

## POLITICS AND ART OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

MARIA J. FALCO, PH.D, INSTRUCTOR

The Italian Renaissance is a period of explosive change that occurred in philosophy, politics, commerce and art that dates from the year that Ghiberti began the "Gates of Paradise" for the Baptistery of St. John next to the Duomo of Florence (1402) until the onset of the Counter-Reformation in Rome approximately 150 years later. The essence of the change was immortalized in the "Oration on the Dignity of Man" by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in 1486. His thesis--that man literally was the center of creation, that he had the power to determine his own nature, to choose whether he wished to be a brute or a god, a rational man or a beast, a rival to the very angels of heaven--was more than a revival of classical Greek humanism, it was the spark that ignited the radical individualism of the Reformation and led to the politics of democratic liberalism of the Enlightenment and the French and American revolutions of the 18th century.

In this course I will show how that humanistic ideal was first expressed in the politics and art of the democratic republic of Florence, and exported first, to the theocratic papal state of Rome, and later to the oligarchic republic of Venice. I will explain how each of these cities interpreted that ideal in light of their own political situations and visions of themselves. In each city the departure from the medieval ideal of the God-oriented commonwealth to the Man-centered power-state can be seen through the unique lenses of the artists who translated that change through the visual art forms of sculpture, painting and architecture. I will use the words of the philosophers, politicians and artists themselves, where possible, to show how the most influential actors of the times saw themselves and their roles in their own societies. It is no accident that the art of these three cities took on such different aspects. My intention is to show how the different political environments of these cities affected what the artists saw and how they depicted it.

MARIA J. FALCO is a retired professor of political science who was born in Wildwood, New Jersey and educated in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Upon graduating from Immaculata College, she received a Fulbright Scholarship to study political philosophy in Florence, Italy. She later received her Ph. D. from Bryn Mawr College and did post graduate work at Yale and the University of Michigan. In addition to teaching political science, she also served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Loyola University in New Orleans, and Vice President for Academic Affairs at DePauw University in Indiana. While teaching at DePauw, she offered "Politics and Art of the Italian Renaissance" as a winter term course to students who wished to travel to Italy during the month of January. Dr. Falco retired from DePauw in June of 1993, served as adjunct professor of political science at Tulane University in New Orleans for a year, and reprised her course in "Politics and Art of the Italian Renaissance" for Elderhostel, the Italian-American Cultural Institute of South Jersey, and for the Rosa Keller Campus at the University of New Orleans in Metairie, Louisiana.

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Instructor

POLITICS AND ART OF THE  
ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

- I. Introduction: What, When, Why?  
Concepts: Philosophical, Political, Artistic.
- II. The "Proto-Renaissance"
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|-----------|----------------|
| Dante     | Nicola Pisano  |
| Petrarch  | Duccio         |
| Boccaccio | Simone Martini |
- III. Florence: Quattrocento to 1530  
The Republic: Guild Democracy to Principate  
Cosimo dei Medici  
Lorenzo the Magnificent  
Savonarola
- Readings: Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the  
Dignity of Man"  
Machiavelli, "The Prince"
- Art: Giotto to Botticelli  
Brunelleschi, Toscanello and Alberti  
Leonardo and Michelangelo
- Video: Bill Moyers, "The Power of the Past"
- IV. Revival of Rome/Theocracy  
From the Great Schism to the Sack of Rome (1527)  
The Counter Reformation and the Council of Trent (1545-63)  
The Borgias and the Medici Popes
- Art: Raffaello and the Stanze  
Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel  
The Last Judgment
- Readings: Sonnets by Michelangelo
- V. Venice, "La Serenissima"  
Republic/Oligarchy  
Eastern Empire and the Turks  
"Terra Firma"  
Arrival of Humanistic Scholars and Artists
- Art: Bellini to Titian  
Veronese  
Palladio
- Video: MichaelWood, "The High Renaissance"

A Partial List of Sources:

- Giorgio Vasari, "Lives of the Artists" (A Selection)
- Niccolo Machiavelli, "The Prince"
- Michelangelo Buonarrotti, "Sonnets"
- Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration on the Dignity of Man"
- De La Croix and Tansey, "Gardner's Art Through the Ages"
- "Larousse Encyclopedia of Renaissance and Baroque Art"
- Denys Hayes, "The Age of the Renaissance"
- Andre Chastel, "The Art of the Italian Renaissance"
- C.F. Black, et. al, "Cultural Atlas of the Renaissance"
- Carlo Pietrangeli, et. al., "The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration"
- C. Gould, "Titian"
- Andres, Hunisak and Turner, "The Art of Florence", 2 vols.
- Jacob Burkhardt, "The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy"
- Alan Bullock, "The Humanist Tradition in the West"
- Serge Bramly, "Discovering the Life of Leonardo da Vinci"
- Christopher Hibbert, "The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall"
- Edward Burman, "Italian Dynasties"
- Felix Gilbert, "Machiavelli and Guicciardini"
- Walter Pater, "The Renaissance"
- Florence A. Gragg, trans., "Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II"
- Ivan Coulas, "The Borgias"
- J. Bronowski and B. Mazlish, "The Western Intellectual Tradition"
- P. Partner, "Renaissance Rome"

Sebastian de Grazia, "Machiavelli in Hell"

