PROGRAMME FOUR: THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

Part 1: ROME AND FLORENCE

EXT. ROME - FOUNTAIN
TRACK ROUND TO FACADE
OF THE PANTHEON

The Pantheon, the most complete monument from the days of ancient Rome.

INT. PANTHEON, ROME

The Pantheon, temple of the gods. In 1520, the artist Raphael was buried there, the first man in modern times to choose the Pantheon as his own memorial. When Raphael died he was only thirty-seven, at the peak of his creativity and the peak of his fame. The story was told that the Pope himself wept at the news of his sudden death.

TRANSFIGURATION,
RAPHAEL (Pantheon, Rome)

As final tribute, Raphael's last great painting, The Transfiguration, was placed at the head of his coffin.

TRACK INTO RAPHAEL'S TOMB

The biographer Giorgio Vasari wrote: "when this admirable artist died painting also died. It is due to him that the arts, colouring and invention have been brought to such perfection that progress is almost
impossible. Happy were those who served under him, because all who imitate his art are sure to succeed in the world, as those who imitate his virtuous life will be rewarded in heaven.

Raphael had become the subject of myth, even in his own lifetime. A myth compounded by his dying on a Good Friday. There were even stories of earthquakes following his death, as on the first Good Friday. And the myth perhaps helps to understand why it was possible for him to be buried here. But his own motives come out clearly in his will, in which he leaves money for the restoration of this most perfect survival from the Roman world, desiring to be immortalised within the very fabric of antiquity which he had helped bring back to life. At once defining his aims as an artist and his status. The status of artists had grown during the 14th and 15th Centuries, but now suddenly we find them compared with princes. In writers as different as Castiglioni, Aretino and Vasari we find not only their works but even their private lives the subject of serious consideration. Popes tolerate their tantrums, rich men indulge their whims. In men like
Raphael then, Leonardo and Michelangelo, this is the moment when the idea of the artist becomes synonymous with genius.

In Raphael's *Transfiguration* we see the revolution in painting that he had helped to create.

The measured symmetry of 15th century painting controlled by strict perspective had exploded into something infinitely more complex. Colours had become more brilliant and various, glowing from out of shadow. Gestures had become more expressive. The individuality of the figures had become dramatised by their inner emotions.

This revolution in artistic ambition as much as in painting had been inspired by an artist who was an old man when Raphael died: Leonardo da Vinci. Though he was equally mythologised, Leonardo's long career was very different from the starry successes of Raphael.
Leonardo's story is a catalogue of unprecedented achievement, and yet also of incomplete and abandoned projects, no better symbolised than by the sorry state of his mural for a monastery in Milan depicting the Last Supper of Christ. The art historian Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt sees Leonardo's frustrated ambition as part of a larger story.

Most of us have some sort of mental image of Leonardo's Last Supper, and yet as is true also with some of the other famous artistic projects of the Renaissance, as we approach more closely we discover that the actual work survives only in part. It's often difficult to reconstruct the artist's intention, to know what the work was to look like originally, to grasp something of the setting for which it was created. What remains to us of Leonardo's masterpiece is slowly being revealed to us by the painstaking work of conservators here. And yet the painting has suffered so much damage over the centuries that it is bound to remain a ghost of its former visual splendour. Compelling, evocative, but also elusive. It makes a poignant visual metaphor for the fragmented image of the Renaissance that's come down to us, and it also
serves to remind us of the insuperable practical difficulties that sometimes separated an act of high artistic imagination from its concrete physical realisation in actual works of art. With the Last Supper, the problem was that Leonardo had the ambition of developing new methods for wall painting, and from a technical point of view that turned out to be catastrophic. The painting began to decay as soon as it was finished. In other heroic enterprises, like Michelangelo's tomb for Pope Julius II or Bramante's designs for the new St. Peter's, the ambitious scale of the project itself doomed it eventually to incompletion, reduction or transformation.

Yet if we look carefully at the fragmented remains of the Last Supper we can still discern a complex work. The figure of Christ sits stable and calm at the centre of a storm, the disciples surround him as though rolled back by a burst of energy, each reacting in a different way to the accusation 'one of you shall betray me'. The disciples are young and old, beautiful and ugly, they give expression to their feelings but they also express the idea of the
first Christian mass. A monk witnessed Leonardo at work in the monastery of Santa Maria della Grazie in Milan.

"Many a time I have seen Leonardo go early in the morning to work on the platform before the Last Supper. And there he would stay from sunrise till darkness, never laying down a brush but continuing to paint without eating or drinking. Then three or four days would pass without his touching the work, yet each day he would spend several hours examining it and criticising the figures to himself."

There are very few works still existing which reveal what Leonardo did to transform 15th century painting, but his many hundreds of drawings reveal how he expanded his view of the artist's role so it embraced philosophy and science. What drove Leonardo was a personal investigation into the deepest structures of nature in a search for pattern and order. He described this lifetime project in the most ambitious terms.
"The deity which invests the science of the painter functions in such a way that the mind of the painter is transformed into a copy of the divine mind. If the painter wishes to see beauties that charm him, it lies in his power to create them. And if he wishes to see monstrosities that are frightful, ridiculous or truly pitiable, he is Lord and God thereof."

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Not literally a portrait, but certainly one in spirit. Michelangelo was twenty-seven when he started to carve the figure of David for his home city of Florence. He portrayed the supreme confidence of a young conqueror, and yet in the same moment he reveals self doubt, perhaps the self doubt of an artist with heroic ambition. If Leonardo was ahead of his times, Michelangelo was supremely a man of his times. From the very beginning he found himself at the centre of power and influence.

"The project to create a colossus of marble had been underway since the early 15th Century, and the block from which Michelangelo's David was quarried was brought down from
Carrara in the 1460's. Several attempts were made to have the block carved, but they all came to nought. It was in fact the first monumental free standing male nude carved in marble since antiquity. Michelangelo himself is a David who confronts the gigantic challenge of the marble that no-one has been able successfully to carve. Originally Michelangelo's David was to have been placed on a buttress of Florence Cathedral, but by the time the David was complete it was clear to everyone at once that this was a miracle of art, as it was called in its own time. A kind of achievement that should be integrated in the Florentine body politic in its broadest sense. Now, David is the young Biblical hero, who against all the odds manages to overcome the armed giant Goliath. So David is the metaphor for the miraculous victory of right over might. So it's no surprise to us that Florence should throughout its history have seen itself as a David among the city states, maintained against its powerful enemies because of its righteousness.
In 1873, the Florentine city fathers decided to bring Michelangelo's David indoors from the Piazza dell Signoria here to this museum, the Accademia. Later a copy was put up on the site but Michelangelo's sculpture itself here was deprived of its original role as a civic guardian and was redefined more narrowly, more exclusively, as a work of art.

Other sculptures by Michelangelo were also gathered here, as if to bring together a sort of secular shrine to the great Florentine. But this historical happenstance gives us the opportunity to look at Michelangelo from a different perspective, to look at his unfinished works, sculptures that he was forced to abandon for a variety of reasons entirely beyond his control. Michelangelo had a very unusual way of approaching the block of marble when it came from the quarry. This is the skin of the stone as has been prepared for - by the quarry master, and Michelangelo began cutting from the front face only, moving in layer by layer into the stone as though he were carving a relief. Or as his contemporary says, it's as though a wax model were being lifted out of a bath of
water. Obviously the forms that are closest to us emerge first from the marble. This technique or system had two advantages. First it meant that Michelangelo could organise the composition of his figure of the pose on one plane as though it were a picture and keep visual control of it as he carved inward through the block. It also meant that the process of design, the creative process of changing his mind could continue while he was actually carrying out the statue, working it in the stone.

Michelangelo abandoned the Matthew sculpture in 1505, when he was summoned to Rome by the new Pope, Julius II. Pope Julius demanded a tomb which would match the majesty of his self image. Michelangelo's original design was for a free standing pyramid of marble with tier upon tier of life size figures, so ambitious a design that many artists would have had to work for many years to make it real. Only one figure on the final tomb, completed thirty frustrating years later, carries the force of the original idea: a figure of Moses.
Vasari calls Michelangelo 'terrible', he speaks often of his 'terribilità', which is a word that really has no precise equivalent in English but one is talking about, I suppose, a kind of awe inspiring power of temperament. And this same word, 'terribilità', was also used to describe Pope Julius II. There is no doubt that artist and Pope met their match in each other. And it's always been felt, there's a kind of undercurrent of feeling that although the Moses is in no sense a portrait of Julius II, that it is an evocation precisely of that 'terribilità' that artist and Pope shared.

SISTINE CEILING, 1508-1512, MICHELANGELO
(The Vatican, Rome)
CUMEAN SIBYL, 1510

CREATION OF SUN, MOON
AND PLANTS, 1511

FALL OF MAN, 1509-10

CREATION OF ADAM, 1511

Michelangelo was bullied by Julius to abandon the tomb, and instead to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. This was part of Julius' grand design for a new Vatican. However reluctant he was, however much he complained, between 1508 and 1512 Michelangelo created one of the boldest and one of the largest paintings in history. Monumental figures act out the Biblical drama from the Creation to the Flood, framed by figures still more monumental. The human body became as much the subject of

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Michelangelo's painting as it was of his sculpture. Pope Julius had neither armies nor cannon enough to influence Europe as he might wish. But he could at least present in the microcosm of the Vatican an image of Papal power to impress all comers.

The story is told that Raphael was mightily impressed when he was smuggled in to see the unfinished Sistine ceiling by the architect of the new St. Peter's, Bramante. Certainly in the decorations of the Pope's library, which Raphael was painting at the same time, there is a figure answering to the description of Michelangelo. There's evidence that the figure was added later than the others, and that its style seems a tribute to the style of his rival. The School of Athens is part of a sophisticated presentation of abstract ideas. In this case, the ideas of philosophy expressed in human form. Plato points towards heaven, Aristotle towards the earth. To the left, mathematics is personified by Pythagorus, surrounded by inquiring minds.
To the right, Euclid, portrayed in the guise of Raphael's friend Bramante, demonstrates the principles of geometry. Behind them Raphael shows himself staring out at the spectator, the artist stands proud in the company of philosophers.

On the facing wall is the *Disputa*, Raphael's depiction of theology.

At the centre, beneath the Christian trinity, is the bread of Christ symbolising his body. God made flesh. Contemporary churchmen engage in debate with religious figures from all ages.

On the side walls of the Pope's library are representations of justice and literature. The Christian and pagan worlds are brought together without conflict. The classical god Apollo is surrounded by his muses. They preside over the ancient writers Sappho, Virgil, Homer and the almost contemporary Dante.
There is a continuity between the golden age of antiquity and the new golden age that Julius II was attempting to generate in his own Papal Rome. We know that he saw himself as the ecclesiastical, the churchly successor to the emperors of ancient Rome.

You can imagine that people who came here and saw the Pope here came away with a very strong feeling of the church's unity, power, wisdom and wealth. Perhaps something of an ideal projection rather than a celebration of fact.

It was not only Popes who wished to place themselves in the tradition of antiquity. Agostino Chigi was banker to Pope Julius and his successor Pope Leo. Consequently one of the richest men in Europe, he persuaded Raphael to decorate his new villa on the banks of the Tiber.

Raphael created the illusion of two canopies to protect Chigi's guests from the heat of the day. The gods dined above while the guests below, tossing their golden plates over the riverbank as they finished each course. Chigi, by the way, kept
servants below, so the plates could be recovered.

Mercury, the god of money, presided over this splendid party and thus gave the pleasures of the flesh more elevated status. But the party, metaphorical and actual, did not last for long. Vasari wrote:

"Raphael kept up his secret love affairs and pursued his pleasures with no sense of moderation. And then on one occasion he went to excess and he returned home afterwards with a violent fever which the doctors diagnosed as being caused by heatstroke. Raphael kept quiet about his incontinence and, very imprudently, instead of giving him the restoratives he needed, they bled him until he grew faint and felt himself sinking. So he made his will."

In one year they were all dead. Agostino Chigi and Raphael died within a month of each other. And in 1521, in the next year, Leo X was dead also. And with him the hedonistic culture of their age.
The grand presentations of Papal Rome had masked the declining power of Papal authority, religious, political and military. In 1527, Italy was invaded by and imperial army from north of the Alps. Rome was sacked. Pietro Aretino described the traumatic events,

"Screams rose to high heaven, doors were beaten in. The whole population took to its heels, weeping and trying to hide. Blood flowed over the pavements, people were being slaughtered, the tortured shrieked, prisoners begged for mercy, women tore their hair. It was pitiful to see fire consuming gilded lodges and painted palaces.

Michelangelo's Last Judgement, painted in the 1530's on the wall beneath the Sistine ceiling evokes a new mood of retribution.

Rome did revive, of course, and the Papacy gained new strength for its fight with the tide of Reformation, and Michelangelo continued with his monumental projects, he became architect of St. Peter's. He re-worked the language of classical architecture into a massive, sculptural style.
He was commissioned to rebuild the civic square of Rome, the Piazza Campidoglio. On a hill above the forum, he created a classical frame for the mediaeval city hall, a stage for the drama of politics. As he had with St. Peter's, Michelangelo used a bold re-working of classical architecture and integrated ancient statues into his design. Throughout his life, as architect and artist, Michelangelo had stayed at the centre of power, a turbulent force in turbulent times.

But there is another journey in his life as an artist, which became increasingly important to him. A journey equally heroic, equally mythic, but private. It's revealed in his most intimate productions, in his letters, in his sonnets and sketches. And it takes him away from this public stage into his inner life, questioning the role of the artist and indeed the very nature of art itself.

In his final years, Michelangelo wrote a profoundly personal sonnet,

"In a frail boat through stormy seas, my life in its course has now

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reached the harbour, the bar of which all men must cross to render account of good and evil done. I now know how weighted in error was the fond fantasy which made art for me an idol and a king. And how mistaken that earthly love which all men seek. What are those thoughts of love, once light and gay, as towards two deaths I move? One is certain, the other menaces. No brush, no chisel quietens the soul once turned to the divine love of he who stretches out his arms upon the cross."

Michelangelo had excavated into the block so deeply, had changed his ideas about the design so many times, that there simply may not have been enough marble left for him to complete any of the images that are suggested all at once in the stone.

Michelangelo probably wouldn't have seen the Rondanini Pieta as a work of art, but it does show his unceasing attempts until just a few days before his death to work through the stone to that image of unifying love that he strove for.
The wall of ice between himself and Christ that he speaks of is here dissolved in a final loving union between mother and child.

END OF PART ONE
VENICE, MONTAGE OF SIGHTS

"This most illustrious and noble city. None other is more famous for the immensity of its glory, the wisdom of its government, the long duration of its rule, or for other features worthy of praise. The matchless convenience of its admirable buildings, the wealth of its incredible riches, its numberless subjects, the industry of excellent men, the infinite variety of its possessions, the divine institutions of the republic, the immortal value of its nobles."

INT. TEATRO OLIMPICO, VICENZA, 1580-84, PALLADIO

"You Venetians are wrong to disturb the peace of Italy and not to rest content with the fine state that is yours. If you knew how everyone hates you, your hair would stand on end."

MICHAEL WOOD TO CAMERA

INT. TEATRO OLIMPICO

In the 16th century Venice was a city of spectacle and rhetoric, of theatre and illusion. It saw itself as an ideal city, as the modern culmination of the ancient city.
state with its good life, its humane values, its sense of play even. And it dramatised itself as an ideal city, both for its own inhabitants and for the world outside. This civic drama was acted out through processions, ceremonies and spectacle and through art and architecture. But this grand illusion whose stage was the city itself was founded in reality. By the 1500's Venice claimed a thousand years of history as a free and independent republic. The chill wind of economic change, the decline of empire, had not yet touched its self confidence. It was still rich in trade and crafts, its imperial possessions still spread out across the Mediterranean and into the Italian mainland, as here at Vicenza. So the theatre and the spectacle were props for a powerful empire which had survived for so long by hard headed business acumen, by skilful diplomacy, and when those failed, by sheer military force.

EXT. VENICE
IL DOGE INGINOCCHIATO
DAVANTI ALLA VERGINE E S. MARCO, TINTORETTO (Venice, Palazzo Ducale)
EXT. VENICE

The cast of characters who paraded on this spectacular stage included the gods of antiquity, whose attributes the city took as its own. Like ancient Athens, Venice personified itself as a woman, a
Serenissima, the serene, as Venus, the sensual. The city even claimed a special relationship with the Virgin Mary, virtuous and pure. Behind its spectacular mask the republic used its prisoners of war as slaves, employed thousands of prostitutes and preserved the privilege of democracy for a small clique of nobles. But compared with the tyrannies of princes and Popes, Venice in the 16th century seemed uniquely free. It attracted talent from the rest of Italy, men like Jacopo Sansovino, who brought from Rome a language of architecture and sculpture ideal for Venice's desire to impress.

David Rosand has analysed the visual language of Sansovino.

At the foot of the Campanile, opposite the entrance to the Doge's palace, Sansovino created a loggetta, a small porch whose monumental sculptural decoration and classical architectural form declared the virtues of the republic. The reigning image of the—
complex was the figure of Venice herself. Venice triumphant, Venice personified as justice, the highest virtue of the state. To that traditional imagery, however, Sansovino brought a new kind of language, from Rome, the language of the Olympian gods. The figure of Minerva of course represents wisdom, the wisdom of the ancients who were so clever as to have established this constitutional republic. The figure of Mercury represents eloquence and eloquence is one of the fundamental political virtues of Venice. We must also remember that Mercury is the god of commerce, and that is the real foundation of Venice. The figure of peace is, of course, the ultimate virtue that is guaranteed by Venice. Venice brings peace to the world in the way that ancient Romans had brought peace to the world. And then there is Apollo. Apollo is after all god of the sun, Sol in Italian. And Sol also stands for one, that is solo. And Apollo is one, Apollo is unique, Apollo is alone in all of this, just as of course Venice is alone, unique in the world.

VENUS OF URBINO, 1538, TITIAN (Uffizi Gallery, Florence)  
Venetian artists Giorgione, Veronese, Tintoretto and above all Titian, transformed these public
personifications and made them private, poetic and desirable. Paintings commissioned by men who were proud of their sophistication.

The Venus of Urbino is domesticated. She's brought indoors. She's put into the context of the bedroom. Two handmaids are in the background, one of them kneels over a chest, a marriage chest, the kind of chest that would hold a trousseau. So a marital theme is established there as surely as it is established by the myrtle plant that is so prominently silhouetted in the background, the myrtle a plant in perpetual bloom, as a symbol of perpetual love. The dog asleep at her feet, a symbol of fidelity. As overtly sensual as her appeal is, this Venus invites us to celebrate marital love. The attributes around her make this very clear, and yet she has lost none of her sensuality. Indeed, she will be transformed by Titian into a variety of other figures.

One of the variations Titian produced is the image that includes Venus with a Cupid. There are a few prominent symbols that Titian has introduced which are really quite
ironic in a way and give us some sense of the range of cultural play available in this kind of painting. The partridge is a bird that Titian actually used in a scene of the Annunciation, because in ancient mythology it is a bird that is so highly sexed that merely the voice of the male, or the wind from his beating wings, is sufficient to impregnate the female. So too with the glass vase with its rose. The imagery of light passing through glass without breaking it symbolically embodying the passage of the logos, of the word of God, of the incarnation through the Virgin without destroying her virginity. The dog now is awake, no longer does he seem to stand for fidelity but rather seems to activate the scene by his yapping. And certainly it would have been the kind of visual punning that Titian's audience would have been responsive to. They would have recognised symbols, they would have recognised the reappropriation or misappropriation of them and would have perhaps smiled knowingly. Perhaps have congratulated the painter on his witty invention.

Woman as goddess and courtesan.
Titian announced his presence as a master with a grand theatrical gesture. He concentrated the vast space of the gothic church of the Franciscans with another image of woman: woman as Madonna.

The culture itself had set up the perimeters of interpretative possibility. That is a scheme that talks about love on the scale of values, love that at its basest is mere lust, love on that level being the love of the beast, of the animal, and that then rises through a series of progressive stages, through culturally licit lust, which is of course marital love. And that eventually arrives at the highest level, which is divine love.

Titian's *Assumption of the Virgin* is 20 feet high. In 1518 it was the largest oil painting ever produced. A painting on the scale to match the most ambitious artists in Rome. Yet Titian had never been to Rome and he was developing the potential of what was still a new medium. Painting on this scale had previously been done in fresco, where the colours are absorbed into the plaster of the wall. But fresco in Venice was vulnerable to the damp climate, only
oils could give the brilliance and permanence that Titian needed to dominate the space.

Titian continued to exploit the spaces of Frari, to dramatise them, in the next painting that he executed for the church. This was the altarpiece of the Pesaro family, located on an altar to the left of the nave. It was visible to the viewer along a diagonal axis before he even reached the altar. And Titian's perspective deliberately offers an invitation to the viewer to enter the painting before arriving at the altar.

The Pesaro Madonna altarpiece illustrates vividly the fusion between church and state, public and private, St. Peter and St. Francis. The Virgin and Child are brought together with members of a Venetian noble family. The several monuments to the Pesaro family in the church of the Frari are both private burial chapels and public statements of their prominent role in the nobility of the republic. Jacopo Pesaro commissioned the artist to portray him giving thanks to the Virgin for his victory at the battle of Santa Maria when the Venetians and the
Pope united to defeat the Turks. Pesaro, the Venetian, was admiral of the Papal fleet.

The spectacle of state included processions from the Doge's palace to the most prominent churches across the water, each designed by Andrea Palladio as a classical temple transformed for Christian celebration.

Palladio adopted the monumental simplicity of ancient Roman buildings to make a new kind of Christian church. And he created spaces of unprecedented clarity.

A very different light actually suffuses the paintings that Tintoretto created for the presbytery of Palladio's church. It is not that clear light of a measured and harmonious universe. It is a much more turbulent light, a light that emerges from darkness.

Jacopo Tintoretto created a symbolic drama with scenes from the old and new testaments. Across the altar, opposite the Descent of Manna from
Heaven, is his version of the Last Supper. Tintoretto organised the perspective so the paintings were best seen from the altar steps by worshippers taking the bread and wine of the mass.

Christ is shown distributing the bread that will be his body in the mass. Up above a great glory of angels, gossamer forms painted with broad sweeping strokes, articulates the darkness as light suffused. A holy presence. Down below dogs play, cats, animals. The hierarchy that is implicit in Tintoretto's painting, that is the hierarchy that runs from the base level of animals, of the dogs, to the level of the angels up above, is a hierarchy that is almost inherent in the painting of 16th century Venice. That is, a hierarchy from the material to the spiritual. This is almost a game that Tintoretto plays in many of his paintings. Giving us, as it were, footholds of substance, footholds of reality, just enough to convince us of the reality itself of the painting, and then he takes us into a flight and we follow. We follow because we've been given that first foundation that we believe in.
Tintoretto's spirituality is a spirituality that is predicated upon realising, making real what had been in effect symbolic. Painting, in other words, gives substance to the spirit.

Daniele Barbaro personified the Venetian union of the spiritual and the actual. He was an ordained churchman and a Venetian nobleman, a farmer and a classical scholar. Together with Palladio he translated an ancient treatise on architecture by Vitruvius, and together with Palladio and the painter Veronese he gave those ideas form in a villa on the Venetian mainland.

Andrea Palladio wrote:

"This fabric is in Maser, a castle belonging to the magnificent Barbaro brothers. There is a fountain behind the house with infinite ornaments of stucco and paintings. This fountain forms a small lake which serves for a fishpond. From this place the water runs into the kitchen. Thence waters the gardens, full of the most excellent fruits."

"City houses are certainly of great
convenience to a gentleman, but perhaps he will not reap less utility and consolation from the country house, where the remaining part of the time will be passed in seeing and adorning his own possessions. And by industry and the art of agriculture improving his estate. Where also, by the exercise which in a villa is commonly taken on foot and on horseback, the body will more easily preserve its strength and health. And finally, where the mind, fatigued by the agitations of the city, will be greatly restored and comforted and be able quietly to attend the studies of letters and contemplation."

DAVID ROSAND TO CAMERA
INT. VILLA BARBARO,
MASER

Paolo Veronese gave full pictorial expression to the harmonic values that informed Daniele Barbaro's conception of the ancient villa. Under the aegis of the ancient Olympian deities of the seasons, of the elements, he placed members of the Barbaro family, actual portraits. The landscapes evoke those of ancient Roman villa decoration, but at the same time they reached out into the surrounding territory of the Veneto to the actual Barbaro lands.
VILLA BARBARO, VERONESE

Veronese invented landscapes based on descriptions by ancient Roman writers, yet he placed among his fictional ruins and temples a portrait of the villa itself. And the Barbari and their servants took their place among the gods. The Barbaro family itself, the clan, its villa, its land, its own small world becomes a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm of the larger order.

PALLADIO'S PLAN OF THE VILLA

Palladio's plan for the villa very clearly marks each room with a number. The numbers themselves fall into very particular relationships, that is these are harmonic relationships, harmonic proportions, the numerical representation of musical harmony. Musical harmony seen metaphorically of course on the largest scale as the harmony of the universe. So that in effect the Barbaro family was living, we might say, quite literally in tune with the universe.

INT. VILLA BARBARO

So at the villa at Maser Veronese re-enacts the role of a painter from ancient times. Palladio becomes a new Vitruvius and Barbaro a new Pliny, a patron in the Roman tradition. But of course these scholarly games were being played.
out in a real world of political and economic change.

EXT. VILLA BARBARO

The stability of the Venetian empire was being undermined throughout the 16th century. By the late 1500's the landholdings of the Veneto had become more and more important to the Venetian nobility. They invested in land reclamation, which would feed them in the short term, but also protect them from the full consequences of a decline in their status as traders. As the century progressed, so did the threat to Venetian trade, from the Ottoman Turks in the East and the new empires in the West. The crisis in the church, Reformation and Counter Reformation, added a further burden of uncertainty. The gap between reality and rhetoric was widening. Yet, as the century moved to a close, the investment in the theatre of illusion, if anything, increased. The citizens of Vicenza, one of the leading cities of the Venetian mainland, commissioned Palladio to create an actual theatre in the imagined manner of the ancient Greeks. In the Teatro Olympico they demanded the erection of statues of themselves as lasting monuments to their dignity, wisdom and wealth. For their first

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production, of Oedipus the Tyrant by Sophocles, Giovanni Gabrielli attempted to compose the music of classical Greece and Veronese designed the costumes. Painting too became ever more theatrical, and in the case of Veronese's version of the Last Supper gave cause for a drama of power and religion in which the artist became the main character in a conflict with the inquisition.

Veronese was called before the Inquisition to answer questions about his painting of the Last Supper, a painting that was filled with all sorts of offensive details. There were to be found dwarfs, jesters, animals and perhaps above all, German soldiers. In the age of the Counter Reformation the presence of German soldiers could hardly be accepted with equanimity.

- "What is the significance of those armed men dressed as Germans, each with a halberd in his hand?"
- "We painters take the same license that poets and the jesters take. The two halberdiers are placed here so that they might be of service, because it seemed to me fitting, according to what I have been told, that the master of the house, who was great and rich, should have such servants."

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- "And that man dressed as a buffoon with a parrot on his wrist, for what purpose did you paint him on that canvas?"
- "For ornament, as is customary."
- "Just tell us, who are at the table of our Lord?"
- "The twelve apostles."
- "What is St. Peter, the first one, doing?"
- "Carving the lamb in order to pass it to the other end of the table."
- "What is the apostle next to him doing?"
- "He is holding a dish in order to receive what St. Peter will give him."
- "Who do you really believe was present at that supper?"
- "I believe one would find Christ with his apostles. But if in the picture there is some space to spare, I enrich it with figures according to the stories."
- "Did anyone commission you to paint Germans, buffoons or similar things?"
- "No, my lords. But I received the commission to decorate the picture as I saw fit. It is large and it seemed to me it could hold many figures."

The judgement of the Inquisition demanded that Veronese change the
content of his painting. Instead he changed the title. So, for subsequent centuries Veronese's Last Supper has been known as the **Feast at the house of Levi**. In this one instance we see the assertion of Venetian independence, the republic defying the Roman church. But also its vulnerability to an outside world of political and economic enemies.

**EXT. VENICE**

**MICHAEL WOOD TO CAMERA**

Floating on its islands and lagoons, Venice has always been different. The age of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese was its last period of political greatness, the 17th century would see the decline of its empire just as the economic centre of gravity of the West was beginning to shift away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic and the new seaborne empires of Antwerp and London. But in its image of itself Venice left behind a potent myth which endured, its loss of real power, the myth of the ideal state. For it came to personify the best kinds of government united in one body politic. And Venetian art is uniquely bound up with that history and that myth. Above all in its expression of the harmony between human beings, the state, nature, and of course the artist.
"Though siren-like on shore
and sea her face
Enchants all those whom once
she doth embrace;
Nor is there any can her
beauty prize
But he who hath beheld her
with his eyes:
These things display if
well observed
How she so long her maidenhead
preserved.
How for sound prudence she
still bore the bell;
Whence may be drawn this high
fetched parallel,
Venus and Venice are great
queens in their degree,
Venus is the queen of love,
Venice of polity.

THE END