

The Emergence of New Genres

The late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the emergence of new types of painting in Italy. For the first time since antiquity, landscape, still life, and genre pictures all became established as independent subjects worthy of attention by the finest artists. Elements of these had always been present in other kinds of pictures: landscape backdrops were prominent, for example, in depictions of the Flight into Egypt and other religious subjects. Portrait painters incorporated as still-life elements objects that helped define a sitter's position, prestige, or profession. Similarly, genre scenes—the word genre describes realistic depictions of ordinary people and everyday activities—sometimes appeared as background vignettes with moralizing undercurrents.

It was in northern Europe that artists first began to specialize in **landscape**. Their so-called world landscapes, which offered a God's-eye view of the earth—wide in scope and complete in detail—were popular with Italian audiences. In the early 1500s Vasari claimed “there is no cobbler's house without its landscape.” Although northern landscapes prompted artists such as Raphael to focus greater attention on their own background settings, it was not until the end of the sixteenth century that Italian landscape came into its own. This was due, in part, to the influence of the Carracci and their renewed emphasis on the careful observation of nature. Annibale Carracci's river scene in this room is among the very first Italian landscape paintings.

Still life seems to have appeared more or less simultaneously in Italy, northern Europe, and Spain. Still-life artists turned their sharp focus on plants, animals, and man-made objects just as scientists and natural philosophers were developing a new paradigm for learning about the world around them. In place of abstract theory and generalization was a new empha-

sis on investigation. Exploration, by Spain and the Netherlands especially, increased interest in goods from far-flung parts of the globe and the need for accurate renderings of biological specimens. At the same time, trade and capitalism created a new picture-buying market—one made up of prosperous men and women eager to see their possessions meticulously recorded by the painter's brush.

It was in this climate too, though somewhat later, that Italian **genre** painting evolved. Poets were ridding their verse of elaborate rhetorical embellishments, focusing more directly on the subject at hand. Genre painting did not rely on a literary theme—stories taken from the Bible, mythology, or ancient history—but spoke in a contemporary vernacular, free of bombast and, often, with humor. These were pictures from actual experience, understandable on their own terms. While Italian collectors continued to prize mythological and religious pictures, these grand themes began to share wall space with scenes of peasants, street life, and tavern brawls—at first by Dutch and Flemish artists, but by the late 1600s by Italian painters as well.



Pensionante del Saraceni

Roman, active about 1610/1620

Still Life with Fruit and Carafe, about 1610/1620

Long thought to have been painted by Caravaggio, this still life shares his naturalistic arrangement of foodstuffs, placed close to the front of the picture plane. Here, however, the painter has used light to soften the forms of ripe fruit—edges of the highlighted apple on the pewter plate seem to blur and dissolve. This is characteristic of works painted by an artist dubbed the Pensionante del Saraceni, literally, the boarder of Saraceni. Carlo Saraceni was one of the many painters in Rome who were heavily influenced by Caravaggio.

A slight elevation in viewpoint reduces the formality of this composition, but it nevertheless evinces the strong sense of geometry underlying its organization—stronger than in Saraceni's or Caravaggio's own paintings. Notice, for example, the repetition of round form in the melons, plates, and swelling wine carafe. This insistent structure, together with a certain elusive and undefinable “melancholy,” has suggested to some scholars that the painter was French. Saraceni was known as a francophile and is documented as having accommodated at least one French artist in his house—hence the name Pensionante. Some dozen paintings are thought to be by the same hand but the artist's identity remains unknown.

Oil on canvas, .504 x .716 m (19 7/8 x 28 3/8 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1939.1.159



Annibale Carracci

Bolognese, 1560–1609

River Landscape, about 1590

Annibale Carracci and his brother Agostino, along with their older cousin Lodovico, established an academy in Bologna. Rejecting what they viewed as the exaggeration of mannerism, they returned to an approach that was grounded in careful observation of the natural world. It is not surprising, then, to find that Annibale and Agostino created some of the first Italian landscape paintings—scenes in which the landscape itself takes center stage rather than serving as a mere backdrop.

Here, the textures of plants—soft foliage, wet reeds, and the mirroring surface of the distant lake—are all carefully recorded. Small figures are subordinate to the world around them. It has been suggested that the figures reclining in the boat are lovers on an illicit outing, but their presence seems intended simply to give scale and a human dimension to nature. The poling boatman in his bright clothing serves best, not as an actor in some narrative, but in a purely aesthetic role as a means to draw our eye into the center of the composition. Effortless and spontaneous brushwork lend the kind of vibrant naturalism that suggests a real place. Biographers noted that the Carracci drew extensively out of doors; these final canvases were, however, painted in the studio.

Oil on canvas, .883 x 1.48 m (34 3/4 x 58 5/16 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.58



Domenico Fetti

Roman, 1589–1623

The Veil of Veronica, about 1618/1622

One of the four principal relics of the Passion preserved in Saint Peter's in Rome is a cloth miraculously imprinted with the image of Christ's face. According to legend, conflated from several different sources in the Middle Ages, Veronica handed the cloth to Christ as he struggled under the weight of the cross along the tortuous route to Calvary. After he used the cloth to wipe his brow the image of his face remained. Veronica's name is often, and probably incorrectly, regarded as being derived from the words *vera icon*, or "true icon"; more likely it stems from a related eastern Christian tradition about a woman named Berenike.

It is possible that Fetti saw the actual veil when it was installed in the crossing of Saint Peter's in 1606. He would certainly have been familiar with other paintings of it. Its popularity for painters was due not only to its powerful spiritual impact—Christ's suffering face, seen isolated from any reference to worldly surroundings, focuses the meditative concentration of the viewer—but also because it seems to have been the first indulgenced image. That is, an indulgence was gained by reciting the proper prayers either in front of the relic itself—or in front of an image of it. (An indulgence is a remission of temporal punishment due for sin.) Painters continued to represent Veronica's veil, even after the pope prohibited such images in 1616.

Oil on panel, .825 x .680 m (33 x 27 1/8 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.7



Antonio Maria Vassallo

Genoese, about 1620–1664/1673

The Larder, probably about 1650/1660

This painting, a compendium of motifs Vassallo used in other pictures, can be seen, and was perhaps considered by the artist himself, as a summing up of his achievements as a still-life artist. Each object has the same uncompromising conviction of reality. They are massed in one enormous display, but Vassallo turned an acute eye on each individually.

Visual description may not, however, be Vassallo's only motive. Scholars have been tempted to find a symbolic meaning, pointing to abundance or perhaps to God's provision for men's needs, both physical and spiritual. In contemporary Dutch still lifes, viewers were reminded of the transience of wealth and life itself by such clues as vessels that were tipped over, insects, or overripe fruit. We do not find these signals here, however.

Another suggestion sees this as an allegory of the Four Elements: air, water, fire, and earth are each represented. The bounty of food includes fruits of the earth and sea as well as birds trapped from the sky. And in the background is the flare of a cooking fire. In collectors' cabinets, such allegorical themes often provided the organizational principle for the display of wonders like fossils and minerals. Existence of these collections, in fact, helped create a demand for still-life painting.

Oil on canvas, 2.292 x 1.632 m (90 1/4 x 64 1/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.91



Giuseppe Maria Crespi

Bolognese, 1665–1747

Tarquin and Lucretia, about 1695/1700

By around 1700 Crespi had developed new genre subjects and cultivated a clientele for these scenes of everyday life. But this canvas—painted around the same time—is instead based on a story from the legendary past of ancient Rome: the rape of the virtuous matron Lucretia by the son of Rome's Etruscan king, her suicide in the face of family disgrace, and the establishment of the Republic after Lucretia's kinsmen avenged her honor by driving the king from Rome.

Despite the weight of his historical theme, Crespi's picture has a directness similar to that found in his genre scenes. We see the speed of Tarquin's assault by his entanglement in the bed curtain. There is no mistaking the passion and violence of his movement, nor any equivocation over good and evil—Lucretia is bathed in light but Tarquin's shadow begins to cover her with darkness. Crespi's conception is unusual. The subject was a popular one, and its formulas well defined. Artists routinely depicted Tarquin as threatening Lucretia with his sword, but Crespi shows his weapon fallen to the floor. Here Tarquin brings his hand to his lips admonishing Lucretia to be silent. Her gesture is more aggressive—and unprecedented. She is not a passive victim but shoves Tarquin's head in a forceful attempt to repel him. Crespi's brushwork, quick and energetic, contributes to the drama, as does the strong play of light and dark.

Oil on canvas, 1.950 x 1.715 m (76 3/4 x 67 1/2 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.30



Jacopo Tintoretto

Venetian, 1518–1594

Christ at the Sea of Galilee, about 1575/1580

This haunting painting illustrates an episode from the Gospel of John. After his Resurrection, Christ appeared to his wonder-struck apostles as they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. The drama of the action and the supernatural nature of Jesus' appearance after the end of his earthly life were well suited to Tintoretto's highly individual style. The figure of Christ appears to be almost transparent, decorporalized by the haze of white pigment brushed over his torso with a dry brush. The surface of the water, likewise, is fragmented into waves by strong light. The whole painting seems almost to flicker restlessly, an unsettling sensation that is accentuated by its eerie green color.

Around 1545, the preeminent painter in Venice, Titian, began to work almost exclusively for foreign clients, freeing the many commissions offered by the city's religious and civic associations for other artists. The removal of Titian's dominance also opened the way for these younger painters to develop independent styles with more freedom than they had enjoyed before. For Tintoretto, this meant greater drama in his use of color and light—a style that was too extreme to have much influence on younger Venetian artists, but which did impress El Greco during the years he spent in Italy. At one point in its history, this picture, in fact, was thought to have been painted by El Greco.

Oil on canvas, 1.170 x 1.685 m (46 x 66 1/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.27