

Vasari's *The Lives of the Artists* traces the development of Renaissance art, dividing it into three main periods still accepted and referenced today. In his "Preface to Part III" he credits the contributions of the artists recorded in the two earlier sections for building the foundation of "rule, order, proportion, design, and style" that allowed the best artists of the "modern" period or High Renaissance to achieve "perfection." In his estimation, the accomplishments of this final group surpassed even the artists of antiquity.<sup>1</sup> According to Vasari, Leonardo da Vinci "made his figures move and breathe," while Raphael incorporated the best of ancient and "modern" art, with a beautiful color sense and the ability to convey character.<sup>2</sup> But he ranks Michelangelo above all others for his achievements in painting, sculpture, and architecture. Ever since, the High Renaissance has been considered the ultimate expression of Renaissance art.

The High Renaissance, led by Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael, changed art and made the Mannerist movement possible. This paper will look at ways the artists Pontormo, Rosso Fiorentino and Bronzino built upon "ideal" art produced in the High Renaissance during the Mannerist period of the Late Renaissance. Examples of similarities between works from the "three greats" of the High Renaissance and those of prominent Mannerist artists will be examined. In addition to these practical examples of likely influence, evidence will be presented of similarities of broader cultural influences. Furthermore, the rules that Michelangelo and Leonardo broke, and the contributions they, along with Raphael, made to the rising status of the artist also helped make the innovations of the Mannerist phase possible.

During the High Renaissance and Early Mannerist period of 1500-1533 we begin to see the confidence and monumentality characteristic of High Renaissance art disrupted by the anxiety and tension manifested in early Mannerist works. Then, as Mannerism develops further, there is a return to elegance and grace, but with a more distant formality. The reasons for these changes and the legacies of the top High Renaissance artists are deeply rooted. This paper will draw connections between the cultural climate of late Renaissance Florence, material concerning works by the artists involved, and original ideas on the subject.

Each generation of Renaissance artists drew upon and reacted to previous developments. In the competitive Florentine art community, artists were continually exposed to the latest innovations, and this idea exchange was not always a strictly linear process from the more established members to the younger ones. Excellent examples of both the evolution of art movements and an indication that an older artist could be influenced by a younger one may be found in "Pontormo, Michelangelo, Caravaggio," by Paul Barolsky. This short article deals with Michelangelo's *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* in the Vatican's Capella Paolina, relating it to Giotto's *Lamentation of Christ*, with its diagonal composition and fifteenth century device of using a hill to move the viewer through space. Barolsky argues the work of Michelangelo circa 1546-1550 was influenced by *Road to Calvary* by Pontormo, "painted a generation earlier at the Certosa di Val d' Ema," a Carthusian charterhouse in Florence.<sup>3</sup> The similarity went unnoticed, he believes, due to extensive damage to the earlier (1520s) work, and also because so much has been made of

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<sup>1</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists: A New Translation by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 277.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 280.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Barolsky, "Pontormo, Michelangelo, Caravaggio." *Notes in the History of Art* 19, no. 4 (2000): 14. <https://doi.org/http://www.jstor.org/stable/23206950>.

Michelangelo's known influence on Pontormo, art historians did not consider inspiration might also have run the other direction. Many years later, in 1601, Caravaggio would draw heavily upon Michelangelo's depiction of St. Peter's martyrdom for his own *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1601) for the Cerasi Chapel at Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome, dispensing with the crowd and the background hills to focus dramatically on the most critical action, and using the diagonal composition that would be a hallmark of Mannerism. The course from one stylistic stage to another can wind around along the way.

The early Mannerists benefited from the rising status of the artist that began in the fifteenth century. For much of the Quattrocento, the cost of materials was a major point in agreements between patrons and painters, and the old notion held that painting was "still too important to be left to the painters."<sup>4</sup> But by the end of the century, more and more patrons prioritized the skill of the artist.<sup>5</sup> Along with this change came a move away from indicating divinity or holiness through the use of halos, in favor of more choice in how works were executed. In addition, Vasari's tremendously influential *The Lives of the Artists* speaks of the pursuit of "perfection," with the highest-ranking artists as heroic, even "divine" figures.<sup>6</sup>

The High Renaissance (1500-1533) is characterized by orderly grandeur and balance. These ideals expressed in art lent a sense of control and glory Italians lacked at the time. Renaissance principles of utilizing geometric forms and mathematical proportions to create harmony, along with linear perspective and knowledge of anatomy to foster realism, were well established and used with new heights of ease and control. But towards the end of the High Renaissance, this emphasis on harmony and rationality began to give way to increasingly complex visual narratives. Space is not always easily readable, color choices can be strange, and emotion displaces rationality. There is also a return to some Gothic traits, such as the elongation of figures. This emerging Mannerist style was very much a response to increasingly turbulent times. After building up for two centuries, the Protestant Reformation erupted fully in 1517 with Martin Luther's written protest of the sale of indulgences. The ensuing religious and political upheaval had profound effects on society. Although Italy remained a solidly Catholic stronghold, it was not immune to turmoil, due to the Church's efforts to reassert its authority and tighten its control. There was also instability and terror from violent military attacks such as the Sack of Rome by troops of Charles V in 1527. As Partridge observes, many artists in Florence "responded by turning away from the balanced and cerebral High Renaissance styles of Leonardo, Raphael, and Sarto to more emotionally and spiritually charged modes, a style usually called first-generation Mannerism."<sup>7</sup>

Raphael died in 1502, Leonardo in 1519, and thus both were gone before or at the very beginning of this cultural shift. But Michelangelo lived until 1564 and was a significant contributor to the development of Mannerism. Like other Renaissance artists, Michelangelo used the *contrapposto* pose from ancient statues, but he took this principle further, eventually creating

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Baxandall, "Painters and Clients in Fifteenth Century Italy," in *Readings in Art History: Volume II: The Renaissance to the Present*, Third Edition, ed. Harold Spencer, Third (New York: Scribner, 1969), 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.80.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Barolsky. "Dante and the Modern Cult of the Artist." *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 12, no. 2 (2004): 1–15. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20163967>.

<sup>7</sup> Loren Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence, 1400 - 1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 140.

figures twisting to an even greater degree with his famous allegorical figures of time for the tombs of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici at San Lorenzo of 1519-1534. This marked a significant deviation from classical forms. Later Mannerist sculptors would continue to develop this idea, creating two or more figures made from a single block of marble designed to be viewed fully in the round. Mannerist sculpture kept the High Renaissance ideals of elegance, gracefulness, and technical mastery, but became more complex, sophisticated, and three-dimensional. (Later Bernini, the son of a Mannerist sculptor, would take the expression of movement still further during the Baroque era.) These are examples of how the stylistic shifts emerging from Mannerism *built* upon High Renaissance ideals.

High Renaissance artists turned to statues from antiquity for study and for inspiration. It is no accident that young Michelangelo's exposure to classical statuary in Rome in 1496 was soon followed by his first distinguished work, *Bacchus* (1496-1497). Just ten years later, in early 1506, the *Laocoön Group* was found in Rome, receiving much attention and admiration for its figure modelling and its dramatic qualities.<sup>8</sup> Young artists also studied the works of the artists they trained with, along with those of other celebrated artists. Two highly influential works, Leonardo's *The Battle of Anghiari* and Michelangelo's *The Battle of Cascina*, commissioned in 1504, were never completed, but the cartoons of these works were studied quite literally to shreds by other artists. The cartoons, while they lasted, then copies and prints of *The Battle of Anghiari* and *The Battle of Cascina* heavily influenced generations of Florentine draftsmanship. Costamagna states "the shock (formal as much as stylistic) that the cartoons for these compositions made on young Florentine artists was unparalleled—to such an extent that Benvenuto Cellini, in a celebrated description, referred to the two cartoons as the *scuola del mondo* ("school of the world")."<sup>9</sup> Depictions of movement and emotion reached new levels. Previously, battle scenes were stylized and static, bearing more resemblance to pageants or jousting tournaments than actual warfare. By powerfully capturing chaos and carnage, Leonardo changed the paradigm<sup>10</sup>. Michelangelo gave another view of the disorderly nature of war, with soldiers caught off guard by a sudden attack. These scenes of the realities of battle present an intriguing dichotomy, reflecting the Renaissance value of naturalism while also somewhat at odds with its idealism. Although the commissions for both scenes were granted to represent proud moments in the history of Florence, neither artist obeyed heroic past conventions. Keizer sees Michelangelo's *Cascina* as "a dismantling of art's former dependence on text."<sup>11</sup> Partridge states *Cascina* was "widely mined for ideas by nearly all following Renaissance artists and is generally considered one of the points of departure for Mannerism, a style that tended to emphasize aesthetic qualities over content."<sup>12</sup> This will also be seen in Pontormo's *Deposition*, and to an even greater degree, in the 1583 statue *Rape of the Sabine Women* by Giambologna, created to show the sculptor's ability to make three distinct yet connected figures out of a single large piece of marble, with the subject tacked on later, as an afterthought.

The most noted High Renaissance artists influenced the next generation because young artists in training were expected to study and copy the works of established artists, then develop

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Costamagna. "The Formation of Florentine Draftsmanship: Life Studies from Leonardo and Michelangelo to Pontormo and Salviati." *Master Drawings* 43, no. 3 (2005), 276.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 284.

<sup>11</sup> Joost Keizer, "Michelangelo, Drawing, and the Subject of Art." *The Art Bulletin* 93, no. 3 (2011): 307. <http://www.stor.org/stable/23046579>.

<sup>12</sup> Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence*, 125.

their own styles as they matured. How the process should work was the subject of much debate. One of the key questions concerned whether it was better to begin by emulating a single artist, or many. This question mirrors one in letters exchanged between late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento scholars regarding the development of a writing style in Latin: was it better to imitate a variety of authors, or to focus on emulating one?<sup>13</sup> By the time Vasari published his second edition of *Lives*, he leaned in favor of studying multiple artists.<sup>14</sup>

Leonardo and Michelangelo profoundly influenced Florentine draftsmanship. Both tended to convey motion with repeated or pulsating contours, a technique Florentine artists would adopt. Andrea del Sarto developed depictions of movement further, influencing the drawings of artists trained in his studio, especially Pontormo.<sup>15</sup> Working in Andrea del Sarto's studio, Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino received instruction in drawing, including working with live models. Pontormo focused on "natural, palpable" aspects of the body, while Rosso Fiorentino, "in the tradition of Leonardo, emphasized the torsion of the body and sought to be as realistic as possible."<sup>16</sup> Pontormo continued to draw from life, becoming so adept his painting was significantly impacted by it.<sup>17</sup> Works by Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo, along with Pontormo's student Bronzino, will be examined here in relationship to the influence and ideals of their High Renaissance predecessors.

#### Rosso Fiorentino: *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*

Vasari notes that as a youth, Rosso Fiorentino "drew from Michelangelo's cartoon" and resolved to develop a "bold style with more grandeur, grace, and surprise than other painters."<sup>18</sup> Further into his biography of Rosso, Vasari praises his originality, noting a painting "of some very beautiful nudes in a scene of Moses killing the Egyptian..."<sup>19</sup> In the High Renaissance tradition, Figure 1, *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*, circa 1523, uses classical references in a biblical scene, in this case from the Book of Exodus Chapter 2. (Vasari mistakes this particular story for action that occurs just a few verses before it, when Moses kills an abusive overseer.) Here young Moses, newly arrived in Midian after fleeing a murder charge in Egypt, finds local shepherds harassing the daughters of Jethro, keeping the young women from accessing well water for their flock of sheep. A well was a commonly understood Christian symbol for the water of baptism.<sup>20</sup> The scenario is built upon the tension between protectiveness and brutality, and that contradictory nature extends to its very composition. What began as a water rights dispute could easily have escalated into physical danger for the young women, and Rosso Fiorentino shows Moses defending them with determination and violence, very likely influenced by Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*. The melee, with its tangle of nude male figures, also shows the influence of Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* and mirrors Michelangelo's tendency to include male nudes in his works, even when there is no obvious need or explanation for them or their nakedness. The mass of male bodies is similar to the famous *Laocoön Group* from antiquity, along with part of

<sup>13</sup> Sharon Gregory, "The Unsympathetic Exemplar in Vasari's "Life of Pontormo"." *Renaissance Studies* 23, no.1 (February 2009), p 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 10-12.

<sup>15</sup> Costamagna, "The Formation of Florentine Draftsmanship," 280.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 282.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 284.

<sup>18</sup> Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 346.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>20</sup> Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence*, 140.

another scene from the life of Moses, Michelangelo's *Brazen Serpent* in the Sistine Chapel, painted 1511-1512. (There is a duality to this Moses story as well, one of punishment and redemption, with the live poisonous snakes biting the Israelites who spoke against God and Moses, and the bronze snake on a staff offering a cure to those who look upon it.) For his own Moses, Rosso borrows the pose Michelangelo used for David in *David Beheading Goliath*, circa 1508-1512, also in the Sistine Chapel. While High Renaissance artists often referenced the art of antiquity, the early Mannerists often referenced the works of the High Renaissance masters. In both cases, the references demonstrate the artist's visual literacy. The alarmed young woman, Zipporah (alternately translated as Sefora or Sephora) in the upper right corner, the future wife of Moses, is clean and beautiful, wearing a cool blue gown hardly typical of a shepherdess. In the sixteenth century, beauty equated with goodness. Zipporah has one breast exposed, a classic Renaissance convention for an Amazon. Humanists of the day saw Amazon women as symbols of virtue, fortitude, and learning<sup>21</sup>. Thus, Rosso Fiorentino incorporates a very High Renaissance humanist touch, bringing imagery from classical antiquity into this biblical scene. In High Renaissance culture, humanist thought found many parallels between Christian theology and imagery with the mythology, iconography, and philosophy of antiquity. This respect for learning extended to other times and cultures, as extensively illustrated in Raphael's frescoes for Stanza della Segnatura, which combine ideas and images from antiquity with Catholic iconography and theology. This Renaissance fusion of diverse ideas would fall out of favor when the Catholic Counter Reformation took hold.

There are, of course, notable deviations from High Renaissance ideals and conventions in this painting. Vasari declares Rosso Fiorentino was so inventive "he never left any space unused in his paintings..."<sup>22</sup> The triangular composition, a staple of Renaissance art, is found in *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro* but the space is so filled with figures, including the mass of foreshortened bodies in the foreground, the traditional balance is negated. The effect is compounded by the heavy use of skin tones and earth tones, with Zipporah's blue gown offering the main contrasting color. The rose color material tied around the Midianite to the left, billowing oddly over his head as he charges towards Zipporah, and the narrow band of black cloth tied around Moses are strange devices with no discernable function, especially on figures that are otherwise unclothed. The lack of spatial depth is another break from Renaissance ideals. These deliberate departures from High Renaissance tradition and the heightened emotion are what make *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro* an early example of Mannerism.

#### Pontormo: *Deposition*

Vasari criticized Pontormo for being overly influenced by Albrecht Dürer. To be fair, Dürer was widely admired by other Florentine artists, and Vasari himself "borrowed liberally from Dürer in his own compositions."<sup>23</sup> Had Dürer been a Florentine, Vasari would surely have heaped praises upon him. Under Dürer's influence, Pontormo began elongating the limbs of his figures.<sup>24</sup> But Dürer was not his only influence, and early in his career, Pontormo does pay homage to other

<sup>21</sup> Edward J. Olszewski. "The Amazon in Rosso Fiorentino's Uffizi 'Moses.'" *Notes in the History of Art* 28, no. 1 (2008): 25–29. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23207971> 27-28

<sup>22</sup> Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, 348.

<sup>23</sup> Gregory, "The Unsympathetic Exemplar," 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21.

artists. The influence of Vatican frescoes by Michelangelo and Raphael is very evident in Pontormo's *Visitation* of 1514-1516 in Santissima Annunziata, Florence. The figures on the steps are reminiscent of Raphael's *School of Athens*, and the unexplained statue of a naked boy on the steps is like something Michelangelo might add. But by the time his *Deposition* was completed in 1528, Pontormo had developed his own distinctive style.

The *Deposition or Entombment* by Pontormo, Figure 2, has many features that break with High Renaissance ideals, beginning with the slightly vague or consolidated subject matter. Clearly, this is a post-crucifixion scene, for the dead body of Christ has been taken down from the cross, but it lacks the standard conventions established to pinpoint the exact nature of the event. Preparatory drawings for Pontormo's *Deposition* include the traditional ladder for removing Christ's body from the cross, signaling a deposition, but the artist omits the ladder in the painting.<sup>25</sup> There is no sign of a cave or crypt that would indicate an entombment, or any empty crosses in the background to show the grouping in relationship to Calvary. The single cloud in the upper left and the bare surface in the foreground are the only hints of landscape. The figures may be on a hill or sloping ground, but the space is not logically laid out with linear perspective. Christ's body is being placed on Mary's lap, as a bookend to the Nativity, but the figures crowding around them make this more of a lamentation or group *pietà*. This painting has been interpreted as combining numerous events in the life of Christ, "all as dramas in progress."<sup>26</sup> A few color choices stand out as odd, especially the mostly pink back of the figure in the front, tiptoeing as he helps carry the body. There is no central, stable vertical axis, and little negative space. Despite the circular composition, the center of the image, previously reserved for the most important figure or a powerful symbol, contains hands – a hand with a cloth for washing the body, and one of Christ's hands held by a mourner. There is a strange weightlessness here. Two men are carrying the body as if it weighs nothing. Elongated figures almost seem to float. Ignoring many of the rules of his training, Pontormo gives the viewer an image that relies on emotion and the grouping of bodies – rendered without anatomical realism – endowing it with an other-worldly, mystical quality. Yet elements of tradition and Renaissance ideals remain. The light in the scene appears to fall from the actual window on the right-hand wall of the chapel, which speaks to the artist's understanding of light. The ethereal effect is fostered by desaturation modelling, using many colors instead of black and white, a technique Michelangelo used in the Sistine Chapel. The pose of Christ, being brought to or from Mary, strongly resembles earlier *pietà* images, especially Michelangelo's famous *Pietà* statue completed in 1499. The long, elegant figures hark back earlier, to the Gothic International style. And this altarpiece serves its very traditional purpose: presenting the body of the crucified Christ as the focus of the mass, stressing the miracle of transubstantiation – a doctrine being denied by Martin Luther and his followers.

#### Bronzino: *Eleonora of Toledo with Son Giovanni*

Agnolo Bronzino (1503-72), a student of Pontormo, greatly admired Michelangelo. Bronzino developed into a Mannerist painter famous for his highly refined, elegant style, especially as the court painter to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici<sup>27</sup>. Working later in the Mannerist period than Rosso Fiorentino or Pontormo, Bronzino's works lack the jarring qualities of the earliest Mannerist

<sup>25</sup> Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence*, 141

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 198.



works, but do utilize flat lighting, a connection to the flatness of the Rosso Fiorentino and Pontormo works already discussed.<sup>28</sup> His recognizable style factored in the constraints of serving an autocratic duke, and for his religious images, the Counter-Reformation rules coming from the Council of Trent, 1545-1563. The sophisticated, guarded manner cultivated in court life is reflected in his oil and tempera paintings and their hard, smooth surfaces. One of Bronzino's best-known portraits is of Cosimo's wife, *Eleonora of Toledo with Son Giovanni* (Figure 3), painted around 1545. A prime example of a Mannerist court portrait, with its richly dressed subjects and cold, polished quality, it nonetheless owes much to both Leonardo and Raphael.

Leonardo revolutionized portraiture with his famous *Portrait of Mona Lisa*, circa 1504-1514. In a time and culture where portraits of women were rare – and those that existed were typically dull memorials done after the subject's death – Leonardo created a compelling image of a young woman with a knowing smile that has intrigued and enchanted viewers for centuries. Raphael's paintings of sweet-faced, simply dressed Madonnas in daylight outdoor scenes with many warm colors, are in some respects quite the opposite of this image of a remote princess bedecked in finery and jewels, rendered in cool colors. Yet all have a calm, refined, uncluttered quality. Bronzino presents Eleonora as a secular Madonna, an ideal aristocratic wife, and every detail in the painting serves to support this message. She is seated next to her healthy second son, reflecting her important role in securing the secession of the Medici dynasty. Eleonora's successful childbearing is underscored by the large gold motif on her bodice: a stylized open pomegranate, a fertility symbol Bronzino also used on frescoes he created in the early 1540s for the vault of the duchess's private chapel in the Palazzo Vecchio.<sup>29</sup> Her beauty and fertility are celebrated without being sexualized. Her elaborate gown covers her body well, and the deep blue background behind them lightens slightly around her head in a subtle suggestion of a halo. The moonlight and Eleonora's pearl jewelry also connect her with the pure and chaste goddess Diana.<sup>30</sup>

The Mannerist ideal of the elongated body was not confined to the conventions of visual art. Unlike his master Pontormo, Bronzino does not elongate his figures, but the dress style of the time, seen in Eleonora's attire, includes a bodice that forces the contours of the upper body into a cylindrical shape, lending an illusion of additional length. This effect, however unnatural (or uncomfortable) also shows off the rich fabric of her dress.<sup>31</sup> Eleonora is known to have brought many expensive Spanish fabrics with her as part of her dowry when she came to Florence, so the material for the gown in this portrait is often assumed to be from Spain. Considering the political and economic agenda of the time, with Cosimo I taking a very protectionist stance as part of his efforts to promote of the Florentine textile industry, this dress and the cloth for it were most likely made in Italy and based upon Spanish designs. Wearing Florentine fabric would have indicated Eleonora's endorsement of domestic textiles.<sup>32 33</sup> Cosimo I was an unusual man for his time in his devotion to and respect for his wife. He also appreciated the status, wealth, and heirs she gave him,

<sup>28</sup> Joe Thomas, "Fabric and Dress in Bronzino's Portrait of Eleanor of Toledo and Son Giovanni." *Für Kunstgeschichte* 57, no. 2 (1994): 262. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1482735>.262

<sup>29</sup> Janet Cox-Rearick, "Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosimo de' Medici and François I: The 'Moda Alla Spagnola' of Spanish Consorts Eléonore d'Autriche and Eleonora Di Toledo." *Artibus et Historiae* 30, no. 60 (2009): 56.

<sup>30</sup> Partridge, *Art of Renaissance Florence*, 171

<sup>31</sup> Joe Thomas, "Fabric and Dress in Bronzino's Portrait of Eleanor of Toledo and Son Giovanni." 262.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 264-265.

<sup>33</sup> Janet Cox-Rearick, "Power-Dressing at the Courts of Cosimo de' Medici and François I," 56.

and surely wanted to present his foreign spouse, whom many regarded with resentment, in a positive light. The duke was not the first ruler, and certainly not the first Medici, to use art for propaganda, and he made this tradition an ongoing aspect of his reign. In this portrait of Eleonora, Bronzino draws from the harmony and clarity of the High Renaissance, adding the more distant, polished veneer of Mannerist sensibilities.

The notion of the artist as creator, introduced by Dante in his *Divine Comedies*, was highly influential on High Renaissance culture. Vasari adapted this approach to his record of the evolution of the Renaissance and its artists, and the idea has endured, shaping much of the modern view of what an artist is. This idea is very important for the artists that followed on the heels of the High Renaissance, the period Vasari saw as the peak of artistic achievement. The hierarchy of art he created, that roadmap to perfection inspired by Dante, is based on progression, and therefore has a built-in paradox. After years of seeking “perfection,” if that was achieved, where then, this next generation must have asked themselves, could they go from there? The best would not be content to simply create more art on the lines of what had been deemed the ultimate achievements. Instead, they explored new visual avenues while building upon the foundations of the past. As with the artists before them, they had to deal with the constraints of what patrons of their time would allow. But this idea of the artist as an original thinker, meant to innovate and forge new paths, would persist and gain momentum over time.

## Illustrations





Figure 1

Rosso Fiorentino. *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*. 1523-1524. Oil on canvas, 160 x 117 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.15995313>.



Figure 2  
Pontormo. *Descent from the Cross*. 1525-1528. Oil on panel, 3.13 × 1.92 m. Capponi Chapel, S. Felicita, Florence. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.18115356>.





Figure 3  
Bronzino, Agnolo, 1503-1572. *Eleonora of Toledo with Son Giovanni*. c.1544-5. Oil on wood, 115 x 96 cm. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.13578725>.

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