# Renaissance Space

Leonardo da Vinci wrote in his journal: "There are three branches of perspective; the first deals with the reasons of the (apparent) diminution of objects as they recede from the eye, and is known as Diminishing Perspective.—The second contains the way in which colours vary as they recede from the eye. The third and last is concerned with the explanation of how the objects [in a picture] ought to be less finished in proportion as they are remote (and the names are as follows): Linear Perspective. The Perspective of Colour. The Perspective of Disappearance."

In his text, Leonardo summarizes a century of research aiming for the realistic representation of three dimensional space from the early discoveries of Filippo Brunelleschi until Leonardo's observation on nature.

**Masaccio's *Holy Trinity*** (1427) is based on the use of **central perspective** that allowed the artist to virtually open up the shallow wall and create the illusion of a niche and an altar.

Indeed, the vanishing point at the viewer's eye level let the figures become actual presence in space. The **architecture**, decorated with Corinthian and Ionic capitols, quotes Roman triumphal arches and acts like a monumental frame for God showing the crucified Jesus, whom the mother Mary is pointing out, at the side of the cross together with St. Johan the Baptist. When the fresco was executed, no actual coffered barrel vault had yet been constructed since the Romans.The kneeling patrons represent another important novelty, occupying the viewer's own space, in front of the picture plane, which is represented by the Ionic columns and the Corinthian pilasters. They are depicted at life size, rather than the more usual symbolic small scale, and with a noteworthy attention to realism and volume. God, Jesus, Mary and John look as human as they are. Several diverse interpretations of the fresco have been proposed. Most scholars have seen it as a traditional kind of image, intended for personal devotions and commemorations of the dead. The tomb consists of a sarcophagus on which lies a skeleton. "Carved" in the wall above the skeleton is an inscription: "IO FU[I] G[I]A QUEL CHE VOI S[I]ETE E QUEL CH['] I[O] SONO VO[I] A[N]C[OR] SARETE" (I once was what you are and what I am you also will be). This *memento mori* underlines that the painting was intended to serve as a lesson to the viewers. At the simplest level the imagery must have suggested to the 15th-century faithful that, since they all would die, only their faith in the Trinity and Christ's sacrifice would allow them to overcome their transitory existences.

Almost hundred years after the Holy Trinity was painted, **Leonardo's *Monna Lisa*** (oil on panel, 77 x 53 cm, Louvre, Paris) is a en excellent example of **aerial perspective**. The atmosphere and the depth of the landscape suggests distance trough a very sophisticate painting technique based on the overlapping of many transparent layers of color (*glazes*).

Here a useful tutorial on central perspective: http://www.olejarz.com/arted/perspective/index.html

Masaccio's Holy Trinity http://smarthistory.khanacademy.org/holy-trinity-santa-maria-novella-florence.html?searched=masaccio&highlight=ajaxSearch_highlight+ajaxSearch_highlight1

Leonardo's Monna Lisa http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/mona-lisa-%E2%80%93-portrait-lisa-gherardini-wife-francesco-del-giocondo