-constructed painting, according to Alberti, the composition reinforces the story. Alberti writes, "I say composition is that rule in painting by which the parts fit together in the painted work. The greatest work of the painter is the istoria. Bodies are part of the istoria, members are parts of the bodies, planes are parts of the members." (p. 70; also, p. 72) Here, in one of the most famous paintings of the Renaissance, Michelangelo tells the story of God's Creation of Adam. How does composition (formal organization of the picture) reinforce the story (istoria) being told?



Creator	Piero di Cosimo, 1462-1521
Title	Fight Between the Lapiths and the Centaurs
Commentary	Alberti writes that everything in the picture -- objects as well as persons -- should support the central story (istoria) that is being told: "Bodies ought to harmonize together in the istoria in both size and function. It would be absurd for one who paints the Centaurs fighting after the banquet to leave a vase of wine still standing." This painting, created perhaps in response to Alberti's treatise, depicts a wedding disrupted by the arrival of a band of unruly Centaurs (creatures half man, half horse). The artist, Piero di Cosimo, is careful to include the overturned jug of wine in his painting.



Title	centaur-jug-3
Commentary	Detail of The Battle Between the Lapiths and the Centaur: find the jug overturned in the food fight!



Creator	Domenico Veneziano (Italy, Ca. 1400-1461)
Title	The St. Lucy Altarpiece
Date	1440-42
Commentary	Alberti advises painters to include a commentator figure inside the picture, whose gestures and expressions can help the viewer understand the story and his or her proper response to what is being depicted: "All the bodies ought to move according to what is ordered in the istoria. In an istoria, I like to see someone who admonishes and points out to us what is happening there; or beckons with his hand to see; or menaces with an angry face and with flashing eyes, so that no one should come near; or shows some danger or marvellous thing there; or invites us to weep or laugh with them. Thus whatever the painted persons do among themselves or with the beholder, all is pointed towards ornamenting or teaching the istoria." (p. 78) In this image of the Virgin and Child surrounded by saints, the role of the commentator is held by John the Baptist. In the New Testament, the role of John the Baptist is to foretell the coming of Jesus as Christ. Why would John be a good selection for the role of commentator in a picture like this?



Creator	Domenico Veneziano (Italy, Ca. 1400-1461)
Title	The St. Lucy Altarpiece detail: St. Francis and John the Baptist
Date	1440-42



Creator	Leonardo da Vinci
Title	Head of Young Woman
Date	1475-1480
Commentary	This drawing by Leonardo da Vinci depicts a young woman of high social standing. How is his depiction "appropriate" to the character or ethos of his subject matter?



Creator	Leonardo, da Vinci, 1452-1519
Title	Old man in profile
Date	c.1487-90
Commentary	Here, Leonardo depicts an old man. How is this image "appropriate" to the ethos or character of the figure he is depicting?



Creator	Michelangelo Buonarroti, 1475-1564
Title	Rome: Sistine Chapel Prophet Jeremiah
Date	1508-12
Commentary	Alberti urges painters to use the rhetorical (and theatrical) resources of facial expression, gesture, and body movement in order to express the movements (emotions) of the soul. He writes: "The istoria will move the soul of the beholder when each man painted there clearly shows the movement of his own soul. ... We weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving." (p. 77) Alberti, himself prone to depression, instructs the painter to depict sadness using the expressive capacities of the entire body: "In the melancholy the forehead is wrinkled, the head drooping, all members fall as if tired and neglected." Michelangelo's portrait of the Prophet Jeremiah is a good example of Alberti's advice in action.



Creator	Giotto (Italian, c. 1266-1337) [painter]
Title	Life of Christ. Deposition Variant: Lamentation Larger Entity: Scrovegni Chapel
Date	frescoes (paintings): created 1305-1306. fresco (painting): created 1305-1306.
Commentary	The istoria of this painting is the preparation of Jesus' body for burial, by his mother and his disciples, in the period between his crucifixion and his resurrection. Giotto works hard to depict human grief using a variety of postures and facial expressions. (Alberti refers to Giotto with admiration in his treatise.)



Creator	Giotto (Italian, c. 1266-1337) [painter]
Title	Life of Christ. Deposition Detail Variant: Lamentation Larger Entity: Scrovegni Chapel
Date	frescoes (paintings): created 1305-1306. fresco (painting): created 1305-1306.
Commentary	Even Giotto's angels mourn in their own distinctive ways.



Creator	Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da, 1573-1610
Title	Boy Bitten by a Lizard
Date	c.1597
Commentary	This image was painted a century after Alberti. What is the "istoria"? How does Caravaggio depict pathos? What's more important in the painting, pathos or narrative? Would Alberti have thought that Caravaggio went too far? (See Alberti, page 80, on "too violent movements" in painting.)



Creator	Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da, 1573-1610
Title	Boy Bitten by a Lizard: det.: right bowl and hands
Date	c.1597



Creator	Botticelli, Sandro (Italy, 1444-1510)
Title	Primavera
Date	ca. 1478
Commentary	This masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance was painted a generation after the publication of Alberti's "On Painting." In my next lecture, we will explore Botticelli's use of ethos, logos, and pathos in order to tell a story about love and desire. We will also return to the Shakespearean themes of holiday, festival, and the rhetoric of love.