

Giorgione

Giorgione paintings were unrivaled in the portrayal of mood. Details of Giorgione's life and career are sparse and unreliable, but it appears that Giorgione was born in Castelfranco and that he studied under the Venetian painter Giovanni Bellini. His original name was probably Giorgio Barbarelli. No signed and dated paintings of his remain; most scholars accept a small core of paintings as Giorgione's, including the Castelfranco Altarpiece (1504, Castelfranco Veneto), Three Philosophers (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), and Tempest (Accademia, Venice). Other paintings are attributed to him on the basis of indirect evidence, although many of these attributions are still debated.

Most of Giorgione paintings consist of a figure or group of figures integrated in a broad surrounding landscape. Unlike earlier paintings in this mode, these paintings exhibit a new and highly lyrical use of light: The lighting is soft and hazy and is used to create mood rather than to define sharply the objects in the scene. He deliberately refused to make preparatory drawings, preferring instead to compose directly on the canvas; Giorgione felt that this led to a more atmospheric rendering and to more striking color effects.

Giorgione's innovations in subject matter were especially important in two areas: the landscape and the female nude. Prior to Giorgione, landscape scenes were taken from biblical, classical, or allegorical stories, but the Tempest appears to have no such source and stands on its own as a purely imaginative work. It gave birth to a revolution against the storytelling element in landscape painting and paved the way for later masters such as the French painter Claude Lorrain and the Dutch artist Rembrandt. The Sleeping Venus (1510, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden, Germany), attributed to Giorgione, pictures a reclining nude and is one of the first modern paintings in which the female figure is the principal and only subject of the painting. It inaugurated the nude in a landscape setting as one of the great themes of European art and led directly to the work of artists such as the Venetian painter Titian and the Flemish master Peter Paul Rubens.

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