

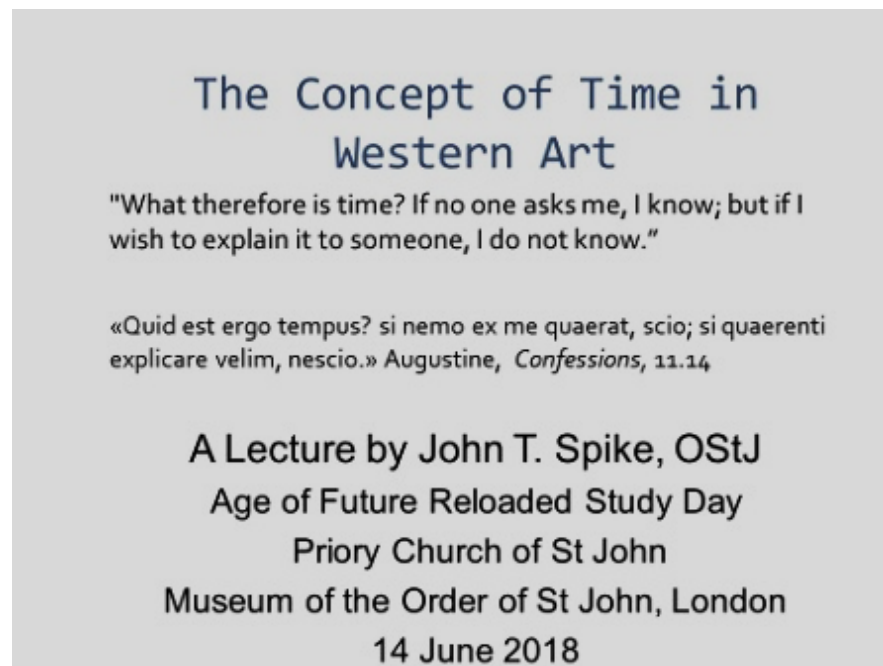
The Concept of Time in Western Art

By John T. Spike

Preface:

This file contains photographs of most of the forty-two slides that were shown, and most of the hundreds of words that were spoken in a lecture that I gave at the Techno Medioevo Study Day at Museum of the Order of St John in London on June 14, 2018, sponsored by The Sir Denis Mahon Charitable Trust. To cover *The Concept of Time in Western Art* in a 25-minute lecture seemed impractical, but by general consensus of the viewers some worthy points emerged from the comparisons between Saint Augustine's historic thoughts on the subject and the illustrations of some excellent works of art ranging in time from antiquity to David Hockney, by way of Masaccio and Claude Monet.

I was encouraged to make this illustrated transcript by Sir Kenneth Clark, who pointed out in his companion volume to his *Civilization* series: "Naturally I thought first of filling out my summary scripts and giving them a more literate form. I soon discovered that to amplify every allusion and support every generalization would take a year's worth of work and would deprive the book of a certain ease and speed which may be counted in its favor. There was nothing for it but to accept the limitations imposed on me by the medium, changing or omitting those passages that would have been incomprehensible without the accompanying film."



Title slide 1.

Around the year 390, Augustine of Hippo wrote:

"What therefore is time? If no one asks me, I know; but if I wish to explain it to someone, I do not know."

«Quid est ergo tempus? si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio.» -- Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.14

The first person in history to think systematically and as deeply as possible about his own consciousness was Augustine, who thus invented psychology, and decided in the process that time is something that was invented by God. As a result, as he pointed out, the rest of us no longer need to ask what God was doing during those eons before the Creation. The question becomes absurd for the simple reason that 'time' did not exist until God made it.

Augustine also said, and this is why he has fascinated people through the ages, that time is a part of our human consciousness. Thereby Augustine had it both ways.

By saying that he knows what time is, except when he tries to explain it, the Church Doctor gave himself an interesting workaround for the task of clearing up the inconsistencies in the precedents of Plato and Aristotle. When the great Greeks mused about time, they mostly spoke about that which comes most naturally to our minds: that time involves motion. The beautiful drawings about planetary motion that have been on display during this symposium are a case in point. The connection between time and motion is certainly real, and indeed is the portal by which time enters human consciousness.

The Concept of Time in Western Art

"What therefore is time? If no one asks me,
I know; but if I wish to explain it to someone,
I do not know."



There is currently [June 2018] an art exhibition in Forlì, near to Bologna, Italy, which will be on view for another week entitled "L'Eterno e il Tempo tra Michelangelo e Caravaggio". This exhibition includes seventy-five of the best-known paintings from the Italian 1500s. If you have never seen any paintings of the Italian 1500s, fly there quickly, because it is an amazing exhibition in that regard. I show the banner on the screen to make a point about the exhibition's title. The pairing of the words "Eternity and Time" is an example of how Augustine's thoughts about time, mortality and divinity have absolutely permeated Western culture – to the extent that people are now quoting him unawares. The pairing of "eternal and

time” in the Forlì show is used to mean the sacred and profane subjects of Renaissance art. “Sacred and Profane” is one of the foundational dichotomies of the human soul, traceable all the way back to the first time someone said to someone else, “Don’t go in those woods, there is something in there, I don’t know what it is.” Which is a way of saying that there is something unfathomable operating in that forest. The shrines and the trees that the Greeks transformed into columns came from this idea of the difference between the sacred and the profane. Profane does not mean lascivious in this context, it means mortal or “of or pertaining to humans”. But the fact is, although “eternal and time” sound fine together, for Augustine they represent an insuperable dichotomy. Augustine said that God moves in the realm of eternity while the rest of us are moving in time.



Antonio de Pereda, *Allegory of Vanity*,
ca. 1632 - 1636, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Historically, most representations of clocks and time instruments are about the theme of vanitas. All things pass away, nothing lasts. And, therefore, everything is vanity.

One example among the innumerable paintings and sculptures of this genre made in past centuries is this fabulous *Allegory of Vanity* (ca. 1632 -1636) by Antonio de Pereda (slide 4) today in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The *vanitas* is an illustrative and emblematic way of making a composition about the fleeting nature of time, but that is not the topic of this lecture.

[British Museum - Introduction to the Time theme](http://www.britishmuseum.org/Explore/Themes) [www.britishmuseum.org › Explore › Themes](http://www.britishmuseum.org/Explore/Themes). This theme uses objects in the British Museum's collection to explore the different ways we understand time. ... Looking through the lens of time enables us to compare and explore objects in thought-provoking ways. While almost any object has a relationship with time through its own ...

[The Time Keeper: 3 artists explore about the concept of Time | Digital ...](http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/article/the-time-keeper-3-artists-explore-about-the-concept-of-time)

www.digitalmeetsculture.net/article/the-time-keeper-3-artists-explore-about-the-concept-of-time ... This exhibition focuses on the theme of Time and its different dimensions (present, past and future), in art

[Famous Artworks on time theme | The Artist - Art and Culture Magazine](http://www.theartist.me/collection/theme/time/)

[https://www.theartist.me/collection/theme/time/](http://www.theartist.me/collection/theme/time/)

[Art That Makes You Experience the Pain of Passing Time - The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/slow-tv-and-.../386665/)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/slow-tv-and-.../386665/>

Mar 6, 2015 - There are many ways to kill time on the Internet. Late one night in January, I found myself on Reddit and came across a thread titled, "This guy ...

[Concept of Time Portrayed in Art - UK Essays](https://www.ukessays.com/arts/the-concept-of-time-in-different-works-art-essay.php)

<https://www.ukessays.com/arts/the-concept-of-time-in-different-works-art-essay.php> ... Mar 23, 2015 -

Time is a determinant concept in forms of art where motion is a key factor ... printmaking and performance, deal with this same theme and what ...

[10 Famous Artworks That Celebrate Father Time | HuffPost](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/31/time-art_n_4519734.html)

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/31/time-art_n_4519734.html Dec 31, 2013 - Here on the Huff Post Arts&Culture page

[Art That Makes You Experience the Pain of Passing Time - The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/slow-tv-and-.../386665/)

<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/slow-tv-and-.../386665/>

Mar 6, 2015 - There are many ways to kill time on the Internet. Late one night in January, I came across a thread titled, "This guy Bennett streams himself sitting and smiling for hours."

Each video is four hours long, give or take a few minutes, and each features a young man sitting cross-legged on the wooden floor of an undecorated room, with a big cheesy grin stretched across his face. He starts to smile at the beginning of the video and doesn't stop—or do anything else—for the rest of the four hours.

The lack of progression makes it unwatchable, and the act of watching it is almost as much of a feat of endurance as Bennett's performance. These are four hours of almost absolute stasis, repeated over and over again. There are no details to observe, no slight changes or unexpected happenings...

Next slides 5 and 6: Two pages of google search results, headed by **British Museum - Introduction to the Time theme**. [https://www.britishmuseum.org › Explore › Themes › Time](https://www.britishmuseum.org/Explore/Themes/Time)

If you look up “time in representational art” in Google, you will see a bewildering array of results, but you will also discover that a high percentage of contemporary artists are fascinated by problems of time. Gareth Bell-Jones presented an excellent lecture earlier in this symposium about the postwar conceptual artist, John Latham (1921-2006), who cared deeply about time. Bell-Jones concluded that how we think about time is inseparable from how we view the world. If you have an opinion about how the world came into being you have to care about time and vice versa. He also spoke about Latham’s position against the ‘static’.

In fact, ‘static’ is an aspect of time that people have thought about throughout history. That is, can we perhaps control time, and is there is any way that we can stop time?

In this same google search, I came across an article titled, “Art that Makes you Experience the Pain of Passing Time”.¹ The producer, director and star of this conceptual art performance is a nondescript young man named Ben Bennet, who is said to be a citizen of Columbus, Ohio. Bennet regularly films himself seated in front of the livestreaming camera, a warm smile on his face, while he does nothing for four hours. Not having watched it myself, we are obliged to Timothy Kennet, the writer for *The Atlantic*, for his report: “The lack of progression makes it unwatchable, and the act of watching it is almost as much of a feat of endurance as Bennett's performance. These are four hours of almost absolute stasis, repeated over and over again.” The work is unapologetically about nothing, it seems, except that watching the immobile actor for hours, forces the viewer to acknowledge the pain of passing time.



Salvador Dali, *Persistence of Memory*, 1931,
Museum of Modern Art, New York City.

Photo:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Persistence_of_Memory#/media/File:The_Persistence_of_Memory.jpg

The Persistence of Memory (1931) by the Surrealist Salvador Dali (Spanish, 1904-1989) (slide 7), today in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, is one of the best known, and most influential, images of the twentieth century. In it Dali expresses his belief that in our memories, and in our sleep, time loses the rigidity that we ascribe to it. The Surrealists believed that the disorientation we feel when objects are seen in unfamiliar states is not a lack of realism, but rather a higher realism -- which is what "sur - realism" means. The effect is like a parable, or a metaphor. The image of this drip drip dripping clock came into my mind recently, in fact, during a 2 hour and 15 minutes ride into London from Gatwick Airport that included an interminable 40 minutes in traffic in central Croydon. Stuck in the backseat of a taxi, I imagined myself as that melting clock.



Oct 30, 2017 - Cambridge researchers announced Monday that Joshua stopped the sun 3,224 years ago today.

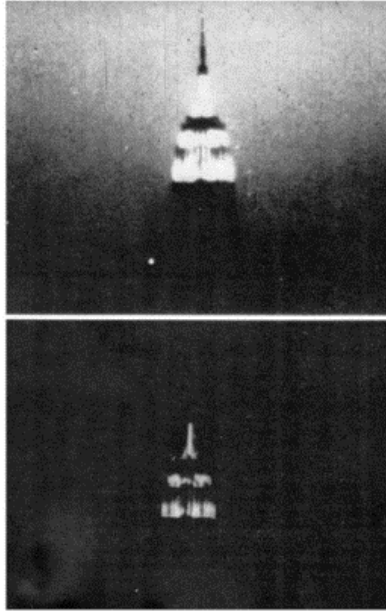
In the day when Jehovah gave up the Amorites to the children of Israel, Joshua said, Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; And thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon! And the sun stayed a whole day until the nation had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Joshua:10-12

Photo:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joshuah_Ordering_the_Sun_to_Stand_Still._c_a_1743-1744._Joseph_Marie_Vien.jpg

The painting *Joshua Ordering the Sun to Stand Still* by the classical painter, Joseph Marie Vien (French 1743-1744) (slide 8) in the Musée Fabré, Montpellier illustrates a recent news item which revealed that Cambridge University researchers had calculated that the date of publication -- Monday, October 30, 2017 -- was in fact the anniversary of the day, 3,224 years before, that Joshua stopped the sun.² The miraculous event was meticulously described in the tenth chapter of the Book of Joshua.

“In the day when Jehovah gave up the Amorites to the children of Israel, Joshua said, Sun, stand still upon Gibeon; And thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon! And the sun stayed a whole day until the nation had avenged themselves upon their enemies.”

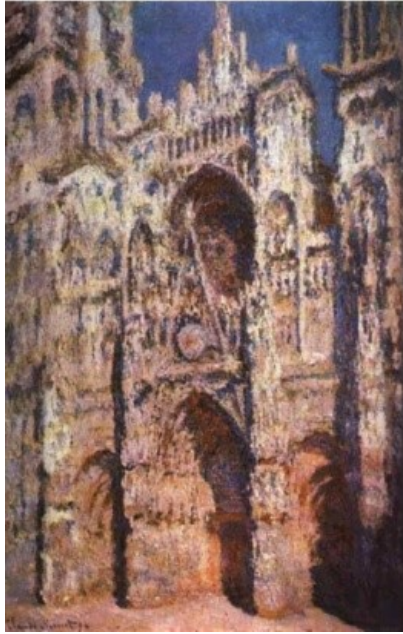
By stopping the sun -- and thereby stopping time -- Joshua gained the longer day he needed to vanquish his foes. His story demonstrates that the age-old yearning to control time dates back thousands of years, at least as far back as the Old Testament.



'Empire' is a 1964 black-and-white silent **film** by **Andy Warhol**, which consists of eight hours and five minutes of a single stationary shot of the **Empire** State Building filmed from 8:06 p.m. to 2:42 a.m., July 25–26, 1964.

Contemporary artists continually try to find ways to make us give them our time. 'Empire' is a black-and-white silent film, conceived, produced and directed by Andy Warhol (slide 9). The film presents a single, stationary shot of the Empire State Building in New York City. This was unveiled in 1964, which might seem a distant stretch of time, but my wife and I can remember hearing about Warhol making this movie, setting his camera at night from another building across the street and pointing at the Empire State Building for eight hours and five minutes, from 8:06 pm to 2:42 am, July 25-26, 1964.

The result was this awful movie, frankly speaking, from which I personally have walked out several times. The skyscraper stands there, grainy and immobile, and yet, nevertheless, it represents an arresting approach to stopping time by being static. Warhol's movies and often his prints are grainy. His purpose is to make them seem to be a 400th generation xerox copy to remind us of something that he had learned from early TV transmissions, which is, that cultural icons like the Empire State Building, or Elvis, or Marilyn Monroe, retain their power to grip us, no matter how poor the image.



Claude Monet
La Cathédrale de Rouen, 1894
 Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The roots for Warhol's *Empire* are intriguing – they reside in the serial paintings by Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926) (slide 10). The most organized of Monet's series are his views of the façade of the Cathedral in Rouen, which he painted in one year, 1893 to 1894. Every day while his wife was doing the shopping, Monet set up his easel in the street and began to paint. He thus captured the façade of the massive structure at different times and seasons in a progression of Impressionist paintings.

The result is a dreamlike tour through a monument's long existence.



A typically Impressionist landscape, such as those produced by Monet, Pissarro and Sisley during the 1870's and 1880's, [and by countless other painters subsequently], is fundamentally a presentation of visual phenomena seen from a given position in space at a certain moment in time. Space is restricted to "the place here" and time to "the moment now" more drastically than in any previous school of painting.
 — George Heard Hamilton, *Cézanne, Bergson and the Image of Time*, 1956.

George Heard Hamilton, an excellent art historian from the postwar decades, wrote:

“A typically Impressionist landscape, such as those produced by Monet, Pissarro and Sisley during the 1870's and 1880's, [and by countless other painters subsequently], is fundamentally a presentation of visual phenomena seen from a given position in space at a certain moment in time. Space is restricted to "the place here" and time to "the moment now" more drastically than in any previous school of painting”.³

To paraphrase this definition, Impressionism is not just a portrait of a place, it is a portrait of a moment of time at that place, including the weather, and that had never been done before. People painted out of doors before and people painted bright sun and colors before. Corot and the Barbizon school of landscape painters, the Impressionists' closest antecedents, had painted sketchily and out of doors, but the Impressionists came along and said, This is in fact a portrait of an instant in time.



Looking at the whole series of Monet's Rouen cathedrals in solar sequence (slide 12),⁴ one sees that Monet's Cathedrals are laboriously created snapshots of the most fleeting of the three dimensions of Time: the present.

The problem confronting Monet was that no one can paint a picture that fast. In order for Monet to get this instant image of the present, he had to work furiously, go home and as best he could, remember what the instant in time he was trying to capture looked like. Then, maybe, if he returned the next day at the same time, allowing for the fact that the sun's

position had changed, perhaps he could paint a few more seconds of time and light frozen in place.

Thus it seems that to make a portrait of an instant requires a tremendous amount of work. And Monet did it across seasons, too. He got to the point where the sun was so hot that his pigments melted on the canvas. This whole whole sequences helps us imagine him standing on the French street in the summer when the sunlight seems to swim around in the heat. **See picture [top row, fourth from left]**

Nonetheless, something very interesting is missing from these portraits of the Rouen Cathedral.



Slide 13

The hardest thing to do when you are thinking about images is to ask yourself what is significant that isn't in the picture?

And what is significant and interesting in these landscapes by the Impressionists is that these images don't have people in them. Because, as Hamilton says, if we saw just one person walking across the street we would ask ourselves who they are and where are they going? Are they happy? Sad?

The introduction of the figure would destroy the idea of the static.

Again, quoting George Heard Hamilton:

"In Monet's Cathedrals each separate painting corresponds to a separate moment in time at a specific location in space.⁵ Any sense of continuity between the individual items or among the series as a whole must be contributed by the consciousness of the observer; it has not been communicated by the painter. The elimination of the human

figure is [essential to this effect], for so pervasive is our curiosity about each other that the presence of even a single person in a painting provokes queries about his or her past and future, and thus expands the concept of momentaneous time into one of extended time".⁶



Slide 14

Hamilton concludes that Impressionism ended the painting of a concept he calls, "timeless space". I quote,

"Despite such superficial sensational evidence of time as the description of climate, weather, season of the year and hour of the day, Impressionist space is essentially timeless since it exists only in terms of the instant at which it is observed.

Impressionism is thus not only the end point reached by Renaissance realism (as is seen in the persistence of Albertian perspective concepts), but it is the last pictorial realization of a Newtonian timeless space."

This is where Spike and Hamilton disagree. Monet's series of Rouen Cathedral are not timeless. In fact, they are exactly, as we have seen, vivid snapshots of time that Monet had to create artificially since he had to rely on his memory to reproduce this single instant and place. The result corresponds to one of the most influential things that Augustine ever said, namely, that time has three dimensions only one of which is real: and that is the present.

Augustine returns us to the earlier discussion today about John Latham. Augustine never goes into too much detail and thus he never gets outdated. According to Augustine, the present is just about one atom wide because as soon as five minutes go by, we begin to disagree about what happened. And, thus as to anything that is past, although it would be contested by people who love novels about time machines, anything that is past exists only in our memories of it. As everyone knows, those memories play tricks and change the order of things.

Augustine concluded that the past ceases to exist when we move to another moment of the present. As to what the future will be, no one knows. The only part of time that exists, actually, is just a hair's breadth of stuff, temporally speaking. Right now, we are all in the same present tense.

By the way, I hope you will be reassured to know, that among the other things that Augustine came to understand about time is that "God thinks in an eternal present tense". And, God's continuous present is eternity.⁷ When asked how he knew this thing, the explanation was simplicity itself. "Because God said directly to Moses, "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14). A New Testament corollary is stated in John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am".



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irtVNTFr4f4>

Next slide 15: Scene from *The Clock* by Christian Marclay (USA-Swiss, born 1955), opening image from 3:32 minute selection hosted by YouTube, requires internet connection.

For a remarkable evocation of 24 hours of continuous present tense, I refer you to an astonishing movie by Christian Marclay called *The Clock* which was presented a few years ago [2011] at the Biennale of Venice and won a prize.

Marclay invented a technique that could find and extract from a thousand movies every picture of a clock and every time somebody says something like, "When will they arrive?". After you

have taken your seat in the dark (invariably entering when *The Clock* is already underway) and watched all the coming and going in these clips, it suddenly dawns on you that the clock on the wall, and the time it says, is the time on your own watch – the film is accurately telling you the time as you watch it. Marclay has made a movie in which the present tense is continuous, like Monet's Cathedrals, and is arguably more real to the viewer.

The Clock is a staggering, almost superhuman feat of research that has gained a cult following ever since it was unveiled at the White Cube gallery in London in 2010. The Clock's easy-to-grasp governing principle coexists with the almost ungraspable fact that its creator, Christian Marclay, really has pulled it off, beguilingly combining the utter randomness of each individual clip with the strict form of his overarching idea, allowing everyone to meditate on time, how we're obsessed with it, how there's never enough of it.⁸



**Advent of the Multiple Viewpoint:
Was Cubism inspired by Einstein's Theory of Relativity, 1905?**

Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1935, Museum of Modern Art, NYC

Next slide 16: Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881 – 1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1935, Museum of Modern Art, NYC

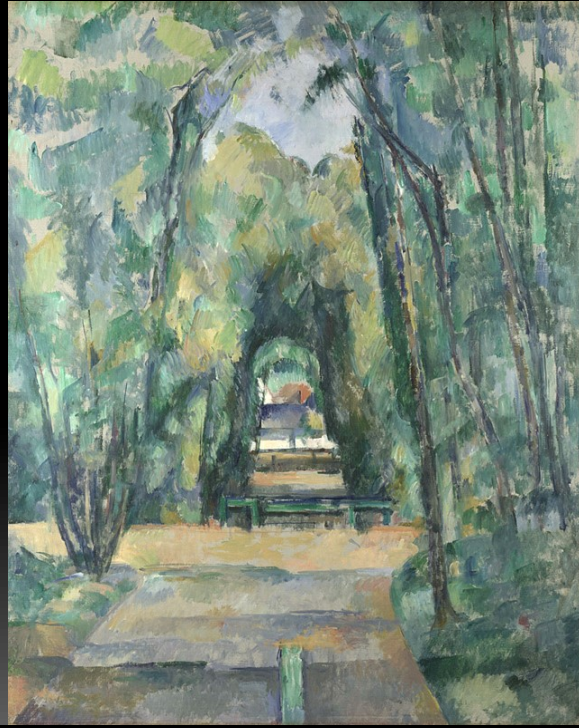
Time is also expressed in paintings through changing points of view and motion.

A popular theme among art historians is whether Pablo Picasso's famous painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1935; Museum of Modern Art; NYC) and the cubist paintings that follow it were inspired by Einstein's Theory of Relativity (1905). They note how Picasso shows different planes of forms, images of space that the viewer could not see without walking around the figure and viewing it from different points in space. Since movement in space implies time, *Les Femmes d'Alger* is credited as being one of the first paintings that tries to represent time.



Paul Cézanne
The Avenue at Chantilly, 1888
 National Gallery, London

Cézanne invented multiple viewpoints, using separate patches of paint, before Einstein



Next slide 17: Picasso, *Desmoiselles* compared with Paul Cézanne (French, 1839-1906), *The Avenue at Chantilly*, 1888, National Gallery, London

Other historians have responded to this assertion, rather convincingly, that there is little that Picasso did that Paul Cezanne had not done 20 years earlier. In fact, Cézanne invented multiple viewpoints, using separate patches of paint, well before Einstein pronounced his views on relativity. A comparison of Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* with Paul Cézanne's *The Avenue at Chantilly* (1888; National Gallery, London) demonstrates Picasso's debt. As you know when our eyes focus on something, we cannot clearly see our peripheral vision. Cezanne captured this truth by putting dab after dab after dab of paint as he moved his focus ever so slightly. It is this checkerboard of observation that captured what he believed is a truer vision of reality.

In sum, Pablo Picasso did not invent the basics of cubism, only the refinements. Paul Cézanne was painting cubist paintings, in all but name, by the mid-1880s. Objects were analyzed and reduced to basic geometric forms, often to aggregations of flat planes, and were seen from more than one angle of perspective in many of Cezanne's works. Picasso himself did not turn to cubism before seeing the great Cezanne show of 1906, shortly after Cezanne's death. He often spoke of his reverence for the older artist. If *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, painted in 1907, was not the first cubist picture, it was certainly the most shocking one at the time. Even Picasso was a little afraid of it; for fifteen years after he painted it, he showed it only to friends.



Next slide 18: David Hockney (British, born 1937); *Pearblossom Hwy., 11 - 18th April 1986, #1*; 1986; Chromogenic print, Getty Museum, LA

And there is a modern artist, David Hockney, who, being a friend of mine, gave me a chance to ask him about his now-iconic photo collage, *Pearblossom Hwy., 11 - 18th April 1986, #1* (1986; Chromogenic print, Getty Museum, LA). As you see, it is built up in the way of Cézanne, using polaroid images.

Hockney spent a week in the Mojave Desert with ladders, getting up, shooting down, and later pasting the photographs together to view this landscape straight down. Like Cézanne, Hockney believes that this is a truer way of seeing than one point perspective, which runs straight and unwavering to a point on the horizon that doesn't really exist.

So I took my chance one day while walking with David and his long-time assistant David Graves, in London to a Chinese restaurant, and asked him about the meaning of *Pear Blossom Highway*. To say that Hockney is a smart guy, is a dramatic understatement. He is a towering genius with a profound knowledge of art history. Rather than reply, he asked me what I thought it might mean.

I had my answer ready, saying: When we see a road going through a desert, our attention is inevitably drawn to the road, we don't look at the desert on either side of the road. We see the

road as a metaphor for a journey, a day or a life, and since it runs to the horizon we can't see where the road leads. Hockney could have set his equipment anywhere he wanted, but he chose to place it in front of these signs. What this says to me, I said, is, "We don't know where the journey is leading us, we only know that there is a stop ahead."

Walking along, Hockney turned to his friend David Graves and asked him, "What do you think, David?" (They had spent months creating this collage, thinking about vision and points of view, and here I was proposing to tell the artist, what the message was.) David Graves thought a moment and then said, "Sounds right." And, Hockney agreed.

Because we are all operating in specific cultural contexts, our choices can be revealing.



**David Hockney, *Pearblossom Hwy.*,
11 - 18th April 1986**

Les Demeurées d'Alger, Hockney's 1987 encounter with a North American

Paul Cézanne
The Avenue at Chantilly, 1888
National Gallery, London



Next slide 19: Comparison between Hockney, *Pearblossom Hwy.*, 11-18 April 1986 and Cézanne, *The Avenue at Chantilly*, 1888, National Gallery, London

This comparison shows two roads: Cézanne's *The Avenue at Chantilly* (1888; National Gallery, London) and Hockney's *Pearblossom Hwy.*, 11-18 April 1986. There is a remarkable similarity in how the roads are composed in patchwork swatches, which then climb vertically.



Picasso 1907

Marcel Duchamp
Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2, 1912
Philadelphia Museum of Art



Next slide 20: Picasso, *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1907, Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887 – 1968), *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2*, 1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art

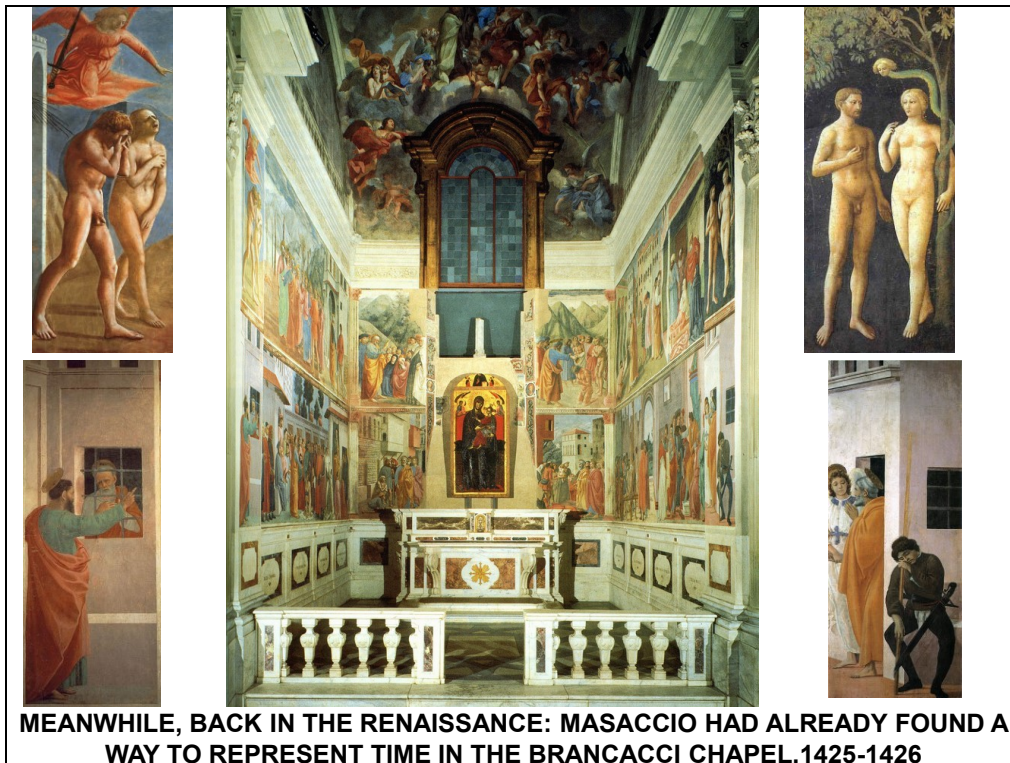
It didn't take much time after Picasso began to show round forms by giving them different facets for another artist to ask, Since showing the unseen facets implies the passage of 'time', why don't we show the object in movement?

In 1912, five years after Picasso's masterpiece, Marcel Duchamp painted his famous *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (Philadelphia Museum of Art) which was shown in the Armory Show of 1913 a year later and flabbergasted everyone. The next step was Futurism.



Next slide 21: Umberto Boccioni, *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*, 1913, (cast 1931), Museum of Modern Art, New York City The best sculpture among many good ones that were produced by the Futurists was this one – a proto-de Kooning -- by Umberto Boccioni. You get the idea that this man is moving, going by in a blur

Slides 22-31: frescoes by Masaccio and Masolino in the Brancacci Chapel



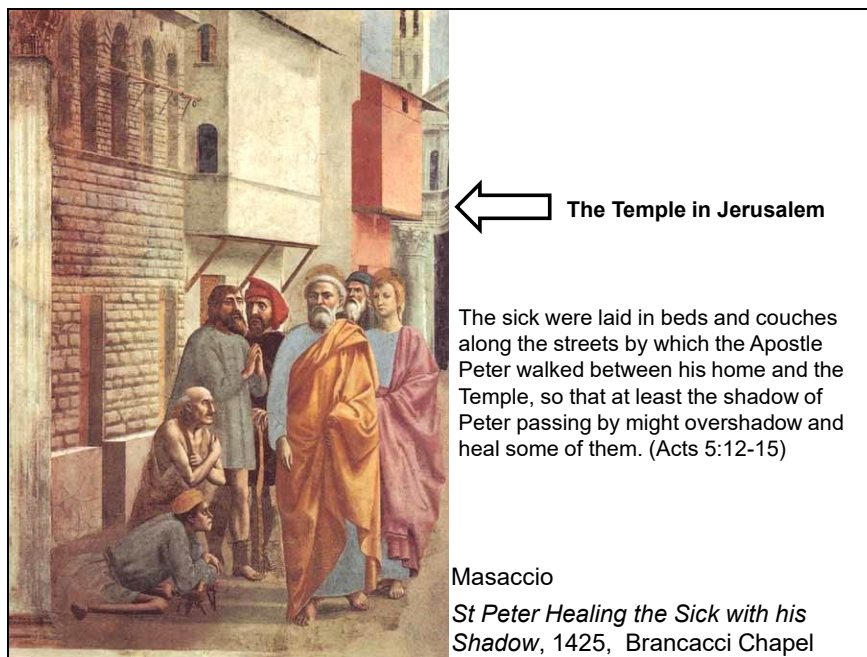
Next slide 22, Interior of the Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, frescoes painted by Masaccio and Masolino, 1425-26

Hidden in plain sight, amidst the world-famous frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, there is a representation by Masaccio of movement that is so advanced and so surprising that no one imitated it for four hundred years. It is a truism that you can't use something unless you understand it.

Masaccio's work is in the fresco on left side of the altar wall, the image circled in the slide slide 23.

Originally, before the destruction of the fresco cycle in 1745, the central panel of the altar wall was a fresco of the *Crucifixion of St Peter*, which made all the scenes on this wall about the life of St. Peter culminate in his sacrifice, which itself related to the sacrifice of Christ.



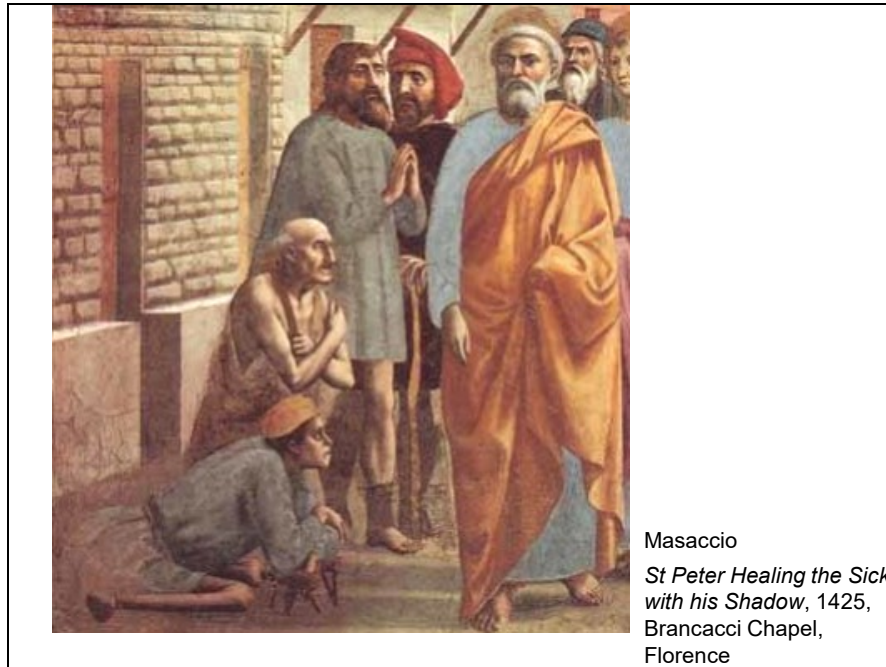


Next slide 24: Masaccio *St Peter Healing the sick with his shadow*, 1425

The fresco, *Saint Peter Healing the Sick with his Shadow*, on left side of the altar wall, depicts a passage from the Acts of the Apostles (5:12-15)

The sick were laid in beds and couches along the streets by which the Apostle Peter walked between his home and the Temple, so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow and heal some of them.

In Masaccio's day of Biblical literacy, everyone knew the story well. Masaccio assumed that viewers could imagine the Temple behind the Apostle, who – as everyone knew – was then in Jerusalem. The Florentines were therefore struck to see in Masaccio's painting that St Peter and disciples appear to be striding through the streets of downtown Florence, as if it were a New Jerusalem.



Masaccio
*St Peter Healing the Sick
with his Shadow*, 1425,
Brancacci Chapel,
Florence

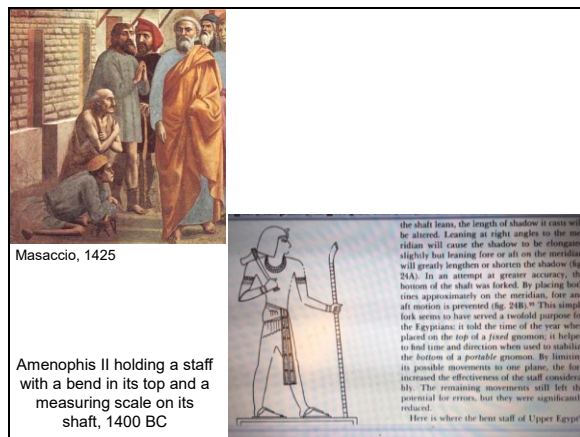
Next slide 25: Masaccio, *St Peter Healing the sick with his shadow*, detail of the figures, , *CLOSE UP* detail of the figures, *SHOWING THE SHADOWS ON THE GROUND*

In an enlargement, you can see that all the action in the fresco is accompanied by shadows. Rather interestingly, at the rear, is a Renaissance looking chap holding a stick which seems to fit in fine, but wait until you see what it really adds up to.

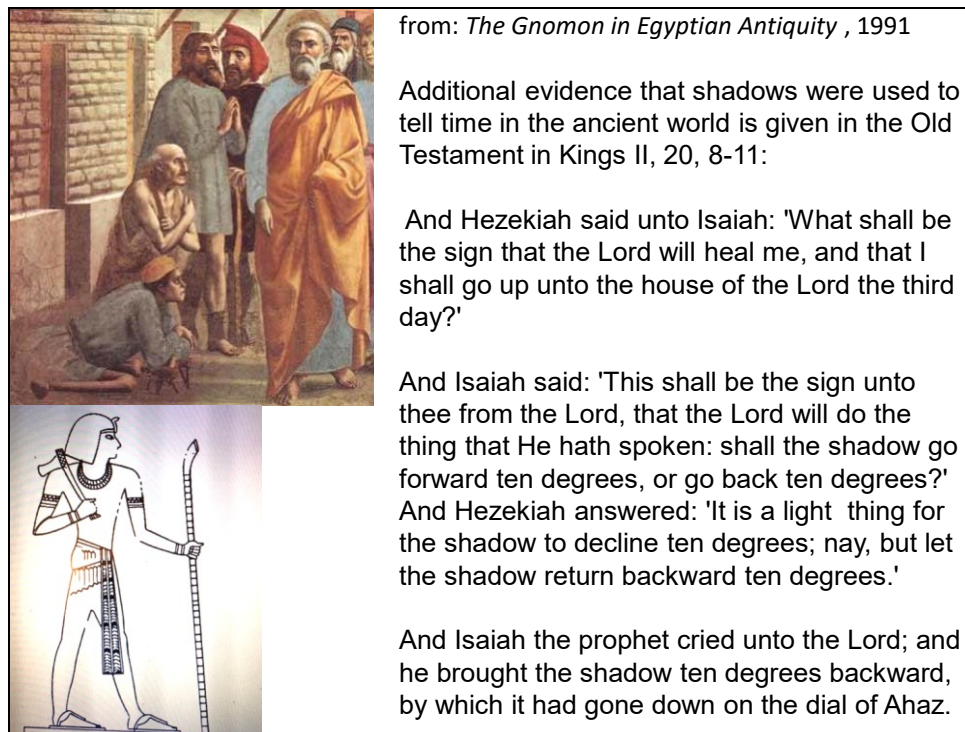
In the foreground we see a man who is kneeling. He obviously cannot stand because his legs are shriveled. Behind him is an older man who seems to be rising as he begins to feel something. And, behind him is a middle-aged man who seems to be saying thank you.

Thus Masaccio is actually showing a progression of healing across these three figures, which occurs while Peter is walking and his shadow falls on them.

Next slides 26-27: Masaccio, *St Peter Healing the sick with his shadow*



Curiously, and this has never been said before today, the origin of the biblical understanding of shadow healing goes back to ancient Egypt. The slide compares a closeup of Masaccio's *Saint Peter Healing the Sick with his Shadow* with an illustration of an Egyptian, Amenophis II, holding a staff with a bend in its top and a measuring scale on its shaft from 1400 BC.⁹ Egyptians, as it turns out, measured the staffs and used the shadow cast by the sun against a staff standing straight up to align the pyramids. They also used the shadows cast to record time, making records day to day.



Slide 27. Comparison of Masaccio and Amenophis II slides with text on the slide, as follows:

In the Old Testament (Kings II, 20:8-11) Isaiah used the power of the shadow cast by a staff to prove to King Hezekiah that Isaiah could heal the King. He said that if the shadow shown by the stick went backward then the King would know something important would occur.

Possibly Augustine was inspired by this story when he wrote one of his key principles: Time can only be perceived or measured while it is passing (*Confessions*, Chap XI). Masaccio surely knew this passage; every Florentine who was literate, had read Saint Augustine's *Confessions*. Both Masaccio and his mentor, the architect Filippo Brunelleschi (who instructed him in the use of perspective) were well aware of the measurement of time and distance through the use of shadows from authoritative pages of Vitruvius and Pliny.



Next slide 28: interior of Brancacci Chapel with tourists.

Before departing from the Brancacci Chapel, I will touch briefly on the allegorical program of the frescoes, when considered in their entirety. This is a picture of the Brancacci Chapel as it looks today (slide 28). On the back wall at left, we see *Saint Peter Healing with his Shadow*, and next to it, a large gold-ground altarpiece that is positioned on top of bare wall, where the frescoes suffered damaged. This was originally the location of a fresco of Masaccio of the *Crucifixion of Peter*. Masaccio's presence dominates the chapel today, because he painted most of the frescoes on the lower walls of the Chapel.

The decorations, however, were not planned that way. The sources who knew the chapel before the drastic alterations in the eighteenth century – Vasari, Bocchi, and Baldinucci – agreed that Masolino worked alone on a significant part – the vaulted ceiling and upper level of the walls. Those frescoes, being most of Masolino’s work on the Chapel, were eliminated between 1746 and 1748, when the Brancacci Chapel was ‘de-Gothicized’ by replacing the ribbed vault with a cupola and eighteenth century frescoes.

The destroyed paintings included Masolino’s four frescoes of the Evangelists on the on the Gothic vault, as well as two large lunettes on the side walls, representing the *Calling of Saints Peter and Andrew* and *Christ Rescuing Saint Peter from the Waves*.



Masaccio,
Saint Peter Baptising,
Brancacci Chapel

“One sees a very fine nude figure, shown shivering among those being baptised, numb with cold, executed with the most beautiful relief and the sweetest style, that was highly praised and admired by all artists, ancient and modern.” -- Vasari, 1550

Next slide 29: Masaccio, *Saint Peter Baptising*, Brancacci Chapel

After these losses and replacements, visitors (and art historians) tended to view the surviving paintings almost as if they were separate easel paintings. They were encouraged in this view by the chief early source, the *Lives of the Painters* by Giorgio Vasari, who naturally extolled the individual qualities of the two artists, but especially Masaccio. Vasari wrote that the Brancacci Chapel became a kind of art school for the youth of Florence and an anatomy class, which was true in fact. The daily influx of artists with paper and carboncino must have done wonders for the attendance at morning mass. Vasari lingered over several of the works, including Masaccio’s *Saint Peter Baptising*, shown here: “One sees a very fine nude figure, shown

shivering among those being baptised, numb with cold, executed with the most beautiful relief and the sweetest style, that was highly praised and admired by all artists, ancient and modern" (Vasari, 1550).

Left wall, upper level.

Masaccio, Expulsion of Adam and Eve; The *Tribute Money*



The story of the Tribute Money is not told in a left to right sequence of events. Instead the most important moment in which Christ commands, 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's...' is given the central place.

Next slide 30: Left wall, upper level. Masaccio, Expulsion of Adam and Eve; The *Tribute Money*

On the side left wall of the Chapel at the upper level, Masaccio painted the Gospel story of The Tribute Money. This single fresco has been unanimously accepted as the origin of "History painting", that is, when a painting depicts a historical subject in a grand style

In the Tribute Money you see a man in a short tunic. He represents a Roman a customs collector who comes up to Christ. Christ is standing in the middle of the picture. The Roman demands the payment of a tax. Christ turns to Peter who, in this cycle, always wears a yellow robe with a blue tunic, and Christ points towards the water at the left side of the picture. Christ says to Peter, go there and you will find a fish and in the mouth of the fish you will find a coin. Give the coin to the Roman to pay the tax. Moving across the picture to the right, you see Peter giving the coin to the Roman soldier who is standing there in that perfect *contra posta* pose with one leg engaged while the other leg is out, the pose that exists in all classical Roman art. and Peter hands the coin to the Roman.

Now if you consider the painting in chronological terms, you realize quickly that the story of the Tribute Money is not told in a left to right sequence of events. Instead the most important moment in which Christ commands, 'Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's...' is given the

central place. Meaning that the art is not organized chronologically, left to right, following most classical art, but Masaccio has placed the most important scene is in the middle, front and center. This incongruity may seem unexpectedly 'medieval'. But rather than an anachronism, so to speak, a justification for positioning Christ front and center is found in Augustine's theory that God is in but not of the world – above and beyond the mortal clock.



Next slide 31: c. 432-440 A.D., mosaics from the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome; scene from Trajan's column, Rome 113 AD. Cf The Tribute Money Brancacci

In order to portray the Roman soldier with historical accuracy, Masaccio traveled to Rome in order to study the sculpted reliefs on the column of Trajan.



Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784

Next slide 32: Jacques-Louis David, *Oath of the Horatii*, 1784.

Borrowing from late Roman mosaics and sculptures, Masaccio's fresco is the antecedent for Jacques-Louis David and Neo-Classic painting. In David's famous *Oath of the Horatii*, he placed all of the actors in a row on the front of the picture plane. Everyone is in perfect equilibrium, the general motion is quite contained, and even their grief is circumscribed by a certain decorum.



The Brancacci Chapel frescoes as preserved today
after the willful destruction of the original vault in 1746-1748

- 1 - Masolino, The Temptation of Adam and Eve
- 2 - Masaccio, The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
- 3 - Masaccio, The Tribute Money
- 4 - Masolino, St. Peter Preaching
- 5 - Masaccio, Baptism of the Neophytes
- 6 - Masolino, The Healing of the Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha

Next slide 33: The Brancacci Chapel frescoes as preserved today after the wilful destruction of the original vault in 1746-1748

Returning to the scheme of the Brancacci Chapel, this is a diagram of the two lower registers which is all that remain with the names of the artists and titles:

- 1 - Masolino, The Temptation of Adam and Eve
- 2 - Masaccio, The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden
- 3 - Masaccio, The Tribute Money
- 4 - Masolino, St. Peter Preaching
- 5 - Masaccio, Baptism of the Neophytes
- 6 - Masolino, The Healing of the Cripple and the Raising of Tabitha

Numbers 1 and 2, rather oddly, show the stories of Adam and Eve. Since the other paintings represent episodes from the life and martyrdom of St Peter, which took place many centuries after the Book of Genesis, when Adam and Eve were in the Garden eating apples and getting thrown out, their inclusion in a Petrine cycle has perplexed historians.

Saint Peter's life and works unfold in scene after scene, but there is clearly much, much more.

Because the narrative program of the chapel illustrates in a detailed way the exemplary life of Saint Peter, the images can be read according to the order of events in the biography,

but because they are put within the context of the story of Adam and Eve – whose importance to the whole is paramount – and the larger theme of salvation, the cycle also demands to be read without regard to narrative or chronological sequence.

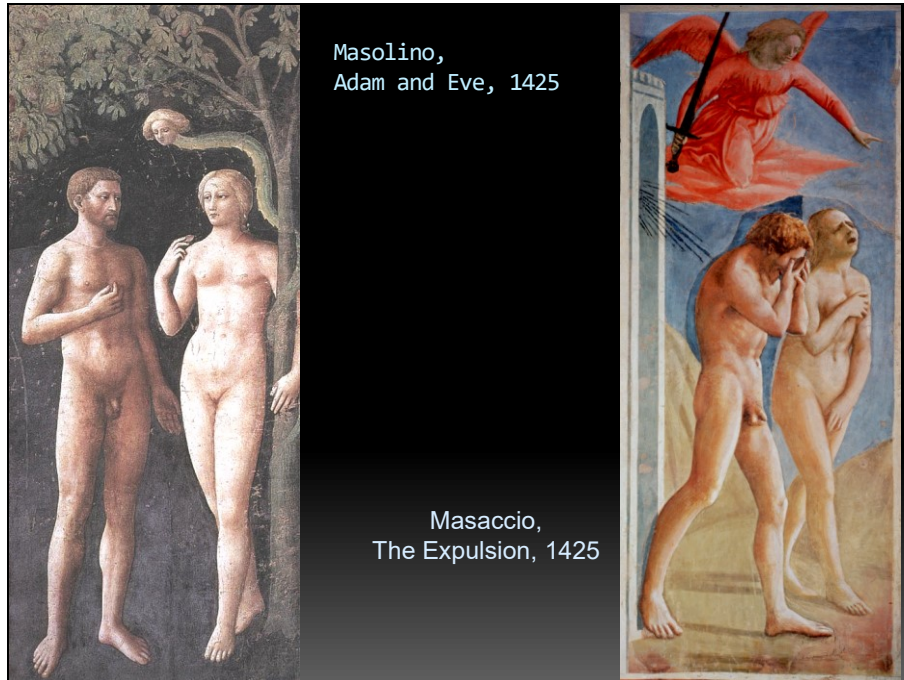
-- A. Ladis, *The Brancacci Chapel, Florence*, 1993.

Next slide 34:

In 1993 Andrew Laddis, a fine art historian who died before his time, summed up the issues involved in the meaning of the these frescoes.

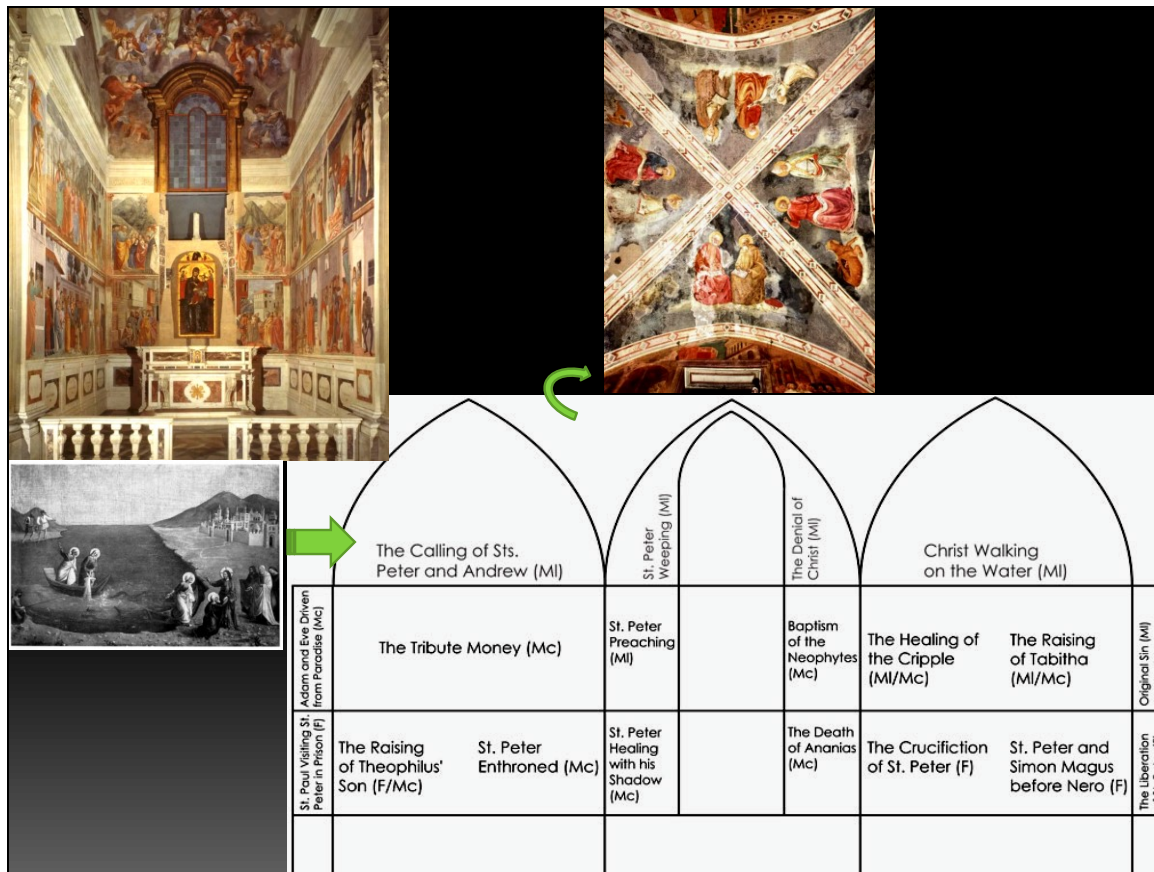
The narrative program of the lower registers of the Brancacci Chapel illustrates in a detailed way the exemplary life of Saint Peter. And, these images can be read according to the order of events in the biography, but because they are put within the context of the story of Adam and Eve – whose importance to the whole is paramount – and the larger theme of salvation, the cycle also demands to be read without regard to narrative or chronological sequence. (A. Ladis, *The Brancacci Chapel*, Florence, 1993.)

Stating that the Chapel needs to be understood without “narrative or chronological sequence,” Laddis noted the importance assigned to the Adam and Eve frescoes placed at the beginning of two of the extant rows.



Next slide 35: *The Temptation of Adam and Eve* By Masolino da Panicale. 1425; Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, 1425

Comparing on the left, *The Temptation of Adam and Eve* by Masolino with *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, (both of 1425), we notice that Masolino's elegant style is idealized: Adam and Eve are both well showered and oiled, enjoying the fruits of the celestial Garden. They are in Heaven, unencumbered by clocks. By contrast, in Masaccio's portrayal of our forefathers being cast out of Eden, their bodies stand firmly on the ground, a strong light projects their shadows. They move with vivid energy and unprecedented emotion as the armed angel hovers over them. The Expulsion is the first work of art in which we can hear the character's speak with cries of grief. Notice the difference between these two paintings and remember that the entire upper part of the chapel, that is the vault and the highest registers, now lost, were painted by the idealist, Masolino.



Next slide 36: Interior that shows the vault, next to a vault by Masolino in Rome Masolino The Evangelists and The Doctors of Church 1428-30. **Fresco** San Clemente, Rome , and a photograph of painting representing the Calling of St Peter, all next to a Diagram of the walls with

Evidently the artists divided the chapel in the way that they divided Eden: Masolino the idealist portraying Adam and Eve before the Fall, Masaccio, the morning after. If we insert the themes of the paintings that are missing, and consider the entirety, the allegorical program of the Chapel comes into focus.

Masolino's graceful figures would have set the tone for the chapel's upper reaches, where the Evangelists reigned on high and Jesus walked by the seaside -- and on water. Masaccio's share begins, we believe, on the second tier in the subjects that take place in crowded cities.

In the left lunette, destroyed in 1746-1748, Masolino had painted the *Calling of Peter and Andrew*. The image of the lost fresco was first identified by Roberto Longhi in a later painting, which does not display the lunette's upper curvature, but conforms in other respects. Masolino is divided his composition into expanses of sea and sky. The opposite lunette held another lost fresco by Masolino, representing Christ, walking on water, who rescues Peter from the waves of a storm.

The two lunettes with marine settings under broad skies once indicated the beginning of a visual parable of the Seven Days of Creation in Genesis 1-1:2.4. The stories descended in layers, like days, from the vault of Heaven with the Evangelists. The lunettes signified the canopy of sky that God made to separate heaven and earth. The days of the creation of dry land and mankind appear in the lower registers. That Adam and Eve are anachronistically present means that the God acts outside mortal time. Peter's life is to be read as the story of Salvation.

Adam and Eve Driven from Paradise (Mc)	The Calling of Sts. Peter and Andrew (MI)	
	The Tribute Money (Mc)	
	The Raising of Theophilus' Son (F/Mc)	St. Peter Enthroned (Mc)
St. Paul Visiting St. Peter in Prison (F)		



Masolino, *Calling of Peter and Andrew*, copy of the lost fresco, 1425, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

Next slide 37: diagram of the original arrangement of frescos on the left hand walls, with Masolino, *Calling of Peter and Andrew* at the top. Masolino, *Calling of Peter and Andrew*, copy of the lost fresco, 1425, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence

Starting at the top was the Gothic groin vault which had four sections in which Masolino painted the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. A classic image which evokes the Logos, or the Word, identified in the gospel of John with God, the creator, and who exists in eternity, as did Adam and Eve in Eden, a model for Heaven. Masolino then painted the two lunettes, also lost, representing the *Calling of Peter and Andrew* on the shore of the sea of Galilee and and Christ walking on water to rescue Peter from the waves of a storm. We know from later copies that these lost lunettes were filled with expanses of sky and water, while the lost works on the altar wall were set in landscape with representations of animals. Masolino's frescoes with marine settings under broad skies once indicated to visitors the beginning of a visual allegory of the Seven Days of Creation in Genesis 1-1:2.4. The stories thus descended in layers, like days, from the vault of Heaven beginning with the Word, the Evangelists. The lunettes signified the canopy of sky that God made to separate heaven and earth. Hovering over the surface of the waters, God separated the waters and made the sky and then God separated the waters from the dry land. All this took place on God's time. Mortal time was created coincident with the creation of mankind.



Masolino, The Four Evangelists and the Four Doctors of the Church, 1428
San Clemente, Rome

Augustine, the Literal Meaning of Genesis, Chapter 1: "In the case of a narrative of events, the question arises as to whether everything must be taken according to the figurative sense only, or whether it must be expounded and defended also as a faithful record of what happened. No Christian will dare say that the narrative must not be taken in a figurative sense. For St. Paul says: "Now all these things that happened to them were symbolic." "What meaning other than the allegorical have the words: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth?" Were heaven and earth made in the beginning of time, or first of all in creation, or in the Beginning who is the Word." [Cf *John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God?* When it is said of the Word, All things have been made through Him.] "Finally, how can it be demonstrated that God, without any change in Himself, produces effects subject to change and measured by time?" – Augustine, Lit. Gen. 1

Next slide 38: Masolino, The Four Evangelists and the Four Doctors of the Church, 1428, San Clemente, Rome

As this slide recounts, the most authoritative discussion available to the Brancacci painters was Augustine, *the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Chapter 1: "In the case of a narrative of events, the question arises as to whether everything must be taken according to the figurative sense only, or whether it must be expounded and defended also as a faithful record of what happened. No Christian will dare say that the narrative must not be taken in a figurative sense. For St. Paul says: "Now all these things that happened to them were symbolic." "What meaning other than the allegorical have the words: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth?" Were heaven and earth made in the beginning of time, or first of all in creation, or in the Beginning who is the Word." [Cf *John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God?* When it is said of the Word, All things have been made through Him.] "Finally, how can it be demonstrated that God, without any change in Himself, produces effects subject to change and measured by time?" – Augustine, Lit. Gen. 1



Next slide 39: c. 432-440 A.D., mosaics from the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome and Trajan's column 113 AD

Saint Augustine deeply informed Renaissance Art. He says that to invoke the Divine we must read beyond the literal, into the significance of parables and allegories. And his reading of Genesis was not as a literal, family history. To sum up, art historians make observations and they go into the hopper of the strands of information that we have. Someone drew the lines of perspective on the fresco of the *Tribute Money* by Masaccio. It turns out that all perspective lines come from the head of Christ which means that Christ is the source. And because all perspective lines come from Christ, then going backwards, through time, it would mean that everything emanates from Christ, who is the Word, the source of all creation.

This is exactly in keeping with the Genesis origin parable and the allegory of Creation: all things emanate from God



Next slide 40: Masolino, *Saint Peter with the Healing of the Lame Man and the Raising of Tabitha*, detail of *Peter Healing the Lame Man*, 1425, Brancacci Chapel

On the wall opposite *The Tribute Money* is a fresco by Masolino, *Saint Peter with the Healing of the Lame man and the Raising of Tabitha*. In the detail shown, Masolino depicts at left the moment in Acts when Peter is recorded as healing a crippled man. At right, Peter appears again about to enter the house where he will raise the widow, Tabitha. Right in the middle of this biblical scene, Masolino has placed two elegant Florentines. All commentators ask, Who are these men, all dressed up and walking down the middle of the picture?

In the passage in Acts (9:36-42) which this painting illustrates, Peter heals a lame man, then they send two ambassadors to him, and then he raises Tabitha. Thus, Masolino is depicting the passage of time in a way immediately recognizable from our own lives. This happened, they sent the ambassadors, then he healed Tabitha. If the fresco is read chronologically, left to right, the couriers become the time link. Without the couriers, Peter would not have gone to see Tabitha.



Next Slide 41 Interior view of the Brancacci Chapel with tourists today

Now when we gaze up at the Brancacci, we must imagine the majestic descent of the Seven Days of Creation. Our arduous descent from the eternity of Eden down to our present day. Fortunately, there is a happy ending. Peter's life and ultimate sacrifice is a parable of the Redemption by which humanity hopes to get back to the Garden.



Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1601, National Gallery, London

Next slide 42 Caravaggio, *Supper at Emmaus*, 1603, National Gallery, London

I will end with Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, a wonderful picture at the National Gallery in London

The story culminates the Gospel account from Luke 24:13-35 which occurs three days after the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus. Two pilgrims are walking down the road and talking about what happened in Jerusalem. They meet a stranger on the road and tell him all of what happened including the empty tomb. Then, this stranger explains to them beginning with Moses and all the prophets how these events were foretold in the scriptures. When the group arrives at their destination, the pilgrims beg the stranger to stay with them for a meal.

Caravaggio depicts the moment, at the meal, when Jesus is revealed to the pilgrims “in the breaking of the bread”. Christ is wearing red and white, the colors of the Resurrection, and the pilgrims look amazed. I describe this painting at length in my catalogue raisonné of the paintings of Caravaggio.

What no one has noticed sufficiently is the fourth figure, the innkeeper, an outsider who stands next to Christ without seeing the Epiphany. While the whole room is exploding with excitement, the innkeeper is oblivious and seems to be asking something like, Would you like sparkling water or still? He doesn't share in the revelation to the two pilgrims at the table, because this is not his day for salvation. Maybe tomorrow will be his day, but not today. As the only person in this picture who is not described in the Gospel text, the innkeeper becomes an Everyman, posing for us the question: “Had I been there would I have seen God?” We cannot know, nor can we know if or when he will ever see God. Caravaggio's painting is an image that opens a path into future time.

Dear Reader, Thank you for your patience and, above all, your time.

¹ Timothy Kennet, *The Atlantic*, Mar 6, 2015. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/03/slow-tv-and-the-excruciating-present/386665/>

² The calculation was based on the likely date of the earliest recorded earthquake. For details: David Sedley, “Joshua stopped the sun’ 3,224 years ago today, scientists say”, *Times of Israel*, 30 October 2017, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/3224-years-later-scientists-see-first-ever-recorded-eclipse-in-joshuas-battle/>

³ G. Heard Hamilton, “Cézanne, Bergson and the Image of Time”, *Art Journal*, 1956, p. 3.

⁴ This grid is adapted from an internet source, <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/539869074055436421/?autologin=true> which credits the painter Sea Dean, “Paint a Masterpiece: Claude Monet – Rouen Cathedral Series”.

⁵ Compare the title of Chapter 14 of Augustine's discussion of time: “There Is Only a Moment of Present Time”. (*Confessions*, Book XI).

⁶ G. Heard Hamilton, “Cézanne, Bergson and the Image of Time”, *Art Journal*, 1956, p. 4.

⁷ (Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XI:14).

⁸ Peter Bradshaw, “Interview with Christian Marclay: 'It's impossible!' – Christian Marclay and the 24-hour clock made of movie clips”, *The Guardian*, 10 September 2018.

⁹ Martin Isler, *The Gnomon in Egyptian Antiquity*, 1991, p. 174, fig. 23, who notes also the empirical method of telling time by estimating, in paces, the length of a man's own shadow, is ancient and widespread” (p. 179). The

same illustration is published by Dirk L. Couprie, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Greek Cosmology: From Thales to Heraclides Ponticus*, 2011, pp. 40-41, fig. 2.20, who transcribes Pliny's detailed advice on the use of the gnomon to tell the time of day, "In Egypt at noon on the day of the quinox the shadow of the gnomon measures a little more than half the gnomon itself, whereas in the city of Rome the shadow is one-ninth shorter than the gnomon, in the town of Ancona 1/35th longer, and in the district of Italy called Venezia at the same time and hour the shadow is equal to the gnomon" (*Naturalis historia* I: p. 182. Translated by Couprie, who notes that similar calculations were made earlier by Vitruvius (De architectone IX, 1.1) Couprie also notes (p. 41) that "the gnomon that is always available is the upright human body with its shadow." Photo:

<https://books.google.com/books?id=MUMdgyUA8bgC&pg=PR10&lpg=PR10&dq=Amenhotep+Gnomon&source=bl&ots=SULxSZbgGI&sig=ACfU3U0971uKO6XNtpgQ9WfWBS9jSAxFsg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwikuIncmaPhAhWBsZ4KHbECCI0Q6AEwAHoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=Amenhotep%20Gnomon&f=false>