

**Literary Club**  
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**The Cardinal and the Casino [With Links]**  
*– Joseph P. Tomain*

The Casino Nobile sits atop Pincian Hill at the head of an old vineyard which, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, was the outskirts of Rome. Modeled after the local villas of merchant princes such as the Chigi, the Frascati, and the Medici, the Casino was built as a country estate for entertaining. Today, not far from the Tiber and bordering the Via Veneto, the Casino has been restored, reopened to the public, and rededicated to its intended use as an art gallery.

From a gravel square, the Casino is entered from either side by a gently sloping double staircase. Once inside, the visitor is greeted with Roman antiquities; marbles – whole and in fragments – of altars, sarcophagi, statues, and reliefs from the first and second centuries. These ancient stones need not detain us; instead, we pass through three rooms, pass by priceless sculptures, and through a chapel to enter Room IV. There, the center of the room is occupied by a white marble group set on a cut back pedestal inviting the viewer closer, within touching distance.

Stand one meter away from the northeast corner of this sculpture and look up at a 45 degree angle. Your eyes will focus on a 12 inch square in the center and within that square, you will see marble turned flesh. At that point, lies the creative apex of over three centuries of art brought to life as Pluto's fingers press into the virgin thigh of Proserpina. Pluto, king of the underworld, abducted the young goddess as she gathered flowers in her native Sicily. This statute speaks of transformation from ancient legend to modern conquest and from the realm of the gods to the world of the human. We will return to this marble, but must first ask: How did

this piece of magic come to sit in this room in this Casino?

May 16, 1605 was a glorious day for the aristocratic Sienese family. On that day, Camillo Borghese exchanged his red hat for a white one and took the name of Pope Paul V. Educated as a lawyer, Paul V was a compromise candidate whose papacy was notable for his steadfast dedication to maintaining the Church's geopolitical jurisdiction. More notable, however, was his practice of nepotism. For as glorious as May 16 was for Camillo, it was more glorious still for his nephew Scipione Caffarelli who was later given the Borghese name by his uncle. Shortly after his election as pope, Camillo conferred the red hat on Scipione and this appointment enabled the new cardinal to indulge his passion for art collecting.

Scipione, officially titled the Cardinal Nephew, a position later abolished, served as the papal secretary and, in effect, the head of the Vatican government. Paul V conferred numerous other titles and offices on his nephew which allowed the Cardinal to accumulate his fortune through papal fees and taxes. Scipione had the authority to build and restore the churches of Rome. He used that authority to bring art, relics, and antiquities into the churches; to confer valuable patronage on aspiring artists; and, to place the Borghese coat of arms throughout the city. With his papal revenue, Scipione purchased entire towns owning nearly one-third of the land south of Rome and he used his rental income to purchase the property for his Casino.

The Casino Nobile, now the Borghese Gallery, was a collaboration between Pope and Cardinal; Uncle and Nephew. The Casino was part of the rebirth of Rome which had been decimated a century earlier to the point of being called a "cadaver of a city." Sixteenth century Rome, Reformation Rome, was a dirty, disgraced place in need of its own reformation. Pope and Cardinal led the effort.

The Borghese collection is admired for its 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century sculptures and oils. However, the collection began a century earlier with a large assortment of antiquities first acquired by an ancestor. From these beginnings, Scipione built a collection of Mannerist and, what was later to be known as Baroque, artworks through purchase and cajolery, thefts and threats, confiscation and even imprisonment. His collection spanned the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane, the mythological and the literary. No major artist of the period went unrepresented.

Scipione's acquisitions reflected personal preference rather than prevailing taste, and represented personal enjoyment rather than objects to be used as ostentatious architectural decorations. The collection also reflected the image not only of the power of a public man, but of a private soul's aesthetic sensibilities, the sensibilities of, in his words, a “. . . Golden Age when freedom from the cares of time made everything golden . . . .” Scipione was not so private, though, that he did not wish to share his art with the citizens of and visitors to Rome as he invited the public to visit his gardens and enjoy his collection with the express wish that “the owner refuses to impose iron laws on the well-behaved guest. Let proper pleasure be here as law to a friend . . . .” Overall, the collection is imbued with Scipione's highest virtue – pleasure. Pleasure of the senses rather than of the mind; and, pleasure of the imagination rather than of the intellect.

Scipione acquired his jewels from a variety of sources, but his collection is best known for his commissioned works and for the artists upon whom he rested his patronage – most notably Gian Lorenzo Bernini and Michelangelo Merisi known to us as Caravaggio.

Bernini was sculptor and architect, painter, and designer. He is also the worthy successor

to, if not the better of, Michelangelo, as a sculptor. The Borghese Gallery contains several Bernini masterpieces yet let's return to Room IV and *The Rape of Proserpina* commissioned by Scipione when the artist had just entered his twenties.

[<http://personal.stthomas.edu/trklein/romeblogphotos/proserpina.jpg>].

Bernini takes his inspiration from Ovid. Pluto lusted after Proserpina, daughter of Ceres, the goddess of harvest and fertility, and wanted to take her to the underworld. Ceres interceded with Jupiter and won, for her daughter, the right to return to Earth for half of every year thus bringing the fruits of spring with her. The battle between and among gods and goddesses was joined. Pluto's desire to possess the maiden was compromised by his obligation to let her return from Hades to live on Earth. Proserpina's fear of violation was later tempered by her marriage to the god. Ambiguities ensue. Proserpina was raped *and* wooed; she feared *and* married Pluto. Pluto won his prize *and* accommodated his bride's wish; gods do live in other worlds *and* goddesses live on the earth. Bernini captures all of these moods and forces in this group.

The focal point of the statue is Pluto's powerful hand pressing into Proserpina's young flesh. Viewed from different angles, the statute takes on different interpretations. Approaching it from the right, Pluto has full grasp of his prize as he lifts her triumphantly up to his shoulder to take her into his underworld. From the front, Proserpina shows her strong resistance to Pluto's grasp as she presses the heel of her left hand forcefully into his temple pushing his head away. Her head is thrown back in an effort to escape; her right hand extends upward in prayer and plea to her mother for rescue.

Another vision appears from the left. For while his right hand presses into her thigh, Pluto's left hand struggles around her waist; his trophy is not secure. Proserpina's hair flows in

the wind as she struggles and her fright is visible as Bernini has sculpted a tear on her left cheek which appears moist to the touch. From this angle, Proserpina's fears materialize in the presence of the three-headed dog Cerberus – mythology's guardian of the underworld and Dante's guardian of the Inferno. The demon howls in fear of the rape of a guileless goddess while warning of a violation of the justice of the gods.

Proserpina's upraised, extended arm and delicate fingers reaching beyond the space of the sculpture are carved from white Carrara marble and express Bernini's unbending faith in his material. Bernini believed that marble cured and became more translucent and warm and, in his sculptor's hands, more plastic and expressive. Bernini's faith in his medium is apparent in Pluto's hold and in Proserpina's prayer. Bernini's belief in the power of marble is more apparent still in his next work – *Apollo and Daphne*.

[[http://www.beardedroman.com/images/bernini\\_apollo.jpg](http://www.beardedroman.com/images/bernini_apollo.jpg)].

This sculpture recalls the myth of Apollo in his failed quest to possess the nymph Daphne as a result of a curse imposed on him by Eros. Apollo, the god of sun and music, chastised Eros for playing with bows and arrows telling him that weapons should be left in the hands of worthier men and, implicitly, not in the hands of effete artists. In revenge, Eros fashioned two arrows – one lead, the other gold. To incite hatred, he shot the lead arrow into Daphne; and, to incite love, he shot the golden one into Apollo. Upon seeing Daphne, Apollo was overtaken with desire. Because of her hatred, she resisted his advances and, in a final effort to avoid being ravaged, she called upon her father Peneus for salvation which came as she was transformed into a bay laurel tree. Bernini captures this transformation in translucent marble as Daphne escapes Apollo while her feet become rooted to the ground, her thighs molt into bark, and her fingers,

reaching into the air, transmute into laurel leaves.

*Apollo and Daphne*, like *The Rape of Proserpina*, contains its own wonders. Apollo's lust must confront Daphne's virgin fear and yet these two figures seem to dance in harmonious unison, in a *pas de deux*, if not of pure love then of youthful, romantic exuberance. The faces of these goddesses unveil their fear of their abductors. Their faces also overflow with other human emotions. Proserpina wishes to avoid violation by Apollo and knows that her mother has secured her safety for part of the year. Daphne also wishes to avoid violation by her captor and she knows that her father has granted her wish – she will remain a part of the Earth. Further, both women know that their lives have been forever changed and their fates, their forever futures, have been defined. Innocence lost; fate secured.

Bernini reveals psychological complexity by transforming the heavy stone into moving stories. Both sculptures extend beyond the space allotted by the marble. Neither sculpture resembles the heroic statues of either Classical antiquity or Renaissance Italy. Neither sculpture is a static, idealized representation of a Classical or Renaissance virtue. Instead, both statues, capture these gods and goddesses in mid flight, in motion; between this world and another; between fantasy and life. Both statues bare another distinguishing mark of this master – human sexuality.

In Bernini, the physicality and delicate complexity of sex and sensuality are on display in both statues but they are on sublime display in two church chapels where two statues uncover fear and promise, love and lust, eros and mystery. Bernini's *The Blessed Ludovica Albertoni* depicts this holy woman on her deathbed.

[[http://www.easypedia.gr/el/images/shared/e/ea/Blessed\\_Ludovica\\_Albertoni.jpg](http://www.easypedia.gr/el/images/shared/e/ea/Blessed_Ludovica_Albertoni.jpg)]. Ludovica

had been married to a wealthy merchant and, upon his death, she spent her fortune caring for the poor until she herself was taken ill. The Church declared her Blessed and Bernini sculpts her lying in bed waiting for her union with Christ.

His famous statute of St. Theresa takes on a similar mood, a moment of ecstasy, as the young girl awaits her saintly death.

[<http://eternallycool.net/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/baroque-st-teresa.jpg>] One French wag, on being told that St. Theresa was encountering a communion with God, exclaimed “Ah, if that is spiritual ecstasy, I have had the experience many, many times.” Both women raise their faces to the sky, heads back, mouths open, eyes rolling back in their heads. Ludovica caresses her breast while gazing to the heavens. St. Theresa’s head, eyes upward, lolls to the side – spent.

Spirituality? Sensuality? Humanity? Saintliness? Bernini’s answer, of course, is: “Yes, all of that and more.”

Bernini’s genius goes beyond catching a subject in motion and beyond the space of the sculpture; he plumbs the depths of the psyche. Witness two busts – one of his lover *Costanza Boneralli*, [<http://www.wga.hu/art/b/bernini/gianlore/sculptur/1630/bonarell.jpg>] the other of his friend and patron *Scipione Borghese*. [<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/b/bernini/borghese.jpg>].

*Costanza* looks at us not directly, but a bit off to the side – her hair mussed, her blouse wrinkled and open, her décolletage visibly alluring. And yet, we are continually drawn to her eyes and her parted lips. At once, *Costanza* looks regal *and* informal; breathless *and* composed; anticipating *and* satisfied. She is a bit of every woman – sensual *and* real; erotic *and* reflective.

*Costanza* is the only statute Bernini made for himself. Unfortunately, this may not have been the proudest moment of the gifted artist. Generally believed to be a pious man, but, a man

nonetheless, Bernini coveted the wife of his assistant. More tragically, the adulterous affair would end ugly. Bernini, spying on his lover one afternoon, noticed his brother Luigi leaving her house with her at the door half naked. He followed his brother and beat him savagely. He then gave a razor to his servant and ordered him to slash Costanza – a charge, apparently, accomplished.

From crazed lust to loyalty, Bernini sculpted Scipione. When he was close to finishing, Bernini cracked the bust from front to back across the forehead. Bernini tried to repair it and when his patron came to view the statue his first reaction was to smile and he indicated his satisfaction. Bernini, though, could see disappointment in his eyes. He anticipated it and to relieve that disappointment he unveiled, to Scipione's astonished delight, a second bust which took him no more than 15 days to replicate. Remarkable considering the depth of this masterpiece.

Scipione's bust is not classically elegant; it is too naturalistic. It is not flattering; it is too lifelike. Like *Costanza*, the Cardinal does not look at us directly, but he commands our attention; our respect even. The Cardinal's face is puffy, his nose bulbous, his neck full, and his cheeks jowly. We can see the stubble of his beard. The bust indicates the size and corpulence of the man. His chasuble is worn casually; it is not pressed. One button is only halfway through its button hole. His berretta sits cocked and pushed back on his head. The Cardinal's eyes and open mouth peak into his soul. His head is tilted slightly as if in conversation. One can imagine talking with Scipione, over dinner perhaps. The conversation could range from art to news of the city or from local gossip to affairs of state. And one can imagine Scipione answering sincerely and candidly. His bust reveals a man who has quietly enjoyed the many pleasures a

life of privilege and wealth offer.

Bernini's busts were not replications; they were interpretations of the person. Costanza is a lover one wishes to touch. Scipione is a friend one wishes to dine with and engage once more. These busts, no less than the large groups, reach into space and reveal new meanings from different perspectives and angles. The mythic figures tell stories in motion; the busts portray human beings in the world and in thought. The mythic figures bring unreal worlds to life; the busts bring intimacy to marble portraits.

Bernini was as good to the city of Rome as he was to the art of sculpture. We retain his Baldichino and the outstretched arms of his colonnade in our memories of St. Peter's. His obelisks and fountains, especially the obelisk which floats at the crest of *The Fountain of the Four Rivers* in the Piazza Navona, constitute the city.

[<http://img2.travelblog.org/Photos/408/10167/t/41658-Four-Rivers-Fountain-0.jpg>].

Bernini's capacity to use solid form to not only hold a moment of movement, but of the inner thought of the subject and the universal meaning of myth and legend, typified his work and typifies the Baroque. As noted by tinker, tailor, apostle, spy Anthony Blount, Bernini rendered the ecstasies and sufferings of saints and martyrs with strong dramatic and emotional effect.

Bernini – delicate, elegant, ethereal – fits comfortably into the refined world of the Borghese.

How, then, does Caravaggio – crude, brawler, man of the street – fit into the Casino and into the Baroque?

Caravaggio is represented by six paintings in Room VIII of the Gallery. His turbulent life and mysterious death made him an unlikely Baroque master, yet Scipione was as much a patron and supporter of Caravaggio as was of Bernini. Perhaps more so.

Street fighting was not unknown to Caravaggio. Caravaggio would fight with competitors, fight over casual insults, and even threatened a waiter with a sword for serving him an apparently distasteful plate of artichokes. Real trouble visited Caravaggio after a tennis match in which he lost money to Ranuccio Tomassoni and a fight ensued. Not satisfied with hitting each other with tennis rackets, the opponents agreed to a duel. That evening, Caravaggio wounded Tomassoni who fell to the ground only to be run through by Caravaggio's sword and, according to the Roman police blotter, murdered.

Enter Cardinal Scipione. The politics of Rome were such that favors could be granted to the favored, even for murder. As the grand penitentiary and prefect of the tribunal for pardons, the good Cardinal could, and did, arrange a pardon for Caravaggio's crime for the price of two oils – *David with the Head of Goliath* and *St. John the Baptist* which remain in the Borghese collection.

Scipione interceded in matters Caravaggio in another way. Caravaggio received commissions from various religious confraternities. Sometimes, the commission would be rejected as unsatisfactory. And, sometimes, the rejected work found its way to Pincian Hill.

The most notable case is the first painting in Room VIII – the *Madonna dei Palafrenieri*. [[http://www.comitatinazionali.it/upload/immagini/03.Caravaggio\\_MadonnaPalafre.jpg](http://www.comitatinazionali.it/upload/immagini/03.Caravaggio_MadonnaPalafre.jpg)]. In the painting, three figures – Mary, her mother, St. Anne, and baby Jesus – stand over a snake. St. Anne is portrayed as an older woman, well-dressed but wrinkled, with shadows around her eyes, observing. Mary holds the naked red-headed Jesus. She too is well-dressed and buxom, her red hair is neatly coiffed, and her foot presses down on the head of the snake. The naked infant places his foot on top of his mother's and together they smite the serpent.

This *Madonna* was commissioned by the confraternity of St. Anne to be placed on her altar in St. Peter's Basilica. It was placed there for a short time, then judged unacceptable. Legend had it that the painting was too crude and not sufficiently religious for such a prized placement. Perhaps it was baby Jesus's baby erection that some found off-putting. Documents tell a different story. The painting was set on the altar on April 14, 1606; removed on April 18; and, on June 16 an accounting entry in the confraternity's books show that 100 scudi was paid for the work by – Scipione Borghese.

Caravaggio's figures are common, yet possess their own elegance. Unlike Bernini, he worked with models and his paintings show the people of Rome. Also unlike Bernini, he had mastered the art of chiaroscuro – contrasting shadows and light. Caravaggio's works are recognizable for their dark brown backgrounds and golden highlighted foregrounds and through this technique, Caravaggio captures a rough naturalism; he captures people in their element; he captures them in their streets.

Caravaggio's masterworks, *The Calling of St. Matthew*

[[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/\\_2O-k28G7W5g/SspSN4NDfFI/AAAAAAAAAOc/uHi\\_qgeAWVo/s400/Carav-calling\\_of\\_st\\_matthew.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_2O-k28G7W5g/SspSN4NDfFI/AAAAAAAAAOc/uHi_qgeAWVo/s400/Carav-calling_of_st_matthew.jpg)] and *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*

[<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipso/journal/images/mather02-4.jpg>], placed in Rome's church of San Luigi dei Francesi, show off his use of chiaroscuro to greatest effect. In both paintings, he uses the light from the high windows of the Contarelli Chapel, as well as the light of the painting, to dramatize moments of conversion and of death. In the *Calling*, St. Matthew sits in a tavern, counting his tax money, maybe gambling, with assorted friends. Two figures appear in the shadows on the right of the panel pointing to Matthew. Neither figure looks particularly saintly,

let alone like the Son of God. The friends at the table have quizzical expressions on their faces as if to say: “Who, him?” while Matthew never takes his eyes off of the table nor off of the coins in front of him. The viewer knows that this calling is from God because a shaft of light points us to Matthew. The light directs our eyes through the picture and illuminates the characters as well as the message of the painting – the light illuminates the common man; not the divine Christ.

Chiaroscuro is also evident in the *Martyrdom*. Matthew lies on the ground about to be slain amongst a jumble of figures. Some figures appear to be accomplices, others simply observers. Shock, fear, curiosity appear on their faces. No one aids the martyr. Matthew raises his arm in resistance, but it is grabbed by his executioner. An angel reaches down extending a palm frond for Matthew’s salvation. Other figures run away from the painting trying to escape the frame. No matter where your eyes roam, the light draws you back to one figure, the figure of Matthew’s executioner. The human executioner, not the holy martyr, commands our attention. Man dominates saint in the *Martyrdom* as the tax collector dominates Jesus in the *Calling*.

Returning to Room VIII, Caravaggio is seen in two self-portraits – one as the severed head of Goliath thought to be his last painting, the other as *The Sick Bacchus* [<http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/thumbnail/75423/1/Sick-Bacchus-C.-1593.jpg>], one of his earliest. Again, Caravaggio uses a dark brown background as Bacchus sits at a table with ivy leaves on his head and with perfectly ripe white grapes in his hand. Perfectly ripe peaches and cherries sit on a table as Bacchus looks directly at the viewer, his face a pallid green – sick in body and troubled in spirit. What does the contrast between a sickly face and fresh fruit mean? Is Bacchus a god or a street boy? To answer, consider another painting *Boy with A Basket of Fruit*.

[[http://farm1.static.flickr.com/141/333302599\\_4816eb64c5\\_o.jpg](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/141/333302599_4816eb64c5_o.jpg)]. Like *The Sick Bacchus*, it depicts a tense interaction between portrait and still life. The boy poses like Bacchus. He sits casually, rosy cheeked, curly haired, open mouthed, holding fruit. His white gown has fallen off his now bare shoulder more than hinting of the homoeroticism appearing in several of Caravaggio's works.

Caravaggio's sexuality is the sexuality of the common man, as distinguished from Bernini's spiritual ecstasies, which is not to say that Caravaggio could not paint religious themes. His portrait of *St. Jerome*, also in Room VIII, is a moment of spiritual and intellectual contemplation caught in oil.

[<http://www.rester.us/HistoricalTheoBlog/wp-content/stjerome.jpg>]. Jerome is in the process of translating the Bible. A skull sits on a table laden with books. The skull mimics, or mocks, Jerome's own forehead bent down while he scrutinizing a passage from a book he is holding with his left hand while his right hand is poised to transcribe into another. A halo faintly shines above his head, while his bald dome reflects the light from some source above him. Why the skull? Human temporality? The impossibility of translating the Word of God?

So, then to the question: Is Caravaggio depicting – Life and death? Good and evil? The human and the natural? The sensual and the meditative? We can give Bernini's answer to the same question: "Yes, all that and more."

With chiaroscuro, Caravaggio made his paintings go beyond the canvas; reach beyond frame; move beyond image and beyond a single expressive moment to reveal the human soul. He made his paintings think. Consider *The Cardsharps*.

[[https://www.kimbellart.org/Collections/Images/AP1987\\_06L.jpg](https://www.kimbellart.org/Collections/Images/AP1987_06L.jpg)]. Caravaggio has caught, as if

by camera, a moment in a card game between two players. One, an innocent youth, stares intently at his cards, deciding his next move. A third figure stands over him, signaling to his compatriot as the second player reaches into his belt for another, trick card, his eyes fixed on his opponent. Will he cheat? Will he succeed? What would we do?

Like Bernini, Caravaggio relied on ancient myths and tales, including those from the Gospels, to speak to contemporary viewers. And, like Bernini, Caravaggio spoke to his audiences with a new naturalism encompassing psychological depth. Caravaggio's paintings are not idealizations of some Renaissance virtue. Instead, they are intended to touch our imperfect humanity with all of its fears, hopes, sensuality, dreams, and more.

What, then, brought Cardinal Scipione to build the Casino and champion Bernini and Caravaggio which, together, embody the misshapen pearl of an era known as the Baroque? The answer lies in the sweep of art history.

From the fall Rome in 476, through the Middle Ages, Church Fathers kept the classical intellectual tradition alive. Augustine resurrected Plato in the Dark Ages, just as Aquinas resurrected Aristotle in the Trecento. It then fell to Renaissance Florence to continue the humanistic connections with classical Greece and revive the traditions and culture of classical Rome. It is for its art, not its philosophy, that we celebrate the Renaissance, and we can draw a straight line from the beginning of the Renaissance to its conclusion and then on to Caravaggio and Bernini.

According to Giorgio Varari, it was Cimabue who “shed the first light upon the art of painting.” With that pronouncement comes the beginning of Renaissance art. In Room II of the Uffizi, viewers can compare the Madonnas of the late Byzantine with Cimabue's *Santa Trinita*

*Madonna* [[http://www.cord.edu/faculty/andersod/cimabue\\_madonna.jpg](http://www.cord.edu/faculty/andersod/cimabue_madonna.jpg)] painted circa 1280. At first glance, it is difficult to see a distinction between the flat Madonnas of these two periods. Cimabue captured Byzantine iconography in his work and extended it to 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy. Painted with gold and rich colors, surrounded with adoring angels, both Madonnas look forward, formal. Both Madonnas appear nearly identical. Keep looking. In the Byzantine Madonna, the Christ child sits on his mother's hand as part of the painting's intended symbolism. The Cimabue Madonna, however, holds the child Christ. Look more closely and you notice that the folds in her dress and in the Child's are more defined and richer in detail. Look more closely still, something is there which is not particularly obvious, but noticeable when attention is brought to it – you can see a small curve on the body of the Madonna, the outline of her breast – the divine made human. Cimabue shifted art from the symbolic to the natural and in the process reopened the world of the human to painting.

The next step in Renaissance humanism was taken by Cimabue's student Giotto. Painted about 30 years later, Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* takes the same pose as his master's yet differences are apparent.

[[http://www.shafe.co.uk/crystal/images/lshafe/Giotto\\_Ognissanti\\_Madonna\\_c\\_1310.jpg](http://www.shafe.co.uk/crystal/images/lshafe/Giotto_Ognissanti_Madonna_c_1310.jpg)]

Giotto's painting is warmer, more inviting; the folds of his Madonna's dress are richer still; the outlines of her breasts, knees, and thighs are more apparent; the adoring angels are joined by ordinary people and all have emotional expressions on their faces. Giotto's naturalism inspired that perennial artist booster Vasari to remark "That very same debt painters owe to Nature . . . is also owed. . . to Giotto [for] he alone . . . revived through God's grace what had fallen into an evil state and brought it back to such a form that it could be called good." Art, particularly

painting, had fallen into the evil state of the Dark and Middle Ages and needed genius to revive. Giotto made his subjects human by letting their faces show emotions. Early Renaissance art shifted from icon to body to human expression.

The next image in our thumbnail art history resides in the Church of Santa Maria del Carmine as we jump from the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the next and into the Middle Renaissance. Inside the church, in the Brancacci Chapel, we stand in front of Masaccio's master fresco, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*.

[\[http://www.firenzeviva.com/Santo\\_Spirito/masaccio.jpg\]](http://www.firenzeviva.com/Santo_Spirito/masaccio.jpg). With this fresco, painting evolves from emotion to movement. Masaccio catches Adam and Eve as they are expelled from the Garden. Their shame is palpable, weighty, painful. Adam buries his face in his hands, weeping; Eve covers her breasts and vagina in anguish, ashamed. Together, with their backs toward the Gate of Paradise, they walk away from Eden, away from God, pushed by the winds of exile brought by the Archangel. Masaccio brings movement to the Renaissance through lifelike realism, perspective, and foreshortening.

The next figure leading to the High Renaissance then to the Baroque, is pivotal – Michelangelo Buonarroti. Michelangelo was intimately familiar with the line from Cimabue to Masaccio and learned from and extended it. Michelangelo, above all, and even in his paintings, is a sculptor. One of his earliest paintings is the *Doni Tondo* or the *Doni Madonna* [\[http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/michelangelo-paintings-1.jpg\]](http://static.howstuffworks.com/gif/michelangelo-paintings-1.jpg) in the Uffizi. Tondo refers to the round frame, crafted by Michelangelo, of this painting of the Holy Family. This painting exposes his mastery of human expression and movement and adds another layer for the viewer – *contrapposto*. Mary is seated on the ground with her knees pointing to her left. Her torso,

though, is in the process of turning to her right and with both arms raised she is handing the baby Jesus to Joseph, kneeling behind her. Her arms and legs and torso all twist in different directions as portrayed by Michelangelo's brush.

Michelangelo's ability to twist the form of the body is most powerfully seen in a quartet of statues which line the walls of the Accademia as one walks toward the magnificent *David*. Sometimes referred to as the *Slaves*, at other times, the *Prisoners*, we see four large blocks of marble in various states of completion.

[[http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3238/2595173643\\_8c89777172.jpg](http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3238/2595173643_8c89777172.jpg)]. Originally commissioned by Pope Julius II for his monumental, but uncompleted tomb, Michelangelo teases us with these unfinished works. The situation of the prisoners captured within the stones defies the space of the stones themselves. And yet, as more of the marble is removed, the more of a prisoner is revealed. Not only does Michelangelo prove that he can take a body out of a rock but that the body was always there no matter how it must bend to fit inside it only to be released by his chisel.

Although *contrapposto* was invented by the Greeks, Michelangelo refined it for his times; for all times. Think of his *Pieta* in St. Peter's. Mary sits regally on a bench cradling the dead Christ on her lap. His body is limpid, awkward, unbalanced. She shifts her shoulders, back, arms, and legs to bear his dead weight. In the hands of 24 year-old Michelangelo, Mary bears the weight with timeless dignity.

Michelangelo also demonstrates his mastery of *contrapposto* throughout the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the bodies of the Son and the Father; the saints and prophets; the angels and satyrs. In Michelangelo's hands, this technique not only enabled him to depict the human form

more realistically and naturally, it also allowed him to idealize the human body. *David*, of course, is the exemplar.

We can see the hand of Michelangelo in the works of Bernini and Caravaggio. Bernini takes Michelangelo's use of *contrapposto* to create not idealized moments in time but to create statues in action – time and movement beyond the space of the medium. Caravaggio, through chiaroscuro, appropriates Michelangelo's concept of motion not to idealize the common man as much as catch the common man in thought and in action thus idealizing common experience.

This line of art history from body to movement to idealized moment to thought, traveled through the Renaissance into the Baroque. The Renaissance, with its classical roots, was intended to be formal, Neo-platonic, idealist, and above all rational. Michelangelo's *Pieta* captures the moment of Christ's death in high form. So too does his *David* capture the youthful aspirations of Republican Florence. Not so the Baroque.

The High Renaissance style of Michelangelo represented a particular point in cultural history. The often ambivalent relationship between merchant and church, commerce and sanctity, money and beauty created a turbulent society, which produced great art, great wealth, and endless warring factions among the city-states of Italy to the ruin of the country and to the end of the dominance of Roman Catholicism. Machiavelli attributed the demise of Italy to Julius II's ever increasing grasp for temporal power which he financed through the sale of indulgences. Simony, it seems, even more than papal concubines, was the straw that broke Martin Luther's back and gave reason for the Reformation. Shortly after the 95 Theses were nailed to the wall of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Rome fell at the hands of Charles V thus ending the Renaissance and giving way to a period of cultural austerity.

No doubt the Catholic Church, via the papacy, had lost its spiritual way. Selling indulgences being the least of it. Wars, assassinations, orgies in papal apartments, bastardy, general whoring, and untold material excesses spelled the temporary demise of the Church's authority. The Reformation not only reformed Catholic Church rule and practice; it also reformed the Renaissance as Protestantism replaced humanism. The secularism of the Renaissance was replaced by piety and devotion, a rejection of materialism, and a new, more restrictive vision of art. The Reformation rejected the portrayal of religious images as idolatrous and favored images of common people performing everyday tasks as depictions of salvation through the grace of God. Apparently, there is only so much piety that the human condition can tolerate. And, there was only so much political repression the Roman Church could stand. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Church had reformed itself, cleaned up the dismal swamp that was Rome, and became the Church Triumphant. Its triumph was most loudly trumpeted through its art. The Baroque replaced Renaissance reason with human passion and replaced Reformation religiosity with, quite frankly, excess – excess in art, music, decoration, and style. The Baroque brought theatricality to culture and reveled in its grandeur.

Once again, man took center stage, but Baroque man differed from Renaissance man. Where Renaissance man was to serve as outward symbol of a universal idea or age, Baroque man symbolized the inner complexity of human nature, the psychology of the individual, the dynamic self-consciousness of human experience. The men and women chiseled by Bernini and painted by Caravaggio are exposed in all their human complexities, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities.

Let's conclude by returning to Pincian Hill and to Room IV of the Borghese Gallery. Go

to the center of the room; find the large translucent marble group; stand one meter from its northeast corner and look up at a 45 degree angle. This time, in a 12 inch square, you will not only see Pluto's grasping fingers press into Proserpine's virgin thigh, you will see over 350 years of art history, and you will see the history of the consciousness of man, exposed in fine excess courtesy of the Cardinal and the Casino.

Thank you.

## Resources

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