

A Classical Renaissance

An Exhibition of Paintings by Benjamin Patterson

on View in

the Rogers-Green House

at the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art

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Above: Detail of *Apollo and Daphne*

INTRODUCTION

A Classical Renaissance presents a collection of paintings belonging not so much to the modern or postmodern art world as to an ancient tradition. Flouting the rule of the painter of modern life, of Édouard Manet and Honoré Daumier that an artist must be of his time, my paintings follow another rule of art which was taught in the old academies and held sway for hundreds of years before their demise in the early 20th century. Not to appear out of date, one of the recommendations that I received from a committee-member at the Copley Society of Art, where this exhibition first appeared in the Fall of 2022, was to include something more contemporary, to which I was tempted to reply that everything I do is timeless, though the committee-member made a fair point. The significance of academic art is not self-explanatory anymore, and so allow me to explain what it is that I do and why it matters.

The story behind this body of work began more than ten years ago in 2009, when I graduated from art school. I received my training in drawing and painting in the birthplace of the Italian Renaissance at a school in Florence called the Angel Academy, just blocks away from the original academy of painting and sculpture founded by Giorgio Vasari in 1563. The Angel Academy is part of the atelier movement, which also includes the Florence Academy, the Grand Central Atelier in New York City, and the Academy of Realist Art in Boston, among many others. The ateliers have done a wonderful job of training a whole generation of painters in a skillset which for much of the 20th century was all but lost thanks to the abandonment of fine craftsmanship by modern and postmodern artists. Initially, the new academicism was called classical realism, which is a passable description of academic art, though this name has waned in popularity in recent years. My work is very classical, but most of the work being produced by other artists in the movement is not, and not all of it can be described as realism either. After a mere two decades, our work has already become too diverse to be easily classified as a particular school or style.

The academic tradition has always fostered a great diversity of styles, ranging from mannerism in the 16th century to Bolognese classicism and Caravaggism in the 17th century to the rococo and neoclassicism in the 18th century, though there was always a unifying thread connecting the diverse schools and styles of academic art. From the Accademia in Florence to the French Academy in Paris to the Royal Academy in London, there was a common idea of art, first articulated in antiquity and reiterated by theorists of the Renaissance. From the publication of the first Renaissance treatise *On Painting* by Leon Battista Alberti in 1435 until the arrival of Romanticism in the late 18th century, it was taken for granted that the art of painting had a certain nature which was succinctly expressed by simple theoretical principles and which was the same everywhere and for all times. Painting was an imitation of nature, and its end was beauty. This nature was given unique expression but not fundamentally changed by the idiosyncrasies of an artist's style or of a given school.

The idea of classical mimesis that art should be beautiful and imitate nature is not common sense anymore, as it was for the Italian Renaissance or to the ancient Greeks and Romans, who had the luxury of taking for granted certain assumptions which have since been called into doubt, beginning with belief in God. The pre-modern world saw nature not as an accidental product of geological time, random mutation, and natural selection but as the definitive work of art uniquely deserving of imitation. According to Plato's account in the *Timaeus*, the divine craftsman Himself

is an imitator, having created the world by imitation of ideal forms, and He did so not for any instrumental purpose as if He had any need of it but for its own sake in an act of benevolence, to serve no other purpose but to manifest the goodness of its Creator.¹ By making fine art, whose beauty is an end in itself, the classical artist did what the divine craftsman does and by improving upon nature in imitation of the ideal even entered into lively competition with him.² Classical art was a reenactment of the story of creation, and so was the art of the Renaissance. Following not only Plato's *Timaeus* but also the story of creation in Genesis, the Renaissance painter improved upon classical art by separating the light from the darkness in chiaroscuro and by separating the heavens from the earth with an horizon line in linear perspective. With particular attention to the human form, the Renaissance painter reenacted the creation of man by making images of the image of God quite literally from the dust of the earth. When naturalism was abruptly abandoned by the authors of abstraction at the turn of the 20th century, it had everything to do with the loss of belief in God. For all the talk of the spiritual in art, Kandinsky and Mondrian were equivocating atheists, and Malevich was an outspoken one. Abstraction stood at the end of Romanticism's project to discover in nature and in art some ultimate meaning which could no longer be grounded in a transcendent God. The modern artist had lost his prototype, and so he retold the story of creation in the absence of a Creator. Modern art became, as it were, a representation of the watery abyss in Genesis. The seminal works of abstraction such as Malevich's *Black Square* are formless and void for want of any Spirit of God hovering over the deep, separating the light from the darkness and the heavens from the earth. While many people find abstraction mystifying, in fact an abstract painting is exactly what it looks like: a painting of nothing – a sublime, primordial nothingness at the bottom of reality where God used to be.

Yet, theism is not the only metaphysical assumption implicit in classicism. Classical art would not have needed to be reinvented in the late Middle Ages had the doctrine of creation been sufficient to arrive at a classical concept of art. There was another idea having to do with Aristotelian metaphysics which had to be rediscovered by scholastic theologians before classical art could be reinvented by Renaissance painters and sculptors. The key which unlocked the Italian Renaissance was Aristotelian realism, as distinct from Platonic realism.

Realism in the generic sense is the idea that things have a nature which can be known, a common-sense idea which only a Cartesian skeptic would think to question. Granted a rational intellect and five senses, everyone knows that it is the nature of a stone to be hard, the nature of the sky to be blue, or the nature of a human being to walk on two legs. From the common-sense perspective of Samuel Johnson, who refuted Bishop Berkeley's skepticism by kicking a stone, it is simply absurd to doubt that one has knowledge of the nature of things.³ How else could artists imitate nature, unless nature were knowable? Nevertheless, philosophers have an irritating habit of questioning the obvious. Plato for one was not so sure that artists *do* imitate nature, in the proper sense of the word. He accused painters of not representing things as they really are but instead painting a soulless imitation of *appearances*, an imitation of an imitation two steps removed from the ultimate reality of the ideal forms.⁴ As far as Plato was concerned, what things really are boils down to a universal nature which is shared in common across things of a kind and determined by the soul. Far from a mysterious homunculus located in the pineal gland as René Descartes apparently believed, the soul is the form which makes the body the kind of thing that it is. Hence, mimesis may be described as soulless insofar as the mere transcription of outward appearances fails to express the form that makes things what they really are.

If painting really did amount to nothing more than handmade photography, it wouldn't amount to very much, because there is more to reality than the surface of things, for which reason academic theorists never failed to stress that a painter must do more than imitate appearances. To quote the English theorist Jonathan Richardson, "[A beautiful] Painting not only shews us how Things appear but tells us what they are."⁵ A fine painting is "more true than truth itself," as the French theorist Roger de Piles put it, by which he meant more true to the nature of things

¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 29D-E: "Let us now state the Cause wherefore He that constructed it constructed Becoming and the All. He was good, and in him that is good no envy ariseth ever concerning anything; and being devoid of envy He desired that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself. This principle, then, we shall be wholly right in accepting from men of wisdom as being above all the supreme originating principle of Becoming and the Cosmos." Trans. W.R.M. Lamb.

² Plotinus, *Enneads* V.8.1.

³ The appeal to the stone comes from James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (London: J. Davis, 1820), p. 218.

⁴ Plato's analysis of mimesis is found in books 3 and 10 of the *Republic*.

⁵ Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting* (London, 1715), p. 24.

than the simple appearance of things.⁶ *The first solution proposed by theorists to the soullessness of mimesis was idealization.* As Sir Joshua Reynolds explains in his *Discourses*, art must improve upon nature by means of an ideal form derived from nature.⁷ To the credit of my teachers at the Angel Academy, the constant refrain which was pounded into my head when I was a student was precisely this, that our objective was to paint *form* and not just to copy what we saw, because the naïve transcription of appearances has no volume, no depth, and no structure. A painter must learn to create such effects by following the principles of chiaroscuro, linear perspective, and anatomical construction for example. To make a painting look realistic, one must paint an *idea of form*, hence the title of Giovanni Bellori's seminal essay on the theory of art, "The Idea of the Painter, the Sculptor, and the Architect," which Bellori delivered in a lecture to the Academy of St. Luke in Rome in 1664.

Yet, idealization is obviously not what separated Renaissance art from Byzantine art. Platonic realism did not need to be rediscovered in the Renaissance, having been the prevailing wisdom among theologians for the first thousand years of Christendom. Rather, the obstacle to classical mimesis was that Platonism favored a highly simplified, formulaic idealization, as in Byzantine iconography. Byzantine art depicts Platonic abstractions, arrived at by reasoning up to ideal forms independent of observation. To motivate the direct observation of nature, medieval artists needed something more than Plato, and that motivation came from Aristotle. Medieval Aristotelianism enlarged Platonism's exclusive emphasis on form by incorporating all four of Aristotle's categories of explanation into the definition of what a thing is, and to distinguish this more expansive idea of the thing in itself from the narrow concept of form St. Thomas Aquinas referred to it as an *essence*.⁸ Whereas a Platonist would say that the essence of a human being is the human soul, Aquinas replied that a human being is not just an immortal soul but the union of body and soul in one substance, which explains why Christians place their hope in the resurrection of the body. While the soul makes the body human, the body gives the soul its individuality. The Platonic ideal, conceived merely as a distillation of what things of a kind share in common, is not what is ultimately real, because real souls are individuated.⁹

Aristotelian realism completely transformed the way that art was made. If essences are not simply abstractions, existing on a transcendental plane of pure thought, but a principle inhering in matter, then it follows that the only way to discover the essence of things is to abstract it out by studying the concrete particular. This is the idea that made Leonardo da Vinci's dissection of the human body conceivable. Indeed, it is this idea of abstracting out the universal from the particular that moved Renaissance art forward along every step of its development. The artist's idea of form could not continue to stagnate once it began to be refreshed and refined by drawing from life, and even as the tradition surpassed the naturalism of antiquity, accumulating an inexhaustible pattern-book of sound precedent, life-study remained indispensable. Just as the truth of human nature according to Aristotle is a union of body and soul, so the truth of art is an elusive union of appearances and the ideal, best exemplified according academic authorities by the works of Raphael.¹⁰ Even though academic training instilled a sufficient understanding of the human form to liberate artists from servile dependency on the model, Joshua Reynolds instructed his students not to imitate François Boucher's deplorable practice of working purely from imagination but to work so far as possible from life, because their purpose was to paint life.¹¹ Even the most idealizing of academic painters Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, who often worked without a model, likewise cautioned his students that idealization is an insufficient solution to the soullessness of mimesis, because ideal form has no life unless the deathly perfection of its symmetries is animated by the imperfections of real life.

As the principle of life, which not only gives the body its shape but also animates it, the soul is expressed above all by the movements, gestures, and expressions of the body. *Movement is the final answer to Plato's critique*, which is why no

⁶ Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes* (Paris, 1708), p. 22.

⁷ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. R. R. Wark (London and New Haven, 1975), p. 44.

⁸ See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*. Aristotle's four causes include efficient, material, formal, and final causes. The efficient cause of a thing is the person who makes it, the material cause is the stuff of which it is made, the formal cause is what makes it the kind of thing that it is, and the final cause derived from the Latin *fine* is the end for which it is made.

⁹ There are as many forms of each general essence as there are individuals. Following Aristotle, Aquinas would say that the essence of things of a kind is specifically the same but numerically diverse.

¹⁰ de Piles, p. 22. De Piles distinguishes the simple and the ideal truth from the perfect truth, which combines appearances and the ideal.

¹¹ Reynolds, p. 224-25.

quality was more highly esteemed by Renaissance connoisseurs. They all agreed that the best paintings are like Michelangelo's frescoes and Titian's *poesie*, which depict the human body in lively, expressive action like poetry. In stark contrast to the wall of separation between painting and poetry later erected by the Enlightenment critic Gotthold Lessing, Leon Battista Alberti modeled his theory of painting on Ciceronian rhetoric and instructed painters to do what poets do.¹² According to Aristotle's *Poetics*, the poet's object of imitation is "the action of men."¹³ The focus is on man, because man is the measure of all things, who stands at the pinnacle of creation and names all things, such that all of creation is contained within him in virtue of his rational intellect.¹⁴ The poet imitates action, because what man really is is expressed by what he does. The movements of the human soul are not a random, Brownian motion to no particular end but purposive and meaningful. They tell a story about the nature of reality. Thus, the highest priority of academic painting as an art modeled on poetry was to depict a great story. The preeminent genre in the academic tradition was known as history painting, which is a slightly misleading translation of *la storia* in Italian, used by Leon Battista Alberti to refer not only to historical subjects but to any story worthy of the poet's craft. This did not include stories of ordinary life, though the Dutch would beg to differ. History painting as opposed to genre painting depicts a story of great deeds which show by example what it is to be human. The story would not be invented by the painter, though he would exercise his powers of invention by interpreting the story in a novel and ingenious way. Ideas could be repeated, but the movements, the gestures, and the expressions had to be reinvented. It was this appropriation of poetic invention, the first and most important canon of rhetoric, which elevated Renaissance painting from a mere handcraft to the status of a liberal art. Aping imitation of nature may succumb to Plato's critique, but creative imitation which follows the principles of invention does not. As the paradigmatic solution to the soullessness of mimesis, history painting stands at the top of the academic hierarchy of genres, while landscape and portraiture fall somewhere in the middle, and at the bottom of the hierarchy is still life, being paradigmatic of the mere transcription of appearances. The omission of still life from my exhibition as well as the descending scale of my history paintings, portraits, and landscapes have been calculated to communicate this hierarchy.

Thus, the simple-minded notion that art imitates nature was not so simple after all. The principles of academic art had to be discovered on the basis of sound philosophy. It was only by looking through the right philosophical lens that artists began to see nature as it really is, and it was likewise by looking through a distorting philosophical lens that modern and postmodern artists lost the ability to see anything at all. The academic tradition arose atop a foundation laid by medieval Christianity and classical metaphysics, and it was demolished by radical skepticism not only of the existence of God but also of metaphysical realism. Modern and postmodern art are the two arms of a single movement. Together, they had one objective, to apply the conclusions of modern philosophy to art, toppling the two pillars of classical art and razing the whole edifice to the ground, as though the academic tradition were the temple of Dagon and the modern artist were Samson Agonistes. John Milton would be so proud.

Before the 20th century, only a handful of modern philosophers were so bold as to frankly announce their disbelief in God, but all of the most notable modern philosophers agreed that the objective of classical mimesis to represent things as they really are in themselves is impossible. Be they idealists or empiricists, be they John Locke and David Hume or Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, all modern philosophers rejected metaphysical realism, both of the Platonic and of the Aristotelian variety. Not one of them recognized what consequence this would have for art, but it did not take long for artists themselves to figure out that classical art was doomed if it succumbed by default to Plato's critique of mimesis. When that whereof Wittgenstein could not speak, the noumenon beyond the reach of Kantian reason, the thing in itself lies beyond the limits of representation, what sense does it make trying to represent

¹² Lessing wrote an influential book entitled *Laocöon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), in which he proposed that poetry concerns the temporal while painting concerns the spatial and that the blurring of this boundary produces art that is weak and ineffectual. The implication of Lessing's distinction was to reduce painting to a purely formal art by making subject-matter a mere occasion for the display of formal qualities, an idea which was picked up by aestheticizing artistic movements in the 19th century and finally taken to its logical conclusion in abstraction.

¹³ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447a 18ff.

¹⁴ To quote William Shakespeare: "What a piece of work is a man, How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, In form and moving how express and admirable, In action how like an Angel, In apprehension how like a god, The beauty of the world, The paragon of animals." *Hamlet* Act II scene 2.

it? There is no point in going to so much trouble. It was this purported discovery of the inescapable soullessness of mimesis that called the nature of art into question.

At the same time that abstraction was announcing the atheism of the modern world, conceptual art was invented to repudiate metaphysical realism. The thesis announced by Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* at the annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in the ominous year of 1917 is that art does not have an essential nature anymore. Duchamp's tongue-in-cheek exposition of an upside-down urinal was intended to turn Aristotelian essentialism on its head. Duchamp presented a mass-produced object which he did not make, and he signed it with a name that was not his own, thereby deconstructing the principle of art's efficient causality, that art must be made by an artist. Duchamp deconstructed art's material causality by not using materials proper to painting or sculpture as well as art's formal causality by not imitating nature, much less in a unique style, to say nothing of art's final causality by making a mockery of beauty. Duchamp deconstructed all that constitutes the essential nature of the work of art. Just as no one is able to say what a woman is anymore, no one is able to say what art is either. There is no such thing as "art," proclaimed Marcel Duchamp, but only objects called by that name. Art is whatever the art world says it is.¹⁵

To comprehend the significance of what Duchamp did, consider the works of Rembrandt. Everyone takes for granted that an original Rembrandt is more valuable than a forgery and that a masterpiece by Rembrandt is more valuable than a sketch by him. Yet, both ideas are based on a belief in essentialism, that the works of a master share an immaterial essence which the forgery lacks and the masterpiece most perfectly expresses. No matter how convincing a 19th-century forgery of a Rembrandt might be, the forgery loses all market-value should it be found out because it lacks something *essential*, namely the hand of the master, the efficient cause of a Rembrandt. Even if a forger perfectly replicates the style of Rembrandt, a challenging but not impossible feat, the forgery will still lose all market-value should it be discovered under the microscope that anachronistic synthetic pigments have been used, because it lacks the material cause of a Rembrandt. Of those paintings that are autograph originals by Rembrandt, their market-value will vary considerably according to quality. The most valuable masterpiece is the one that most faithfully imitates nature in the style of the master, the formal cause of a Rembrandt, and is therefore his most beautiful masterpiece, the final cause of a Rembrandt. Being by the hand of Rembrandt, of materials that Rembrandt used, in the form of Rembrandt's style, and undeniably beautiful, the works of Rembrandt have a nature which can be known and is determined by Aristotle's four causes.

Duchamp's upside-down urinal was designed to expose the premise of essentialism implicit in the work of art and to dispel that premise, merely by bringing it to consciousness. Leaving it to philosophers to make a cogent argument against immaterial essences, Duchamp made the case rhetorically in an *argumentum ad lapidem*, by simply ridiculing Aristotelianism as superstitious nonsense, and it worked. Since the 1960's, the art world has been given over to postmodern cynicism. As Andy Warhol announced in 1963, "Art is dead," and an exhibition has been made of its lifeless remains, of which abstraction is the skeleton and conceptualism the putrefied flesh. This grizzly display has been used to collapse objective reality into a flat plane on which to paint a subjective reality. By exhibiting a banana taped to a wall or marketing a painting by Matisse for millions of dollars, the art world asks rhetorically, why does anything have value but because one values it? Does value not come from an evaluator? The human will has become the measure of reality, in the mistaken conviction that there is no deeper reality beneath the surface of things, or at least none that can be known. "It's surfaces all the way down," to quote Stanley Fish. Beauty is not truth, and truth is not beauty, because the transcendent meaning which John Keats purported to find in a Grecian Urn independent of any transcendent God was a delusion. As Friedrich Nietzsche predicted, the failure of Romanticism has left postmodern man in despair not only of ultimate meaning but of sense and reason. He has lost his wits. The postmodern condition is nothing so hifalutin as skepticism of meta-narrative but what used to be called insanity.

Whatever madness may do for professors, it doesn't do much for artists. As Leon Battista Alberti remarks in his treatise *On Painting*, a painter must clearly understand what he is attempting to do, because he draws the bow in vain who has nowhere to point the arrow.¹⁶ The purpose of the atelier movement has been to restore the understanding of

¹⁵ This is known as the institutional definition of art, as proposed by George Dickie in 1974.

¹⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer (New Haven, 1966), section 1.51, p. 58.

painting that has been lost. Hundreds of professional artists have now been trained to a very high standard of competence, comparable to and in many cases exceeding my own, though there is something other than skill that sets my work apart. The paintings in this exhibition are not typical of contemporary academic art, either stylistically or in terms of subject-matter. My paintings are idealized with close attention to historically precedented styles, and they also depict canonical subjects drawn from classical mythology and Christian iconography. To my knowledge, no one else is doing this, even though this is what academic painting used to be all about. Most of the work coming out of the ateliers is not of a kind which Giorgio Vasari would have recognized as belonging to the academic tradition which he founded. One reason for this is ignorance of good, academic theory, and another is the effect of bad theory. Contemporary painting degenerates by default either into photographic transcriptive naturalism or Romantic self-expression under the persistent sway of the same old revolutionary ideas which overtook the French art world in the 19th century.

An enduring effect of the Enlightenment and Romanticism has been to corrupt the popular understanding of art. From the perspective of Enlightenment rationalism, what matters most is a rationalistic concept of form, consisting of whatever can be measured and precisely transcribed from direct observation, as illustrated perhaps by the works of Jean-Léon Gérôme. The question of art's purpose scarcely enters into the rationalistic transcription of appearances, as a disinterested scientific enterprise. From the perspective of Romanticism by contrast, having a purpose matters a great deal, quite irrespective of what purpose that happens to be. For the Romantic in the footsteps of Eugène Delacroix, what really matters is authenticity, a sincere expression of one's own interior life and subjective experience. In either case, the formal cause of the craft is separated from its final cause. The imitation of nature is divorced from beauty and enters into a custody-battle with it. Why should the imitation of nature be beautiful, asked Gustave Courbet, when nature is not always beautiful? Is ugliness not an equally meritorious goal, asked Francisco Goya? Of course, artists of the 19th century were so deeply shaped by the tradition that the effect of corrupting philosophies was merely to add a stylistic flare to their work. The rationalistic style of Jean-Léon Gérôme is still highly admirable, because it reflects the most profound understanding of the tradition, and the same concession must be made to Delacroix's Romantic self-expression. Today, the situation is entirely different, because there is no sense of the tradition at all. My work is the exception which proves the rule.

Ultimately, the great difficulty of restoring the art of painting is that classical art proceeds from and sets up a world which is not our own. It expresses a worldview which contemporary artists do not have, myself included at one point in time. When I arrived in Italy in 2006, I knew that there was something wrong with putting an upside-down urinal on display in a museum and calling it art, but I couldn't say what precisely. I had no idea of the philosophical premises of modern and postmodern art, much less did I realize to what extent I took the same erroneous beliefs for granted. All I knew was that I didn't care for the postmodern art world, and I was on the lookout for an alternative. Upon encountering Renaissance Italy, I found a world more to my liking, and so I decided to try it on for size. My education instilled a natural desire to do what artists of the Italian Renaissance had done, being the most natural use of the skills I had acquired. Finding Enlightenment rationalism absurd and Romantic individualism paralyzing, I looked to the tradition from which my skills derived to give me an ideal at which to aim. I wanted to paint the Holy Family and the Pietà, because Correggio had painted them. I wanted to paint Bacchus and Ariadne and Venus and Adonis, because Titian had done so before me. Nothing I might have contrived could rise to a higher standard of spiritual or historical seriousness than canonical subject-matter, and so I confined myself to the canon. It was all perfectly logical. The fact that I was not a medieval Catholic or a Renaissance humanist did not deter me, because I did not intend to impose my amorphous individuality on the tradition but to find my identity as an artist by embodying the tradition. I was not interested in expressing my own point of view but sought rather to understand how Renaissance artists saw reality, because I found their vision compelling.

It was by turning to the primary sources such as Alberti's treatise *On Painting* and Joshua Reynolds' *Discourses* that I discovered the deceptively simple objective of painting, to show what things really are, and I also had to read some philosophy to figure out what this has to do with beauty, which turned out to be perfectly intuitive. The identification of beauty with truth is actually implicit in the way that we speak of it. When do we call a thing beautiful but when it shows itself for what it really is, as when a flower blossoms? When is a woman most beautiful but when she becomes

a woman? When is the sun most beautiful but when it rises? When is a local color most beautiful but when it is clear and bright? Beauty is the name of truth's appearance. Beauty is what truth looks like. To express this idea, I follow the advice of Sir Joshua Reynolds by using simple, bold local colors after the grand manner of the Florentine and Roman school of Renaissance painting, as opposed to the more complex local colors and subtle textures of the Venetian school, while my portraits and landscapes focus on the simplest, most paradigmatic examples of beauty, be it a sunrise or a young woman with a rose in her hair.¹⁷ Although the rationalistic imitation of appearances is often at odds with beauty, the imitation of nature never is, because beauty reveals the true nature of things. Beauty is the revelation of what things really are.

Beauty is an *unveiling*, which does explain the paramount significance of the unveiling of the human body in classical art. The importance of the nude to the academic tradition cannot be overstated, considering that the overwhelming majority of an academic artist's education would be spent learning how to draw the human figure. The classical nude answers Plato's critique of mimesis insofar as the unveiling of the human body unveils something more than the body, the invisible and immaterial human soul, which revelation forestalls the appetitive inclination to objectify the body. The classical nude has always been suspected of moral turpitude, but in fact it is surprisingly contemplative. Rather than excite the appetites, the classical nude mortifies them, as Arthur Schopenhauer observed, because its beauty is a purely intellectual pleasure. As a representation of the essential goodness of human nature as it was originally created, the classical nude is unfallen, and it invites one to experience the same prelapsarian innocence vicariously. To make this point as clearly as possible, I make use of the nude only in the context of mythological and allegorical subject-matter, which demands a heightened idealization of the figure, setting it at a sufficient remove from everyday experience.

All of my stylistic choices are motivated by historical precedent as opposed to subjective taste, because academic conventions and hierarchies provide the most reliable means of arriving at the objective properties of beauty. Contrary to the teaching of the Enlightenment, which reduced beauty to a matter of subjective aesthetic pleasure, the beauty of a painting obviously depends upon objective properties. A beautiful sight is often described using words like captivating or enthralling, both metaphors of bondage, because beauty is an experience of subjection to a power outside oneself. To see a beautiful painting is to become subject to it. The object acts upon you, and it changes you. The object takes hold and conforms the soul to itself. Beauty is the action of an object disclosing itself to a subject, the action of one being revealing itself to another being, and therefore a revelation of the transcendental properties of being, of *unity, goodness, and truth*. A painter captures these three properties using three tools, of drawing, composition, and color as defined by Alberti.¹⁸ Even though there are no lines in nature, a painter expresses the unity of things by circumscribing each figure with contour lines to show its discrete, corporeal integrity. A painter then uses the rules of composition to unify a painting's diverse parts, weaving the lines seamlessly together, harmonizing the local colors, unifying the shadows, and massing similar tones. A painter expresses the property of goodness by hitting the mark. Good drawing accurately represents the proportions of things, and a good composition has a proportionality within itself. Each part fits in relation to the whole in lively symmetry. Some parts come forward and others recede, creating a hierarchy of emphasis. Lastly, a painter expresses the truth of things by capturing their characteristic form in a convincing likeness, and he thereby expresses the truth of art, crowning a painting with a resplendence analogous to the gilded background of a Byzantine icon but consisting instead of an overall clarity of form which makes a painting cohere at a glance. Hence, the objective properties of beauty as derived by St. Thomas Aquinas from the properties of being are *integrity, proportion, and clarity*.

Straightforward as these properties are to describe, they are not so easy to achieve. It is difficult to make a beautiful painting, because it is difficult to show what things really are. Modern philosophers had reasons to be skeptical of metaphysical realism, for as Aquinas once said, the efforts of human thought cannot so much as plumb the essence of a single gnat.¹⁹ What art reveals of the essence of things has the character of an analogy. Art is merely a

¹⁷ Reynolds, p. 61.

¹⁸ Alberti, sec. 2.21-22, p. 67.

¹⁹ See the Preface to Josef Pieper's *The Human Wisdom of St. Thomas: A Breviary of Philosophy from the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Drostan MacLaren (Pickle Partners Publishing, 2019).

likeness of the thing in itself, but when the likeness is good, it amounts to a veritable miracle. Good art opens the eyes of the blind. Everyone needs art, because everyone forgets how to see. Reality really does disappear behind a veil of appearances. The world is so obscured by familiarity and thoughtless instrumentality that in time one ceases to see anything at all except what one already knows. Who needs eyes when one has knowledge? Who needs taste when reality has been predigested? Who needs ears to hear oneself speak? Fine art awakens dormant senses. By representing reality on canvas or panel, a painting calls attention to all that one has learned to ignore. A painter studies what others take for granted. He looks, and then he looks again, not simply imposing his preconceptions upon nature but allowing nature to be a model of itself and abstracting out an intelligible form from it. Some paintings are better than others, because they do a better job of showing what things really are. The work of art is most beautiful when it shows what art really is, as an imitation of nature. Seneca the Elder said it best: “All art is an imitation of nature.”²⁰

For one hundred years, this simple truth has been obfuscated by powerful institutions, moneyed interests, and intellectual fraud, yet all the propaganda in the world has not silenced and cannot silence the testimony of fine art, whose beauty still attests to an objective reality which can be known and to which we must conform ourselves, because refusing to do so can only end in folly and human misery. Even today, the most beautiful art continues to show us exactly what real art looks like. To make real art again, an artist does not have to be an ancient Athenian, a medieval Catholic, or a Renaissance humanist or even a classical academician, but one does one have to be a realist, because anyone who denies that there is a target cannot possibly hit the target. It is clear what artists need to do, though hardly anyone is doing it considering the price to be paid for it. One must go into exile, because real art has no home in the contemporary art world. Rightly considered, this homelessness is no cause for misery but a calling to artists to set up another world. To rebuild the world that we have lost, artists have only to do what artists have always done. I just paint what artists used to paint. I think the way that artists used to think. I inhabit the very same world which Renaissance artists inhabited, and so it is only natural for me to paint like them. I have nothing more to give than what I have received. My pictorial inventions reflect my personal rediscovery of a reality which has never really left us, truths which have not changed because they cannot change. Art is not just a name. Art has a nature, which can be known.²¹ Taking leave of Duchamp’s upside-down urinal and returning to the twofold origin of nature and tradition, I go to the true source and fountain with confidence that art will rise again from the waters.

²⁰ “*Omnis ars naturae imitatio est.*” Seneca, *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, Epistle 65, 3.

²¹ “Art – that is just a word to which nothing real any longer corresponds. It may serve as a collective notion under which we bring what alone of art is real: works and artists. Even if the word art is to signify more than a collective notion, what is meant by the word could only be based on the reality of works and artists. Or are matters the other way round? Do work and artist exist only insofar as art exists, exists, indeed, as their origin?” Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-2.

HISTORY PAINTINGS

Like nature, great art is distinguished by its formal immediacy. A Ph.D. may be required to figure out what's so wonderful about Pablo Picasso, but anyone can see the greatness of Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. It is the excellence of great art which motivates one to take the trouble to understand it, just as the beauty of nature provoked the discovery philosophy in a moment of wonder at the mystery of being. If a painting should fail to move and delight, it will also fail to instruct, because a halo of verbiage will not compensate for what a painting lacks in excellence. Assuming that I have not failed entirely, I offer an interpretation of my paintings.

At the core of the exhibition is a collection of history paintings, including nine of religious subjects and five of mythological subjects. Each of the mythological paintings focuses on a female protagonist, modeled after Titian's seminal mythological series painted during the 1550's and 60's known as the *poesie*, which by sheer coincidence were just brought together for the first time in several hundred years in a groundbreaking exhibition at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. For those fortunate to have seen that exhibit, which also visited the National Gallery in London and the Prado, it will provide the perfect contextualization for my own.

Context is always key, because a painting does not interpret itself. A painting has to be read, and like any text it is liable to be misunderstood by those too far removed from the author's point of view. I was disappointed, if not entirely surprised, to find that Titian's paintings at the Gardner met with widespread incomprehension for this very reason. The critical response included a lot of handwringing and moralizing over Titian's subject-matter, and even the subtitle of the show, "Women, Myth, and Power," implied a postmodern analysis of the paintings, which were dutifully filtered by the commentariat through the narrative of intersectionality. It is needless to say that Titian had no such narrative frame in mind.

Of course, it is not obligatory when interpreting a work of art to defer to the author's intention. A text can always be interpreted in many different ways, and if it can be improved upon by recontextualizing it, the best interpretation may not be what the author intended at all. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what Renaissance artists did with ancient mythology. The depiction of Greco-Roman myths by Titian and other artists of his generation would have been unthinkable absent a creative misreading of them, because Renaissance artists were not ancient pagans. In antiquity, myths were the propaganda of a pagan religion, but in the Italian Renaissance they were aestheticized and allegorized, the better to suit the purposes and sensibilities of the time.

Renaissance paintings naturally represent a medieval view of reality, because they were painted by medieval people. Wandering around Florence and spending most of my spare time in the museums and churches, it was obvious to me despite having no deep familiarity with Catholicism at the time that Renaissance art was a tradition of Catholic art. The first generation of Renaissance art was invented to adorn the walls of Franciscan and Dominican churches as I discovered firsthand touring Santa Croce and Santa Maria Novella in Florence, and even as I delved into the works of Petrarch, the founder of Renaissance humanism, and read Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, I could not discover a trace of the 19th century's secular humanism which historians since Jacob Burckhardt have projected onto the Italian Renaissance. It was not long before I came to the conclusion that unorthodox currents of Renaissance thought which

were promoted by Marsilio Ficino and especially by Pico della Mirandola exerted only a negligible influence over artists in comparison to Dominican and Franciscan theology, which consisted of a grand philosophical synthesis of the best that had been thought and said by both pagan and Christian authors and had been achieved already by the late 13th century, at the very moment that Giotto began to revive classical mimesis. The Renaissance was a Catholic appropriation of classical culture, which began when St. Thomas Aquinas figuratively baptized Aristotle. It is not incidental that Giorgio Vasari described the revival of classical art as a rebirth, using the imagery of the sacrament of baptism, and he was not the first to do so. The self-explanatory intention of the very first Renaissance painting of the female nude, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, was to baptize classical art by depicting a classical nude being born from the water. The appropriation of the classical nude and of pagan mythology entailed an invisible metamorphosis. As a metaphorical baptism, the Renaissance justified and sanctified the artifacts of pagan culture by effecting a transformation of their meaning.

Make no mistake, the worldview of pre-Socratic pagan religions originally expressed by naked statues and pagan myths was very much contrary to Christianity. Pagan religions were polytheistic, and the gods which they worshipped were not transcendent. Divinity was not believed to be from above but from below, and the ground of being was not believed to be eternal and unchanging but a mutable, fluid, watery abyss of nothingness from which the gods themselves were born. How exactly something is supposed to come from nothing is a question, which Parmenides was the first to pose.²² Prior to the discovery of logic and ontology by classical philosophers, the prevailing polytheistic worldview was fundamentally irrational. Whereas the foundation of Aristotle's logic is an absolute distinction between being and non-being, between what is and what is not, the implicit foundation of polytheistic logic was the *identity* of being and non-being.²³ If the ground of existence were nothing in itself, then there would be no law of non-contradiction. If there were no supreme being and no supreme good, there could be no immutable facts and no absolute values. Human existence would be defined by moral contradiction. Hence, the protagonists of Greek literature from Agamemnon to Medea are shockingly amoral, pulled to and fro' by fateful commitments in irreconcilable conflict with one another, which is why Socrates didn't think very highly of the Homeric epics, and he thought even less of the tragedies of his own day. From Cronus devouring his own children to Zeus's sexual escapades, the gods as depicted in Greek mythology are rapacious fiends, motivated only by their lust for pleasure and power. On the terms of polytheism, the inescapable meaning of life is to wield power. Pagans revered their kings as gods, because lording power over others was their definition of godliness. Classical thinkers witnessed the deplorable implications of this ethos in practice. The central theme of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War is the human misery caused by the Athenians' relativistic worldview, which motivated them to lord their power over their neighbors with impunity. It was Socrates' hope that a reformation of Athenian society could be accomplished by means of philosophical education, and it was for this purpose that Plato founded his Academy, though arguably to no avail. Classical philosophy failed to change the character of pagan society, which did not shed its idolatry or build a world in conformity with natural revelation. Notwithstanding Petrarch's idealized representation of the noble pagan Scipio Africanus or Christ's own expression of astonishment at the faith of the centurion mentioned in the Gospel, neither ancient Greece nor ancient Rome ever exemplified the ideals of its own philosophy.²⁴

It was the Catholic Church which accomplished what philosophy alone could not, an achievement which is commemorated by two of Raphael's greatest masterpieces, located in the Stanza della Segnatura in the Vatican. The two paintings now known by the spurious names of "The School of Athens" and "The Disputation" are in fact a depiction of the fulfillment of philosophy by theology, the perfection of reason by faith, and the completion of natural revelation by divine revelation, in recognition of the fact that it was the Catholic Church which set up a world in

²² Parmenides was the pre-Socratic philosopher who invented ontology, the study of being properly conceived as eternal and unchanging, and famously claimed that the first principle of philosophy is that nothing comes from nothing, *ex nihilo nihil fit*.

²³ This is the explicit foundation of Hegel's *Science of Logic*, derived from the pre-Socratic philosophy of Heraclitus, to say nothing of Descartes. If being and nothingness were identical in themselves but opposed in thought, as Hegel claimed, then being would come into being as distinct from non-being only through the thought of a thinking subject. In the immortal words of René Descartes, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." The thesis of idealism is that being and thought are one, meaning that the world is a projection of the human mind.

²⁴ Petrarch wrote an epic poem entitled *Africa* on the defeat of the Carthaginians by the Roman general Scipio Africanus, whom Petrarch portrays as the very incarnation of the cardinal virtues.

which the principles of Aristotelian logic actually hold and which was governed in the best of times by philosopher kings, saintly popes and saintly monarchs who established justice in the temporal order and the mercy of God in the spiritual order. The healing balm which philosophical reason could not administer was Christian charity. To be, from the point of view of a medieval Catholic, was not to wield power but to love and be loved by God. There was nothing sentimental about this belief, as medieval Catholics also believed that the wages of failing to be charitable toward God and neighbor is an eternal privation of being, known as damnation. Wealthy patrons like the Medici supported great art and architecture not only for their own self-aggrandizement but to exercise the Christian virtues of magnificence and charity, because the salvation of their souls depended upon it. The wealthy had a grave obligation to use their wealth for the common good by building great churches and monasteries and hospitals and filling them with great art. The construction of a civic environment conducive to virtue was moreover the highest priority of Petrarchan humanism, and upon the final return of the papacy to Rome from its so-called Babylonian captivity in Avignon, the Church itself undertook to fulfill Petrarch's dream of a new Rome, equal to the splendor of antiquity. Under Pope Sixtus IV, the city began to be rebuilt to the glory of God and for the temporal happiness of the city. Popes began collecting classical art, and in 1506 Julius II opened the very first museum of art so that the public could enjoy that collection. At the same time, princes of the Church commissioned living artists to make paintings and sculptures of classical subject-matter. There was nothing scandalous about this, as artists and their patrons had only to map Christianity and classical metaphysics onto pagan myths to transform the vulgar stories of pagan gods into beautiful Christian allegories. A host of possibilities for new meaning presented itself. Apropos of the classical artist's need to answer the charge of soullessness, the female figure in particular became an allegorical representation of the human soul, *anima* being feminine in Latin. It is this convention which undoubtedly guided the design of Titian's later mythological paintings. Titian's *poesie* focus on the female nude, because they were presumably meant to tell an allegorical story about the life of the soul. The same tradition guided the design of my own mythological paintings.

In antiquity, the nude was originally reserved for gods and heroes, because the human body in its ideal form is truly described as godlike. For the purposes of the Italian Renaissance, it made for a fitting representation of human nature in its original glory unstained by original sin. The classical nude with its overtones of pagan immorality became in the hands of Renaissance artists a representation of prelapsarian innocence, to which state they believed the body would be restored at the general resurrection, an intention which is made quite explicit in Michelangelo's monumental painting of *The Last Judgment*, populated by some three hundred classical nudes being raised on the last day. The gratuitous proliferation of nude bodies in Catholic art during the Renaissance did meet with a certain amount of resistance and was tempered by the judicious censorship of the Council of Trent, but once the initial anxieties of the Counter-Reformation had eased, all suspicion of Renaissance art was set aside and the art of the Baroque was born in the service of the Counter-Reformation. The most Catholic art paradoxically became the most sensuous, such as the art of Peter Paul Rubens and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who celebrated the beauty of the flesh without reserve in recognition of the *imago Dei* stamped on it and of the Word made flesh. Moreover, the nude was used to express not only the dignity but also the humility of man, as it is from our nakedness that we discover that we are not gods, that we like other animals are in fact male and female, that we come into the world with nothing and go out of the world with nothing, that we come from an origin beyond ourselves and go to an end we would not choose, namely death, that we have a nature delimited by the body and determined by the soul, which can be thwarted but not altered.

Artists also used the classical nude and ancient mythology to comment on the historical moment, and my paintings have a similar intention. Titian's *poesie* address the historical context of the 16th century in fascinating ways, most notably perhaps the crown-jewel of the Gardner's collection, *The Rape of Europa*, which has the distinction of being the most significant Venetian masterpiece on display in the United States. This painting of Titian's represents not only a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* but inevitably alludes to John's Apocalypse as well, because the infamous whore of Babylon is in fact portrayed by St. John in the guise of Europa, riding on a beast. The central event prophesied in the Apocalypse is the great apostasy, a falling away en masse from the faith of formerly Catholic countries. Europe having been destined to become the heart of Christendom, St. John represents the spiritual adultery of the apostate church in the form of a prostituted Europa. The falling away of Catholic countries into Protestantism was widely regarded by Catholics in the 16th century as the beginning of the great apostasy, as Pope Paul IV himself speculated, while

Right: *The Rape of Europa* by Titian, 1562



Protestants for their part accused the pope of being the Antichrist and the Roman Church of being the whore of Babylon. Nearing the death of Paul IV in 1559, there was even fear among Catholics that this slander might come true, should a crypto-Protestant be elected to the papacy and institute the abomination of desolation by installing a Luther-table in the sanctuary of every Catholic church. To allay such fear, the ailing Pope Paul IV wrote the papal bull *Cum ex apostolatus officio*, declaring that no heretic even if otherwise lawfully elected can assume the office of the papacy or command the submission of the faithful. Considering that Titian painted *The Rape of Europa* between 1559-62, he could hardly have failed to address the apocalyptic anxiety of the times. Titian's Europa sports two colorful draperies of red and gold, not entirely unlike the whore of Babylon who wears purple and scarlet. Just as Europa's abduction is involuntary, most Catholics who suddenly found themselves in Protestant countries had no desire to separate themselves from the Church, but neither did they have the will to go into exile or suffer persecution for the faith. Hence, Titian's Europa holds onto her abductor, grasping the horn of the bull for fear of drowning. This is a particularly fitting image of the tragic fate of English Catholics, who in 1558 had suddenly found themselves once again oppressed by a Protestant government upon the death of Mary Tudor, the wife of Philip II, who commissioned the *poesie*.

Even if Titian had given no thought to such matters, which is almost inconceivable, it wouldn't matter in the least, because what determines the meaning of a painting is not the author's unknowable, idiosyncratic intention but the context which can be known and brought to bear. Very often a painter plays with iconography without any particular intention but in such a way as to allow it to generate meaning of itself. One finds the same in Dante's poetry, as everything Dante says has fourteen different sides to it. He couldn't possibly have intended every implication of his words, but he didn't need to, because the power of a deep tradition is that it generates profundity all by itself. The painter is an avatar of his tradition. He makes art that transcends his own hand as well as his intentions, because he

does not speak a private language but a language shared in common with others across time and space. Through him, the whole tradition speaks. I trust that the tradition speaks through my works as well.

In the descriptions that follow, I recount the stories that my paintings depict, reflect on their allegorical significance, and explain how my interpretation of each story informed the design of my paintings. I also present a source-analysis of my paintings, which is essential to understanding any work of art. Originality is always derivative, because no artist creates in a vacuum without reference to other works of art. To quote the art historian Norman Bryson, the meaning of a painting is always another painting.²⁵ In good Socratic style, academic art is a dialogue, in which one artist speaks, and another responds. Each work of art is designed like a work of rhetoric to make an argument by appeal to reason, authority, and emotion. Hence, academic artists have always eschewed capricious originality, preferring to cite authoritative works of art in an appeal to historical precedent. Whereas the Romantic's inventions appeal only to emotion and the Enlightenment rationalist's inventions appeal only to reason, the true academician appeals to all three. The academician recognizes the authority not only of nature but also of the Old Masters, and he emulates them, not only to give them honor but also to enter into lively competition with them. Only by appropriating the tradition in this way can an artist hope to stand atop it.

Lastly, the descriptions also include some information about technique. My methods are very traditional, though I do not confine myself to an historical palette or eschew modern materials when they have superior qualities. Most of my history paintings, for example, are painted on canvas mounted on aluminum panels. Even though this is a material that the Old Masters did not use, mounting my canvases on a metal substrate has the advantage of making my paintings much more impervious to the ravages of time. Structural problems like cracking which inevitably plague paintings on stretched canvas are all but eliminated by using a rigid substrate. To take another example, my palette consists primarily of traditional pigments such as lead white, natural umbers, siennas, and ochres, as well rarer pigments like Naples yellow, genuine vermilion, and rose madder, but I will avail myself of modern synthetic pigments to extend the traditional palette, including titanium white and cadmium red as well as a range of blues and greens. I also use modern mediums such as stand oil, which is superior to the traditional sun-thickened oils that the Old Masters used.

²⁵ Norman Bryson, *Tradition & Desire* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. xix.

Figure 1



1. *Apollo and Daphne*

Oil on canvas mounted on honeycomb aluminum panel

30" x 60"

The story of Apollo and Daphne is recounted by Ovid in Book One of the *Metamorphoses*. Of all the gods in the Greco-Roman pantheon, Apollo was the Renaissance man par excellence skilled in music, poetry, and sport. Striking the golden mean between the image of Bacchus, always looking slightly drunk and effeminate, and the Farnese Hercules, so muscular as to make a caricature of masculinity, Apollo was depicted as the ideal man of perfect proportions, carrying either a lyre or a bow and quiver, being a lyric poet and the consummate archer. Espying Cupid with his bow and arrow, Apollo mocked the infant god of love, saying, "What are you doing with such mighty weapons, better suited to our shoulders, which have killed the great Python with countless arrows?" For this insult, Cupid prepared two arrows, one of gold with which he shot Apollo to make him fall in love with the water nymph Daphne and the other of lead to make Daphne rebuff his advances. As a servant of the goddess Diana, Daphne had already consecrated her virginity and had rebuffed many lovers, despite the wishes of her father, the river god Peneus, that she should marry and have children. Unwilling to take no for an answer, Apollo followed Daphne relentlessly, but Daphne was swift of foot and evaded Apollo's advances until Cupid intervened to help Apollo catch her. Seeing that she could not escape, Daphne called upon her father Peneus for help, either to open the earth or to change her into another form to free her from this danger. Peneus reluctantly complied: "Torpor seized on all her body, and a thin bark closed around her gentle bosom, and her hair became as moving leaves; her arms were changed to waving branches, and her active feet as clinging roots were fastened to the ground—her face was hidden with encircling leaves." She had turned into a laurel tree. Notwithstanding the frustration of his desire, Apollo vowed to honor Daphne forever by rendering the laurel tree evergreen, saying that "as my youthful head is never shorn, so, also, shalt thou ever bear thy leaves unchanging to thy glory." Apollo also made wreaths of her leaves to wear as a crown: "Although thou canst not be my bride, thou shalt be called my chosen tree, and thy green leaves, O Laurel! shall forever crown my brows, be wreathed around my quiver and my lyre."²⁶

The story of Apollo and Daphne first appeared in Renaissance art as early as the 1470's in a painting which is now in the National Gallery in London by Piero del Pollaiuolo, who was among the very first Renaissance painters to attempt subjects from classical mythology. The story found its definitive expression in the art of the Baroque, in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's incomparable sculpture from the early 1620's, housed in the Villa Borghese in Rome. My own interpretation of the story draws inspiration from these precursors as well as from the frescoes and mosaics of Apollo and Daphne which survive from antiquity. The billowing draperies in particular are derived from an ancient Roman fresco from Pompeii.

Bernini's influence is most evident in the figure of Daphne, which I designed using Bernini's statue as my model. The correlation is admittedly loose but close enough to bring the sculpture to mind. The figure of Apollo has a more interesting derivation. I decided to have Apollo kneel rather than running and grasping at Daphne as he does in most depictions of the subject in order to express Apollo's veneration of Daphne which Ovid describes at the end of the story. I struggled at first to find a suitable posture for Apollo's arms, but in the course of testing out different possibilities I noticed a striking correlation with the pose of Michelangelo's Christ in *The Last Judgment*. This correlation was especially fortuitous, because this particular depiction of Christ uses Apollonian iconography. The Second Coming of Christ is represented in Scripture as a sunrise, and so it made sense for Michelangelo to represent Christ in the trappings of Apollo as the Greco-Roman sun god.

Having found my pose for Apollo, I stumbled upon a happy coincidence. A common element in the iconography of river gods like Daphne's father, Peneus, is a cornucopia, a horn filled with the fruits of agriculture. By happenstance, I had designed the figures of Apollo and Daphne to intertwine in such a way as to resemble a cornucopia. Despite the frustration of Apollo's desire, this symbol of fruitfulness is entirely fitting. Apollo is not left bereft at the end of the story but enters into a chaste union with Daphne, as she becomes his crown and glory. I place

²⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Brookes More (Boston: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922), 1.452-566. The first quotation is paraphrased.

the head of Daphne directly above the head of Apollo to suggest this transformation of Daphne into Apollo's crown of laurels. Daphne's metamorphosis tames Apollo's animalistic passions and transforms his love into a purely contemplative recognition of her goodness. Apollo and Daphne are united not in the flesh but by a gaze, which does not objectify her but uplifts her into her essential nature. Her metamorphosis is not the destruction of her nature but the fulfillment of her femininity in a superabundant fecundity of evergreen foliage, which is why I render the foliage in brighter colors and sharper detail in the upper left, to represent the copious fruits pouring from the top of the cornucopia, and why I depict her in an attitude not of distress but of serenity. Apollo's love is her honor, and she is Apollo's glory. His love is the recognition of her excellence, and she is the manifestation of his excellence, because it is he who makes her evergreen.

To interpret the story of Apollo and Daphne Christologically, this observation recalls a verse from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he remarks that man is the glory of God and the glory of man is woman. At the level of nature, this is a puzzling statement, yet the Apostle is not just speaking naturalistically but of Christ as the Man and the human soul as the woman. In the Song of Songs, one reads of the love-affair between God and the human soul, of which romantic love is a dim reflection written into the order of nature. Not knowing God, the soul suspects Him of rapacity, of being a Zeus-like character, a patriarchal tyrant with an objectifying gaze, whose insatiable passion for justice like Zeus's insatiable lust impels Him to judge and to condemn the soul for her sins, but this is a pagan caricature. The Christian God does not subdue the soul by violence but chases the soul relentlessly to save her from defeating her reason for being. It is the nature of the soul to bear the spiritual fruits of virtue, as it is the nature of a woman to be fruitful by bearing children, which nature Daphne thwarts by consecrating herself to Diana. Daphne runs away from Apollo, and by implication away from the rising sun, because she does not want to be exposed to the light. The wood of Diana is a dark place, where the soul can hide its shame and nakedness from the light of justice, but like Adam and Eve in the Garden she cannot hide from God. The sun of justice will arise, as the prophet Malachias writes. Finding no escape, the soul finally implores God the Father either to swallow her up in the bowels of the earth or to change her into a form which will not be burned by the light. Daphne's metamorphosis is symbolic of the regeneration of the soul, re-created through the waters of baptism, and her evergreen leaves are symbolic of the fruits of the Holy Spirit which will never wither but crown the soul with everlasting honor.

Like Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, my depiction of the story of Apollo and Daphne is an image of rebirth, a Renaissance painting par excellence, which is why I have chosen to make this image my largest canvas and the centerpiece of the exhibition. The painting is also set apart by a unique frame in the Art Nouveau style, courtesy of Bryan Smith Frames, as opposed to the Renaissance style frames which I use for most of my history paintings. As a style which was popular from about 1890-1910, Art Nouveau brings one back to the final decades in the life of the craft-tradition just before the imitation of nature and beauty were decisively eclipsed by abstraction and conceptualism, my intention being to pick up where the tradition left off without interruption. The painting is not merely a window onto a now distant past but painted on the scale of a doorway, the better to serve as a portal through which the tradition may re-enter the contemporary world.

To talk a little bit about matters of technique, a history painting such as this requires a great deal of preparatory work before one ever puts paint to canvas. There are hundreds of decisions that have to be made about the composition and the drawing, and most of them need to be settled before one begins to paint. One begins with thumbnail sketches to test out different poses and placements. With a basic concept in hand, the next step if one has the luxury of working from life is to do detailed studies of all of the figures and draperies and other assorted elements. Since I work mostly from imagination, using principles of constructive anatomy to create my figures, I usually skip this step and dive right into the cartoon. Derived from the Italian *cartone*, meaning a large sheet of paper, cartoon is a word which academic painters use to denote a line drawing done to scale for the purpose of transferring to the canvas. The cartoon for *Apollo and Daphne* took me about two months to finish, upon which I transferred the design by rubbing charcoal on the back and tracing the lines. The use of a cartoon originated in fresco painting, as an art form in which everything has to be figured out in advance, since fresco does not permit of correction. Oil painting is more flexible, and so oil painters always end up making further corrections even with the use of a cartoon, and there are as a matter of fact several so-called *pentimenti* which are visible on *Apollo and Daphne* if one looks closely.



Above Left: Detail of Christ from *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo, 1541

Above Right: *Apollo and Daphne* by Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1625



Left: Ancient Roman fresco of Apollo and Daphne recovered from the ruins of Pompeii



Figure 2

2. *Venus and Adonis*

Oil on canvas

27" x 38"

Venus and Adonis was the first history painting that I attempted, on and off between 2013 and 2015. As the subject of the first work published by William Shakespeare in 1593, it seemed a fitting way to begin my own body of work. Shakespeare's narrative poem elaborates on Ovid's much shorter account in Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses* and departs from that story in ways which were motivated by prints of paintings by Titian and especially by the Flemish mannerists, to whom I looked for inspiration as well.

In Shakespeare's version, Adonis is a mortal man of such beauty as to make the goddess of love herself fall in love, and yet Venus finds him indifferent to her advances, because Adonis's only love is for the hunt. She tries to coax him down from his horse to speak to her, but Adonis has no patience for conversing with women. Undeterred, Venus drags him down by force, lies down beside him, gazes into his eyes, and talks of love. She tries to coax a kiss from him, but still he wishes to depart. Adonis manages to get away but only to find his stallion galloping away with a mare, preventing him from going hunting. Again Venus approaches, and again she speaks of love, and again Adonis spurns her, upon which Venus dramatically faints away as if to die of unrequited love. For fear that he has killed her, Adonis kneels and caresses her, upon which Venus promptly recovers and completes the conquest. Venus is eager to see him again the following day, but Adonis resists, insisting that he has plans to hunt the wild boar, upon which Venus has a vision of his impending death and warns him that if he does he will not come back alive, but to no avail. After a fruitless wrestling match and a lecture from Adonis on the difference between love and lust, Adonis leaves, and Venus weeps. The following morning Venus goes in search of Adonis. She hears his dogs crying in the distance and hurries in their direction, only to find the dogs injured and Adonis dead, killed by the wild boar. Devastated, the goddess of love ordains that henceforth love shall be mingled with suspicion, fear, and grief, "fickle, false, and full of fraud."²⁷ From the soil soaked in Adonis's blood a white and purple flower grows, white being the color both of a cadaver and of purity, purple being the color of blood and of mourning. Venus departs to confine herself on the isle of Cyprus.

In Ovid's version of the story, Venus is a reluctant participant in Adonis's hunts, constantly fretting about her clothes and her complexion and fearful of dangerous wild animals. Shakespeare's Venus is herself a wild animal. She is not at all self-conscious but ruled entirely by her passions, and she goes about naked, having no more fear of the elements or shame of her nakedness than Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the better to turn the story of Venus and Adonis into an allegory of lost innocence, the



Right: *Venus and Adonis* by Titian, ca. 1560

²⁷ William Shakespeare, *Venus and Adonis*, line 1141.

fateful discovery of self-consciousness, shame, and death. In Shakespeare's poem, Venus is clearly intended to represent the human soul and Adonis the body, *anima* and *corpus* being masculine and feminine in Latin. Their union represents the hylomorphic union, as an Aristotelian would say, of body and soul in one substance, united by the primary passion of the soul, which is love. Venus's vision of Adonis's imminent demise represents the opening of the eyes of the intellect. Upon attaining the age of reason, the soul projects itself into the past, causing shame, and into the future, causing worry. The soul discovers that it is not what it could and should be, that its nakedness and abandonment to bodily passions is a shameful condition and moreover that it will be separated from the body, for although the soul may be immortal the body is fated to die. Fearful of death, Venus implores Adonis not to go, but go he must, because death is the defining fact of the human condition. Confining herself in mourning, the soul resigns herself to death by embracing the mortification of the flesh, symbolized by a flower of purity and of mourning.

The moment that I have depicted is that of Venus's last desperate entreaties to stop Adonis from going on the hunt, which is the same moment depicted by Titian. In Ovid's version of the story, Venus simply warns Adonis of his impending death after a night of love-making, and then leaves. Some decades before Shakespeare, Titian was the first to turn the scene around by depicting Adonis rushing off to the hunt and Venus desperately trying to stop him. The arrangement of my painting was inspired by the Flemish mannerist Bartholomeus Spranger, while the soft, atmospheric style, brown harmony, and unified local colors were adapted from Anthony van Dyck.

Turning again to matters of technique, it is worth addressing the role of geometry. There is a debate among



contemporary academic painters about whether geometric grids, also known as compositional armatures, should be used to design a painting. Many artists are dismissive of this practice, while others insist that it is the secret to good design. I have found grids to be a useful tool in designing my own paintings, and I am also convinced that Renaissance painters made good use of them.

There are countless ways to subdivide a rectangle geometrically. Many are mathematically significant but not very useful for the purposes of design. What really counts in a painting are relations that can be seen with the naked eye, or at least sensed intuitively. In the most traditional grid used by Italian Renaissance painters, one begins with the simplest possible division of the rectangle in halves and along the diagonals. Further divisions build on this foundation by way of symmetry, parallelism, and perpendicularity. I tend to think in terms of two grids, one consisting of vertical and horizontal divisions, the other consisting of diagonals and orthogonals. Ideally, the canvas should have proportions which relate these two grids in a visually pleasing way, which only happens when based on a square root. The canvas for my painting of *Venus and Adonis* is based on the ratio of 1 to the square root of 2. This is a beautiful proportion, because the orthogonals coincide perfectly with the halves, so

Left: *Venus and Adonis* by Bartholomeus Spranger, 1597

that the two grids relate to each other in the simplest way possible, as can be seen in the diagram.

When it comes to designing the figures in relation to the grid, there must always be a hierarchy of emphasis. For example, the dominant lines in my painting of *Venus and Adonis* consist of the diagonal which runs through the figure of Venus and the orthogonal which passes along her shoulders and arm. The opposing diagonal and orthogonal are also stated but with less emphasis.

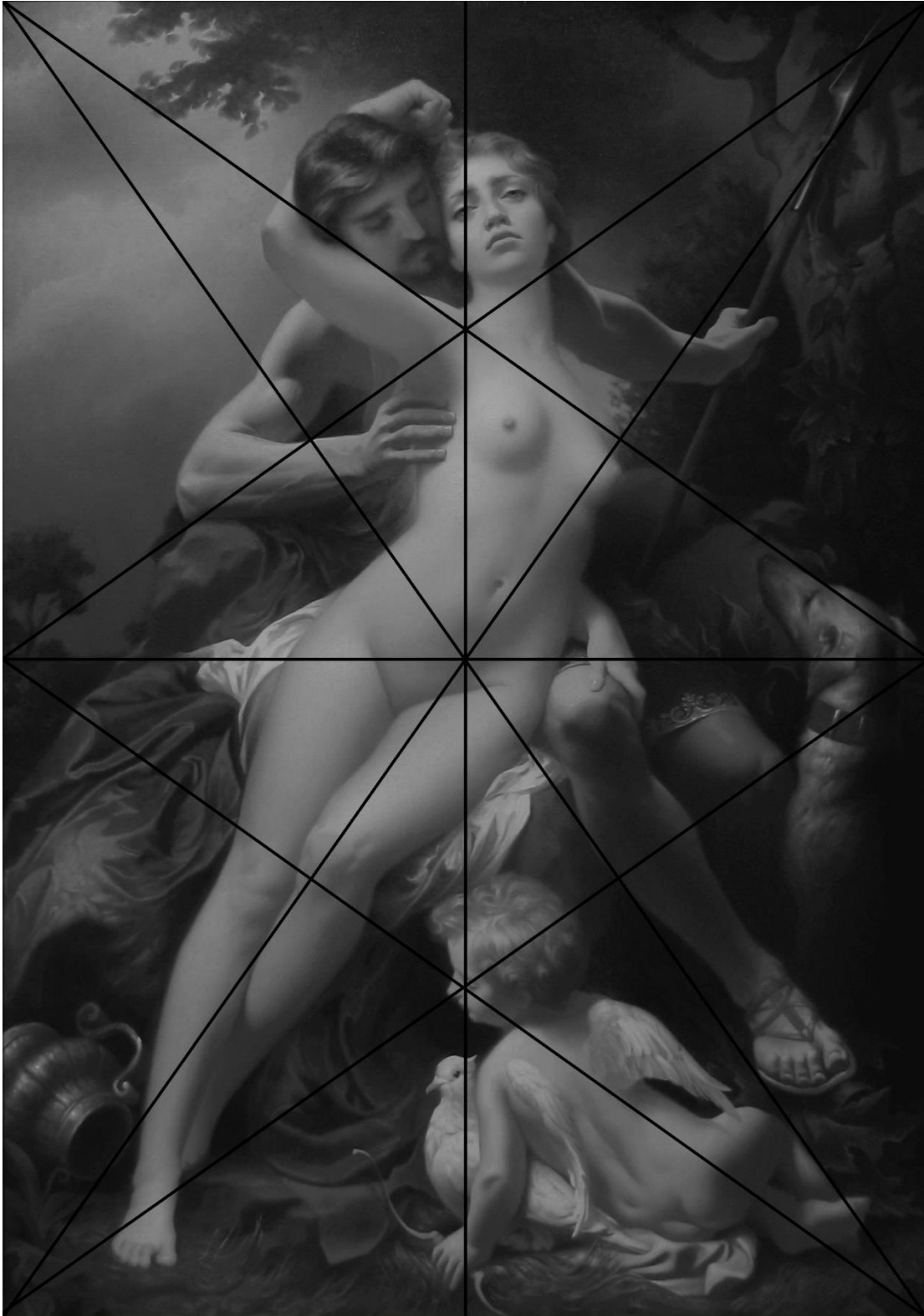




Figure 3

3. *Bacchus and Ariadne*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

45" x 34"

The story of Bacchus and Ariadne is found in Ovid's account of King Minos and the Minotaur, a monster born to his wife which was part man and part bull, from Book Eight of the *Metamorphoses*:

Now the infamous reproach of Crete had grown, till it exposed the double-natured shame. So, Minos, moved to cover his disgrace, resolved to hide the monster in a prison, and he built with intricate design, by Daedalus contrived, an architect of wonderful ability, and famous. This he planned of mazy wanderings that deceived the eyes, and labyrinthic passages involved. So sports the clear Maeander, in the fields of Phrygia winding doubtful; back and forth it meets itself, until the wandering stream fatigued, impedes its wearied waters' flow; from source to sea, from sea to source involved. So Daedalus contrived innumerable paths, and windings vague, so intricate that he, the architect, hardly could retrace his steps. In this the Minotaur was long concealed, and there devoured Athenian victims sent three seasons, nine years each, till Theseus, son of Aegeus, slew him and retraced his way, finding the path by Ariadne's thread. Without delay the victor fled from Crete, together with the loving maid, and sailed for the Isle of Naxos, where he left the maid forlorn, abandoned. Her, in time, lamenting and deserted, Bacchus found and for his love immortalized her name. He set in the dark heavens the bright crown that rested on her brows. Through the soft air it whirled, while all the sparkling jewels changed to flashing fires, assuming in the sky between the Serpent-holder and the Kneeler the well-known shape of Ariadne's Crown.²⁸

²⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 8.152-182.



Left: *Bacchus and Midas* by Nicolas Poussin, 1630

Below: *Mary Magdalene in a Grotto* by Jules Lefebvre, 1876

These few sentences have furnished artists since the Renaissance with ample material for pictorial invention, the seminal version being Titian's painting of 1523 in the National Gallery in London. The design of my version was based on a composition by Nicolas Poussin of a related subject, *Bacchus and Midas*, painted ca. 1630 and now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. I placed the standing figure of Bacchus and the seated figure of

Silenus in the same position with minor adjustments to their poses, and I transformed Poussin's reclining Bacchante in the foreground into the figure of Ariadne. My pose for Ariadne was further inspired by a Penitent Magdalene by the 19th-century academician Jules Lefebvre. Other quotations from William Bouguereau and Carlo Maratta are also scattered throughout. The billowing clouds and the Corona Borealis, Ariadne's Crown, recall Titian's version.

In my allegorical interpretation of the myth, the heroine once again represents the human soul, as she so often does. When is the soul forlorn but when her love is misplaced and the object of her love disappoints? As Petrarch reflects in his imagined dialogues with St. Augustine concerning Petrarch's inordinate attachment to the dearly departed Laura, the soul is tempted to seek its fulfillment in creatures rather than the Creator, in earthly goods instead of the supreme Good. Theseus represents the allurements of this world, which leave the soul bereft rather than fulfilled. Bacchus is a figure for Christ, who rescues the soul from her despair by presenting Himself as a more worthy lover. Bacchus being an effeminate figure, this Christological image does not look like the ideal man, quite the contrary, which is actually fitting, because Christ appears under the unprepossessing form of a creature. Just as Bacchus's masculinity is cloaked in a feminine bearing, Christ's divinity is cloaked by His humanity, and even His humanity appears only as bread and wine in the Eucharist. The wine and grapes of Bacchus are thus a figure for the Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. The wine is offered up to restore Ariadne from her spiritual malaise, because the life is in the blood. In my painting, Bacchus finds Ariadne lying on the ground as though dead, but under his gaze she begins to rise. She does not yet look at Bacchus but out at the viewer, because she does not know what is happening. She is only just beginning to come to, like a soul beginning to discover the truths of the faith and the grace of conversion. Hence, I depict her in the form of the Penitent Magdalene. By the gift of Bacchus as by the grace of God, Ariadne finds her place among the stars, as the penitent soul finds her place in the communion of saints. The nymphs and satyrs dance and play as the saints and angels in heaven rejoice over the penitent sinner, recalling the words of Christ: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."²⁹



²⁹ Luke 15:7 (Douay-Rheims).



Figure 4

Right: *Shepherd and Shepherdess* by François Boucher, 1760



4. *Arcady*
Oil on canvas mounted on
aluminum panel
27" x 33"

Arcady is modeled after pastoral paintings by the rococo painter François Boucher. Although he was hardly a scholar, Boucher's pastoral fantasies have an allegorical significance. Not merely a sentimental misrepresentation of agricultural life, pastoral paintings belong to the tradition of Arcadian poetry.

The Arcadian theme is a venerable tradition of Renaissance art and poetry, beginning with Jacopo Sannazaro's pastoral romance *Arcadia*, which he wrote in the 1480's and published in 1504. Disappointed in love, the protagonist Sincero retreats from the city of Naples in search of an idealized pastoral existence among the shepherds, inspired by the Idylls of Theocritus. Amidst his day-dreaming, a frightful vision prompts him to go back to the city, upon which he discovers that his beloved has died. Her death represents the loss of Arcadia. The tone of the poem is melancholic, replete with elegiac descriptions of the lost world of Arcadia. Arcadia is always represented in paradoxical conjunction with death, as it is in Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego*, which depicts the tragic discovery of death and consequent invention of the art of painting by Arcadian shepherds. Another influential work of Renaissance poetry on the theme of Arcadia was Sir Philip Sidney's *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, published in the 1580's. The main characters, as the title suggests, are all royal visitors of the countryside, a motif which would recur in rococo painting, especially in works by Jean-Antoine Watteau. The poetry most relevant to my own painting was *Arcadia, Prosas y Versos* by the Spanish playwright and poet Lope de Vega, published in 1598. I did my best to paint the following description:

Does not the pleasantness of this place carry in itself sufficient reward for any time lost in it? Do you not see how all things conspire together to make this country a heavenly dwelling? Do you not see the grass, how in color they exceed the emerald, every one striving to pass his fellow, and yet they are all kept of an equal height? And do you not see the rest of these beautiful flowers, each of which would require a man's wit to know and his life to express? Do not these stately trees seem to maintain their flourishing old age with the only happiness of their feat, being clothed in perpetual spring, because no beauty here should ever fade? Doth not the air breathe health, which the birds, delightful both to ear and eye, do daily solemnize with the sweet harmony of their voices? Is not every Echo thereof a perfect music? And these fresh and delightful brooks how slowly they glide away, as loath to leave the company of so many things united in perfection? And with a sweet murmur they lament their forced departure? Certainly, certainly, cousin, it must needs be that some goddess inhabits this region, who is the soul of the soil: for neither is any less than a goddess worthy to be shrined in such a heap of pleasures, nor any less than a goddess could have made it so perfect a plat of the celestial dwellings.³⁰

The action in *Arcady* centers on the young woman's gaze, fixed on a goldfinch in mid-flight. To ensure the visual

³⁰ Lope de Vega, *Arcadia, Prosas y Versos* (Barcelona: en Casa Sebastian de Cormellas, 1602), pp. 75-76.

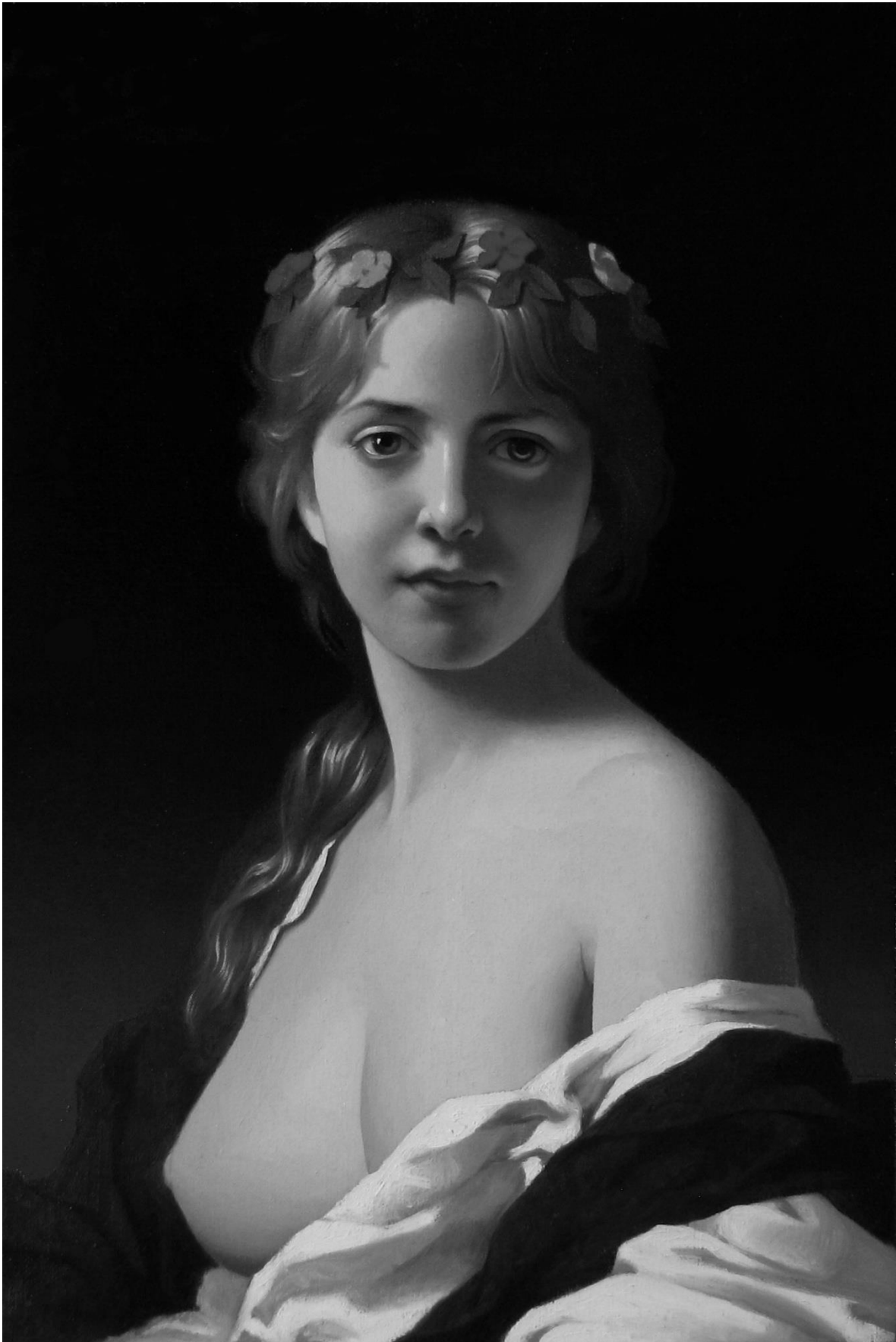


Figure 5

significance of this glance, I have placed her eye at the center of the painting and the goldfinch at a significant point of intersection. Iconographically, the goldfinch has traditionally been used as a symbol of the Crucifixion, in works ranging from Raphael's *Madonna of the Goldfinch* in the Uffizi to the famous *Goldfinch* by Carol Fabritius in the Mauritshuis. According to pious legend, the bird acquired its red spot as it attempted to pull a thorn from Christ's brow, upon which it was splashed with a drop of Christ's Blood. The goldfinch thus represents the conjunction of death and Arcadia, while also purifying the Arcadian myth of its tragic implications. Death and suffering may rob one of worldly happiness, and yet it is by death that paradise is regained, in the first place by Christ's death and in the second by one's own, symbolized by baptism, hence the water. The painting is appropriately framed in a very high quality reproduction Louis XV frame.

5. *Truth Unveiled by Time*

Oil on canvas

14" x 21"

The subject of *Truth Unveiled by Time* is a popular allegory of a kind preferred by Giorgio Vasari, who was an allegorical painter par excellence. Some famous examples of *Truth Unveiled* include a statue by Bernini in the Villa Borghese, a painting by Tiepolo at the Boston MFA, and another by Annibale Carracci in the Royal Collection, to name just a few. Most depictions include a personification of Father Time as an old man sporting wings, who pulls back the veil of Truth, represented by a female nude. Together, they are typically shown trampling an allegorical figure of Deceit. Since my version is not a full-throated history painting but more like a portrait, leaving little room for Father Time, I had to find a more subtle way of expressing the idea. I decided to use two radiating lines converging on the lower left hand corner to suggest the two hands of a clock. One hand falls along the breast, the other along the top of the drapery. Imagining the hands moving clockwise, the figure is, as it were, being undraped by the hands of time. I thought it was a clever solution, though no one would ever pick up on it without explanation, which is a downside.

The painting is composed of stark but harmonious oppositions, with the division of light falling right down the middle of the face and the green background being complemented by a red drapery. These stark oppositions of light and color symbolize a metaphysical opposition, of which all things are a composite.

The truth that time unveils most directly is that one has a beginning and an end. There was a time when one was not, and there is a time when one will no longer be, because it is not in one's nature to be. There is a basic distinction in metaphysics between what a thing is and the fact that it is. There are infinitely many possible natures which do not actually exist. To become an actual substance as opposed to an abstract principle, an essence must be joined to existence. All that is is a composite of essence and existence.³¹ Nothing comes from nothing, because effects cannot exceed their cause, and so an essence can only receive existence from existence itself. Beings receive their being from Him whose essence is existence. God alone is not composed of essence and existence but pure being, pure and simple. Granting the premises of metaphysical realism, the existence of God is a tautology like the analytic truths of mathematics. When God is defined as existence itself, the fact that anything exists suffices to prove that God does too, as the necessary source and ground of existence.

To say the same thing less abstractly, time reveals that life is a gift. As the color of blood, the red drapery speaks to this gift of life, and so does the green background, green being a color of fecundity. Above all, the female nude speaks to the gift of life, because her body is manifestly ordered to bearing and nurturing life. One of the truths that the classical nude reveals is the purposiveness of our bodily nature, which obviously includes the purpose of participating in the creation of other human beings. Our bodily nature makes us lower than the angels in the order of nature, and yet our bodies permit us to do something that angels cannot do. Incredibly, society has become so divorced from reality as to deny the difference between male and female, though this was perhaps to be expected from the first moment that we began to deny the purpose of this difference.

³¹ See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*.

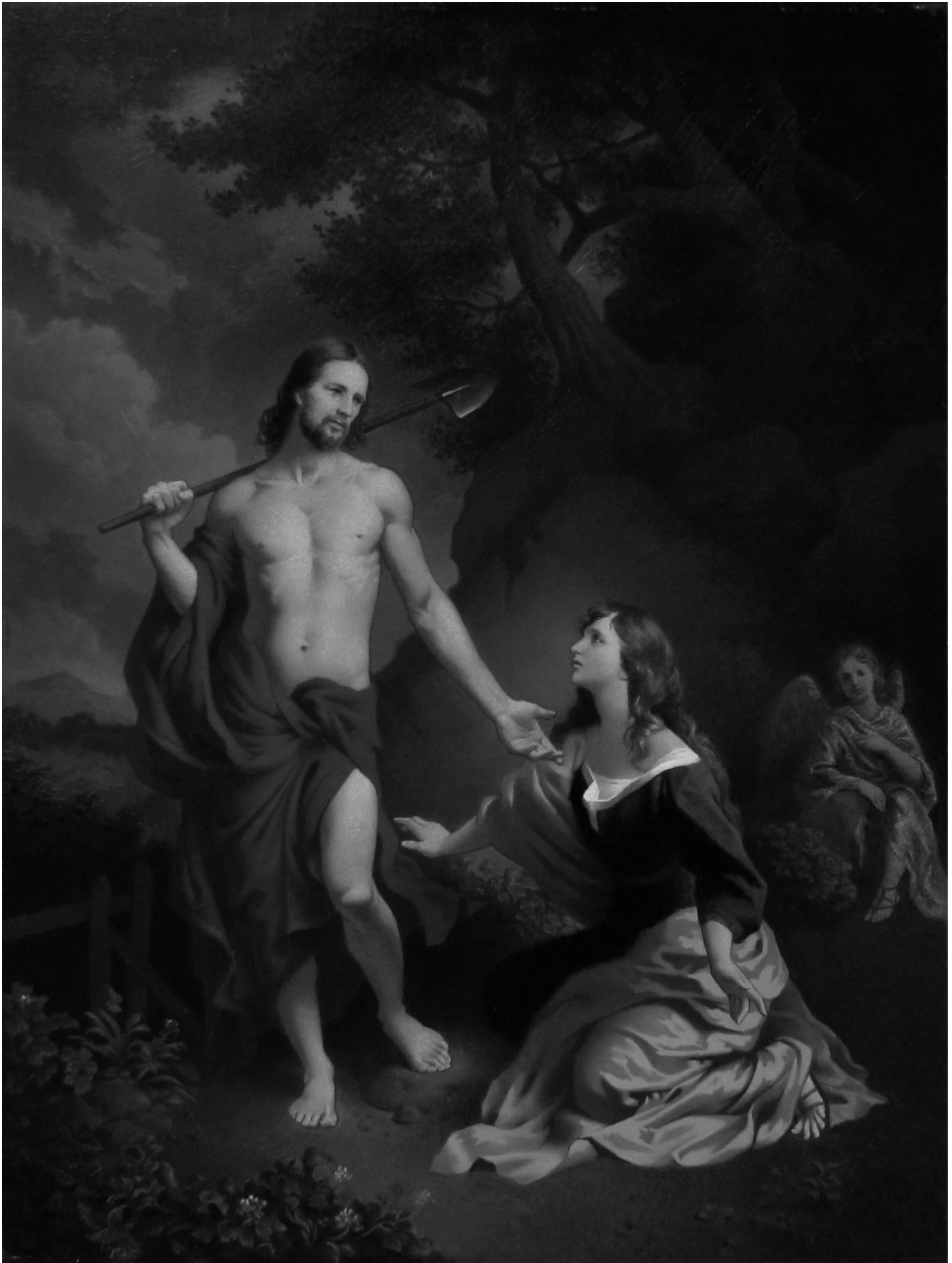


Figure 6

6. *Noli me tangere*

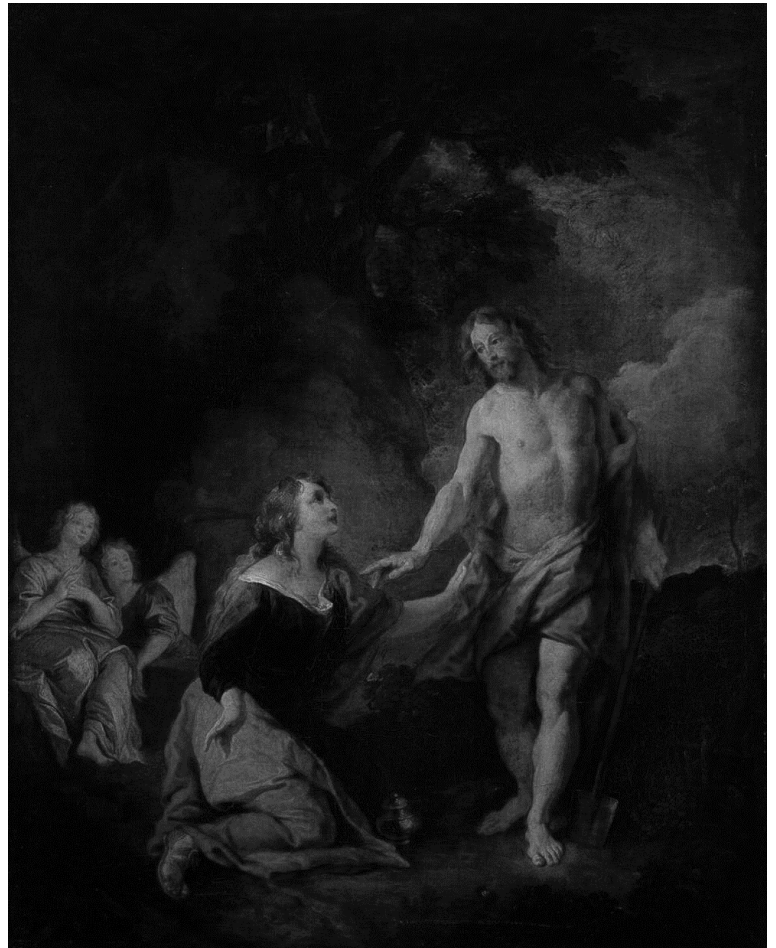
Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

15" x 20"

The first religious subject that I attempted, between 2014 and 2015, was a scene from the end of the Gospel of John in which the Risen Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, a subject known as *Noli me tangere*, which means "Do not touch me," the words spoken by Christ as the Magdalene was about to embrace him.

For this painting I adopted a strategy of invention recommended by Sir Joshua Reynolds, to copy and improve upon another composition designed by an Old Master. My chosen inspiration was a painting by the French colorist Charles de la Fosse, whose coloring I greatly admired but whose draftsmanship left room for improvement, following a more classical sensibility at least. Charles de la Fosse's style is loose and painterly, whereas mine is very tight, which means that I sacrifice a degree of dynamism and depth for the sake of a more linear, classical beauty. I chose the very classical proportions of a 3x4 rectangle to contribute to a sense of stasis and serenity, a mood which I preferred for narrative reasons. At first, the Magdalene does not recognize Christ but mistakes Him for the gardener, which is why He is traditionally shown carrying a spade and without the Stigmata, the wounds in His hands, feet, and side. Upon recognizing the Risen Christ, the Magdalene's natural reaction is to throw her arms around Him in joy, yet Christ bids the Magdalene not to touch Him, because He has yet to ascend to His Father. This puzzling story has been understood as an allegory about the Eucharist, for where else does the Bride of Christ touch Christ? Mary Magdalene is a type of the Church, and in this case specifically of the laity. At first, she is blind to who Christ is, just as one is blind to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and when she finally recognizes Him, the Magdalene does not understand the nature and significance of Christ's Resurrection, which signifies something much more profound than resuscitation like the raising of Lazarus. Jesus commands her to remove her hands in pointed contrast to the story of Doubting Thomas, in which Christ invites Thomas to touch His wounds. The allegorical implication is that the laity whose hands are not consecrated are not to receive communion in the hand, because this action belies the nature of the Sacrament and the dignity of God Incarnate. Instead of reaching out toward Christ, as the Magdalene does in the painting by Charles de la Fosse, in my version she has already obeyed as she kneels, as if to receive the Sacrament with the reverence that Christ deserves.

Returning once again to the subject of technique, a painting is rarely finished in one layer *alla prima* but generally has to be built up in stages. There are many different ways of doing an underpainting. One way is known as the Flemish technique, invented by Netherlandish painters such as Jan van Eyck, which consists of doing the underpainting in grisaille (i.e. shades of gray) and applying the color in thin glazes. In my *Noli me tangere*, I used this technique for the figures, while underpainting the rest of the canvas in an umber wash over a midtone primer.



Right: *Noli me tangere* by Charles de La Fosse, ca. 1685



Figure 7

7. *The Holy Family*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

27" x 33"

The second religious painting which I began in 2015 but only managed to finish this year is of the Holy Family. It was inspired in the first place by Correggio's *Adoration of the Child*, which is one of my favorite paintings in the Uffizi's collection. I made a point of copying the proportions of Correggio's painting and repeating certain elements from his composition. The poses of the Virgin and Child were inspired by a drawing by Sigismondo Cavola, which I knew from the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as Michelangelo's painting of the Holy Family, the *Doni Tondo* in the Uffizi. My representation of the Virgin also recalls a famous painting of the Virgin and Child by Carlo Maratta. The figure of Joseph follows a standard posture, variations of which are found in many different images of the Holy Family.

The somewhat implausible assortment of architecture and scenery was selected for iconographic reasons. The marble column with its elaborate, colorful veins foreshadows the Flagellation. The yellow rose bush alludes to the Madonna of the Roses and the rosary, to say nothing of the Crown of Thorns. The pool of water alludes to the Baptism of Christ as well as to the story of Moses, who was drawn from the water by a daughter of Pharaoh, Christ being to the New Covenant what Moses was to the Old Covenant. The stones in the water anticipate the Temptation of Christ, when Satan would tempt Jesus to turn a stone into bread. The palm trees in the background allude to the Entry into Jerusalem, and the manger of course alludes to the Nativity. The sprig of cherries which Joseph holds is a common motif in paintings of the Madonna and Child, symbolizing the fruit of the tree of life, namely the Eucharist.

The unusual illumination of the Virgin's face, which is actually in shadow but illuminated by reflected light, is a motif picked up from another famous painting by Correggio of the Nativity, in which the light emanates from the Christ Child. Christ being the metaphorical sun and the Virgin the moon, His face is in light, while her light is a reflected light.



Above Left: *The Adoration of the Child* by Correggio, 1520. Above Right: *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* by Sigismondo Cavola, ca. 1700.



Figure 8

8. *The First Mourning*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

45" x 28"

The story of the death of Abel comes from the book of Genesis:

And Adam knew Eve his wife: who conceived and brought forth Cain, saying: I have gotten a man through God. And again she brought forth his brother Abel. And Abel was a shepherd, and Cain a husbandman. And it came to pass after many days, that Cain offered, of the fruits of the earth, gifts to the Lord. Abel also offered of the firstlings of his flock, and of their fat: and the Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offerings. But to Cain and his offerings he had no respect: and Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said to him: Why art thou angry? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door? but the lust thereof shall be under thee, and thou shalt have dominion over it. And Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him. And the Lord said to Cain: Where is thy brother Abel? And he answered, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said to him: What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth. (Gen. 4:1-10, Douay-Rheims)

In my painting, Adam and Even stand and kneel around the body of Abel, lying across the foot of an altar, while Cain has already fled the scene. The composition is based on an engraving which I found in the Metropolitan's collection from 1576 by a Flemish engraver named Johann Sadeler after a drawing by another Flemish artist Michiel Coxie. Even though the authors of this print are of no particular historical significance, 16th-century prints of this kind were extremely influential, because they were used by artists as visual references. Turning to a more venerable authority, I designed the figure of Adam after Michelangelo's painting of Adam being expelled from Paradise, with a

Right: *Adam and Eve Mourning the Death of Abel* (Plate 3 from *The Story of Cain and Abel*), engraved by Johann Sadeler, designed by Michiel Coxie, 1576

Below Left: *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* by Michelangelo, 1508-1512

Below Right: *Crouching Venus*, 2nd Century AD Roman copy of Greek original

minor adjustment to the position of the arms, and I designed the figure of Eve in the pose of a *Crouching Venus*.

On the ground is the blood-stained murder weapon, the jawbone of a donkey, and all around are indications of Abel's animal husbandry, including his shepherd's staff, a ram, a goat, and a sheep dog. The goat with its back turned to us alludes to the scapegoat which was ritually driven into the wilderness carrying the people's sins, while the ram brings to mind the Passover lamb. Both are Christological images. The sheep dog brings to mind Isaiah's prophecy concerning the day when wolves will live at peace with lambs. The mountain prominently displayed in the background points to the Noahic covenant, which God makes with mankind after the Flood when Noah's ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat, and to the Mosaic covenant handed down from Mount Sinai, both of which anticipate the New and eternal Covenant sealed in Christ's Blood on Mount Calvary. The death of Abel is a

type of the death of Christ, who like Abel was hated without cause and murdered by His own kin.

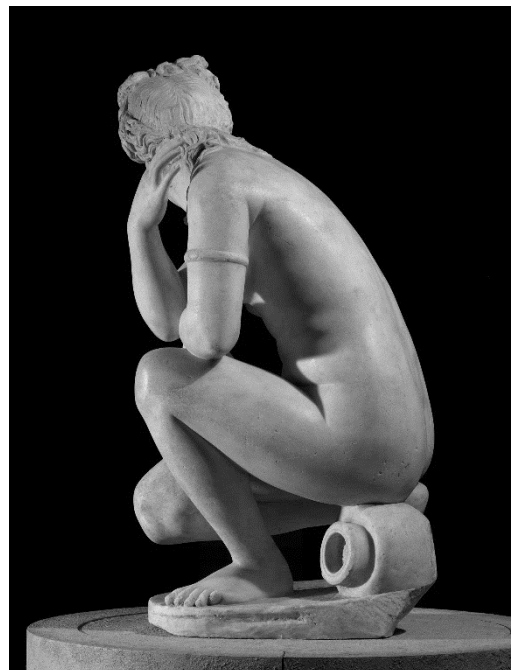
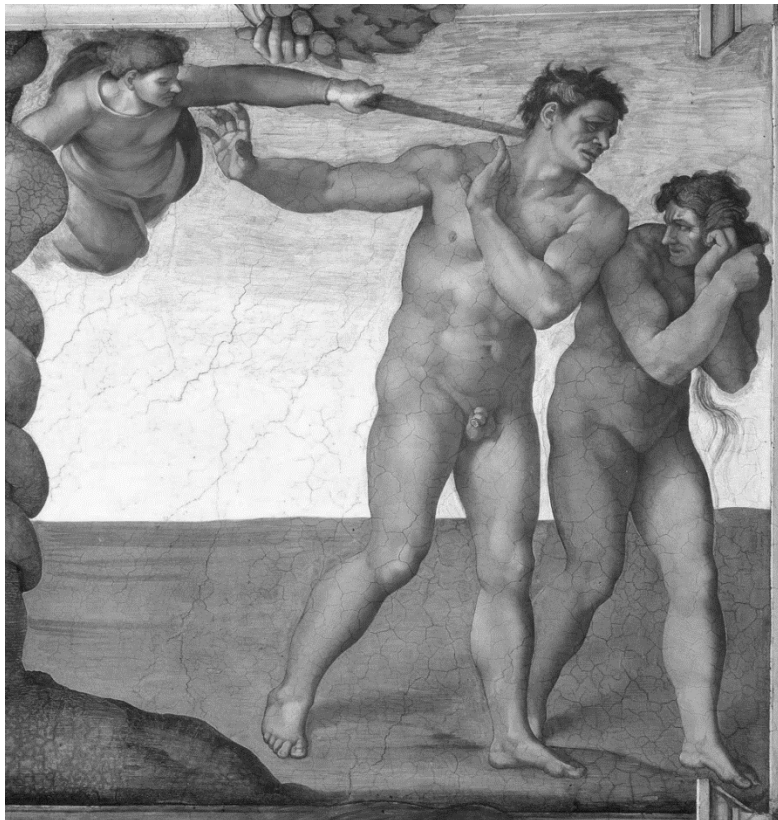




Figure 9

9. *Judith and Holofernes*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

32" x 45"

The story of Judith and Holofernes is an allegory from the Old Testament, which centers on a daring and beautiful widow who heroically slays the enemy of the Jews. It is possible that the story had some historical basis in events which occurred in the second century BC, but if so the author has veiled the facts by using overtly anachronistic names, speaking of the enemy as “the king of Assyria” and calling him by the name of “Nebuchadnezzar,” and also using imaginary topography, such as the city of Bethulia, which literally means “The virgin of the LORD” and probably represents Jerusalem. In the story, Bethulia is besieged by the Assyrian army led by the general Holofernes over the strident objections of his subordinate Achior, whom Holofernes sends off in chains to Bethulia as his reward for taking the side of the Jews. Facing starvation, the people of the city begin to despair, but Judith will have none of it. Chiding her Jewish countrymen for not trusting in God to deliver them from their enemies, Judith goes with her loyal maid to the camp of the enemy general. She quickly ingratiates herself with Holofernes, promising to lead him through the streets of Bethulia. Captivated by her beauty, Holofernes drinks himself into a stupor in celebration and grants her access to his tent during the night, with amorous intentions. Having no desire to permit her purity to be violated, Judith cuts off his head with his own sword and silently flees the enemy camp with the decapitated head stuffed into a bag. She parades Holofernes through the streets as she had promised. When the Assyrians discover that Holofernes is slain, they disperse, and Israel is saved. Though courted by many, Judith remains unwed for the rest of her life. The book closes with a song of praise to God sung by Judith in celebration of her victory.

Judith has traditionally been interpreted as a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Judith’s victory over the Assyrians represents the spiritual victory over the evil one, sin, and death accomplished at Calvary, in which the Virgin played a crucial role, because the success of Christ’s mission depended upon His Mother’s cooperation. The Virgin might have refused to become the Mother of God at the Annunciation, or she might have demanded that Jesus not suffer His Passion, in either case to the ruin of mankind, but she didn’t do that. Being confirmed in grace from the moment of her conception, she could hardly have willed anything contrary to the will of God. Just as Judith used Holofernes’ own sword to slay him, the Virgin slew the god of this world with the Cross on which Christ hung, a sadistic instrument of torture and death in the shape of a sword. Thus, the head of the serpent was crushed not only by “the seed of the woman” but also by the woman herself as one reads in the protoevangelium in Genesis, which is why images of the Immaculate Conception always depict her standing on the head of a serpent. As a matter of fact, the seed of the woman refers not only to Christ but also to the members of His mystical Body, as the children of the Blessed Virgin. The Church is Judith, called to slay Holofernes by bearing a cross of suffering and death. Judith’s victory is a type not only of what happened two thousand years ago but also of the eschatological triumph of the Church over evil at the end of time. The design of my painting is based on passages in Scripture concerning this final victory. As John writes in Apocalypse 11:15-12:1 (Douay-Rheims):

And the seventh angel sounded the trumpet: and there were great voices in heaven, saying: The kingdom of this world is become our Lord’s and his Christ’s, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Amen. And the four and twenty ancients, who sit on their seats in the sight of God, fell on their faces and adored God, saying: We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who art, and who wast, and who art to come: because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and thou hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst render reward to thy servants the prophets and the saints, and to them that fear thy name, little and great, and shouldst destroy them who have corrupted the earth. And the temple of God was opened in heaven: and the ark of his testament was seen in his temple, and there were lightnings, and voices, and an earthquake, and great hail. And a great sign appeared in heaven: A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Like the woman clothed in the sun, Judith is dressed in a brilliant, golden hue, while the drapery which falls from her shoulder is a deep blue, alluding to the veil which covered the Ark of the Covenant and the hammered gold in which the Ark was covered. The blue drapery is shown in the act of falling to signify the unveiling of the Ark. The

braid encircling the back of her head with twelve visible knots represents the crown of stars, while the storm-clouds looming overhead allude to the meteorological events which are said to accompany the unveiling of the Ark.

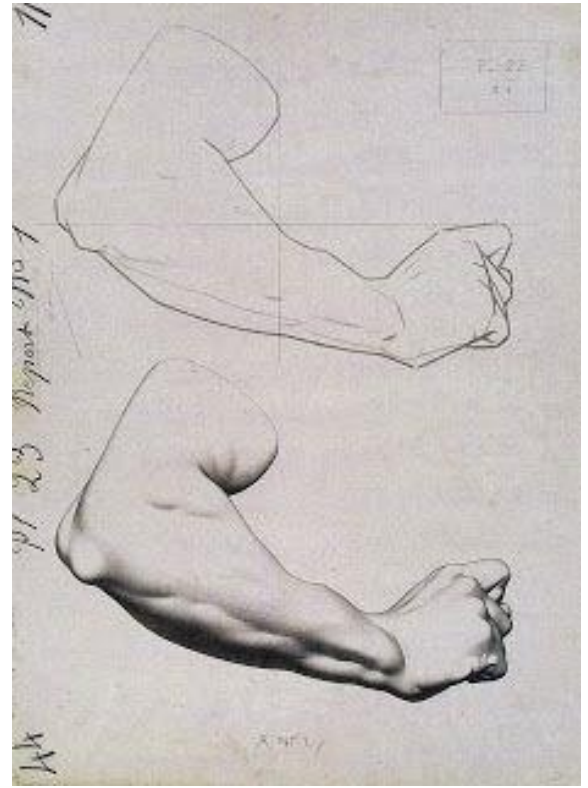
The waterfall in the background and the trees on either side are also taken from the Apocalypse. They are images of the river of the water of life and the tree of life, which represent the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin Mary, since one eats of the life-giving fruit of her womb in the Eucharist. To quote from Apocalypse 22:1-5 (Douay-Rheims):

And he shewed me a river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street thereof, and on both sides of the river, was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruits every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no curse any more; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

The sources for *Judith and Holofernes* include Cristofano Allori's magnificent painting of the same subject in the Palazzo Pitti, which was easily my favorite painting in the collection when I was a student in Florence. Unlike Caravaggio's version or Artemisia Gentileschi's, which is also in the Pitti, both of which were painted around the same time as Allori's at the turn of the 17th century and depict Judith in the gruesome act of slicing through Holofernes' neck, Allori's painting is not so dramatic. To Allori's credit, the immaculate elegance of his Judith, stained by neither sweat nor blood but dressed in the most sumptuous clothing totally unsuitable for the messy business of carrying out an execution, does reflect a better understanding of the typology. It is not by might nor by power but by a delicate woman assisted by the Spirit of God and unsullied by the deed that the spiritual enemies of God's kingdom are laid low. For this reason I wanted my own version to be more akin to Allori's than to Caravaggio's. The head and shoulders of my Judith were inspired by Frederic Leighton's *Pavonia*, and the arrangement of the background with a drapery and a wall opening onto a vista was inspired by the conventions of Venetian portraiture. Students of Charles



Above Left: *Pavonia* by Frederic Leighton, 1859. Above Right: *Judith and Holofernes* by Cristofano Allori, 1612.



Above Left: *Portrait of Doge Francesco Venier* by Titian, 1556. Above Right: *Drawing Course Plate 1, 23* by Charles Bargue, 1860's.

Bargue's *Drawing Course*, which includes everyone in the atelier movement, will also recognize the source for her left hand, which holds the sword.

To revisit the topic of technique, the color blue has always presented a host of challenges and vexations for oil painters. For a long time, the only stable deep blue pigment was lapis lazuli, which when available at all was frightfully expensive, because it had to be imported from Afghanistan. Artists had various substitutes, such as smalt, which is a type of powdered glass and a primitive version of cobalt blue, but all of the alternatives tended to fade and were never a very pure blue to begin with. Yet, even artists who had ready access to lapis lazuli still found it a great challenge to apply the paint in a way that would not be discolored by the oil. As linseed oil oxidizes, it becomes yellower, which means that blue paint turns gray and green as it dries. There is a loss of chroma and a shift of hue. There are several ways to mitigate this problem. Oil painters know from experience that an impasto yellows worse than a glaze, particularly in mixtures of lead white. The reason for this has to do with the oil separating from the pigment and migrating to the surface of the paint film as it dries and discolors. Hence, blue would often be applied in thin glazes, which had the added benefit of reducing the amount of pigment needed. The downside of this solution is that glazes generate a rough texture, which is not always desirable. Another solution is to reduce the acidity of the oil. The essential ingredient in drying oil is called linoleic acid, which is what makes the oil oxidize. It is also the thing that turns yellow. Since walnut oil has less linoleic acid than linseed oil, it is paler and a preferable binder for cooler colors. The acidity of walnut oil can be diluted even further by mixing it with non-drying oils, like poppy oil.

Since the invention of ultramarine blue, which is a synthetic version of lapis lazuli, artists no longer have any difficulty finding blue pigment, but we still have to grapple with the same old problem of yellowing. Since I wanted the blue drapery in my painting of *Judith and Holofernes* to be as blue as possible, I ground my own ultramarine blue in walnut oil and mixed it with a white that I also ground myself, consisting of titanium and lead white in walnut oil. Titanium is a modern pigment, which is whiter and more opaque than lead white, and it also has cool undertones, which is ideal for mixing cool colors. The downside of titanium is that it does not dry, which is why I mixed it with lead. I also used sun-thickened walnut oil sparingly as a medium. Fortunately, my efforts were not in vain, as the blue drapery has remained clear and bright over time.



Figure 10

10. *Pietà*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

27" x 33"

The subject of the *Pietà* naturally brings to mind Michelangelo's sculpture in St. Peter's Basilica, though he was not the first to attempt a *Pietà*, nor was he by any means the last. The subject of the Blessed Virgin holding the dead Christ originated in Germany around 1300, and although it was some years before it was imported to Italy, Michelangelo's sculpture was preceded by a painting by Domenico Ghirlandaio. After Michelangelo, the subject of the *Pietà* became wildly popular. Indeed, there are so many versions both painted and sculpted as to make it extremely difficult to invent a novel arrangement, the best ideas having already been taken. I first turned for inspiration to Baroque paintings by Annibale Carracci, Anthony van Dyck, and Charles Lebrun, as well as a few works which are less well-known by the Caravaggisti Daniele Crespi and Baciccio, though it was not until I came across a pen and ink drawing by Rubens of *Venus mourning the dead Adonis* that I discovered the kernel of an idea that I could build upon. By happenstance, the posture of Rubens' *Adonis* is almost the same as Michelangelo's *Adam* in the *Creation of Man*, flipped and rotated ninety degrees, a correlation which in my painting assumes a typological significance. Christ being the new Adam, I designed the limp arm to resemble Adam's, no doubt the most famous in art history. As for the Virgin and the cherubs, I found inspiration in paintings by William Bouguereau and Carlo Dolce. I chose to include two winged cherubs in order to allude to the cherubim atop of the Ark of the Covenant, a type of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the Ark of the New Covenant. This allusion is augmented by the coloring, the dominant notes being gold and blue, corresponding to the gilded surface and blue veil of the Ark.

Below Left: *Venus Mourning the Dead Adonis* by Peter Paul Rubens, 1612. Below Right: *Pietà* by Annibale Carracci, 1600





Figure 11

11. *Penitent Magdalene*

Oil on canvas mounted on aluminum panel

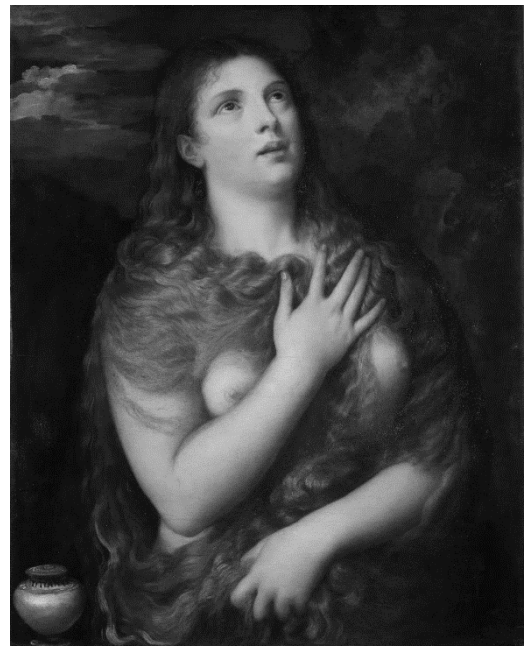
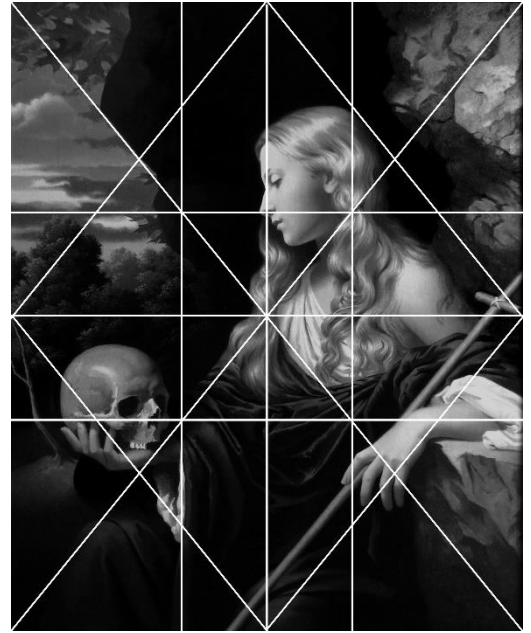
27" x 33"

My painting of the *Penitent Magdalene* was inspired by a portrait of a boy dressed as a shepherd by Sir Peter Lely, though my original intent had been to imitate Titian's superlative depiction of this subject in the Palazzo Pitti, a painting of ravishing locks of golden hair such as a painter can only dream of rivaling but with a surprisingly clumsy face, which could easily be improved upon. Titian depicts Mary Magdalene naked and in a barren wilderness recalling the Egyptian desert in which Mary of Egypt lived a life of penance, though there is another tradition, possibly historical, which places Mary Magdalene's monastic retreat in France. I decided to depict her in a state not quite so bereft in a plausibly French wilderness, with foliage and greenery on one side of the painting to balance the bare rocks on the right. Death's face is grouped with symbols of spring, because the Christian finds hope in death. Meanwhile, the cross leans against the rocks, as a symbol of the travails of this life.

Within a small margin of error, the proportions of 27" x 33" are identical to Titian's *Penitent Magdalene*, and as a matter of fact the same proportions occur in Correggio's *Adoration of the Child*, mentioned above. This was a standard size in Italian Renaissance painting, which I like to use in my own work. The ratio of 27 to 33 is about 1 to the square root of 1.5, a proportion which was preferred because it worked well with the compositional armature used by Italian Renaissance painters. For this painting, I used a simplified armature consisting of halves, thirds, and diagonals, as shown in the diagram.

Below Left: *A Boy as a Shepherd* by Sir Peter Lely, 1660

Below Right: *Penitent Magdalene* by Titian, 1533



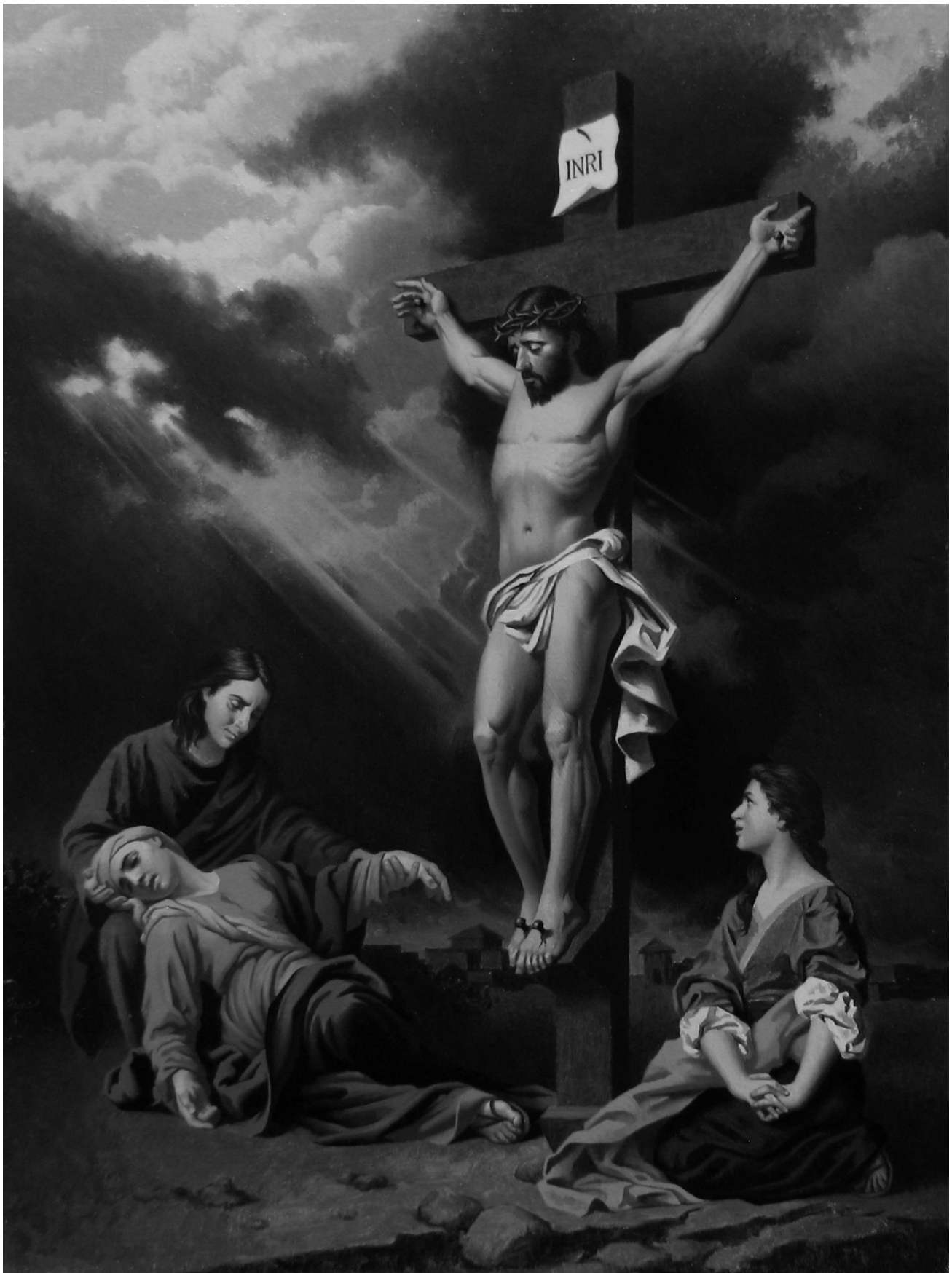


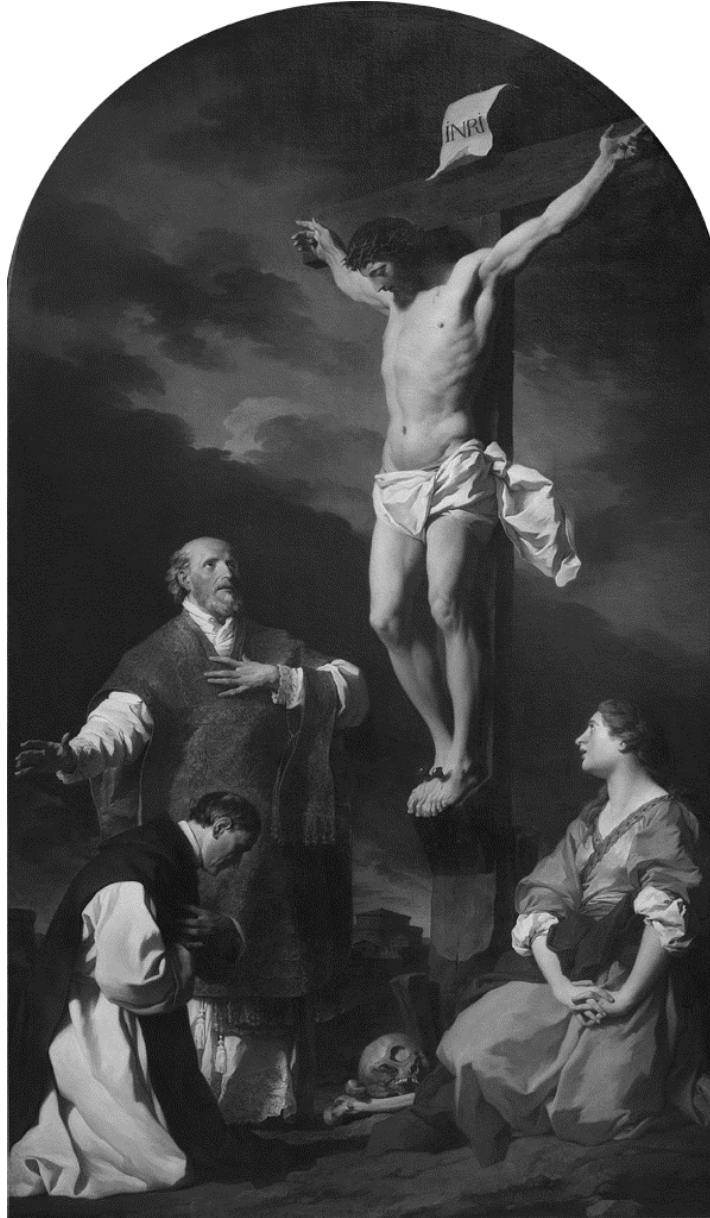
Figure 12

12. *The Crucifixion*

Oil on canvas mounted on wood panel

15" x 20"

The primary inspiration for my version of the Crucifixion was an altarpiece by the 18th-century French painter and longtime denizen of Rome Pierre Subleyras, the *Crucifixion with St. Mary Magdalene, St. Eusebius, and St. Philip Neri*, which can be found in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan. I used a similar three-quarter view of Christ on the Cross while making a variety of changes to the design of the figure, mostly to make the anatomical construction more robust. My representation of the Magdalene also has certain obvious similarities to Subleyras's painting as do the clouds, while the figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. John derive from other, more obscure sources.



Above: *Crucifixion with St. Mary Magdalene, St. Eusebius, and St. Philip Neri* by Pierre Subleyras, 1744



Figure 13

13. *The Virgin and Child*
Oil on panel
11" x 14"

For *The Virgin and Child*, I turned for inspiration to works by Anthony van Dyck and Leonardo da Vinci. The pose of the Christ Child is similar to one recurrent in paintings by Leonardo and his studio, and the blue drapery across the Virgin's lap is also adapted from a famous drapery study by Leonardo. In other respects, the painting is modeled on *The Virgin and Child with St. Catherine of Alexandria* painted ca. 1630 by van Dyck in the Metropolitan.

Images of the Virgin and Child are often designed in dialogue with the Pietà. The Virgin not only holds the Christ Child but presents Him, as if to place Him upon the altar. She sits on a roughly hewn stone in a garden, as if at the tomb in which Christ's Body was laid. I have given both of them unnaturally pale skin, suggestive of Christ's death and of the purity of His sacrifice, like a spotless lamb.

HISTORY PAINTINGS



Left: *Virgin and Child with St. Catherine of Alexandria* by Anthony van Dyck, ca. 1630

Below Left: *Madonna Litta*, by Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1490



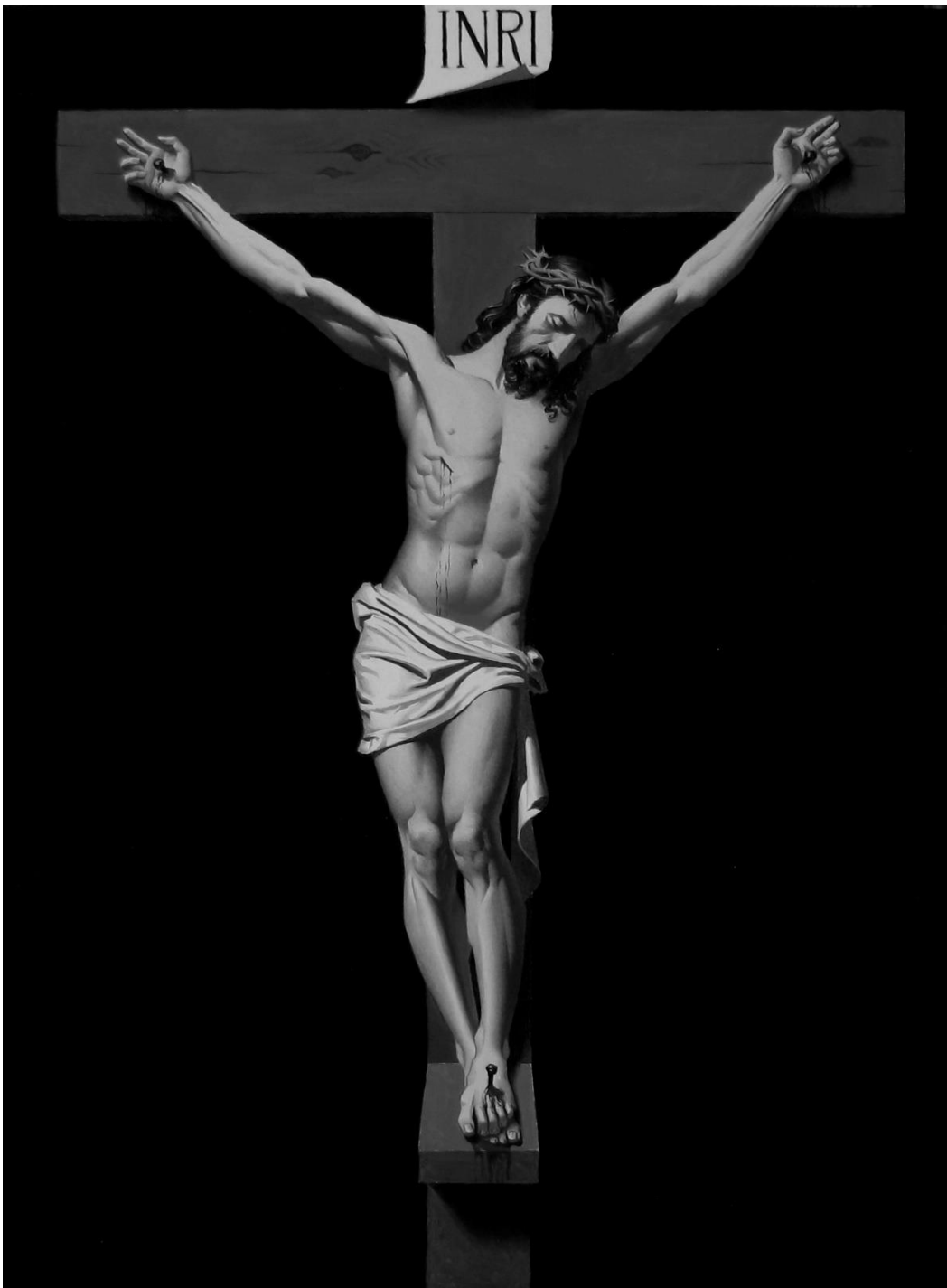
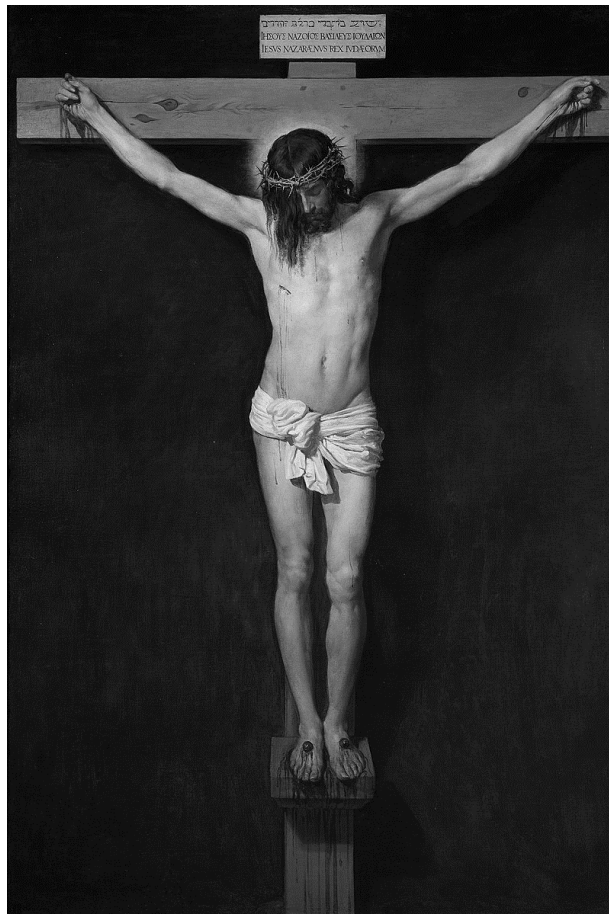


Figure 14

14. *Christ Crucified*
Oil on panel
12" x 16"

The composition of *Christ Crucified* is based on Diego Velázquez's painting which goes by the same title of 1632 in the Prado, which has a simple black background and frontal view. Departing from Velázquez's version, I then turned to primitive paintings of the Crucifixion by Cimabue, introducing a significant contrapposto into Christ's pose and rendering the figure with less naturalistic, more idealized anatomy.

HISTORY PAINTINGS



Left: *Christ Crucified* by Diego Velázquez, 1632

Below Left: *Crucifix* by Cimabue, ca. 1265



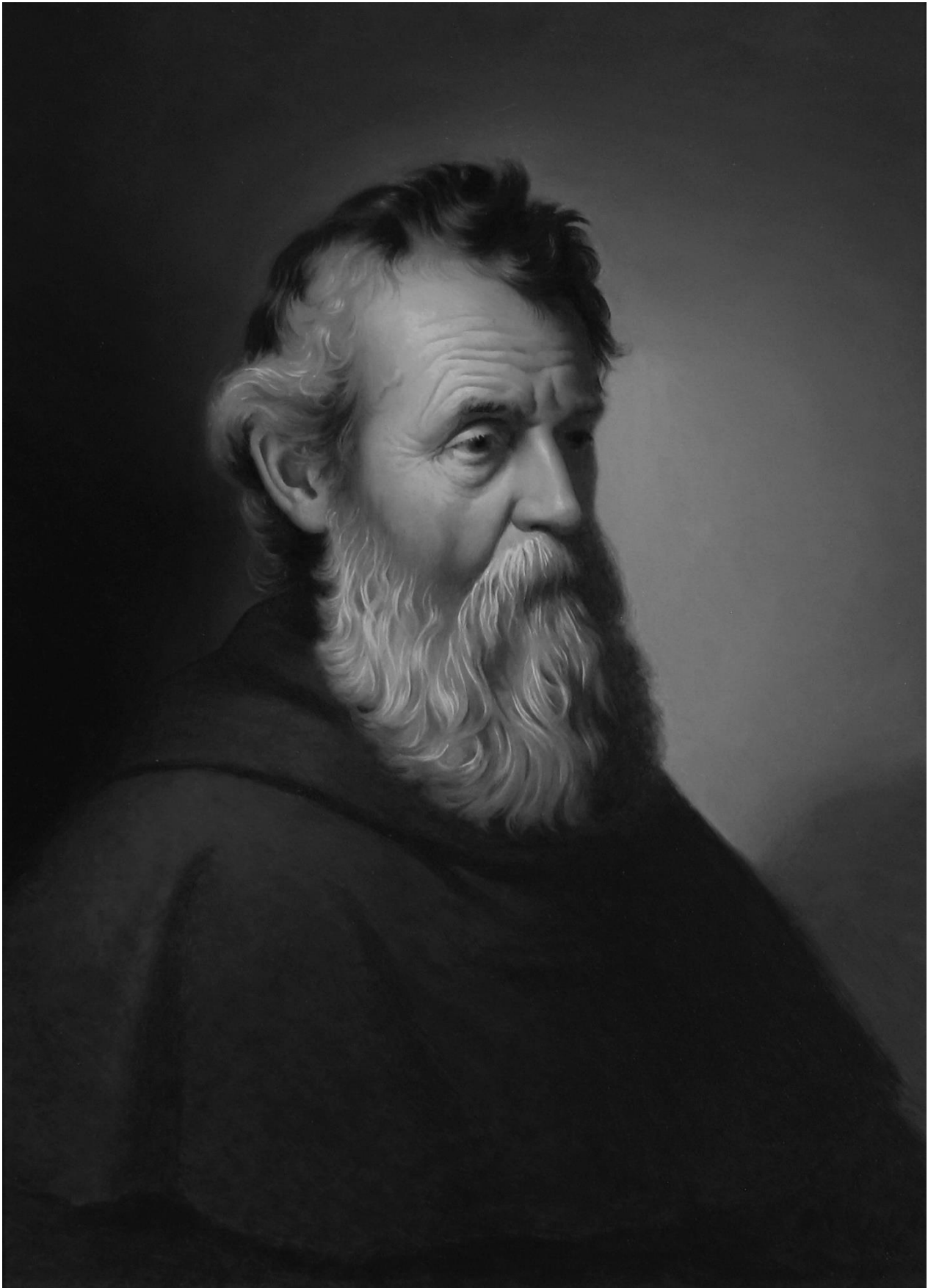


Figure 15

PORTRAITS

Most of the portraits included in this exhibition are what historians of the Dutch Golden Age might call a *tronie*, a character type painted from imagination. There is one formal portrait of an actual person, and there are also a couple which are painted from models, but the rest are idealized types. Most of my portraits are also based on famous examples of portraiture from art history, such as the *Mona Lisa* and Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* to say nothing of works by Titian and Rembrandt.

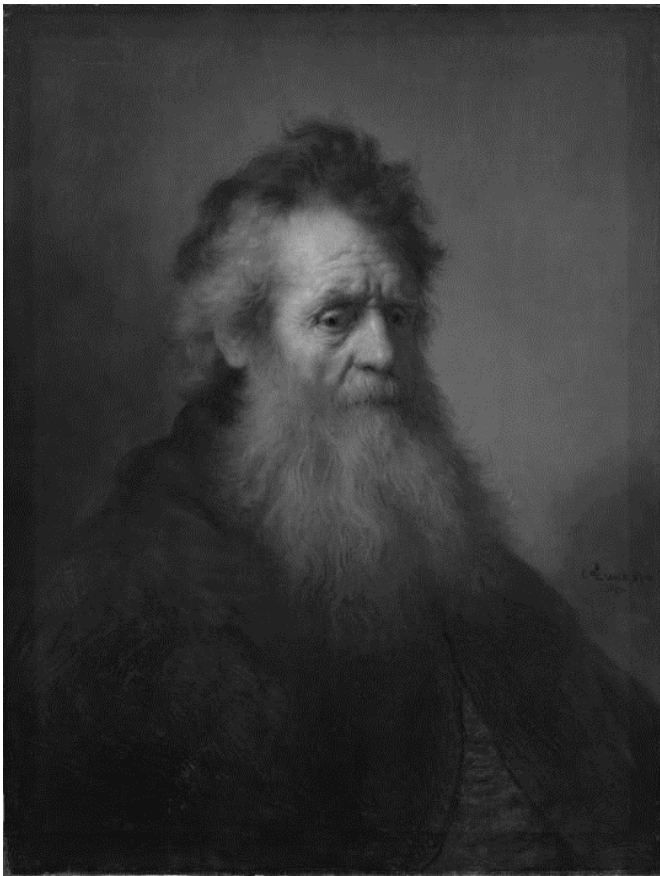
15. *Friar Roger Bacon*

Oil on panel

18" x 24"

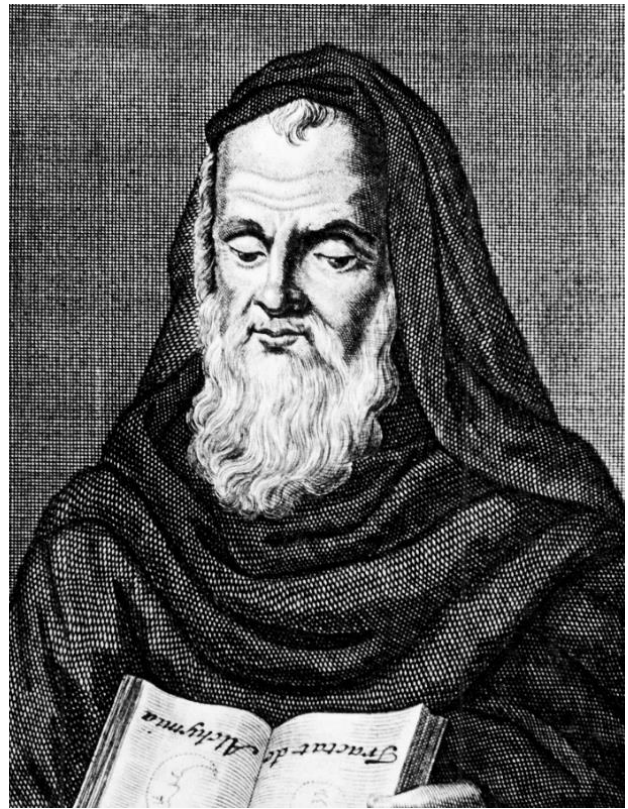
My portrait of Roger Bacon, a 13th-century Franciscan theologian and philosopher, is based on a *tronie* by Rembrandt van Rijn on display at the Fogg Museum. The face is obviously different, but the composition is very similar. I chose to paint a Franciscan Friar, minus the tonsure, because the Franciscan habit is vaguely similar to the clothing in Rembrandt's painting, and I also wanted to make a painting specifically of Roger Bacon in recognition of the pivotal role which he and other Franciscans played in launching the Italian Renaissance. I did my best to reproduce Rembrandt's technique. The particular painting which I used as my guide was done in 1632 and so belongs to the beginning of Rembrandt's career, when his methods were still relatively conventional. Working on panel, I began with an umber wash drawing, and I used a limited palette of earth colors throughout, using the transparency and opacity of the paint to create variations of color, just as Rembrandt would. Raw umber accounts for about ninety percent of the picture, from the brilliant ruddy browns of the Franciscan habit, which are achieved by glazing raw umber, to the grayish browns in the background, achieved by scumbling a mixture of raw umber and lead white. A glaze is a semi-transparent application of darker paint over a lighter ground, while a scumble is a lighter mixture over a darker ground. Glazes extend the range of a limited palette by making the color brighter and warmer, while scumbles do the same by making the color grayer and cooler. I didn't manage to preserve as much transparency as Rembrandt's painting has, since I had to make too many corrections, and my style is a bit heavy-handed in comparison to the jaw-dropping virtuosity of an autograph Rembrandt, but the result is worthy of Rembrandt's studio, I think, be it the hand of Nicolaes Maes, Gerard Dou, or Ferdinand Bol.

Since we don't strictly know what Roger Bacon looked like, my painting is based on a widely circulated portrait of Roger Bacon dating to the 18th century. As early as the 1260's, Bacon was among the very first to propose that churches should be decorated with naturalistic art the better to communicate the mysteries of the faith. The patronage which Giotto subsequently received from the Franciscans and the Dominicans was intended to do what Bacon had recommended. The mendicant orders were the original patrons of Renaissance art.



16. *Bertrand*
Oil on canvas
20" x 25"

Bertrand is the earliest painting in the exhibition, dating all the way back to 2010. It was inspired by Titian's portraits in the Musée du Louvre. After finishing my studies in Florence, I spent a year in Paris, mostly for the purpose of studying the collections in the Louvre and the Musée d'Orsay. More or less everyday was spent in one museum or another, taking notes on color and composition and so forth, doing the occasional sketch, and then heading back to my studio in Bagnole, a suburb of Paris, to do some painting. This portrait is of a Frenchman whose name was Bertrand, who was generous enough to sit for me and the two other artists with whom I was sharing the studio. Being tremendously impressed by the subtle variations of tone in Titian's *Portrait of a Man with a Glove*, I tried to reproduce a similar tonal scheme in my portrait of Bertrand. There is a story about Titian, which my teacher John Angel liked to repeat, that a student once marveled at the variety of Titian's blacks and asked the master how he achieved such subtleties, to which Titian replied, "With



Left: *Portrait of an Old Man* by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1632

Above: *Sir Roger Bacon*, engraved by Johann Daniel Tauber, 1725

Below: *Portrait of a Man with a Glove* by Titian, ca. 1520

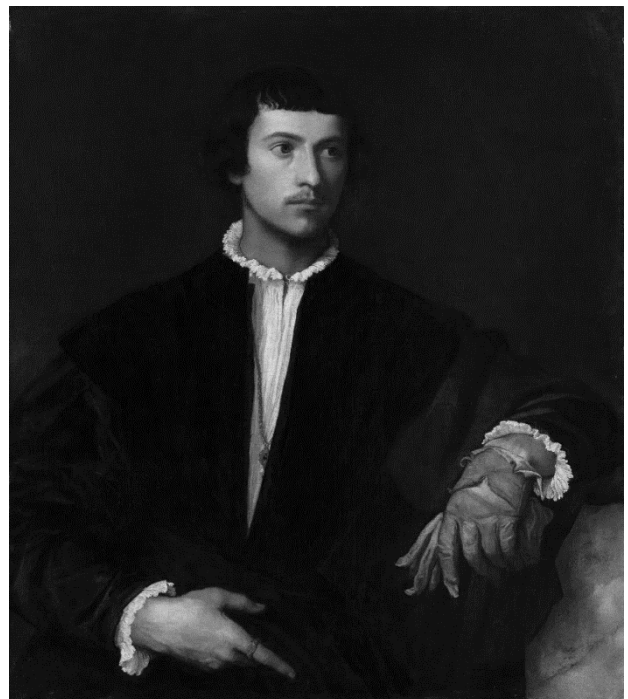




Figure 16

brains, my boy, with brains!” Judging from my own experience of painting *Bertrand*, I would have to say that it has just as much to do with elbow grease, because it was a laborious business modeling the dark background, the black clothing, and the hair properly within such a narrow value range. Unfortunately, none of this variation could be captured in the photograph. Unlike most of my paintings which are keyed for typical indoor lighting, *Bertrand* has to be seen under a bright natural light to bring out the variations in the darks.



Figure 17

17. *La Fiorentina*
Oil on panel
12" x 16"

La Fiorentina follows a type found in the works of Raphael and Andrea del Sarto based on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Raphael and del Sarto adopted the pose of the *Mona Lisa* in several different paintings but in most cases replaced Leonardo's landscape with a dark background, and for Leonardo's murky coloring they substituted stark local colors in the usual Florentine manner. The color scheme of my painting is taken from del Sarto, who used a slightly purple blue backdrop against a pale red drape in several paintings of the Blessed Virgin Mary, including altarpieces of the Annunciation and the Assumption which are now in the Palazzo Pitti. The character of the face is particularly indebted to Raphael, while the deep shadows and sfumato are of course indebted to Leonardo.

The cropping of *La Fiorentina* is a little tight, because it was originally going to be a study for a larger, half-length painting including hands and torso following Leonardo's convention. I have not gotten around to doing this yet, but I will be returning to it in the future.

PORTRAITS



Left: *Portrait of a Woman* by
Andrea del Sarto, 1514

Below Left: *Portrait of a
Woman* by Raphael, 1507





Figure 18

18. *Portrait of a Woman with a Pearl Earring*
Oil on canvas
14" x 20"

This portrait is obviously a nod to Vermeer's famous *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She wears similar clothing and of course the requisite pearl. The most conspicuous difference is that my portrait is in profile. Vermeer's use of the three-quarter portrait was the culmination of a tradition of female portraiture begun by Leonardo da Vinci. In the early Renaissance of the quattrocento, most portraits were painted in profile, but in search of a greater sense of life and movement, Leonardo began to paint portraits at an angle, and it was not long before the profile fell almost entirely out of the portraitist's repertoire. It was only in the 19th century that the profile portrait really came back into vogue, and so the style of my painting straddles three different eras, from the early Renaissance to the Dutch Golden Age to the 19th century.

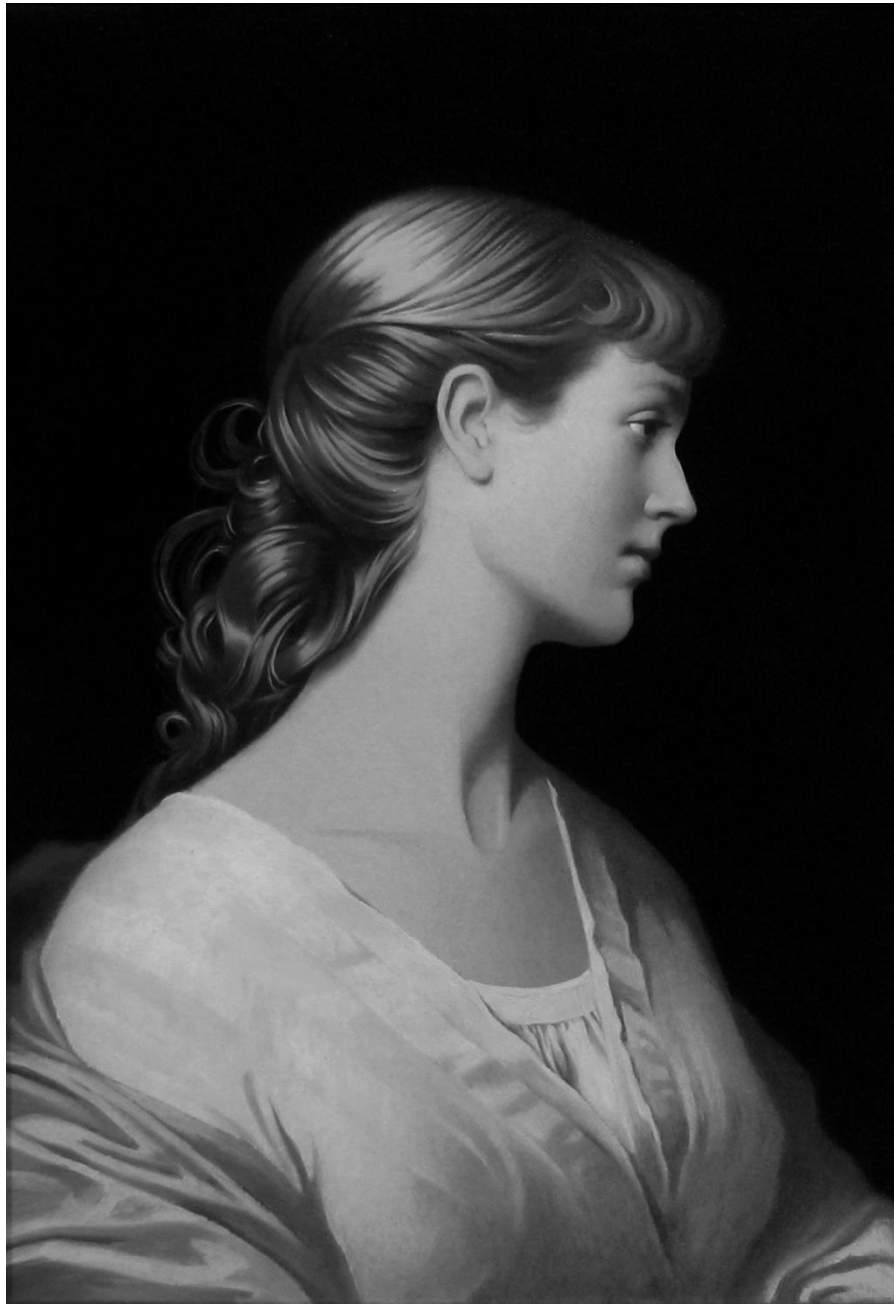


Figure 19

19. *Portrait of a Woman*
 Oil on canvas
 14" x 20"

The inspiration behind my second profile portrait is a striking *Portrait of a Girl* painted ca. 1880 by Frederic Leighton, which is similarly distinguished by a brilliant coif of ruddy blond hair. Leighton's deft, painterly handling of the hair puts my attempt at imitation to shame, but it is no great humiliation to fall somewhat short of so high a mark. Of the late 19th-century academicians, Leighton is easily my favorite, because his style is uniquely cosmopolitan. He trained first in Germany and then in Italy and finally in Paris. His work strongly reflects the influence of the Nazarene School in Germany, who invented a very elegant neo-Raphaelite style of painting. Eschewing the decadent virtuosity of the 18th century, the Nazarenes wanted to return to the simple purity of Renaissance painting, and for my money they succeeded. By the time that Leighton began his studies, many of the Nazarenes had become influential teachers in the



German academies. Although Leighton would not confine himself to religious subjects like the Nazarenes, the idealization of his form has all the hallmarks of the Nazarene school, augmented by other influences from Italy and France.

As a 19th-century-style painting, my *Portrait of a Young Woman* is complemented by an elegant 19th-century frame, from ca. 1875, which matches the picture perfectly.

Left: *A Portrait of a Girl* by Frederic Leighton, ca. 1880

Below: *The Soap Bubbles* by Charles Joshua Chaplin, 1881

20. *Portrait of a Young Woman*
Oil on canvas
16" x 20"

My third profile portrait was inspired by an 1881 portrait entitled *The Soap Bubbles* by Charles Joshua Chaplin, who specialized in decorative female portraits. I changed the cropping and reinvented the face, the hair, and the background while retaining the clothing and the pose from Chaplin's painting. She is framed in a very delicate 19th-century American frame in beautiful condition, from ca. 1890.





Figure 20



Figure 21

Right: *The White Hat* by Jean-Baptiste Greuze, ca. 1780



21. *The White Rose*
Oil on canvas
18" x 22"

The White Rose is based on a painting by Jean-Baptiste Greuze entitled *The White Hat*, ca. 1780, in the Boston MFA. The following is the description of *The White Hat* from the MFA's online catalogue:

Although Greuze was commissioned to paint many portraits, it's unlikely that this painting depicts an actual person. The young woman, who appears at once innocent and seductive, is probably the product of the artist's imagination. Greuze has dressed her in the more natural, *déshabillé* ("undressed") fashion that was en vogue at the time. Queen Marie Antoinette began wearing white muslin dresses that did not require structural undergarments in the 1780s and after some initial scandal, this style became very popular.

My portrait is likewise painted from imagination, which was more challenging than it should have been. I started this painting all the way back in 2013, and after repainting it several times, I finally finished it this year. I initially copied the style of undress in Greuze's painting but ultimately decided against it. It's best to reserve gratuitous nudity for subjects that have some allegorical justification for it. The nudity in Greuze's painting works, because his style is not too realistic, and at first I tried to make my own painting look quite a bit more idealized, but the best solution in the end was to make her look more like a real person. The painting is appropriately framed in an 18th-century French style, in a reproduction Louis XV frame with an oval liner.



Figure 22

22. *Urania*
Oil on canvas
15" x 20"

Urania draws on both Florentine and Venetian traditions. The pose and headdress were inspired by the *Garvagh Madonna* by Raphael in the National Gallery in London. The exposed shoulder and hair are an allusion to Titian's painting of *Flora* in the Uffizi Gallery. The painting is also inspired by 17th-century Florentine paintings, for example by Francesco Furini, who painted similar decorative images of beautiful young women. This painting was intended to be more idealized and have the soft atmosphere of Furini's paintings, but unfortunately this did not work out. Like *The White Rose* I had to settle for a simpler, more naturalistic solution. The title *Urania* refers to the Muse of Astronomy, who typically wears blue and white and is often pointing to a globe and holding a compass. I decided not to include these accoutrements and instead used a glistening strand of pearls to suggest her connection to the celestial bodies.

PORTRAITS

Right: *Garvagh Madonna*
by Raphael, 1511

Below Right: *Flora* by
Titian, 1517





Figure 23

23. *Julianne*
Oil on panel
12" x 16"

Unlike most of my female portraits, *Julianne* is in fact of a real person, as opposed to an idealized type. I painted her as a study, with the intention of introducing her face into what is otherwise a copy of a painting by William Bouguereau. I think that my head-study turned out better than the copy, though both are a success.

24. *Réverie*
Oil on panel
18" x 24"



Figure 24

Most of this painting is copied directly from William Bouguereau's *Première rêverie* (First Reverie), also known as *Whisperings of Love*. Bouguereau's painting was completed in 1889 and can be found at the New Orleans Museum of Art, which I visited several years ago. Besides the cropping and the scale, the primary differences between my painting and Bouguereau's are the cupid, which I chose to discard, and the head, which I repainted entirely using my own portrait of Julianne as a model. I wanted to include at least one homage to Bouguereau in the exhibition, given his importance to the atelier movement.

25. *Lauren Chase Eastman*
 Oil on canvas
 25" x 30"

This portrait depicts one of the founders of the Lauren Rogers Museum. He was the grandfather of the museum's namesake, Lauren Eastman Rogers, who died tragically in 1921 at the age of 23. In addition to endowing the museum, Eastman also donated his own private collection of 19th and early 20th-century paintings, which still comprise the core of the museum's collection. The portrait is being donated to the museum. The accompanying photograph of Lauren Chase Eastman, which is in the public domain, is what I had to work from.



Figure 25

PORTRAITS



Lauren, as a young boy, with his grandfather, Lauren Chase Eastman, circa 1910



Figure 26

26. John Singleton Copley
Oil on canvas
13" x 14"

This painting, which was included in the original exhibition in Boston but is not on display at the Rogers-Green House, is a copy of a self-portrait by John Singleton Copley, which can be found in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. I painted it on the occasion of a lecture that I gave on Copley's life in 2019 at the Copley Society.

LANDSCAPES

My landscape paintings are done in two different styles. One style is modeled after Italianate landscape paintings by 17th-century Dutch masters, while the other derives from the American tradition of landscape painting, particularly the Hudson River School.

The tradition of Italianate landscape painting dates back to the Renaissance but only fully blossomed as a genre in the 17th century in the works of Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin, who used classical myths and biblical stories as an occasion to paint elaborate idealized vistas of the Italian countryside. Dutch painters contemporary with Lorraine and Poussin were inspired to do the same and imported the tradition to Holland, whose flat terrain made the rolling hills of Italy an exotic sight to behold. Italianate landscape painting thus became a cosmopolitan genre par excellence, hailing from Italy, perfected by the French, and appropriated by the Dutch. My paintings look to the leading Dutch representatives of this tradition for inspiration, including Jan Both, Nicolaes Berchem, and Adam Pynacker among others. With one exception, my Italianate landscapes are original compositions, though all of the elements of which they are composed are direct quotations from other paintings, which I used as visual references. Since my purpose was to master a particular manner, I avoided reference to nature the better to imitate art. To complete the effect, my Italianate landscapes are suitably framed in a Dutch style, courtesy of Guido Frames.

American landscape painting is obviously a much more recent tradition, dating back to the 19th century. In the footsteps of John Constable and J.M.W. Turner who made of the English countryside what Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin had made of Italy's, painters of the Hudson River School from Thomas Cole to Thomas Moran transformed the American landscape into a subject to rival history painting by creating monumental canvases of majestic American vistas. My landscapes are of a much more modest scope than the standard fair of the Hudson River School, but they are in a related style and depict scenes from across the continental United States. From a sunrise over Plum Island to a stream off Mt. Chocorua, a country road in Blue Ridge, North Carolina, a Mississippi cotton field, the Rocky Mountains, and the Grand Canyon, my subject-matter is drawn from many of the same locations painted by great American landscape painters. I also include two views of the English Lake District. My method of composing these landscapes was quite different from my Italianate landscapes. Since the American tradition is much more naturalistic than the Dutch, I freely resorted to nature as well as to art, and with one or two exceptions I avoided direct quotations from other paintings. For my larger American landscapes, I selected some beautiful antique frames dating to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, while my smaller American landscapes are in gilded frames which I am pleased to have made myself.

27. *Shepherdess Milking a Goat*

Oil on canvas

16" x 20"

This was the first Italianate Landscape that I attempted between 2014 and 2015. It was intended to be a study of a

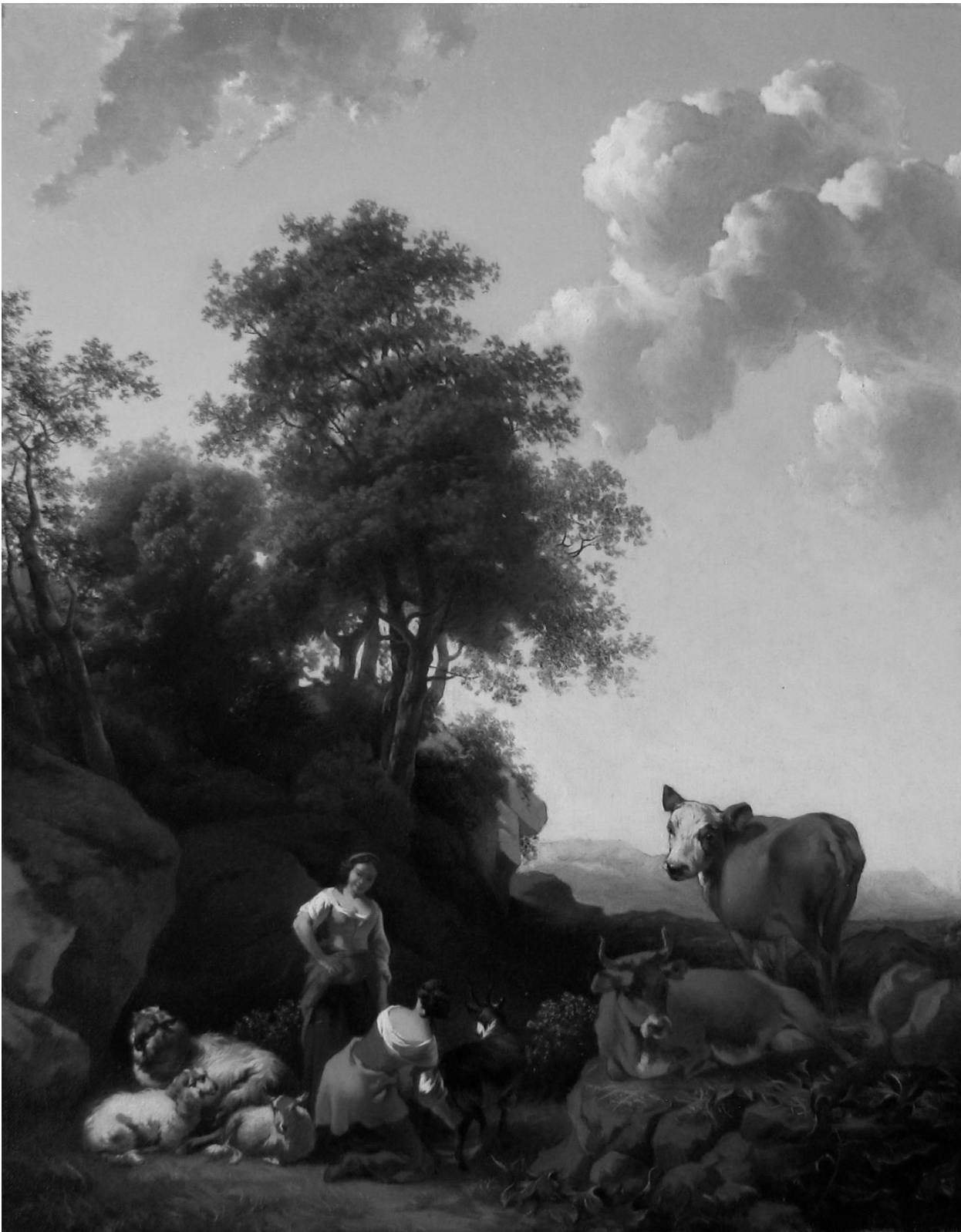


Figure 27

beautiful painting of the same name by Nicolaes Berchem in the Louvre, which captured my attention from the first moment I saw it. Berchem's painting is quite a bit larger than my humble imitation at about a meter tall, and the proportions of it are more square. Berchem's original includes almost everything except for the figures and animals in the foreground, which I took from other sources, just to change up the composition.

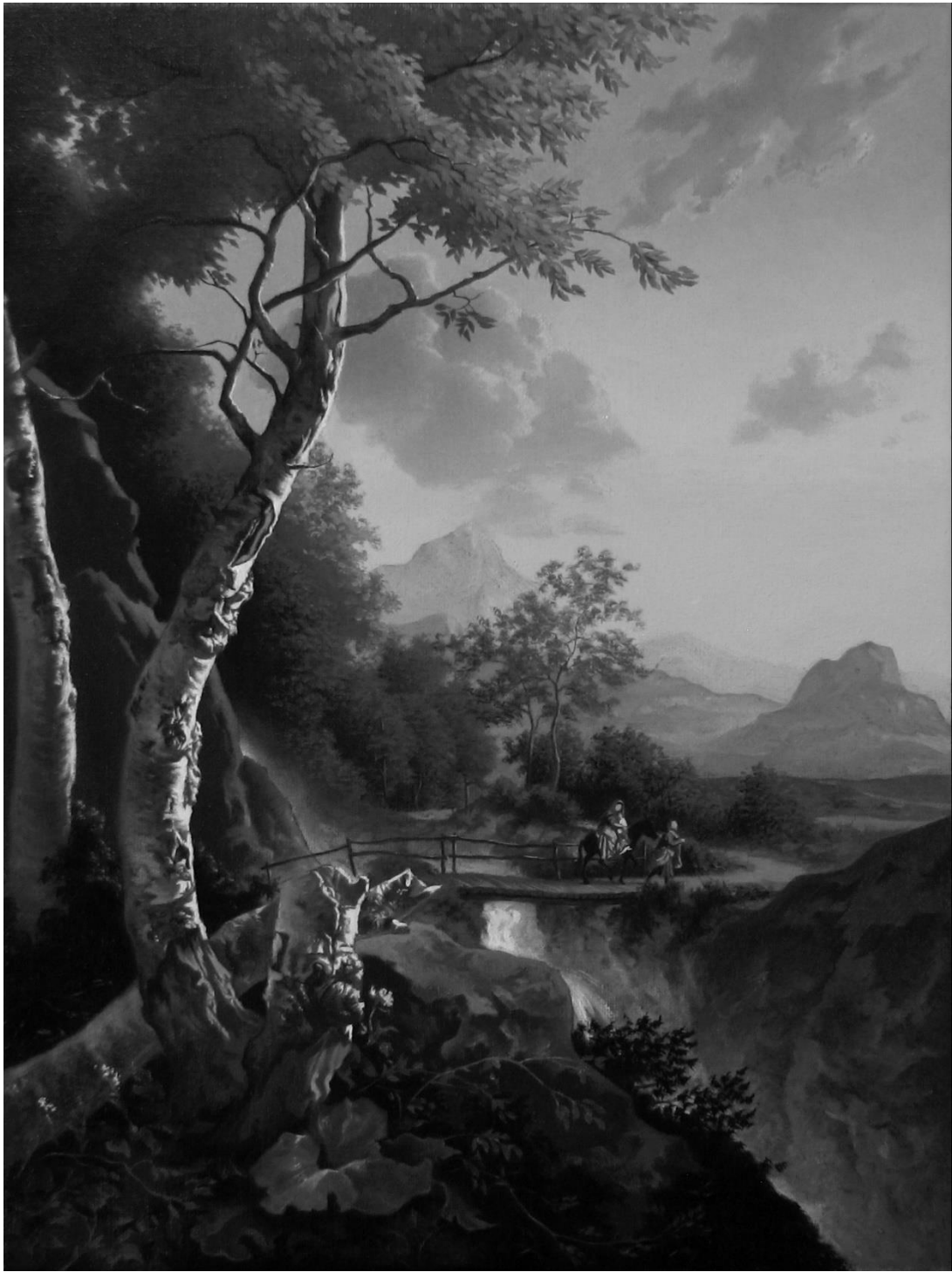


Figure 28

28. *The Flight to Egypt*
 Oil on canvas
 13" x 17"

Of my Italianate landscapes, *The Flight to Egypt* is perhaps the most original. The waterfall coursing through the rock was loosely drawn from a painting by Jan Both, as were the mountains in the distance, while the birch tree on the left was inspired by a famous painting by Adam Pynacker. The figures of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the distance on the road to Egypt allude to a painting by Giorgione.



Figure 29

29. *The Watering Hole*
Oil on canvas
17" x 12"

The Watering Hole is based on a painting by Nicolaes Berchem in the National Gallery in London, entitled *Peasants with Cattle Fording a Stream*. Using Berchem's painting as a foundation, I made substantial changes to the composition, increasing the movement of tone in the sky, adding trees on the left, and replacing almost all of the figures and animals. The central group of a woman sitting on a donkey and giving a treat to a dog I took from a popular print which was designed by Berchem.

Right: *Peasants with Cattle Fording a Stream* by Nicolaes Berchem, ca. 1670's





Figure 30

30. *Waterfall and Wending Road by a Riverbank*
 Oil on canvas
 20" x 16"

This is based on a painting by Adam Pynacker, entitled *An Italianate Landscape with a Traveler on a Path*. The cliff and waterfall as well as the trees in the center are adapted from Pynacker's painting, while the rest of the picture has been redesigned, including the road, the trees and vegetation on the left, the river, and the mountain in the distance. The color of the well-worn road is characteristic of Tuscany, whose clay soil is rich in yellow ochre, shades of which appear on almost all of the buildings.

Painting this picture reminded me of my time in Italy. As a student in Florence, I particularly enjoyed going for a jog along the Arno and into the countryside. It never took very long for the city to recede from view behind the hills, since medieval cities like Florence are built on a human scale and designed to meld seamlessly into the natural environment. At the same time, nothing of the Italian countryside feels entirely wild, the way that forests often do in the United States. All of Tuscany is a garden extending as far as the eye can see.



Figure 31

31. *Mountaintop Vista*

Oil on canvas

18" x 15"

Mountaintop Vista is a variation on a painting entitled *Mountain Landscape* by the French rococo painter Jean-Honoré Fragonard. In the 1760's, Fragonard made a series of Italianate landscapes inspired much like my own by the works of Nicolaes Berchem in the Louvre. I copied Fragonard's composition with just a few alterations. I transformed the rocky outcropping in the middle ground into a medieval ruin, and I also adjusted the design of the trees to give them more shape as well as to interject a quotation from Berchem. The tree that hangs over the middle of the picture is very similar to one that appears prominently in one of Berchem's most important paintings in the Louvre, of which Fragonard incidentally made a master-copy.

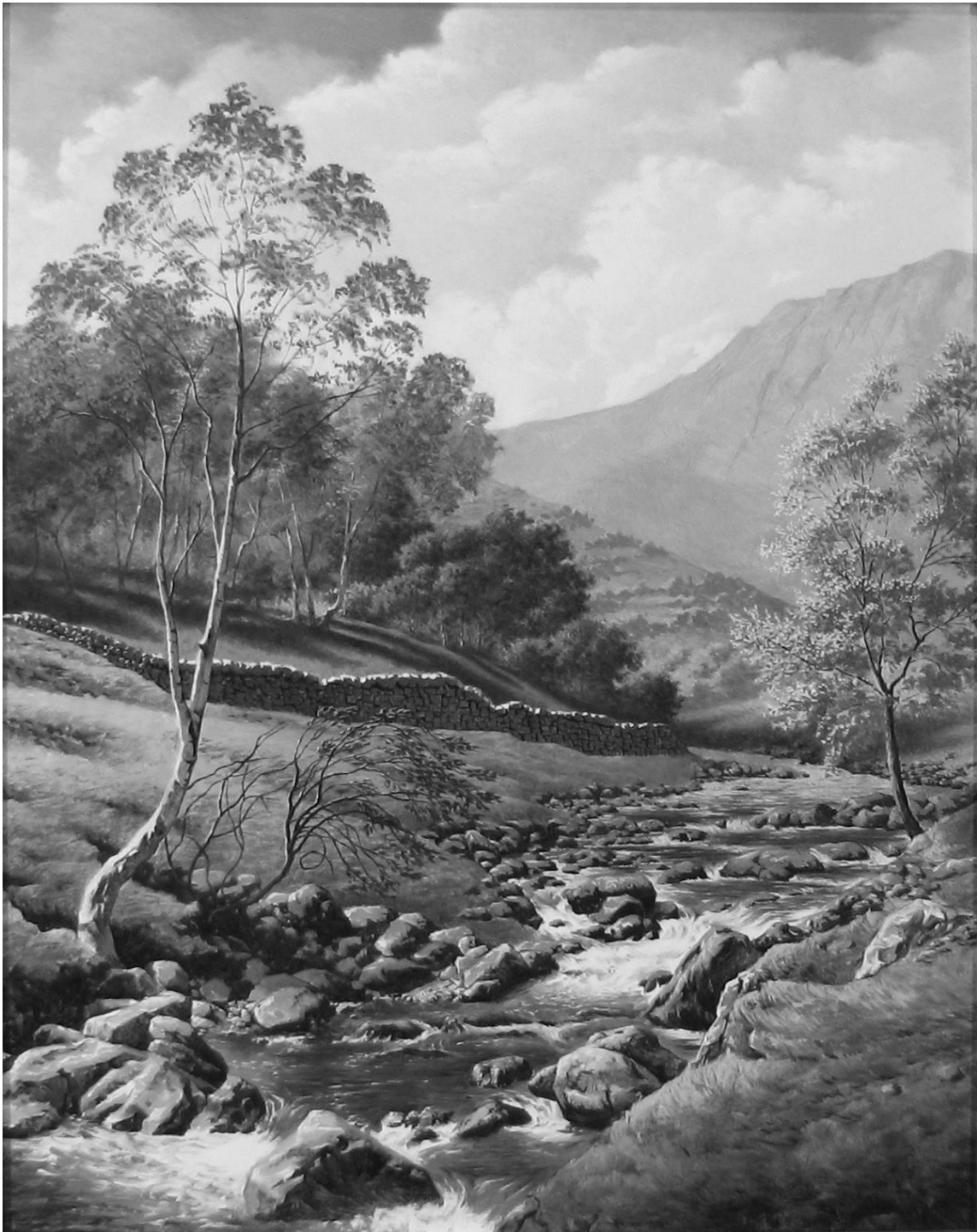


Figure 32

32. *Stream off Mount Chocorua*

Oil on panel

16" x 20"

Mount Chocorua was a very popular subject of Hudson River School painters, especially Thomas Cole, who painted it several times. There are a few streams around the mountain, though this scene is made up from imagination, because I wanted the stream set in a more open field as it might have looked in the 19th century when the forests in New Hampshire were not quite so overgrown.



Figure 33

33. *A Pinyon Pine Overlooking the Grand Canyon*
Oil on panel
16" x 20"

This is an imaginary depiction of the Grand Canyon, inspired by Thomas Moran's pictures of the same subject. I also tried to draw on my own photographs and memories of the park, which I visited when I was a child. Hiking down into the Canyon in the middle of July was a memorable experience and one of many life-threatening adventures that I've had with my father.



Figure 34

34. *Lake George*
 Oil on panel
 20" x 16"

Lake George in Upstate New York was another popular subject of Hudson River School painters, including John Frederick Kensett and Jasper Cropsey. My composition is based on a couple paintings by Cropsey, as well as photographic references. Cropsey did a similar picture of Lake Greenwood but on a smaller scale and with more elongated proportions, as well as cattle in the foreground. I am delighted to have found a beautiful period frame for this painting, from ca. 1880, which is in almost perfect condition.



Above: *Greenwood Lake* by Jasper Cropsey, 1873



Figure 35

35. *Sunrise over Plum Island*
Oil on panel
20" x 16"

Growing up as I did on the North Shore in Massachusetts, one of my fondest memories from childhood is of bicycling early in the morning along the coast near Newburyport and watching the sunrise over Plum Island. This painting is my best attempt at reconstructing this memory, with a little help from some American seascape paintings in the Boston MFA and photographs of clouds.



Figure 36

36. *Pilot Mountain*
Oil on canvas
20" x 16"

Pilot Mountain is located about twenty miles northwest of Winston-Salem in North Carolina. This particular painting has a familial connection, since my mother grew up in the vicinity, in Greensboro, and my great-grandparents also had a home in Winston-Salem. The stream that I've painted is an imaginary scene based on my mother's memories of a park where her family used to have picnics.



Above: View of Pilot Mountain



Figure 37

37. *Lake Windermere*
Oil on panel
20" x 16"

This painting was made with reference to photographs of Lake Windermere, the largest lake in England and the heart of the Lake District, home to the Lake Poets, including William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge. Wordsworth wrote a number of poems about Windermere, including one entitled *Winander* (Windermere being an abbreviation of *Winander Mere*):

MIDWAY on long Winander's eastern shore,
Within the crescent of a pleasant bay,
A tavern stood; no homely-featured house,
Primeval like its neighboring cottages,
But 't was a splendid place, the door beset
With chaises, grooms, and liveries, and within
Decanters, glasses, and the blood-red wine.
In ancient times, and ere the hall was built
On the large island, had this dwelling been
More worthy of a poet's love, a hut,

Proud of its own bright fire and sycamore shade.
But, though the rhymes were gone that once inscribed
The threshold, and large golden characters,
Spread o'er the spangled sign-board, had dislodged
The old Lion and usurped his place, in slight
And mockery of the rustic painter's hand,
Yet, to this hour, the spot to me is dear,
With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay
Upon a slope surmounted by a plain
Of a small bowling-green; beneath us stood



Figure 38

A grove, with gleams of water through the trees
 And over the tree-tops; nor did we want
 Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.
 There, while through half an afternoon we played
 On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
 Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
 Made all the mountains ring. But ere nightfall,
 When in our pinnace we returned at leisure
 Over the shadowy lake, and to the beach

38. *Country Road in the Blue Ridge Mountains*

Oil on panel

16" x 12"

Of some small island steered our course with one,
 The minstrel of the troop, and left him there,
 And rowed off gently, while he blew his flute
 Alone upon the rock,—O, then the calm
 And dead still water lay upon my mind
 Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky,
 Never before so beautiful, sank down
 Into my heart, and held me like a dream!

This autumn scene set in Appalachia was painted from imagination, with some help from photographic references of trees. In this painting as in all of my landscapes done in an American style, there are no animals or people to liven up the space. Though unconventional, my decision to make these landscapes barren of all animal life was motivated by a couple considerations. I didn't want any people in them, because antiquated clothing would look artificial and modern clothing would upset the timelessness of these scenes. As for animal life, I seriously considered including some deer



Figure 39

and birds and so forth, but I found that the contemplative mood I was going for was better served by their absence. There is a thought-provoking stillness in these paintings. The frenetic movement of life is brought to a halt, and the noise is silenced, which never happens without reason. What has stopped the birds from singing? What keeps the groundhog in his hole? Is there a storm approaching? Could it be a predator, lurking on the periphery? An earthquake? A fire, perhaps? No, I can detect no imminent calamity in these landscapes. There is just the still small voice of the wind.

39. *Mississippi Cotton Field*

Oil on panel

16" x 12"

My father's family being from Mississippi, I could hardly fail to do a painting of the deep South, of which nothing could be more representative than a cotton field. This is what a cotton field would look like around early November.



Figure 40

40. *Sunset over Lone Cone, Colorado*
Oil on panel
16" x 12"

Although the mountain in this painting doesn't have exactly the same shape as Lone Cone, it is intended to be a picture of the Rockies. Lone Cone is one peak in the Rockies which happens to stand alone and is also surrounded by meadows, not unlike what I have invented in my painting.

Right: Meadows at Lone Cone Mountain, Colorado





Figure 41

41. *Cobblestone Road, the English Lake District*
Oil on panel
16" x 12"

For this painting I actually had a good photographic reference for once, which I augmented by inventing a cobblestone road and making the clouds a bit more dynamic. The ruddy brown patches on the ground are ferns, which are all over the Lake District and turn red in winter. Speaking of the ferns that grow in the Lake District, Wordsworth wrote in his poem *Point Rash Judgment* from *Poems on the Naming of Places* published in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800):

Many such there are,
Fair Ferns and Flowers, and chiefly that tall Fern
So stately, of the Queen Osmunda named;
Plant lovelier, in its own retired abode,

On Grasmere's beach, than Naiad by the side
Of Grecian brook, or Lady of the Mere,
Sole-sitting by the shores of old romance.

In July of 1800, Coleridge likewise observed in one of his notebooks, "An eminently beautiful Object is Fern, on a hill side, scattered thick but growing single – and all shaking themselves in the wind."



Figure 42

42. *The Ridgeway*
 Oil on panel
 16" x 12"

This is an imaginary view from one of the oldest existing roads in England, the Ridgeway, which dates back 5,000 years. The view from Ivinghoe Beacon, where the Ridgeway begins, is very similar to this, though there are not so many trees there anymore. In antiquity, roads tended to pass along the tops of ridges and low lying hills, where weathering made the ground naturally hard and unlikely to collect water.



Above: View from Ivinghoe Beacon



Figure 43

ACADEMIC STUDIES

The exhibition concludes with two drawings which I did as a student at the Angel Academy and which represent the bread and butter of academic training. One is a figure drawing done from life, and the other is a cast drawing. In Alberti's treatise *On Painting*, only two subjects are recommended to the student who would learn how to draw, either nature herself or statues in the round, and academic training has always followed this advice to the letter. Drawing from life became so closely associated with the academies that drawings of the nude figure came to be known as *académies* in French, and even today cast drawings have become a distinguishing feature of the new ateliers.

43. *Académie d'Homme*
Graphite on paper
10" x 20"

44. *Cast Drawing of Michelangelo's
Giuliano de' Medici*
Charcoal on paper
22" x 32"



Figure 44



Self-Portrait of the Artist, 2010

ABOUT THE ARTIST

I grew up north of Boston in Boxford, Massachusetts. I had an interest in the fine arts from a very young age, but I didn't imagine that I would become an artist, since I wasn't aware at the time of any schools that offered a classical education in drawing and painting. So, I went to the University of Chicago and got myself a degree in another childhood interest, namely in Egyptology. It was in the course of my studies at Chicago that I discovered the Angel Academy, and at the first opportunity I headed across the pond to Italy to study with John Angel and Jered Woznicki. Although I had a lot to learn in a very short period of time, their instruction was sufficient to make all of the work that I've done since then possible.