COUNTER REFORMATION ARTISTIC IDEALS
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ARCHITECTURAL SETTING: THE DECORATION OF CHURCHES WITH WALL AND CEILING PAINTING;
A theatrical strategy to persuade the viewer of Catholic truths
- Large, allegorical themes
- Complex, dynamic compositions
- Deep space produced by illusionism
- Personalized, affective characters that often address the spectator and/or endeavor to bring the spectator to empathize with the story

Historical Context of the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter Reformation
In 1517 John Tetzel, a Dominican preacher, promoted Indulgences in Saxony, and Martin Luther posted 95 theses condemning the concept that the Church had authority to grant grace to the deceased. Luther subsequently developed a theology that Christianity is a priesthood of all believers and that redemption is achieved by faith and the reading of the Holy Bible. Luther also translated the Bible into German. Thus he challenged the hierarchical structure of the Roman church, with its privileged priesthood, sacraments administered by priests, and a language of Latin for church services. In 1521, Luther became a fugitive, after being condemned by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet (Council) of Worms. He was protected by Frederick III of Saxony in the castle of Wartburg. At the same time, resistance to Rome grew in France and Switzerland under the leadership of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, in a more radical form. Not only were the saints reject as intercessors, imagery was expressly condemned and iconoclastic campaigns stripped churches of statues, wall painting, and stained glass.

The Catholic Church responded by convening the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to reform the organization of the Catholic Church for the duties and preparation of the clergy, and to produce a coherent set of principles for the laity. The Council issued condemnations of Protestant positions and defined Church teachings on Original Sin, the Sacraments, the Eucharist in Holy Mass, and the veneration of saints.

The Tridentine Profession of Faith (excerpt), a product of the Council, was promulgated by Pope Pius IV, November 13, 1564. The short text included references to images.

I steadfastly hold that there is a purgatory and that the souls departed there are helped by the acts of intercession of the faithful; likewise that the saints reigning together with Christ should be venerated and invoked, that they offer prayers to God for us, and that their relics should be venerated. I firmly declare that the images of Christ and of the Ever-Virgin Mother of God and of the other saints as well are to be kept and preserved, and that due honor and veneration are to be given them. . .

BACICCOIO (GIOVANI BATTISTA GAULLI)
Vision of Saint Ignatius at La Storta, about 1684-85
Oil on canvas
Charlotte E. W. Buffington Fund
1974.298
Giovanni Battista Gaulli (8 May 1639 – 2 April 1709) was also known as Baciccio, Il Baciccio or Baciccia and was the artist of the illusionistic vault frescos in the church of the Gesù in Rome (mother church of the Society of Jesus). 1661-79, pictured below.

Gaulli was influenced by Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck who had worked in Genoa for several years. His ability to conceive vast compositions crowded with figures and dramatic gesture echoes his mentors. Gaulli was probably also influenced by Bernardo Strozzi, who painted the brilliant narrative confrontation in the WAM’s Calling of St Matthew.

This Worcester painting is thought to be a model for a large altarpiece intended for Saint Ignatius of Loyola one of the major Jesuit churches in Rome. Appropriately, the subject represents a key event in the life of Saint Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuit order. In 1537, while on his way to Rome, Ignatius had a vision in which God the Father and Christ instructed him to establish a religious community in that city. The final commission, however, appears never to have been completed.

The Church of Saint Ignatius of Loyola at Campus Martius
The architecture was inspired by Il Gesù’s architecture of the 1580s. The frescoes were painted after 1684 by Andrea Pozzo who was a Jesuit brother. The nave frescos shows St. Ignatius offering the work of Society of Jesus to Christ and being welcomed into paradise, and surrounded by allegorical representations of the four continents. Christ is in the center striding forward and holding a cross. See next page
FRANCESCO SOLIMENA

*Modello for the Assumption of the Virgin* (Capua Cathedral)

Important city south of Rome, 16 miles north of Naples, about 1725,
130.2 x 104.1 cm (51 1/4 x 41 in.) 41/3 x 3 ½ feet; 1978.97

“Francesco Solimena settled in Naples in 1674 and became the unchallenged head of the Neapolitan school of painting during the first half of the 1700s. He modeled his painting on the exuberant Baroque style of his predecessor, Luca Giordano, modified by the classical tendencies of Roman decorator Pietro da Cortona. Flickering patterning of light and shade, clarity of line and theatricality are equally characteristic of Solimena's art.

His figure style was actually very conventional. His figures often derived from classicizing masters of the past such as Annibale Carracci, Domenichino, and Raphael. Solimena was in constant demand by royal patrons, including Prince Eugene of Savoy and Louis XIV of France. He established his own academy, which became the center of Neapolitan artistic life, and trained innumerable young painters.”


A duplicate image of *Assumption of the Virgin*, (1725 and same size as the WAM painting) is in the Courtauld Institute of Art, London. Solimena had other compositions on the theme.

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven at the end of her earthly life is a defined dogma of the Catholic Church: declared November 1, 1850 by Pope Pius XII. The tradition, however, is ancient, by at least by 6th century (see Gregory of Tours). The WAM’s medieval ivory showing the Dormition of the Virgin shows part of this story. (Byzantine: date 10-11th century)

The *Golden Legend* (late 13th century compendium) gives a long account of the Dormition and Assumption. The Apostles witness Mary on her deathbed; Christ appears and takes her soul (sometimes looking like small person or a child) in his arms. Christ then commands the Apostles to take Mary’s body to her tomb and wait three days. After that time Christ came again; Mary’s soul enters into her body and then she rises accompanied by angels. The account adds that “it is said that the Virgin’s garments were left behind in the tomb for the consolation of the faithful” meaning that then they were preserved as relics. During the Baroque era, the dramatic elements of the concept were seized upon by artists. The importance of this theme is connected to the promise that at the Last Judgment, all faithful souls will be reunited with their bodies (see Apostles and Nicene Creeds recognized by almost all Christian denominations). Mary is thus the precursor for the human race.
DOMENICO ANTONIO VACCARO

Madonna and Child with Saints Roch, Sebastian and Francis Xavier
(plague saints and missionary saint)
about 1730
132.1 x 85.1 cm (52 x 33 1/2 in.), 1977.129

Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (1678 –1745) was a painter, sculptor, and architect, and a member of a family of artists. He, like Francesco Solimena, was active in Naples where the art of the late Baroque flourished. His work articulated Catholic dogma. See Allegory of the Papacy of Clement XI, c. 1720. Walters Art Museum. 37.1897 (to right)

St. Roch (or Rocco) was an extremely popular saint, venerated in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance as an intercessor for plague victims (unverified biography). Born in Montpellier, France, he rejected a comfortable middle-class life, selling his goods to give money to the poor. He then made a pilgrimage to Rome where he worked in hospitals taking care of plague victims. He finally was stricken with the plague and was forced to hide in the forest. He was miraculously sustained by the dog of the nobleman of the area who brought him bread and who cured his wounds by licking them.

St. Sebastian (unverified biography) was a saint and Roman soldier. Under the emperor Diocletian, who persecuted Christian as dissenters, he was ordered to be executed. He was shot with arrows and left for dead; a widow, St. Irene, found that he was still alive and nursed him back to health. He was afterward beaten to death. Saint Sebastian was venerated at Milan as early as the time of St. Ambrose (Archbishop of Milan 340 –397), and his tomb is venerated on the Appian Way. He is patron of archers, athletes, and soldiers, and is appealed to for protection against plagues.

Francis Xavier (1506-1552) Spain, studied in Paris where he met St. Ignatius Loyola. Along with five others he made the famous vow of Montmartre, Aug. 15, 1534 which was the prelude to founding the Society of Jesus. From 1542 until his death in 1552 of fever he traveled extensively in Asia, primarily in India, Indonesia, and Japan. (From the Catholic Encyclopedia on line) “St. Francis Xavier is considered the greatest missionary since the time of the Apostles, and the zeal he displayed, the wonderful miracles he performed, and the great number of souls he brought to the light of true Faith, entitle him to this distinction. He was canonized with St. Ignatius in 1622. The body of the saint is still enshrined at Goa [India] in the church which formerly belonged to the Society. In 1614 by order of Claudius Acquaviva, General of the Society of Jesus, the right arm was severed at the elbow and conveyed to Rome, where the present altar was erected to receive it in the church of the Gesù.”
SMALLER SCALE PAINTINGS

- Strong contrasts of value (dark and light)
- Uncomplicated backgrounds
- Figures close to the picture plane
- Personalized, affective characters that often address the spectator and/or endeavor to bring the spectator to empathize with the story

ALONSO CANO

*Christ Bearing the Cross*
about 1635-37
1920.95

A painter, sculptor, and architect, Alonso Cano (1601-1667) trained under the prominent teacher Francisco Pacheco in Seville, the home of Spain's most important Baroque painters. Like his fellow student Diego Velázquez, who rose to become the great master of this age, Cano was called to Madrid to work at the court of Philip IV. The subject of Christ carrying the cross was a popular one in Spain and even today is often acted out as part of religious ritual at Passontide. The tradition continues today, exemplified by a 2007 photograph of a float paraded in Zamora on Good Friday (to right). Cano drew attention to the suffering Christ through realistic details like the rope around his neck, the crown of thorns on his head, and his blood-stained brow. The realism is heightened by strong contrasts of light and shadow, a technique that ultimately derives from the influential Italian Baroque master Caravaggio. These dramatic effects were favored by many artists of the Counter Reformation, who used them to engage the viewer in their subjects.

Francisco Pacheco (baptized 1564 –1644) was a Spanish painter working primarily in Seville. He taught Alonso Cano and also Diego Velázquez, who married Pacheco’s daughter. Pacheco was both highly intelligent and deeply devout, writing a number of works on painting in his time, the biography of artists and on the appropriate ways or representing the stories of the Bible and of the saints in art. He expressed ideas of modest clothing, covering the body, the nobility of the holy figures, even when subject to torture or death. The figures should be anatomically correct. Pacheco was personally influential because of his pupils but also because he held the post of censor for the Inquisition in Seville.
**EL GRECO**  
*The Repentant Magdalene*, about 1577  
1922.5

El Greco, born Doménikos Theotokópoulos, (1541 – 1614) produced most of his significant work in Spain. In 1577, El Greco migrated to Madrid, ultimately setting in Toledo, which at that time was the religious capital of Spain.

Mary Magdalene is one of the most beloved of Christian saints. She is, however, a personage constructed from different sources: the female sinner who washed his feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50), the woman who stood beneath Christ’s Cross (Matthew 27: 56), and the Mary who came to anoint Christ’s body at his tomb to find that he had risen (John 20: 14-16). On a rock to the left, we see her unguent jar and a scull, a symbol of meditation on judgment and death. See the same symbol in the WAM’s early American portrait of Thomas Smith, about 1680.

**FOLLOWER OF MICHELANGELO MERISI DA CARAVAGGIO**  
*The Vision of Saint Jerome*, first half of the 17th century  
73.2 x 97.5 cm (28 13/16 x 38 3/8 in.)  
1960.13

St. Jerome (c. 347–420) was a widely revered figure in the Renaissance and Baroque era, seen as penitent, scholar, and visionary. In the WAM’s painting, he is shown meditating on death, the scull before him while presumably writing the Vulgate – the official Catholic Latin translation of the New Testament from the Greek and the Old Testament from the Hebrew. This was a century after Martin Luther’s challenge of a German translation of the Bible (1521). The candle has gone out to signal that a greater force (a light beyond the material) has entered his vision. Jerome is portrayed with the features of a common person, a strategy often selected by Caravaggio. Compare, Caravaggio’s *Calling of St. Matthew*, or *Conversion of St. Paul* as well as his *St. Jerome* (1607, St. John’s Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, on right).
BARTOLOMÉ ESTEBÁN MURILLO
Saint Rosa of Viterbo, about 1650
Viterbo is a city 50 miles north of Rome
83.3 x 64.2 cm (32 13/16 x 25 1/4 in.)
1936.44

Murillo (1616-1682) was one of the most popular painters of his time. Born in Seville, he was influenced by the art of Alonzo Cano and Jusepe de Ribera. Studying later in Madrid, he came to know the work of Velázquez, as well at the Italian and Flemish art in the royal collections. He moved between his birthplace Seville and Madrid during his life, and became known for his themes of the Immaculate Conception (on right, 1678, in the Prado), the concept that the Virgin Mary was granted the unique privilege of being born without the trace of original sin. This idea was important to the Spanish Kings, for whom it became a personal devotion. Susan Stratton’s *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* argues that the cult of the Immaculate Conception the royal court supported this theme and the works by Velázquez, Zurbaran, and Murillo served to propagandizing the devotion. His painting depicted these religious themes and images of the saints in a sweet and accessible manner. In 1660, he and the architect Francesco Herrera the Younger founded the Academy of Art (Academia de Bellas Artes) of Seville, which ushered in a period of great productivity.

St. Rose (1234-1252) died at the age of 18, but she had already distinguished herself as someone deeply given to prayer. At age 10 she became a member of the lay society of the Third Order of St. Francis. Rose lived at the time of the conflict between the papacy of Innocent IV (reigned 1243-1254) and the Germany Empire (Holy Roman Empire). She preached that the town should support the pope and her family was banished until the Emperor’s death. The depiction of the saint refers to the story that when she was 17 years old, she dressed as a Franciscan, wearing a brown robe with a cord around her waist and held a crucifix in her hand to urge the people of Viterbo to be faithful to the pope. The Emperor Frederick II (reigned 1220 – 1250) was one of the most powerful ruler of his age, cultivated, a patron of the sciences and the arts ruling Germany, Italy, Sicily, and Burgundy. After her death Rose became revered for her ability to produce miracles of healing, and was canonized in 1457. Her incorruptible (mummified) body is still on display today in the monastery of the Poor Clares of Santa Rosa in Viterbo.
Ribera was born in Spain but moved to Italy as a young man, intent on a career as a painter. In Rome he was influenced by Caravaggio, adopting his style of sharp contrasts of dark and light and his interest in using models of common people for his biblical subject matter. Ribera’s success is testified by his acceptance as a member of the Accademia de San Luc, the Roman painters’ guild. The artist then moved to Naples, a city then ruled by the Spanish Hapsburgs, and under the control of Viceroys. Because of his Spanish background he found ample patrons. One of his most celebrated paintings The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, 1648 (above), is found in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

The Worcester painting is described: “A bearded scholar gazes upwards thoughtfully, as he seems to calculate with a compass the measurements of the terrestrial globe. At the right upon the slate are geometric diagrams and below them the signature Jusepe de Ribera F. 1638. . . . the appearance of geometric diagrams involving circles on the slate at the right suggests the probability that the person represented is Ptolemy, the astronomer, geographer, and mathematician who lived in Alexandria in the middle of the second century A.D.12.” (Harold E. Wethey in European Paintings in the Collection of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester Art Museum (1974). More specific comments on the geometric figures in the painting are given in a letter of 1968 from Derek J. de Solla Price, Yale University, to Louisa Dresser: “... the figures are taken from an early edition of Ptolemy, from perhaps the 1543 Editio Princeps. The left-hand diagram with the main circle, an eccentric circle and an epicycle, is probably that from Book 3, Chapter 3 of the Almagest” See diagram: “On the Hypothesis Concerning Regular and Circular Movement.” The figure on the right is from Book 4 Chapter 6, calculating the path of the moon.

See tour notes prepared by Sudha Swaminathan and Frank Lamelas, Physics at the WAM Worcester State University, 2013