

# *Story of the Renaissance*

By Suzanne Strauss Art

## SELECTED PASSAGES

Giotto admired the relief statues of the Pisani, and he wondered if he could paint figures that were as lifelike. But creating the illusion of the third dimension (depth) is a difficult thing to do on a two-dimensional surface. Giotto discovered that he could create solid-looking figures by adopting the Byzantine techniques of foreshortening and shading. He also used lighting to suggest the roundness of a figure or object by illuminating one side and then painting the other side in a shadow. He further heightened the sense of realism by placing his people in natural settings in the Tuscan countryside.

...

Giotto's major work was the series of frescoes he painted on the walls of the Arena Chapel for the wealthy merchant, Enrico Scrovegni of Padua. Scrovegni hoped that by building and decorating the chapel he could atone for the sins of his father, Reginaldo, a notorious moneylender. (Dante placed the elder Scrovegni in one of the circles of Hell!)

...

Brunelleschi nearly did not get the job because he refused to show anyone his plans before he started work. He explained that if the other architects saw his model they would steal his ideas. When the guild committee members remained adamant in their demands to see his design, he challenged them to stand an egg on its end. No one could, so Brunelleschi banged the egg on the table and stood it on its cracked bottom. When the committee complained that anyone could do that, the architect replied, "Yes, and you would say the same thing if I told you how to build the dome!"

...

As a young man, Cosimo [de Medici] had studied the writings of the ancients, and he had been impressed by the Greek ideal of moderation. He applied the principle to his

business dealings, always proceeding in a prudent and cautious manner. He occasionally took risks, however, but only when the odds for success looked extremely promising. He was a practical man, who enjoyed solving problems by skillful negotiation. Cosimo once remarked, "You may pursue the infinite, but I pursue the finite; you may set your ladder against the vaulted heavens, but I set mine firmly on the ground."

...

Leonardo wanted to understand everything he could about the natural world so that his art would be as true to life as possible. He was constantly asking himself questions. What causes cracks in walls? How are clouds formed? What caused the body to bruise? He was particularly fascinated by the flight of birds. He often bought live game birds at the town market, set them loose in his rooms, and studied their movements. After making careful sketches, he set them free. (He never considered having them for dinner, since he was a vegetarian.)

...

As more and more people left the Church to form new Protestant communities, the reform movement lost the support of Erasmus. Although the Dutch scholar agreed with Luther's basic ideas (hadn't he proposed many of them himself?), he refused to endorse the creation of a separate church. He once said, I laid a hen's egg, but Luther hatched a bird of quite a different species."

...

The Queen [Elizabeth] set the style of dress for the women of her court. Like her father Henry, she had red hair, which she wore in a frizzled style. As she aged, her hairline receded. This was the signal for the other women to shave the hair above their foreheads so that they, too, would have a receding hairline... A remarkable feature of Elizabethan dress was the huge ruff that had evolved from a simple lace collar. Worn by both genders, it was often embroidered with gold and silken threads. The fork became a popular utensil in England mainly because it prevented spotting of the ruff during meals.

...

But the Pope was not pleased [about the claim made by Copernicus that the earth circles the sun], and Catholics as well as Protestants, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, strongly opposed the revolutionary theory. Some objected that if the earth moved, buildings would collapse and a stone dropped from a person's hand would not fall directly to the ground. Others quoted the lines from the Bible in which Joshua told the sun, not the earth, to stand still. (Joshua 10: 12-13.) The Catholic Church put all of Copernicus' writings on its Index of Forbidden Books. And that wasn't the end of it. Seventy years after his death, the Church declared the astronomer a heretic.