

## ***High Renaissance***

### **Smart History**

The High Renaissance is just that—the height of the Renaissance! When you think of the Renaissance the names that come to mind are probably the artists of this High Renaissance? Leonardo and Michelangelo for instance. And, for many people when they think of the greatest work of art in the Western world, they think of Michelangelo's *Sistine Ceiling*. This is a period of big, ambitious projects, as we will see.

#### **Our Question: What exactly is the High Renaissance, and how is it different from the Early Renaissance?**

The way that I like to think of it is that, as the Humanism of the Early Renaissance grows, a problem begins to develop. Have a look again at Fra Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child with Angels*. We see in this painting an image of the Madonna and Christ Child that has become so real, the figures so human, that we can hardly tell that these are spiritual figures (except for the faint shadow of a halo). On the other hand, we have seen that in the Middle Ages, if you want to make your figure spiritual then you sacrifice its realism.

Its almost as if there is this feeling in the Early Renaissance that if you want to be spiritual, then your painting can't look real, and if you want it to be real, then it loses some spirituality. It has to be one or the other. Well, Leonardo da Vinci comes along, and basically says—you don't have to make that choice. It's not either/or. Leonardo is able to create figures who are physical and real -- just as real as Lippi's or Masaccio's figures and yet they have an undeniable and intense spirituality at the same time. So we can say that Leonardo unites the real and spiritual, or soul and substance. The best way to see this, is in this painting by Leonardo's teacher Verocchio.

When Leonardo was a student, Verocchio asked him to paint one of the angels in this painting of the *Baptism of Christ*, that we see on the next page. Can you tell which angel is Leonardo's?

One angel should look more like a boy -- that's the Early Renaissance angel (the one painted by Leonardo's teacher) and the other angel should look like a High Renaissance angel, like a spiritual figure -- truly like an angel sent by God from heaven. Which one is which? Take a minute and look closely.

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(Answer: the Angel on the left)

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