

Mona Lisa

by Leonardo Da Vinci

This is probably the most famous painting in the world. Leonardo painted it somewhere between 1503 and 1506. It is thought to be a portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo. Her enigmatic smile, the way her body is not facing straight at the viewer, and the use of color and size to show distance in the background all make this a groundbreaking painting.

The painting was stolen from the Louvre in 1911 and Pablo Picasso was arrested on suspicion of being the thief! He was cleared when the real thief, an employee of the museum, was caught two years later.

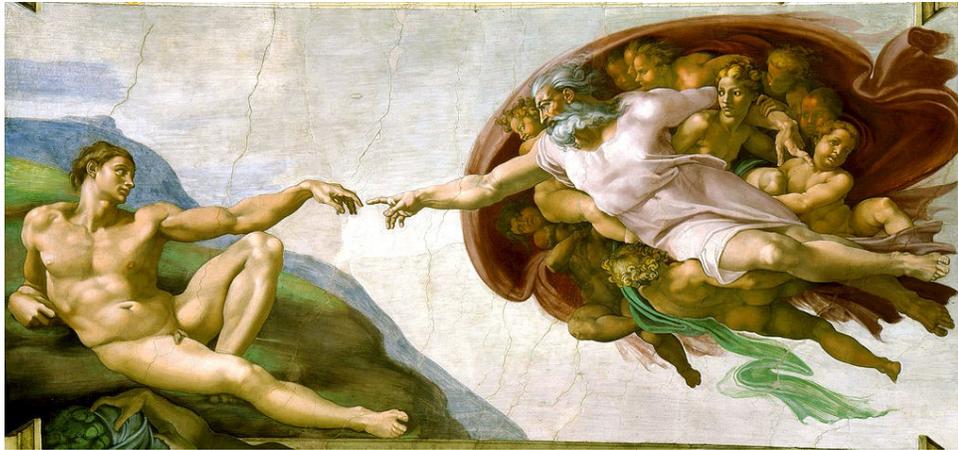


Last Supper

by Leonardo Da Vinci

This is a mural painting, done in around 1495 on the wall of a church building, the Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan, Italy. It shows Jesus with his disciples at the final supper before he was killed by the Roman authorities, at the moment when Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray him.

It was painted directly on the wall of the church with tempera paints, not as a fresco onto wet plaster, but onto dry plaster. Leonardo sealed it, but it still began to deteriorate a few years after it was completed. Over the years people purposely and accidentally did things to hasten its destruction. Two of Leonardo's assistants made copies of the painting on canvass soon after it was completed. If they hadn't, it would have been lost by now.



Creation of Adam

by Michelangelo

This is a scene from the Book of Genesis in the Bible when God breathes life into Adam, the first man. It was painted as a fresco directly onto the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome in 1512, along with dozens of other scenes and hundreds of other figures. This is the most famous section of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

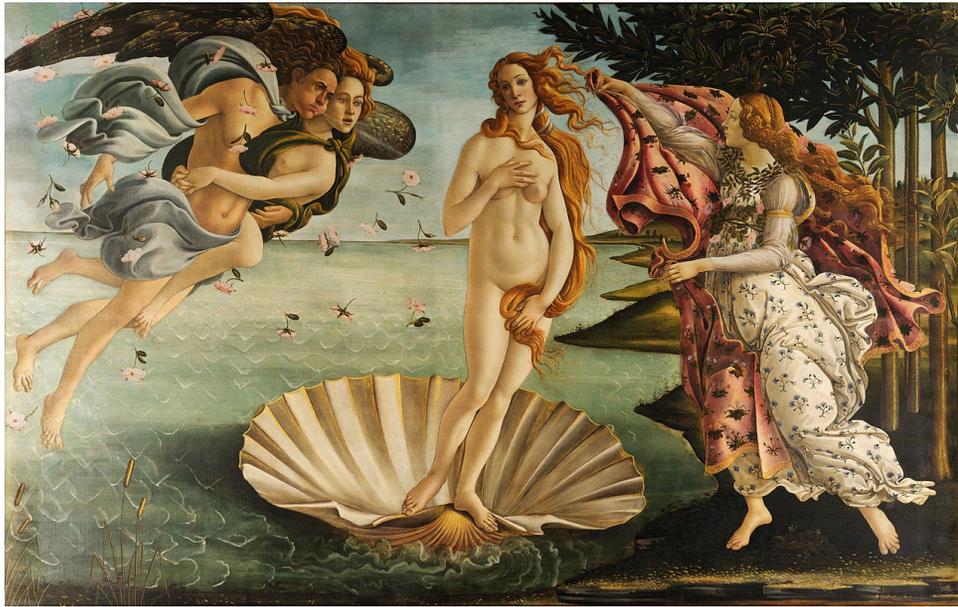
Many people see this painting as symbolic of man's relationship with God. God is directly involved and we are made in his image, but he is on a higher plane, which we cannot quite touch.



Primavera

by Sandro Botticelli

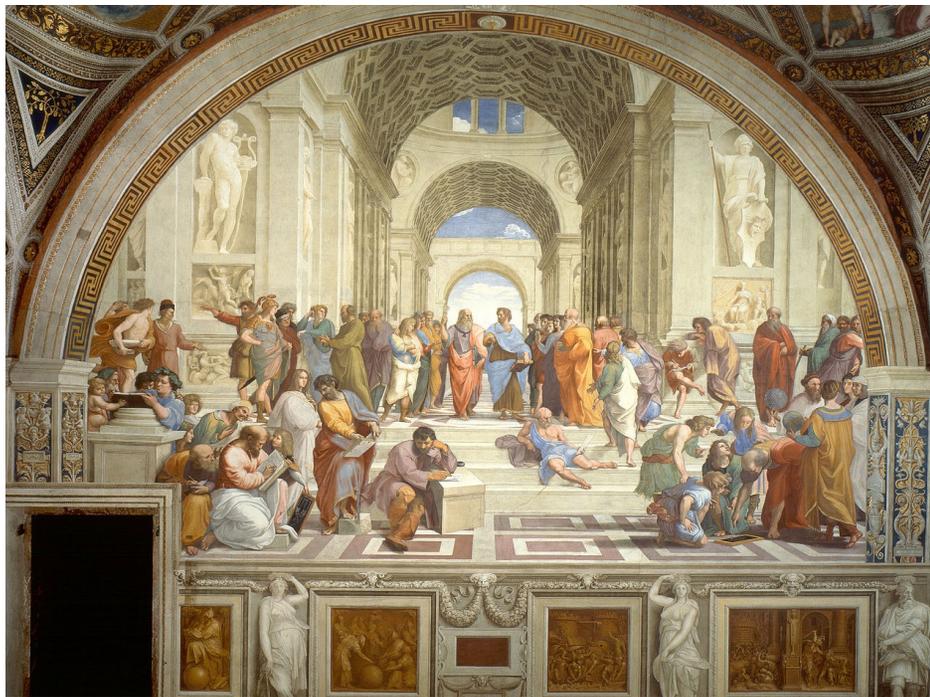
This painting is an allegory representing spring and fertility. It was painted in about 1482 with tempera paints on a wood panel. The painting is from a myth written by the ancient Greek author, Ovid. In the tale a beautiful wood nymph, Chloris, attracts the attention of Zephyr, the first wind of spring. As Zephyr ravishes the resisting Chloris, flowers spring forth from her open mouth, populating the world with color, which before this had all been shades of green alone. This scene you can see on the right hand of the painting. In the center is Venus, presiding over the garden. The woman in the flowered dress is Primavera, the embodiment of spring. The group of three women are the three graces. And the man on the left is probably supposed to represent Mercury.



Birth of Venus

by Sandro Botticelli

This painting was commissioned by the Medici family of Florence and was painted in about 1486. It shows Venus, the Greek goddess, emerging from the sea as a fully grown woman. Plato believed that physical beauty draws the attention of humans who are then able to understand intellectually divine beauty through earthly beauty. Many scholars believe Botticelli was showing this concept. The physical beauty of Venus draws our minds to God. The nudity of Venus also suggests Eve and her innocence before the Fall. In a moment she will be clothed with worldly sins.



School of Athens

by Raphael

Raphael painted this fresco on a wall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican between 1509 and 1510. It shows the branch of knowledge called philosophy and depicts many of the great ancient thinkers. In the center you see Aristotle, on the right, and Plato, on the left, walking side by side. The man bent over and drawing with a mathematical compass is Euclid, the great geometer. The figure on the right in a pink tunic and holding a great book is Pythagoras. Many others have been identified, but not all. The building is in the shape of a Greek cross, which may represent the harmony of ancient philosophy with Christian philosophy. In the background you see statues of



Europa and the Bull

by Titian

This painting, from 1562, depicts the abduction of Europa by Zeus, who is disguised as a white bull. Zeus had hidden as a bull in the herd of cows owned by Europa's father. Europa caressed the bull's sides, adorned it with flowers, and eventually climbed on its back. The bull ran off, jumped in the sea, and swam Europa across to the island of Crete where she was made a queen and given gifts. In the story, Europa's union with the god Jupiter resulted in a line of kings who become the ruling houses of Europe. It is a story first told in the Iliad.

The painting shows contrasts. The blue sky contrasted with the red stormy sky. Europa's obvious struggles and her equally obvious helplessness. Europa's naivety and gullibility contrasted with her impending loss of innocence.



Madonna of the Meadow

by Raphael

The three figures in the meadow are the Virgin Mary, the Christ Child, with the halo, and John the Baptist, with the cross. The blue on Mary's robe represents the church and the red in her gown represents Christ's death. Mary unites the church and Christ's atonement in one.

It was painted in 1505 and shows exquisite realism and masterful use of atmosphere and size variation to show distance in the background. The vanishing point is directly behind Mary, whose head is centered in the painting though the overall grouping of people is to the left. The babies look like real babies, not miniature adults as you see in earlier medieval paintings of the Christ child. Mary looks real as well. Her face is serene even as she looks at John, but seems not to notice the cross.



Young Hare

by Albrecht Dürer

Done in watercolor and gouache, this was painted in 1502. Gouache, pronounced goo-aaa, is similar to watercolor, but has larger particles, less water, and chalk added to make it opaque instead of translucent.

The detail, shading, and light source in this painting are incredible and show a mastery which has rarely been seen before or after Dürer. Each hair is drawn in with life-like accuracy and patches of variation in the animal's fur don't confuse the viewer with patches of dark shadow and light highlights. The detail is so intricate that you can see the bars of a window reflected in the creature's eye.



Last Judgment Triptych

by Hieronymus Bosch

This was done with oil painting on wood in about 1482 for a church somewhere in the Netherlands. It consists of three panels, attached together to form an altarpiece. The first panel shows the garden of Eden with God at the top. The center panel shows the judgment with Christ at the top welcoming the righteous into heaven, while below the wicked are enduring unspeakable tortures. And the last panel on the right shows the afterlife with the unrepentant entering hell, welcomed by the devil.



Arnolfini Marriage

by Jan Van Eyck

This is the most famous painting of the Northern Renaissance. It was done in oil on an oak panel in 1434. Many art historians believe this painting was actually a record of a marriage. It has much symbolism including the dog, which represents fidelity and the flowing fabrics represent the wealth of the couple. The single lit candle represents the presence of God in the home. The red draperies on the bed represent fertility, as does the tiny carving of Saint Margaret on the finial of the bedpost. Around the border of the mirror are a series of medallions that represent the life of Christ. The mirror itself may be a symbol of purity. The technical skill of Van Eyck is unsurpassed and his use of oil paints in fine art was revolutionary.



Assumption of the Virgin

by Antonio da Correggio

This intricate scene teeming with figures was painted inside the dome of a church vault in Parma, Italy from 1526 to 1530. Jesus is suspended at the apex of the dome and Mary is below, looking up and ready to ascend to Him. She wears blue and red robes and in this view is on the center bottom. A host of angels is helping her rise to heaven. Apostles and saints look on.

The figures at the top of the mural are drawn smaller than the ones lower down, foreshortening the whole painting to give a greater illusion of depth, or height. Later this technique would be copied during the Baroque period of art.

Renaissance Art Cards

Print these art cards and descriptions onto white card stock. Cut the cards out on the solid lines.

Help your kids become familiar with these paintings and artists by playing matching games, sorting the cards, and quizzing over them.

1. Place the cards face down, with images in one group and description cards in another group. Choose one card from each group. Determine if they match. You can read the description of the painting to see if they do.
2. Arrange the paintings in order of date. Which were painted first? Can you see a progression of techniques or style in the cards?
3. Hold up an image card and see if your child can remember the title of the painting. After these are mastered, use the image cards to memorize the titles and artists together. Finally master the titles, artists, and a little information about the painting.
4. Go online and find more art by the same artists. Can you tell which artist painted the piece just by looking at the style?