THE SURGE OF THE RENAISSANCE IN EUROPE

By BEATA VON ERDBERG

As the result of the existence of national states which for centuries have been fighting each other and jealously guarding their independence, the world has become accustomed at the mention of "Europe" to think, not of that which unites its peoples, but of that which divides them. Yet all through its history Europe has possessed a cultural unity.

The following essay combines a clear, sensitive presentation of one of the greatest cultural epochs of the Occident with a study of the Renaissance as a phenomenon which, although, modified by the various nations, prevailed throughout Europe. It is our hope that, when this war is over, a great European art will arise again which, like the Renaissance, will be filled with common ideas and yet enriched by the national individuality of the various European peoples.

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The change which took place in European thought and art about the year 1400 seems to us today so fundamental that we cannot but feel a complete break; nothing seems to fit into the picture of the Middle Ages any more. We begin a new era of history with the discoveries of new routes to the Orient and of a new continent across the Atlantic, with the Renaissance in the world of art and with humanism in that of thought and letters.

Today, the name "Renaissance" is a rather misleading one. What is important is not the rebirth of classical studies and subjects but the awakening of man's consciousness of his individual possibilities. Nevertheless, the Renaissance in the narrow sense of the word, namely, rebirth of the classical world, is important enough, even though it was limited to an exclusive circle of learned men; for it demonstrated to thousands of groping minds that the means of individual self-expression—bowing to the laws of taste only—had already been worked out by the Greeks.

GREEK ROOTS

It is to the credit of the ancient Greeks that they have time and again provided stimuli for the demands of a growing art: the Romans and the Near East shaped much of their art on the Greek pattern; during the Renaissance it gave Vignola his columns, Donatello and Verrocchio their youthful athletes, Holbein his cherubs, Cranach his seductive women, and Goujon his nymphs. All these men were different from each other, and their art is not really Greek; but they were united in the greatest difference of all—that between the preceding generation and theirs. When they looked around for a suitable vehicle by which to convey a new attitude toward life, art, and man, the Greeks did not fail them.

Of course, they adapted the given forms to fit their national character, the Italians and French in a different way from the Germans or Scandinavians. But they all recognized that the Greeks had taught balance in art, moderation, and the beauty of an organism. Every-
body could be a Greek after his own fashion, because their cult of the lovely and befitting form provides an inexhaustible store from which Carolingian art, the Renaissance, the early nineteenth century, and our own generation have drawn according to their needs in order to recover from artistic stagnation or turmoil. But none of these revivals ever gave us another Greece; they all bore the stamp of nation and era. If art is alive, it cannot but develop according to its own heritage, no matter what tricks it may learn to use; if it is dead, how can it revive the past?

The fifteenth century was very much alive, and it was no small help that the fresh torrent of spiritual activities, freed from the shackles of medievalism, could flow into a prepared and well-proven channel. But we must not forget that this channel had been sadly neglected for centuries; extensive restoration and widening were necessary, including changes which would adapt it to the new time and use.

EXPERIMENTS WITH BEAUTY

Italy, with her vividly remembered glorious past, with her ancient temple ruins and statues, with a language that had the greatest similarity to Latin, with her small courts of vainglorious tyrants and, last but not least, with the riches accumulated by skillful handling of the Oriental trade—Italy, then, was the country to set the pace for a new era. The Italians were in an experimenting mood; they experimented with philosophies, flying machines, literary styles, forms of government, and church façades. The results of such experimenting could be seen in every town. Even the casual passer-by could not but notice the expressions of all the arts promising mastery of subject and material, a prominent place for man himself, and unfailing formulas for all problems of taste.

And it so happened that many people from all over Europe passed through the Italian cities, came to Florence, Milan, Venice, Rome. Students flocked to the famous seats of learning at municipal universities or private academies. Mercenaries came to serve under some condottiere, famous for his munificence and luck in the constant petty wars of cities and dukedoms. Clerics of all nationalities had business in Rome; pilgrims came to worship and merchants to trade. Kings and princedlings were eager to take a hand in the turmoil of Italian politics. If a city or tyrant sought their support, they and their retinue would be treated to a pageant of all that was of the most advanced and spectacular in this astonishing age and country.

ITALY KNEW THE ANSWERS

Had the phenomenon of the Italian Renaissance been nothing but a national specialty which could be cultivated and enjoyed on Italian soil only, travelers from abroad would have spread tales of wonder at home. Such tales might have inspired abortive attempts at imitation; but if these latter had not fitted in or succeeded, they would have passed like a fashion and left no trace. The Renaissance had a stronger effect, for what happened in Italian thought and art was the obvious answer to the doubts and needs of an age that had outlived the Gothic.

A style in art has only a measured span of life in which to develop and finally exhaust its possibilities. The Gothic style had reached the point of exhaustion. Artists in every country instinctively felt this. It was no longer enough to drive the pointed arch to the limit of its possibilities, to carve draperies in dazzling richness of shadow and line, to strew tiny figures in brilliant colors, like a handful of gems, over a manuscript sheet. It was not enough to strive in a workshop, to learn the craft and fill the orders, just like any other honest craftsman. The artist discovered himself behind his creation—himself as a creator, different from the craftsman, who could produce only life's necessities. The artist became a personality, whose name meant something, who carried his laws in himself.
THE END OF THE SOARING LINE

The Gothic style found its expression predominantly in terms of architecture. Here its rules were formed and here too its possibilities were exploited to the utmost: the negation of weight and the flaming, upward sweep of pure line. To go further in that direction than late Gothic had done would mean to sever the connection of the building with the ground, to start lines on their erratic way which could not possibly find a goal.

In Vienna, Reims, and York, we see the vertical line reigning supreme. Neither its mathematical principles nor its linear impulses had anything to do with the laws of natural growth; yet it was so convincing in its purity of purpose that no nation could withstand it, not even the Italians. The cathedral of Milan is Italy's outstanding Gothic building; but it is only skin-deep, for the church is broadly and safely anchored to the ground. The Italians had already recognized what all Europe was soon going to clamor for: the value of a solid base for a structure which could harmonize in proportion with the surrounding earth, grow like a tree with its roots in the earth and its branches spreading.

It is a wish inherent in all mankind to conform with the laws of natural growth. But man, on the other hand, also wishes to put the stamp of his mastery on Nature by disregarding her forms and substituting them by others which he finds new, interesting, and hence beautiful in a logical, abstract way. Primitive people file their teeth and extend their ear lobes in order to lift themselves above Nature's rules. Later they find symbols expressing the principle of beauty. Art has to reckon with both tendencies. Theoretically, the perfect work of art would be the one in which each modifies the other. Actually, the prevalence of the naturalistic or the abstract marks the changes of styles and their greatest creations.

MAN AS AN OBJECT OF ART

After centuries of abstraction in art, the will to be natural will again assert itself. The Orient found a safe and steady outlet in landscape and flower painting. But the West had chosen man as Nature's outstanding representative—a problematical choice, since the lines of his body are not easily generalized or adapted to linear decoration; furthermore, the uncovered human body had become the battlefield of moralists. The late classics had temporarily dropped man, because he was difficult to reconcile with the many foreign influences and hierarchic tendencies in art. With him was also dropped the sense of natural dimensions and organic growth. There began a search for new standards, which could be more easily formulated. Romanesque style contributed the rhythm of masses and of light and shade. The Gothic substituted this by the "one direction." In doing so, it moved farthest away from organic life—until a reaction was inevitable. The more extreme the expression of the abstract had been, for example, in architecture, the more revolutionary the changes were bound to be. Painting and sculpture could walk more leisurely into the new camp.

In late Gothic sculpture and painting we already find a relaxation in line, which is only natural after a period of such emotional strain. Although Riemenschneider and other masters of his period still used the Gothic line in drapery, their composition, background, and faces already showed a new conception of Nature, an interest too passionate to be content with symbols of life only. Monumental idealism made way for realism, which often appeared quite crude in its endeavor to assert itself.

Such changes go beyond national taste and faculties. Their cause, the Gothic style, had spread rapidly over Europe and gone through similar stages of development in all countries concerned. The reaction was bound to set in everywhere at about the same time, in about the same way—subject only to national modification.

In the process of changing thought and expression, the solutions offered by Italy were of vital importance to Europe. Yet
this fact does not give Italy the sole claim to all the glories implied in the name of the new age. It was not the fact that one country knew all the answers that made the Renaissance one of the most fruitful eras in European history—no, it was the fact that all Western nations asked the same urgent questions and turned this new movement into a big, surging wave which carried Italy on its crest.

ROME REBORN IN ROME

Architecture was the first to feel the change. A Renaissance of Roman architecture could happen only in Italy and nowhere else, not even in the South of France, where Roman relics abound. Only for Italians was the return to Roman forms a natural process; to them it did not mean dabble in a foreign style. It was their own past. They used a style that had already been found to fit their landscape and temperament. As early as the twelfth century they had what has been called a proto-Renaissance. But French Gothic, brought to Italy by German architects, proved to be too international a movement to be ignored; thus the reawakening of classical architecture was postponed.

The great cathedrals of Europe had been built by nameless craftsmen, masters of a profession which they had studied in every technical detail. We can divine the genius behind their gigantic plans, but rarely can we isolate the personality in the building yard. The Renaissance crowned the work with its creator's name: the individual, not his craft or workshop, is credited with the achievement. The structural technique of the Florentine Brunelleschi was still quite medieval, but he put it to use in the true spirit of the Renaissance. He refused to submit his plans for the huge dome of Florence Cathedral to a committee, afraid to share the glory of solving this difficult problem with anybody else.

THE LURE OF FAME

The idea of personal glory and posthumous fame is a classical one which had fallen into disuse in the Middle Ages, eclipsed by the glory of God. Now it proved its worth again as an instigator of great deeds. There is nothing like the striking façade of a new church or palace in the center of a busy town to remind people of the man who conceived such novel and noble forms. A mighty lord ordered a spectacular tomb as a memorial to his importance in life, but the artist had a good chance of turning it into a memorial to his own genius.

The artist was the first to leave the proven categories of professions by which the Middle Ages so definitely classified men. Since universal man was the ideal of the new age, many tried their hand at tasks outside their profession, and several did so with supreme success. Leonardo and Grünewald were engineers; Italy boasts of many artists whose sculpture was as superb as their painting. The architects were not necessarily trained as such; Brunelleschi was originally a goldsmith, Michelangelo studied to be a sculptor. They designed a building as they would design a picture—for its surface appearance. That is why many of the Renaissance buildings in Italy are interesting mainly as a solution of the façade problem—the show side. They give little indication of what they shield.

THE DEPENDABLE COLUMN

A code of principles and proportions governing classical architecture was laid down by Vitruvius, a Roman architect of the time of Emperor Augustus. His treatise on architecture was republished in Rome in 1486; in 1521 an Italian translation appeared. His ideas and his architectural principles reigned supreme for the next two hundred years.

Gothic buildings had expressed the fervor of their builders, the faith which could move stone to an ecstasy of rising lines. Renaissance buildings show the classical education of their architects, who combined the same two features which characterized so many of the successful tyrants of that stormy age: power—and the effective display of it, logically calculated.
Fig. 1. Self-portrait
by Albrecht Dürer

RENAISSANCE ART
Fig. 2. Courtyard of the Palazzo Gondi in Florence. Designed after the Roman atrium, the open court is the representative and artistic center of the Palazzo.

Fig. 3. Ruins of Heidelberg Castle (1547). Renaissance castles were built on a larger scale than the old strongholds. Protective, practical, and representative units had to be welded together by the architect.

Fig. 4. Monument to Duke Albrecht of Prussia by Cornelis Floris of Antwerp, in Königsberg Cathedral. An elaborate architectural fantasy houses a set of statues which, although unrelated to each other, glorify the central figure by their austerity.
Of all the arts which strove to express the break with medievalism and mark the advent of an enlightened age, architecture was perhaps the most successful. History may tell us that sinister happenings occurred just as frequently behind the well-balanced façades of new palaces as in the old fortress-castles, that prejudice and disregard for another man’s personal freedom were as rampant in one as in the other—but look at a Renaissance courtyard (Fig. 2): the graceful columns, the poised arches, the very candor of the proportions will say: It is not our fault.

BUILDINGS WORLDLY AND ENLIGHTENED

During the Gothic period only a few churches were built in Italy, and it so happened that the shortage was felt by the time the Renaissance set in. New churches sprang up everywhere. What an opportunity to show power and gain glory! In the same way as much church-building was not prompted by wholly religious motives, so the style of architecture was not a solely ecclesiastical one. On the contrary: a church was made up of the same Roman elements as a secular building. The effect is a very worldly one if we compare it with a Gothic cathedral. Instead of pointing to Heaven and leaving the petty world far behind, the Renaissance church candidly faces the hubbub of earthly existence, relying on the austerity of its proportions and the correctness of its detail to set it apart from ordinary structures.

No more spires with unchecked upward movement from a minimum of earthly base, but a carefully thought-out combination of squares, triangles, and semicircles; a balance of horizontal and vertical lines. No points—but, for height, an impressive dome. Its rational curves bind and confine what vertical tendencies there might have been. No line is left to stray, the impulse to rise is substituted by the majesty of self-contained space, by the sheer logic of the dome that encloses it (Fig. 5).

Such poised buildings made up of clearly defined details in natural and unassuming repetition seemed most restful to a generation that had become tired of being lifted off its feet all the time. In employing logically conceived details in the proper way, they experienced the highest form of freedom.

THE NORTH NEEDS CHIMNEYS

The climate of Italy favored the Renaissance palace façade, a rectangle unbroken by roof line or chimneys. In all northern countries the climate called for many chimneys and a more or less sharply pitched roof. If these features are absent, the building looks foreign to northern surroundings. For this reason the Gothic lingered north of the Alps until a satisfactory solution was found. Italian architects worked for French kings, French architects studied in Italy, but the classical style did not assert itself before the sixteenth century (Fig. 6).

The new trends in style were the same in the north as in the south: uniform, square windows in strongly accentuated horizontal rows; the pointed arch was abandoned; well-confined space triumphed over masses on the move. Gone was the dramatic teamwork between pillars and glass; the wall regained its proper place—the solid, dependable wall. It could be
countries took quickly to the separate parts and details of the classical style of building as presented by Italy, but climate and habit dictated less formal assembling of these parts. Flat roofs and open, arcaded courtyards suited the Spaniards well, but their temperament did not readily condone the austere simplicity of rusticated walls and discreet profiling. They borrowed more vivid ornamental details from an art working on a smaller scale: their Renaissance architecture took its motives from the goldsmith's art.

**GUILDHALLS AND RESIDENCES**

In the Germanic countries, those builders who managed to distinguish between the call of a new era and the fad for copying Italy were most successful when they followed the former. The builders of Heidelberg Castle (Fig. 3) kept a level, critical head, weighing locality and purpose against the lure of the modern. They were not carried away by the modern, they used it. The sixteenth, even the seventeenth century, was favorable to Renaissance architecture. Its rippest creations are found at a time when, chronologically speaking, they should already have "degenerated" into the baroque.

If the French Renaissance tried hard to follow Italy, the architects of Germany and the Netherlands would not be denied their own fancies. They shared this attitude with Spain, but the results were, of course, not the same. The Germanic

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**Fig. 6.** Courtyard of the Château Rocher-Mezangers. The outside of French châteaux is still severely defensive, but in the courtyard imagination, elegance, and rhythm can have their way.

**Fig. 7.** St. Gervais in Paris. Façade by Salomon de Brosse, built 1616/21.
and for the residences of merchant princes (Fig. 8).

Wood was one of Germany's natural resources. Its traditional use for house-building mellowed and Germanized the Renaissance forms (Fig. 9). It suggested color and dictated less plastic and more delicate ornaments than stone masonry would call for.

Elizabethan architecture in England also used a great deal of wood. In spite of Renaissance details, the outline with its quaint irregularity of roof and chimney is far removed from classical simplicity. This fruitful period of transition coincided with a tide of prosperity; rich returns from far-flung trade enterprises, and the secularization of wealthy church estates after Henry VIII's fling at individualism, made it imperative for many a newly rich estate owner to build in order to impress. True Renaissance found its place in England even later than on the Continent. Only after it was well established in France and in the Netherlands did it cross the Channel in its modified Continental garb.

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**THE LAW OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY**

The new wealth was found to be a mighty factor, influencing European culture in every country. Commercial wealth is a fickle blessing, and one must enjoy and show it while it lasts. Church and community continued to be the patrons of artists; kings and popes attached some of the greatest painters, sculptors, and architects to their courts and assured them of a sufficient income in return for the execution of whatever order it might please their lord to issue. Leonardo and Michelangelo both benefited from this medieval relationship; and they suffered from it too, because they belonged to a new age and a certain amount of freedom was essential to their work. The rich nobleman, the successful merchant, who ordered and bought on a smaller scale, but steadily, put the artist on a new footing. By following his own ideals, he could shape the taste of the public, that needed pictures to hang up, fountains for its gardens, silver to use at its banquets, and an epitaph in the city church to commemorate a private existence. Titian was the first artist to be
entirely independent of any patronage; he painted what he thought worthy of his brush, and he always found a buyer. For a man of his ability and reputation, that was an ideal arrangement—but there is still many an artist who would welcome the steady, if exacting, patronage of a duke or cardinal. And some of our art exhibits today might be less appalling if the Renaissance had not presented every painter with the freedom of using his oils on any dead fish that caught his fancy.

WHAT TO DO WITH A BARE WALL

The new style had changed the interior of churches considerably. There was no more relying on the play of shadows around the composite pillars, on the colored mystery of stained-glass windows, or on the fading away of high vaults. In classical architecture the window had not been an important factor, only a necessary break in the wall to admit air and light. It now went back to that function. Columns and pillars became as plain as those of the classical ruins; the decoration of cornices, capitals, and entablatures was dictated by Rome. But there remained the wall. Painting was the obvious solution to enliven its dead planes, as had already been done in Romanesque architecture. The ceiling too, whether flat or plainly cross-vaulted, would again yield to such embellishment. Beginning with Giotto, many painters struggled with the problem of fitting pictures—which ought to be composed within a frame—into huge and often irregular wall spaces, which limit but do not support the composition.

Romanesque wall-painting had thought in patterns rather than in pictures. Patterns can be adapted to any kind of background—vaults, triangles, niches, or semicircles. But the picture is cut out of real life and therefore requires a very definite border to show where its life ends and ours begins. In the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo succeeded in giving each picture its depth, in isolating his subjects without disrupting the unity of the interior—a solution far superior to dissolving the wall into illusory architectural perspectives. Such architectural divisions as Michelangelo used strengthen instead of dissolving. But the latter method is easier, and we find it in great favor from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Its effect is based on the skillful employment of a correct perspective (Fig. 10). This creates an illusion, not for the spirit, but for those brain cells which register the pictures of reality. Linear perspective is one of naturalism's most effective tools. The fact that today we regard the knowledge of it as indispensable to any artist, no matter what he creates, whereas the Middle Ages and the painters of the East did not bother to figure it out properly, shows how deeply we are steeped in the naturalist tendencies of the Renaissance.

FROM BUD TO FRUIT

To the sculptor, his old patron—the Church—offered two tasks: statues of saints and ornamental decoration in relief. The tasks were the same as in earlier periods, but the solutions were to be different. The sculptor, too, had to study the classical code of proportions to give the proper support to his compositions (Fig. 4). It was an age of resplendent accessories: pulpits, doors, founts, tombs could be covered with a riot of ornaments.
straight from heathen temples. Masks and garlands testified to the uncritical attitude toward anything antique and to the open joy in the blessings of this earthly life. Bud, leaf, and tendril had been the delicate subjects of Gothic carving; now it was the ripe fruit, the luscious success of the plant's flowering, the good gifts of the earth.

The same change is apparent in the ideal of feminine beauty, the Madonna. In the Gothic period, the ascetic ideals of early Christianity had dethroned the age-old precept “Be fruitful and multiply,” and put virgins and sexless angels in its place. But, with the Church, Heaven had also lost its predominant position and now shared with Mother Earth the credit for pouring out the gifts of life. Fertility, always of vital importance, was again granted an expression in art. The weightless, fragile virgins of Gothic paintings made way for blooming womanhood, for the Mother who understands not only God’s mysteries but also the ways of men. Ethereal angels were relieved by the chubby cherub, of healthy weight and playful spirit, romping instead of floating, teasing instead of adoring.

THE HUMAN BODY

The master sculptors of the great Gothic cathedrals had found the one solution for the draped statue, standing alone and self-contained yet structurally bound to architecture and thematically linked to similar solitary spiritual giants. No innovation could better what they had achieved. But their fellow craftsmen struggled with the evasive curves of the human body every time Adam and Eve had to be represented, and with the problems of depth and simultaneous action whenever many figures were united in a narrative scene. The human body, with its infinite variations of movement, is the best vehicle for drama (Fig. 11). But, to be truly suggestive, not only the gestures but the very muscles that made the gestures possible had to be studied. If the mute figures of the artist’s creation were to enact a scene convincingly, they had to be caught in perfectly natural movements, at the pinnacle of action.

The Greeks had made the human body the standard of beauty; the Church had promptly termed it a vessel of sin. But, even if the Church barred the nude body from the temple of art, it could never suppress the idea that it was something worth representing. The body could never again be relegated to the negligible part it plays, for instance, in Oriental art. There was always the doctrine that “God created man in His own image.” The representation of the many sacred personages did not entail any of the grotesque exaggerations, deformations, or animal admixtures found in other religions. Face and posture at least could be invested with a beauty that was essentially human and could be studied by looking at lovely specimens of mankind.

Humanism and the Reformation had broken up the spiritual unity of men. The individual, finding himself isolated and thrown back on his own resources, remembered the great advantage of having a body to carry and express his personality. Consequently, man now took pride in this possession. The discovery of Roman statues could never have caused the discovery of the body in the face of strong and unquestioned Church authority. But, with these bonds loosening, they helped immensely. They demonstrated how simple it was to arrange all conceptions of beauty around man. The universe once more revolved around man and his happiness.

As a creed this was so revolutionary that it could often be expressed only in terms of classical mythology, acted out by classical heroes, gods, and beauties. Yet the old gods were not entirely reinstated; the Bible held its place as the chief source of subject material, even if the Renaissance artists chose other subjects than did their forefathers. The inherent dogmatic value seemed less important to them than the obvious dramatic qualities that could be expressed in figures—preferably nude. One of the most popular subjects of the German Renaissance is the Fall of Man. No other period has given us so many Saint
Sebastians, Judiths (Fig. 12), and Susannas—simply because the subject called for a nude. For the same reason, the Judgment of Paris, Venus, and Lucretia are almost as popular.

SEEKING FOR PERSONALITY

Botticelli thought nothing of using the same model for Venus and the Madonna; both were invested with the realities of everyday and contemporary life and had come close to the painter—one out of oblivion and the other out of Heaven. His Madonna is not above bewilderment, nor is his Venus so very sure of herself—they are human (Figs. 13 and 14). When the monk Savonarola succeeded for a short period in throwing the pleasure-loving people of Florence into a frenzy of penitence, even Botticelli was induced to add his mythological pictures to the pyre of hair ornaments, toilet articles, mirrors, brocades, and games. Savonarola was overzealous when he thought of such poems and pictures as the outcome of heathenish, licentious minds. The artists were simply in search of humanity.

The Greeks would not have understood this. Their faults and enthusiasms were very much of this world; they did not have to look for humanity—they looked for the ideal type. In this the Renaissance artists would not follow their masters; they were after the thrilling variety of individuals. Filippo Lippi dressed his wife—a former nun with whom he had eloped—according to the latest fashion, and she became his Madonna; Raphael discovered the eternal Mother in the strong, kind woman of the people, his Madonna della Sedia; La Bella Simonetta, loved by a Medici and doomed to die of consumption, lent her melancholy beauty to Botticelli’s Venus and Mary. Leonardo tried to fathom a smile; Michelangelo built up a magnificent body, strong and harmonious as only Nature’s masterpiece can be. Yet there is no grand air to the face of his Pietà to satisfy the classical desire for dignity. It is dramatic and quiet at the same time, a combination which no generalization could achieve but which might grace an exceptional individual (Fig. 16).

In Dürer’s self-portrait we find all the characteristics of Renaissance man: the studied effect of one personality on his surroundings, the careful choice of rich details, the exploiting of such beauty as Nature has bestowed on the individual—but above all the man who can think out his own problems and shape himself accordingly (Fig. 1). No wonder Hutten exclaimed: “O century, O sciences, it is a joy to live!”

MEASURING BEAUTY

The artist had to work hard, study, and experiment; but he welcomed the chance. It was not always a simple matter. Signorelli secretly dissected corpses in order to find out how the muscles and sinews are placed. His pictures sometimes look more like anatomical demonstrations than illustrations of some happening (Fig. 15). Dürer, who studied a blade of grass, the petal of a violet, the fur of a rabbit, so minutely that not the least manifestation of natural growth could escape him—Dürer could not be satisfied with a face and a drapery. Questions of proportion were of the utmost importance to his mathematical mind. He measured and calculated, trying to catch beauty in numbers.

To the Italians, beauty came naturally; the north had been so long concerned with the beauty of the soul that an artistic appeal to the senses had to be arrived at by a very roundabout way. They started by faithfully representing what met the eye. Dürer and Cranach did not always choose the most beautiful models, and their relentless naturalism would not stoop to flattery (Fig. 19); but finally, with the help of the Italians, they discovered, which elements go to make a lovely form. They learned the secret of soft flesh over the correct bones.

When stone ceases to be stone, wood to be wood, bronze to be metal, and become skin, hair, or silk; when a figure convincingly expresses its faculty to move—then it cannot be part of architecture. No more rows of figures, alternating with columns to flank a cathedral entrance; the human form will no longer
The Renaissance Rediscover the Human Body

Fig. 11. Lovers and Death, a woodcut by Burgkmair (1510). Greek figures against a perspective of classical buildings enact the timeless story of love and death at its most dramatic moment.

Fig. 13. Head of Madonna, by Botticelli

Fig. 14. Head of Venus, by Botticelli

Trachtenberg says that the wistful face so often painted by Botticelli is that of the lovely Simonetta.
Fig. 15. This drawing by Signorelli shows the contrast between the tense muscles of life and the relaxation of lifeless limbs.

Fig. 16. Head of Mary from the "Pietà" by Michelangelo. It is easy to express extreme feelings, but it takes a master to show profound sorrow by pose and restraint.

Fig. 17. View of Toledo, by El Greco (early 17th century). Instead of serving as a backdrop for human dramas, landscape develops its own drama with the dark clouds and greenish light of an approaching storm.

Fig. 18. A nymph from the "Fountain of the Innocents" in Paris, by François Goujon (1549). After drapery had been an end in itself for centuries, a substitute for the body, it once again becomes form-revealing, an accent on a human figure.
lend itself to structural tasks. A niche, a pedestal, air, and space in which to move, has to be provided for a statue, which is as particular about its personal rights and individual glory as the artist himself (Fig. 4).

COLOR ON ITS OWN

The Middle Ages had thought in masses and movement. Its faith had moved mountains of stone; all details had been caught in the upward surge. The line was independent, it carried the figure, the composition. The Renaissance thought in color and balance, it weighed and measured, and found the golden mean, which prolonged forever the perfection of here and now. The eye of the individual is the arbiter of all art. How does it take in the contrast of dark hair, white skin, jewelry and silks, light and shadow on velvet or skin, the paling of colors at dusk? The colors of Vermeer have a soft glow that absorbs the line; Velasquez places the exquisite little Infanta, all flickering whites and pinks, against the shadowy depths of an interior full of silvery, fugitive tones.

The eye discovers not only the chiaroscuro and indirect lights of the interior but also the subtle shading of colors in the landscape. Nature gave occasional gifts to medieval man—a flower here, a tree there. Renaissance man sees it as a whole. Petrarch was the first to climb a mountain solely to enjoy the vast view; Pope Leo X used to go into the country just to feel Nature around him. The landscape is no longer the view through a window, or a garden enclosure, a bower for lovers. Width and depth challenge to be caught with all their fleeting charms, the moment wants to last (Fig. 17). Such pictures were not painted to order, nor would they exert any moral influence, nor did their subject matter illustrate a well-known truth. They were and are still bought by those who like them, by those who wish to borrow the painter’s eyes.

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With the passing of the Renaissance one of the great circles in the history of European culture was closed. After the easy naturalness of the Greek ideal was lost, Europe turned to the solid satisfaction to be found in formality. Then it tried the power of sheer line and experimented with pigments as a jeweler might try the effect of different colored stones. The Renaissance brought back the realization that, just as man is the creative artist, so man is the chief standard and content of his art. Balance and measure give true freedom, because they are restful and self-contained.

But no experience is ever lost. The soaring strength of the Middle Ages fructified the mobile grace of Goujon’s nymphs on the Fountain of the Innocents in Paris (Fig. 18), no matter how classical they appear. No Renaissance in the narrow sense of the word could possibly have lived long. The infusion of Greek blood alone could not have kept it alive; it needed—and obtained—the heart-blood of the greatest artists of all nationalities, who exchanged, modified, sifted and enlarged the inherited and the newly acquired ideas.