VIOLENCE and VENUS

AGGRESSION AND COMPASSION

30,000 B.C. to MODERN TIMES

V I O L E N C E A N D V E N U S

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of mankind, every known culture has been responsible for the production of a variety of diverse art forms, from the simple to the most sophisticated. Under the best of conditions and under the worst, man has continued to be artistically creative; for art exists not as a luxury but as an essential human need.

Extreme aggression and hostility have been ever present in man's nature, and this fact has been recognised and repeatedly dealt with by many great artists from every age. The visual depiction of horrifically violent scenes of brutality in countless works of art has proven to be a recurring theme in the history of art from the earliest times to the present day.

A vast number of various artists living and working in a myriad different contexts have displayed in their work a moving realization of the savage cruelty which man has proved himself capable of perpetuating against his fellow humans. As a result, these artists have left a long, involved legacy of masterpieces which nightmarishly depict scenes of murderous war, death, rape, destruction and starvation which mark history.

Much of this work has been discussed in these pages in an attempt to show that through the creation of art, many artists have personally experienced the terrible horror which they perceive to exist as an inevitable part of the human condition.

Some of these artists have produced work which stems from

the recognition and realization of the violence of actual existence, others from a personal experience of, and response to, war and organised killing in their own lives.

The content and presentation of much of this work was to a great extent determined by various forms of patronage which changed with time and often dictated the attitude with which much violent subject matter was portrayed.

Time has shown that some artists actually relished and glorified the romance, thrill and adventure of battle and extreme conflict; while others were compelled to communicate the thrill of affirming the appreciation and respect of humanity, and displayed in their work an abhorance to the disregard and abuse of life itself. Time has been, and will continue to be, the one impartial judge of these diverse artists.

C H A P T E R I

Paleolithic Art: 30,000 - 19,000 B.C.

Through the study of archaeological discoveries, much is known regarding the habits and behaviour of primitive man, yet the mysterious origin and meaning of his art work is still open to much speculation.

The earliest existent examples of artistic creation are the carved or sculpted statuettes of the female form commonly referred to as the various 'Venus' images. The most famous and striking of these figures found near Willendorf in Lower Austria is dateable between c.30,000 - 25,000 B.C. and is acknowledged as a superb work of art. Several others, such as the 'Venus' of Lespuque found in France, are thought to be of a later date, c.20,000 - 18,000 B.C. All are significant in that they mark the period when human beings took the step of making objects for their own interest, rather than for pure utility.

It has been suggested that the purpose of their creation possibly involved a magical or religious rite of fertility, but all that can be definitely said of them is that they show evidence of and interest in, the importance of the female sex on the part of the 'artist' who created them at that time.

The other, most impressive, artistic creations of pre-history are those of Paleolithic man, the large scale paintings found on the walls and ceilings of limestone caves in Southwestern France and Northern Spain. Hidden away from

the main living area of the caves in remote, underground chambers, these paintings were executed in easily found mineral pigments, with the use of red predominant, although black, yellow, brown and violet are also found.

The fact that these paintings almost exclusively represent animals have led to the discounted[1] belief that they were produced in an attempt to gain magical control over animals which early man hunted for food. Recent investigation has proven, by the analysis of bones found in the inhabited caves, that the principle food supply of the cave dwellers was reindeer meat, although these animals were rarely represented in paintings and were easily caught.

The wild horse, the bison, the mammoth, the ibex, the aurochs and several species of felines were the chief animals depicted, often locked in fierce combat with images of human beings. The low ceiling of the so-called Hall of Bulls at Lascaux c.15,000 - 10,000 B.C. is covered with bulls and horses, often partly superimposed, which appear to run with energetic liveliness and vitality in rhythmic movements across the ceiling surface.

In another chamber is a painting of a bison pierced by a spear, dragging his intestines as he turns to gore a man who is represented only schematically as compared to the naturalistic treatment of animals. In this painting the man falls back with mouth agape, his arms outstretched, hands flung open, and is shown with an excited, erect penis.

These works are probably more likely to be pictographic than aesthetically considered, but quite apart from their artistic interest these representations of animals and figures

Figure 1

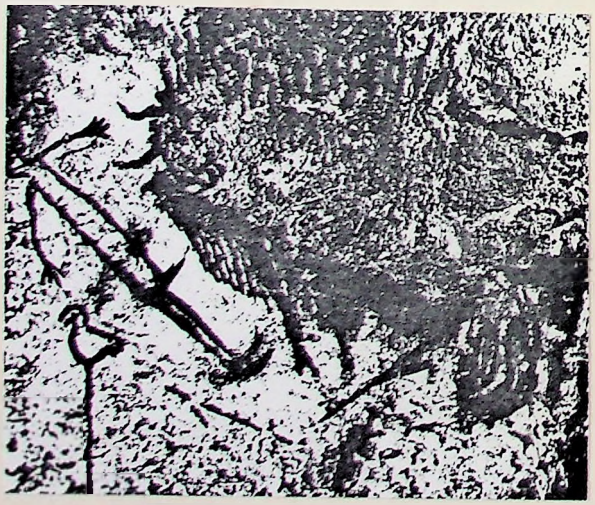


Figure 2

in battle give an idea of the life of Paleolithic man. Humans are shown in their daily principle occupation, hunting, and it is possible from these works to study their weapons, tools and ornaments. Pictures such as the fighting scene from the Galeria del Roble, near Morella la Vella in Spain, which depict only humans fighting among themselves with spears and bows and arrows, raise questions yet unanswered concerning the behaviour of early man, the interests and preoccupations of the artist, and his role in early society.

Although the temptation exists to try to link the beginnings of cave art with work being created today, there is no direct artistic tradition which connects the work left by Paleolithic man and that of modern artists. However, it remains true that for reasons still undefined, primitive artists were motivated to create sublime, tactile 'Venus' images, and later, visual scenes of ferocious human and animal combat amid a shower of arrows and spears depicted in deep red and black paint. On the surface of certain pictures, marks have been found which indicate that arrows had been fired at them. As the theory of magical domination of the animals through depiction has been ruled out, these marks constitute the first evidence in a tradition of viewing art which has persisted to the present day!

Mesolithic Art

As the temperature of the environment rose with the disappearance of the great glaciers, man's existence shifted from cave dwelling toward open air living. This stage of human development is known as the Mesolithic period or middle

stone age, which lasted for approximately ten thousand years.

Very little art appears to have been made at this time, and that which does exist is agreed to be less interesting than work created in the Paleolithic period, although one example from El Cerro Felio in Eastern Spain shows a group of male and female hunters pursuing animals with spears and arrows done in a single tone of red. In another instance, human figures carved in a stone wall outside Palermo, Sicily, are shown engaged in a supposed ritual dance which includes sexual acts as well as acts of torture, and the horned bull again makes an appearance.

Neolithic Art: 8,000 - 3,000 B.C.

In the warmer climate of the Neolithic period, wild plants and grains flourished and were eventually cultivated, at the same time certain species of animals were domesticated. Although man was still a hunter, he no longer depended entirely upon wild animals for survival, and depictions of them became less frequent.

Neolithic man's principal material for weapons and tools was still stone, but the first evidence of smelted metals appears alongside that of pottery. More lasting settlements grew up and the beginnings of architecture can be seen. Travel and commerce are indicated by objects later found far from where they were originally made.

Also at this time the first sanctuary-like structures appear which imply the existence of forms of organised religion. The great heathen sanctuary at New Grange, County

Meath, Ireland, is believed to date from c. 3,000 B.C. or earlier, and the passage grave at Knowth, Co. Meath from a bit later. Some of these Neolithic religious places passed down through Bronze and Iron Age man without losing their sacred significance, proven by metal tools found in them which date from later periods.

The kerb stone which lies before the entrance of the site at New Grange is covered in a decorative pattern of swirling spirals that flow into each other and adapt themselves to the contours of the huge stone. On one end of the stone the pattern breaks, changing into a repetitive diamond design, while on the opposite end a large diamond shape breaks the overall harmony of this subtle motif.

The stone lies horizontally today in the landscape of County Meath, but if it were to be viewed standing upright, as many ancient Irish ogham stones exist, the stone at New Grange would assume an entirely different character altogether.[2]

The large diamond shape would act as a base, from which the flowing spirals travel upward and out through the circular crown adorned with smaller diamonds at the top. These stressed diamond shapes, viewed from any angle, simultaneously form four triangular or pyramidal shapes which point out in four definite, separate directions, all at the one time.

Other decorations at New Grange and Knowth, which vary considerably from the type described, include primitive representations of distorted, perhaps disfigured, animals. Human forms also appear, but purely abstract decorative pattern and balance mark the essential basis of all Celtic art from this time. Diodorus, in the first century B.C. said of the

Figure 3

Celts of Gaul in his history of the world: 'In conversation they use few words and speak in riddles, for the most part hinting at things and leaving a great deal to be understood. . .'[3]

Recent excavations (1961-63) in the mound of Catal Huyuk on the plain of Anatolia in central Turkey disclosed a small portion of a city which was destroyed and rebuilt a dozen times between the years 6,500 and 5,700 B.C. The city had a common outer wall for defense and could only be entered by means of ladders, marking the discovery of the earliest known fortifications.

The houses were clustered together without streets, the bones of the dead buried inside under the floors after having been exposed to vultures to remove the flesh. Shrines or holy places lay alongside the dwelling, many adorned with entire horned bulls' skulls, almost certainly symbolic of males; and on one wall appears a stylized but very aggressive silhouette painting of a large bull. On another wall was found the earliest[4] known landscape painting, which shows the city of Catal Huyuk itself, represented before a cone or pyramidal shaped red, erupting volcano.

Other wall paintings from these shrines depict death, symbolized as huge vultures devouring tiny, headless humans shown in the poses in which corpses were buried. Human skulls were found, their features reconstructed in modeled plaster, with shells inserted for eyes.

Curiously, as in the previous societies discussed, amid all these violent, gruesome and morbid creations, a remarakable series of sexual artifacts were found; including numerous statues of a female goddess whose immense breasts, belly and thighs recall the famous Paleolithic image known as the 'Venus' of Willendorf.

C H A P T E R II

Three Ancient Cultures

During the years dating from around four thousand B.C. to the rise of the Roman Empire, the human gift of reason underwent great cultivation and sophistication. In the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Aegean civilizations, man first set down intellectual information in visible form, arriving at systems of writing essential to further development.

From the idea of setting down meaningful symbols on papyrus or impressing them in soft clay came the ability to record and communicate concepts of commerce, governmental authority, systematic agriculture, science and mathematics, philosophy and architecture, and finally, literature and music.

In Egyptian and Mesopotamian societies the emphasis in figurative art was transferred from animals to humans, first in groups then gradually towards individual studies culminating with the later Greeks; and all visual artwork became increasingly complex. Despite the continuous, successive achievements of man, curiously, much of the art which remains of the ancient world has often been mutilated, defaced, scarred and battered for reasons yet to be fully comprehended.

Egyptian Art

The antiquity and continuity of the Egyptian civilization were legendary even to the Greeks and Romans. Many Greek masters went to school with the Egyptians and the art of

Egypt has had a tremendously important influence on nearly all subsequent art.

Egyptian art persisted, unchanged in many essential respects, even when its identity was submerged in that of the Roman Empire. Although rival cultures of the Near East were also artistically productive, especially Mesopotamia, they were frequently invaded, overwhelmed and much of their heritage destroyed.

The separate kingdoms of Upper (southern) and Lower (northern) Egypt were united by a powerful upper Egptian monarch known as Narmer, founder of the first Egyptian dynasty. The Egyptian king or pharaoh was considered divine, believed to have been generated by the cycles of nature which dominated the Egyptian existence. The Egyptians devoted their major artistic efforts to the gods and the after life, not only in architecture but also in sculpture, both of which were of colossal dimensions meant to rival the landscape and sky.

Obviously the most famous of these achievements is the Great Sphinx (c. 2,530 B.C.) not only the earliest colossus to be preserved but also by far the largest to survive. Equally well known are the great Egyptian pyramids, the earliest being the stepped limestone pyramid Imhotep (c. 2,750 B.C.), followed later by the pyramids of Giza, Cheops (c. 2,570 B.C.), Chephern (c. 2,530 B.C.) and Mycerinus (c. 2,500 B.C.).

But before these monumental works were created the Egyptians had been prolifically producing decorative reliefs and paintings from which most knowledge of Egyptian life is derived. The earliest[5] known example of an Egyptian mural painting, made shortly before 3,000 B.C. is not essentially

different from Neolithic rock paintings found in the Spanish Levant. The composition shows three Nile boats, possibly carrying coffins, attended by mourning women with raised arms, while scattered randomly about are shown men fighting animals and each other.

A century or two later, Egyptian art changed totally, reflecting the character of Narmer's monarchy, which had affected all aspects of Egyptian life, and the first cosmetic stone palettes (c. 3,000 B.C.) were produced. The earliest of these, a fragment of a slate tablet, shows a bull that has overthrown and is about to gore and to mount a helpless man. The animal has been interpreted to symbolize the king of Upper Egypt triumphing over his defeated lower Egyptian foes. The bull's hoof presses into his enemy's calf, and pins him to the ground. The tablet is a fragment of a stone palette used to mix paint applied to the eyes of divine images in order to provide the gods with sight.

The finest of these palettes is that of King Narmer (c. 2,980 B.C.), in which a sense of total order prevails. The king himself appears in this work, wearing the bull's tail and his own crown, and he is shown grasping his enemy by the hair with his left hand while his uplifted right hand brandishes a mace. Below the king's feet his other foes flee in terror, while in the upper corners of the palette cows' heads, symbolic of the Egyptian goddess Hathor,[6] hover above.

On the flipside of the palette, the King strides forth wearing the crown of lower Egypt, preceded by warriors carrying standards, and inspects ten decapitated bodies, their heads placed between their legs. Hollowed out to hold paint, a

Figure 4

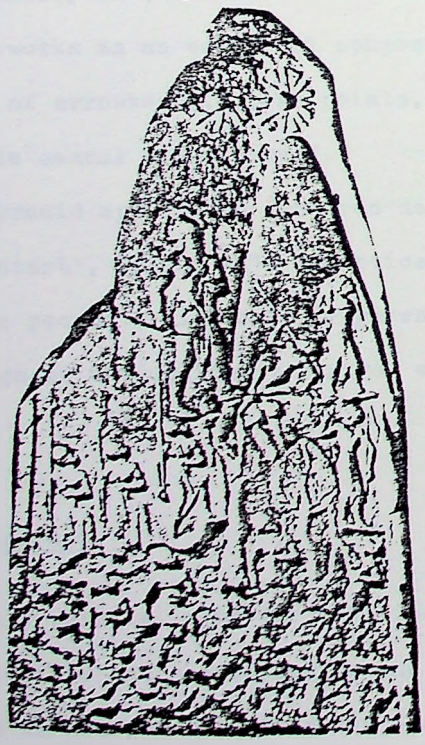


Figure 5

cup-like disk represents the sun; below which, as in the earlier fragment, another bull again gores a helpless human victim.

The powerful image of the great pyramids has proven to recur as an aggressive shape in much art through the ages. Said to have been constructed from forced slave labour, according to the accounts of Greek and Roman writers, there is now speculation that this information was fabricated, for it is inconsistent with what is known of Egyptian society in general. The pyramids do show evidence of the wealth and power of the pharaohs in a society so organised that it was capable of constructing these immense perfectly shaped monuments, with four complex isosceles triangular sides, in the lifetime of a single king. The pyrimidal shape and image, symbolic of power, legendary in the tradition of art, has been utilized in violent works as an essential compositional device; reflective of arrowheads, spear points, swords and knife tips and the male sexual organ itself.

The pyramid appears in Leonardo da Vinci's furious 'Battle of the Anghiari', Delacroix's romantically melodramatic 'Liberty leading the people', Picasso's frightening 'Guernica' and even throughout the comically serious violent work of Saul Steinberg.

Mesopotamian Art

Roughly parallel with the civilization of Egypt, another historic culture was developing in the region of the Near East known as Mesopotamia, from the Greek word meaning 'land

between the rivers'. This fertile valley was attractive to ancient peoples, but lacked the natural defenses which secured Egypt's unity, stability and permanence. Mesopotamian cities were under frequent and repeated siege from neighbours and foreign invaders and had to be heavily fortified. The climate was also harsher than that which the Egyptians enjoyed, subject to sharp contrasts of heat and cold, flood and drought, as well as violent storms. As a result of these factors, the Mesopotamians were less concerned with the afterlife and concentrated more on their struggle to survive, which is reflected in their art.

The impermanence of Mesopotamian society is clearly shown in the carved boundary stone found at Lagash, called the 'Stele of King Eannatum' (c. 2,560 B.C.). This stele, or upright slab bearing inscriptions or sculpture is also called the 'Stele of the Vultures'.

King Eannatum led one ethnic body of Mesopotamian people called the Sumerians, who were eventually conquered, but whose culture was adopted by their victors. His stele shows him clad in goat skins, carrying a mace as he leads his soldiers into battle. The battalion is represented symbolically by a solid block of four shields, topped with helmeted heads. From each shield protrude six spears, each held by a pair of hands, while below the shields a steady row of feet tramples a shapeless mass of prone naked bodies. Frederick Hartt, Professor of Art History at the University of Virginia, ends a description of this limestone stele with these words, 'To modern eyes accustomed to mechanized warfare, this relentless and inhuman attack is all to familiar.'[7]

The Sumerian social order in Mesopotamia collapsed under the weight of warfare and was ruled by a Semitic people from a place called Akkad, the site of which has not yet been found. Akkadian art seems to have excelled in emotional violence, an example being the sandstone 'Stele of King Naram Sin' (c. 2,220 B.C.) one of the early monarchs. This ruler is depicted about to kill the last of his enemies, mace in hand, while one crumpled foe on bended knee vainly attempts to pluck a spear from his own throat. Others plead for their lives as they dive headlong over a cliff in an apparent agonizing attempt to escape. The victorious soldiers of the king stride proudly up a hill in dramatic relief, unaware that Akkad would soon be invaded by a powerful mountain people, the capital destroyed and the 'Stele of King Naram Sin' carried off as booty.

The conquerers of the Akkadian Empire, led by a ruler called Gudea, left few positive artistic achievements. Gudea's people, the Guti, devastated the cities of Akkad, created a few statues dedicated to their ruler, and built a huge temple or ziggurat, a pyramidal building with terraced storeys in what is now Iraq, this being their major accomplishment.

Two cities briefly ascended in the period 2,025 - 1,763 B.C., these called Isin-Larsa after which the period was named. From this time dates a terra-cotta relief of a voluptuous female nude representing the goddess of death. She is both alluring and frightening with full breasts, sensuous rounded hips and terrible feathered talons and wings. She perches upon the backs of two lions, and is flanked by two large owls. Originally, her body was painted red, one owl black and the other red, both lions black. This fearsome red woman marks the

highpoint of Babylonian rule and represents the first[8] naturalistic depiction of the female form in a long line of others to follow.

A warlike people called the Assyrians, through skill and ruthlessness, eventually gained control of the entire Mesopotamian region. Their historical records and their art show them to be merciless, engaged in continuous warfare, destructive of conquered populations and cities, until they too fell by the sword and their cities razed to the ground as they vanished.

From Assyrian rule (c. 1,000 - 612 B.C.) only information of one royal residence is known in detail today. It is the eighth century palace of King Sargon II which has been excavated in present day Iraq. The entrances are flanked with enormous man-beasts; monsters with the bodies of bulls and human heads. These large limestone guardians of the palace are reminiscent of royal Egyptian pharaohs palettes and precursory of much of Picasso's work which deals with the man-bull creatures derived from Greek culture.

Inside the palace are a succession of halls, lined and adorned with continuous stone reliefs of unrelieved mayhem said to relentless portray the king's military exploits and personal courage. In these descriptive stone passages, ancestors of the lengthy political narratives of Roman imperial sculpture such as Trajan's Column (c. 110 A.D.), the Assyrian soldiers are shown fighting numerous battles which they seem always to win. Even in reproduction, they are clearly seen gleefully burning cities, besieging fortresses, and dismantling the fortifications as they slaughter the inhabitants. Such commissioned monuments to the glory of victory in war tell

of the tribes defeated, the booty taken and ensure the survial of the 'heroics' depicted.

In later times, these monuments developed into complete picture-chronicles of episodes from the king's various well organised campaigns. They are actually forerunners of modern documentary war newsreels, which even today are prone to be less than impartial. The best preserved of these stone chronicles date from a relatively late period, the reign of King Ashurnasirpal II of Assyria, who lived in the ninth century B.C.[9] They show many events in the unfolding of the king's campaigns; the army crossing rivers, again attacking fortresses, on marches, etc., but for the first time soldiers are seen camped and having meals. The scenes become more crowded and complex, the action heightened and the abundance of dead and wounded more apparent, though not one of them is Assyrian. As if to pave the way for all war monuments and glorification of war lords, battle and killing appear to be no problem at all; widespread violent death is inflicted trouble-free on the enemy.

Also from the remains of King Ashurnasirpal II's palace arise two other important developments in violent art, the first being the earliest indications of humour in war. Possibly unconscious on the part of the sculptor, there exist nonetheless amusing passages delicately chiseled into the alabaster reliefs from this time. An excellent example is the agreeably absurd scene depicting the 'Elamite Fugitives Crossing a River' (c. 883 - 859 B.C.), the Elamites being Mesopotamian enemies of the Assyrians.

The three fugitives are seen swimming across a stylized

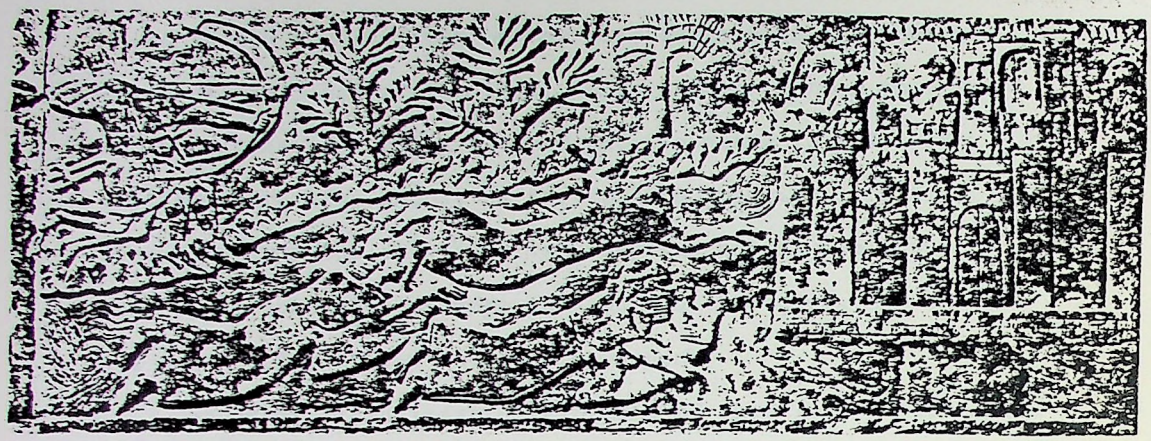


Figure 6

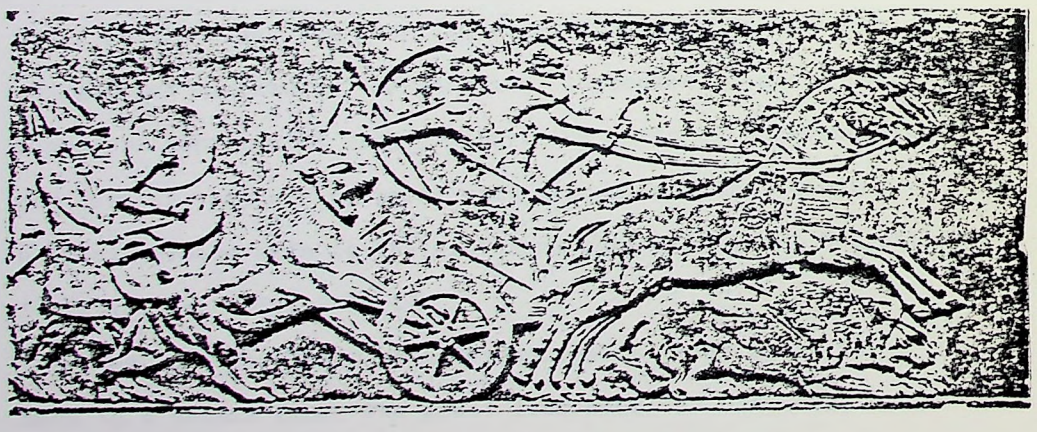


Figure 7

river toward their little walled city while from the towers three of their mates clap their hands and cheer them on. The three swimmers are fully clothed and two cling to inflated goat skins to stay afloat as they paddle frantically across; meanwhile from the riverbank two Assyrian bowmen are about to let fly at both the swimmers and lads in the tower, who have yet to even fit arrows into their weapons.

The other significant development of this late Mesopotamian art is the depiction of fierce, deadly conflict as obvious sport. Perhaps the most powerful reliefs from the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II in Nimrud are those which show the king displaying his courage and strength in savage attacks on lions with bow and arrow from a horse drawn chariot. The animals appear to have been goaded into fury and released from cages, their mouths wide open with rage. Standing in his chariot, sword at his side, the Assyrian ruler fires arrows into the exaggerated muscles of the snarling, tormented beasts. The lions are represented with a surprising depth of understanding and care as they are peppered with arrows, and they display a fatal heroism akin to the grotesque scenes of Saint Sebastian to follow centuries later.

The intense climax of Ashurnasirpal's cruel sport is seen in a detail from 'The great lion hunt' c. 688 - 627 B.C. which shows a dying lioness pierced by three arrows which have paralyzed her hindquarters as she attempts to drag herself away from the slaughter, bleeding profusely from her wounds.

The lion hunt becomes an often repeated theme in art which was followed by Rubens and later Delacroix, whose glorification of the ferocity of feline savagery and sacrifice

Figure 8

of horses for sport equals that of the ninth century B.C.

The death of animals is shown later as symbolic of ultimate death, without resurrection, and is dealt with by numerous sensitive artists, becoming an entire preoccupation for Franz Marc, the German Expressionist painter who was killed in the first world war.

Aegean Art

Three decades before the turn of the nineteenth century, the discovery of extensive ruins of a vanished civilization shed light on two distinct cultures which existed on the dry, rocky islands in the Aegean Sea.

One was centred in what is now present day Crete and has been called Minoan after the legendary Cretan king, the other is known as Helladic named after the Greek mainland. These cultures are known by scholars to have risen somewhat later than those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, but roughly parallel them in time.

These gifted people appear to have been well organised, relatively peaceful and constructive, and produced work which remains highly original and imaginative. They developed a form of very early Greek writing and excelled in music, pottery and architecture, as well as nearly modern looking sculpture and colourful fresco murals. Their art gracefully represents swift movement in free, flowing lines which they used to depict humans and animals, birds and marine life as well as calm landscape murals which adorned the walls of their buildings.

A particularly interesting fresco excavated from the palace of their king at Knossos c. 1500 B.C. depicts a ritual

ceremony known as 'The Bull Dance' in which the bull seems to co-exist with two nearly naked females while a reddish coloured boy acrobatically leaps over it. Whether or not the bull is destined for the slaughter is not evident, nor are any definite sexual implications readily obvious.

Another fine fresco which dates from approximately the same time is known as 'Boxers from Thera' or 'The Young Princes' and shows two small boys boxing toe to toe, their extended left arms crossing and becoming one. Their conflict is not portrayed violently, but appears as a gentle, natural activity for young males to engage in. The fluid contours of their moving bodies is echoed in the downward flowing of their long dark hair, and this fresco appears as one of the first works of art where a violent sport is not in pursuit of death, but athletics. The later Greeks took the representation of the athlete to a still unequaled height of perfection, but rarely did they achieve the passiveness of this naive scene.

In keeping with the general violent thread of this dissertation thus far, it seems fitting to discuss two examples of the final phase of Helladic culture known as Mycenaean, from its principal center in Mycenae. Spanning both time and place, the bull once more makes his appearance, being violently captured by muscular young men on two golden cups found in Laconia on the Greek mainland. A number of frantic bulls are shown being lassoed around the ankle and entrapped by nets, a far cry from the graceful creature in the Knossos fresco.

Mycenaean warrior kings felt their weapons to be of great importance,[10] as an inlaid bronze daggar found in a royal grave clearly displays. Executed in gold and silver, a fierce battle

between men and lions is depicted with characteristic Aegean swiftness of movement. One lion assaults lunging warriors who protect themselves with huge rectangular shields while two other lions flee in terror toward the tip of the daggar.

The most aggressive of the animal beasts appears to have dispatched one of his tormenters and is involved in what military strategists term a 'rear guard action', allowing the two other big cats to escape; one looking back to witness the hero's destruction at the hands of his human antagonists.

Attacked by another group of Greek invaders from the north, the rich and powerful Mycenaean civilization was overwhelmed and destroyed about 1100 B.C.

Greek Art

For the purposes of this dissertation, it would be ludicrous, if not impossible to attempt any in depth study of the ancient Greek civilization and art as a whole. The massive achievements of the Greeks have been well documented and it would be repetitive to enumerate them here, but the abundance of violence related work which came from their civilization demands mention.

Both the landscape and the climate of Greece stimulated the unprecedented concentration of Greek culture on the quality of human life and on physical and intellectual activity. The successful marriage of these two major interests later culminated in the intensive stress placed on direct observation of nature and the extremely accurate representation of the human form.

Obviously the Greeks were fascinated by the principally

male body, nearly worshipping it, evidenced by the numerous statues of perfectly conditioned physiques of male athletes and warriors which they produced as well as by their exquisite female forms of still unsurpassed sensuality and beauty.

The rational Greeks, as opposed to the rigidly conventional Egyptians, derived their art from the nature and behaviour of mankind, dealing with the dignity and beauty, as well as tragedy, of the individual human being. They dealt with the physical, intellectual and psychological interplay of individuals instead of dwelling purely on the glorification of kings and armies. Unlike the Egyptians and Mesopotamians, whose art changed very little with the passing centuries, the Greeks created no known collossal monuments to particular rulers, as they believed no single human monarch or god ruled the entire Greek world.

The Greek civilization, anything but free from war, conflict and violence, was governed by a political system of city states and was guided by a belief in various gods who took on the appearance and characteristics of humans. The Greeks believed that these gods (who were capable of experiencing hatred, jealousy and rivalry, etc.) frequently united with humans sexually,producing a race of demigods known in their literature as heroes, and who often took active part in human wars. The rational philosophy and literature which flourished in ancient Greece leaves no indication of a challenge to the belief in these gods, nor to the existence of monsters who were depicted as part animal and part human.

These imaginative creatures, always dangerous, are well known to art history enthusiasts as satyrs, centaurs, sirens,

and the totally evil minotaurs, and reappear throughout the work of artists to come, generations later.

The ancient Greeks had been active potters since at least the ninth century B.C. and have left fine examples of geometric patterned works which include large and small vases, pitchers, wine and oil jars, etc. The earliest of these were created by a conservative war-like people called Dorians, also responsible for the devastation of the highly developed Mycenaean civilization. By the middle of the seventh century B.C. the tight, Egyptian influenced geometric pattern style of painting these vessels had become more free and figurative.

One amphora, or dual handled wine vessel, which dates from c. 650 B.C. shows a fierce fight between a lion and a boar, the first depiction of purely animal conflict, while the reverse side is adorned with a gruesome scene of Odysseus, the wandering adventurer as he and his companions plunge a burning stake into the one eye of a cyclops. This horrible and perhaps symbolic art is rendered quite calmly as a decorative consideration to the vessel; the faces of the attackers smiling as the cyclops- quite human in appearance - displays only mild surprise.

A much smaller amphora known as the Chigi vase, made at Corinth c. 650 B.C. but found in central Italy, shows foot soldiers equipped with helmets, shields and spears vigorously hurrying into battle, reminiscent of the Assyrian reliefs which showed those warriors happily running off to war. This curious, lemming-like activity has taken place ever since humans were advanced enough to organise disciplined armies, and has continued to occur in every successive generation as an accepted outlet for the extreme human aggression which exists in every person, but

which is kept in close check under normal circumstances.

Much Greek art known to have existed perished naturally or was destroyed by invaders, and what has survived is often in a ruinous condition. Monumental painting, an art form held to be of great importance to the ancient Greeks, is lost to modern man completely. Although often referred to in Greek literature, none of their paintings has ever been found. It is believed that bright colour was stressed in both wall painting and in early sculpture, upon which traces of pigment have been found. Statues which today appear in naked, natural stone hues are said to have once been richly coloured with bright paint. In later periods the colouring grew more restrained and subtle when ancient Greek sculpture took on a more life-like appearance.

Early Greek sculpture shows similarities to Egyptian work in many respects, attributable to the navigation abilities of Greek sailors which enabled the two great civilizations to communicate. Statues of individual persons which date from c. 600 B.C., as well as the earlier pottery decorated with geometric patterns, show definite Egyptian influence in style and execution. It is not until around c. 450 B.C. that Greek sculpture really achieved the naturalistic qualities so readily associated with it today.

However, the first[11] large scale Greek depictions of serious violence appear somewhat earlier, as in the north frieze of the Treasury of the Siphnians, Delphi. A fragment, known as the 'Battle of Gods and Giants', which dates from c. 530 B.C. is a portion of a continuous relief of battle scenes which circles the treasury. The handling of these reliefs is revolutionary in that it marks new concepts in space and depth, and though the

depiction of battle was no doubt commissioned, the sculptor's own creative ability and inventiveness is apparent. The scene shows a variety of figures engaged in mortal combat, those in the foreground sharply cut from the stone and raised on high relief, while those furtherest from the eye are only slightly chiseled out. No longer is distance indicated by showing figures above one another to imply depth, as in the Assyrian reliefs, but all stand or move on the same ground line and overlap in appearance due to the variations in the degree of relief.

Amid the fighting, human-like figures, two lions are shown pulling a war chariot, one ferociously devouring (or chewing, at any rate) either a god or a giant. This is the first depiction of the savage feline in the service of 'men' at war, probably due to the inhuman qualities which the combatants possess. Women are also shown, but because of damage to the frieze their role and involvement in the battle is unclear.

Toward the end of the sixth century B.C. Greek vase painters began to leave the figures in their compositions in the red terra-cotta colour of the vessels themselves for a more effective and life-like result. One of the earliest and finest red figure vases in existence is dateable to c. 515 B.C. and illustrates a passage from the Illiad.

The body of the fallen Trojan warrior Sarpedon, son of Zeus, is shown being carried from the field of battle by the winged, twin brothers Hypnos and Thanatos (Sleep of Death) under the supervision of Hermes. Deep red blood pours from three spear wounds, one to the heart, as the muscular, youthful

body is removed in preparation for a hero's grave, hands and feet already dragging in the dirt. This superb black and reddish coloured vase is delicately painted in thin, positive flowing lines which mark a high point in Greek vase painting and is undoubtedly attributable to a particular artist known as Euphronios, who carried it out with unexpected tenderness.

Of the numerous artistic break throughs brought about by the ancient Greeks, the appearance of works signed by individual artists, and studies of individual figures or characters rank among the most important. The earliest and most impressive of these superb individual studies are often of fallen or dying warriors which embody evidence of the ultimate quality and perfection of the Greek sculpture to follow.

The marble 'Dying Warrior', from the east pediment of the temple of Aphaia in Aegina (which lies at the end of a long peninsula in the part of Greece now known as Peloponnesos) was executed in c. 490 B.C. and remains a truly powerful, remarkable work of art to view, even today.

The warrior is presented on his left hip after having been knocked to the ground, the bicep of his left arm, passed through a loop on the inside of his circular shield straining as he vainly tries to raise himself. Although he is still helmeted, his right hand is weaponless and his exquisitely contoured muscular body is rendered helpless and vulnerable. He gazes downward calmly - almost peacefully - as the realization of impending death envelops him; his bearded face nearly shows a smile. The 'Dying Warrior' epitomises with heroic grandeur the tragic Greek ideal of the nobility and celebration of self

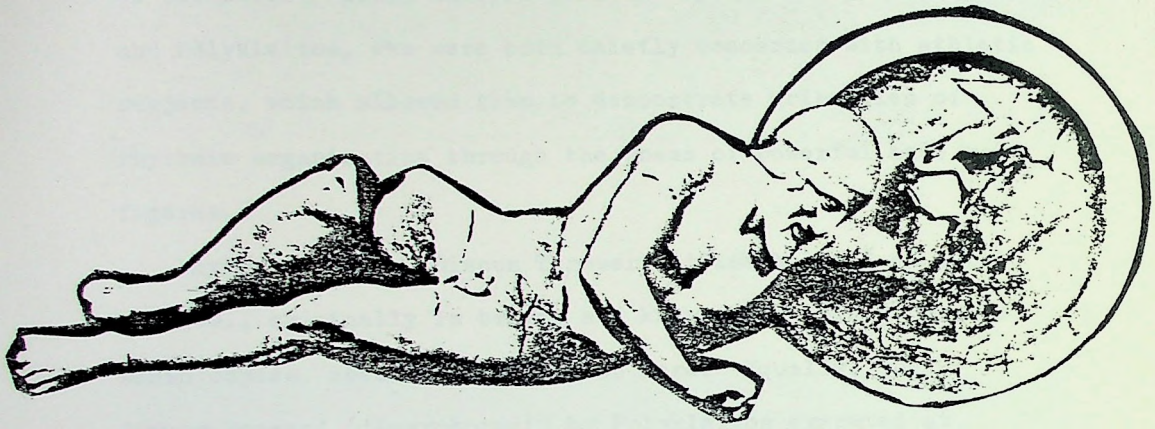


Figure 9

possession and calm, even at the moment of violent death. The warrior's right thigh and knee, smashed off through the ages, only add to the modern impact of this heroic, emotional and psychological artistic masterpiece.

Figurative Greek sculpture reached its climax in the middle of the fifth century in work produced by two sculptors, Myron and Polykleitos, who were both chiefly concerned with athletic subjects, which allowed them to demonstrate principles of rhythmic organization through the poses of powerful nude male figures.

Myron's famous 'Discus Thrower' ('Diskobolos') of about 450 B.C., originally in bronze and known only through marble Roman copies, needs no description here. Equally, the 'Spear-Bearer' ('Doryphoros') by Polykleitos executed at around the same time and also lost has been widely discussed and analyzed through the bronze reconstruction, and the temptation to detail them now must be resisted. It must be noted, however, that these works mark a point where the highly developed depiction of a human, assertive act is not military but athletic, a theme which recurs later in the history of art.

During the same period, the symbolic depiction of 'Victory' as a female form bearing a standard is evident in works by Painos such as 'Victory from Olympia' c. 420 B.C. and 'Victory Untying her Sandal' c. 410 B.C. from the parapet of the temple of Athena Nike, Athens. Obviously, this symbolic image was also later to be dealt with by a number of artists in countless works of art.

Also the first depictions of men and women in mortal

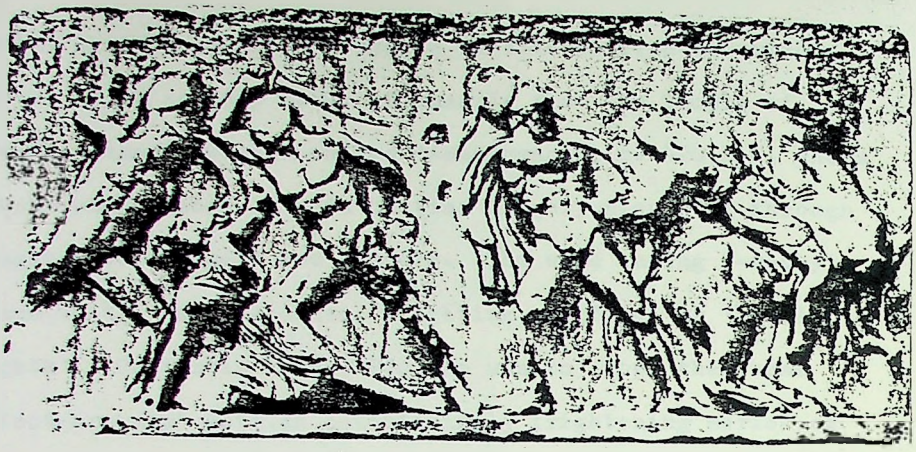


Figure 10

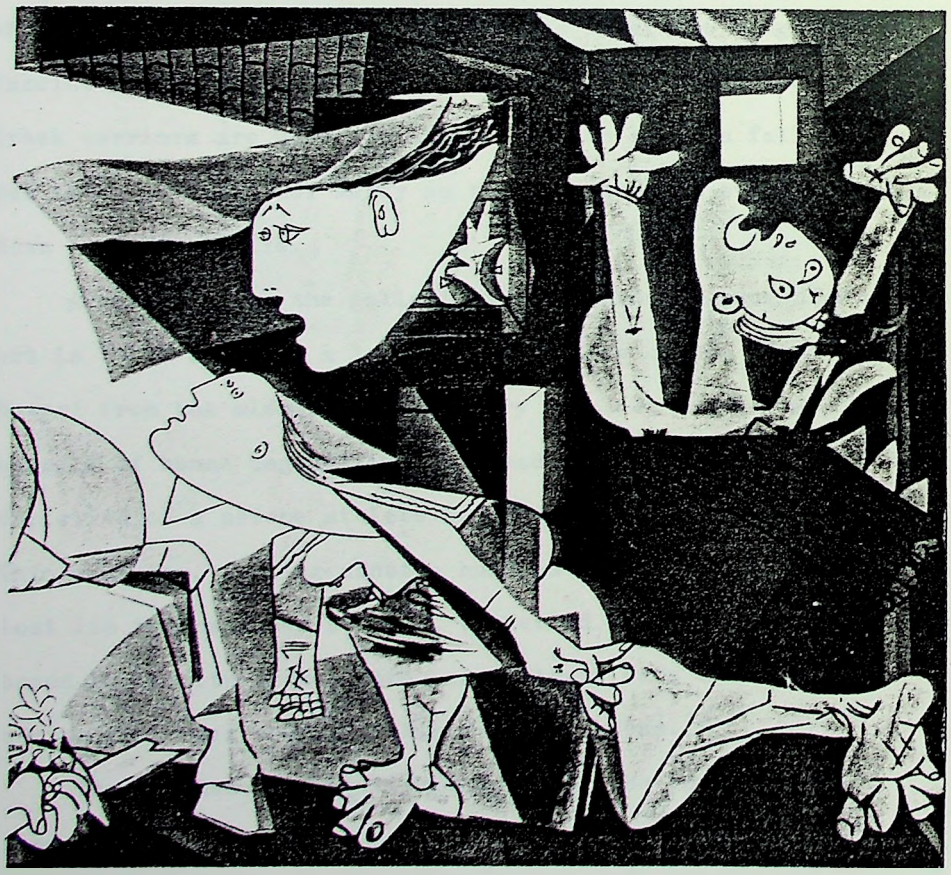


Figure 11

combat against each other appear in friezes from the middle of the fifth century B.C. An example from the Temple of Apollo, Bassai, Greece called 'Amazonmachy' c. 420 B.C. shows Greeks and Amazons in wild battles of gory slaughter through exaggerated movement and gesture. The word ending '-machy' means in the general sense, 'fighting, warfare' or 'battle, that fights'. Centuries later, Picasso was to adopt the theme 'Minotaurmachy' into an astonishingly frightening series of work which show direct roots in the violent, yet undoubtedly progressive work of the Greeks.

A particular connection with the Greek friezes is a particular passage from Picasso's 'Guernica' painted in 1937 which shows a woman fallen to her knees under the weight of a Fascist air attack, which recalls a frieze in which two Greek warriors are about to slay an Amazon who has fallen to her knees and begs for mercy as the huge pointed swords speed down to end her life.

A variation on the gallant athlete theme in ancient Greek art is to be found in a large bronze statue of the 'Seated Boxer' from the middle first century B.C. It is a tragic example of human degradation, instead of a graceful depiction of a serene athlete in command of his own destiny. This sculptor, working about a hundred years after Athens lost its independence to Rome, preferred to show a muscle bound boxer with broken nose, cauliflower ears and blood oozing from open wounds on his swollen cheeks.[12]

The stunned, harrowed expression of the boxer's face seems to ask for release and sympathy as he carresses his sore and bandaged hands, seated to rest his body. This work

Figure 12

is akin to the 'Dying Trumpeter', also known as the 'Dying Gaul', from Pergamon c. 230 - 220 B.C., a marble copy of the original bronze. The tormented, agonizing expression of this equally muscle bound warrior is a far cry from that of the earlier 'Dying Warrior' who so calmly faced the glorious death of the soldier.

These late Greek masterpieces, the culmination of the expertise of master sculptors, thinkers, writers and philosophers depict not the thrill and glory of battle, but for the first time, the agony of defeat and death.

C H A P T E R III

Roman Art

From a single central Italian city state in about 350 B.C., Rome rapidly rose to rule most of the civilized ancient world. Through constant warfare with aggressive, hostile neighbours and invaders, Rome eventually dominated all of Italy, Sicily and Spain, then expanded to conquer Greece and Asia Minor. By the first century B.C. the growing Roman Empire had captured all the land of Gaul (now France), Syria and Egypt; in the first century A.D. it took Britain and most of Germany, then Mesopotamia one hundred years later.

Ambitious generals, well disciplined armies and total organisation allowed incredibly rapid expansion of Roman imperial rule and determined to a great extent the nature and direction Roman art was to take. Early Romans had little interest in aesthetics and were more concerned with austere virtues and military valour, for obvious reasons. The growing empire demanded much new building, and early Roman architecture and townplanning were disorderly, impractical and of poor quality. Importing Greek principles of style, Rome eventually built fortifications, bridges, aqueducts and sewer systems of a high quality as well as planning the layout of military camps and colonial cities after methods taken from the Etruscans. Through conquest and commerce, Rome transmitted the artistic and cultural heritage of the Greeks throughout the rest of the world.

Because of the stress placed on militarism in Roman society, a step backward seems to have been taken from the developments of the Greeks, in that heroism and glorification of war triumphs were celebrated in numerous monuments.

The Arch of Titus c. 81 A.D. is an early, more simple example of the famous Roman arches of triumph, of which perhaps the Arch of Trajan c. 114 - 117 A.D. is most well known. To commemorate the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., a permanent, marble triumphal arch was dedicated to Titus, leader of the campaign. Military scenes are carved on it in high relief, and although the naturalistic representation of the Greeks is recognizable, there is an obvious lack of personal artistic creativeness and psychological insight depicted. One frieze shows 'Spoils from the Temple of Jerusalem' being carried off by Roman soldiers, and reverts back to the Assyrians in subject matter. By the end of the Roman Empire, more than sixty of these arches were to be found in Rome itself, with more scattered throughout the Empire. Many were built by Roman commanders themselves (that is, commissioned by them) to celebrate their triumphal return to the capital at the head of vast armies bearing the spoils of war, leading starved fettered prisoners.

No precedent for the extraordinary idea of Trajan's Column c. 106 - 13 A.D. has ever been found,[13] and to imply phallic connotations to this spiralling, one hundred twenty-five foot high monument would be presumptuous. Most likely it was fashioned after ancient scrolls, wound between two spindles which would account for its design and spiral narrative, carved in relief. The story of Trajan's campaigns are told

more objectively than the Assyrians sllowed themselves; through sieges, river crossings, pitched battles, routs, tortures, suicides, mass slaughters and so on, the Romans fight hard to win 'victory'.

The legacy of Roman art eventually boils down to massive architectural ruins, colonial cities and towns throughout the one-time domains of the empire and monuments devoted to leaders of military conquest. By the middle of the second century the illusionistic depiction of space achieved by the Greeks, already compromised by having to suit Trajanic narration, was rejected altogether.

Monumental glorification continued on various other columns, such as that of Antoninus Pius which was carved in c. 161 A.D. The crowded, confused scene on the base of this monument shows the 'Ceremonial Circular Gallop of the Cavalry' and already marks the decline of quality with which such sculpture was being carried out. Centuries marked by Roman war, decadent self indulgence, assassination and genocide culminated in sarcophagus decoration in the third century A.D.

A detail of the Ludovisi Battle Sarcophagus called 'Battle between Romans and Barbarians' is one of the best examples of the final stage of Roman art. In comparison with the historical reliefs on the Arch of Titus and the Column of Trajan, which show the Romans in command of their destiny (as well as nearly everyone else's), and which were undoubtedly carved by Greek sculptors working in Rome, the sarcophagus sculpture seems fittingly claustrophobic. In the Ludovisi example, both Roman soldiers and barbarians appear trapped in perpetual hand to hand combat. Space depiction, so cherished

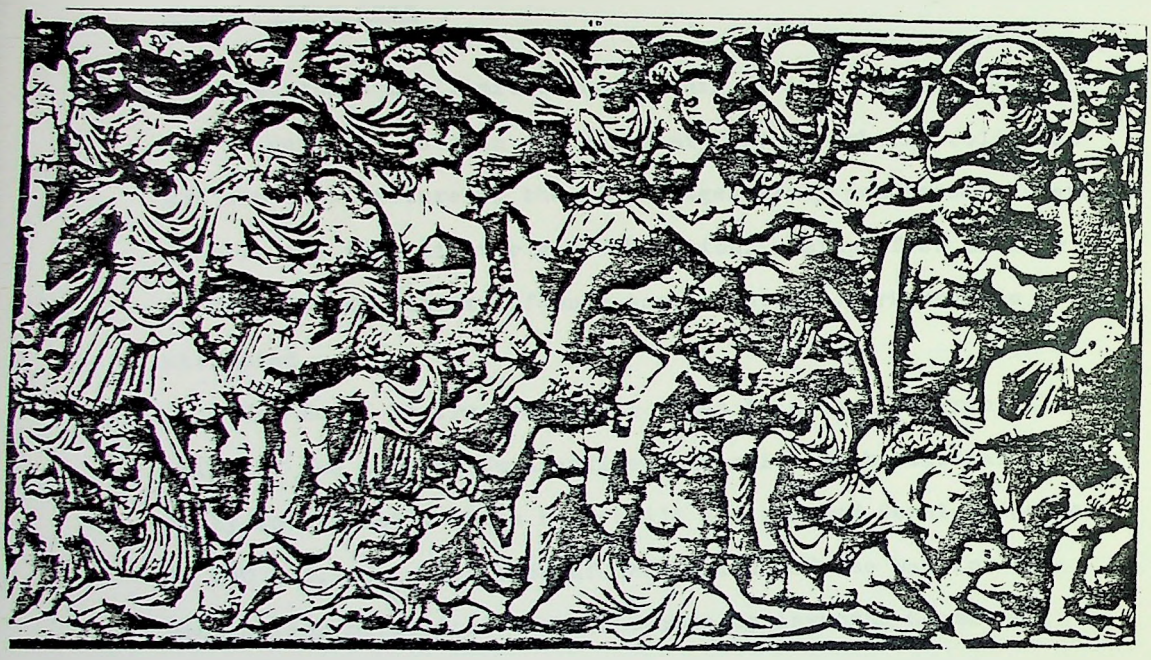


Figure 13

by the Greek innovaters, is nonexistant; shapeless tangles of tormented faces, slashing swords, broken limbs and torsos are heaped about and trampled upon by furious horses.

Early Middle Ages

The theme and limitations of this treatise do not allow the in depth discussion which the stylized, symbolic religious art and architecture of the Middle Ages truly deserves. However, despite the risk of over generalization, a simplified summary of the violent aspects of such ecclesiastical work must be attempted.

The Roman Empire inevitably began to dissolve during the reign of the emperor Constantine, who shifted the capital from Italy to Byzantium which he rebuilt and renamed Constantinople in 330 A.D. This division of the empire led the way for the reclamation of most of Western Europe by invading Germanic tribes, heralding the eventual break up of the land into separate city states.

Constantine also officially recognized Christianity, marking a decline in the persecution of Christians, and instigated the building of churches. The earliest Christians had no need for visual art of any sort, as teaching was done verbally in houses, streets, squares, even from the hillsides...

Christianity flourished, demanding greater structures which could hold vast masses of people, the internal space greatly determining the outward appearance, and the emphasis of this religion was on revelation over reason, demanding an aesthetic, sanctuary like atmosphere in these massive buildings.

Equally important, this emphasis on the after life weakened interest in naturalistic representation and prohibited the depiction of the nude human body, both of utmost importance to the ancient Greeks. The visual art which eventually was produced to illustrate the Bible for the illiterate masses was stylized and schematic; individualistic art was discouraged as pagan.

The crucifixion scene was often depicted in the Middle Ages by diverse artists from Syria to Ireland. This famous incident proved to be a compelling theme for artists to work with from around 500 A.D. to the present day, and constitutes the subject of some of the greatest masterpieces of all time. Handled in a variety of styles, mediums and materials, scenes of the crucifixion range from the single depiction of Christ on the cross to crowded scenes with the two crucified thieves, the Roman soldiers with piercing lance and tormenting vinegar-soaked sponge, Mary Magdalene on her knees in frenzied anguish, the Virgin in a state of despair and near collapse, etc.

With the connotations of resurrection and spiritual transcendance of physical pain removed, all crucifixion scenes depict the human body of an innocent man, tortured, mocked, beaten and hoisted up on a wooden cross to slowly bleed to death from spike wounds through his hands and feet. Few scenes of soldiers killed in battle equal this in intensity of misery and suffering, and none show the destruction of human life in so wasteful, pointless and cruel a light.

There is no lack of violence in the pages of the Bible, and numerous works of art illustrating the descriptions of infractions of the first commandment have been created. The

crucifixion, the descent from the cross, the pieta, the martyrdom of numerous saints (each one more gruesome than the next), the story of Cain and Abel, the slaughter of the innocents, visions of the Apocalypse, nightmarish scenes of Hell, the fall of the rebel angels, the Archangel Michael in full armour, Saint George battling the dragon; they are all too numerous to mention, much less describe in detail.

Although Christianity was non-violent in essence, the abundance of violent subject material caught and held the interest of artists all through the Middle Ages, perhaps because of the vivid drama which violent scenes allowed even the most devout artist to express.

The great cathedrals which were erected throughout Northern Europe demanded iconographic decoration dedicated to the glory of God, and this work occupied most artists until the fourteenth century. The importance of the church itself and ecclesiastical artwork cannot be underestimated in relation to the people of Europe at this time, for the unification it brought created a sense of purpose which allowed the creation of some of the most grandiose architecture and visual artwork of all time.

Later Middle Ages

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, a new style of painting and sculpture arose in central Italy, based on a revolutionary understanding of human values. Numerous republics, consisting of flourishing commercial cities and the surrounding towns and villages, were the scene for the

new art. Florence was the most active and creative centre, but Pisa and Siena were lively as well, and the existence of a dominant merchant and banking class ensured patronage and encouragement to artists with fresh, rational ideas. The centre of political and economic life in these republics was the market place, and they became stage settings for confrontations of human values, wills and emotions. Artists sensitive to the humanity around them in such an environment found suggestion for new direction in art, became interested in the human body set in real space, and looked back to the surviving or unearthed fragments of art from the ancient world. These exploratory fourteenth century artists paved the way for the fifteenth century masters to follow.

Of the earliest of these fourteenth century artists, Giovanni Pisano excelled in accurate depiction of the human form, and appears less dominated by the regulations of the Middle Ages than his great contemporaries Cimabue, Giotto, and Duccio.

Pisano's work indicates that he was a traveller and he no doubt came into contact with examples of ancient art. In a panel of the Pistoia Pulpit, Italy executed in 1298-1301, he depicted the 'Slaughter of the Innocents', a horrifically brutal scene of children being massacred by soldiers. In an expressive, narrative style, he realistically carved the violent movements of crazed soldiers and the agony of screaming mothers, vainly attempting to protect their infant children from butchery. The motivation for this piece of work is unknown, but it is surely clear that the scene depicted is not being glorified, and personal artistic comment is quite clear.

This same theme was to be recreated two hundred and sixty five years later by one of the most important early Flemish masters, Pieter Bruegel, a brilliant satirist and one of the greatest landscape painters of all times. In both these works the image of the mother holding her murdered child is rendered as being so deeply disturbing that it is logical to assume that they were influential in the appearance of the theme in a passage from Picasso's 'Guernica', to be painted during the Spanish civil war, centuries later.

After the Black Death, an epidemic of the bubonic plauge that swept Europe in 1348, killing from half to two thirds of the population of Florence and Siena, much of the optimistic, exploratory work of the early fourteenth century masters came to an abrupt halt. A universal gloom followed, and was justly reflected in a large fresco in the Campo Santo at Pisa called 'Triumph of Death', probably the work of a local master named Francesco Traini, c. 1321-63. This panoramic view shows three richly dressed couples on horseback as they come across three open coffins in which lie the remains of rotting corpses; shock registers plainly on the faces of the riders. At the right of the fresco a group of people sit happily in an orange grove, which a symbol of death hovers above them, possibly preparing to swoop down upon them with the proverbial scythe.

This well known masterpiece seems a fitting epilogue with which to end this discussion of horrific artwork created in the early stages of human artistic development, and the sentiment in the title 'Triumph of Death' almost begs for the introduction of the next chapter in the story, appropriately called 'The Rebirth'.

C H A P T E R IV

The fifteenth century was a period noted for its political turbulence and almost continuous warfare. The existence of the Florentine Republic and other Italian city-states was threatened by outside enemies, yet each proved to have the time, energy and financial resources to continue or finish building ornate cathedrals and public buildings, adapting them to suit the new, reborn classical style. Painting and sculpture were commissioned to decorate the buildings, frescos and altar-pieces for the inside of the churches and sculpture generally for the coutside.

While for the most part, early fifteenth century painters still worked in a somewhat 'old fashioned' or late Gothic traditional manner, sculpture took great strides at this time in Florence, despite the fact that the city was literally fighting for survival against Milan, then Naples and then Milan again. Donatello appears as one of the first outstanding early Renaissance sculptors and was known to have been recognised as a leading Florentine craftsman at an early age.

Donatello produced a number of sculpted works from about 1411 onwards, a small bronze statue of 'David' done for the Medici, one of the most interesting. This slim, soft-looking figure stands naked save a peculiar, feminine style hat, casually holding the Giant's massive sword as his toe playfully pokes the grimacing, severed head of the fallen Goliath. This work, executed in 1430 marks Donatello's mature style and is recognised as the first depiction of a

nude human figure since the ancient times - and is also the first nude 'David'. This presentation of the victor as a slight, unheroic youth is in complete contrast with his later massive equestrian monument of the Venetian General Erasmo du Narmi, shown in full armour with huge sword, proudly riding his gigantic charger with ease, a true soldier glorified to the last detail.

Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) displays in all his work an undoubted obsession with one point perspective. No matter what his subject, the accurate rendering of objects in perspective seem to have been his primary concern. It is strange, therefore, to find a good deal of his paintings to be of catastrophes such as 'Hunt by Night', the 'Deluge' and his most well known work depicting the 'Battle of San Romano' painted in about 1445. The battle took place near Pisa in 1432, between Florentine and Sienese forces, the Florentine counter attack being depicted as the culmination of the fight.

Uccello's aim may not have been to communicate the savagery and ferocity of such a conflict, fought on horseback and on foot with slashing swords, lances, hatchets, etc., for this colourful and labouriusly painted scene is anything but unpleasant. The Florentines are shown on prancing white ponies pointing their blades at the enemy in threatening gestures while the ground shows no traces of blood and only one body, politely lying dead in perfect perspective. Flowers bloom immediately behind the warriors and figures can be seen running through the beautiful landscape of the Arno Valley in the distant background. The 'Battle of San Romano' is a fine painting, but certainly no realistic representation of the

horrible brutality of such warfare, and for that reason maybe Uccello deserves more credit than he is generally given, perhaps less.

The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian has already been mentioned as one of the most horrific visual themes to rise from Christian literature. One of the earliest and most interesting rendering of this often repeated theme is that done by Antonio del Pollaiuolo, 1431-98. This Florentine master excelled in violent works, and seems to have placed mankind on a level equal to the most cruel wild beasts, perhaps due to a personal preference or possibly through suiting the taste of his primary patron, Lorenzo the Magnificent of the Medici family.

The composition of Pollaiuolo's 'Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian' 1475 is built up from the actions of the bare legged, arrow-shooting male figures, rather than by their arrangement, a new development in Renaissance art. In this pyramidal composition, Sebastian's head forms the apex of the pyramid shape, and is shown bound hand and foot to a tree stump while six naturalistically rendered bowmen prepare to fire another volley of arrows into his helpless white body.

To modern viewers, the calm transcendence of human physical pain which Sebastian is supposed to be experiencing must surely be difficult to comprehend, his eyes raised to heaven seemingly pleading for the end as six large arrows protrude from his skin - six more on the way.

Another of Pollauiolo's viciously violent works is the engraving known as 'The Battle of the Ten Nudes' for lack of any knowledge of its actual subject. In this work, ten naked men are slaughtering each other in a variety of poses, with

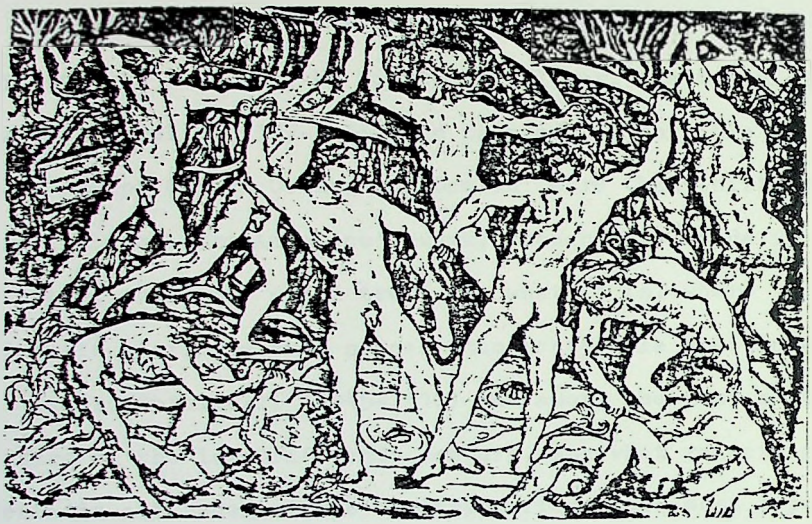


Figure 14

pointed swords, arrows, knives and hatchets. The massacre seems like a jolly dance affair, rather than gruesome, mortal hand to hand combat, and the pairs of naked male wrestlers on the ground seem more like playful effeminate boys than the killers they actually depict.

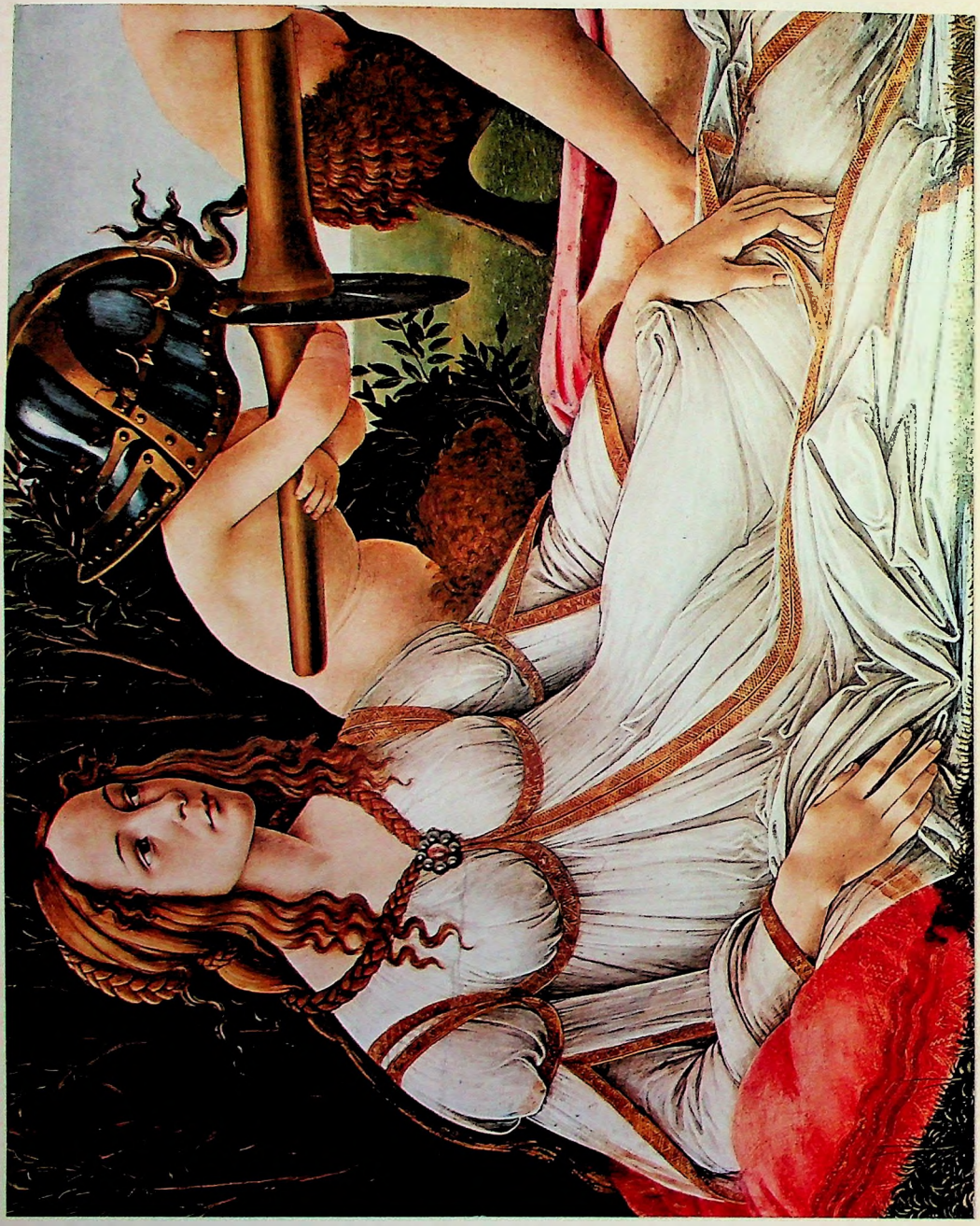
Pollaiuolo shows blood in these scenes of murder, as compared with work done by Giotto's follower, the Dominican friar Fra Angelico 1387-1455, who painted the horrible 'Beheading of Saints Cosmas and Damian' more than thirty-five years earlier. Fra Angelico's work, though more crude in execution, shows the awful truth for what it is, where Pollaiuolo glorifies such scenes into acceptable spectacles.

Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) was among the most poetic painters of the late fifteenth century, somewhat rejecting the scientific attitudes of his contemporaries. His most popularly known works are the 'Primavera' or 'Spring' and 'The Birth of Venus', both an attempt to reconcile pagan legend with Christian tradition. Due to the success of these two works, painted in about 1478, Botticelli was recognised as the leading painter in Florence in the 1480's and 1490's, though he seems to have given up painting after 1500 for religious reasons.

Despite the depth of feeling and delicate style evident in these painting, there was a darker side to Botticelli's personality which came out in numerous private drawings of chained naked men, being beaten and tortured, as if the artist were giving visual manifestation to a tormenting and recurring nightmare.

Many of these drawings were used as illustrations for

Figure 15



Dante's 'Inferno' which Botticelli illustrated in c. 1482, or perhaps a year or two earlier.[14] The drawings were engraved by Baccio Baldrini, and the horrific series was used as a basis for Robert Rauschenberg's illustrations of the 'Inferno' produced in 1958.

In 1483 Botticelli painted 'Venus and Mars' in which Venus triumphs over Mars, god of war, a symbold of hate and discord and conquers him by means of the harmony of opposites. The pair of gods are shown reclining, Mars fast asleep while playful little centaurs steal away with his helmet and lance.

Where does one begin describing the work of Hieronymus Bosch? This early Netherlandish painter, c. 1450-1516 was perhaps the greatest master of fantasy who ever lived. His obsessive, haunted scenes of the Gothic world (gone mad?) were not purely free expressions of a disturbed subconscious mind, but had very definite, deep symbolic and commentary meaning.

The 'Crucifixion', assumed to be his earliest surviving work and other paintings such as 'Christ Mocked' are in keeping with the other dominant styles in the Netherlands in the late fifteenth century and rate among the most 'normal' of his works. Later, after 1500, his imagination exploded in fantastic landscape scenes painted in pale, yet bright transparent colour, the primary example being the enormous triptych known as 'The Garden of Delights'.

The left panel, 'The Creation of Eve', speaks for itself and shows the Lord, amid a bizarre landscape presenting Eve to an interested Adam. But unlike later scenes of paradise or other contemporary ones such as that of the German, Albrecht Durer, all is not bliss in Bosch's garden. Plainly obvious in

the lower left, a cat stalks off with a captured mouse, and though the other animals co-exist peacefully, the stress placed on this passage indicates Bosch's position and opinion concerning mankind even before the serpent's gift to Eve.

In the central panel, an equally fantastic landscape is peopled by hundreds of frolicing naked young men and women who appear to be thoroughly enjoying themselves. Many appear in couples, or in groups of three and four, but no explicit sexual activity is shown. Although there have been many recent elaborate attempts made to 'explain' or interpret Bosch's works such as this altarpiece as having been painted for a heretical cult engaged in orgiastic rites, there is no evidence to positively support these theories.[15] The general lack of acceptance for such propositions usually stems from the realization of the actual dangers of belonging to such a cult (never mind painting altar pieces for one), at a time when the whole of Europe was devoutly religious and pious. Also the fact that the fanatically orthodox Philip II of Spain owned the triptych and several other major works by Bosch has led to skepticism that the altarpiece could ever possibly have heretical intonations.

However, the erotic nature of much of the imagery in the triptych is unmistakable to even the most prudish eyes, and to presume that the blatant sexual connotations which exist in the work were 'overlooked' by Bosch and Philip II would be coldly presumptuous. The habits of many righteous monarchs from this period (including several Italian popes) are known to have been anything but morally virtuous by modern religious standards, and there is no evidence to prove that they were not

endowed with a human sense of humour.

Some figures in the painting caress or embrace enormous juicy-looking strawberries and other fruits, as well as birds, fish and other humans, while others ride bareback on horses, pigs and goats, animals known for their voracious appetites around a pool in which people play and bathe together. Perhaps it should be suggested that in this painting Bosch was honestly admitting the pleasure of indulging in the fleshly desires, and the moral argument left at that.

The right panel of the triptych depicts 'Hell', where Bosch shows the torment and agony of damnation to equal or even surpass the projected fun in the 'Garden of delights'. To make an attempt to verbally describe the nightmarish scene conjured up from Bosch's apparently limitless and inexhaustable imagination would be foolish at best. The suffering is endless, relentless, horror rules eternally. The artist depicts a frightening vision of 'Hell', there is no salvation for these damned souls.

Bosch's 'Hell' is illuminated by the light from a burning city, shown in the background engulfed in flame and smoke. Musical instruments appear not as soothing, pleasant vehicles for the release of human emotion, but as elements of nightmare and torture. Grotesque animal-like monsters feed on live humans, the body of a soldier in full armour lies still clutching a flag or standard while being forever devoured alive by a furious, ravenous pack of rat-dogs. Below the soldier a huge carving knife slices the still-kicking legs from a helpless torso.

Yet, despite the extreme miserable horror shown, the painting is not without an element of humour - a hawk-creature sits on a toilet and eats a human leg, reversing the roles of fowl and man, a pig in a nun's habit embraces an unreceptive, handsome fellow, licking him and whispering in his ear, and still more images appear which may imply sexual connotations, again depending on the attitude of the viewer.

One such image shows two enormous ears 'pierced' by an arrow, an erect knife blade protruding between them. This image, which appears to move, crushing tiny naked human bodies beneath it like an engine of war, can possibly be seen as an obvious phallus if one accepts the existence of sexual implications in the central panel and assumes that the presentation of Eve to Adam in the first is for reasons other than companionship.

Much of Bosch's work appeals to twentieth century viewers and has gained wide public popularity through reproduction for posters, wall prints and even rock-record sleeves in the 1960's and 1970's. His visual language was embraced by the Surrealists and influenced Dali to a great degree, particularly in works such as 'Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War' painted in 1936.

The end of the fifteenth century was a troubled period in the history of Italy, marked by invasion, foreign domination, fruitless struggles to maintain independence, corruption in the papacy and ultimate powerlessness of the proud Italian city-states. From this political chaos sprang the High Renaissance, a dynamic vision of human grandeur, heroic action and marked artistic achievement which lasted only about twenty-five years, but which dominated and influenced nearly

all European art for over three hundred years.

The skeptical genius Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was the leading individual of the High Renaissance and he has left a mysterious and fascinating legacy which still boggles the mind today. The diversity of Leonardo's interests and immense scope of abilities, along with the unprecedented amount of work he left behind, are well known and have made him one of the most famous individuals of all time. Leonardo's varied career involved a great amount of contact with war and militarism and it is this aspect of his life which will be dwelled upon when discussing the work of this fantastic artistic giant.

It is recorded that Leonardo, the illigitimate son of a notary, was arrested for homosexual offenses in a public place in 1476, left his master Verrocchio's studio and was given permission to work in the Medici garden by Lorenzo di Medici. In the Medici circle in Florence at this time, mathematical experiments were carried out based on logical theories and Leonardo adopted these theories in his own scientific experiments, the interest in which first became evident in the 1480's.[16] Leonardo left Florence for Milan in 1482 or 1483, where he offered his services to Count Lodovico Storza Il Moro, Duke of Milan. In a letter of introduction, Leonardo proclaimed himself to be a highly skilled military engineer and seems to have stressed this practical, detached ability of his over that of being an artist, although at the end of the letter he suggested that he could supply complete satisfaction in times of peace as well as war.

It is widely known that during this stay in Milan Leonardo painted the symbolic 'Lady with an Ermine' and 'The Last Supper',

a masterpiece which deteriorated in his own lifetime but which marks the important point in history when the artist was accepted as a contemplative and creative thinker equal in status to the philosopher.

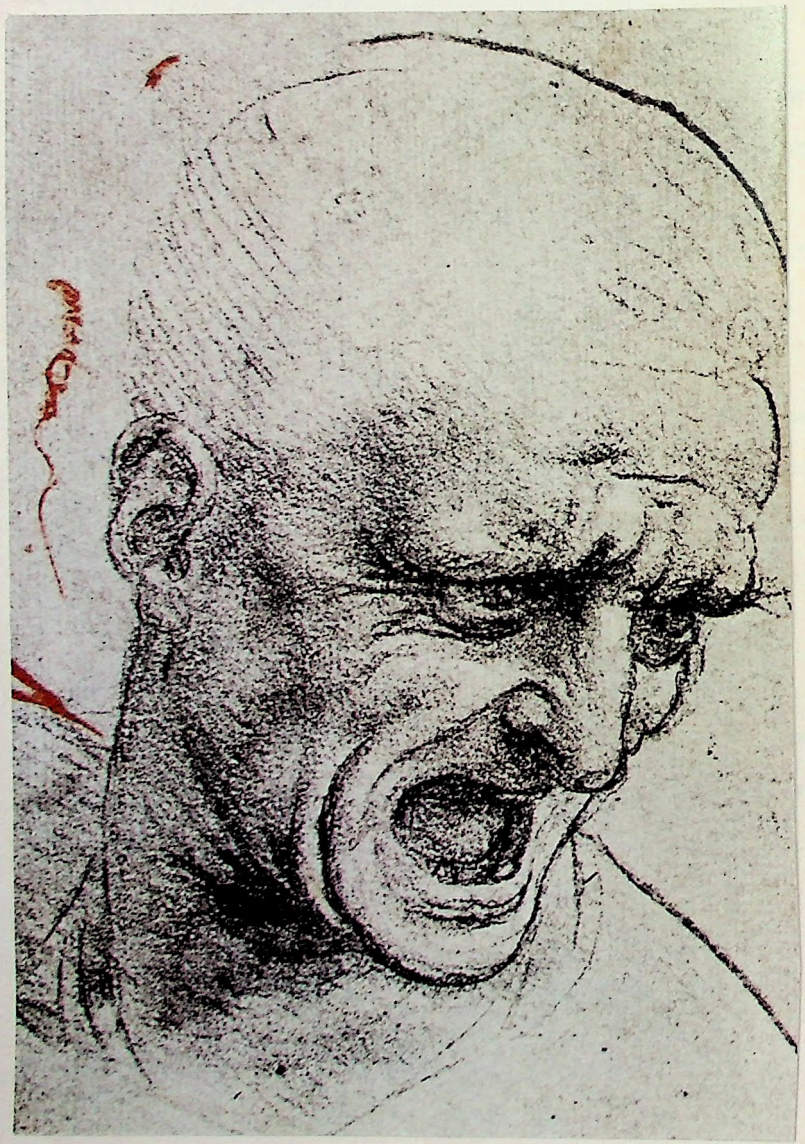
Despite the sensitivity and psychological insight displayed in these two famous works, Leonardo was also engaged in logical, rational scientific research during his stay in Milan, studying aerodynamics, hydraulics and submarine investigation. Apparently almost 'by the way' he planned the dome of the Milan Cathedral, further proof of his versatile genius.

In 1499 the French under Louis XII invaded Milan, Duke Il Moro's situation obviously became precarious and Leonardo fled to Venice where he immediately entered the service of the Venetian Republic, his task being to prepare plans for the defense to withstand the Turkish advance on the Isonzo. This completed, he returned to Florence and worked as a military engineer, designing battle engines and siege devices for the infamous Cesare Borgia between the years 1501 and 1503. Some sources[17] claim that at this time Leonardo also designed defenses for Duke Valentino's fortresses in the Romagna, and his designs for armoured fighting vehicles precurse the invention of the 'tank' by more than four hundred years. His drawings of war chariots appear to be so terribly and imaginatively effective that it is plainly obvious that Leonardo had a full knowledge and understanding of the events of warfare in his time through first hand experience.[18]

In 1503 the Florentines commissioned the great master to paint a huge scene depicting the 'Battle of Anghiari' to commemorate a fifteenth century Florentine military victory.

Figure 16

Figure 17



The painting was intended to adorn a wall of the newly constructed Hall of the Five Hundred in the Palazzo Vecchio. The mural was destined not to be. Firstly, it was expected that Leonardo create the painting cooped up in the same room with a younger man, Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564). These two great artists detested each other for reasons only to be speculated about in the twentieth century, though they were both known to be homosexual and polarized in attitudes concerning religion, artistic intention and creative practice. Michelangelo was to paint 'The Battle of Cascina' on the wall facing Leonardo's effort and it can only seem today to be a strained atmosphere (perhaps intentionally so on the part of the patrons) in which the artists were expected to work.

Leonardo chose an ancient wax technqiue in which to paint his furious battle scene, but his experiment failed and the result refused to dry. He then set about energetically devising a system of scaffolding and pulleys from which pots of burning oil were suspended to accelerate the drying process which resulted in the entire work melting and running off the wall. Michelangelo was summoned to Rome by the Pope before he even started.

All that remains of the work created during the three year period in which Leonardo was involved in the production of the 'Battle of Anghiari' is an organic series of study drawings of men on horseback killing each other, and numerous copies of the cartoon depicting the main focus of the mural, Peter Paul Rubens' copy being perhaps the most well known.

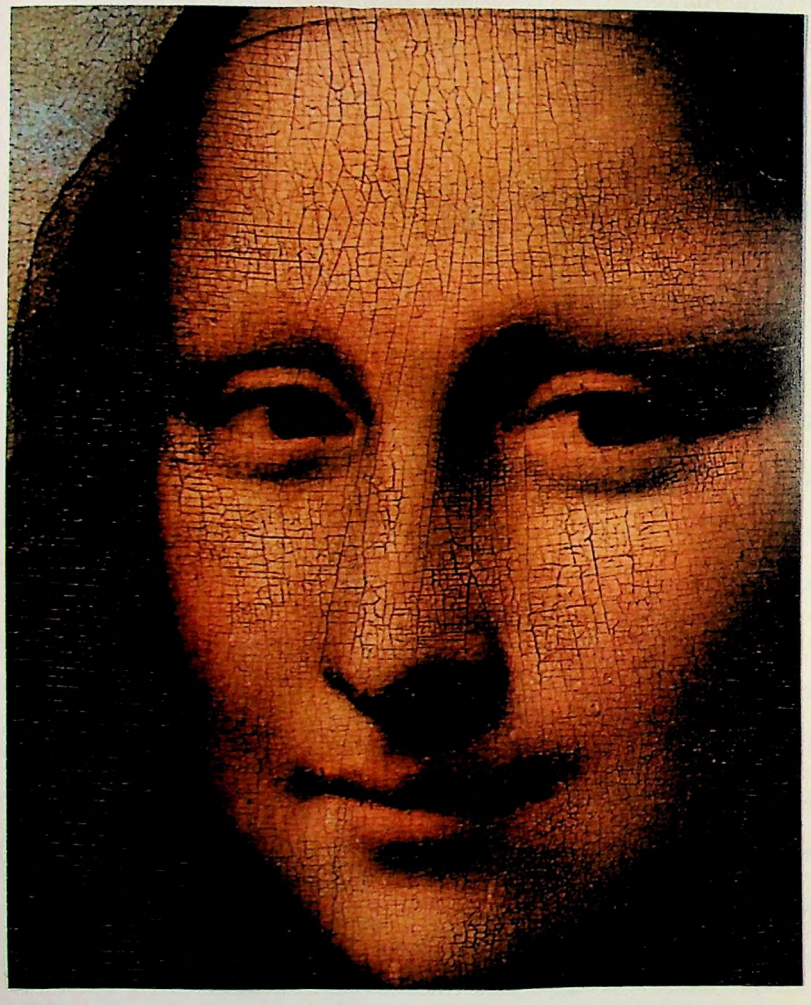
This scene shows the central figures engaged in the fight around the standard, and is considered by historians to be the

nucleus of what the painting would have depicted. The fury of this work makes nearly all depictions of war which preceded it look tame by comparison, and it became a model for scores of battle scenes painted throughout the late Renaissance, the Baroque period and the nineteenth century, none of which really equalled it in horror and intensity. The cartoon itself was lost, only the copies exist to show the terrible reality with which Leonardo depicted war, there is no glory in this scene, only savage murder and wasteful, agonizing death.

The screaming central figures, their faces twisted and contored in fury, slash at each other with swords as they grapple on rearing, frightened horses for control of the standard or flag, so essential in war. One soldier is shown with a massive spear[19] having entered his back and exited his body through his throat, his facial expression indescribable. A dead body is crushed and trampled beneath the horses hooves, while a fallen, wounded warrior crawls away in terror from the fight. The horses themselves chew at each others mouths, their inhuman eyes glaring not with hatred but with what clearly appears to be animal fright.

The scene is composed in a definite pyramidal shape, two crossed swords forming the apex. One helpless warrior, attempting to protect himself with a shield if shown on one knee, reminiscent of the figure shown in the 'Stele of King Naram Sin', who on bended knee tries to pluck a spear from his own throat, while Leonardo's figure anticipates the fallen female figure in Picasso's 'Guernica', her own knee dragging on the ground as her outstretched arms and inquiring eyes ask 'why?'

Figure 18



beaten with sticks about the head from which blood pours. This awful scene of torture reaches a point of intensity unlike any of Titian's earlier works, and is evidence of the fear and trembling of a sensitive artist in the last years of his pleasant life.

The German High Renaissance paralleled that of Italy, but followed in the innovative footsteps of the great Italian masters. The highpoint of this Germanic achievement came in the early sixteenth century on the part of Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) who created numerous paintings, woodcuts and engravings of a high technical quality and expressive power.

The obvious example to discuss in relation to the theme of violence carried through these pages is the woodcut 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse', one of the greatest prints ever made. Durer's powerful, energetic design shows the four horsemen - war, conquest, famine and death - riding over the helpless figures of humanity as they brandish their evil weapons. This print, made c. 1498, led to another in a different medium, to be engraved in 1513 showing 'Knight, Death and the Devil'. Durer's Knight sits on a charger, accompanied by his dog, as a disgusting creature representing death shakes an hour-glass at the bold knight, while the monsterous devil follows behind. This powerful engraving, meant to rival the Italians' mastery of oil paint,[20] symbolizes the life of the Christian saint Jerome. Durer, like many others before and after him, excelled in depicting the most violent passages from the Bible, and his work can be seen as a clear link with the expressionistic work of many great German artists to follow him.

Durer's greatest contemporary, usually known as Matthias Grunewald (c. 1470-1528) was responsible for perhaps the most intensely shocking of all crucifixion scenes ever painted. Grunewald's masterpiece, the Isenhem Alterpiece was created for a hospital between 1512-15, and due to this patronage the most physically repulsive details of the crucified body are accurately and emotively portrayed.

Hospital patients were brought before the altar in order to realize Christ's suffering and the nocturnal depiction of death at Calvary powerfully expresses the actual horror of the tragedy, unlike many other more stylized devotional interpretations of the famous event. When the altarpiece is closed, Christ's scourged body hangs lifeless from a rough cross, having just expired in agony, his face contorted, his last cry on his tongue and lips. His arms are nearly torn from their sockets by the dreadful weight, his spike-impaled hands clawing at the air in tortured helplessness. The crown of thorns is an evil, prickly sharp mess of huge needles, no nearly woven circular arrangement about the head of Grunewald's innocent victom. Christ's skin is painted the grey-green colour of death, while a river of bright red flows from the third sinister spike twisting his crushed feet to the cross.

Standing on the right of the painting is John the Baptist in a blood red garment, pointing to the horrible scene, while on the left in a blood red cloak John the Evangelist comforts the pale-white Virgin as the grief-stricken Mary Magdalene throws herself at the foot of the cross. Along with Grunewald's intensity of expression displayed in the crucifixion, there is also to be seen a freedom of brush work, a heightened sense of

colour used unrestrainedly, and an obvious sympathy with suffering and unjustly treated human beings. Unlike the aristocratic Durer, Grunewald was implicated has having had an active part in the Peasants' War (1524-25) and was forced to flee to Saxony where he died.

When the altarpiece is opened, three scenes of astonishing beauty are revealed, the reward for the suffering hospital patients having already seen the horror of the crucifixion. Painted in warm reds, orange, yellows and gold are scenes of the Annunciation on the left, a tranquil view of Mary caring for the Christ child in the centre amid angels playing music, and on the right a truly amazing resurrection scene unlike any in the Italian High Renaissance.

Grunewald succeeded in raising a scene of horrible tortured suffering to a level of high tragedy through beautiful painting, then with a complete transformation, gives the viewer peaceful, tranquil scenes of hope.

The Netherlandish master painter of extreme importance in the sicteenth century was Pieter Bruegel the Elder, probably from near the home of Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1525-1569). Bruegal was exposed to Italian art around 1551 through the guild of St. Luke in Antwerp, four years later he was working in an engraver's workshop turning out designs based on Italian landscape paintings and Bosch-like themes. Having journeyed through Italy, Bruegal was influenced by the Italian Renaissance but importantly was able to reject certain aspects of those influences when they became incompatible with his own vision. He interpreted the message of Italy as a monumental harmony of form and space, and applied this lesson to his own Netherlandish

subject matter in the creation of vast colourful landscapes peopled with emotional, psychological studies of human beings as he knew them. Bruegel's work shows great similarities to that of Bosch, but also marked differences as well, perhaps due to age discrepancy and probably to character and personality differences too. However, the theme, composition, subject and treatment are much the same in the work of the later artist as in the earlier, and there can be no doubt that the great work of Bosch exercised a profound and beneficial influence on Bruegel. Bruegel created lasting universal images of human existence bound to nature, rooted between the realities of life and death, but unlike Bosch's overall pessimism, Bruegel's body of work emits a calm, peaceful tranquility as a whole. His often humourous, frequently tragic renderings of human existence spare no one in either joke or torment, but his sensitive treatment of man and landscape is practically unequalled in straightforward honesty and affection.

Breugel refused to portray humanity according to some idea of formal beauty or in the light of a religious view of the universe. He observed the people of his time in their dramatic and peaceful moments, then penetrated to the inner being of mankind and discovered what was really essential in the individual by precise observation and sensitive perception. Conveyed in a form of direct, involved emotion, Bruegel set his human story in the heart of nature, in the changing seasons seen through the lives of peasants who were closest to the land and the earth itself.

Bruegel frequently disguised himself as a peasant and attended wedding feasts and holiday ceremonies,[21] and his most

peaceful work stems from such experiences, as do some of his most powerful comments on human cruelty, as in the 'Massacre of the Innocents' painted in 1565-67. This powerfully dramatic composition is set against the cold white of a squalid winter landscape in a peasant village of snow covered red brick houses. It is generally accepted to be a personal commentary on the violent regime of the Duke of Alba, responsible for the Spanish repression which began at the same time as the painting was executed.

Over twenty young children as shown being murdered with swords and hatchets as peasant mothers and families, insane with grief, beg for mercy or weep over the dead bodies of their offspring. The horsemen who appear throughout the picture wear the blood red costume of Flemish soldiers in the service of Spain and these bright red cloaks and coats are starkly set off against the white snow, the blood of babies flowing into it.

In two earlier paintings, Bruegel is much closer in style to Bosch in the anti-classical rendering of religious themes. 'The Fall of the Rebel Angels' and 'The Triumph of Death', hallucinating visions of grotesque creatures and dreadfully horrible pessimism seem to be justified conclusions to the bloody battles fought between the iconoclasts and the Duke of Alba's armies. These nightmarish scenes rival Bosch in terror, and must be seen to be imagined, they can not be described in words. Another biblical subject painted by Bruegel in 1562 is again one of horrible violence, and the artist's response to the conflict of armies can clearly be inferred from the choice of the topic. 'The Suicide of Saul' shows a vast swarmlike army marching and battling through a fantastic green landscape, the

Figure 19

monotony of grey steel armour and long spikey spears broken only by the blood-red banners which they carry. The battle still rages as Saul's army hacks away at stragglers of the enemy's fleeing army, which runs in panic uphill into a forest for survival. On an outcroping ledge in the near background, piles of bloody bodies lie heaped in a mess, while archers stand among them and fire arrows at the fleeing terrified survivers struggling to scamper up into the woods. Amid the slaughter before the onslaught of the unstoppable speared army, Saul himself lies dead on a large rock in the foreground, having taken his own life by placing his sword to his throat and then falling upon it. His blood pours onto the ground from his grotesque self-inflicted wound, his valiant soldiers too busy to even notice.

Despite the extreme horror of Bruegel's violent work, he created many peaceful scenes which display such a sensitivity to beauty and appreciation of life that they remain today timeless statement of heightened human emotion. Children skating together on frozen lakes, workers eating and resting together in golden yellow fields, people dancing in a wood or drinking at a wedding appear to be Pieter Bruegel's answer to the necessity of creating a 'Venus' by artists compelled to depict the cruel violence in man's often terrible human nature.

C H A P T E R V

By the end of the sixteenth century, fundamental changes had taken place in the social structure of the European world which had expanded to Asia, Africa and North and South America. After centuries of violent religious persecutions and warfare, the religious divisions of Europe were soundly embedded and showed little possibility of change. Holland and Spain continued to wage war against each other, and in central Europe religious/political wars raged until around 1650.

Art centres were established in many European cities, and new, definite forms of patronage gave rise to artwork created for private homes rather than solely for the church. With the great work of the Renaissance to teach, inspire or dominate them, artists drew scenes from daily life, from history or from the Bible; the emphasis in the latter of these works shifting in emphasis from miracles of the saints to their often gory martyrdoms.

The leading figure in seventeenth century painting in Italy was Michelangelo Merisi (1573-1610), known as Caravaggio after his native home in Lombardy. A life-long rebel against conventionalism, Caravaggio lived a tragic life on the fringe of respectable society, marked by violence and disaster. He went out of his way to shock conventional people with his brilliant paintings by representing religious themes in terms of seamy low-down settings of every day life.

Caravaggio depicted 'The Calling of Saint Matthew' taking place in a scruffy, common public house, the 'Conversion of Saint Paul' in an ordinary stable and other religious themes in inglorious settings. His work was condemned by artists and critics in Rome and was often refused by the clergy who commissioned them. Caravaggio's everyday naturalism and personal development of intense, stage-like contrasts of light and dark revolutionized the art of his own time and greatly influenced the work of Rembrandt and Velasquez. Caravaggio's unruly temper (and contempt for Renaissance masters) has been widely publicized and is evidenced by the fact that he had to fleeRome after stabbing a man to death over a dispute during a tennis match in 1606. One of the last works which this great painter executed before leaving Rome is the gruesome, perhaps semi-autobiographical 'David with the head of Goliath' which shows the anxiety in the face of the youthful victor as he gazes at the grotesque, bleeding severed head of the giant in his left hand, while his right hand firmly grasps the sword of decapitation. Again there is no 'holiness' about this awful scene, the event is depicted as a horrible affair, much like the earlier 'Judith and Holofernes' which shows the frantic face of a man who has just realized that a sword has punctured his throat as he slept. The violence in these works by Caravaggio is quite realistically depicted, the blood flows and the voices shriek, but there is no glorification, only human, psychological understanding displayed in masterful painting.

There is little to be added to the reputation of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) whose scholarly, diplomatic and painterly

authority is infamous. Rubens was an adopted Italian, said to have little interest in the early Netherlandish masters, and no recognisable influence of their achievements is to be seen in his work. Rubens was Italian in outlook, energetically copying Roman sculpture and high and late Renaissance paintings (Leonardo's battlescene has already been mentioned). His well known renderings of the cricifixion scene have great emotional impact due to their large size and muscular, twisting bodies - though they may appear melodramatic by modern standards. In the 'Raising of the Cross' muscular male executioners hoist an equally well-built Christ up to death in a fury of movement which forms a colossal pyramidal composition, but there is no display of psychological perception. More prominent a concern appears to be the rendering in paint of moving flesh. This same criticism may apply to Ruben's 'Le Coup de Lance' or 'Christ on the Cross' (c. 1620) which shows the dead Christ being brutally pierced by the Centurion, depicted as a forceful gesture, but not a savage act.

In scenes such as 'Fall of the Damned' (1618) and 'Battle of the Amazons' Rubens delights in nurtling bodies, and ferocious conflict appears as an orgy of nudity and drama. The Amazon painting proves Rubens to be more at ease with classical pagan subject matter; the furious killing is not altogether unpleasant looking, the numerous naked female victims fall about beheaded or dead from invisible wounds while male horsemen slash away, romantically, with swords and spears. Again, in the 'Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus' (c. 1615) the 'splendidly robust'[22] daughters delightedly respond in helpless struggle to their brown skinned assailants,

Figure 20

Figure 21

heroically trying to resist what Rubens makes them appear to actually want. There are great expanses of blond hair and ripe, pink flesh, the scene is depicted on a clear sunny day with prancing excited horses waiting to gallop away with the spoils. The picture is decoration, painted either to please an aristocratic patron, or to satisfy an unadmissable personality trait in the artist.

At this point, three of the greatest masters of the seventeenth century (and best painters of all time) must through necessity be unceremoniously be passed, for their artistic greatness lies far beyond the realm of obvious depiction of human violence. It would be hopelessly sidetracking to attempt even a brief discussion of a few examples of the brilliant work of Frans Hals (1581-1666), the genius Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) or Jan Vermeer (1632-75). A few pages could never do them the justice that their art deserves, and it would be irresponsible to try to link their major artistic concerns to a preoccupation with violence, though both Hals and particularly Rembrandt painted well known masterpieces derived from military commissions. These paintings were generally of the militia companies responsible for protecting the Dutch republic against hostile enemies (the Spanish come to mind) and by the time the group portraits were commissioned, they had outworn their major military function. Hals's 'Banquet of the Officers of the Sant George Guard Company' painted in 1616 is a traditionally styled composition of the middle-aged citizen-soldiers at a banquet table. Rembrandt's 'The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq and Lieutenant Willem van Ruytenburch' (1642) formerly (and simply) known

as the 'Night Watch' due to its darkened condition through time,[23] takes the commissioned portrait style to a level of high drama and possibly veiled satirical criticism - the painting was rejected by the patrons. Even Vermeer, whose work is tranquil, peaceful and calm, managed to display a military subject despite his limited output in his 'Interior with a Soldier and a Girl Laughing' (c. 1656) which shows a commonplace scene, a soldier in a bright red coat amusing a young girl over a glass of wine.

In Ireland, the seventeenth century began with war and rebellion, climaxed at mid-century during the brutally violent Cromwellian massacres and ended with Protestant victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. There exist countless depictions of this famous defeat of King James by King William of Orange, too many to enumerate and most so amateurish that they do not deserve mention.

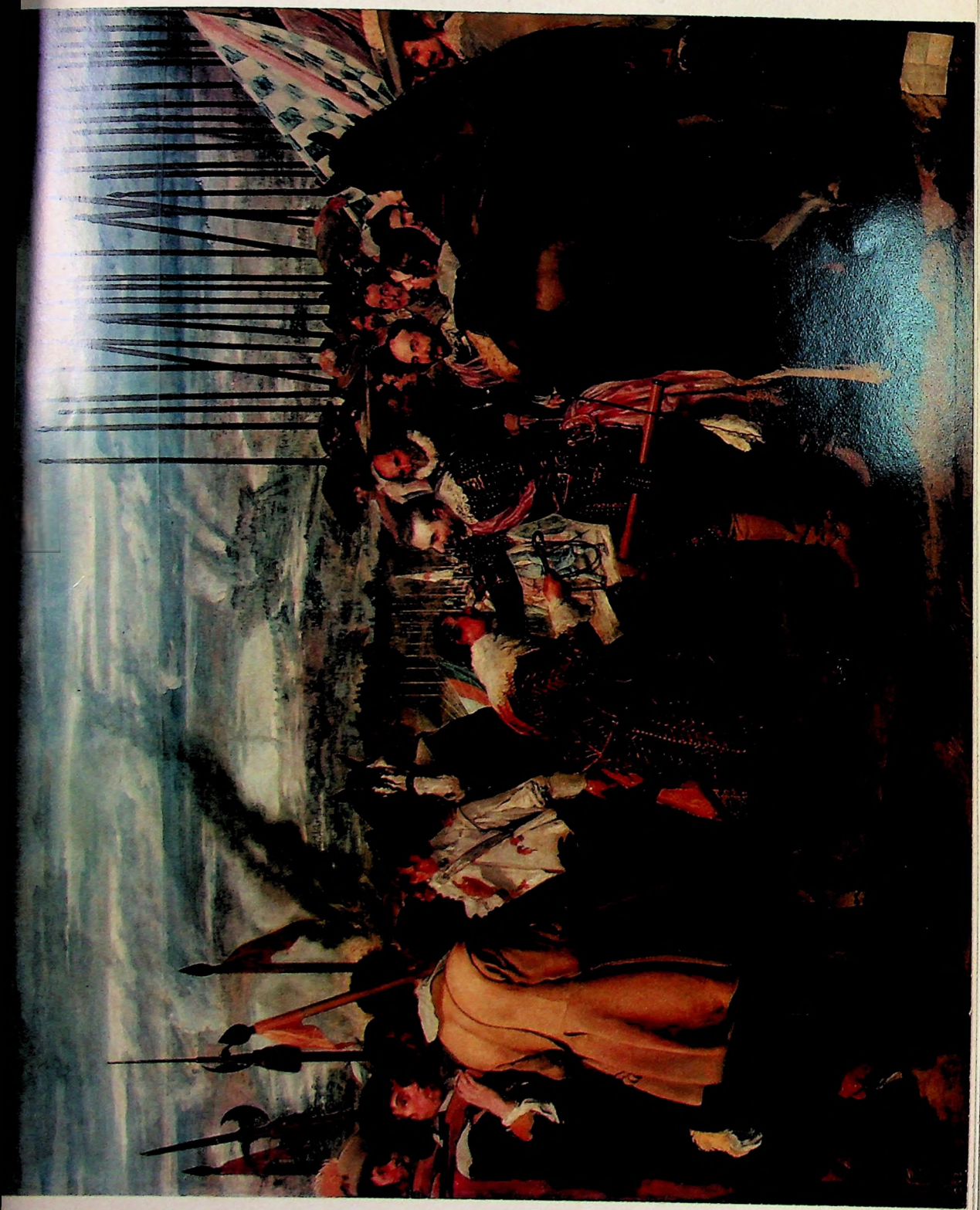
The military situation which pitted the combined forces of the Irish and Spanish against the English during the Siege of Kinsale (1601-1602) gave rise to what has been called the 'first Irish landscape painting'[24] which is now in Trinity College, Dublin. This naive looking picture is really a panoramic, map-like military record of the events of the long siege which ended in disaster for the Irish. It shows hundreds of soldiers rushing about seemingly willy-nilly, and cannot be said to either glorify or condemn the violence as it actually has a rather comic appearance to modern eyes. 'The Siege of Kinsale' was painted in Ireland by an unknown artist in about 1633. One year later the great Spanish painter Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez (1599-1660) was to begin one of the most

revolutionary historical military paintings of all time. Probably never to be surpassed in pure beauty, masterful execution and emotive interpretation of a military event, 'The Surrender of Breda' (1634-35) stands as one of Velazquez's most outstandings works of genius.

'The Surrender of Breda' represents General Ambrosio Spinola, one of the Spanish monarchy's most able military commanders during the course of the thirty years war, receiving the key of the conquered city from General Justinus of Nassau who defended it for the Dutch. The immortalization of the fall of Breda came about as a commissioned decoration for a luxurious Spanish palace, but the greatness of Velazquez's artistic perception enabled him to take the painting far beyond visual glorification of Spanish military might. He introduced an entirely novel[25] concept of composition for such a theme, and his handling of paint makes the intriguing story of the siege come alive in mere coloured pigment.

Breda, the key fortress of Antwerp was besiged in 1624 by the Spanish, the conflict closely watched by all of Europe as a test of power between the Netherlands and Spain. The two renowned generals, both well versed in warfare, battled trying to outguess one another for months, with their reputations on the line. Justinus of Nassau's numerous ingenious schemes for breaking the siege failed, and the beleagured city was entirely cut off from outside help. Forced by hunger to submit, Justinus sought an honourable surrender. Spinola, already victorious, granted unusually generous terms to his respected adversary. The Dutch were allowed to keep their arms and ever important colours, the citizens of the city were allowed to

Figure 22



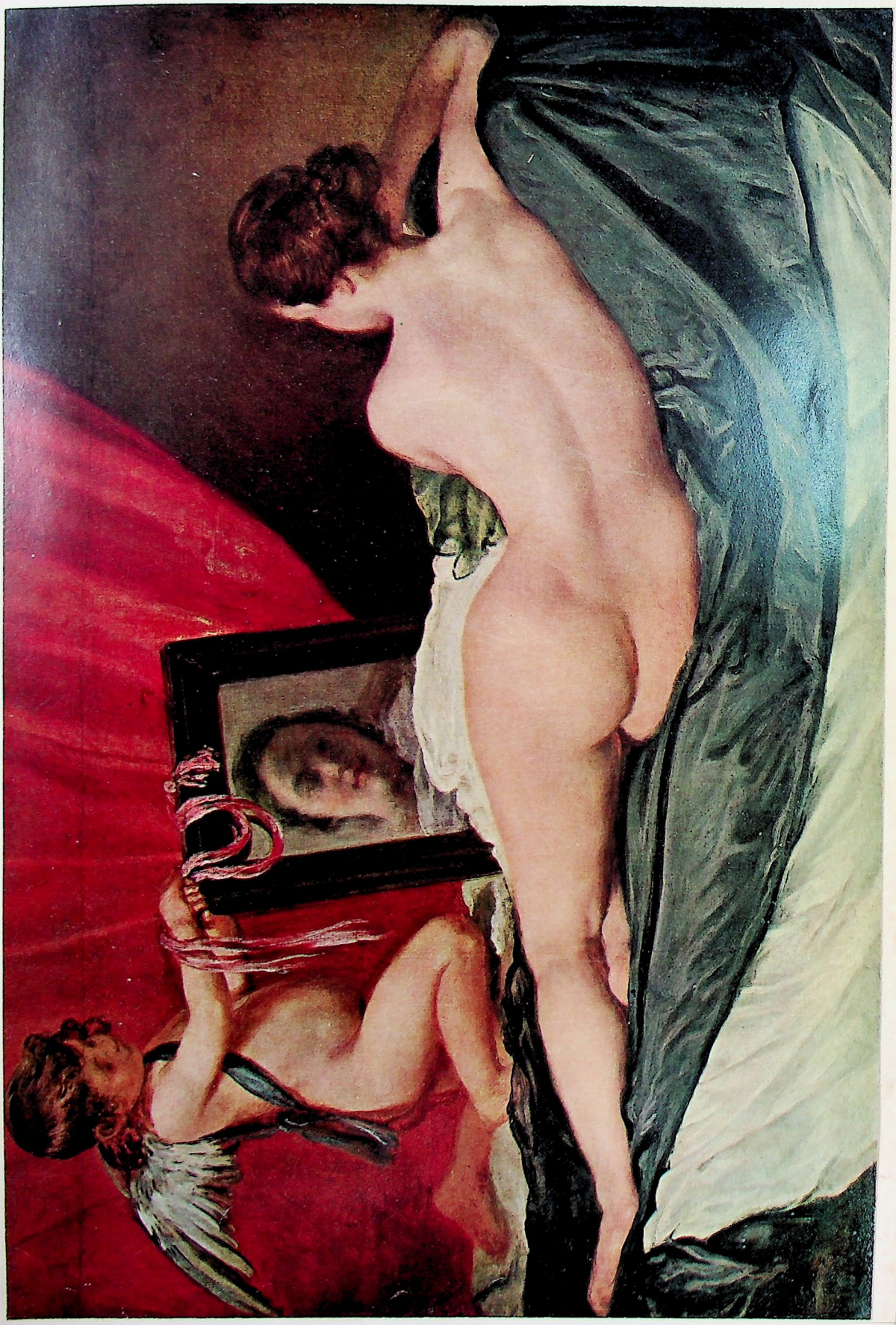
leave before Breda was burned and the Spanish general forbade his troops to insult, jeer at or 'otherwise abuse' the beaten Dutch soldiers.[26] Such a humane attitude on Spinola's part was not accepted warmly in Spain, and he was even criticised for his handling of the Spanish victory.

Velazquez chose to depict the moment when the generals met, and portrays them as equals, or perhaps as host and guest. He shows Spinola greeting Nassau warmly with his hand on the Dutch general's shoulder in a compassionate gesture, rather than with the condescension most likely to have been preferred by his patrons. The Dutch soldiers are placed in the foreground and are shown in full length to the left of the picture, while the Spanish officers (whose individual portraits demanded depiction) are shown much smaller in scale and are situated behind the rump of Spinola's horse which hides their bodies from view. The Dutch are portrayed as young and bold as they casually hold their various weapons, one soldier confidently looking straight from the canvas at the viewer in accusation or defiance. The Spanish are middle aged and bald-headed, behind them dozens of orderly spears attest to the power of the Spanish army, not the gallantry of the officers themselves.

Compassion radiates from nearly all of Velazquez's major works of a religious or mythological nature, but rarely from the commissioned portraits of the royal family which earned him his keep. Most of these character studies are of pale, sultry looking individuals. Whether this is due to the actual persons painted or the artist's interpretation of them is hard to tell today.

If one compares the vigorous life portrayed in 'The

Figure 23



Drinkers' or 'Triumph of Bacchus' (1628) with a portrait such as 'King Philip IV at Fragra' (1644) the human qualities portrayed appear polarized and the artist's vision far from impartial. Velazquez's depictions of Christ suffering are realized with sincerity and understanding, and his paintings of dwarfs - human beings kept around the royal courts for amusement and ridicule - show these unfortunates endowed with dignity and self-respect.

Velazquez's version of female perfection 'The Toilet of Venus' or 'The Rokeby Venus' (c. 1650) defies any attempt at verbal description, the painting must be seen to be truly appreciated.

The Revolutionary War in America provided a 'noble', heroic theme for developing Early American artists to deal with at the end of the eighteenth century. A major figure among these artists was Benjamin West (1738-1820) who left America at an early age and settled in London. In Europe he painted Roman historical subjects, which became forerunners of the more significant classical scenes by David to come thirty or forty years later. West's best known painting is 'The Death of General Wolfe' (1770) which directly led to the countless European battle pieces of the nineteenth century.

An American contemporary of West's was John Singleton Copley (1738-1815) also who left the country and never returned, his most important work being a curious scene called 'Watson and the Shark' painted in 1778. This canvas shows Watson, a friend of the artist,[27] floundering naked on his back in the sea at Havana Harbour, a huge shark about to devour him as frantic mates attempt the rescue from a boat, one gallantly

poised to strike the aquatic beast a fatal blow of a harpoon.

John Trumbell (c. 1750-1830) had served in George Washington's army and was enthralled by the events of the war. He devoted his life to painting hundreds of battle pictures describing encounters and glorifying the various American officers involved in them. Paintings such as the dramatic 'Battle of Bunker Hill' (1785) and 'The Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown Virginia, 19 Oct. 1781' painted near the end of his life are representative of his style and subjects.

These painters formulate the basis of early American art and paved the way in determining the realistic vein in American art history which was to remain dominant until the middle of the twentieth century, when the events of the second world war caused an explosion of American artistic values, goals, ideas and beliefs.

Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) became the official artist of the French Revolution, commisioned to paint commemorative portraits of martyred revolutionary leaders. David, a neo-classicist, paved the way for openly republican political French art with his most impressive work, the 'Death of Marat' painted in 1793. Marat, one of the leaders of the Revolution, had contracted a skin disease while hiding in the sewers of Paris from the royal police before the Revolution and he was confined to a bath tub for treatment. While immobilized in the tub, a female counter-revolutionary stabbed him to death.

David depicted the dead Marat much like a Pieta of the dead Christ, complete with bloodstained bath towel and obvious bleeding stab wound. The painting is a masterful

piece of artwork, but perhaps owes as much of its power to the tragic life and death of Marat himself as it does to David's disciplined, expert manner. Later, after the chaos which followed the Revolution threatened David, he sought protection from the notorious Napoleon and painted the 'Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine' in 1805-7, a massive academic work which shows little sign of true revolutionary thinking.

Unknown to David and other French Neo-classicists was their contemporary, a Spaniard now recognised to be perhaps the greatest artistic genius of the turn of the eighteenth century and one of the most compassionate artists of all time.

Francisco Jose de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) was born in the small village of Fuendetodos in the Aragonese province of Saragossa to humble parents. In the poverty stricken social and geographical surrounding in which he grew up, it is unlikely that he would find complacency in landscape painting or be exposed to literary, classical or contemporary artistic stimulation. At an early age Goya left the isolation of the countryside but failed to gain admission to the Academy of San Fernando in 1763, and was repeatedly refused for the next three years. Goya's instinctive search for expression forced him to remain free from convention, and in his work his recognition of the human condition (cultivated throughout his early years when human contact was his only satisfying reality) burst out irrepressibly.

In 1773 Goya was in Madrid, where he married a woman (Josefa Bayen) whose brother introduced him to Madrid society and secured for him a commission from the Royal Tapestry

Factory in Santa Barbara. Through fear of failure and poverty,[28] Goya pleased contemporary taste with his themes and compositions in which he displayed his supreme rendering ability and expert draughtsmanship. In 1783 Goya was entrusted with several portrait commissions of the royal family, and two years later was elected the assistant director of painting to the Academy which had earlier continued to refuse him. 1786 found him to be official painter to the royal family and in 1789 he was appointed the position of court painter to Charles IV.

Goya was accepted in the court without being a courtier, he was not a flatterer and certainly had no ingratiating manner, this being proved by the painting 'The Wounded Mason' (1786) which has obvious undertones of social criticism, and by the many official portraits which portray the royalty in pompous insolence and vulgarity, much like Velazquez had done earlier. Goya's veiled satire was unnoticed by the royal family, for he depicted them as they actually were, fat and red faced, chests ablaze with colourful medals which pleased them.

Goya wrote to a friend in 1789 'It is essential for my character that I learn to control myself, to adhere to my principles, maintaining that dignity that every person should maintain. . .'[29]

Goya became ill with a middle ear infection and was deaf by 1792. Like his younger contemporary the great Beethoven, this disability may have caused him to meditate on the deeper significance of life, and he became increasingly introspective. He began to paint unrelentingly, most of his works dealing with cruel and violent themes - 'Bandit

Attacking a Woman', 'The Shipwreck', 'The Fire', etc, all painted around the same time.

In 1800 he painted 'The Family of Charles IV', in which all the figures are clearly shown to be pig-like except for a few of the small children. This painting is now accepted to be a vision of Spanish monarchy through the eyes of an 'ordinary citizen' and from this time on, Goya's work became increasingly denunciatory, polemical and openly controversial, perhaps it should also be mentioned that Charles IV is recognised as having been one of Spain's most liberal rulers, but he was certainly not reformative.

In 1808 Napoleon threatened invasion of Spain, and the people of Aranjuez, fed up with the oppression and injustice of the rich monarchy, put fake hopes of liberation in the French and revolted against the king. The monarch abdicated and was succeeded by Ferdinand VII, who abandoned Madrid and allowed the French commander Murat to enter the city unopposed. On the second of May 1808 the people of Madrid took up arms against the invaders and attacked a detachment of Mamelukes in a fierce and bloody street fight.

There followed violent reprisals and executions of Spanish republicans occurred throughout the night of the third of May, and Spain was at war for the next three years.

Goya's position in the war does not stand out clearly at first, but it must be remembered that he was past middle age at this time. He remained involved with the court which he had struggled to make accept him, and retained his position as court painter even during the reign of the French puppet king Joseph Bonaparte. Many of Goya's friends were intellectuals

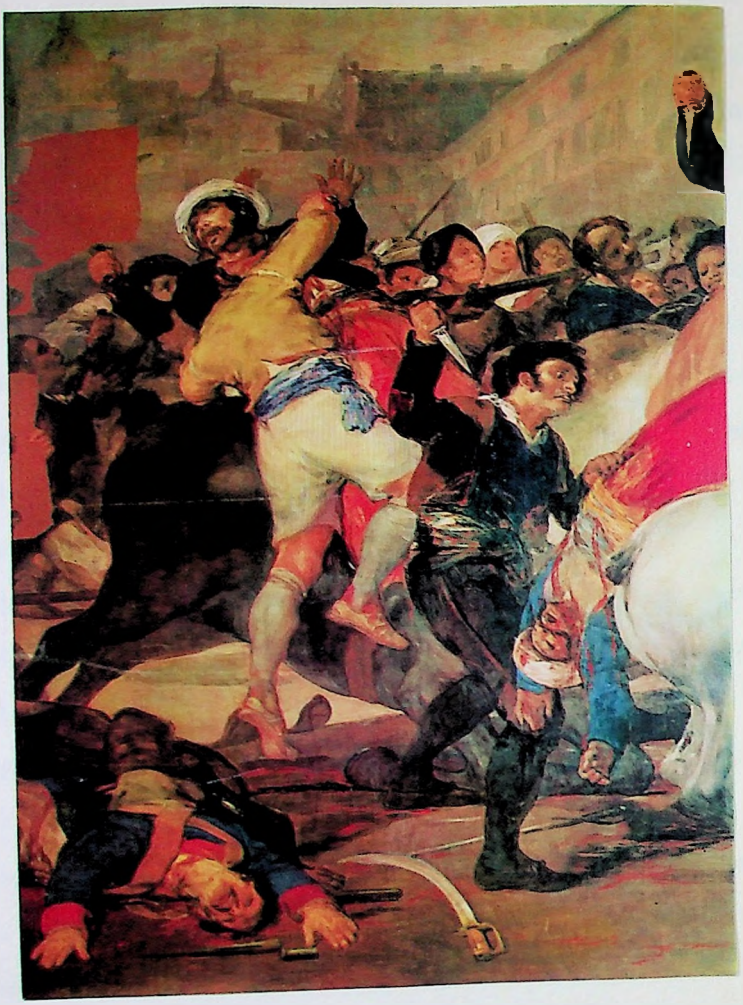


Figure 24

who had welcomed the French anti-absolutism and constitution at first, but a number of Goya's unsigned paintings were discovered in Saragossa by French troops and were destroyed for reasons open to speculation.

After the expulsion of the French in 1814, Goya requested the liberal government to commission him to paint a series of pictures dealing with the insurrection. Rather than glorify the victorious rebels, Goya's intense humanity compelled him to indignantly and passionately denounce the inhumanity of warfare itself. Two monumental paintings came from the commission, '2nd of May, 1808' and '3rd of May, 1808' both painted in 1814 as conplementary pictures, which hang in the Prado in Madrid today. These paintings, perhaps Goya's most ferocious and bloody, are not merely propaganda items directed against the French military, but are the culmination of a lifetime of condemnation of cruelty and inhumanity in mankind itself. Goya had painted the crucifixion, the bullfight, scenes from prisons and insane asylums, nightmarish visions of evil, witches' sabbaths, even simple but deeply felt incidents of fist fights and beatings, and had gone as far as to criticize the king of Spain himself. In the '2nd of May, 1808' and the '3rd of May, 1808' he lets forth an attack against warfare more powerful than any hail of lead or burst of fire ever unleashed.

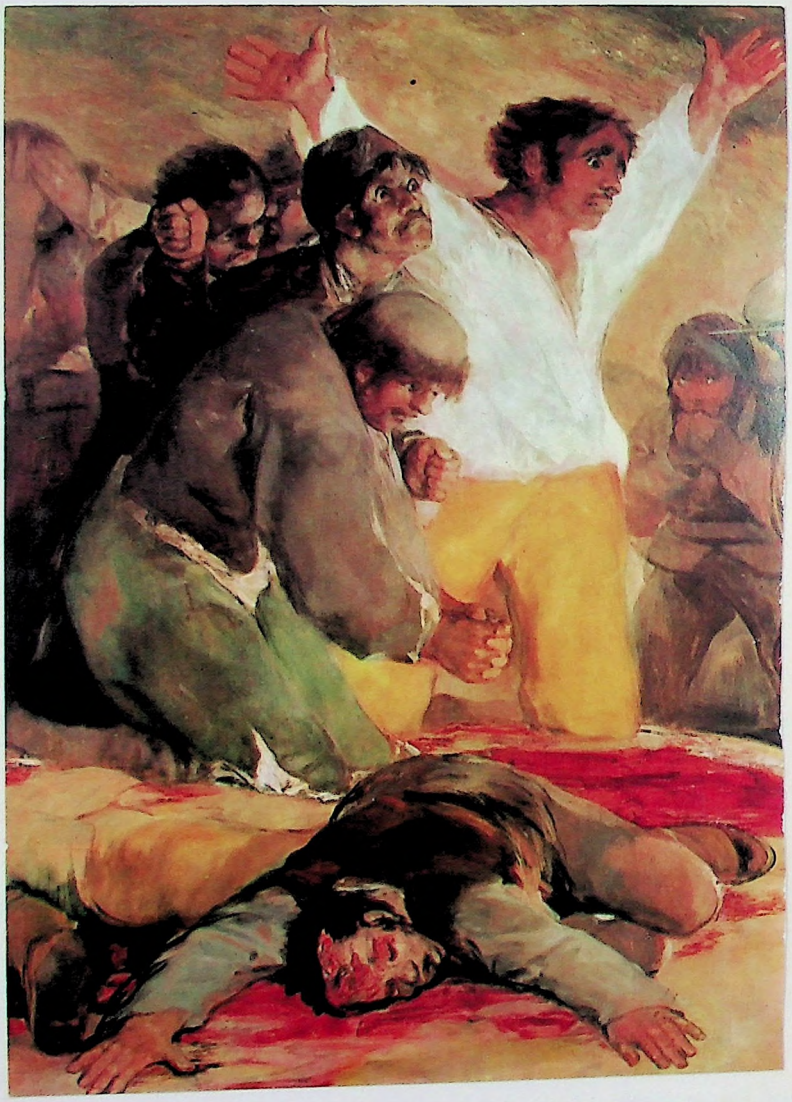
In these two savage paintings, Goya proves himself to have felt, and in essence personally experienced the heat of mortal combat and has found it intolerable. He shows the street fight of May 2nd on a hand to hand massacre of life, a waste of human blood. The eyes of the rebels are as insane looking

as those of the Mamelukes' who are pulled from their horses by a furious mob, and repeatedly stabbed by crimson stained knives. The soldiers slash at the mob with their swords,not in hatred but in uncontrollable fear, as their horses are killed from under them, stabbed with swords as a practical tactic, but shown as a symbolic act. Swirling motion dominates the crowded scene which centres around the bright red uniform of a dying warrior, his chest punctured repeatedly, his blood flowing into that which already lies in pools in the street. The dead bodies of the oppressors and the oppressed are not shown as inevitable consequences of war, but as tragic, unnecessary results.

'The 3rd of May, 1808' depicts the executions of the rebels which resulted from this riot. Goya treats the firing squad as a many-legged faceless monster, painted in grey, brown and black, with bayoneted guns about to roar at a group of helpless victims. A group of Spanish rebels kneel among the dead, shattered bodies of comrades already mowed down, one is praying, one is shown with cleched fists in defiant rage, one with outstretched arms like a Christ figure, dressed in a clean white shirt with a look of sorrow and amazement on his young face. Others hide their faces from the horror as they cringe helplessly in the last seconds of precious life.

The manifestation of Goya's passionate humanity was not limited to the use of oil paint, and he expressed himself uncensored in contemporary, even avant garde terms through the aqua-tint etching process. Goya made several series of prints in the newly invented technique, all of them imaginative and fantastic, often horrible and frightening. 'The Caprices' of

Figure 25



1796-98 dealt satirically with events from everyday life, 'The Follies' of 1813-19 show a takeover of human life by terrible monsters and 'The Disasters of War' series which was probably started around 1820 and was not published until thirty years after Goya's death.[30] 'The Disasters of War' is an immensely powerful, graphic representation of the unimaginable horror of war and the aftermath of starvation shockingly depicted. The series consists of eighty aquatint plates, each one showing an expertly drawn scene of horror and misery unlike anything which came before or which has come after. The visual depictions are accompanied by short, vivid captions (often of only one word) which were probably composed by Goya's friend Ceán Bermudez[31] from the artist's notes. The large number of disturbing prints on the theme of brutal warfare and its effect on civilians created by Goya attest to the effect the events of 1808-1814 had on the artist as a human being, and the decorations he painted on the walls of his house show him to have been tormented by entire chains of events. He surrounded himself with scenes of nightmarish gruesomeness, such as the fresco 'Saturn Devouring One of his Sons' executed on the wall of his country residence between 1820-22. This horrible scene, derived from classical mythology, is so horrible that it is hard to believe that it was painted by the same man responsible for 'The Maja Nude' (c. 1797-1800) which is one of the most beautiful paintings of the female form in existence, and which eventually forced him to exile himself to France where he died.[32]

Antoine Jean Gros (1771-1835) was a young French Romantic painter who accompanied Napoleon on his north Italian campaign

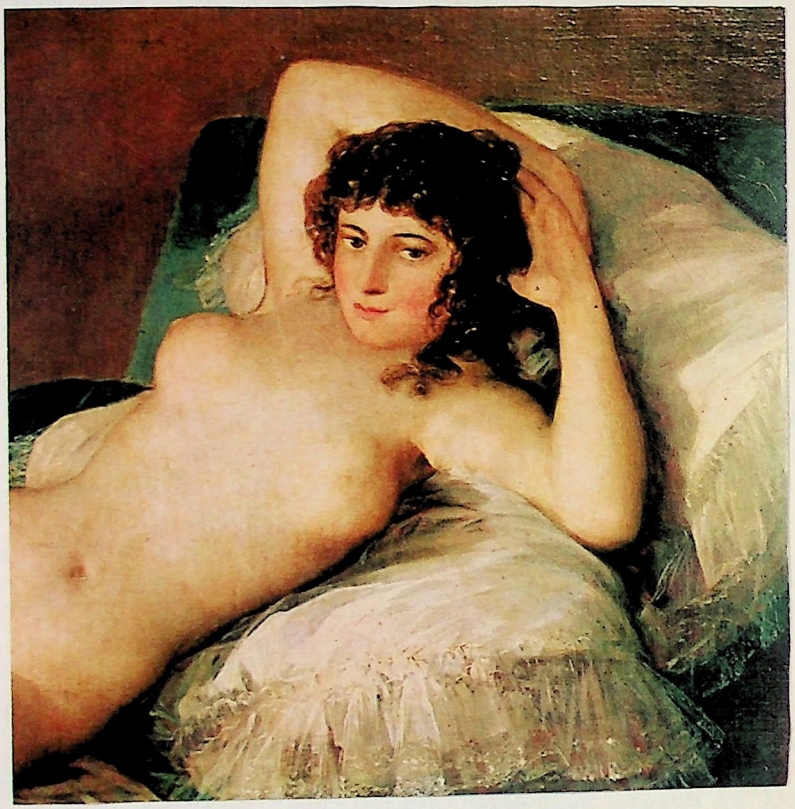


Figure 26

of terror. It was public knowledge at the time of this campaign that Napoleon's medical services were nearly non-existent and Gros's painting 'Napoleon on the Battlefield at Eylan' (1808) was commissioned to propogate images of Napoleon as a 'humanitarian' to counteract the outrage instigated by the truth.[33] Gros shows the aftermath of the bloody, indecisive battle as piles of frozen, green-grey corpses scattered about in the snow - but unacceptably paints Napoleon himself appearing on a white horse as a king of saviour, who commands that the wounded and dying Russian and Prussian soldiers be taken care of. Not only did Gros glorify Napoleon's murderous carnage, but then he showed him to be benevolent and kind.

There were many battle paintings (such as the one painted by Gros) painted throughout the nineteenth century, mostly commissioned by France, England and Russia. Most are of an acceptable quality of workmanship, but none deserve mention as great works of art. The Russian Hermitage museum is lined with war scenes from this time, as well as portraits of officers, and England has no lack of military glory on the walls of her museums.

The development of the camera was to lead to a more accurate though often no less slanted recordings of battlefields and eventually took the place of the battle scene painter. Gros's 'Napoleon on the Battlefield of Eylan' deserves mention as an example of the style of execution of most of the battle pictures of the nineteenth century, but stands out for its open falsity and immorality. Gros was to eventually drown himself in the Seine.

Theodore Gericault (1791-1824) was the hero of early French Romanticism and wholeheartedly accepted the Napoleonic glory of war, he himself living a 'dashing' life, riding around on horses and siplaying a taste for the gruesome. Gericault never portrayed the suffering of war, and his most famous paintings are 'heroic' struggles of man against nature. 'Officer of the Imperial Guard' painted in 1812 shows a young soldier in full costume easily riding a furious horse as he calmly looks around for something to slash at with his sword or someone to bark an order at. 'The Raft of the Medusa', executed between 1818-19 was inspired by an incident which shocked France in 1816. The French ship 'Medusa' was wrecked after abandoning ship, the raft was crowded with passengers and cut adrift in rough seas from the officers' boat, commanded by a captain who owed his position not to his competence, but to his support of the monarchy.

Gericault portrays the tragic event in a romantic, dramatic pyramidal composition full of dead, starved bodies who look surprisingly well fed and muscular even after drifting with no food and water under the equatorial sun. The painting is a symbolic man versus nature theme rather than a political criticism, and no brilliance of workmanship can disguise the lack of feeling with which it was painted. Gericault himself fell from a horse and died, but not before he painted enough romantic work to feed the strange imagination of Eugene Delacroix, his friend and pupil.

Delacroix (1798-1863) was the veritable champion of art based on the romance of emotional violence. Nearly all of Delacroix's art is romantic and violent, so it can be discussed

Figure 27

in general terms for the most part.

Never were there so many massacres put down so lovingly on canvas, until Delacroix hit his stride. He gained wide recognition in his own lifetime from his paintings and was usually warmly received by critics and the salons, particularly toward the end of his career when he had stopped massacring beautiful women and had turned to lions and tigers instead.

'The Massacre at Chios' painted for the 1824 salon was taken from the events of the Turkish repression of the Green insurgents in the Greek struggle for independence. While he worked on the canvas, which shows the final stages of a bloody massacre, Delacroix spoke of '. . .the smile of one dying, the mother's despair. . .'.[34] In the painting Delacroix shows the mother dead, the living child clutching her breast. The painting won him the gold medal second class at the 1824 salon.

Delacroix plundered every field which could provide him with a theme for horror, turning to literature when his own world was not violent enough. A poem of Byron's which tells of Sardanapalus, the Oriental despot (thought to have been the king of Babylon) who ordered that all his 'possessions' - slaves, women, horses - be put to death before his eyes as his city was being overrun by invaders. Delacroix exploited the taste for adventure, and romanticized sick murder.

For a man so interested in bloody struggle it is surprising (or perhaps understandable) that he never took part in the revolutionary days of July 27, 28, 29 in Paris 1830, even though the events and street fighting happened right under his nose. The fact that Delacroix hid indoors during the three days of fighting in 1830 is all the more interesting

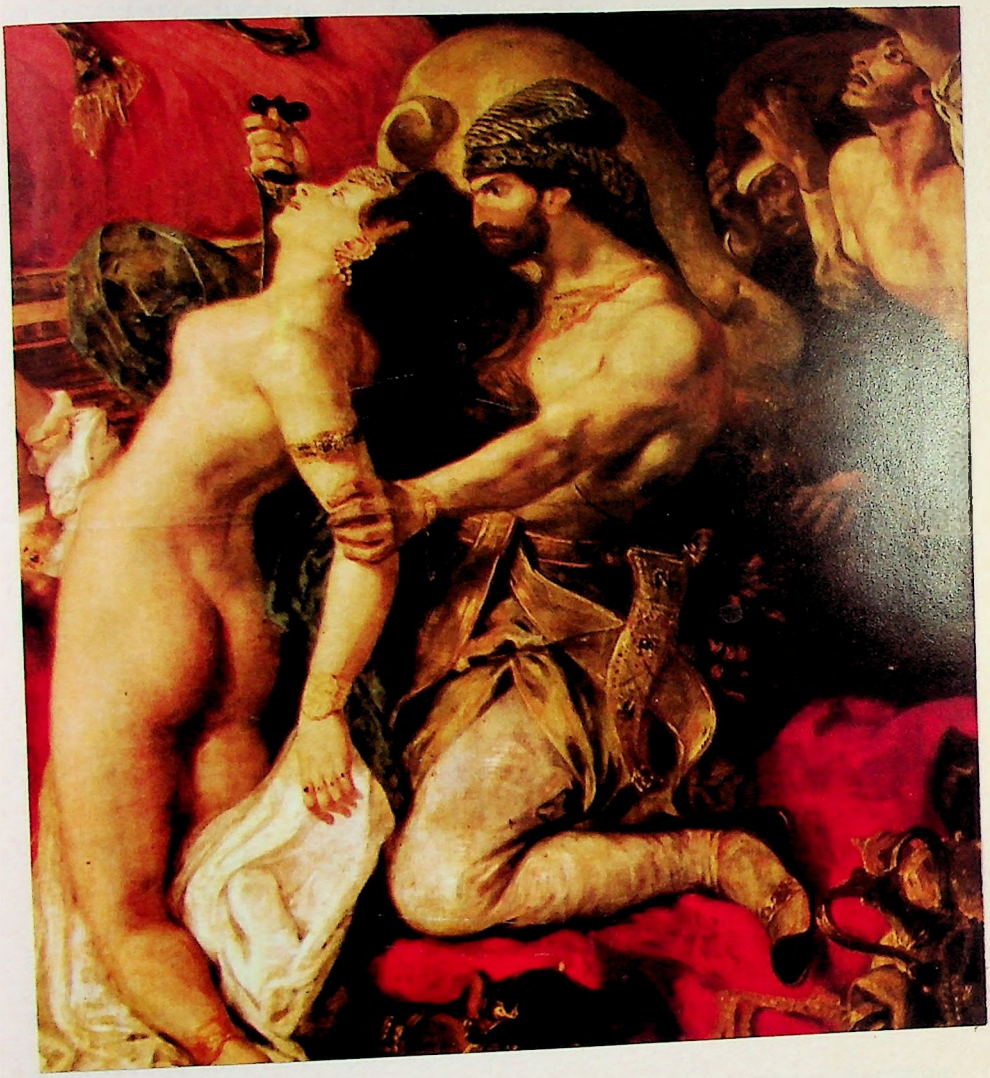


Figure 28

because of his famous painting 'Liberty, leading the People' which shows a symbol of 'Liberty' (going back to the Greeks) leading rebel insrugents over dead soldiers on a make shift barricade. One of the rebels, wearing a top hat of all things, looks very much like the self-portraits painted by Delacroix. The painting was bought by the government of King Louis Philippe, brought into power by the rising. Two years later, while Delacroix was gallivanting in Italy, a young artist who received a serious head wound in the fighting was imprisoned for six months for producing a caraicature of King Louis Philippe as the giant Gargantua, swallowing the earnings of workers and peasants, and excreting honours, decorations, and political favours for the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

Honore Daumier (1808-79) produced more than four thousand of such satirical lithographs and was one of the most brilliant and devastating caricaturists who ever lived. He attacked unmercifully in his biting work, blasting the royalists, Bonapartists, politicians in general and lawyers in particular. As such he was known mainly as a caricaturist but also produced a number of fine paintings and produced a series of sculptures as well.

While Daumier was in prison for his 'Gargantua' cartoon (which was influenced by a print by the English artist Robert Seymour (1800-1836) entitled 'The Great Joss')[35] he met important members of the resistance movement, in prison for voicing public discontent with the monarchy they helped install. Outside the prison, violence erupted again for the reign of Louis Philippe had difficulties from the start. There were many social disorders as well as disasters, such

as the outbreak of cholera, which in 1832 killed 22,000 people in Paris alone.[36] The government was held responsible for these misfortunes, for even though Louis Philippe had been 'king' of the barricades, he was said to favour the middle classes and took stern measures against the agitation of the proletariat when he ascended the throne. Daumier never forgave Louis Philippe for his subsequent repression of the poor, and France lived in a chronic state of rebellion which gave rise to secret societies which required artists to fan the fires of discontent.

In this heated atmosphere, many artists who worked for popular newspapers began to bombard the regime with cartoons which taunted and denounced the government, Daumier's aim being the most deadly. Daumier worked for a paper called 'La Caricature' and it was in this satirical weekly that 'Gargantua' was published. Daumier was arrested and fired for this lithograph, but he was not sent to prison right away, he still attacked the government in various publications, and after a drawing titled 'La Cour du Roi Petand' he exhausted the government's patience and was locked up in the prison of Sainte-Pelagie.

Serious riots had broken out in parts of Lyons and street fighting raged between insurgents and government troops, from April 9 to April 13, 1834. One quarter of Paris rose in rebellion on April 13th and 14th, the riots marked by confusion and violence, and many supporters of the left withdrew their assistance and the rising was left without leadership, and degenerated into hopeless street battles.

Meanwhile, as the fighting in Lyons continued, the

Figure 29

government tropps overran the barricades in three streets. A lone shot from a sniper allegedly wounded an officer and the troops rushed into a building in the Rue Transnorrain and butchered the family which lived there.

Daumier's lithograph, simply called 'Rue Transnorrain April 15, 1834' shows the body of a working class father in his nightshirt lying dead over that of a young child bathed in early morning light. The room is torn apart and the floor stained with blood, as the body of a woman lies sprawled in the background, and that what surely must be the child's grandfather lies in the foreground. This powerful lithograph shows Daumier's intense abhorance to not only the actions of the army, but to the taking of life itself. Earlier Daumier had produced a lithograph representing a street scene during the rebellion of 1830 called 'The Insurgent Grocer Gives them a Good Load of Shot' in which he comically glorified the killing of soldiers. But in the 'Rue Transnorrain, April 15, 1834' his attitudes appear to have changed and he shows only the disaster and wastefulness of violence.

'La Caricature' was suppressed in 1834 and Daumier joined the staff of a scion publication, 'Le Charivair', which was strictly Republican in its outlook. In 1835 after an assassination attempt on Louis Philippe, increasingly harsh measures were instigated to silence criticism of the government in the popular press, in fact they repressed most cartoonists to silence as nothing critical of the king or his regime was allowed without repercussion.

Daumier developed a more veiled form of satire, such as drawing the king viewed from behind and imitating the pear-shaped

body of the repressive monarch, and found numerous imaginative means to indirectly ridicule the authorities. Eventually he turned to less political themes and attacked the frivolity of society and the esotericism of art, literature and theatre, at the same time painting and drawing constantly.

Daumier's paintings have been overshadowed by his powerful graphic work and are rarely mentioned in association with his political satire. Daumier was a highly accomplished painter and produced some beautiful, original and tranquil works. A variety of themes run through the paintings, but a basic recognition of compassion and aggression are obvious when they are viewed as a whole.

Many of Daumier's paintings deal with musical subjects depicted with heart felt emotion, others with respectful depictions of the poor in their daily activities. Children appear throughout Daumier's work, and the appreciation and celebration of humanity is expressed in all of the paintings. There are violent themes too, such as 'The Donkey and the Two Thieves' painted in 1856 and 'The Wrestlers', about 1866, but by this time in his life Daumier had lost his desire to express anger and turned to showing violence comically again, as in the 'Don Quixote' series where human aggression is parodied in the foolishness of this fantastic imaginary character.

After the revolution of 1848, Daumier returned to political satire, attacking the government of the 'New Republic' even though it welcomed him as a consistent revolutionary. Daumier was adamantly anti-violence, and he blasted Louis Napoleon's involvement in the Franco-Prussian War, producing

Figure 30

some of his finest lithographs at this time.

Gustave Courbet (1819-1877) was, like Daumier, a staunch Republican and champion of the working class, and the most aggressive and vociferous of the realists. His work embodied his ideas concerning society and he consistently painted the events of his own time. 'The Stone Breakers' of 1849 caused a furor when it was exhibited in the salon of 1850, not only because the art viewing public were not accustomed to such hardcore a study of reality, but also because the dehumanizing labour of breaking stones to repair the roads was taken as a social/political comment on the inequality of the new Republic which followed the 1848 revolution. The same sentiments applied to Jean Francois Millet's 'Sower' (c. 1850), which was taken to imply a suggestion of sowing seeds of rebellion, which it may or may not have contained. Both of these artists were brilliant painters and draughtsmen, but their work was not emotionally violent, so the temptation to discuss them in depth must be avoided.

The nineteenth century American artist Winslow Homer (1836-1910) was a prolific painter of a high quality, beginning his artistic career as an illustrater during the American Civil War. He was a realist throughout his productive life and painted numerous, sensitive scenes of American rural society. His work was not essentially violent, except for his civil war drawings, but towards the end of his life his work dealt deeply with the struggle between man and nature. This theme was particularly successful in his depictions of the sea, and man's struggle resulting from living and working with it. 'The Fog Warning', painted in 1885, shows a fisherman rowing

his small boat alone in rough seas, with no shoreline in sight as he anxiously watches the gathering storm clouds above him, the fog rolling in. One of Homer's masterpieces is undoubtedly 'The Gulf Stream' painted in 1899, which shows a muscular negro cast adrift in treacherous water alive with sharks, his small, crippled boat offering little refuge. On the horizon of the mountainous seas is a water spout, or sea hurricane, which would destroy his disabled cat-boat and throw him into the shark infested water if he survived its fury.

Homer was a master of water colour and was responsible for gaining its acceptance as a high art form in America, equal to oil paint, which had always dominated in importance. An example of his brilliance with the technique, as well as being one of his most violent works, is 'After the Hurricane, Bahamas' probably painted during a trip to the islands in 1899. This scene shows a beach, on which a dead man lies among the wreckage of his small craft as the sky clears, and the storm's effects subside, leaving the vulnerable human in its wake.

Homer was aware of the developments in the arts in France, but seemed to have little or no interest in the concerns of Impressionism. He developed a personal vision and style of working which was wholely American in outlook and feeling, and he influenced generations of American painters to follow.

The Realist movement in France unexpectedly gave rise to a complete artistic revolution in the 1860's and throughout the 1870's. This style of painting, widely known as Impressionism was concerned mainly with the effects of light use of colour, and so transformed the art of painting completely and irreversibly.

At the same time the camera was so developed that it freed artists from striving for accurate representation or depiction as a main concern, though this by no means meant reckless abandonment of artistic values of the past.

Impressionism changed painting in function, nature and vision, and political statement no longer stood as a legitimate artistic aim for all artists. Perhaps it could be said that by the very fact that the essential Impressionist movement was solely apolitical that it was a political comment in itself.

One artist who is often, and probably rightly, connected with the Impressionists depicts great differences in manner and intention was Edouard Manet (1832-83) whose perception was not wholely in keeping with those of other members of the movement. Although most Impressionist painters shocked the public by their style of painting, Manet also shocked by his subject matter. Manet's 'Luncheon in the Grass' (1876) shows a calm group of people enjoying a picnic in a public park, but beside two fully clothed men sits a naked woman, nonchalantly gazing at the viewer. This painting infuriated Parisians by its implied immorality and 'indecency'.

Despite his distaste for obvious political propaganda in art, Manet was a consistent left-wing republican and his political ideas were akin to those of Daumier, Courbet and Millet. In July of 1867, a shocked and disbelieving European public received the first news of the capture and execution of Emperor Maximilian, France's puppet ruler in Mexico. The regime of Louis Napoleon in France was justifiably unpopular with republican sympathizers, and Manet set out to criticize

Figure 31

the regime of Louis Napoleon and his ministers for deserting their puppet emperor and for their cowardice to take action before he was captured and executed.

Popular opinion blamed Napoleon III for the tragic events which led to the killing of Maximillian and two of his generals on June 19, 1867 and Manet produced a lithograph of the event which indicated French responsibility. The print was suppressed, and Manet began a series of oil paintings which depict the tragic, contemporary events.

In all, there are four versions of the 'Execution of Maximillian of Mexico', the final and most finished one being the most well known. Manet relied to a very great extent on photographs of the event, and on lithographic portraits of Maximillian and his generals, for documenting material for his paintings, all done in 1867.

The final picture 'The Execution of the Emperor Maximillian', is a culmination of the collecting and combining of information relating to the central event, and of a personal artistic interpretation of it. The clothing and faces of the victims are accurately depicted, so they be definitely identified, but the uniforms of the soldiers have been slightly altered to give them the appearance of French troops, thus implying the blame for the death of the popular Maximillian to lie with the government of Louis Napoleon.

The composition of the picture has also been changed to suit Manet's preference, and rather than follow exactly the news information reports on the killing, Manet has adopted a more powerful composition, very similar to that of Goya's 'Third of May, 1808'. The three doomed men are shown holding

hands as the first volley of shots hits a figure identified as Maximillian's General Mejia, an American Indian whose head is thrown back as he receives the fatal volley. Maximillian and General Miramon wait quietly for their death, Miramon's gaze directed past the soldiers, possibly indicating that there stands another firing squad out of the picture, which would be in keeping with the facts of the event.

Overall, Manet's 'Execution of the Emperor Maximillian' is less a gory depiction of the killing, but more a powerful piece of social protest, and appears not as an obsession (as with Goya) but as a comment which the artist felt compelled to communicate. It is, however, similar to other examples of Manet's work which dealt with violence, such as the bull fight series produced in 1866 and earlier studies of the theme such as the brilliant painting 'The Dead Toreador' of 1864, painted the year after Manet's famous and tantalizing sensuous 'Olympia'.

Figure 32

C H A P T E R V I

Manet marked the end of straightforward representational depiction in paint of violence and violent historical/ political current events. During the twentieth century, mankind advanced intellectually, technologically and emotionally perhaps more rapidly than ever before, so it would be pointless to attempt a description of modern and contemporary art in the same detailed vein as that in which the art that preceeded it has been discussed.

The entire nature and function of art drastically changed with the artistic developments brought about by the progress and events of the twentieth century. By the year 1900 artists had seen the demise of monarchic and religious patronage to a great extent, and the established academics dwindled. The end of artistic officialdom allowed many artists greater freedom to embrace radical individualism, and most'thinking' artists began to follow in the explorative and challenging footsteps of Cezanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin. The rise of a gallery system, which encouraged and supported intellectual, purely aesthetic and experimental art forms started movements of approximately ten year trends of vogue art styles which in turn seriously questioned the role of the artist as political commentator and blatantly obvious social protester, though many admirable artists continued to produce deeply felt specific social statements.

The rapid development of photography as an accurate, immediate and practical means for documenting and recording such occurrences as wars, catastrophes and violent acts led

to its universal acceptance as the most logical and primary medium for depicting such events. Photography was eventually (if painfully) admitted to an art form, and many artists used it to comment on violence in their time, recording wars, etc. with a less than impartial attitude. The American artistic war photographer Matthew Brady photographed nearly every aspect of the American Civil War, but surpassed mere documentation by repeatedly and consistantly aiming his crude equipment at the thousands of dead rotting corpses which had once been his fellow countrymen. Brady shows little if no glory of either side in the Civil War, and his pioneering work influenced perhaps the greatest war photographer of all time, Robert Capa. Capa reported and virtually commented on a number of wars in a sharply perceptive and highly sensitive manner which shows him to have been an artist of an extremely high calibre (no pun intended). Both fascinated and repulsed by war from Spain in 1937 through three major conflicts he revolutionized war photojournalism until he was killed working in Vietnam in 1954.

But long before these wars, at a time when the first twentieth century war machines were nearly as primitive as some of Leonardo's more inspired designs for armoured fighting vehicles, projected flying machines and submarine navigation equipment, man's advanced state of aggression brought him to the previously unknown horror of history's first global mechanized war. While millions of young men were being torn apart in rat infested trenches, which scarred Europe, the Spanish born artist Pablo Picasso was shattering art through his cubist experiments. There was nothing sacred, at a time when it

Figure 33

thought that the end of the world was near, Picasso broke, distorted, cut, tore and directed the male and female form in sharply broken planes rendered on canvas with paint or paper with pencil and ink. Even today, Picasso's cubist portraits look frighteningly violent and anguished.

During the insanity of the first world war, the claustrophobic atmosphere in neutral Swiss Zurich united a group of diverse, creative and sceptically intellectual artists who also challenged the conventions of art by attempting to kill it entirely. The Dadaists sought to destroy art as they perceived it to be a product of a society whose ideas and values culminated in the mass destruction of and senseless waste of human life.

The German expressionist painters Franz Marc and Aguste Macke had already been imprudently killed in the war by the time that George Grosz and John Heartfield had been thrown out of the Kaiser's army and nearly shot for insubordination.

Grosz was perhaps the most brilliant satirical draughtsman of his generation, violently attacking post war German society in cubist influenced ink drawings of war cripples, fat industrialists and insane military enthusiasts. Even Grosz's 'Venus' images, sensitive and compassionate drawings and water colours of prostitutes, show the torment and sickness which pervaded his world as he felt and saw it.

Heartfield is accepted to have been the inventor of photomontage and he spent his life attacking the canvas of oppression and organised, institutionalized violence through this imaginative medium. Heartfield took photomontage to limits of perfection which have been only recently approached by contemporary artists who apply this technique to current

Figure 34

Figure 35

SONDERNUMMER, REICHSTAGSBRAND

PROZESS/GEGENPROZESS

art trends. Perhps his best work dealt with his often brutal, often comic attacks at Hitler and his staff, produced before and during the second world war, which eventually brought him such pressure that he was forced to end his days in England. Heartfield and Grosz were close friends, and both were played out by the inherent torturous, disturbing undertones of their work, Heartfield drifting to the creation of propaganda which supported the radical left (even through the Vietnam war), Grosz was employed in a New York art school even though he never learned English tospeak and he eventually fell down a flight of stairs in drunken depression and accidentally killed himself.

The Germans Max Beckman and Otto Dix were also associated with the hard core Dadaists, but all four of these inventive and talented Germans remained much more expressionistic in attitude than the Dadaists, and used their artistic abilities to further their social criticism in an obviously recognisable, representational visual style more conventional, but no less bitter, than the intellectually motivated Dadaists per se. Not surprisingly, all four of these great artists produced works which clearly display a great deal of human warmth, compassion and understanding as well as violent response to a violent society.

Surrealism sprouted from the ruins of Europe after the war, and the surrealists also attacked the insanity which they perceived to have run rampant in their environment. Salvadore Dali most directly merged violent imagery with sexual symbolism and Max Ernst produced works which sadly comment on the state of 'Europe after the rain'. The brillian surrealists painter Rene Magritte rarely made direct political accusations, but the fantastic nature of his work delightfully breaks the

reality of the world into surreal, colourful, lovingly painted works of humourous if deeply contemplative and critical insight and conception. Magritte commented on the doom of war, and created variations of female nudes which show a bizarre and immensely imaginative mind at work.

Even the great, poetic painter Paul Klee was not solely able to ignore the violence of his age, though his work shows him to have demanded a concentration of his energies on the progressive development of his art as his primary concern. A great number of Klee's beautiful works are shadowed in a melancholy gloom and realization of human cruelty, but he remains a colourist first and foremost and a happy humourous spirit shines in most of his extraordinary work.

Klee spent much of his later life in the Wiemer Republic on the run mentally and physically from the repressive forces which sought to crush his genius, and like many other brilliant artists working in Germany during the years preceding Hitler's rise to power he was eventually forced to flee in exile to Switzerland where he died.

Across the sea from the asserively creative artistic developments taking place in Europe, previous to the first world war, American art was all the while exerting a profound belief in the merits of representational art. Much American art was revolutionary in its subject matter, but conservative in execution when compared to the intellectual and emotional artistic outbreaks happening on the continent.

Robert Henri and the ashcan school were revolting against the complacency of American art by portraying the commonplace urban scene in oil on canvas - either to raise the importance of the simple, harsh city life to that of fine art, or to

lower high art to the level of urbanity. John Sloan and George B. Luks were important members of the group which voiced often challenging antagonistic manifestos regularly, but perhaps George Bellows was the most passionate and dynamic painter among them. Bellows turned to a number of themes which imply violence in the urban existence and he painted many scenes of boxers and wrestlers in athletic combat. Although the energy and strength of these artists must be acknowledged and credited, their painting techniques were not as far advanced as those of the best French Impressionists, and their insight was somewhat limited to the social problems and failings of American urban society in particular. As a group they showed no indication of abandoning the straight representation of fact so deeply imbedded in the history of American art, and mostof their works are of an inferior quality to that of Winslow Homer who had mastered both the oil and watercolour techniques to create a magnificant body of work which surpasses that left by all of these artists combined.

Georgia O'Keefe stands out as one of America's most imaginative and inventive artists, producing many paintings based on her travels and experiences in America. O'Keefe produced enlarged views of colourful, delicate flowers which appear strikingly sensuous, and also painted bold compositional works which incorporated depictions of dead animal skulls, implying a preconception with the beauty of living things and the finality of death.

Marsden Hartley's unabashed use of bright colour in nearly abstract compositions counter the appearance of war related medals and aggressive shapes indicative of his concern for

the war raging in the trenches so far from the United States.

Generally, the realistic trend continued to dominate American art, and the solemn but again colourful work of Edward Hopper was perhaps the freshest, most humanly felt painting to come from America throughout the twenties and thirties. Hopper's work deserves vast discussion, but it is so well known that description of it here is unnecessary. It shall suffice to say that the lonely feeling work of this independent American artist continued steadily throughout the massive changes in American art as a whole, brought about by the search for identity after the second world war.

Needless to say, Europe was devastated following the explosions that rocked during the second great global conflict. As a result, very little great art was being produced there as people picked up the pieces of their lives, and the leadership in innovative art shifted to the United States.

The inherent, existentialist violence in abstract expressionist works crated in the United States during the forties and fifties is plainly evident in the frantic brush work of these massive, powerful works.

Jackson Pollock is, of course, recognised as having been the leading painter of the New York school and his drawings tell of a sad, tortured preoccupation with the inevitability of violence. Pollock's life history has been widely publicized and examples of his great work are famous. In Pollock's private drawings, a large collection of which have been assembled since his untimely death, seem to have been greatly influenced by Picasso's oeuvre of work which culminated in 'Guernica'. The images and concerns are much

Figure 36

the same, even the drawings attest to the hold the theme of cruelty and horror had on Pollock's mind.

Franz Kline, William de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, Hans Hofmann, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still. . . all produced abstract work which reek of despair and violence, the bold use of colour seemingly the only indication of what might be symbolic of the peace, tranquility and compassion embodied in the 'Venus' images of earlier representational art. Although these bright splashing colours are often anything but tranquil (and sometimes dominated by black entirely as with Kline and even Pollock) they are none the less pleasing, sensuous and passionately handled.

In the 1960's, the Pop art movement rose in contrast, if not challenge and defiance, of the acceptance of the unrestrained personally expressive and autobiographical abstract expressioniist paintings. Pop claimed to be instant mechanical art, cold, uninvolved and non-emotional. Most critics accept it as such, but the appearance of so much connotation-ridden imagery raises questions concerning the legitimacy of statements made by the pop artists themselves about the work.

Andy Warhold shows silk screened images of Jacqueline Kennedy in mourning, Marilyn Monroe with smeared, disappearing facial features, car crashes and electric chairs and claims them to be non-images. These claims are avidly accepted as being explanatory of the fundamental meaning of the work and are usually unquestioned, even though modern artists are known to be habitually fond of playing the devil's advocate.

Roy Litchenstein's comic strip paintings often depict violent war themes such as fighter jets shooting rockets through

Figure 39

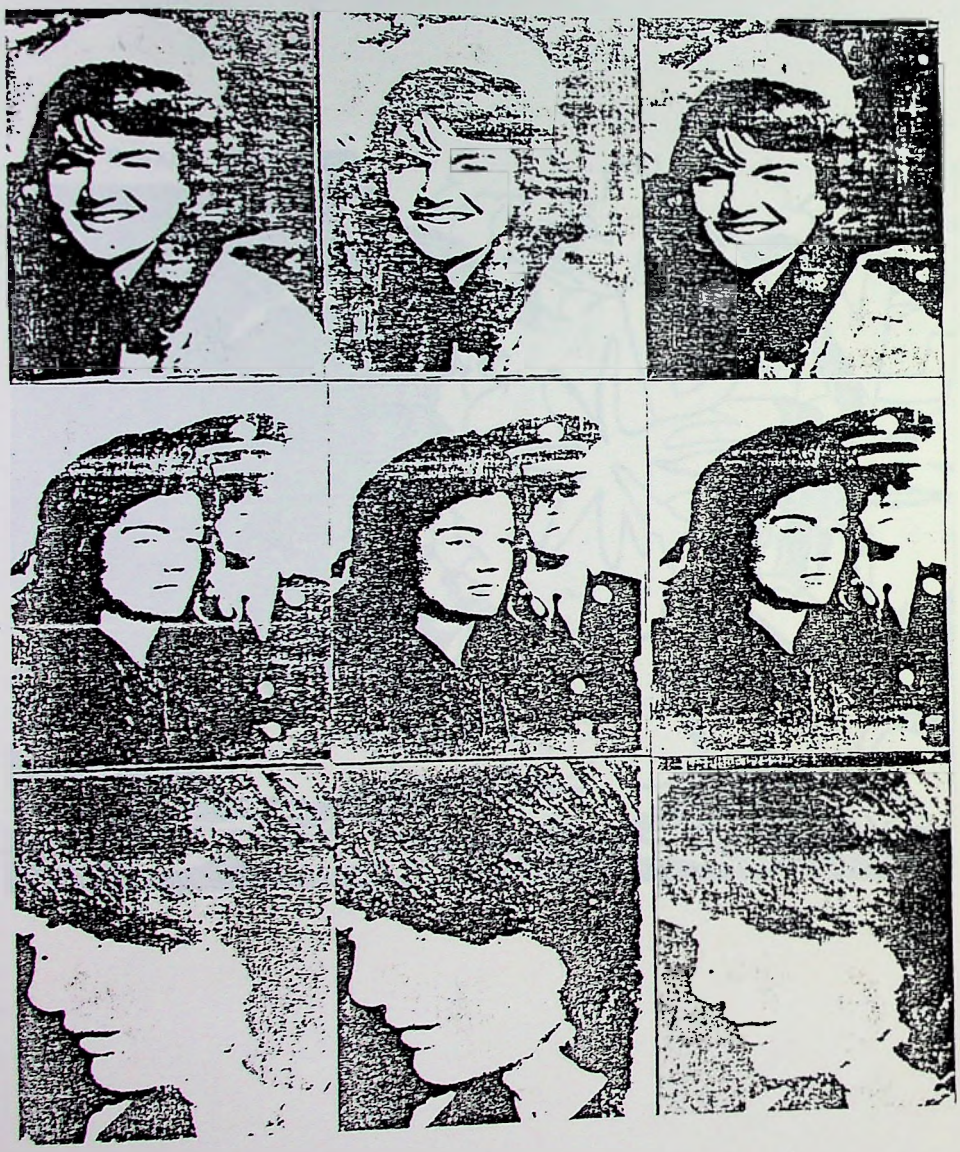
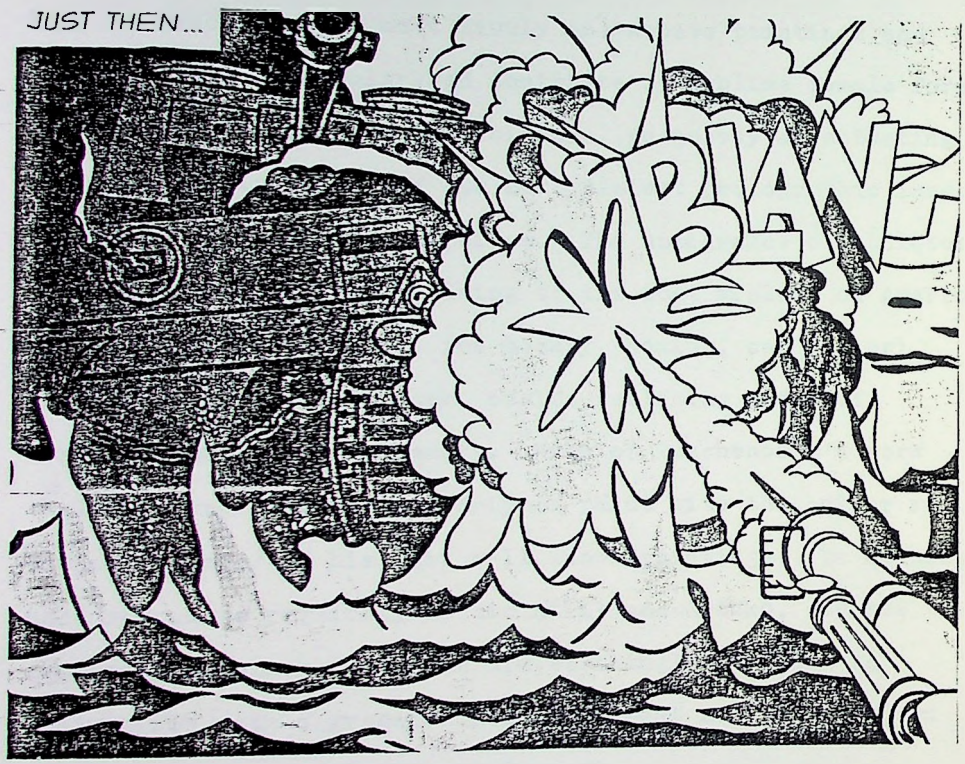


Figure 38



the air, and war tanks exploding, in addition to scenes of tender love affairs gone sour or in heights of sweetness.

Robert Rauchenberg's combined painting even go so far as to include silk screened images of classic nude images derived from art history, the most famous of the 'Venus' images super-imposed among a jumble of collaged violent imagery. Many of Rauchenberg's most lively and active paintings and prints utilize the polarized contrasts of sublime female forms taken from the annals of art history, purposely accentuating and complementing some of the most violent photographic imagery of modern and contemporary times. The appearance of athletes and athletic equipment relating to the most violent of American sports (such as football, ice hockey, boxing, car racing) recur in Rauchenberg's work, beside reclining nudes of legendary and symbolic beauty. Much of Rauchenberg's work includes large expanses of dripped paint with the colour red dominating many of his most well known paintings. De Kooning used red quite regularly as did Still and Rothko, and the contrasts of black and white are strikingly utilized in conjunction with aggressive red in a great amount of modern and contemporary violence related art.

Figure 37

CONCLUSION

Since the earliest evidence of human artistic endeavour, violent acts have been depicted in artworks which span the ages. From every generation some artists have recognised and deeply realized the extreme aggressive hostility in mankind and have been compelled to artistically comment on its inevitable existence. Some glorified the romance and adventure which they felt accompanied violent conflict, while others repulsed and disgusted by the results of battle condemned it on humanitarian grounds. Through the creation of art which deals with a profound concern with violence, many artists actually experienced a heightened sensation of human feeling, and through constructive artistic means created works as shocking as the violent events themselves. Those most deeply affected by the realization of the horror of wasting life were compelled to create subline 'Venus' images symbolic of tranquility, compassion and peace in order to balance or counteract the horror and murder of the violent works.

The use of red pigment is predominant in a great many works and can be interpreted to be symbolic of humanity itself as it is obviously the colour of that organic substance which allows all human and animal life, and therefore death, to exist on earth.

As sensitive perceptive human beings, many artists have always found the undeniable existence of extreme aggressiveness and compassion to be a major engrossing and consistant artistic

preoccupation with which to deal in their work.

There is every reason to believe, therefore, that some artists will continue to find these to be valid themes which unavoidably enter their work and will attempt to find personal means to realize their feelings and ideas concerning them by constructive means.

FOOTNOTES

1. Secrets of the Ice Age. Evan Hastingham P. 105

2. The statement containing an implication of this stone as a phallus stems entirely from primary research into Early Irish carved stones and Irish Neolithic sites.

3. A Concise History of Irish Art, Bruce Arnold. (London, 1969), p. 9.

4. Art. A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, vol. I, Frederick Hartt. (London, 1976), p. 34.

5. The Art of Ancient Egypt, K. Michalowski. (London, 1968). p. 22.

6. Egyptian Art, Francesco Abbate. (London, 1972), p. 89.

7. Frederick Hartt, op. cit. p. 80.

8. Frederick Hartt, op cit. p. 81.

9. Art of Ancient, Near and Middle East, Carel J. Du Ry, (New York, 1969), p. 39.

10. Minoan and Mycenean Art, Reynold Higgins, (London, 1967), p. 97.

11. Frederick Hartt, op. cit. p. 152. Although examples of Mesolithic art show females engaged in hunting, this is the first obvious depiction of men fighting women as enemies.

12. This is not only an indication of a change in attitude by the artist, but is evidence of part of a realistic trend in Roman portraiture.

13. The Art of Ancient Greece and Rome, Giovanni Becatti, (London, 1968). This idea is supported by Frederick Hart in his book, Art, A History of Painting.

14. Botticelli, Gabriele Mandal, (London, 1970), p. 123.

15. A Dictionary of Art and Artists, Peter and Linda Murray (Penguin Books, Ltd., 1975), p. 58.

16. The Unknown Leonardo, ed. Ladislao Reti, (London, 1974), pp. 48, 49.

17. Leonardo da Vinci, Bruno Santi Beocci (Editore, 1977), p. 40.

18. The effectiveness of Leonardo's war machines is apparent by the finished drawings of their designs, but since no indication exists which prove that they were ever created

18. (cont'd) it can be assumed that they were in some way unacceptable. Perhaps due to the landscape and poor roads of the time, war machines which would have in theory worked, were in actuality impractical.

19. Most sources refer to this object as the standard itself, but this does not account for the appearance of a flag in the far right of the copies made from Leonardo's drawings. Also, the object in question resembles the war lances in use at that time, and unmistakably is causing anguish to the mounted figure in the far left. As only copies of the original cartoon exist, the identification of the object is open to interpretation.

20. The Story of Art, E.H. Gombrich, (London, 1950), p. 262.

21. Bruegel, Arturo Bovi, (London, 1971), p. 19.

22. The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, Michel Levey, (London, 1969).

23. Dirt and grime had built up on the surface of the painting to such a degree that the content was obscured, and it was believed to depict an actual military event.

24. Irish Art, Bruce Arnold, (London, 1969).

25. Previous to Velazquez, most Spanish military pictures followed a standard compositional format, the convention which Velazquez rejected. He placed his central figures in the landscape, as opposed to viewing it from a height or from a window of an enclosed room.

26. Velazquez - A Catalogue Raissonne of his Oevre, Jose Lopez Rey, (London, 1963), p. 288.

27. A History of American Painting, Matthew Baigell, (London, 1971).

28. Goya, Margherita Abbruzzese, (London, 1967),

29. The Disasters of War, Francisco Goya Lucientes, (New York, 1967), p. 17.

30. ibid., p. 22.

31. ibid.

32. Goya painted the wife of one of his patrons in a compromising nude position, then hurriedly painted her clothed and hid the 'Nude Maja' away. It was discovered during the Spanish Inquisition, and was judged to be indecent.

33. Frederick Hartt, op. cit., vol II, p. 341.

34. Delacroix, Adelaide Murgia, (London, 1968), p. 72.

35. Daumier's print was identical in composition and similar in concention to this earlier English print.

36. Honore Daumier, Robert Rey, (London, 1966), p. 11.

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