

## **Influences on renaissance art**

Classical art, Christian religion and Humanism, as well as many other things such as new techniques, money and patrons, and gothic styles, northern European styles and Byzantine styles, heavily influenced the renaissance.

Classical art, religion and humanism are similar in their influence upon renaissance art. In the early 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the Franciscan friars began a process of bringing Christ's message to the urban poor, by living a life of poverty themselves. This intense identification with Christ and with the human side of Christ led to a new theme in art – Christ's suffering was portrayed instead of his 'triumph'.

Nicola Pisano's carving of an elaborate marble pulpit for the Baptistry in Pisa is one of the earliest examples of religion and Roman ideas coming together in the middle ages. The Virgin in the 'Adoration of the Magi' is heavy and statuesque, with a straight Roman nose and impassive eyes. His aim was to make his images more naturalistic, physically credible and dramatic.

Brunelleschi's dome of the cathedral in Florence, built between 1420 and 1436, is another example of Roman influence. He was so impressed with the Pantheon in Rome, that he built an imitatio – his dome in Florence. The cathedral has a double shell design, an idea reached through studying Roman methods. However, aesthetically it owes more to the Gothic influences. This is typical of Renaissance art, drawing inspiration from many areas.

Another man influenced by ancient Rome was Sigismondo Malesta. He received a humanist education and his classical learning is reflected. He wanted all the artists he employed to evoke imperial Rome in all its glory. Leon Battista Alberti, who was chosen by Sigismondo to transform the church of San Fransesco, clad it in marble. Arcades of columns were added to both exterior sides, supported by a wall into which was cut 'S' and 'I'. It alternates with a design of elephants, the symbol of Scipio. Christianity as a whole was also a major source of inspiration for artists, sculptors and architects. Many pieces of art depict stories or characters from the bible. Donatello's 'St. Mark', 'Habbakuk' and 'Mary Magdalene' are key examples. Mary Magdalene remains noble and graceful despite her dirty, shabby look.

Humanism is closely linked to religion and the classics.

"The humanist mainstream saw man as a comprehensible being, standing midway between God and the lower order of nature. They concerned themselves with a philosophy of man. While they hoped to attain new approaches to Christianity, the humanists enormously increased the secular content of thought and literature."

*(A. G. Dickens, 'The age of humanism' 1977)*

This idea that man could make his own decisions is apparent in many works of art. 'The Journey of the Magi', by Fra Angelico, shows a continuous band of fresco running around the walls of Cosimo Medicic's chapel. The first of the Magi is Cosimo, the third a portrait of his grandson Lorenzo. This painting reflects the human-centred attitude of humanism – portraiture. Piero della Francesca also painted the portrait of Federigo da Montefeltro, showing him on profile, as opposed to on a coin or medal.