

PART VI RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION: FUSION OF THE ROOTS

Chapter 17 Art and Architecture in Florence

1. In a prologue, Leon Battista Alberti's Latin Treatise *On Painting* (1435) compares Florentine accomplishments in the arts to that of the ancients.
2. The successful artists of the fifteenth century had roots in Roman antiquity.
3. This lineage represented not only a break with the immediate medieval past but also demonstrated a spirit of courageous exploration.

I. The City of Florence

1. In the center of Italy, Florence sits on a plain at the foothills of the Apennine Mountains, bisected by the Arno River.
2. The red-tiled octagonal dome of Saint Mary of the Flowers (the *Duomo*) dominates the view of the city.
3. The bustling city has many centers of activity and a worldly intensity that is a legacy of its historic past.

II. Florentine Architecture

A. The Church of San Lorenzo

1. Brunelleschi redesigned the interior for the Medici family, starting work in 1421.
2. The simplicity of the Church of San Lorenzo is in direct contrast to the style of the Middle Ages.
3. Space is clear, but limited, and ordered into a rigorous sequence of bays.
4. The lighting is dim but not mysterious.
5. Brunelleschi's design at San Lorenzo is an early example of the emerging ideal of Renaissance church architecture.

B. The Pazzi Chapel

1. Designed by Brunelleschi, the Chapel is located in the cloister of the Santa Croce church.
2. The chapel strongly contrasts with the church which is one of the few Gothic buildings in Florence.
3. The Chapel was classically inspired but was very much a product of Renaissance Florence as well.

C. Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) and His Theory of Architecture

1. Alberti believed that architecture should be an analysis of problems, needs, site, and climate.
2. A well-designed and managed city would inspire its citizens.
3. Churches were the most important, followed by public buildings and finally, private dwellings.
4. Alberti favored public housing for the poor.
5. He opposed lavish private homes.
6. Alberti believed that geometric and musical forms were divine and that architecture should emulate these forms.

III. Sculpture in Florence in the Fifteenth Century

1. Sculpture, like architecture, was an important source of civic and religious pride.
2. The ancients, nature, and their predecessors from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were major influences.
3. No single sculptor of this period can be said to be representative of the period.
4. Donatello created a body of work that covers the range of sculptural possibilities—low relief, freestanding sculpture in the round, carved marble, and cast bronze.
5. His work also covered a prolific variety of subjects.

IV. New Developments in Painting

1. As with other eras, painting and sculpture in the Middle Ages depended on conventions and formulas for the presentation of visual equivalents of important ideas and beliefs.
2. Those of high status or importance were rendered larger in relation to subjects of lower status in the same work.
3. In the art of fifteenth-century Florence, new rules and conventions developed based on trial and error.
4. A return to the representation of nature was an important ideal of the new Florentine aesthetic.

A. Giotto (1267?–1337)

1. Giotto is regarded as the first Renaissance painter.
2. Giotto rose to fame as the inventor of a new style of painting.
3. Giotto portrayed gesture and movement captured in time and conveying a sense of three-dimensional space.

B. Masaccio (1401–1428?)

1. Masaccio built on the work of Giotto.
2. He also conveyed added dimension to his work through contrasts of light, shade, and shadow.
3. Masaccio applied the principles of linear perspective that had been developed by the architect Brunelleschi.
4. There is a close parallel between the development of perspective in painting and the humanists' sense of the historic past.
5. For the first time the Florentines developed a coherent understanding of the differences between pagan and Christian Rome and the changes in thinking that had gone on afterward.
6. The purpose of Renaissance Christian art was to inspire the viewer toward repentance and salvation.

C. Piero della Francesca (1420–1492)

1. Painters and sculptures and other artisans were dedicated to serving their faith through their art.
2. Piero created art of severe harmony, clarity, and cool detachment.
3. Piero wrote a treatise on delineating bodies and architectural forms by way of perspective techniques.
4. Like Alberti, he was interested in perfect forms.

D. Botticelli (1444–1510)

1. Botticelli was more interested in expressive possibilities than in technical issues of form and structure.
2. Botticelli was interested in humanism and was one of the first to represent subjects from classical mythology.

3. Botticelli's Venus represents a fusion of the pagan and Christian traditions.
4. Botticelli was the Medicis' favorite artist and his *Primavera* decorated the Medici palace.
5. *Primavera* captures, in visual terms, much of the spirit of the Florentine Renaissance under Lorenzo de' Medici.