Rembrandt: Self-Portraits

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606-1669) was one of the greatest painters of the Dutch Golden Age, that century following the establishment of the Dutch Republic free of Spanish rule. Among his many works were about 80 self-portraits – about 40 paintings, 30 etchings and 7 drawings – far more than any other painter before him. These works were created for several purposes: to provide examples of his art for prospective buyers, to work out techniques for visually representing emotions and ideas, and to record the passage of his own life. The illustration shows a small self-portrait from 1630, painted on copper: the discerning gaze.

Life

Rembrandt was born in Leiden, located between the cities of Amsterdam and The Hague. His surname "Harmenszoon van Rijn" means son of Harmen from the Rhine. As a young man, Rembrandt was apprenticed to Jacob van Swanenberg and later to Pieter Lastman, both of whom had spent time in Italy and were aware of the new baroque painters, such as Caravaggio, who painted with sharp contrasts between light and dark. Though he opened a studio in Leiden in 1625, Rembrandt moved in 1631 to Amsterdam to find a more wealthy clientele. There he became a sought-after portraitist for the rich and famous. He also painted large group portraits such as *The Night Watch* (1642). In 1634 Rembrandt married Saskia van Uylenburgh, and moved into a series of evermore luxurious residences. Four children were born but only the last – a son, Titus, born in 1641 – survived infancy. After Saskia died in 1642, Rembrandt had relationships with his housekeeper, Geertge Dircx, and with Hendrickje Stoffels, with whom he had a daughter, Cornelia, in 1654. Despite his continued success, Rembrandt's taste for the good life – a fine residence furnished with beautiful *objets d'art* – led to bankruptcy in 1656. Though his financial difficulties persisted, Rembrandt continued to paint both

portraits and large commissioned works, such as *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Deijman* (1656) and *The Syndics of the Drapers' Guild* (1662) and until his death in 1669. One of his last paintings was *The Return of the Prodigal Son*.

Self-Portraits

Artists have always produced self-portraits (Hall, 2014; Rudd, 2021). Medieval illuminators included miniatures of themselves at work. Artists of the early Renaissance included images of themselves in the background of their history paintings. As the Renaissance flourished, artists became recognized as divinely gifted individuals, and representations of the actual artist became as valuable as his representations of the world. Another factor contributing to the rise of self-portraits was the developing technology for manufacturing mirrors of glass to replace those of polished metal.

In the 17th Century, the market for portraits expanded beyond the aristocracy to the growing middle class. A major purpose of the self-portrait was thus to demonstrate to prospective buyers how well the artist could capture the true likeness of a person. Buyers could see for themselves both the image and its subject. Furthermore, if the artist were famous, a self-portrait would become valuable in itself. Buyers could then obtain a portrait of a person more famous than themselves.

The self-portrait also provided the artist with a means to examine how best to depict the inner life of a subject. The artist could try to capture in paint the way that he knew he was feeling. The exercise would also allow him to recognize such feelings in others and become a better portraitist.

A final purpose of the self-portrait would be to increase the artist's awareness of his own identity. Rembrandt made many more self-portraits than any other artist before him. These images provide a record of how he appeared as he grew older. More importantly, they provide a record of how he felt.

> Why did Rembrandt show such an untiring interest in his own features? It is true that in the beginning his face often served as a convenient model for studies in expression. Thus he may have come into the habit of looking at himself with a painter's eye. But this reason alone cannot explain the tremendous quantity and the deep significance of his self-portrait production …. Rembrandt seems to have felt that he had to know himself if he wished to penetrate the problem of man's inner life. The phenomenon of the soul attracted him as strongly in his own personality as it did in that of others, and such profound self-realization was, it seems, indispensable for his access to the spiritual and the transcendental. (Rosenberg, 1964, pp 37).

This idea that self-portraits were a means of self-realization (see also Chapman, 1990, and Osmond, 2000) has been criticized as anachronistic (see van der Wetering's essay in White & Buvelot. 1999). Such a purpose might be appropriate to those of us living after the Romantic Revolution and Freudian Psychoanalysis, but would have seemed foreign to an artist in the 17th Century. In those days one thought about the salvation of one's soul rather than the improvement of one's self. Nevertheless one might be skeptical of this skepticism. Human beings have always sought to understand themselves better. It seems to me that Rembrandt was certainly intrigued by how he was changing, and how his inner self was reacting to the changes. Painting these effects could help him to know himself.

Rembrandt's self-portraits may have also allowed him to invent himself as well. In his various costumes and guises, he could see how he might be at a different time, or in a different context:

> No one demonstrates better than Rembrandt that self-portraiture is more invention than reflection. This is evident not just in his imaginary, romantic, and historical

> guises but in every way that he chose to present himself. However, if his self-portraits are not pure reflection they are also emphatically not fiction. For whatever the, element of invention (and justification, compensation, even delusion, all of which must be operative but which I, for the most part, would not presume to analyze), conviction stands behind each of Rembrandt's images. The seventeenth-century individual, however much engaged in self-fashioning and self-cultivation, was sustained by belief in the authenticity of his personality (Chapman, 1990, p 7).

***Tronies* and Portraits**

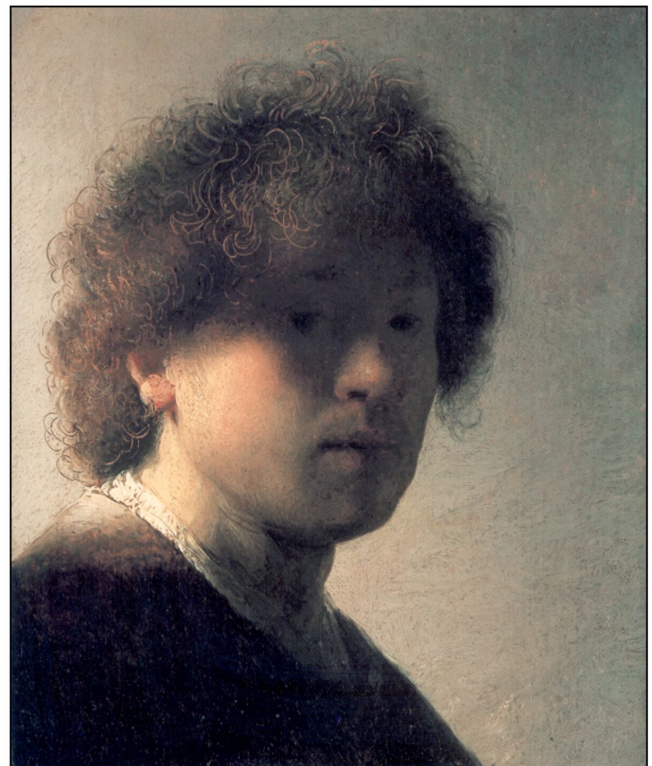
Many of Rembrandt's early self-portraits can be considered *tronies* (Hirschfelder, 2000). The Dutch term *tronie*, derived from the Gaulish word *trugna* for nose, means a depiction of a bust, head or face, especially one with a definite expression or in a particular costume. The primary purpose of such a picture was not to portray the sitter, but rather to represent an idea (the transience of life, the beauty of youth, etc), illustrate an emotion (anger, humor, etc), or display a particular fashion (Renaissance dandy, noble warrior, etc). *Tronies* probably developed from the practice of painting heads with particular characteristics for insertion into larger historical compositions (Schwartz, 1989). After a while, however, *tronies* became sought after as "character studies" independently of any larger painting. Many of Rembrandt's *tronies* used himself as a subject. The following are two etchings from about 1630, one demonstrating surprise and the other anger:

Schwartz (1988) remarks that the sitter for a portrait presents himself to the painter in a particular way whereas the anonymous sitter for a *tronie* is asked by the painter to represent something. The painter of the *tronie* is in control not the subject. Rembrandt worked extensively with *tronies* in his early years in Leiden. This experience helped him in his portraits to depict the inner emotions as well as the outward presentation of his subjects:

> a crucial aspect of Rembrandt’s new and seemingly unprecedented portrait style is the direct result of his transposing certain elements of the tronie mode onto that of the portrait. From his work in Leiden, Rembrandt arrived at a system or vocabulary of physiognomic characterization that comes directly from the face paintings and …was at odds with the other portraiture of the time in important ways. While it would be superficial psychologizing to claim that Rembrandt painted “character,” “inner man,” or “the human soul” –a persistent myth from which we have not yet fully escaped– it is nonetheless clear that Rembrandt’s portraits used many of the same techniques that create the centripetal

> quality tronies in order to suggest a general sense of "inwardness." If he did not paint specific "character," Rembrandt had learned pictorial strategies by which to allude to character in general, to "passion" with a minimum of "action." (Schwartz, 1988, p 104)

Slowly the *tronies* began to morph into real self-portraits. The following illustration shows an etched self-portrait from about 1630 and one of the first of his painted self-portraits from 1628. Here we have the young artist with his smoldering eyes and unruly hair: the very portrait of an unrecognized genius. The background of this portrait and of the one at the beginning of this essay are light colored. Backgrounds generally became darker as he grew older. Perhaps he became more aware of Caravaggio's paintings; perhaps life itself became darker.



Standard-Bearers

The Eighty-Years' War (1568-1648) was the prolonged revolt of the Dutch people against Spain, which since 1482 had

controlled the Netherlands as part of the Hapsburg Empire. The conflict brought out a tremendous sense of patriotism. Every district in every town established its own civil guard, led by a captain and his lieutenant. The company's standard-bearer or ensign was the person selected to carry the standard into battle. Ensigns were bachelors, since their duty was to defend the standard with their lives. Typically, these young men dressed themselves in finery, cutting as dashing a figure as possible to display of their company's ardor.

In 1636, Rembrandt painted himself in the role of a standard-bearer (Bikker, 2024). It is a bravura painting (left below). Rembrandt stands with his right arm akimbo, its silken sleeve jutting defiantly out of the picture plane. The ensign's drooping moustache balances the jaunty plume of his cap. The lighting comes strikingly from the left, and shadows cloud the right side of the painting. Many years later in 1654, Rembrandt painted a more subdued portrait of a real standard-bearer, the wealthy Amsterdam bachelor Floris Soop (right, below).

In Praise of the Renaissance

Rembrandt was far more interested in the fashions and flamboyance of the Renaissance than he was in the costumes and reticence of his own age. His portraits of others often showed his sitters in somber black, their faces highlighted by pure white collars. But not his self-portraits. The lower part of the following illustration shows an etching (1639) and a painting (1640) of himself with his elbow resting upon a window sill or balustrade.

Rembrandt's pose is clearly adapted from Titian's 1509 portrait of a man, at one time considered to be the poet Ariosto (upper left). Rembrandt probably saw this painting, which in 1639 was in the collection of Alfonso Lopez, an art dealer in Amsterdam. He was likely also aware of Dürer's 1498 self-portrait in a similar pose, perhaps by way of a print. Rembrandt's etching would have been reversed in the printing process so that in the etching Rembrandt is looking to his left rather than to his right.

Rembrandt as Painter

One of the most intriguing of Rembrandt’s self-portraits (1652) shows the artist in a simple brown robe, likely his work-attire, staring defiantly at the viewer with his arms on

his hips. Hall (2014, p 157) notes that the pose is the same as that in Holbein’s famous portrait of Henry VIII of England (1540). However, the styles of the two portraits are completely different. Rembrandt’s focus is on the face whereas Holbein’s is on the costume. Rembrandt’s face shows clear emotions – curiosity, pride, confidence – whereas Henry’s face is passive:

The following comments on Rembrandt’s self portrait are from Chapman (1990, p 87):

> he wears a brown painter’s smock, belted with a sash, over a black jerkin and a collarless white shirt. Instead of the brimmed hat he has the more customary black artist’s berry. His drab brown garb, his muted hands, and the overall dark tonality of the painting focus our attention on his face and his direct, authoritative gaze. The aggressive informality of this portrait must have seemed shocking at the time. With a disarming sense of real presence, Rembrandt stands

frontally, his arms akimbo, his thumbs tucked under his belt. His proud, confrontational worker's stance conveys a self-assurance matched only in a few of the late paintings. In short, Rembrandt presents himself with unprecedented inner authority.

A Fall from Grace

When Saskia died in 1642, Rembrandt employed Geertge Dircx as a nurse and housekeeper. Their relationship soon became intimate but ended acrimoniously when Rembrandt began an affair with Hendrickje Stoffels in 1849. Geertge sued Rembrandt for breech of promise and was awarded alimony. Rembrandt never married Hendrickje, probably to ensure that Titus would inherit something from Saskia's family. The church was sufficiently upset with this common-law arrangement that they investigated Hendrickje for "fornication." Thus the decade of the 1640s was for Rembrandt a period of anxiety (White, 2022, pp 118-121). One way to handle this was the defiance evident in the self-portrait that we just considered.

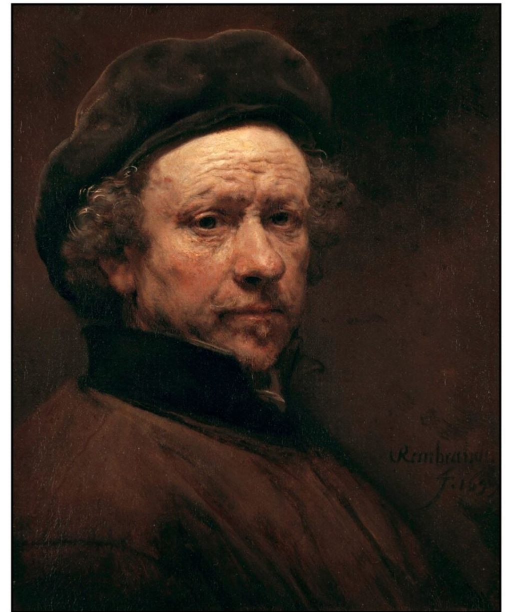
As the 1650s began, financial difficulties began to add to Rembrandt's family problems. Never one to skimp when he wanted something, Rembrandt began to lose money when the first Anglo-Dutch War (1652-54) caused an economic depression and patrons no longer had money to spend on portraits. In 1656, he was declared bankrupt and his possessions were auctioned off to pay his creditors (White, 2022, pp 162-175). Rembrandt moved to a small rented house. He continued to paint.

In 1658, Rembrandt painted his largest self-portrait. This painting, now part of the Frick Collection in New York, is unusual in many aspects. The artist is dressed in what appears to be an artist's smock, but one that is bright gold in color and unmarked by any paint. The smock is tied at the waste with a red sash. This outfit may have been one of the costumes left

over from previous paintings of oriental potentates. The colors, the rough brushwork, and the frontal pose are reminiscent of those used by Titian and other Venetian painters (Clark, 1964, p 130). Chapman (1990, pp 88-95) also notes that the main colors of the painting – black, white, yellow and red – are those chosen by the great Greek painter Apelles, the "Prince of Painters."

In the portrait, Rembrandt holds a baton in his left hand. This may simply be a painter's *mahlstick*, a rod with a padded leather ball at its end, held against the painting to support and steady the brush hand. However, in the painting, it gives the impression of a royal scepter. Indeed, the whole painting seems to depict a "Philosopher King" (Clark, 1964, p 130), serenely unaffected by the vicissitudes of the world. Undoubtedly, this is what Rembrandt wished he could be at that time.

The two portraits that follow the Frick portrait, both from 1659, the larger one in London and the smaller in Edinburgh, both use the same costume: a dark coat with a turned-up collar and Rembrandt's by now trademark beret. They show an artist coping with his problems, bordering on despair but ultimately not giving in. His collar is turned up against life's cold.



The Kenwood Portrait

After Hendrikje died in 1663. Rembrandt spent the last years of his life alone. During this time, he made several self-portraits. Most of these show a highlighted face upon dark background. One self-portrait differs strikingly from the others: the large self-portrait in the Iveagh Bequest at Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath.

Rembrandt is dressed with a red smock and a white shirt, but has also put on a coat with fur collar. Perhaps the studio is cold. He wears a bright white cap like an artist's halo. He holds in his left hand a palette and mahlstick. Radiographic examination of the painting shows that it initially represented the painter's left hand in the act of painting. Rembrandt was right-handed and this right left reversal would have resulted from seeing himself in a mirror (White &

Buvelot, 1999, p 220). Rembrandt revised the painting to show the artist’s left hand holding the palette. The artist’s right hand is lost in the darkness. Self-portraits find it hard to represent the hand that paints the portrait.

The background is light in color and shows two large circles. The nature of these circles is a matter of much dispute (Porter, 1988; White & Buvelot, 1999; Gerson, 1968, p 130). One idea is that they might represent the outlines of a map showing the world in two hemispheres. However, the circles are further apart than usual in such representations. Another explication considers a famous story about Giotto. Thinking to hire the young painter, Pope Benedict IX sent one of his courtiers to obtain some evidence of Giotto’s painterly abilities. Giotto took a brush and quickly drew a perfect red circle on a piece of paper without moving his arm and without using a compass. This small piece of paper convinced the pope. Perhaps Rembrandt is claiming his two perfect circles as evidence of his own ability. Another idea is that the two circles represent in abstract form the ideas of theory and practice, with Rembrandt standing as the artistic genius who mediates between the two.

John Fowles’ novel *Daniel Martin* (1977) concludes with its protagonist Daniel standing before Rembrandt’s self-portrait in Kenwood House. He had just said farewell to Jenny, his young girlfriend, and was about to return to Jane, his old love:

> The sad, proud old man stared eternally out of his canvas, out of the entire knowledge of his own genius and of the inadequacy of genius before human reality. Dan stared back. The painting seemed uncomfortable in its eighteenth-century drawing-room, telling a truth such decors had been evolved to exclude. The supreme nobility of such art, the plebeian simplicity of such sadness; an immortal, a morose old Dutchman; the deepest inner loneliness, the being on trivial public show; a date beneath a frame, a presentness beyond all time, fashion, language; a puffed face, a pair of rheumy eyes, and a profound and unassuageable vision.

Dan had been working as a script-writer in Hollywood. Although he had always wanted to write a novel, he has not had the will power to leave his easy job and devote himself to more meaningful writing.

> Dan felt dwarfed, in his century, his personal being, his own art. The great picture seemed to denounce, almost to repel. Yet it lived, it was timeless, it spoke very directly, said all he had never managed to say and would never manage to say—even though, with the abruptness of that dash, he had hardly thought this before he saw himself saying the thought to the woman who would be waiting for him on the platform at Oxford that evening; telling her also what had gone before, a girl and a past walking into winter trees, knowing she would understand. He had lied a little to Jenny, to make it easier for her. But that was his secret now, his shared private mystery; which left him with the imagining of the real and the realizing of the imagined. Standing there before the Rembrandt, he experienced a kind of vertigo: the distances he had to return. It seemed frightening to him, this last of the coincidences that had dogged his recent life; to have encountered, so punctually after a farewell to many more things than one face, one choice, one future, this formidable sentinel guarding the way back.

Dan finds solace in the portrait. He must make the necessary decisions and he must choose his path for the right reasons.

> He could see only one consolation in those remorseless and aloof Dutch eyes. It is not finally a matter of skill, of knowledge, of intellect; of good luck or bad; but of choosing and learning to feel. Dan began at last to detect it behind the surface of the painting; behind the sternness lay the declaration of the one true marriage in the mind mankind is allowed, the ultimate citadel of humanism. No true compassion without will, no true will without compassion.

Daniel Martin found much to see in the portrait (Horlacher, 2018, Vieth, 1991). So, we presume, did John Fowles, since much of the novel is based on his personal experience. Other viewers may find other messages in the portrait, depending on the context their own lives. The great genius of Rembrandt's self-portraits is their ability to communicate to us what we need to know.

An Infinite Regress

In a review of some of Rembrandt's portraits, T. J. Clark (2014) remarked that

> what we are looking at in a self-portrait is the image a painter saw in a mirror. It seems to follow that the kind of attention we are shown is special, not to say exotic: the look of someone looking is at himself looking. The trouble is that we can only decide where to put an end to that final phrase by pure fiat.

The end of this infinite regress might come when we become part of the looking, share some part of the artist's self, see some part of ourselves in the image, and come face to face with Rembrandt.

A Lifetime of Self-Portraits

We do not know why Rembrandt painted so many self-portraits. Susan Osmond (2000) considered various reasons: as an exercise in representing faces and their emotions, in response to a demand from patrons for images of the famous artist, and to try out for himself a new persona. She concluded

> Perhaps, knowing all too well that a single portrait can convey only certain selected aspects of a person at a particular point in his life, he wanted, as an artist, to take at least one subject through a lifetime, and the one he could explore most intimately was himself. Every painting has to have some unifying mood or theme, so in this respect Rembrandt had to approach each self-portrait with some sort of "programme," but this does not rule out self-searching and examination in the process. It only limits its scope – and that probably left the artist hankering for more. In his early years, he likely knew that using himself as a model for tronies would help his face become a household item and increase his reputation. As time went on, while a ready market remained for his self-portrayals, his internal motivation may have altered or at least broadened. At times, he used the self-portrait as a forum to broadcast a persona. At others, in showing himself playing a role such as the prodigal son, a potentate, or an artist of the past, he could by allusion make comments about aspects of his inner state or his status in the flow of history. In most of the late works, contemplation of himself as an individual and as a representative of humanity seems to have played a major part.

Website

Website Rembrandt Van Rijn: life, paintings, etchings, drawings & self portraits contains images and documentation

for self-portraits and etchings

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Late Byzantine

The Byzantine Empire began with the founding of the city of Constantinople by the Emperor Constantine the Great in 330 CE. By the 12th century Constantinople was the largest and richest city in Europe. Byzantium maintained its glory until the sacking of of the city by the forces of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 CE. After this the Byzantine Empire existed only in fragments. The Ottoman conquest of the Constantinople in 1453 CE ended the empire, replacing Eastern Christianity with Islam.

The art and architecture of the Byzantine Empire is justly famous. Buildings such as the Hagia Sophia taught the world the use of space; the mosaics of Ravenna, Venice and Palermo gave the Christian religion its iconography. This is the Byzantium of Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium* (1927)

> O sages standing in God's holy fire

As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre
And be the singing-masters of my soul.

A common view of the early Renaissance in Italy is that it adapted the mosaic images to the new techniques of fresco and panel paining. Painters such as Cimabue and Giotto “transformed ” the static, flat Byzantine style by adding the realism and movement of late Roman art – thereby translating painting from Greek into Latin (to use a phrase from Cennino Cennini). The images became more real and natural. Three dimensions were suggested by shading and by perspective. Both the artist and the model asserted an individuality that went beyond the limits of the orthodox. Most importantly the new images both portrayed and evoked emotions.

Yet these developments were not unique to Italy (Grahan Dixon, 1999). Similar images were being produced in the surviving regions of the Byzantine Empire. Movement and corporality was represented in Byzantine paintings long before it was seen in Italy. Unfortunately, much of late Byzantine painting did not survive the Ottoman occupation of Eastern Europe. Those paintings which still exist have been poorly conserved. Any photographs are of poor quality. Despite these problems, it is clear that the artists of the late Byzantine Empire contributed much to the onset of the Renaissance. Three pairs of images illustrate the relations between late Byzantine and early Renaissance.

The first is a pair of paintings of the *Annunciation*. Both are trying to break out from the earlier conventions of flatness and immobility. The painters exercise their freedom in different ways. The Byzantine icon illustrated above comes from Orhid in Bulgaria. It was probably painted in

Constantinople in the early years of the 14th century. Though Mary maintains a stylized universality, the Angel Gabriel is full of motion and individuality. The icon shows an appreciation of perspective though this is not the perspective we have become used to. Instead of converging on a vanishing point, the lines of perspective radiate outward, leading the viewer into the image (Grall, 2008).

The Italian image of the *Annunciation* (above) was painted by Simone Martini in 1333 in Siena. The perspective remains almost completely flat. However, the image of the reticent, anxious and uncertain Mary is one of the great achievements of early Renaissance or late Gothic art. She demonstrates a highly individual response to the Angel’s announcement of “Ave (Maria) gratia plena dominus tecum” – Hail (Mary) full of grace, may god be with you. – which hangs in the golden air.

The next pair of paintings portray the *Lamentation*. The iconography is so strikingly similar that one of the painters must somehow have been aware of the others’ work. The Byzantine image (above) is from the Church of Saint Panteleimon in Nerezi in the Republic of Macedonia. Mary cradles the body of her son between her legs, almost as though she is giving birth rather than lamenting death.

The Italian fresco was painted by Giotto di Bondone in the Arena Chapel in Padua. The grief of the family and friends of the dead Christ is echoed by the angels who survey the scene from above. The figures in Giotto's painting are more natural than in the Byzantine painting. Their emotions are more sublime than raw.

One might easily think that the Byzantine image was based somehow on the famous Italian fresco. Made more acute in its design and in its passion. However, the Nerezi fresco actually predates Giotto's work by more than a century: 1164 versus 1305 CE. Giotto must have based his painting on some memory or description of the Byzantine work.

A final comparison involves several paintings of the *Nativity*. All use the same iconography. Mother Mary rests after the birth; Jesus sleeps in the manger beside her; humble animals stand nearby; above the stable, the angels celebrate the birth; the shepherds come to worship; Joseph sits by himself in wonderment. As well as sleeping, the infant Jesus is also

shown being bathed by midwives. This iconography has a long tradition in Byzantine art. The following examples are an illustration from the *Menologion* (Church Calendar) of the Byzantine Emperor Basil II from around 1000 CE:

and a mosaic in the Palace Chapel in Palermo made by Byzantine artists in Sicily around 1150 CE.

Those images that yet
Fresh images beget.
Yeats *Byzantium* (1930)

In the early Italian Renaissance Duccio di Buoninsegna painted a small panel of the nativity for his Maesta (“majesty,” usually denoting the enthroned Madonna) in the Cathedral of Siena in 1308. The painting derives from the earlier Byzantine icononography but the figures and their faces are highly natural and individual. Everyone is harmoniously placed in the space around the stable:

This late Byzantine fresco is from the Church of the Monastery of Mary Peribleptos (“admired by all”) in Mistra, in the Greek Peloponnesos. Painted in the middle of the 14th century, the fresco contains all the elements of the Duccio painting, and adds the visiting wise men. However, the most striking aspect of the fresco is its swirling perspective – the geometry is emotional rather than spatial. The earth is distorted by the divine birth. The painting represents miracle rather than reality:

This expressionist style was not seen again until the work of Domenikos Theotokópoulos, known as El Greco (1541-1614). He was born and trained in Crete, and was clearly aware of the developments in late Byzantine art. From Crete, he went to Venice and then on to Rome, finally moving to Toledo, Spain, in 1577. His *Adoration of the Shepherds*, one of his last paintings, now in the Prado, is similar to the Mistra *Nativity* in the way that the figures float around the newborn Christ. Everyone is suspended in the darkness and illuminated by the newborn Christ. El Greco’s style was isolated from the main currents of European art. He had no immediate followers. His highly emotional approach to painting did not recur until the expressionist movements of the 20th century.

Art is sometimes more intense at times of great political upheaval. The disintegration of the Byzantine Empire may have precipitated the passions that we see in the surviving art of the late Byzantine period. Italy was also in turmoil: from the 12th to the 15th century Guelph fought with Ghibelline and condottieri waged wars among the dukes.

The play *Pentecost* by David Edgar looks at the political upheavals that followed the fall of communism in Eastern Europe through the fate of an imagined fresco that perhaps may

have been a link between late Byzantine and early Renaissance. The play touches on many issues. Whether concentrating on past glories overwhelms any hope of solving present problems. Whether the free movement of people from one region to another can be prevented. Whether politics or religion can ever fully control artistic expression. Yet behind all these issues is the idea of all that must have been lost after the fall of Byzantium. History is notoriously incomplete.

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