





Defining the Renaissance by its Values

Civic Humanism, Appreciation of Nature
and Naturalism, Virtù

Civic Humanism

- Civic humanism was the concept that all citizens owed loyalty, love, honor, and sacrifice to their city-state
- The accepted communal belief that individual citizens should use their talents—whatever those might be—to the service of the city-state and work toward its greatness and distinction among the city-states.

- Part of the revival of Classical ideals and obviously related to humanism, some historians see this as equal to humanism and individualism in defining the Renaissance.
- The Greeks had *philotimia*, normally meaning the love of honor or distinction, especially as the warrior in battle. Demosthenes makes the point that the distinction earned by the warrior is reflected on his city-state.
- For the Romans, service and sacrifice for the *patria* was a civic duty and a religious obligation.

Civic humanism is seen in the literature of the Renaissance in these ways

- Works by Renaissance writers who specifically and positively cite the works or actions of the ancients who practiced civic virtue and thereby encouraged it in their contemporaries

Machiavelli, in *The Discourses*, “In all the people love of country was more powerful than any other consideration.”

- works chronicling the historic and/or contemporary greatness of the author's city-state

Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric of Florence*

“I...shall have fulfilled my task of praising Florence if I make adequate use of all the knowledge I have acquired through my ardent study, although I know full well that my ability cannot ultimately apprehend such an extraordinary city.”

- works defining the good and purpose of the city-state and encouraging service and right action with regard to the state

Marsilio Ficino, *On the Duties of the Citizen*, letter to Piero del Nero

“It is the duty of a citizen to consider the state as a single being formed of its citizens who are the parts; and that the parts should serve the whole, not the whole the parts.”

- Works comparing the author's city-state to another, emphasizing the superiority of his own

Vespasiano, writing on the work of Poggio Bracciolini

“If the chronicles of the Venetian Republic, with its numerous men of learning, which has wrought such great deeds both by land and sea, had been written down and not left unrecorded, the renown of Venice would stand higher than it does today.”

Civic humanism is seen in the art of the Renaissance in these ways

- the documenting of the city and its traditions, celebrations and legends



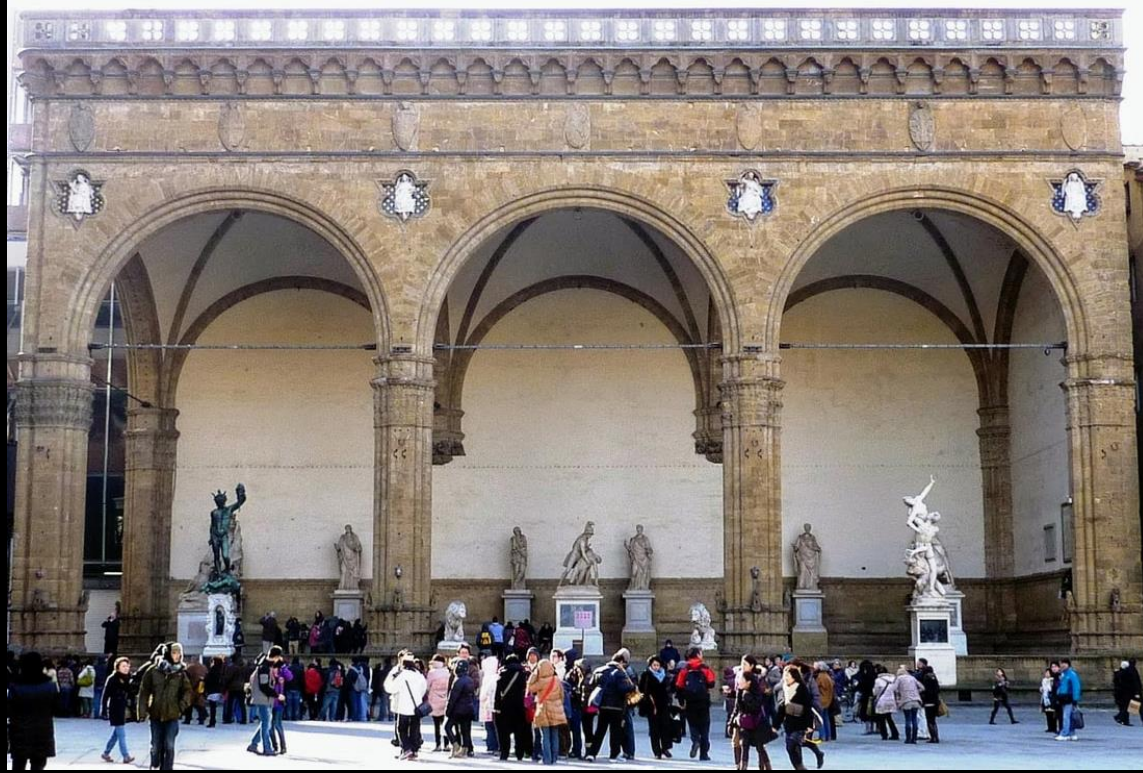




- the inclusion of recognizable settings from the artist's city in the backgrounds of portraits and of religious paintings, even if the person or event depicted had no connection to the city





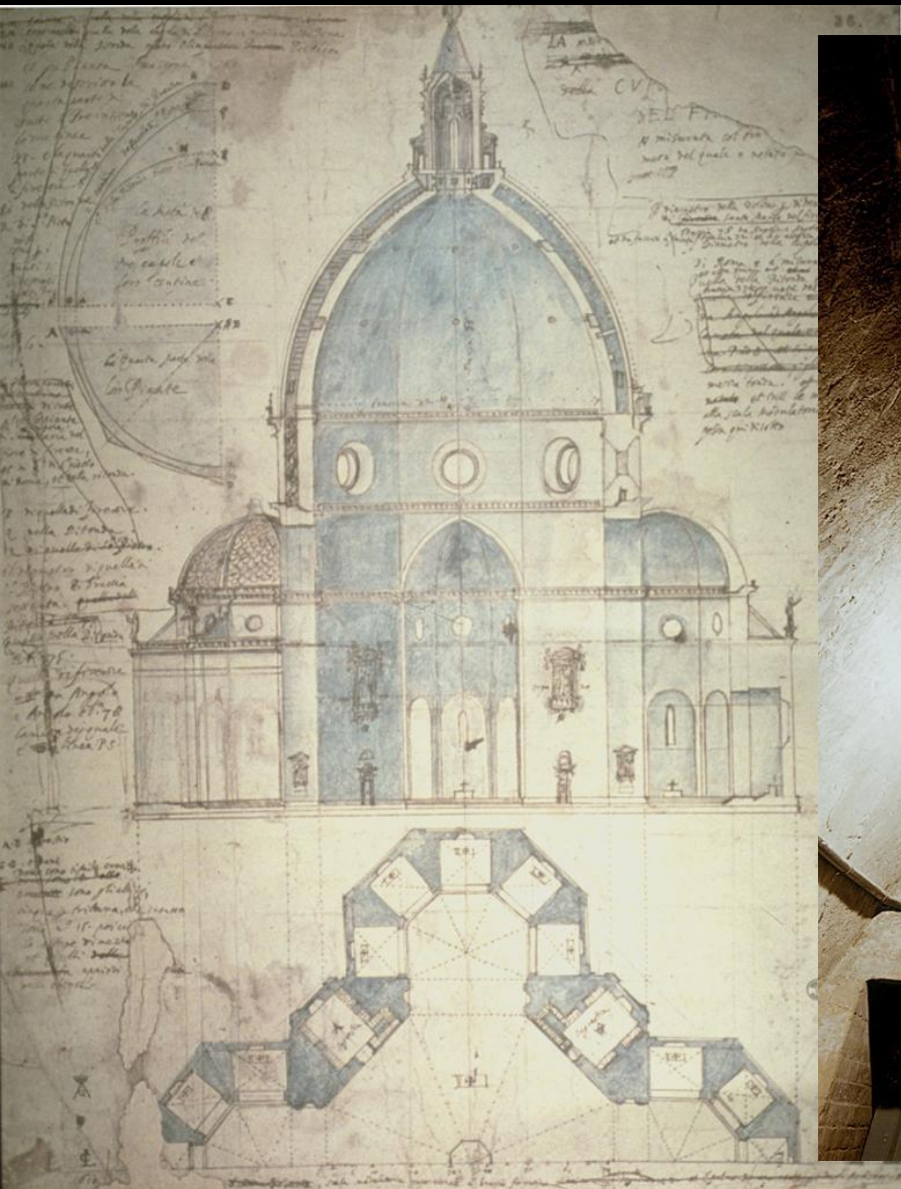


- The commissioning and creation of works to represent a symbol, quality, or value of the city-state



- the construction of public and private buildings and public spaces that added beauty and brought glory to the city





Appreciation of Nature and Naturalism

- Appreciation of Nature was the recognition and enjoyment of the beauty and variety in the natural (outdoors and rural) world.
- Naturalism was the appreciation of Nature set to work in literature and art as inspiration and in the creation of works. From their study and observation Renaissance artists moved toward accurate and natural depictions of not just the rural outdoors but of all subjects.

Two forces came together to foster this value

- By the 1300s, the re-growth of central authorities, order, trade, and transportation had “tamed” Nature to a certain extent; at least, it had become much less frightening to the men of the Italian Renaissance.
- More importantly, the paradigm shift from G-d as stern judge to G-d as awesome creator—a critical foundation of the development of humanism—led to a different and more positive relationship between man and his natural surroundings.

Naturalism and the appreciation of nature was depicted in Renaissance literature through

- letters and similar types of prose that take as their subject the glories of nature or detail the natural surroundings in which the author finds himself

Francesco Petrarca, “On the Ascent of Mt. Ventoux”

“Today I made the ascent of the highest mountain in this region... My only motive was the wish to see what so great an elevation had to offer.”

- poetry with pleasing and positive similes and metaphors to nature and natural occurrences

Matteo Maria Boiardo, Sonnet III

One morning I beheld the sun arise
Out of the waves in shining gold attire,
Flushed was his face, and in so deep a wise
That the whole seashore seemed to be on fire;
And I beheld the dew of early morn
Awake the rose to such a vivid hue
That distant vision would indeed have sworn
A flame was kindled on the green stalk too.
And I beheld how for young April there
The tender buds, as is their wont, did blow
Sweetly, O sweetly in their early pride;
And I beheld a lady, kind and fair,
Rose-gathering on the lawn at morning-glow.
She was far lovelier than all else beside.

- Works praising artists for their success in depicting the world naturally and accurately

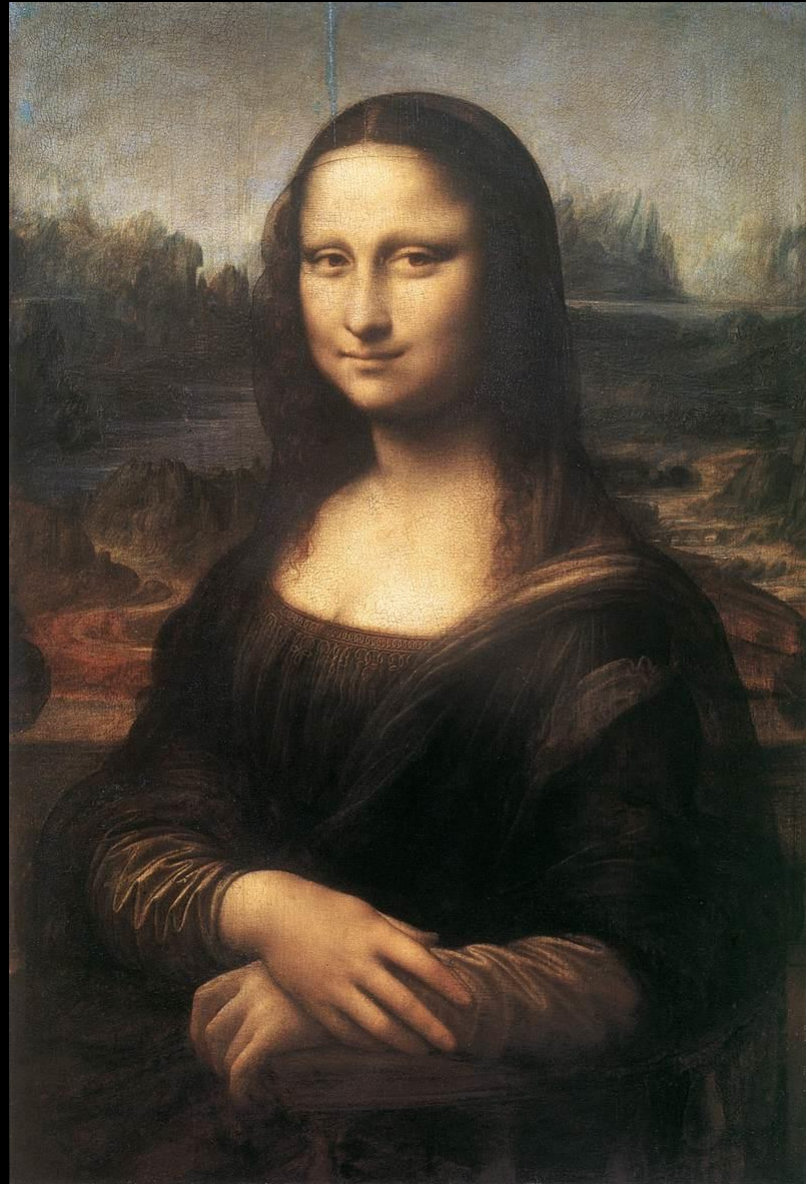
Cristoforo Landino, from the Proem to the first edition of his commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1481)

“Masaccio was a distinguished artist with a pure and controlled style, always dedicated to imitating nature and making figures come alive.”

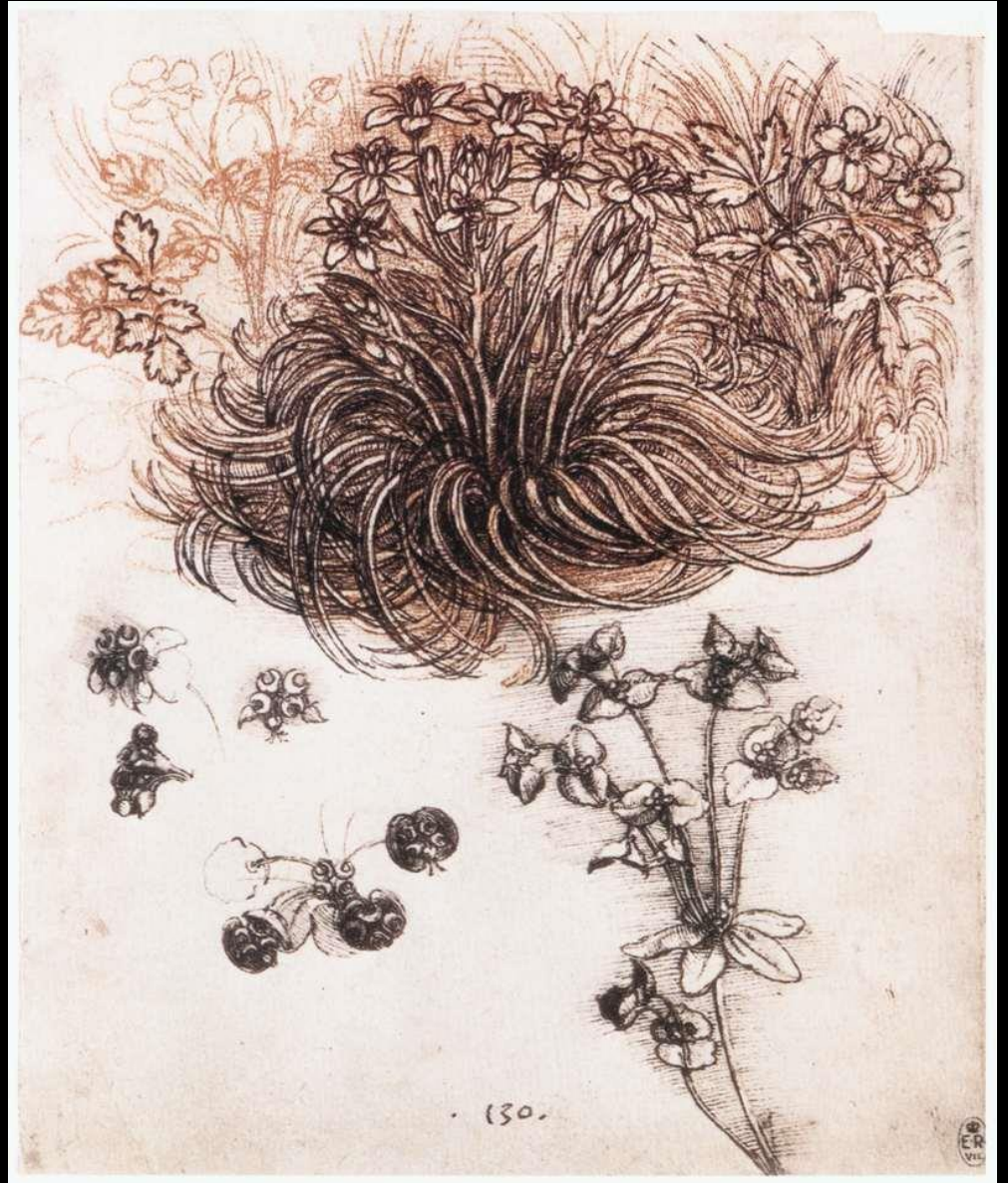
speaking of Brunelleschi: “Above all he had an astute understanding of perspective, so much so that some hold him to have either rediscovered it or invented it.”

The appreciation of nature and naturalism was depicted in Renaissance art through

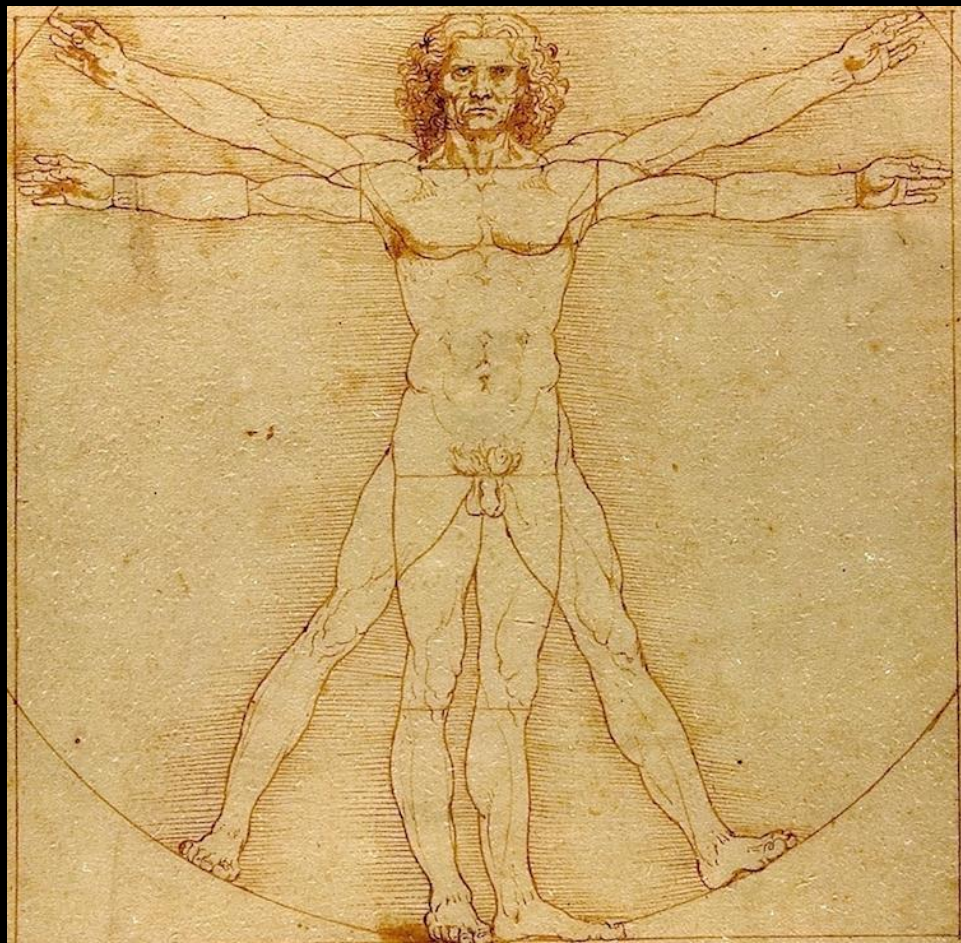
- the placing of subject figures in natural (outdoor) settings



- the effort made to show flora and fauna in the most natural and accurate way in all their variety







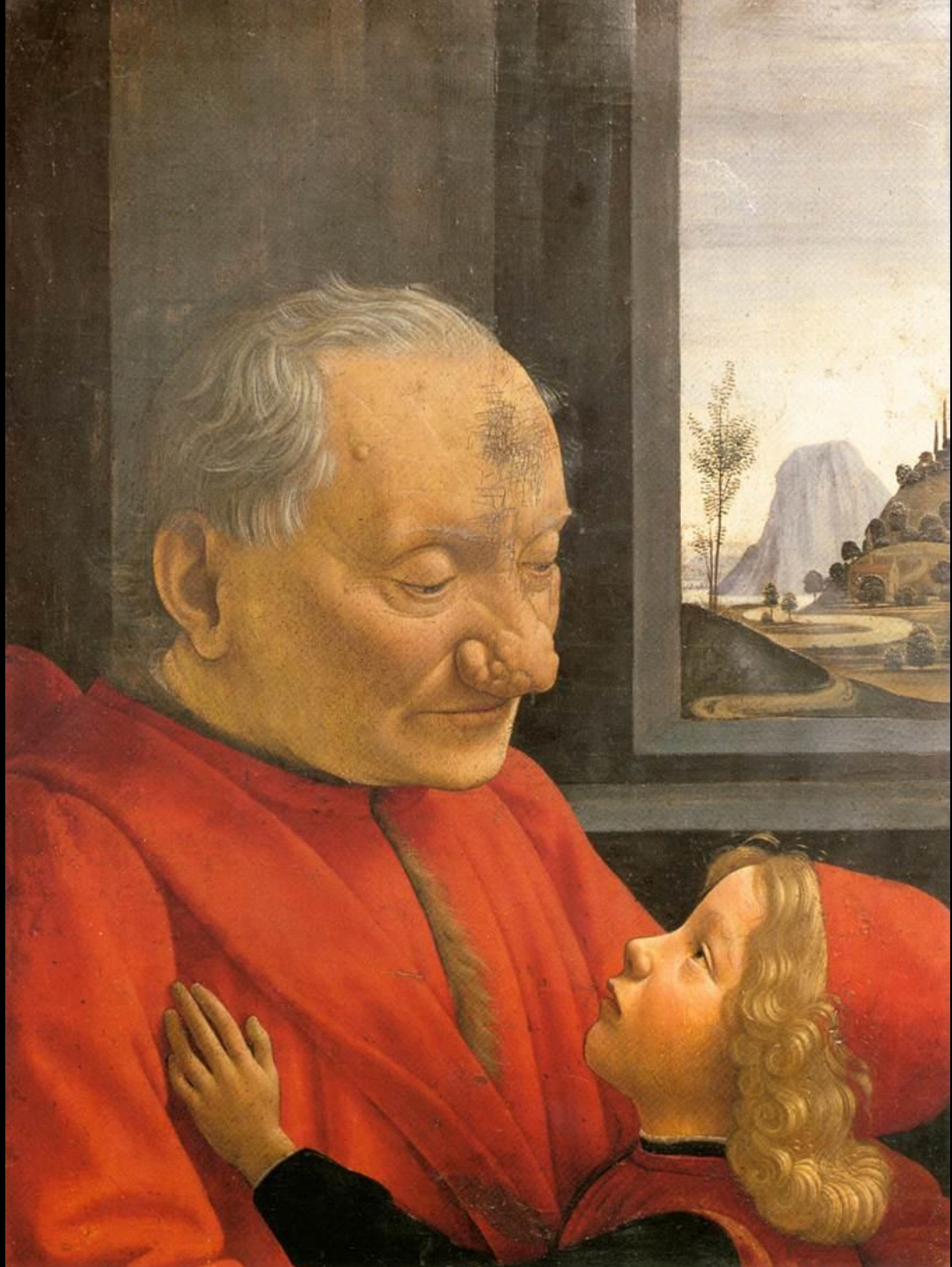
- The use of linear and aerial perspective to recreate the 3-D world with a 2-D medium





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Varietas was an important element in the expression of naturalism in art. This was seen in the inclusion of varieties of all sorts of things—man-made and natural—alongside a painting's main subject.



Virtù

Virtù is an Italian word coming from the Latin root *vir* (man). A direct translation is “manliness.” Virtù meant that one was expected to develop all of his skills and talents to the fullest and not shy away from challenges.

Another term used at the time was “l’uomo universale” or in modern terms, “Renaissance man.”

The Renaissance was an age of self-awareness—the perception that one was living in extraordinary times, even a period of genius—but also of self-improvement—no matter how adept one was one had always to continue to do more and better.

This value grows alongside individualism as it focuses on an individual's talents. It also connects directly to civic humanism in that the talents developed should be used for the betterment and glory of the city-state.

Virtù is demonstrated in the literature of the Renaissance through

- the lengthy enumeration of an individual's talents and qualities and his use of them included in the biographies, dedications, and letters

Marsilio Ficino, letter to Niccolo Michelozzi, "The astonishing glories of Lorenzo de' Medici"

Christoforo Landino, from the Proem to the first edition of his commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1481)

- the production of vast numbers of “how-to” books on everything from marriage, procreation, and the household to ideal proportions in architecture
 - Leon Battista Alberti, “On Painting”
“On Architecture”
“On the Family”
 - Niccolo Machiavelli, “The Prince”
 - Leonardo da Vinci, “On Painting”
 - Baldassare Castiglione, “The Courtier”

Virtù is demonstrated in the art of the Renaissance through

- portraits including symbols or objects connected to the subject's interests or talents

