

# Raphael's triumph of galatea from 1512



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Art is interesting because it is simultaneously distinct and contextual: great art stands on its own, but it also stands in the shadow of that which has come before, and serves as the guiding light to cast the shadows of that which will come after it. Two paintings which share a number of similarities and differences are Raphael's Triumph of Galatea from 1512 and Bronzino's Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time from 1546. Each work concentrates on representing mythological characters and events, and concerns itself with notions of love.

However, Raphael's work represents love and beauty as archetypal, more abstract concepts, where Bronzino's work has achieved both fame and infamy for its sexual overtones, emphasizing erotic love. Raphael's painting is a fresco, and uses more washed-out colors to represent the dream-like aspect of the events: even as Galatea is on the cusp of divination, the world becomes less real to her, and more dream-like, which is what the painting attempts to emphasize.

Bronzino's work emphasizes flesh-colors to bring out the striking nudity of its characters, as well as the barely-concealed sexual nature of the proceedings. Bronzino draws the eye to the sexual proceedings between Cupid and Venus by putting Venus in the foreground, which contrasts quite well with Raphael's focus on the nymph: while she is centered and obviously the focus of the work (the eyes are inevitably drawn to her), but she is drawn to the same scale (relative to the viewer) as the other mythological figures of the work.

Additionally, while each work uses mythological characters, each does so to a very different end: in focusing on ascension to divinity, Raphael

concentrates on this event as the culmination of earthly beauty becoming transcendent...something to which even we mere mortals can aspire. By contrast, Bronzino's work serves an allegorical function: the borderline incestuous events that are being enacted by Venus and Cupid are being overseen by Folly (looking pleased, as an unsubtle indicator that their action is a foolish one) and a horrified Father Time.

Other characters are in similar "reaction shots" of shock and horror. While both Raphael and Bronzino were Italian, their works were products of very different cultural movements. The allegorical art of Bronzino is the textbook ideal of Mannerism: it is intellectual and thought-provoking while at the same time drawing attention to the artificial nature of what is being portrayed.

Arguably, such works function more as spectacle than art, as part of the work's power lies not within the work itself, but in the reaction it engenders from others. Raphael, of course, epitomized the use of the fresco: being painted to complement the opulence of a home, it focuses on the aspects that the rich commissioner wishes to see in himself (the intersection between earthly existence and spiritual divinity is, of course, featured in the home of someone who earnestly hopes their earthly wealth can be tempered by spiritual riches).

Obviously, Raphael and Bronzino utilized different mediums in different time periods to represent different events. However, it is striking how, regarding subject matter, each one approached things so differently. Raphael treated the mythological characters with an almost historical focus, and chose to highlight the spirituality and divinity of a single mythological event.

Bronzino's work takes on the nature of a grotesque hypothetical, and serves to remind cultured art aficionados that the decadence of the mythological characters that they so love is nothing to be admired or emulated. Each artist, however, was concerned with what beauty was, whether that answer is spiritual or simple practical: whether it concerns transcendent godly love or simple earthly passion. In the debate between these two points of view, the substance of their art lives forever.