

Some Aspects of the Idea of Space in the Italian Arts

Authors

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Introduction

This brief course – built using the material of the database section and referring to important Italian art criticism- has the purpose to be a reflection about the development of the concept of “space” in the different times of the Italian history of art, useful to focalize from the theoretical point of view this important topic, but –primarily- to be a didactical experience with suggestions to be followed and revised from teachers of art subjects in their everyday work into the class.

We have chosen this subject (the idea of space) because it is one of the most important topic in the art theory and practice, and also because behind the different concepts of “space” there are the different concepts of the man and his representation, of the world and the place of the man inside it and, finally, of the idea and signification of the Art itself . Also, in a so vast panorama of art as it is the Italian one, it is really difficult to summarize only some aspects of it (artists or work of art), without penalize others, if not by passing trough very general topics. Moreover, Italian art is historically important just for its contribute –through the Renaissance and between other aspects- to the development of the perspective and the modern representation of the space.

“Space” in Art means for us both the idea of “space of representation” and “representation of space”, as it will be clear in the following of the course. In this way it will be possible to touch also the modern and contemporary practice (and not only history) of art.

Despite this course has a textual structure, it would try to be more visual and interactive as possible, in a practical way useful in the classroom work; for this reason, the textual argumentation are brief and directly pointing to the bibliographic sources from where they are obtained. For the same reason the concepts are always argued by pictures, that are the very soul of figurative art, and many examples of the didactical work conducted in the classes are offered to the European colleagues.

The group of teacher was very much well involved in the development of the project. It is important to consider that the group of teacher are all Art (Painting or Visual practice) teachers, and not History of Art teacher. For this reason their didactical approach is more visual and practical and less theoretical and historical. Also, they thought that all their involvement in the project would be much more useful for their work if their students were involved in it from the very beginning. So, proportionately with the little time that within their respective school programs they were able to dedicate to the project, they tried, successfully, to involve their classes in the development of the different parts of the course, also in the moment of the translation in English of the material.

The results of the didactical work is all showed in the following material, and it constitute the very soul of the course. They hope that the European colleagues will find this material interesting for their own work within their classes. Finally, the different parts of the course has been developed by different group of teacher with different research and didactical methods.

Excerpts from, Robert Williams, Italian Renaissance Art and the Systematicity of Representation
“The twentieth-century view on Renaissance individualism had its precedents, notably in Jacob Burckhardt’s *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy*. Like Wind and Panofsky after him, Burckhardt was heir to a long tradition of German philosophy that placed central emphasis on the relation of subject and object. In Burckhardt’s view, medieval people slumbered under a veil of ignorance in indistinction from their environs; bourgeois culture in the Italian Renaissance created modern distinctions between subject and object, allowing man to discover both himself and the world as distinct from one another.

Ernst Cassirer extended and refined this notion with a careful study of early Renaissance (largely neoplatonic) philosophical writings on the microcosm and macrocosm. He looked, for instance, at Charles de Bovelles, who claimed that man was the (potentially comprehensive) mirror of the world, separate from it and thus able to reflect on it, to represent it.

In art historical terms, in part thanks to Panofsky’s *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (though the text was not widely read in Anglophone contexts²⁵), this divide was thought to have materialized in the practice of perspective. In the assumptions of twentieth-century art history, the Renaissance picture is a window on the world that distances subject and object and constitutes them separately in so doing.

The Renaissance stands for a comforting clarity of subject and object; perspectival practice in art—Leon Battista Alberti’s window, which distances the viewer from the object and at the same time produces (a view of) objective space—stands as the sign of that clarity.”

In *Renaissance Theory*, edited by James Elkins and Robert Williams, Routledge, New York 2008.

Chapter 1: 1000 – The Dome of Modena

Work on the Cathedral began in 1099, under the direction of the master builder Lanfranco, over the site of the sepulchre of Saint Geminianus, Modena’s patron saint.

Two previous churches had been constructed on the site since the fifth century, but they had both been destroyed. The Saint’s remains are still exhibited in the cathedral’s crypt. The present cathedral was consecrated by Lucius III on 12 July 1184.

After Lanfranco’s work, the Cathedral was embellished by Anselmo da Campione and his heirs, the so-called “Campionese-masters”.

The current façade therefore exhibits different styles. The majestic rose-window was added by Anselmo in the 13th century, while the two lions supporting the entrance’s columns are of Roman age, probably discovered while digging the foundations.



Wiligelmo, La creazione e il peccato originale

The facade has also notable reliefs by Wiligelmus a contemporary of Lanfranco's; these include portraits of prophets and patriarchs, and most of all the Biblical Stories, a masterpiece of Romanesque sculpture. The scholars have pointed out the splendid achievements in the creation of Adam and Eve, the original sin and the story of Noah.

The side gates are also noteworthy. On Piazza Grand, the Porta Regia ("Royal gate"), also by the Campionesi, and the shorter Porta dei Principi ("Princes Gate") decorated with a relief depicting episodes of life of Saint. Germinianus, by the pupil of Wiligelmus. On the northern side is the Porta della Pescheria ("Fish-market Gate"), with reliefs inspired by cycle of the years twelve month (on the doorposts) and tales from the Breton Cycle of King Arthur (on the arch).

The interior is divided into three naves. Between the central nave and the crypt is a marble parapet by Anselmo da Campione portraying the Passion of Christ, including the Last Supper. The pulpit is by Arrigo da Campione, decorated with small terracotta statues.

Notable also the wood crucifix from the 14th century. The Duomo houses also the nativity scenes by two great Modenese artists: Antonio Begarelli's one (1527) and, in the crypt, Guido Mazzoni's one (1480), also known as the Madonna della Pappa ("Madonna of the Pap").

Chapter 2: 1100 - The Cathedral of Cefalù and the Byzantine Mosaics

The Byzantine dominations, Moslems, longobarde and Norman in southern Italy and in Sicily, determine the composite character of an architecture in which it's normal to find associated, with happy hybridism, northern and oriental motives.

Lombards elements appears on the surface in the cathedral of Cefalù, in the half of the century XII, perhaps coming through Puglia.

The mosaics of the XII century in Sicily shows how much strong still is the oriental culture in Italy, even if local workers participate.

At the kingdom of Ruggero II belongs the first phase of mosaics. We have some examples in Palermo, Martorana's mosaics, and those of the apse of the cathedral of Cefalù (1148).

This last is a grandiosely ritual figuration: it has two zones overlapped with figures of saints, a bystander with the Virgo among the Archangels and, in the apse, the Christ Pantocrator, governor of the world.



Cefalù, Cristo Pantocrator

They are hieratic images, isolated, lined up on the gold screen. In the second phase, in the times of Guglielmo I and Guglielmo II, to the solemn presentation of the images succeed the representation of episodes of the biblical story, in the Palatine Chapel and, especially, in the vast historical cycle of the cathedral of Monreale, with evangelical figurations very near to those, contemporary, of the basilica of St. Mark in Venice.

Venetian teachers evidently go taking the place of the Byzantines and also Sicily is about to enter the circle of the western artistic culture (from Argan, History of Italian Art).

Chapter 3: 1200 – The Sculpture of Giovanni Pisano

Giovanni Pisano (1248 approx. -1314 approx.) was the son of Nicola Pisano. After the death of his father he becomes the master of Siena Cathedral Fabric between 1285 and 1296, when it takes responsibility for the master of the cathedral. In the same period he sculpted Madonna and Child for the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua and also Madonna and Child for the Cathedral of Prato. Between 1297 and 1301 he works on the pulpit of the church of St. Andrea in Pistoia, and between 1302-1310 he sculpted the pulpit of the Cathedral of Pisa. In 1313 Margaret Luxembourg commissions him his burial monument.

Giovanni began practicing sculpting since young age in the workshop of his father Nicola, with whom he is working for the pulpit of the Cathedral of Siena. Also under the apprenticeship of his father, he works in the Major Fountain of Perugia and at the external decoration of the Baptistery in Pisa, where he realizes the Prophets and the Evangelists John and Mark.

Giovanni Pisano transformed the classical sense of stillness of his father Nichola into a drama made of lines and forms, and the return to the ancient manner took pathos and anxiety which project the artist's work towards the renewal naturalistic Gothic style.

The pulpit of the church of Sant' Andrea of Pistoia is a work completed in 1301, in which we can measure the relationship with other similar works carved by his father (the pulpits of the Baptistry of Pisa and the Duomo di Siena).

The structure resumes the pulpit of the Baptistery in Pisa's structure: hexagonal-shaped supports over seven columns (six in the corners and one central) supported at the base by two lions (so-called 'stiloforesi') and one from an extraordinary 'telamone' (a figure supporting the columns) while the middle column is based on a three winged griffins, and finally, the last three, are based directly on the ground. The organization of the parapet's reliefs resumes instead the pulpit of Siena. Decorations are interspersed by figures placed at the corners. The monument express verticality by the major raising of the three-shaped arches that support the upper part. The scenes are inhabited by a smaller number of characters than the pulpit of Nicola, and the figures are treated with greater plastic sense.

Comparing the rhythmic organization composed of Nicola Pisano is easy to recognize stylistic innovation created by Giovanni: here he carved the figures as suddenly emerging from the background, with sharp play of light and shadow derived from different emphasis of each figure and an extreme quest for dynamism.

One of the most remarkable scene is the Massacre of the Innocents, where he gave to the scene a whirling motion to the characters, accentuated with the expressionism of the eyes, deformed by pain, fear, consternation. In addition, the yield of relief has many nuances and details preciously executed: these are put in contrast with summarily executed figures. Never a medieval artist had been able to make such a live drama.



*Giovanni
Pisano,
Natività*

The peculiar character of the teacher are particularly evident in the two major works of the artist, the pulpits of S. Andrea a Pistoia and the pulpit of Pisa Cathedral.

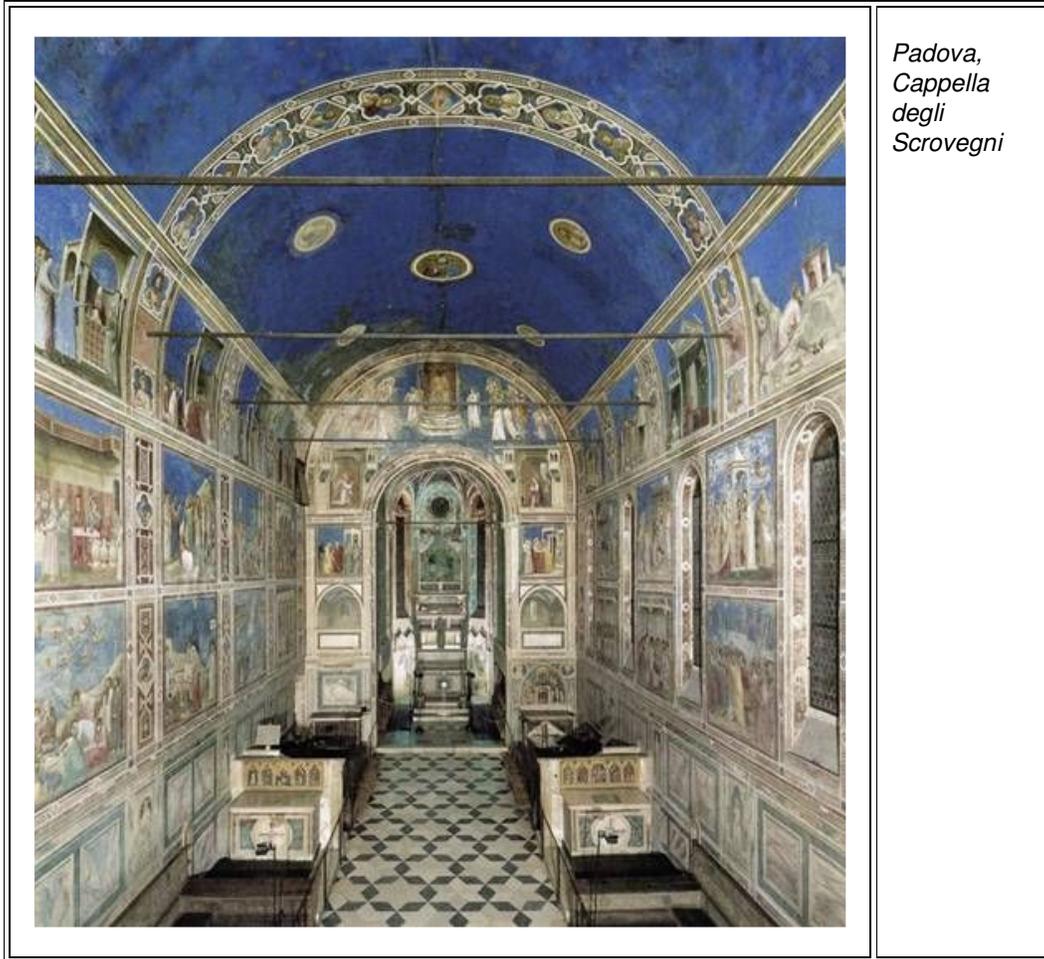
In particular the crucifixion in Pistoia's pulpit shows the artist's deformation of the figures and faces up to a limit of grotesque.

In the pulpit of the Cathedral of Pisa deepens more elements of its language: adopting a plant octagonal he gets a circular structure connecting the panels through the statues on the corners. The architectural structure seems to become unable to contain the exuberance of forms that invade every area.

Chapter 4: 1300 - Giotto da Bordone, The Cappella degli Scrovegni in Padova

In Padua Giotto resorts to Roman suggestions as will happen more systematically for some Renaissance artists; the bas-reliefs of the false plinth that for instance seems a terrestrial ideal crop for the Mantega and some solutions of Ferrarese workshop, but not only (for example the "Libel" by Botticelli, preserved in Florence Offices, with its bas-reliefs that adorn the building where the unfair trial consumes).

In Padua, unlike Assisi, the space is articulated by architectures represented in the painted (while in the frescoes of Assisi the architecture of the cathedral "scan" the painted scenes), the human figures become more numerous: the architecture structure and model with greater awareness and precision filled void with believable dimensions, from the human bodies; depth and proportional surrender result more convincing, that is realistic, of the Byzantine art and mostly investigate than it happened to Assisi.



*Padova,
Cappella
degli
Scrovegni*

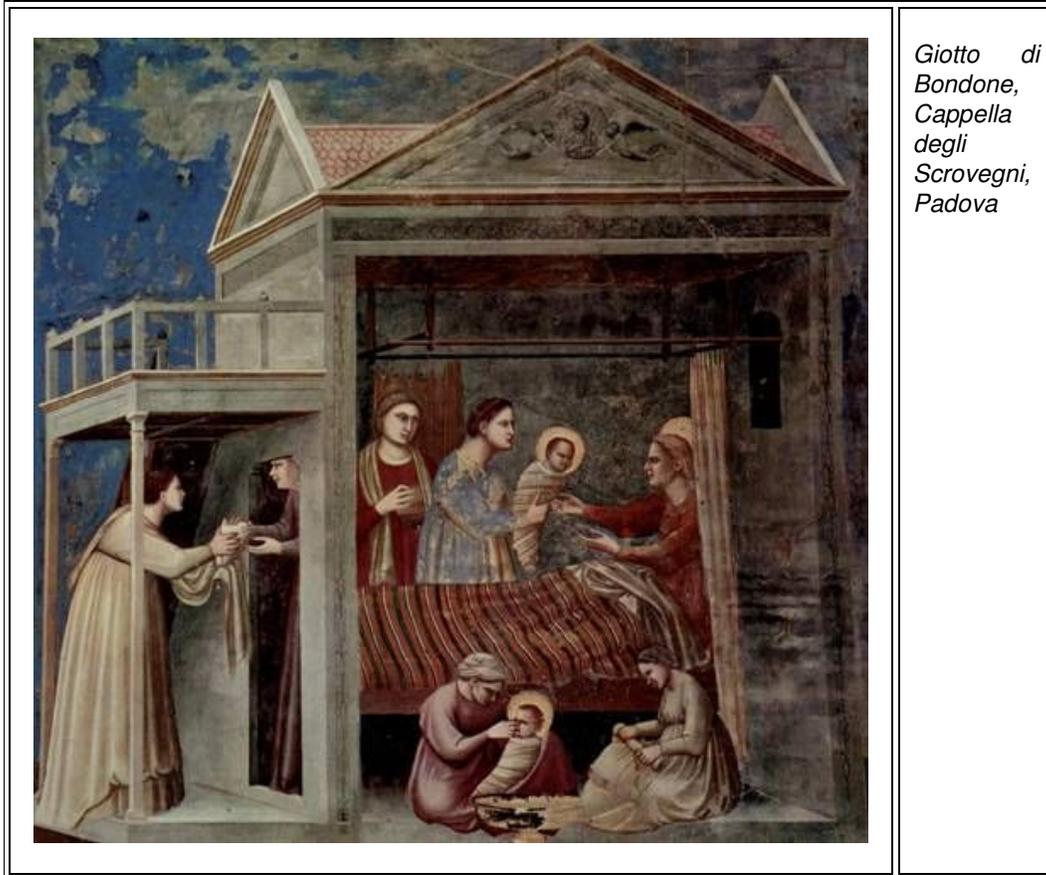
A search of great realism culminates then, in the cycle of Padua, with two "coretti" paintings that almost "smashing" the wall of support (as will happen hundred years later in the Trinity of Masaccio, S. Maria Novella, where recalls Vasari, viewers of one time stayed surprised by that wall that seemed laundry so much it appeared convincing, for that time, the representation of the depth) and that denote a great ability of space illusion's representation, almost from "Trompe l'oeil", in to mime the spatial depth, an ability that seems directly inherited by the distant the Roman domuses distant, almost antithetical, to the Byzantine's spatialize dominated by the so-called capsized perspective.

And also the sky, that is glimpse by the windows before, renouncement to the transmarine tonality, and almost "metaphysical" that submerges the narrated episdis, to welcome misty and more consistent tonality to the padovano environment.

In Padova (Padua) Giotto paints frescos (destroyed) in the Franciscan basilica of Sant'Antonio and, between 1304 and 1306 (according to others between 1309 and 1310), he covers the walls of the chapel of the Scrovegnis with the Stories of the Madonna and Christ. The chapel is a vain rectangular, barrel vault; the walls are naked, deprived of architectural structures.

The definition of the space is entirely therefore submitted to the painting. More than to Assisi, where an architectural structure there was, motive would have been to frame the figurations in painted architectures; instead they are framed by a flat frieze, monochrome, with small colored medallions, as if the wall were a great miniated page.

Not conditioned by spatial architectural data, the succession of the stories doesn't have the almost ritual order enacted by the iconographic traditions anymore; the scenes, coordinate but independent, follow themselves as the songs of a poem (Gnudi).



*Giotto di
Bondone,
Cappella
degli
Scrovegni,
Padova*

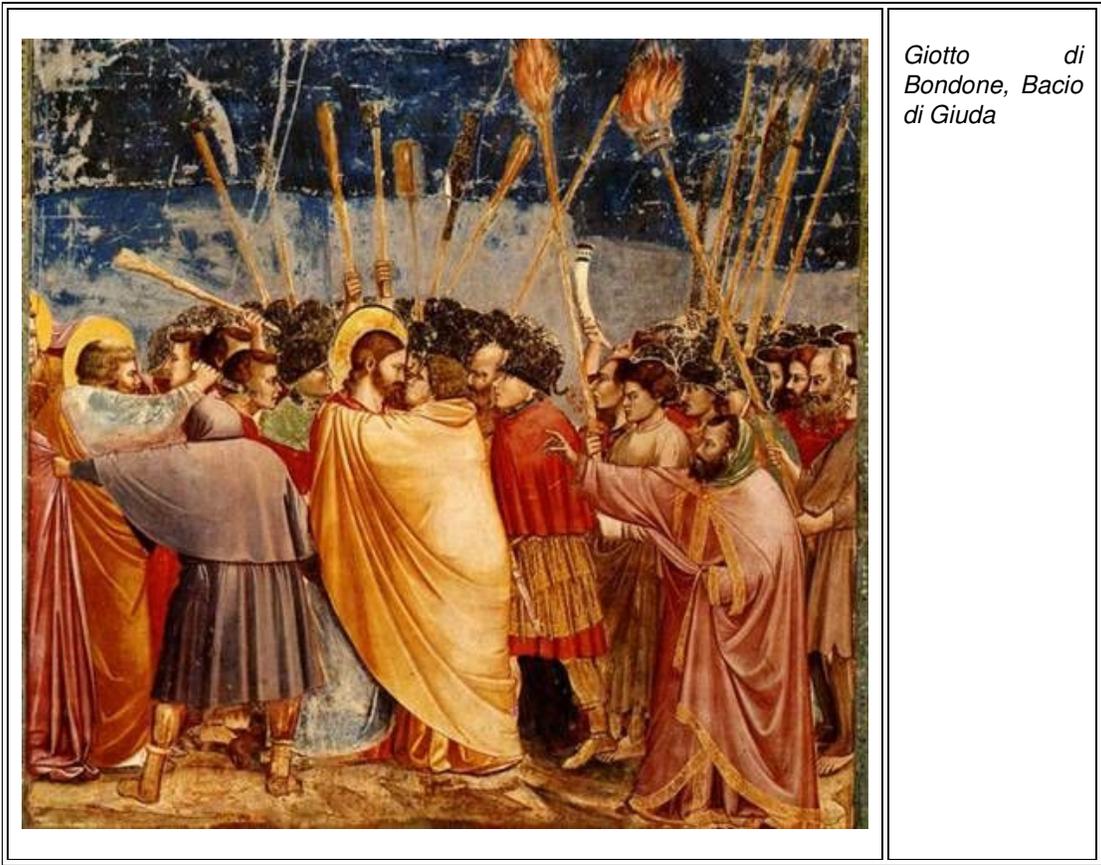
The cycle starts with the Hunting of Gioacchino from the temple, a biblical episode connected with the birth of the Virgo; follows with the Stories of the Madonna and Christ; it finishes with the Pentecoste, that is with the Jewish-Christian solemnity that alludes to the diffusion of the doctrine through the Church.

The ideological continuity of ancient and new Testament is expressed in the history lived of the affective and human relationship between the Madonna and Christ.

It is also, for Giotto, the culminating and crucial point of the history of the humanity, to which the real presence of the Christ sets with extreme clarity the alternative moral of the good and of the evil.

Under the Stories, in fact, it races a tall monochrome frieze with allegorical figures of the Virtues and the corresponding Vices. Over all it dominates, in the interior façade, the final Judgment.

Undoubtedly Giotto has sought a chromatic harmony of the whole: independently from the single histories, there is an unitary spatial image determined by applying some dominant note of the blue in the funds and, uncontested, in the vault.



Giotto di Bondone, Bacio di Giuda

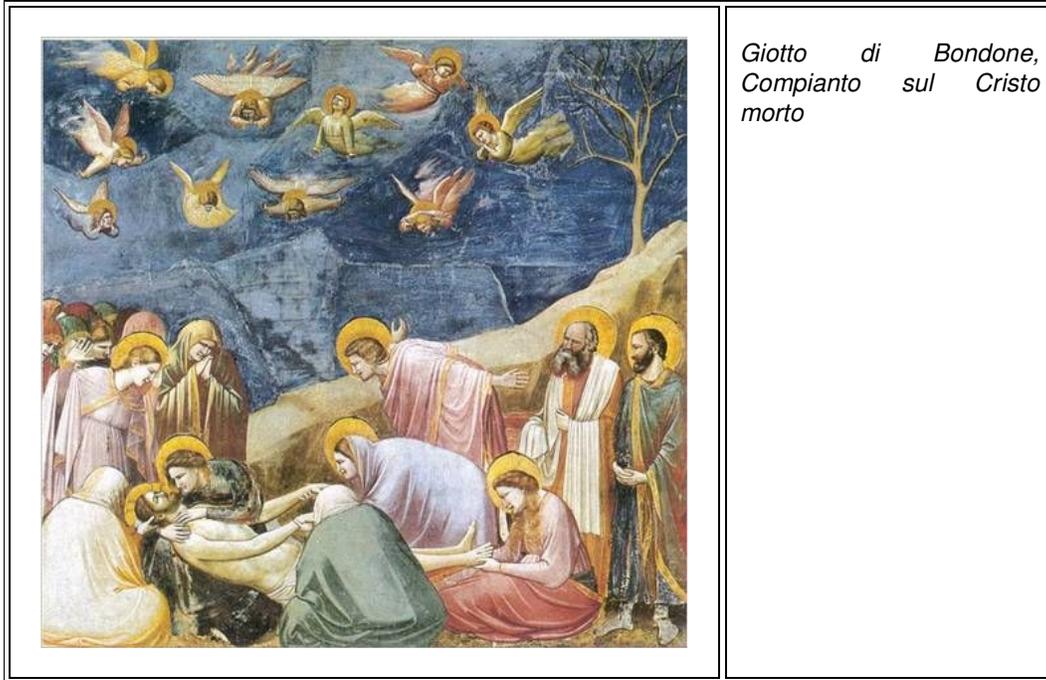
In Padua the figures are smaller and numerous, assembled. The gestures are contained even more in the limits of the coloured masses: they form solo brief salient, vertexes to which converge the lines of tension that model the masses in plain of deeper colour or gradually cleared.

Instead of the historical steadiness of the gestures it is had so a pathetic tension that accumulates and it grows within the masses forcing the limits of it, at the best on a glance, on a hand, on a mouth.

In Padua the contours that close the masses prevents that the gestures extends over the figures; and really because they don't establish a relationship between figure and space they don't express an action, that is always motion in the space, but a feeling, that it is internal motion.

The contours so express the growth of the pathos and the external space is annulled by the uniform layout of the blue bottom. In this fresco there cannot be a light that engraves from the outer, the variations of the light take place inside the figures themselves as modulation of the chiaroscuro of the colour, that passes from a figure to the other, spending the tint on all them. This construction achieved with the quantities of bright and the qualities of the colours, already is, in nuce, a tonal construction: Giotto, doesn't think to the colour as the surface of the masses, but as volumes of colour formed.

The research of a formal and coloristic proportionality doesn't attenuate, contrarily, the intensity and the height of the pathos, even if this has an accent more lyric than dramatic and it is expressed in the rhythm of the lines and the colours more than in the dynamics of the gestures.



*Giotto di Bondone,
Compianto sul Cristo
morto*

One of the most pathetic figurations in Padua is the Complaint on death Christ. The vertex of the pathos is in the approached heads of the Madonna and of the Christ: and it is setted low, to an extreme, so that on it they gravitates, with progression to decline, the masses of the figures to the right and, with sudden aplomb, those of left. The rocky slope accompanies the lilt of the first group and accents the verticality of the second.

Giotto is the maximum contribution to the foundation of the figurative humanism: the creation of a space of the representation (rendition from G.C. Argan, History of Italian Art).²

²About this new concept of space, Robert Williams wrote: "Perspective offered artists a means of creating plausible illusions of three dimensional space on two dimensional surfaces; its appeal lay not only in its apparent fidelity to natural appearances and optical experience, but in its consistency. Perspective establishes a system, a pictorial economy in which every detail is dependent upon the overall structure, in which the representation of any individual thing is responsible to, conditioned by, the structure as a whole. No detail exists in isolation and the ability to represent any one thing correctly depends upon the ability to represent everything else correctly. Perspective emphasizes the radically contingent or conditional nature of visual perception and representation, yet, at the same time, as a means of organizing any possible contingency, it comprehends all contingency within a larger order." (Op. cit.)

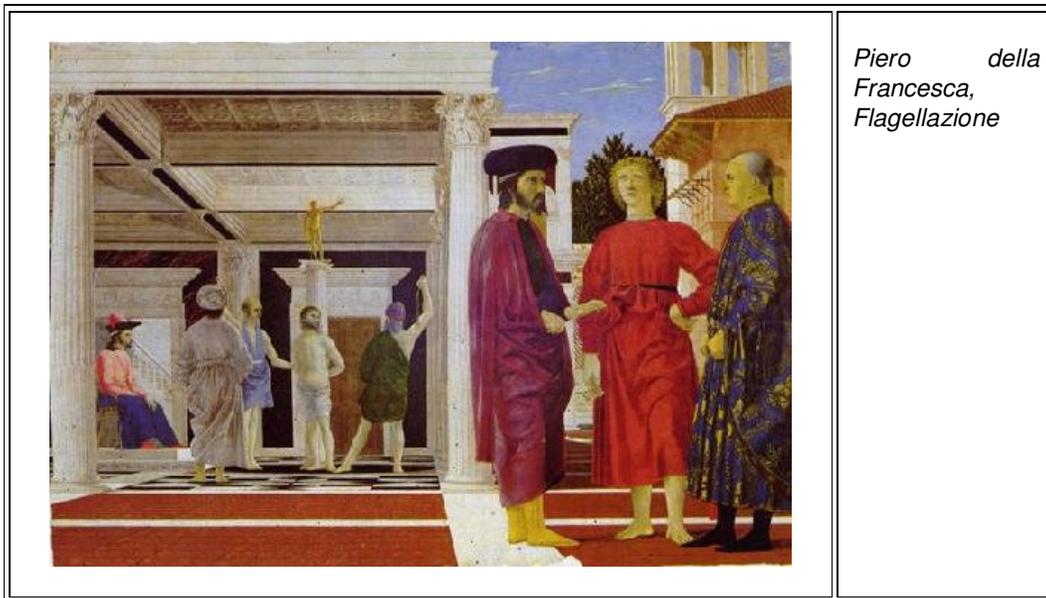
Chapter 5: 1400 - Piero Della Francesca

Piero della Francesca write the masterwork *De perspectiva pingendi*. He was one of the most original men of the renaissance. Piero had two passions - art and geometry - the very things that this course is dealing with. He carried on these at the same time and, we will try to show here, how he integrated the two.

He was strongly influenced by Masaccio and Domenico Veneziano. His solid, rounded figures are derived from Masaccio, while from Domenico he absorbed a predilection for delicate colours and scenes bathed in cool, clear daylight. To these influences he added an innate sense of order and clarity. He wrote treatises on solid geometry and on perspective, and his works reflect

these interests. He conceived the human figure as a volume in space, and the outlines of his subjects have the grace, abstraction, and precision of geometric drawings.

The Flagellation is particularly admired for the mathematical unity of the composition, and for Piero's ability to realistically depict the distance between the actual flagellation scene and the three characters in the foreground through perspective. The portrait of the bearded man on the left is considered unusually intense for Piero's time. The biblical event takes place in an open gallery in the near distance, while three figures in the foreground on the right side apparently pay no attention to the event unfolding behind them. The panel is much admired for its use of linear perspective and the air of stillness that pervades the work. According to the traditional interpretation, the three men would be Oddantonio da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, Piero's patron, and his two advisors Serafini and Ricciarelli (who allegedly murdered the Duke in 1444). The two advisors are identified as Manfredi del Pio and Tommaso di Guido dell'Agnello, who were also allegedly responsible for Oddantonio's death due to their unpopular government, which led to the conspiracy. Oddantonio's death would be compared, in its innocence, to that of Christ.

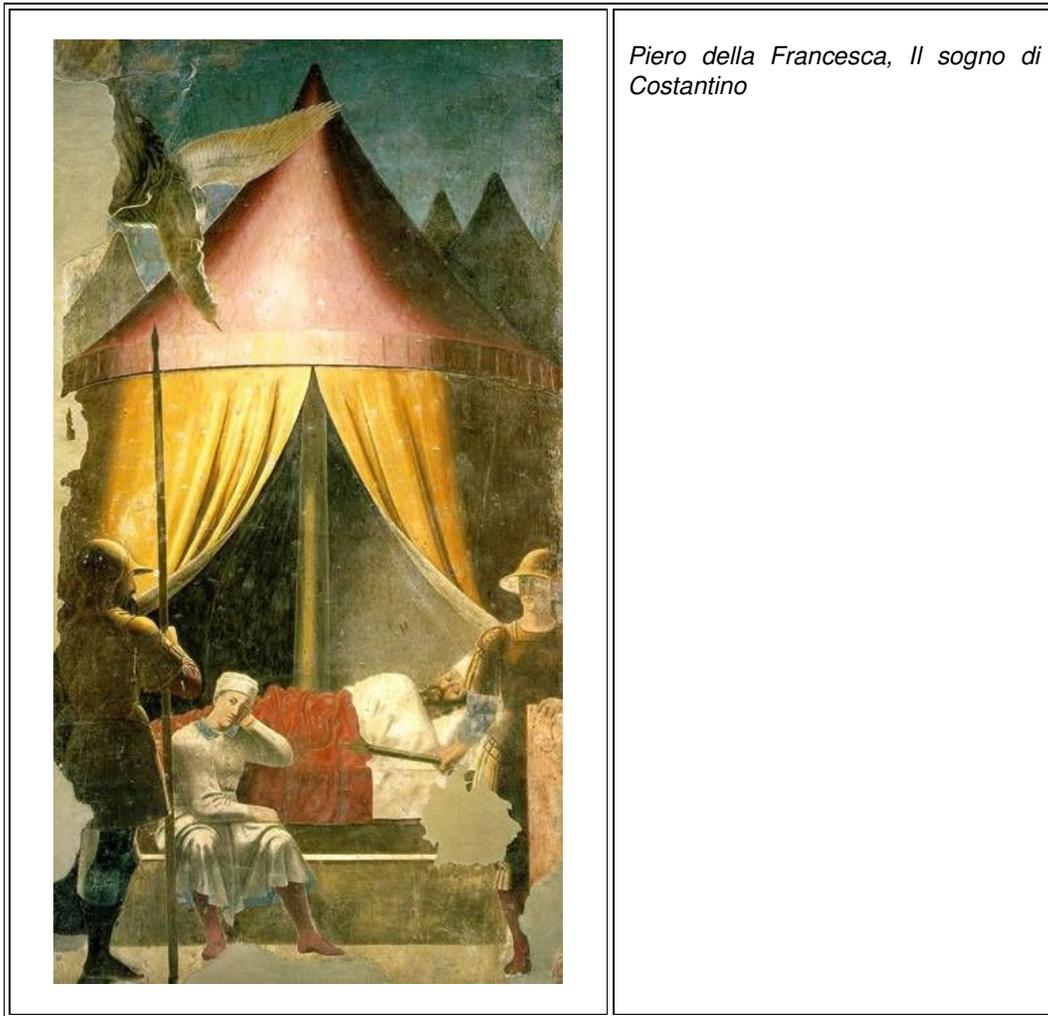


After having worked in Ferrara and in Rimini (fresco with Sigismondo Malatesta in the temple Malatestiano, of the 1451), Piero decide to face the problem of the history: it is possible to reduce the succession, the becoming of the history to the evidence and to the fixity of the positive phenomenon in himself (in terms of value)? It is a question that also has religious implications: can the fixed truth of the dogma be reconciled with the becoming of the religious history? From 1452 to 1459 (approx.) Piero works, with intervals, to the cycle of frescos with the *Leggenda della vera Croce* in the choir of the church of St. Francesco in Arezzo. The three walls are separated in panels of different greatness: "In the side walls, the division in the three great zones grants to the narration. In the low zones two battles are represented; the composition for groups gives to the spectator the feeling that is the composition that sustains the impending bands.

In the second zone there is the story of the Visit of the queen of Saba to the king Salomone and, on the front wall, of the *Invenzione della Croce*; there are less figures and they seem to align along the wall. Finally, in the *Death of Adamo* and in the *Restitution of the Cross to Jerusalem*, the two scenes in the tallest zone, the sky dominates and the figures are so thin to

give an illusion of lightness to the eye. This progression shows in an evident way the intent of Piero to give an architectural function to its figurations" (L.Venturi)

In the *Sogno di Costantino* the beam of light that goes down with the angel strikes the conic tent; it is one of the first "nocturne" ones, one of the first effects of "particular light" in the four hundred painting history. In the two battles the sky is not a background, empty beyond the compact teams of the fighters: it is defined as "space" from the pole of the lances, from the vivaciously coloured patches of the banners. The space is not surface that closes or open depth: also the antithesis of depth and surface it is not given as it is, but as proportion of the two opposite values. There is not contrast of light and shadow, because the light is space, the space is homogeneous, The space cannot have interruptions: after all the solid forms of the things don't even arrest the light, they are crossed from it, filled.

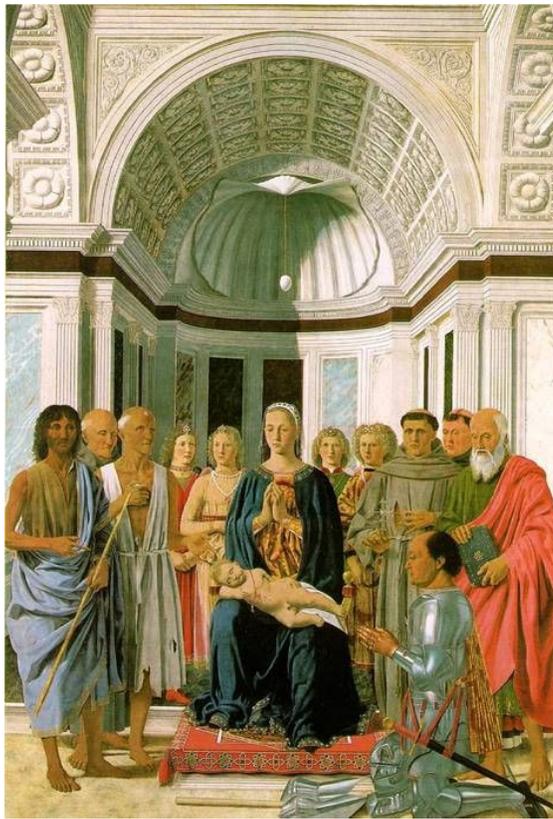


The volumes are expressed from the contours that limits the coloured zones, and these are inserted one in the other as in a "tarsia". The colours are pure, high, bright, approached without any respect for the nuance of Gentile de Fabriano, for the delicate harmony preferred by Beato Angelico.

Such a global vision would seem to have to exclude every interest to the particular; but it is true

the contrary. Piero, with his mathematical knowledge, can represent infinitely great scale (like in Arezzo frescoes) and infinitely small with the same realism.

In Urbino Piero della Francesca paint the famous Madonna, Santi e Federigo da Montefeltro in preghiera (between 1472 and 1474). For the first time the architecture is not only a structure of perspective plans but a vast and deep vain, covered by vault and with a niche at the bottom; and tha architecture extends, with the opening of the great arcs, sideways and in ahead. The semicircle of the figures is placed on the intersection of the arms of a cross building. In the piece of Brera the semicircle of the saints repeats, with a wider bending, the hollow of the apse, and connecting itself with the open spaces at the sides, it receives the light, it picks up the light around the central and almost conic figure of the Madonna, and it transmits it to the hollow of the apse. But, on that semicircle of figures, the light it qualifies according to the different colours and to the situation and the different inclination of the figures.



Piero della Francesca, Pala di Montefeltro

The theory, in Piero painting method, doesn't precede the experience conditioning it with an "a priori" idea, but the theory is built on the experience, it concludes it in the unity of an absolute form: it is as the dome of the building of the knowledge, and the pylons that shore it are the experience of the nature and the history.

The same Pietro gives the key of his theory by suspending an egg in the center of the hollow of the apse in form of shell and above the egg-shaped head of the Madonna. The egg is a form rich in symbolic meanings; but here it means that nothing is too small to not to be re-entered in an universal proportion: and the "middle" term among the "least" of the egg and the "maximum" of the apse is the form of the human head of the Madonna. Not only: the same form is given, in different greatness, in all the things of the nature, so in the egg as in the shell and in the human

person, and the value of that form doesn't change passing from the concave one to the convex one.

This is the last surely datable work of Piero, since, in the last years of his life, he lost the sight and he abandoned the painting for the pure mathematical speculation; and this work, that shows the supreme convergence and identity of experience and idea, of idea and form, it constitutes the historical and ideal base of the Five hundred classicism of Bramante and Raffaello (rendition from G.C. Argan, History of Italian Art).

Chapter 6: 1500 - Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo

To the first time of the activity of Leonardo 3, still under the direct influence of the Verrocchio, belongs some Madonna (in the Ermitage of Leningrado, in the Pinacoteca of Munich), in which the light source is double, frontal and from the background.

Leonardo accents the curvilinear course of the contours; but the opposite incidences of the light prevent the chiaroscuro to turn in an single sense and it create a diffusion of shadow named "sfumato" effect.

Robert Williams recently wrote: "For Leonardo, perspective is simply one aspect of the systematicity of painting: it provides a conceptual armature onto which one can add an understanding of light and shade, atmosphere, anatomy, human expression, indeed, all one's knowledge of the world.

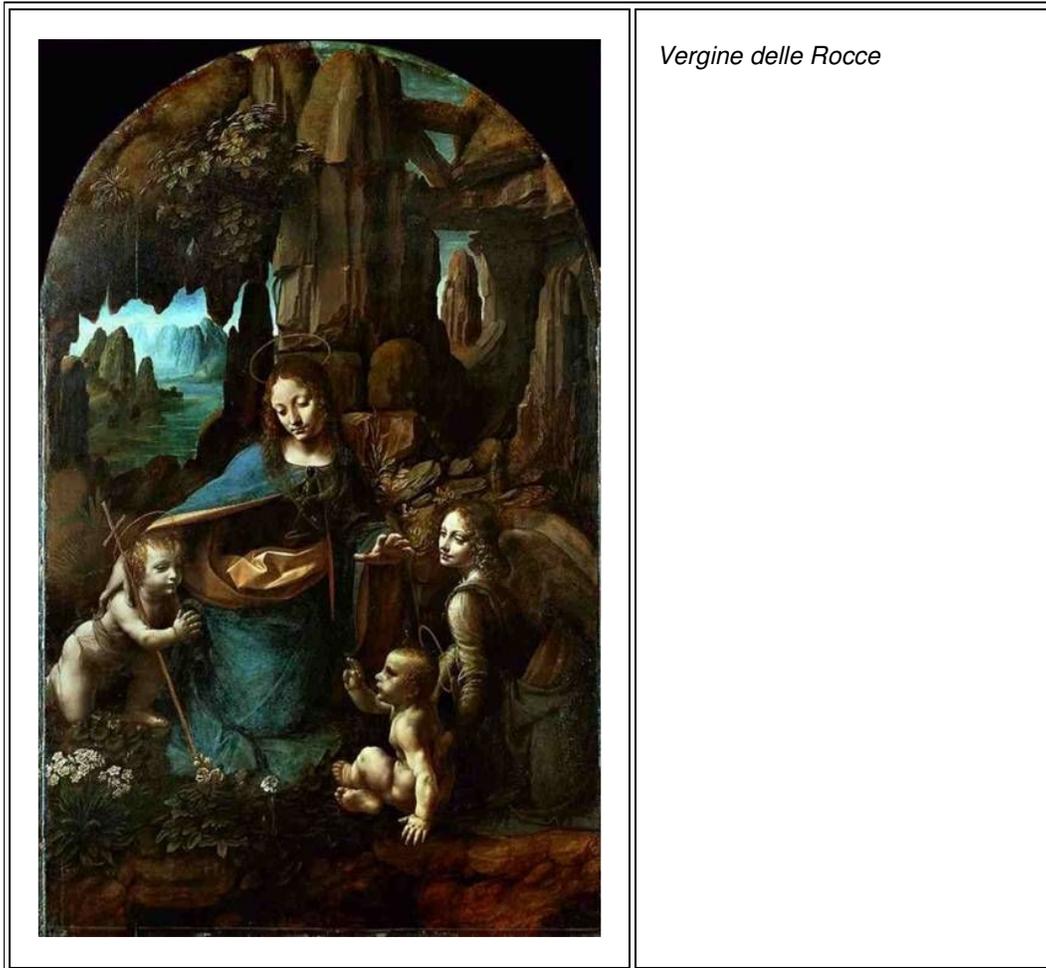
As perspective is to painting, so is painting to the world as a whole: the perfect integrative instrument for all knowledge, a means for expressing a comprehensive—systematic—understanding of nature.

The demands of consistency are even greater than for Alberti: all aspects of a picture, including the treatment of color, are as deeply interdependent as those elements governed by perspective. Painting thus becomes an even more comprehensive, and, as a result, more self-reflexive, more critical activity."



Many times the Florentine painters had tried to give the firmness of the engraved form to the painted form: at the opposite, the sculpture interests the young Leonardo, because it doesn't have defined contours and because it is a body absorbed in the light and in the natural atmosphere .

Let's consider the *Vergine delle Rocce*; the figures are at the threshold of a cave, a sort of natural crypt, that receives light from the high and from the openings of the bottom. Against every custom, the figures are situated in cross, at the meeting of four axes of space: Jesus tilts, in the foreground, toward the external space, the Baptist and the angel suggest the side expansion of the space, the Madonna, that overhangs the group, seems to show us a "dome" as light source.

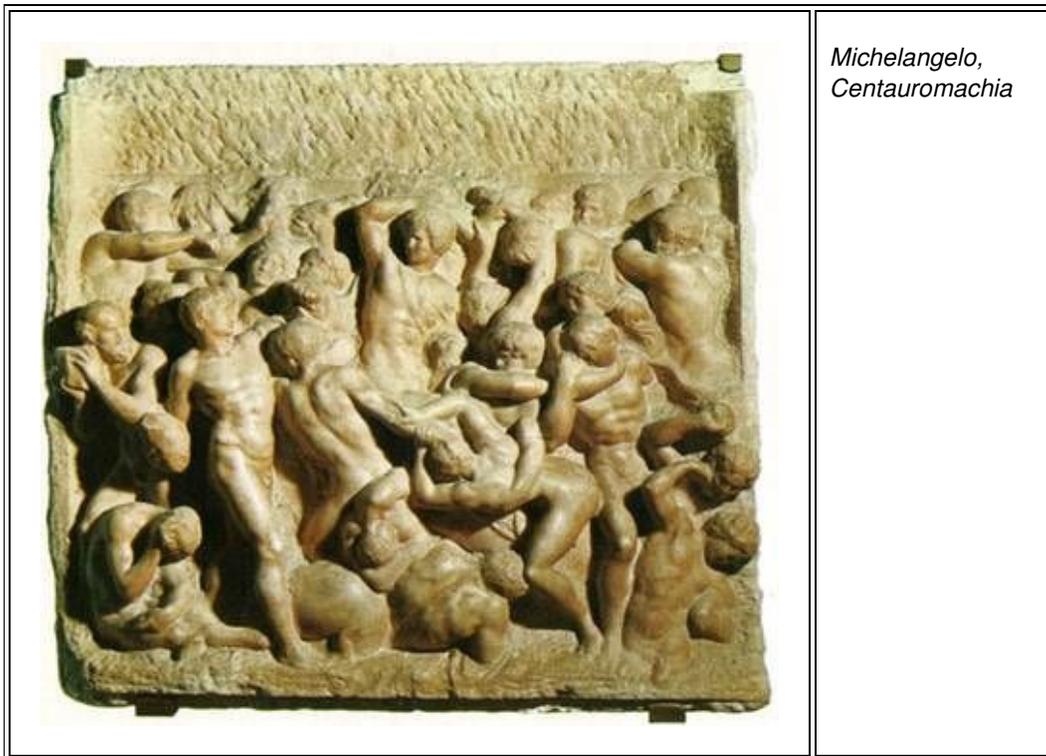


We now observe that the cave is a vast hollow in which it grows thick damp and dense atmosphere, while the grass and the flowers are described with extreme care until the least details, with a flemish attention that Leonardo has learned in Florence from Hugo van der Goes. Unquestionably Leonardo place the problem of the relationship between the maximum and the least: it resolves it as a "naturalist", keeping in mind that the nature introduces these differences of scale. Leonardo departs from the presupposition that the human mind, also if natural, it is perfectly able to pass from a universal scale to another one without any need to reduce the great one and the small one in a meedle. The space is not therefore a constant structure, with a mathematics logic; it is the indefinite extension in which experience take place or where is realized the human existence.

The *Vergine delle Rocce* is undoubtedly a cryptic picture, full of hermetic meanings: not symbolic, nevertheless, because the symbol manifests, in a way, while Leonardo wants that the meanings remain dark, shaded, and the only the forms are visible: as the natural phenomena,

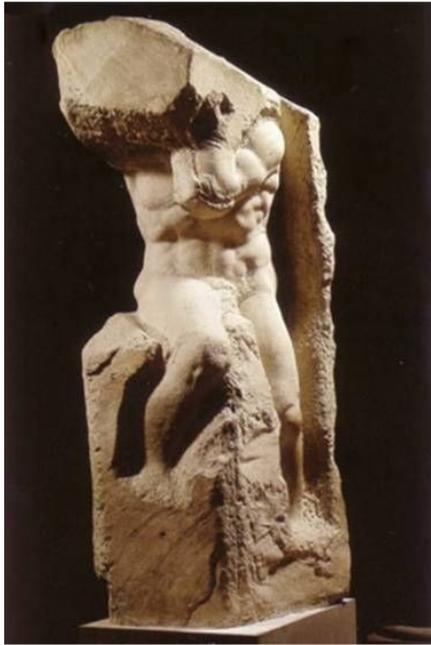
that are seen and certain they have causes and meanings that can be investigated and uncovered, but that are not given previously.

What Leonardo will call "prospettiva aerea" (aerial perspective) it is not anything else other than the measure of the distances in depth according to the density and the color of the atmosphere in the "empty" space: so all the things will appear us wound, veiled, vanished. This softness, impalpable fusion of light and shadow it is the beauty of Leonardo: a beauty that doesn't have a constant form, but born from the inspiration, or from the internal impulse to investigate and to know, to be in relationship or in unison with the nature, and therefore it depends from the attitude of the mind and from the place, from the time, from the light. The four figures of the Vergine delle Rocce doesn't have defined gestures, precise motions: the angel shows, Jesus gathe himself, the Baptist stretches out, the Virgo has an action and a smile full of understanding and of "melancholy", as if she knew or foresaw the inevitable punishment of the experience. Those are perhaps the images of inner motives: therefore they are still in the underground cave, although on the threshold.



For Michelangelo the motion rise and concludes within the figures, and the cause that arouse it is a spiritual principle, a God's gesture. In fact, there is not a space, a perspective that frames and set up the action: the voids among the figures allow to perceive the scabrous stone of the fund. The values in contrast are not the void and the full, but the inactive subject, almost passive under the light that invades it, and the subject animated by the motion, where the light coincides with the tensions and the releases of the gestures.

The artist doesn't dissimulate, rather he puts in evidence the trial of the sculpture, the sour job of the chisel: almost to say that a naturalistic inspiration as that in Leonardo had his expression in the painting, but the spiritual inspiration has its expression in the sculpture (rendition from G.C. Argan, History of Italian Art).

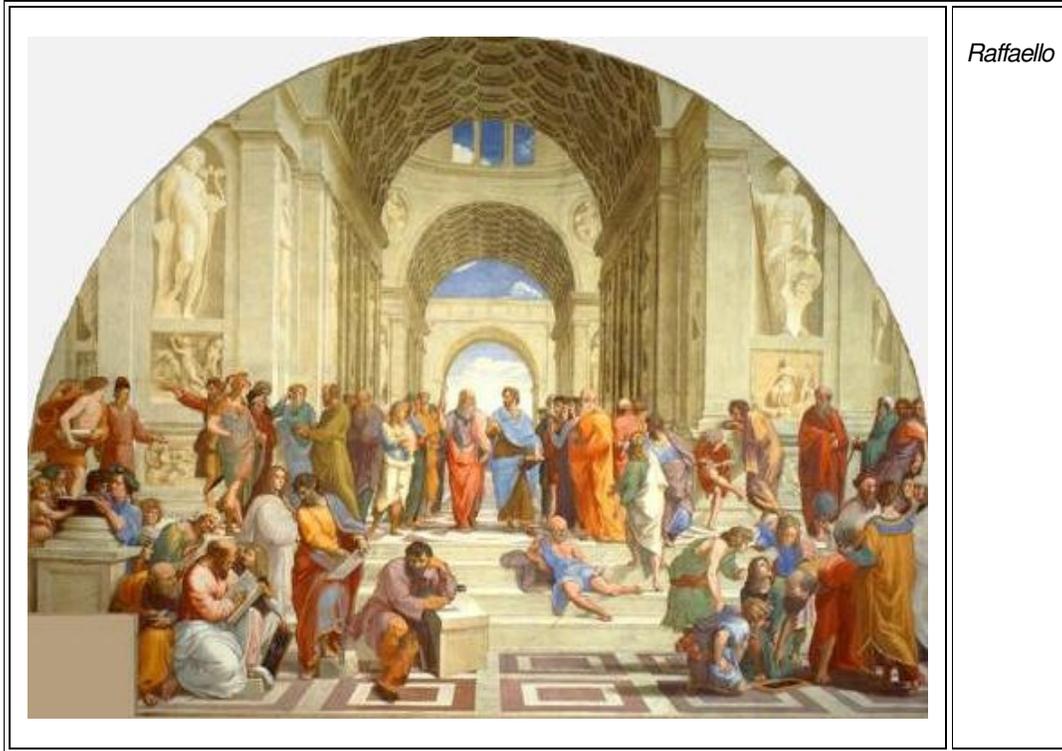


Michelangelo, Atlante

Michelangelo will say that the image is since the beginning contained in the block and that the sculptor won't owe whether to free it raising the superfluous subject: it is sufficient to observe the figure of the Madonna, the laying of her Child or the boy on the staircase to see how the masses and the volumes almost re-enter strongly in the plain-limit of the initial cube, of the block.



Michelangelo, Pietà Rondanini



Raffaello

Chapter 7: 1600 - Caravaggio

Caravaggio, by name of Michelangelo Merisi, Italian painter whose revolutionary technique of tenebrism, or dramatic, selective illumination of form out of deep shadow, became a hallmark of Baroque painting. Scorning the traditional idealized interpretation of religious subjects, he took his models from the streets and painted them realistically.

The younger Caravaggio at thirteen years old went to the workshop of Simone Paterzano. Caravaggio stayed at Paterzano's school for four years, he learned the Lombard and Venetian school.

At some time between 1588 and 1592, Caravaggio went to Rome. He was already in possession of the fundamental technical skills of painting and had acquired, with characteristic eagerness, a thorough understanding of the approach of the Lombard and Venetian painters, who, opposed to idealized Florentine painting, had developed a style that was nearer to representing nature and events.

Caravaggio had a very particular technique. Before his style the technique was very different, about the studio of academy classic artist, like Michelangelo, Raffaello, Tiziano, Coreggio and Leonardo. The revolution of his style was about the atmosphere and the lightness of his painting. The figure of his painting came up from the dark shadow.

It formed in Milan on the works of masters from Bergamo and Brescia of the sixteenth century, which drew attention to daily reality, and a genuine religiosity and without emphasis. Innovative feature of his painting is the function of light, which reveals things out of and builds volumes. Without doubt included among the artists most "revolutionary" always disruptive to the breaking force of his works in relation to the theories and techniques contemporary paintings, Michelangelo Merisi, known as Caravaggio had a peculiar destiny - an early glory, a life

adventure, one end premature, lonely and miserable - which has a legendary character, charming and cursed, capable of influence for three centuries, although it has also helped create an image romantically simplified his biography. Only in recent times, thanks to the important historical studies of Italian and foreign - above all Hermann Voss, Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi, René Jullian - were unable to correct or clarify many aspects of his life and significantly change the verdict on his work



Caravaggio

*David with
Head of
Goliath*



*Caravaggio Il martirio di
S. Matteo*

Chapter 8: 1700 - Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

In total contrast to Baroque, the Rococo style dances, plays itself out completely. Its lilting tones sing with the passion of the castrati, glorifying God with the fervour of an entire era.

This very fervour comes through in the work of the Venetian painter Jean-Baptiste Tiepolo, for instance in his "La Montée au Calvaire" (The Way to Calvary), one of the rare episodes of the Christian epic he chose to stage. What we see here goes counter to all that precedes it: gone from the scene are the dark-light essentiality, immobilism, silence and, above all, vital confidentiality between the viewer and the work. This work lives autonomously, exalting its own prowess, dancing and singing to its own glory.

Clearly, all the lines of this work progress upwards, towards the heights of Golgotha. The colours too - all the reds, blues, whites, gold, yellows, flesh colours in various shades - all progress upwards. The artist obviously enjoyed playing with space, producing something that is basically theatrical. In its contrast with the work of Caravaggio, Meylan, Guido Reni, van der Werff and Piazzetta, this painting serves as a masterful introduction to pictorial Rococo.

It also points the way to architecture: just as the Baroque paintings led us to the Il Gesù choir in Rome, so this painting by Tiepolo guides us to Rococo architecture, in particular as exemplified by Bavarian constructions. Here again, we will find ourselves far from the austere cult of the divine mystery. Instead, we will be confronted with works that translate a stylistic explosion accomplished with supreme mastery.

Tiepolo and his sons arrived in Madrid on 4 June 1762. In spite of his advanced age, he was extremely productive in the remaining eight years of his life, creating an impressive number of large frescos and altarpieces in Madrid. He appears to have been very well aware of the fact that the time for his art, in which he portrayed triumphal apotheoses and the glorification of the virtues of his clients by means of illusionistic settings, was well and truly over.

Tiepolo was one of the few European painters still working on a monumental scale and able to realize extensive interior decorations. King Charles III of Spain had thus made the right choice in commissioning this artist to decorate the Throne Room of the Royal Palace in Madrid, only recently built to designs by Filippo Juvarra (1676-1736) by his pupil Sacchetti (died 1764).

Tiepolo had also completed the oil sketch for the ceiling fresco in the Throne Room, The Glory of Spain, in Venice. The subject portrayed is the glorification of the Spanish nation, which in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries had developed into one of the leading European powers, politically, geographically and culturally.

The compositional scheme of the ceiling fresco in the Throne Room is a brilliant synthesis of decorative elements from Tiepolo's earlier works, such as those in the Residence in Würzburg and the Villa Pisani in Stra. Tiepolo reproduces his previous work in a new setting without compromising the original character of the fresco or giving the impression of its being a copy.

In spite of the complex structure of the numerous figural elements and the intricate meaning of its content, and thanks to the largely empty expanse of sky, the fresco appears to be one of the airiest Tiepolo ever created.



Work on the Throne Room was completed in 1764. The King was pleased with the result and asked Tiepolo to carry out further decorative work within the palace. The painting of a ceiling fresco in the Guard Room followed. In the Queen's antechamber, a small room adjoining the Throne Room, Tiepolo created the ceiling fresco *The Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy*.

In 1726, Tiepolo began work on the frescoes in the stairwell and in the rooms on the 'piano nobile', or first floor, of the Patriarchal Palace (now the Archiepiscopal Palace) at Udine. This important project had been commissioned by Dionisio Dolfin (1663-1734), a member of a Venetian patrician family, who had held the office of patriarch of Aquileia since 1699.

In the centre of the stairwell ceiling, Tiepolo frescoed *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, which he surrounded with eight monochrome scenes from the book of Genesis. He then went on to decorate the Gallery, the so-called *Sala Rossa*, or Red Room, (at that time, the seat of the ecclesiastical tribunal), and the Throne Room on the piano nobile.

The Gallery features scenes from the lives of the Old Testament patriarchs, likewise inspired by the book of Genesis. The three main episodes, *The Three Angels appearing to Abraham*, *Rachel Hiding the Idols from her Father Laban* and *The Angel appearing to Sarah* are each surrounded by a *trompe-l'oeil* frame. They are hung alternately with monochrome portraits of prophetesses, which create the illusion of being statues in niches along the walls. On the ceiling, a depiction of *The Sacrifice of Isaac* occupies centre position, flanked by smaller oval compartments portraying *Hagar in the Wilderness* and *Jacob's Dream*. Tiepolo was aided in the realization of this famous ensemble by the quadratura specialist from Ferrara, Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna (1688-1766), with whom he continued to work closely during the years that followed.

On the ceiling of the *Sala Rossa*, Tiepolo painted *The Judgement of Solomon*, surrounded by portraits of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel - a theme appropriate to a room used both as a civil and ecclesiastical tribunal. Finally, there are portraits of Old Testament patriarchs in the Throne Room, but these have deteriorated badly, and not all are by Tiepolo himself.



*Giovanni
Battista
Tiepolo*

*The
Judgement
of Solomon*

The ambitious pictorial program of the overall decoration was probably conceived by Dionisio Dolfin himself, with the help of his theological advisers, including Francesco Florio, his vicar-general. The subjects chosen for the pictures were intended to reinforce the legitimacy of the ruling patriarchy, which at that time found itself at the centre of a fierce politico-ecclesiastical struggle between Venice and Vienna.

The decoration of the Patriarchal Palace in Udine unquestionably represents the high point in Tiepolo's early career. By portraying figures in 16th century dress, and placing them in landscapes bathed in sun and light, he recalls the magnificently staged scenes of Veronese. The decisive element in this project must be his sense of the theatrical, where the respective subject matter of the picture is presented in a dramatically staged scene. Each figure is assigned a primary or secondary role and the relationships between the protagonists are elucidated by means of a masterly handling of colour. Tiepolo thus transformed the revival of Veronese's art, also favoured by his contemporaries, from a mere stylistic fashion into a pictorial language that was to confirm his own reputation as a representative of the Venetian tradition.

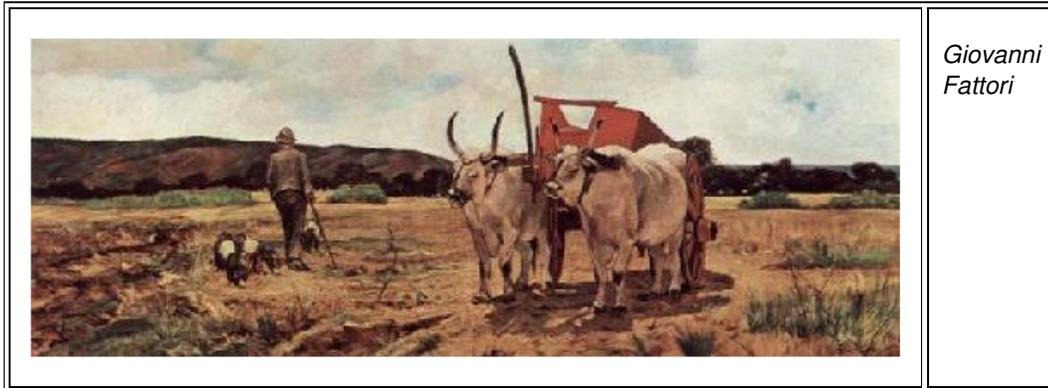
Chapter 9: 1800 - Giovanni Fattori

Fattori belongs to the "macchiaioli" group, in which we can see the strong anti-academic refusal of design and form in favour of the "spot" effect: it's that stage of the traditional painting in which the painter puts on the burlap, in a highly summarized sketch and without care of the contours, a series of colour spots in the aim of studying the effect of the tones.

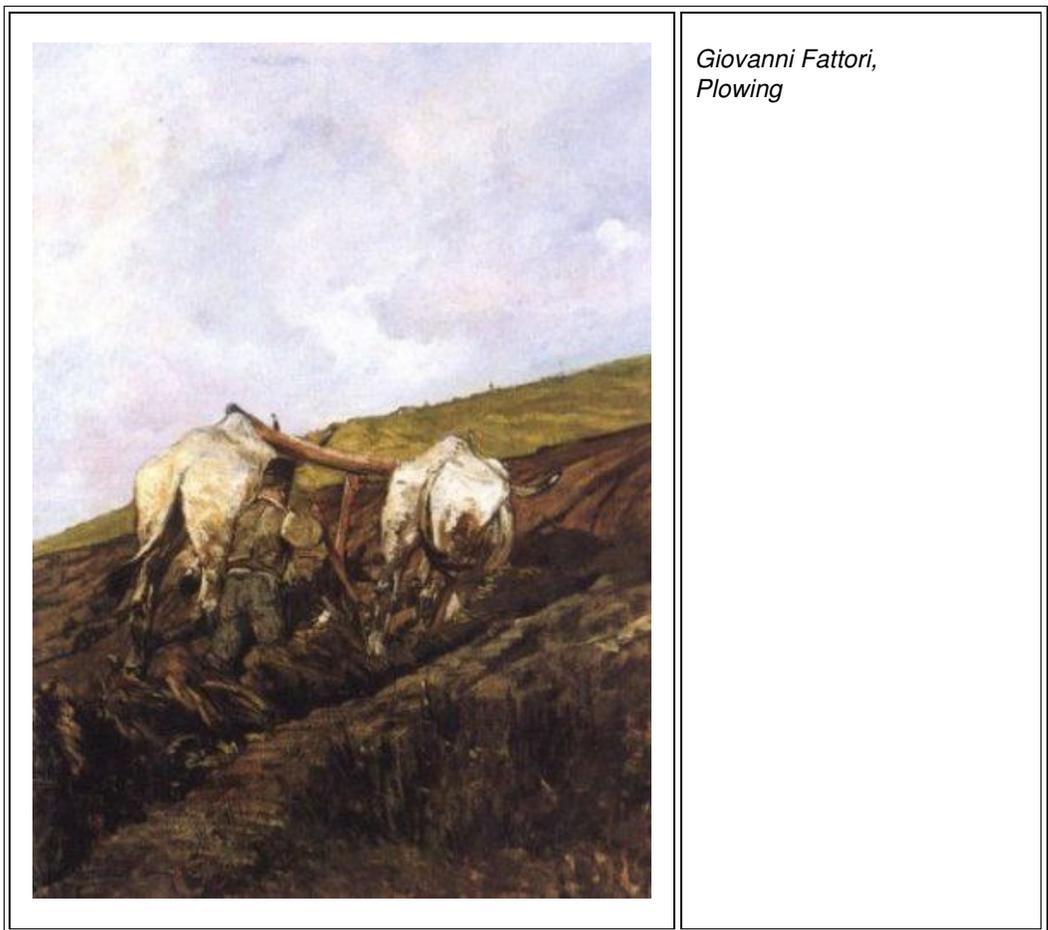
The "macchiaioli" abolished the traditional "chiaroscuro" in order to paint colour-shadow and colour-light matching so to obtain great brightness effects and evocative atmospheric yield, simplifying the landscape till its essential structure. The innovation of the "macchiaioli" was not however only of formal character, in fact they placed end to religious or rhetorical thematic in favour of the "true one" beauty.

And the true one did not go on separated from a very defined social interest and a political

choice in a democratic sense. The “macchiaioli” are considered a big part of the “Risorgimento” history also because they personally took part in it.



The Italian cultural artistic climate is much fervent and sees various artists and currents emerging within the nineteenth-century realism. We have the divisionisti group with Segantini, Previati, Pellizza da Volpedo; moreover as part of the Scapigliatura artists we can find Tranquillo from Cremona and Ranzoni. In this climate emerges Fattori's work, with various interpretations of the realism. He first joins the group of the macchiaioli and then develops very personal outcomes previously described.



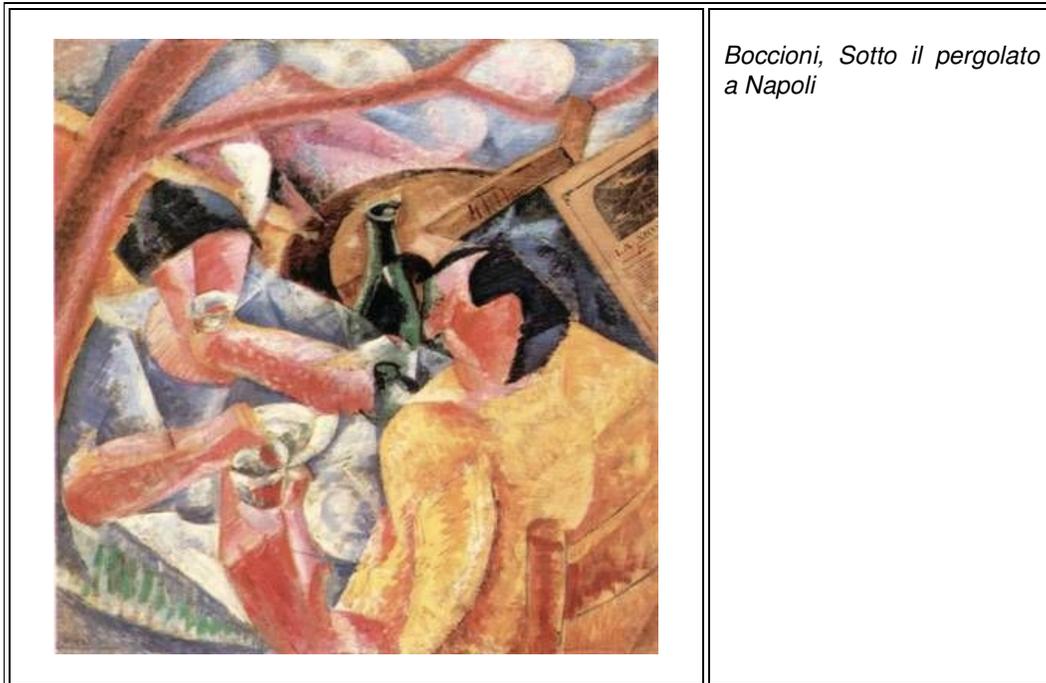
Giovanni Fattori first starts with an academic and conventionally historical painting; but soon he began to sketch from the true scene of military life and finally landed to a happily naturalistic painting, than would develop in an always greater sobriety and solidity. He gradually abandoned the romantic “chiaroscuro” for a light-colour of great cleanness; and he started constructing more and more his pictures through chromatic zones, of a nearly abstract weight.

Sometimes he also took advantage of the qualities of the support table or cardboard in order to create evocative effects. The recurrent topics of Fattori's works of are landscapes, people of the Tuscany and the military life (seen without any minimal rhetorical).

The adhesion to the realism unify all his fazes: himself once asserted that art is in the manifestation of nature and social illustration. G. Fattori joined the “spot” painting movement, without radically renouncing to the “chiaroscuro” and the “contours”, like in all his successive jobs: we find the new technique already partially applied in the great painting “the Italian field after the battle of Magenta” (1862), indicated from the art critic C. Maltese like “the first historical modern Italian picture”.

Chapter 10: 1900 - Umberto Boccioni

He meant to re-connect himself to “the revolutionary” lesson of Medardo Rosso; noticing however as this last one had neglected “the problem of a new construction of plans”, and therefore assumed the necessity to create a “style of the movement”- by the co-penetrating of the same plans – so to give constructive and synthetic power to the impressionistic vibration of the light that aimed to represent more than the bodies, their action.



He first differs from the “divisionista” lesson that he absorbed and cultivated when he abandoned even more the vibrating fragmentation of the paint-brush strokes for a deepened study of the volumes and their effect in motion.

As part of the realistic painting he withholds topics that bring back to the imaginary such as industries, machines, sports, vitality and discards those more melancholic and reflexives.

The authors of futurist The Manifest thought that the goal of the modern artist was to get rid of the models and the figurative traditions of the past, in order to turn themselves decidedly to the contemporary, dynamic, lively world, in continuous evolution. The proposed subjects of the representation therefore were the city, machines and the chaotic daily truth. In his futurist works he succeeded in fusing in one single image the importance of the chronography obtained by Etienne Jules Marey in the 1800's. It is not in fact mechanical science his representation, but dynamic feeling (look at the "Stati d'animo").

Boccioni merged in its paintings the vertical lines of the new scaffoldings and the high horizon, that left to see much part of the ground, with the diagonal dynamic line. He used complementary colours and he saturated the pictures with lines that attract the eye without making it easy to arrest.

In the sculpture field the artist neglected the noble materials like marble and bronze, preferring wood, iron and glass. What he was interested in was to illustrate the interaction of an object in motion with the surrounding space: the "futurist sculpture is related to the ambient", first declaration of an invasive attempt by an atmosphere that is no more any, but strictly connected to the presence of the artistic work and to the situation that is created around it.

Coherently to this the literary part of the futurist group was dedicated also to the constructions of theatre scenes with the active participation of the public. These were the first examples with the Dada ones, of participated art.



*Boccioni,
Unique Forms
of Continuity in
Space*

Very few of his sculptures survived. In the most famous "Single Forms of the continuity in Space" the artist succeeds to effectively suggest the idea of movement and the co-penetration of the atmosphere in the figure and vice-versa, even if the material is solid bronze. The first works that we can in a modern way define "open" were actually born thanks to futurist painting and sculpture. The futurist's work always departs from the reference with the truth. In the group of painters, the one who more than others left this adhesion to the true and opened to the newborn abstractionism was Giacomo Balla with the "iridescent co-penetrations".

Boccioni is influenced by cubism to which reproaches to be excessive static. It suffers like many Italian artists of the political and cultural movement that characterizes city like Paris and countries like the Russia that matured the revolution. The opposition taken to the tradition recognized and reconfirmed in the Salon is common to the European climate of vanguard. In Russia with little years of delay, (before and between the "constructivism" was born), sees to be born the Russian futurism that becomes representative both of the propaganda and the Municipality. This contrasts with the Italian futurism that instead was taken more easy as a loan from the fascist party.