

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Art of the Masters

Unit 1 of 6

Welcome to the College Guild course Art of the Masters.

Guidelines for all College Guild courses:

1. **Answer all the questions that are in bold print, using black or blue ink or dark pencil if possible.** After we receive and review your completed Unit, we will send you feedback from your reader along with your original work and the next Unit. You don't need to return the questions – it saves us both postage.
2. There is no **specific deadline** to complete any Unit, but we would get concerned if we hadn't heard back from you after two months.
3. Remember how often the mail service loses things. **If you don't hear back from us after a month, please write to make sure we received your Unit** and sent out the next one.

Let us know if you need a dictionary, free to students who complete the first unit.

ART: It's an enormous subject. We'll be able to touch on only a smattering here. What is art? One definition would be: the use of skill, imagination, and innermost feelings - expressed in paint, pen, pencil, clay, wood, or other matter - culminating in the creation of an object of beauty. One must add, however, the quotation, "Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder," or - what one person may see as beautiful, another may see as ugly.

1. **What is your own definition of art?**
2. **Have you been exposed to art in your life? How has it influenced you?**
3. **If you decided to pursue a career in art, which medium (paint, pencil, clay, collage, etc..) would you choose and why?**

We're going to start with the Renaissance, known as the Golden Age, which began in Italy in the 14th century and ended in the 17th century. It was a period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity. Three very famous Renaissance artists were: Michelangelo (1475-1564), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510).

Michelangelo (1475-1564)

Michelangelo was born in Florence. He was a sculptor, painter, architect, and poet. When he was fourteen, he attended the school of Lorenzo de Medici, ruler of the city. As time went by, he became like a son to Medici. In 1494 at the height of the political and religious upheaval, Michelangelo was expelled from Florence and went to Venice. Before he left Florence, he hid in a small basement room where sketches he made on the walls can still be seen.

Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* (Appendix 1), begun in 1508 and finished in 1512, occupies a portion of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican in Rome. The Sistine Chapel was built in 1475. It is a rectangular room sixty-eight feet high. The walls of the chapel were decorated with frescoes by some of the most famous artists of the Renaissance, including Botticelli and Michelangelo (an inside look at the Sistine Chapel is shown in Appendix 2). The Vatican itself, the headquarters of the Catholic Church, has in addition to the Pope's living quarters, a library, a museum, archives, a

publishing house, and St. Peter's Basilica and St. Peter's Square where the public gathers to see the Pope and get his blessing.

4. How do you think Michelangelo went about the job of physically painting the Sistine ceiling?

In *Creation of Adam*, note the difference in the placement of the bodies of God and Adam; Adam is reclining on a solid base while God is floating in air.

5. What do you think Michelangelo meant to tell us through the different placements of God and Adam?

6. What do you think the meeting of the two fingers (God and Adam) means?

7. What kind of emotion do you think this painting is meant to evoke in the viewer? Do you think Michelangelo wanted us to feel sad for Adam and God's separation? Excited?

The *Pieta*, meaning the Deposition (Appendix 3), is among the most famous marble sculptures ever carved and is the only work signed by Michelangelo. It was done at the end of the 15th century and resides in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It depicts Jesus in the arms of his mother Mary, after being taken down from the cross. It is an extreme Renaissance expression of classical beauty.

8. Looking at it, do you see anything unusual in the size of the two figures? Explain.

9. Do you think that Michelangelo's rich and powerful father-figure helped him achieve success - or would his talent alone have brought this about? Explain.

Unfortunately, the *Pieta* has been damaged throughout the years. In 1736, Giuseppe Lirioni reattached four fingers that had broken off of Mary. Some say he placed the fingers in a more rhetorical gesture.

10. When art is damaged, whether it be a little or a lot, do you think it is our job to fix it? Explore the argument and morals for both sides of this problem - fixing the art, and letting it be.

**Leonardo da Vinci
(1452-1519)**

Mona Lisa (Appendix 4), officially titled *La Gioconda*, is a painting of the wife of a citizen of Florence whose name was Francesco Giocondo. The artist was Leonardo da Vinci. He was born out of wedlock and had no surname in the modern sense. Da Vinci simple means "of Vinci" - Vinci being the Tuscan town where he was born. He was strong and handsome with a great singing voice. He had a keen eye and quick mind. He was a painter and sculptor as well as an architect, musician, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, geologist, cartographer, botanist, and writer. At 15, he was an apprentice in Florence and proved to be a better painter than his teacher. He is considered one of the world's greatest painters, yet he left only a handful of completed works. He wrote backwards so that his writing could be deciphered only with a mirror.

11. Why do you think Leonardo da Vinci wrote backwards? Why would he want someone to only be able to decipher his work with a mirror?

Da Vinci died in France in the arms of King Francis. The *Mona Lisa*, considered to be the most famous painting in the world of art, was given directly to King Francis I of France. It hung in the palace at Versailles near Paris and then was transferred to the Louvre, Paris' renowned museum. In 1911, an employee stole it and hid it in a broom closet. Two years later, he tried

to sell it and was caught. Currently, its value is set at 645 million dollars. The *Mona Lisa* is, indeed, famous: Nat King Cole sang about her (Appendix 5) and Elton John wrote a song about her.

12. *Mona Lisa* is famous for a puzzling feature. What do you think this feature is?

13. Can you find a link between the woman in the painting and the landscape? Explain.

14. Would you call her beautiful by today's standards? If not, how would she be changed to fit today's image of beauty?

Sandro Botticelli
(1445-1510)

Sandro Botticelli was born in Florence and lived there most of his life, except for two years when he went to Rome and worked on the Sistine Chapel. He didn't become famous until several centuries after his death.

As a young man, Botticelli was apprenticed to Filippo Lippi, a famous Italian painter. During his life, the Medici family of Florence supported him. Most of Botticelli's paintings were done for private collectors in Florence - works to be displayed in luxury homes. One of his best known works is *The Birth of Venus*, where Venus emerges from the sea, poised on a scallop shell. Botticelli was a deeply religious man who created mythological paintings. Mythology gave this Renaissance painter a new freedom to illustrate human emotions and attitudes denied by Christianity. Another one of his mythological paintings is *Pallas and the Centaur* (Appendix 6). Into Botticelli's world in Florence came the monk, Savonarola, a religious fanatic who preached that these paintings were leading his congregation down the road to Hell. At this point, Botticelli lost his nerve, and his pagan-themed paintings were burned in what was called "The Bonfire of the Vanities". He died in poverty.

Another of Botticelli's renowned works is called *Primavera* (Appendix 7). *Primavera* is an Italian word meaning "first green".

15. What is our word for Primavera or First Green? Which season do you think would be the most interesting to paint and why?

Primavera, *Birth of Venus*, and *Pallas and the Centaur* are classified as mythological paintings and were the first of this type. They were influenced by classical Roman antiquity. From ancient times up to the Middle Ages, the Romans, picking up from Greek mythology, believed in the supernatural. There were many specialist gods: gods of sowing and planting, hearth gods, and war gods. Jupiter was a very important god - god of the elements (wind, rain, snow). Diana was the mother of wild animals, moon goddess, goddess of strength, athletic grace and beauty, and goddess of the hunt. The gods were worshipped because the Romans believed their fate was in the hands of the gods. The first Italian Euro - a coin made in 2002 - has the head of Venus on it.

16. What do you think prompted Botticelli to create these unusual paintings?

17. Write a short paragraph on a detail you find interesting in *Primavera* (Appendix 8).

18. Botticelli had perfect mastery of his profession. How much do you think this mastery is reliant on natural-born skill versus hard work?

An added note: Botticelli's name has been mentioned in popular culture in the TV sitcom *Frasier*. In the show, when Niles saw Roz's baby picture, he said: "Botticelli himself couldn't have painted a more perfect angel." He is also mentioned in the book, *The Da Vinci Code*. The novel is fictional and has become a springboard for discussions of faith, history, and religion.

The theories expressed are ancient ideas discussed by modern fictional characters. The reader can interpret these as she/he wishes. The book is not anti-Christian or anti-anything - just a novel with an entertaining story.

19. Throughout this Unit we've been discussing a time period in the 1400s called the Renaissance. What time period in history would you most like to read a book/watch a movie about and why?

20. Of these three painters, whose work do you prefer? Why?

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

Appendices

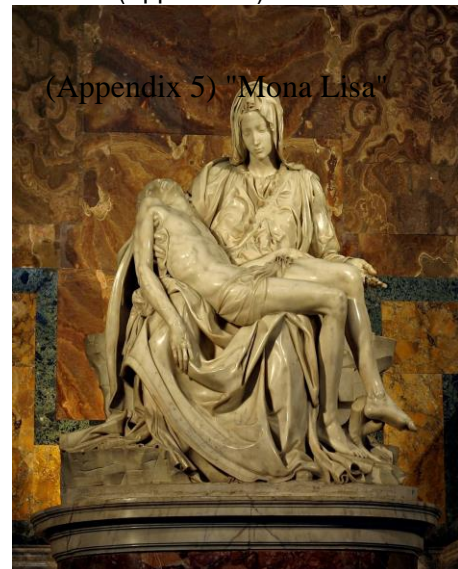
(Appendix 1) *The Creation of Adam* c.1508



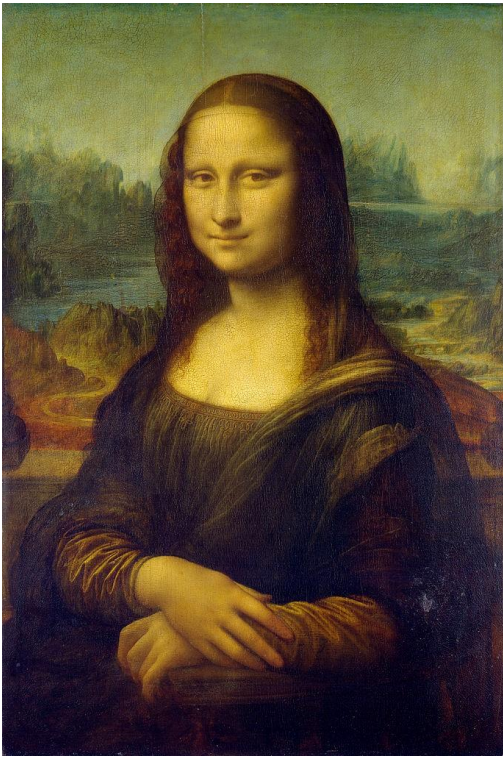
(Appendix 2) Interior View of the Sistine Chapel



(Appendix 3) *Pieta* c.1498



(Appendix 5) "Mona Lisa"

(Appendix 4) *Mona Lisa* c.1508(Appendix 5) *Mona Lisa*, by R. Evans & J. Livingston, 1950

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa
 Men have named you
 You're so like the lady with the mystic smile
 Is it only cause you're lonely
 They have blamed you
 For that Mona Lisa strangeness in your smile

So you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa
 Or is this your way to hide a broken heart
 Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep
 They just lie there, and they die there
 Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa
 Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art

(Instrumental Interlude)

Do you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa
 Or is this your way to hide a broken heart
 Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep
 They just lie there, and they die there
 Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa
 Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art

Mona Lisa, Mona Lisa

(Appendix 7) *Primavera* c.1482

(Appendix 6) *Pallas and the Centaur* c.1482



(Appendix 8) Detail from the *Primavera*

