

The development of interior and exterior space during the trecento is an interesting topic. Over a period of thirty years or so in the early trecento many developments occur in both Florentine and Sienese painting. These are best discussed by comparing works from the two regions and highlighting some of the stylistic differences at the same time.

It is logical to begin with Giotto di Bondone, perhaps the most famous of all Florentine painters. His Arena Chapel frescoes of 1303-5 paved the way for many advances that were made during the Renaissance.

To begin with Giotto's main concern was to tell stories of the life of the Virgin and of Christ directly and simply. This is the Franciscan way. The exterior and interior spaces that he designed to do this are shallow, and often unrealistic, but having said that, many of his ideas are still innovative for that time. For example, in Birth of the Virgin he doesn't divide exterior and interior but connects them using the two women. Also the building is set on an oblique angle to give depth to his picture plane. John White states that, "seventy five percent of Giotto's architecture settings are on oblique angles". Giotto's main aim is to show his figures realistically, standing in the picture plane. He does this by tonal modeling to give the figures monumentality and plasticity which leads the viewer to believe that there is a body underneath the robes, occupying their space. He creates shallow stage-like spaces in which to do this. For example in both Joachim Takes Refuge in the Wilderness and The Dream of Joachim the foreground space appears shallow, flat and stage-like. The rocky backdrop appears to be just that, a backdrop. The sky is always blue and this adds naturalism to his works although it was not intentional. However, Giotto was from the Mugello a mountainous area in the north of Tuscany, so it is possible his rocky hills relate to this landscape. The trees are sometimes an effort at naturalism and at others are symbolic, as in The Lamentation where the dead tree on the right symbolizes the death of life as Christ is mourned by his family and

followers.

Giotto is more concerned with the naturalism of his figures using many techniques and devices to help create his images. Almost all his figures stand parallel to the picture plane, on “real ground” as it were and they are pushed forward to emphasize the psychological rapport between the individual looking figures. This is due to rise of humanism which is an influence by the Greek and the Romans. He abandons the Medieval tradition of “stacking” in favour of isocephaly to assist this. This is clearly demonstrated in The Betrayal, where the foreground figures of Jesus and Judas are framed by the dark helmets of the guards behind them, but all on a level playing field. No attempt is made to show the Garden of Gethsemane here, the betrayal and Peter’s anger are the story. This shows that Giotto only wants the viewer to focus on the main event.

In Flight into Egypt the rocky backdrops does not really change although the story now presumably takes place in a foreign country. Giotto’s Vision of Anna is possibly his most developed interior space. It shows a small room with a front wall missing so that the viewer can see the action. There is an antechamber on the left where a servant sits spinning. Giotto sets the building at an oblique low angle so that he can show the corner of the room and the under part of the ceiling. By showing both the ceiling and part of the exterior roof he creates the impression that his building is solid. Inside people can pray, go to bed, or sit and spin. The angle used also helps him to show the window where the angel is coming in speaking to Anna.

Even in his later work, such as St. Francis Undergoing the Test by Fire before the Sultan (Fresco from the Bardi Chapel, c.1320), Giotto creates another stage set with a door way on either side. It is a shallow space with the background behind the throne apparently cut off with a hanging cloth or tapestry. These devices were used in classical Roman wall paintings and it is possible that

Giotto had seen some in his visit to Rome (along with classical sculpture). He has angled the throne of the Sultan so that a focal point would be achieved on the elbow of the pointing arm of the Sultan. This does give a sense of depth, albeit limited. It is also possible that the relief sculpture of Nicola Pisano influenced his creation of shallow space.

If one compares Giotto's Last Supper (Arena Chapel) with Duccio's Last Supper (panel, Maesta, Siena Cathedral) it appears to be a shallow pagoda rather than a room. This is just a device for the viewer to see the backs of half the disciples and the faces of the other half as they sit around the table. The bench and the table have a three dimensional appearance with the underside of the seating bench, the robes, and feet of the disciples in naturalistic shadow. In the Sienese painting, Duccio's version the table is considerably tilted towards the viewer in the Medieval fashion in order to show the food and drink on the table. The interior is more fully developed than in Giotto's work. A part of this difference is to do with the Sienese love of story telling. A whole cooked animal (a lamb?) sits in a dish on the table for the Passover feast. In Giotto it is hard to see what they eat.

Both Giotto and Duccio use contemporary buildings in their exterior space. For example, both use a 'Baptistry'. Giotto uses one in the right background of The Massacre of the Innocents (Arena Chapel) to suggest a city scene. Duccio creates a full blown city scene in his Entry into Jerusalem (back of Maesta, Siena). He creates a four part structure of landscape in which the Baptistry and the tower of a Medieval town hall create the background layer which are depicted exactly as they appear in space and light. In front of this are the city wall and the city gates. Through the arch of the city gate (a contemporary design of Duccio's own era) we see the jutting out top storey of a Medieval house. To the left of the gate Duccio creates a small area of open landscape where trees appear to be olive trees, strong enough for people to climb and hand down olive branches. In front of this there is a road bordered on two

sides by grey stone walls. The surface of the road appears to be beaten clay or cobbles/tiles. The colours are bright and contemporary with the Italian landscape of the time. Terra cottas, beiges and sand colours. The man/boy in front of Christ holding a palm leaf demonstrates that Duccio does not really know what palm trees are like. The branch is more like a laurel matching the trees in the foreground. Also in the foreground is the beginning of the rocky hill and a sentry box which stands empty (presumably because the guard has left his post to watch Christ's procession entering Jerusalem). Although Duccio makes an effort to create a population dressed in possibly biblical robes the whole cityscape would be comparable with contemporary Siena, including the uphill road. Giotto's version of this story is much simpler with just a gateway in front of Christ, a road, and a rocky backdrop. He demonstrates how events are progressing through the various stages of disrobing on the one side, and the movement of the donkey on the other. Movement and counter-movement suggests the origin and the end of the procession. This action is more horizontal to the picture plane. Duccio introduces a diagonal sweep which curves up into the city. This is in keeping with the Sienese love of curvilinear line.

Later Sienese work demonstrates even more fully developed exterior space. For example, Allegory of Good Government: Effects of Good Government in the City and the Country by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1338-39, Fresco, Siena) shows a city square and what is happening outside in the country as well. A city square which is a beautiful terra cotta colour which matches the city walls forms the foreground. The city walls slope up hill as do the buildings showing streets disappearing behind buildings. The shadows on sides of buildings create a sense of depth although it is limited as we can see that the people have no shadows on the ground. Careful layering has been used so that two half horses disappear behind a building on the left creating the idea that a street runs along behind the houses. A. Lorenzetti allows us to see inside several of the lower buildings which could be shops. The

painting is entirely contemporary and secular, which gives the artist an advantage because he is not trying to paint an unknown past. Most of the buildings and the city wall show the crenellated tops (battlements) of Medieval cities. The upper storeys are often jutting or have balconies. In the distance silhouetted against the skyline builders work on a house in the centre of the city.

A sense of space is created in the foreground by a circle of dancing maidens. Over to the right laden mules enter through a city gate. The artist has used a diminishing scale between the maidens and the man by the mules, and the mules themselves to give a sense of distance between the Piazza and the gate. Nobles are also seen leaving the gate going out into the countryside, one with a hawk. A. Lorenzetti creates at least a four part landscape outside. In the foreground peasants work in the field, next comes the road where the nobles ride the horses, behind this is a backdrop of vineyards and farms fading away to distant hills. On the far right are the possible buildings of another city. So we can see that by this time many developments in depicting exterior space have been made by the Sienese painters. Much of the influence for works of this kind had come from the north. Particularly the paintings of Medieval castles and landscapes from French prayer books (for example, The Book of Hours). However these are all small scale works on paper and A. Lorenzetti's frescoes fill three sides of a town hall!

Simone Martini and Pietro Lorenzetti continue the development of interior space in Sienese painting. Martini creates a simple interior in Vision of St. Martin (c. 1328, Fresco, Assisi). Again the bed is tilted against the picture plane and a shallow room space appears cut off around the bed. By placing the figures behind the bed Martini has created a deeper space in the left hand side of the room. He has used isocephalia for the heads of the group and shown the underside of the curved panelled ceiling. The effect is one of Christ appearing in a Medieval bedroom. In Funeral of St. Martin he has developed this idea more fully showing elaborate gothic architecture surrounding St. Martin, and has increased the

foreground space by including the kneeling figure on the left with his back to us. The pose and weight of this figure would suggest that Martini had learned from Giotto's earlier work.

The two most highly developed interiors of that time were Birth of the Virgin by Pietro Lorenzetti (1342), and Presentation in the Temple by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1342), both panels. The former shows a room with an antechamber on the left where Joachim waits for the news of his daughter. Joachim and his friend are seated on an angle to take the viewer's eye through an open arch at the end of the room and through this Romanesque arch a courtyard is seen outside and beyond a gothic church. By painting from a lower angle P. Lorenzetti has created three domed ceilings, but the central dome and the right hand dome belong to the same room. The arches of the panel frame double as the supporting pillars of the vault inside the picture plane. Here the artist creates considerable depth by stationing two women washing the baby in the foreground another woman seated on a bench beside the bed and beyond her St. Anne on the bed. The sense of distance is stopped abruptly by a white curtain hanging around two sides of the bed. He used the lines of a tiled floor and a checked bedspread to lead the eye of the viewer right to the back of the picture space.

In the latter Presentation in the Temple, Ambrogio Lorenzetti creates an even more fully developed interior space. He uses the mosaic floor tiles to lead the viewer from slender gothic pillars past five weighty figures in the foreground, to an altar where a priest/ rabbi officiates. A. Lorenzetti has continued a receding structure of pillars and arches behind the chair of the priest to a final gothic double-paned window in the center distance. By a view which seems to have been painted by the painter standing outside the temple he is also able to show a tower at the top of the central panel. This is clearly linked to the domed ceiling that the viewer sees inside above the head of the priest.

Both Florentine and Sienese painters make great strides towards

the development of exterior and interior space which come to be a part of the era which we think of as the Renaissance. It would seem that the Sienese painters learn much from the Florentines about how to paint figures, but that the Sienese painters with their love of detail go further into the creation of realistic interior and exterior spaces.