

Around 1600, between Mannerism and Bolognese Reforme

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The Council of Trent and Counter-Reformation Painting

The Counter-Reformation was both a spiritual and institutional movement. To respond to the ideas developed by Protestant Reform from 1520, the Counter-Reformation based its arguments on the efforts of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to restore strict discipline within the Church, improve the system of clerical training, and reaffirm and clarify the dogma. The educational role of religious art was reinforced. The painter was to draw inspiration from the Scriptures alone and work together with theologians. The subject matter depicted was to be obvious so as to be clearly understandable to all. Cumbersome detail and anecdotes were to be avoided so as not to distract the faithful from their prayers. All heathen references were prohibited in religious paintings and nudity was banished as being inappropriate and liable to whet "carnal appetites". Nevertheless in Florence, where the spirit of the Renaissance still held sway, the painter Alessandro Allori (1535-1607) in his *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness** placed his saint meditating in an idyllic Flemish-style landscape.



fig.1- Annibal Carracci
The Resurrection
Musée du Louvre, Paris
RMN / © René-Gabriel Ojéda

The Griffin Hall

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European Art
from the Fourteenth
to Eighteenth Century

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Private Worship

Strongly encouraged, private worship made it possible to form a more personal relationship with God and the saints. A fine example of this is the *Everlasting father holding the Dead Christ** by one of the Zuccari brothers. Michelangelo is the inspiration behind Christ's marbled body, while the angels adopt a mannered pose. Increased production of small-format works ensued, sometimes as scaled-down copies of large retables. Thus the *Resurrection** attributed to Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) is a reduction or modello of the large-scale work in the Louvre (fig.1). This oil on copper, with the refined nature of its workmanship and its prestigious origin – the collection of Louis XIV – make it a work in its own right.

The Spirituality of the New Religious Orders

The Jesuits and Oratorians pressed for a more human and more sentimental style of painting that would make it easier for worshippers to identify with the picture's subject matter. The *Holy Family** by Cesari (1568-1640) emphasizes Mary's tenderness, with her workbasket at her feet, lowering her face to her son's to kiss him under Joseph's kindly gaze.

Landscapes Revisited

Allori's (1535-1607) *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness** testifies to both the growing interest in landscapes and the Flemish influence, in this case that of Paul Bril who was active in Italy around 1575. Around 1600 the German painter Elsheimer (1578-1610) would play a determining role, particularly in his concern for rendering space. His *Saint Lawrence** is teeming with detail painted with a miniaturist's precision, while the view from above draws our gaze down into the bluish background. Cigoli's (1559-1613) *Flight into Egypt* owes much to this atmospheric approach to landscape. The precious gleam of this copperplate with its moving sense of humanity and the enraptured spirituality of his *Saint Francis receiving the Stigmata** are characteristic of the expressive sentimentalism of this Florentine painter.