GODS AND MONSTERS

In the 15th century in Italy, many painters began to be inspired by the art and stories of ancient Rome and Greece. They wanted their paintings to look as lifelike as ancient Greek and Roman sculptures.

The period between the 15th and the 17th centuries in Italy became known as the 'Renaissance', which means 'rebirth'. People rediscovered lots of painting skills that had been forgotten since ancient Greek and Roman times.



The Annunciation
By Fra Filippo Lippi, painted in 1450–3

A monk, Fra Filippo Lippi, made this elegant painting of the Angel Gabriel visiting the Virgin Mary.



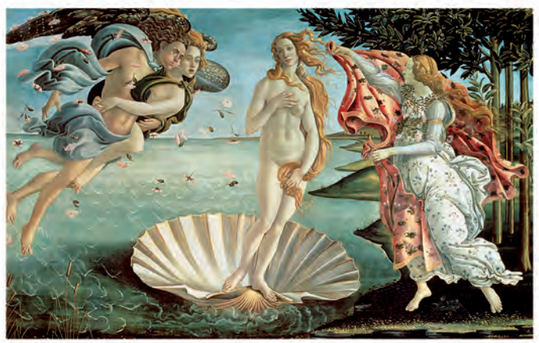
Notice how real the faces in the painting look – Filippo Lippi made lots of sketches from life, and was famous for his simple, natural style.



This painting was based on an ancient Roman myth. It shows the birth of Venus, goddess of beauty, as she springs out of a shell in the ocean.

Look out for the roses floating through the air. According to the myth, roses appeared when Venus was born.

This is a wind God, Zephyrus, with a goddess of the breeze, Aura. Together, they blow Venus to the shore.



The Birth of Venus
By Sandro Botticelli, painted around 1485

The artist based the figure of Venus on an ancient Roman statue.



This dramatic painting celebrates a battle between Florence and Siena, two cities in Italy. The central figure is the leader of the victorious Florentine army.





The artist was so fond of painting animals and birds that he became known by the nickname, 'Paulo Uccello', which means 'Paul of the birds'.



The Battle of San Romano
By Paolo Uccello, painted around 1438–40

Uccello drew his horses from a small wooden model. That's why they all look so similar.





Uccello collected paintings of birds and animals.

This painting combines several scenes from a famous ancient Greek myth.



1 Princess Andromeda is chained to a rock, and is about to be eaten by a sea monster. A hero named Perseus flies in to save her, using his magical winged sandals.



Perseus Frees Andromeda
By Piero di Cosimo, painted around 1513

2 Perseus kills the monster.





3 Perseus and Andromeda fall in love and get married.

From 1817

LANDSCAPE

In the 19th century, lots of artists painted wild, lonely-looking landscapes. They went on sketching trips to the countryside to inspire them.

This blustery seascape is by English artist, J.M.W. Turner. Turner became fascinated by the sea when he was a boy. He made sketches on ships out at sea, and loved the ocean so much, he earned the nickname 'The Old Sea Captain'.



Margate (?) from the Sea
By J.M.W. Turner, painted around 1835–40

For the time, Turner's painting methods were quite unusual. He used big, rough brushstrokes and was always experimenting with new paints. He even tried smearing tobacco on his paintings.



Notice the big, golden brushstrokes Turner has used to paint the swirling waves.



Turner was sometimes seen adding the finishing touches to his paintings when they were already hanging on gallery walls.

Dramatic scenes of nature were all the rage, but John Constable just liked painting places he was fond of – such as this country lane close to his childhood home.



The Cornfield
By John Constable, painted in 1826

When he was a child, Constable had walked along the lane to go to school. He probably drank from the stream, just like this little boy.



German artist Friedrich painted pictures of people alone in wild, beautiful places. This scene shows a man gazing out over foggy mountain peaks.



Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog
By Caspar David Friedrich, painted around 1817

From 1870

LEGENDS

During the second half of the 19th century, there was a fashion for imaginary scenes inspired by poems, myths and legends.

This picture is by French artist Gustave Moreau. It shows a dramatic moment from the famous legend of St. George and the dragon, as George slays the dragon with his lance.





St. George and the Dragon
By Gustave Moreau, painted in 1889–90

George fought the dragon to save a princess – who you can see kneeling in the background.



The dragon was just one of many mythical beasts Moreau painted. "I have allowed my imagination free play, and I have not been led astray by it," he said.

The woman in this painting was based on ancient sculptures of sleeping magical spirits from Greek myths.



Flaming June
By Frederic, Lord Leighton, painted around 1895

A famous poem called 'The Lady of Shalott' inspired this scene. In the poem, the lady was trapped in a castle by an evil curse...



The Lady of Shalott
By John William Waterhouse, painted in 1888

1

She would die if she looked out of the window, so she watched the world through a mirror.





2

When she heard a knight singing a beautiful song, she couldn't resist looking out at him.



3

Knowing the curse was going to kill her, she ran out of the tower and floated down a river in a boat, singing songs until she died.

BRIGHT AND BOLD

The Impressionists inspired the artists who came after them to use brighter, sunnier colours. But the new artists also invented different ways of painting, and found new subjects to paint.



These yellow sunflowers were painted by Dutch artist, Vincent van Gogh, for his friend Gauguin. For van Gogh, yellow was the colour of happiness and friendship.

Van Gogh sometimes squeezed paint straight from his tubes onto the canvas.



Sunflowers
By Vincent van Gogh, painted in 1888



Up close, you can see van Gogh's brushstrokes. Notice how thick the paint is.

In the 1880s, Japanese prints became very fashionable in Europe. Both van Gogh and Gauguin collected them.



The Suijin Woods and Massaki on the Sumida River
By Utagawa Hiroshige, designed in 1856

This painting shows two women on the island of Tahiti, in the South Pacific. The artist, Gauguin, spent most of his life in France, but then moved to Tahiti, hoping to find a simpler, more peaceful way of life there.

Inspired by Japanese prints, Gauguin used flat shapes and strong outlines in his paintings. He also used lots of bold, unusual colours – notice the bright blue shadows behind the women.

"I shut my eyes in order to see."
Gauguin





When will you marry?
By Paul Gauguin, painted in 1892

In real life, this painting of people by a river is 3 metres (10 feet) long. At the time, it was very unusual for an artist to paint ordinary people on such a grand scale. Paintings this big usually showed kings or queens.



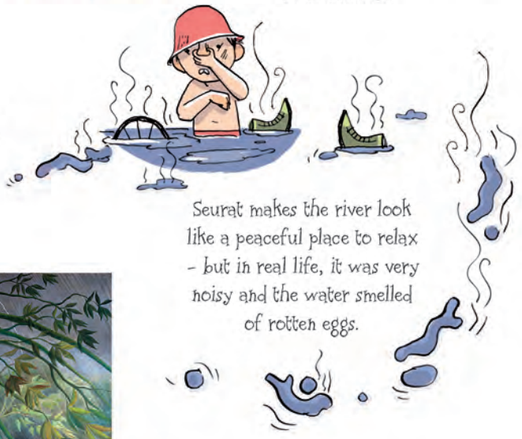
Bathers at Asnières
By Georges Seurat, painted in 1884



The people's clothes show they are workers, maybe from the factories in the background.



Seurat was inspired by ancient Egyptian art, which always showed people from the side.



Seurat makes the river look like a peaceful place to relax – but in real life, it was very noisy and the water smelled of rotten eggs.

Artist Rousseau claimed to have painted this picture after going to the jungle with the French army...

...but he never actually left France. He probably sketched this tiger at the zoo.





Surprised!
By Henri Rousseau, painted in 1891



Rousseau probably based his jungle plants on house plants and specimens he'd seen at a botanical garden.

Toulouse-Lautrec made bold, colourful prints of night life in Paris. He designed this poster to advertise a friend's cabaret show. But his posters were so popular, they were often stolen as soon as they were put up.



Ambassadeurs: Aristide Bruant
By Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, printed in 1892