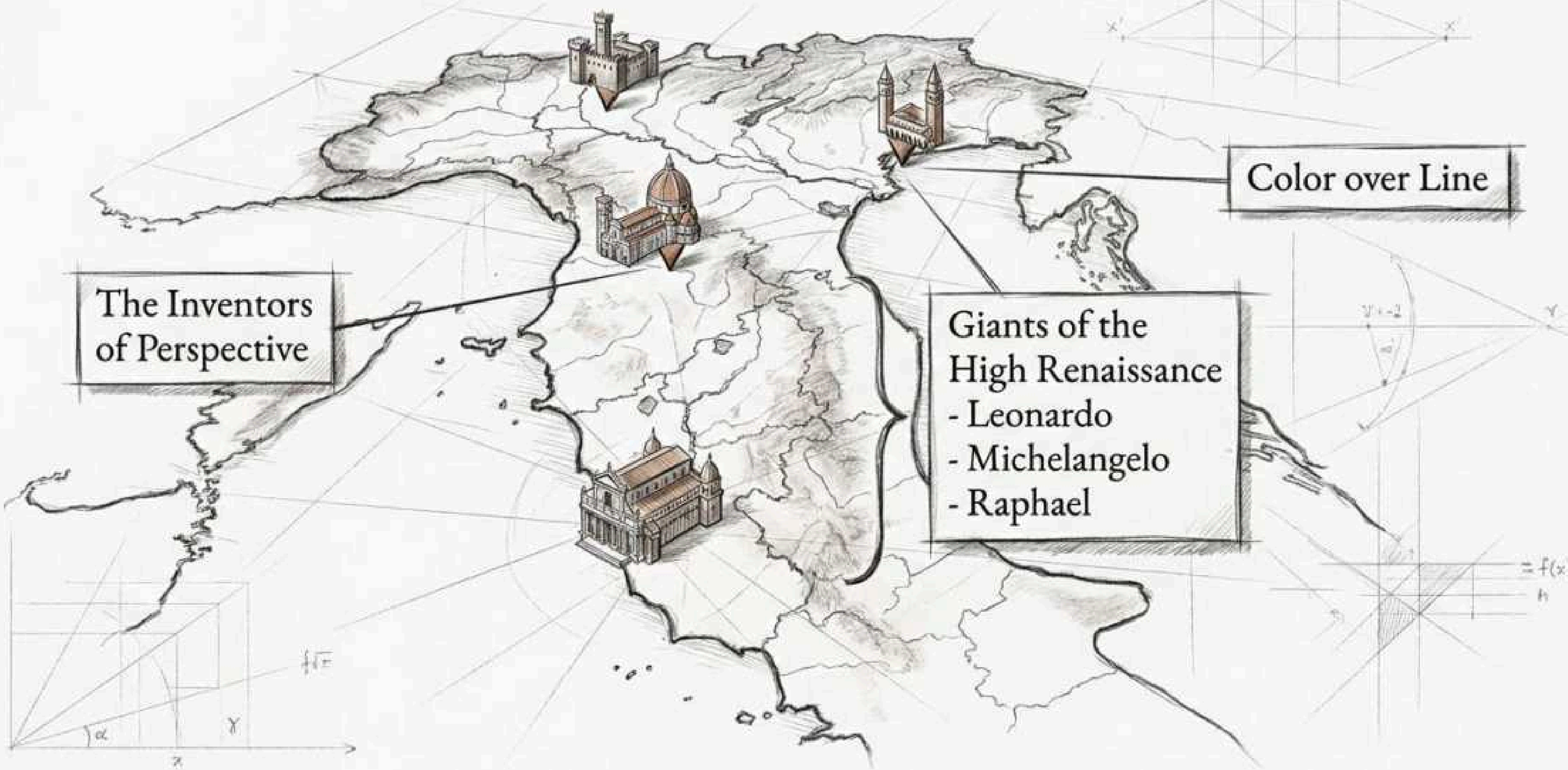
The Italian Renaissance (1400–1520)

¶ 1.1



Renaissance = Rebirth

(Looking back to ancient Greece and Rome)





Banking & Wool Trade
Powers the Republic of Florence

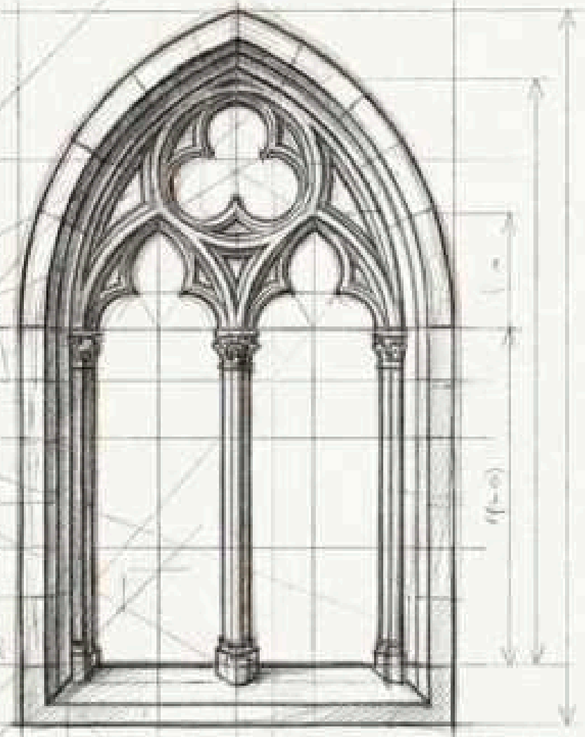
Medici Wealth
Cosimo & Lorenzo (The Bankers)

Patronage
Paying for monumental buildings, paintings, and sculpture

Power
Ruling Florence from behind the scenes

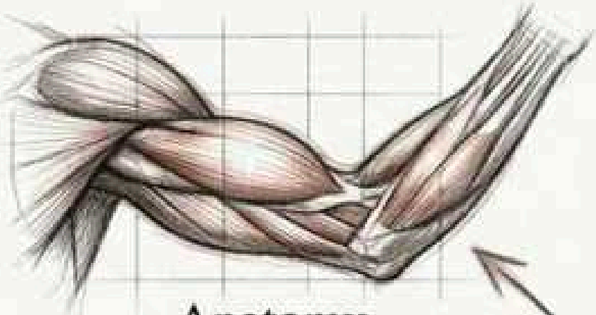
The Humanist Shift

The Foundation

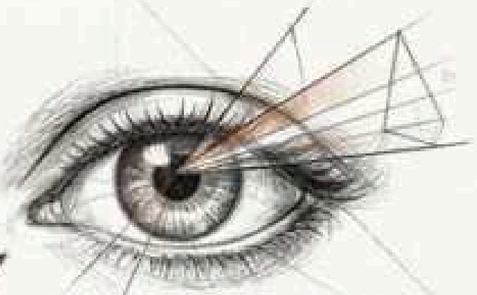


Classical texts, human abilities, and Church patronage (Religious subjects still dominate).

The New Focus



Anatomy

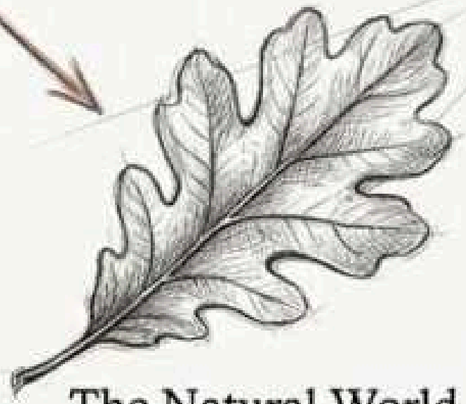


Light

Humanism



Portraits & Myths



The Natural World

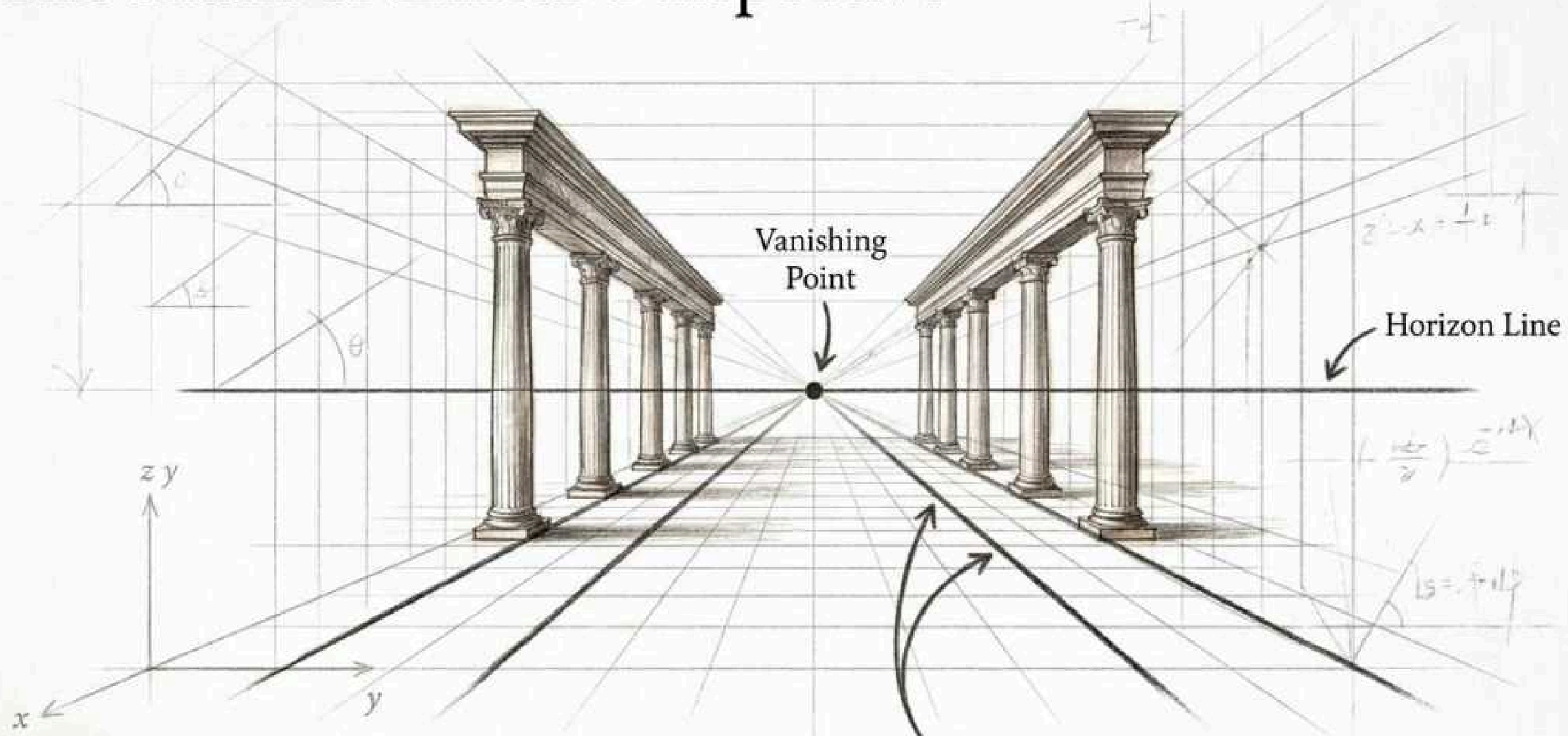
The Artist as a Thinker.

Brunelleschi's Great Feat (1420–1436)



Built without a wooden support frame (inspired by careful study of Roman ruins).

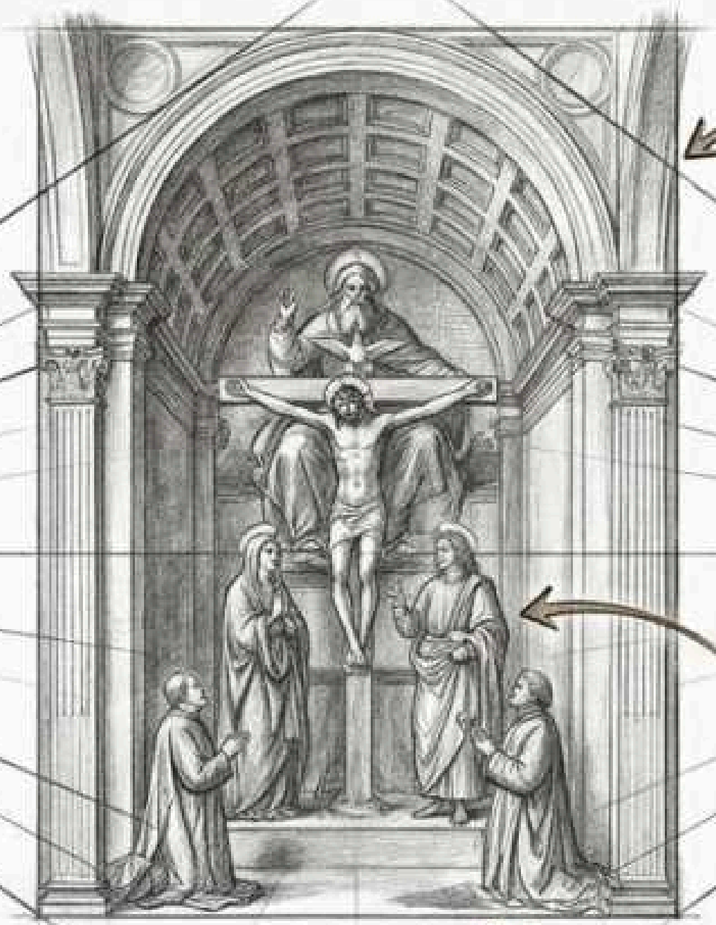
The Math of Linear Perspective



- Developed c. 1420 by Filippo Brunelleschi.
- Codified 1435 by Leon Battista Alberti in *On Painting*.

Masaccio & The Holy Trinity (c. 1427)

Location: Santa Maria Novella, Florence.



Vaulted space cut into the wall.

Vanishing Point

Figures possess real weight.

Accurate cast shadows.

Masaccio died in 1428 in his twenties, but shaped generations of painters.

The Rebirth of Sculpture

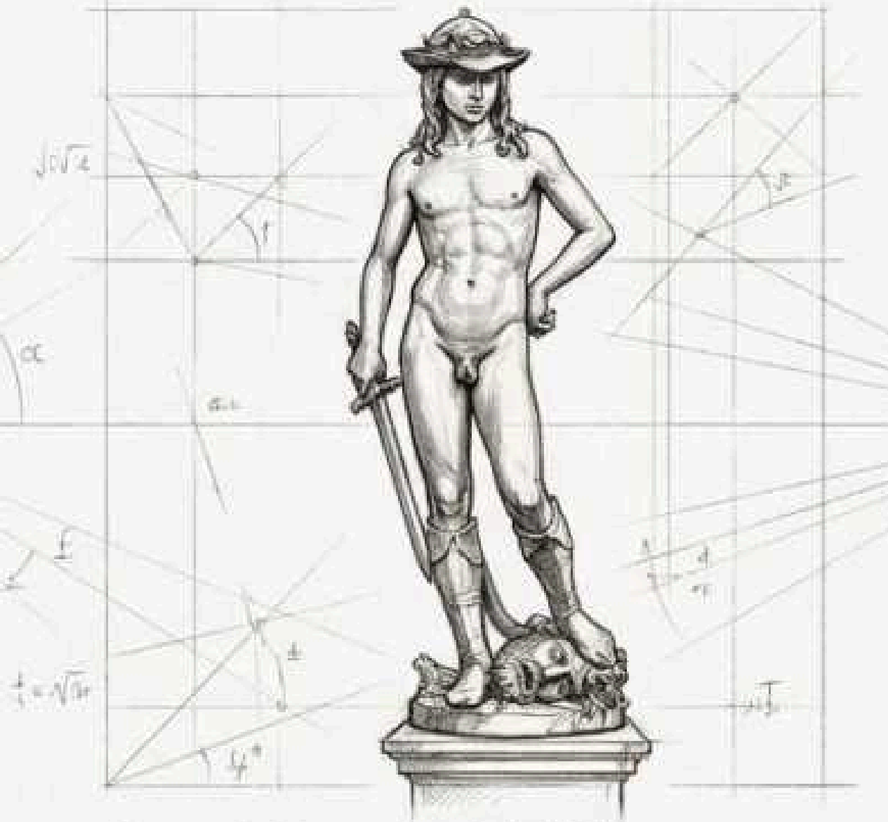
¶ 1.7

Lorenzo Ghiberti



Artwork: *Gates of Paradise* (Florence Baptistery, finished 1452).
Note: Decades of work on bronze doors.

Donatello



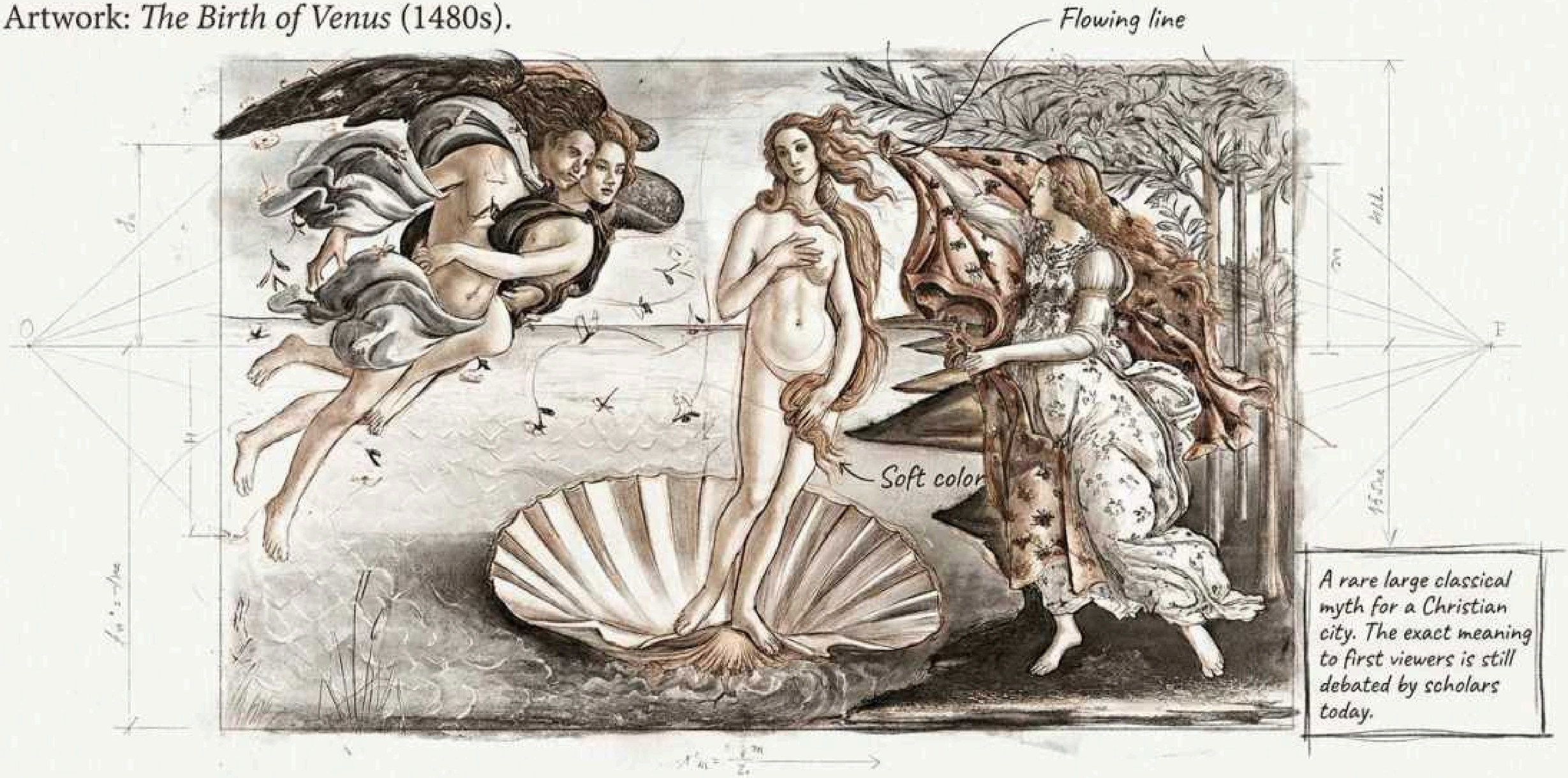
Artwork: *Bronze David* (1440s).
Note: First freestanding nude since antiquity.

Combined classical poses with close study of real bodies.

Botticelli & The Medici Circle

¶ 1.8

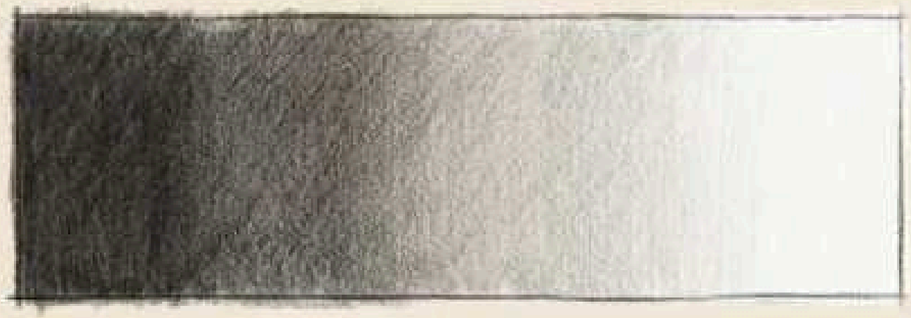
Artwork: *The Birth of Venus* (1480s).



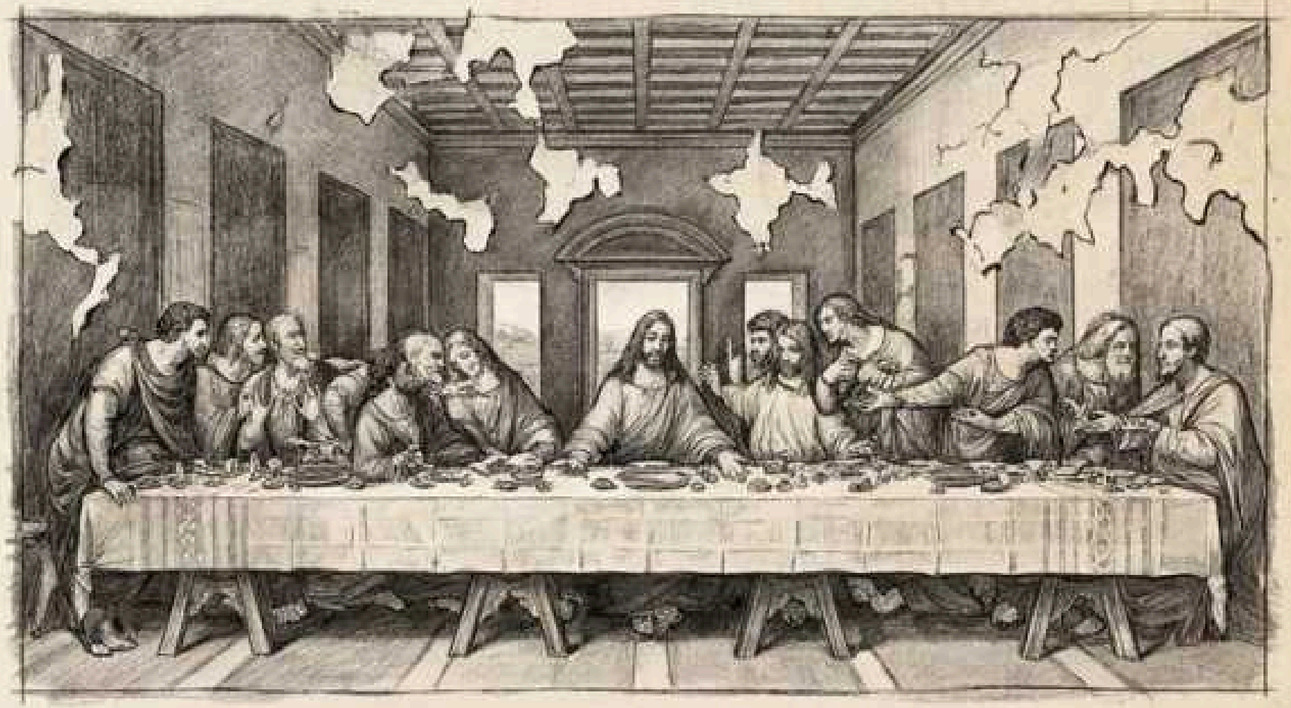
A rare large classical myth for a Christian city. The exact meaning to first viewers is still debated by scholars today.

Leonardo da Vinci: The Polymath (b. 1452)

Roles: Painter, Engineer, Anatomist.

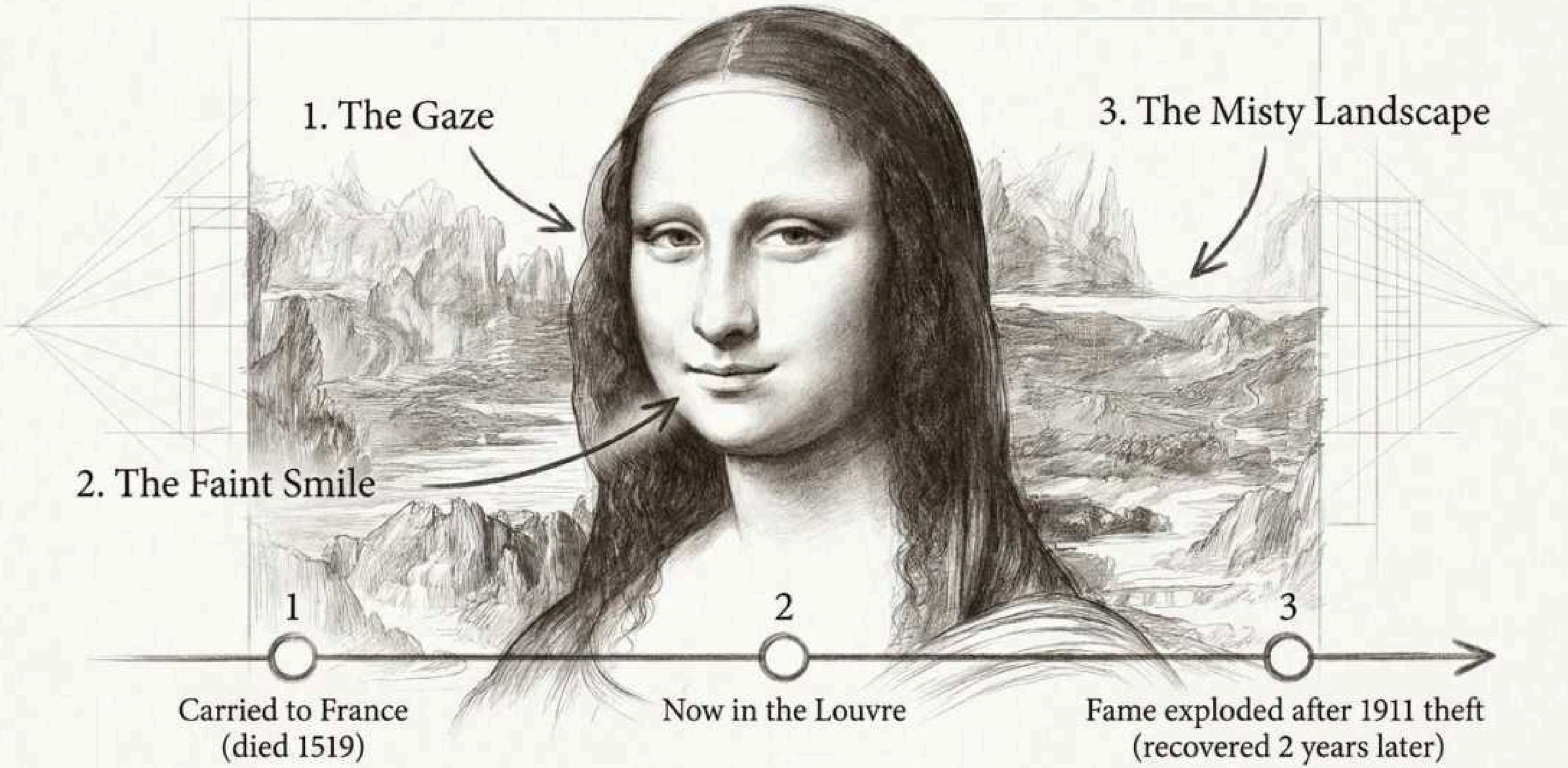


Sfumato (Soft blending of tones without hard outlines).

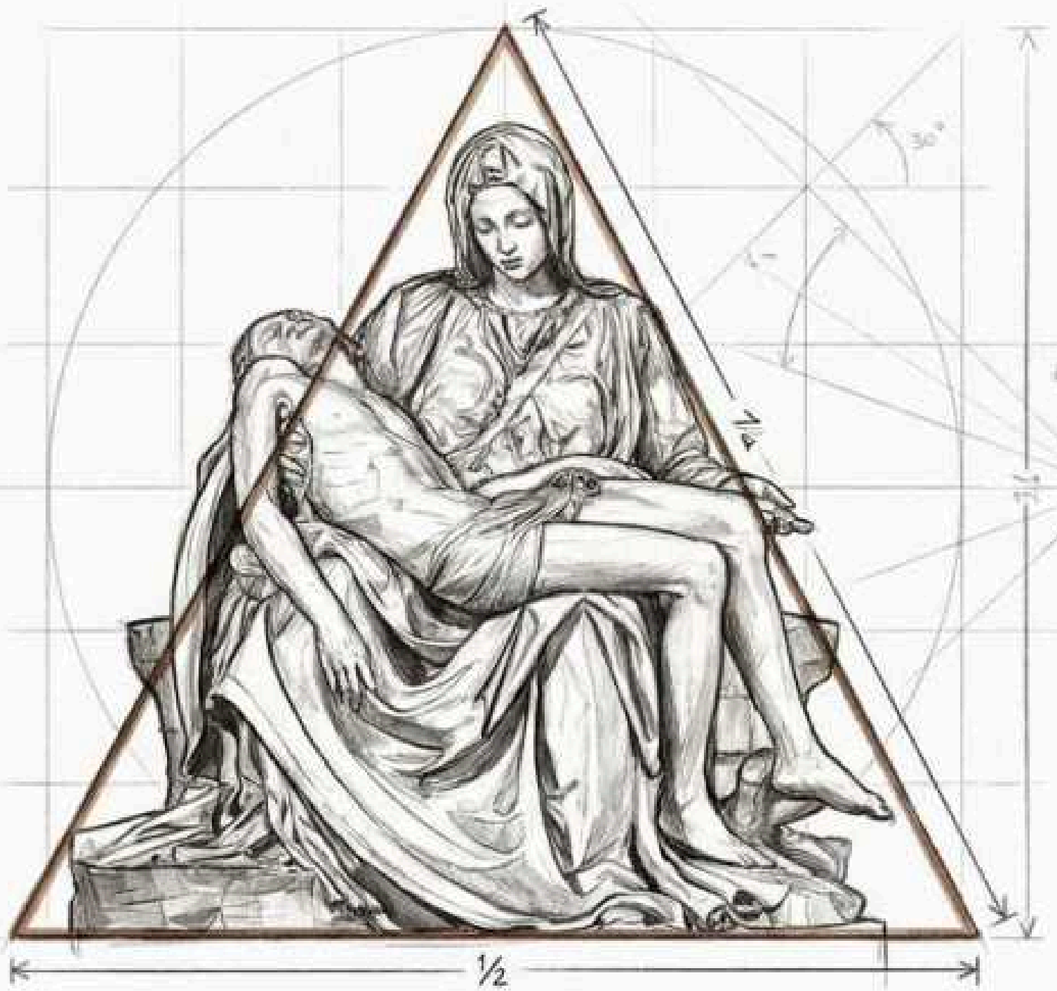


The Last Supper (1490s, Milan)
Used experimental technique instead of true fresco—began flaking within his lifetime.

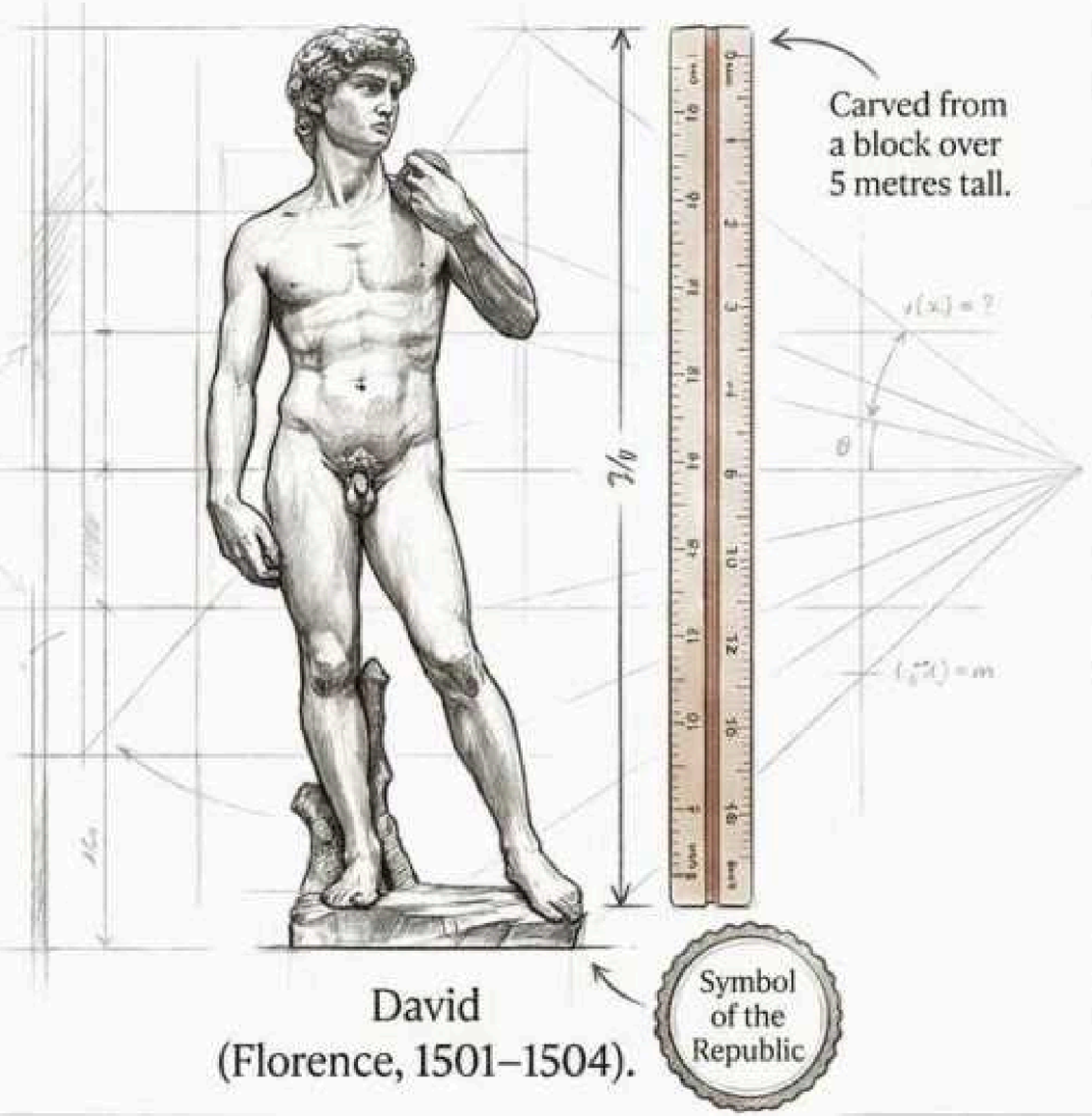
The Mona Lisa (Begun c. 1503)



Michelangelo Buonarroti: First a Sculptor (b. 1475)



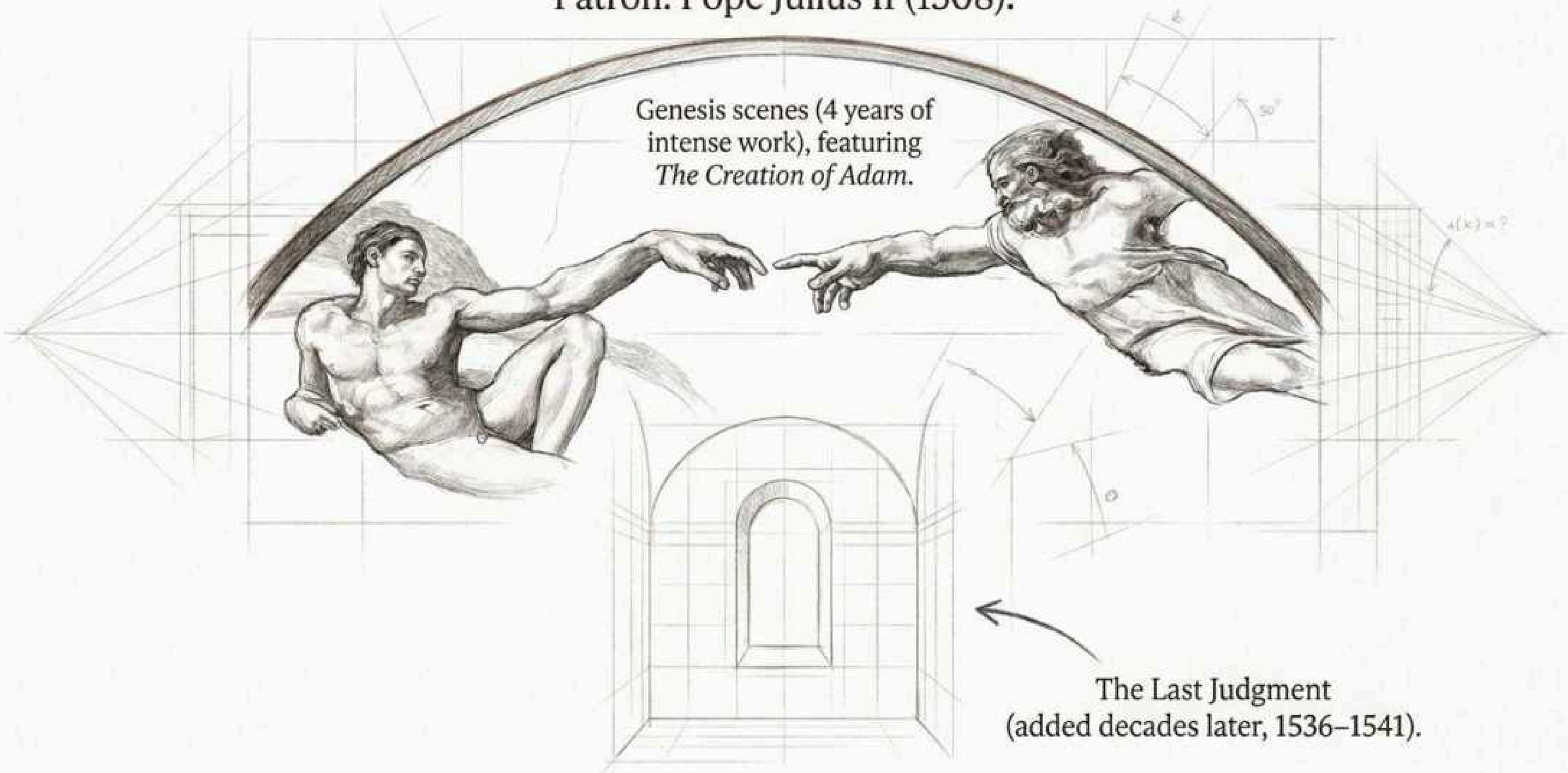
Pietà (Rome, 1499).
Mary holding her dead son.



David
(Florence, 1501–1504).

The Sistine Chapel

Patron: Pope Julius II (1508).

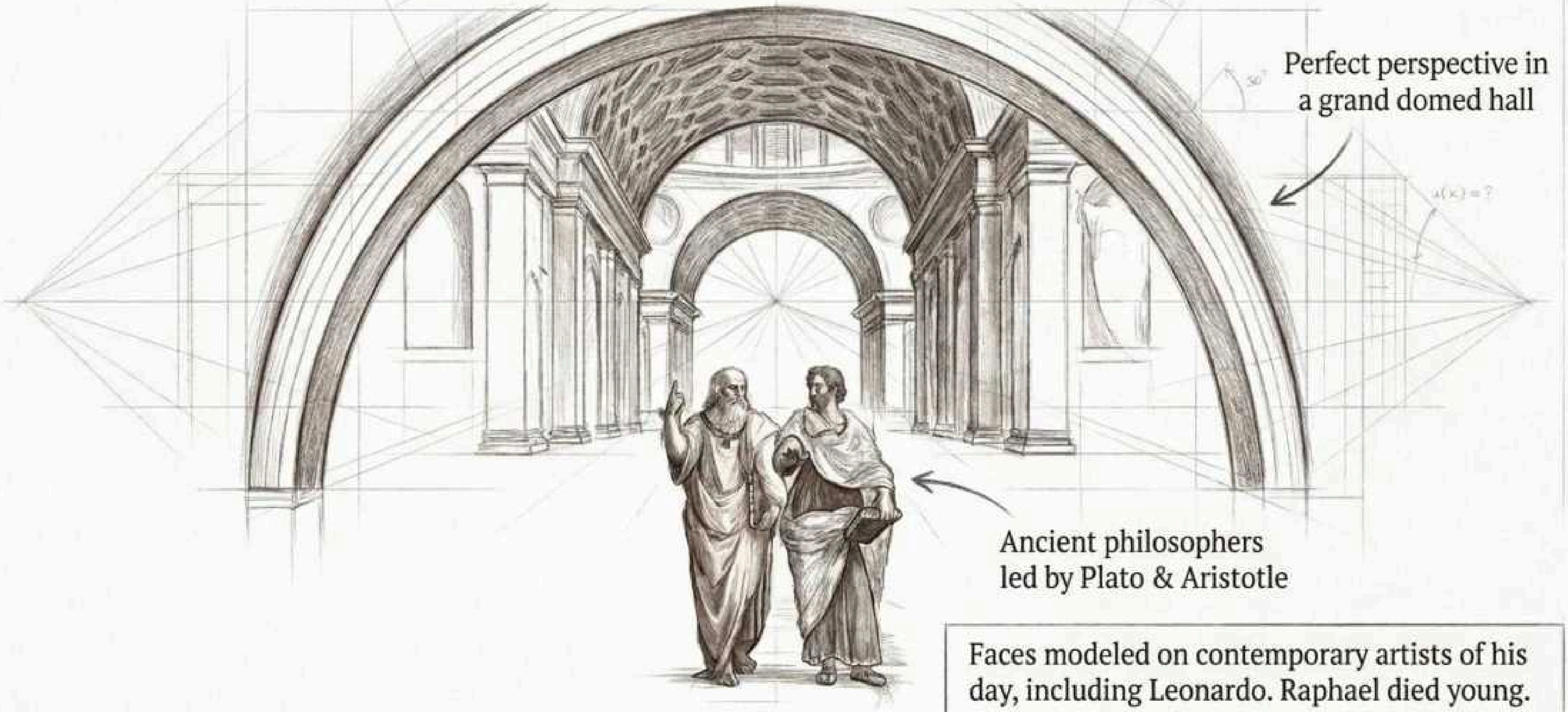


Genesis scenes (4 years of intense work), featuring *The Creation of Adam*.

The Last Judgment (added decades later, 1536–1541).

Raphael & Perfect Harmony (1483–1520)

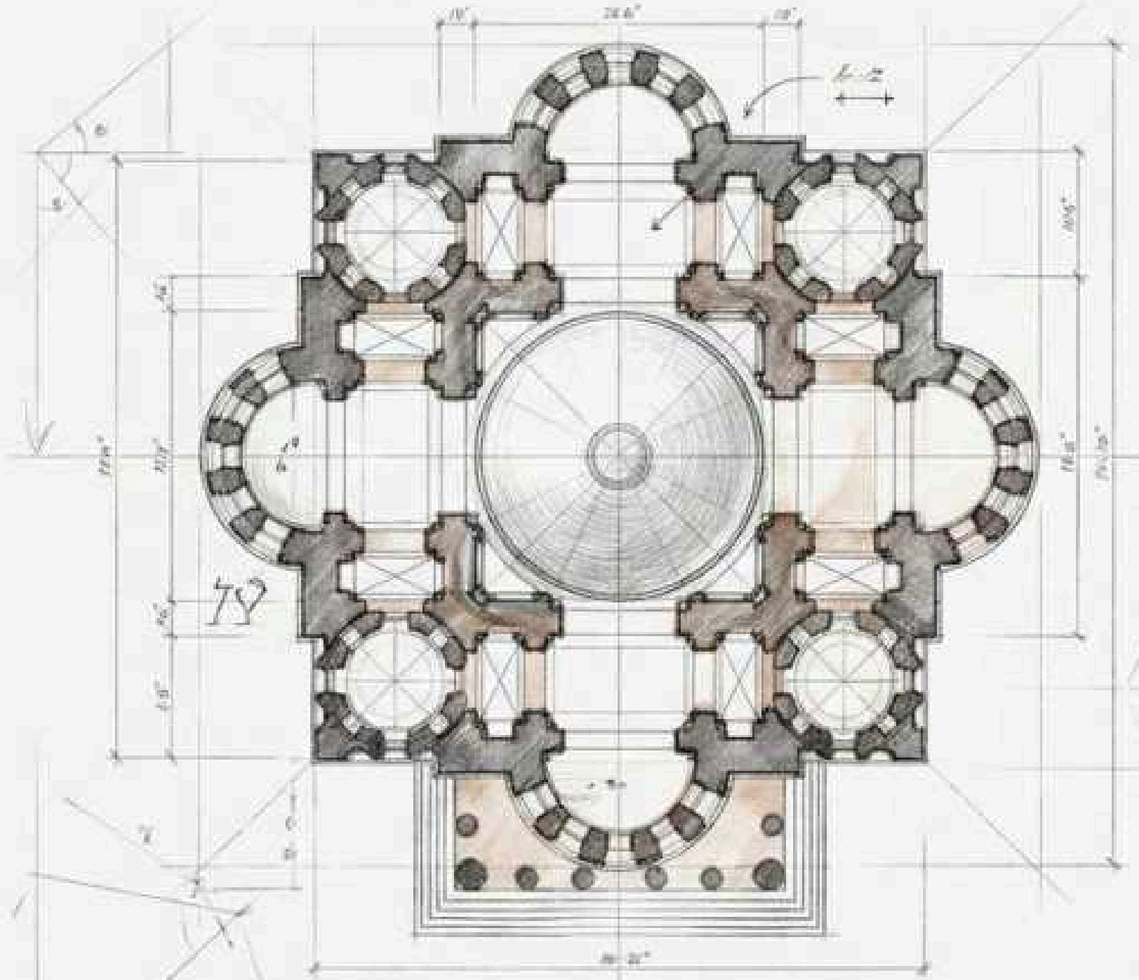
Artwork: *School of Athens* (Vatican, 1509–1511).

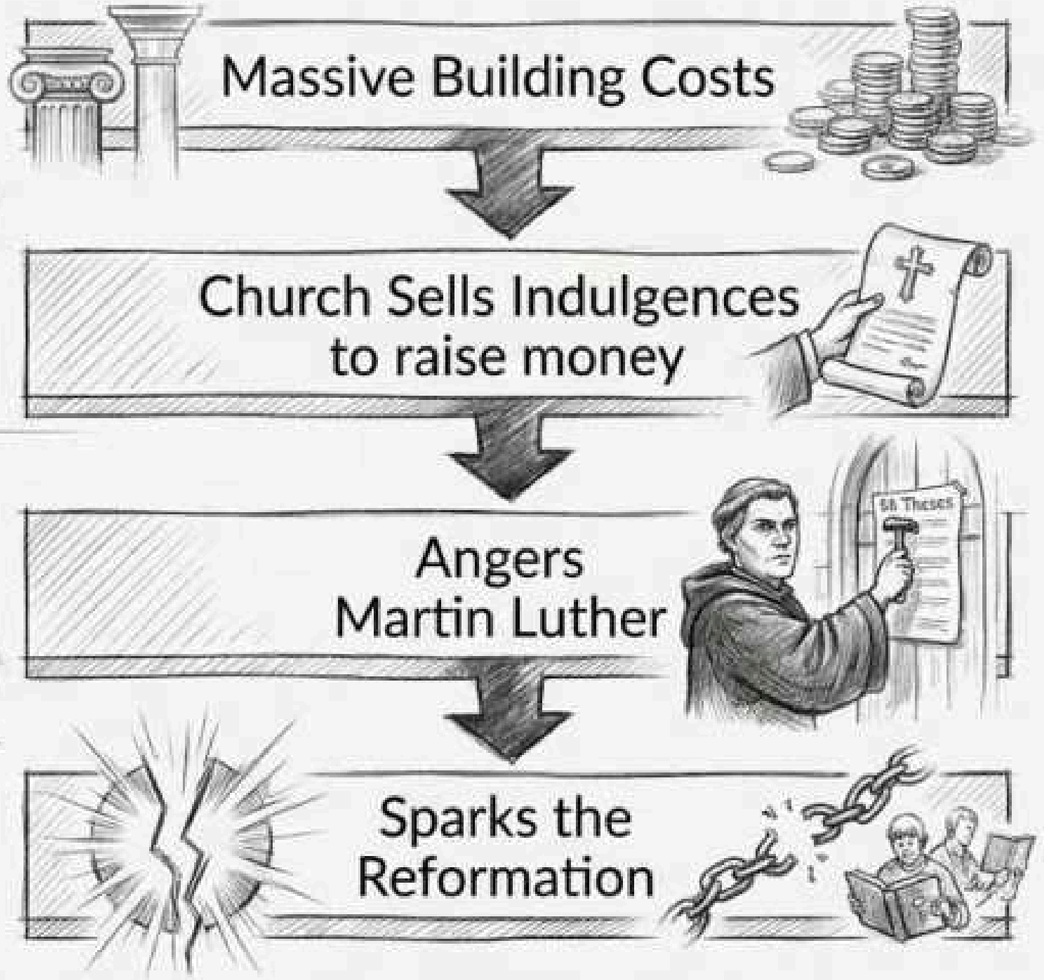


Faces modeled on contemporary artists of his day, including Leonardo. Raphael died young.

Rome, St. Peter's, & Unintended Consequences

Popes with great wealth rival Florence, planning the new St. Peter's (Donato Bramante).





The glory of the High Renaissance indirectly triggered religious revolution.

Venice: A Different Tradition

Florence (Disegno)	Venice (Colorito)
	
- Precise drawing, structure, and mathematical line.	- A Trading Republic prioritizing rich color and soft light. - Subjects: Sensuous landscapes, portraits, and myths.

Key Figures: Giorgione and Titian

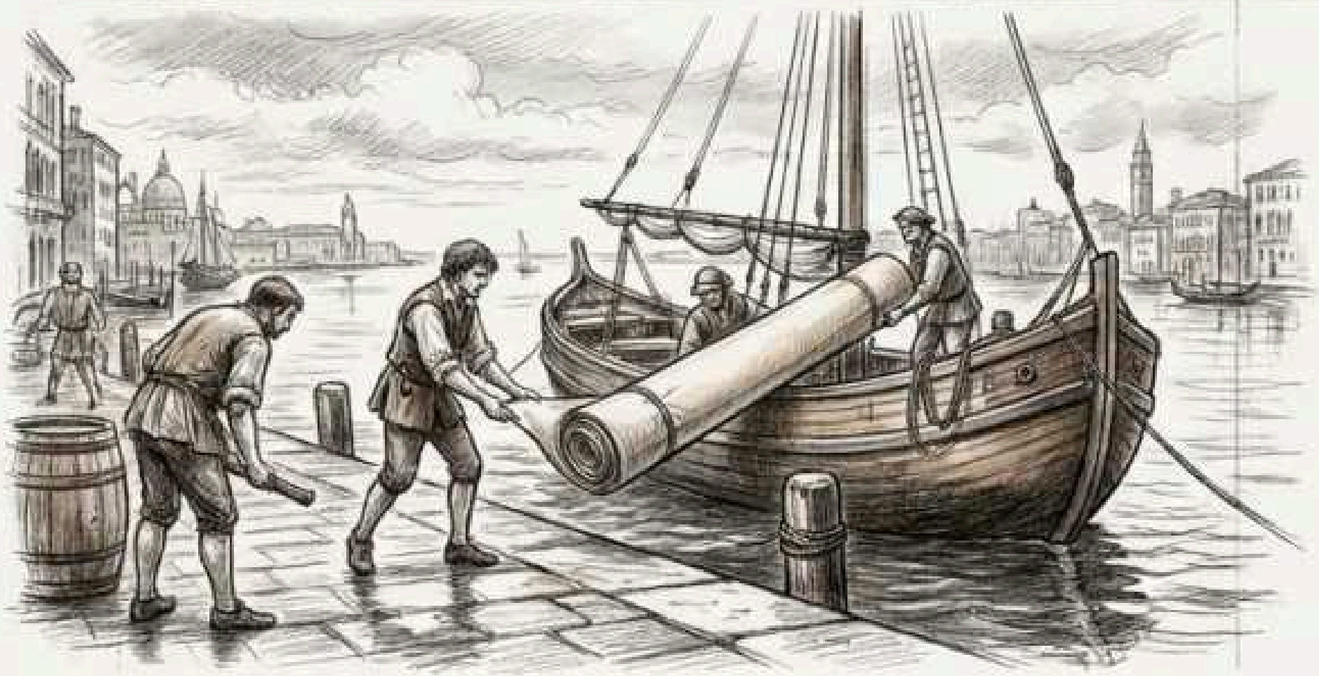
Titian lived to ~90, painted for popes/emperors/kings.
Loose brushwork influenced centuries.

The Technology of Oil Paint

Origin: Imported from Northern Europe.



Mechanics: Oil dries slowly → Allows layering of thin glazes → Creates depth and glowing color.



The Shift to Canvas:

- **Problem:** In damp Venice, wooden panels warped.
- **Solution:** Canvas was adopted because it was light, cheap, and rollable for long-distance shipping.

Women Artists in the Renaissance

The Barrier



Guilds and workshops mostly closed.
Women barred from studying nude models.

The Breakthrough: Sofonisba Anguissola



- Born to a noble family in Cremona.
- Trained locally; achieved fame for her portraits.
- Recruited to Spain as court painter for Philip II in 1559.

Vasari & The Invention of Art History

¶ 1.18

The Book: Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550).



The Narrative:

Treated artists as "geniuses."

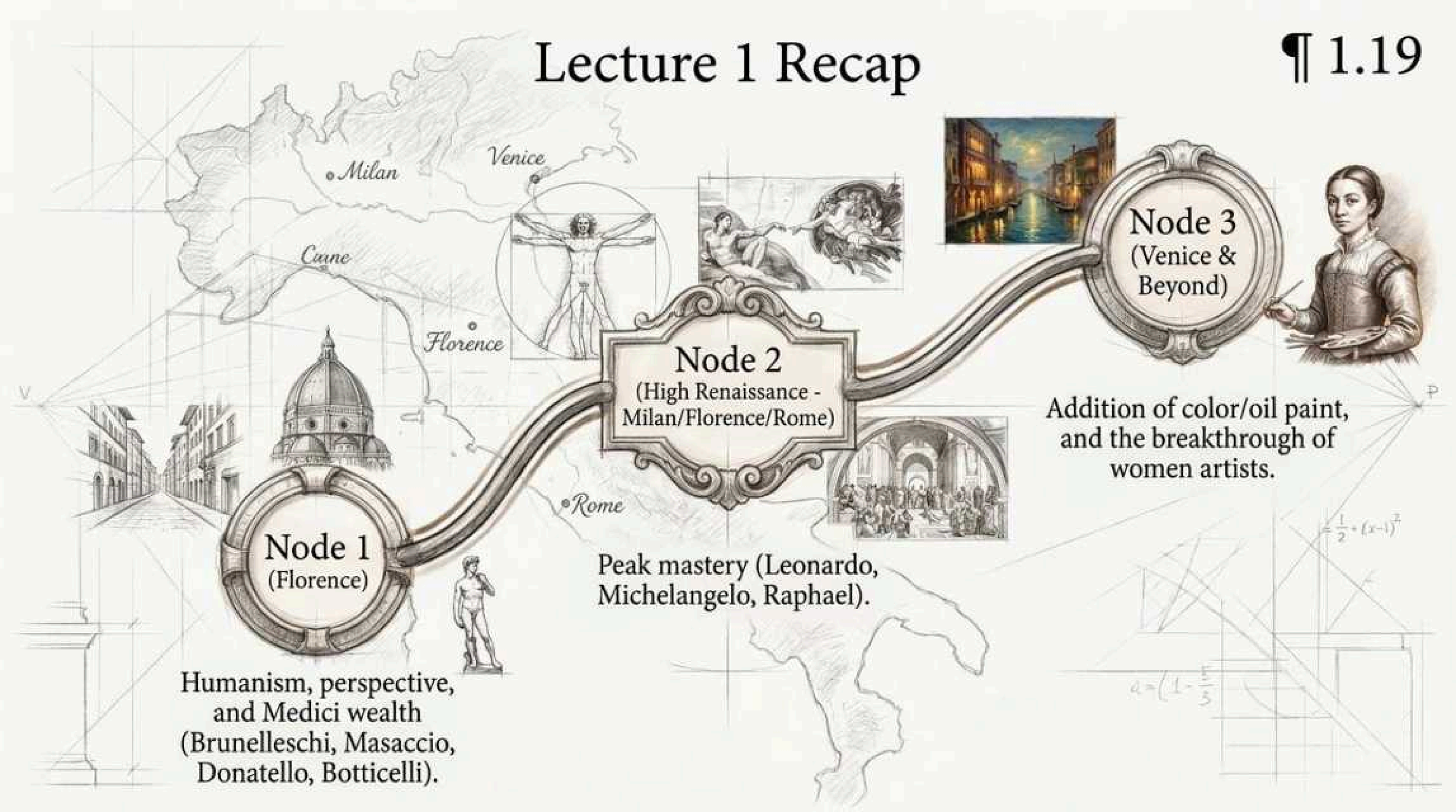
Told a story of steady, inevitable progress peaking with Michelangelo.

Gave artists unprecedented fame and status.

Historian's Warning Label: Use with care. Vasari made Florence the center of art history because he heavily favored his own city and his personal friends.

Lecture 1 Recap

¶ 1.19



Humanism, perspective, and Medici wealth (Brunelleschi, Masaccio, Donatello, Botticelli).

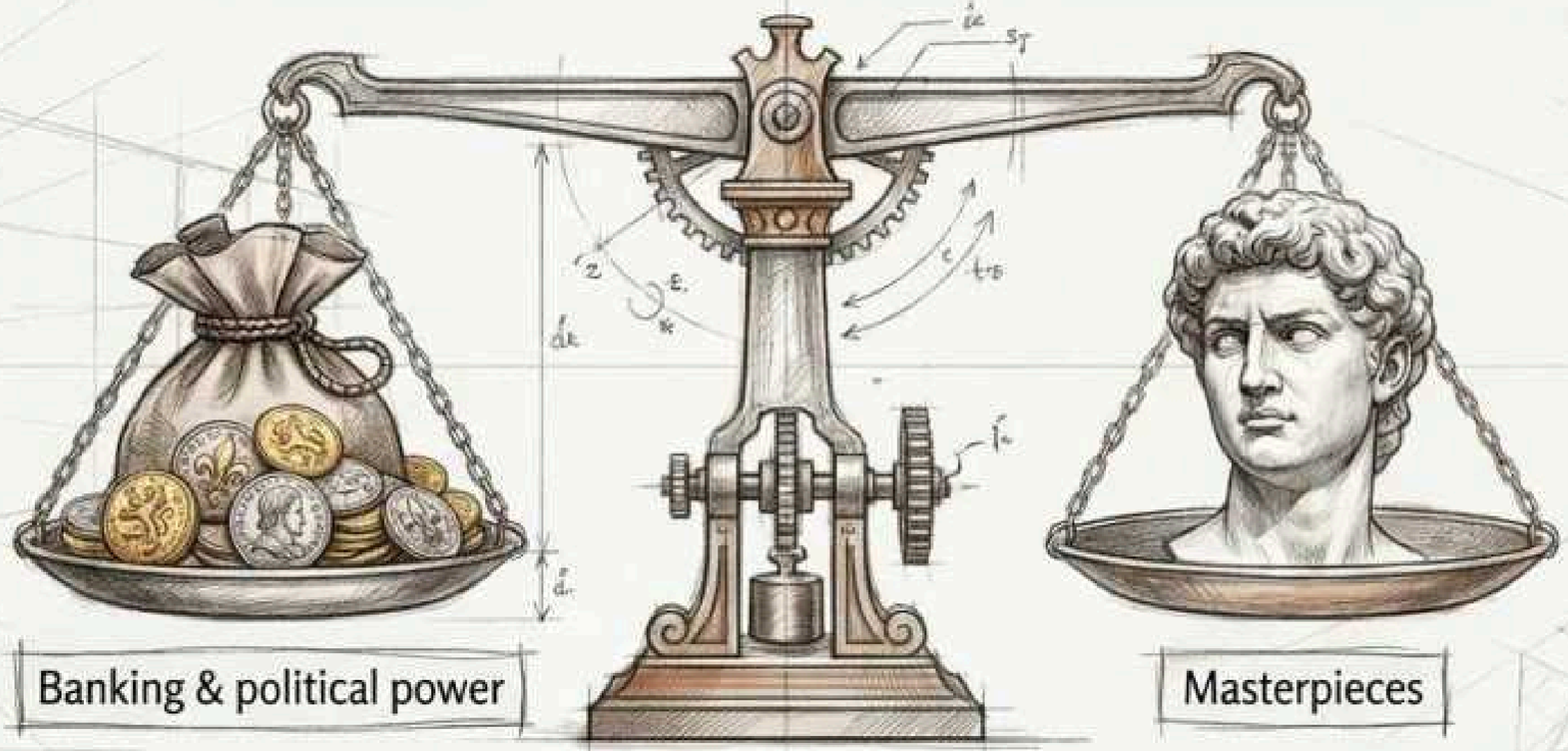
Peak mastery (Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael).

Addition of color/oil paint, and the breakthrough of women artists.

The Takeaway Question

¶ 1.20

The Medici paid for many of these masterpieces using money from banking and behind-the-scenes political power.



Does it matter where the money for great art comes from? Or should we judge the work purely on its own merits?

↳ Action Item: Think of a museum or building near you—ask yourself who paid for it.

Preview of Lecture 2

Moving North of the Alps.

- Jan van Eyck & Albrecht Dürer.
- How the Reformation changed what artists could paint.
- The drama of the Baroque.
- The Dutch Golden Age (Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Vermeer).

