

History

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Art, Plague and Fear

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They were given power over the fourth part of the earth to exterminate with the sword, with hunger, with the plague and with the fairs of the earth.
Revelation VI, 1-8

Human frailty is one of the omnipresent themes in the art of any time and of any people, and therefore with it the vicissitudes of human life which also include disease and death. Therefore, whether it is a way to exorcise it, to document it or more simply because through the representation of physical evil, of the disease, the artist can somehow approach it unharmed, privileged spectator of a tragic moment that brings with it on the same level pain anyone in the same way. Illness, especially the dreaded plague makes no distinction between prin-

ces, prelates and simple commoners, treating everyone with the same regard. Chronically recurrent disease of the plague, will generate a state of anxiety that will spread in Europe for at least three hundred years, eventually becoming a commonplace of human fear.

We then try to give an image to this invisible enemy, and here is where painting intervenes, with its ability to concretize, to coagulate something that is impregnable, rarefied as a disease, in a painting. It is the power of pictorial art, making visible what otherwise would not be. And seeing the “evil”, in this case the plague, means knowing it and perhaps even being able to dominate it. So it is above all the painters from the Middle Ages onwards to render the “plagues” in images, with the representation of emphasized bodies that soften the

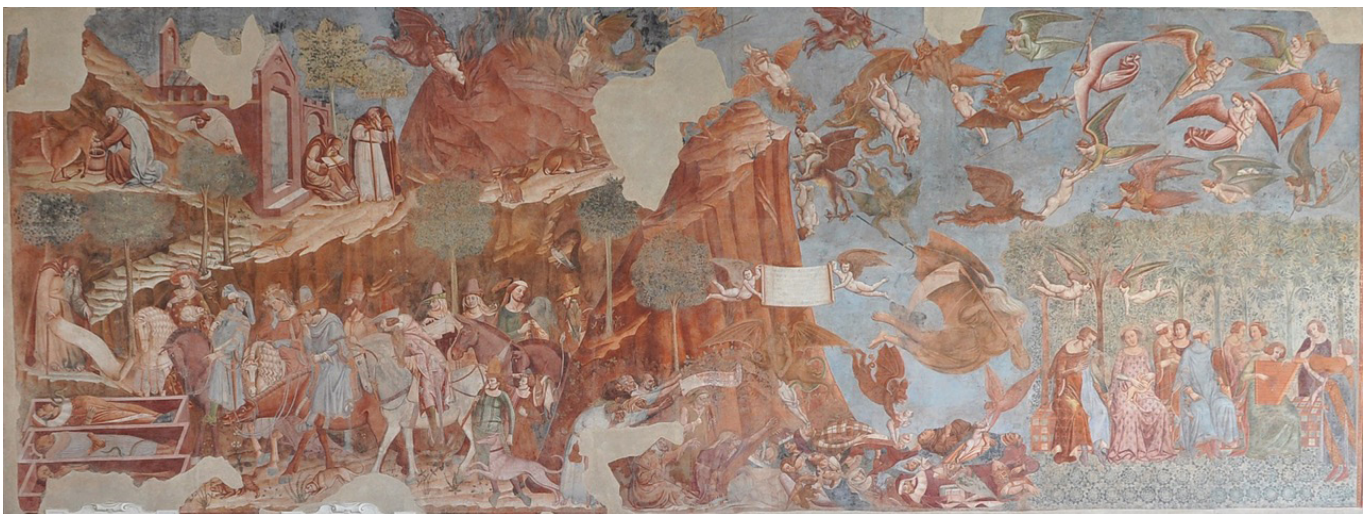


Figure 1: The Triumph of Death, fresco, Buonamico Buffalmacco, 1336-41 5.6 x 15.0 m, south-east wall of the Camposanto of Pisa.



Figure 2: The Plague, Gaetano Zummo, 1690, polychrome wax, 76 × 93.5 × 47.8 cm, La Specola Museum, Florence.

cities or clouds that, moving from one country to another, sow death as they pass. It is also the fault of the stars which astrologically cause the deadly contagion. There is therefore a conspicuous source of iconographic material that shows the suddenness of the attack of the disease, its striking in an undifferentiated manner with an obscene death, often deprived of the usual funeral rituals.

We also observe, at least in some artists, more or less veiled, a curious look at the limit of morbidity, on body swellings, on sores, pustules and ulcerative wounds which they sometimes almost enjoy depicting, insisting on them as a stigma of the bad and therefore, ultimately of the demonic. Disease, Plague or other always comes from Hell, even if someone may consider it a divine punishment for the sins of humanity, the disease, the younger sister of Death is, without any doubt, of infernal origin, and not by chance it joins often at the work of the Witches¹.

Hence the idea of a “poisoning” emerges: an extreme attempt to give a face to the unknown but ubiquitous and deadly enemy by finding him in the greaser, the stranger or the witch, who has come to poison the city. The days of the plague are presented as an open-air theater that has the city as its stage and where the actors are sick humans, contemplated in their death by those who are immune.

But this imaginary, which is not often the result of mere imagination, but of a careful look at the reality of the time, is not only relegated to past centuries, to the Middle Ages and especially to the Renaissance and the Baroque age, but we also find it, changed in form but no less disturbing in some contemporary works. Man

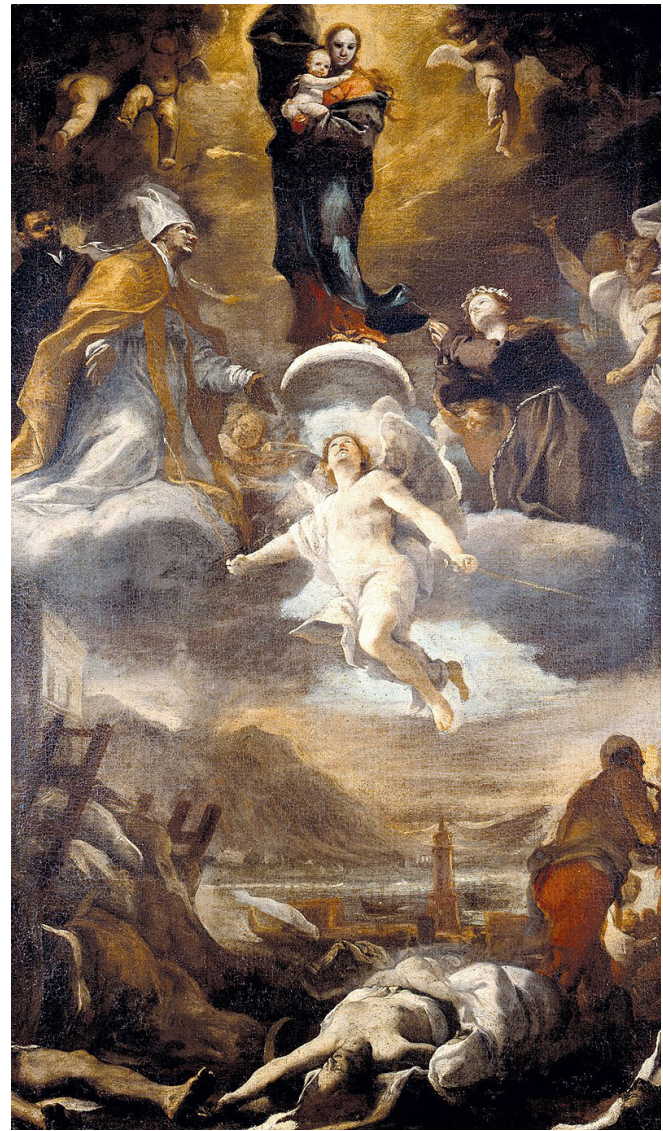


Figure 3: Fresco of Porta S. Gennaro, The plague of Naples, Mattia Preti, 1657-1659, Porta S. Gennaro, Naples.

changes over the centuries, it is true, but very slowly, and at the bottom of his soul he fears, trembling, with the same fears of his ancestors gathered around a bonfire to protect himself from the night beasts.

Today, this ancient theme has always coexisted with human life: the epidemic, or for those who prefer the most apocalyptic Pandemic, has reappeared in our lives. Expelled from the collective imagination in recent decades, especially if seen in such an all-pervading way in our country, the disease has reappeared unexpectedly, presenting itself at the door of our homes as an uninvited and unwelcome guest. Only in catastrophic movies, in various forms and formulas, the danger of a new

plague was considered, in a flood of anthropophagous zombies, vampires and viruses from deep space².

However, not being able to say yet how this Coronavirus, also known as Covid 19, will affect the artistic creativity of the 21st century, we will limit ourselves to taking into consideration how similar events, indeed certainly much more dramatic than ours, have affected the art of the past, starting from one of the best known paintings that deal - also but not only - with this theme: *The Triumph of Death* by Pieter Brueghel the Elder³, an oil on panel painted in around 1562 and which is currently preserved in the Prado Museum in Madrid.

The work shows the spectator precisely the triumph of Death over the things of our world, herself queen, followed on a reddish horse by an army of living skeletons, in a real hymn that refers to the macabre dances, to the four knights of the Apocalypse and resurrection of the dead.

Against the background of Brueghel's painting, there is a barren, burnt and devastated landscape in which scenes of destruction are still taking place that do not spare any social class and there is manifested the violent and unstoppable action of Death that brutally annihila-

tes humanity, proving itself impartial and ruthless and that arrives and dominates everything by killing men in various ways, in an allegory of war, pestilence and human misery. The warm tones of the oil colors used by the artist evoke an arid and infernal atmosphere in which men face the transition with the most varied moods: with surprise, dismay, resignation and even in the throes of a vain rebellion.

An immense terror and a chilling silence - interrupted only by the echoing of a distant bell - emanate from the painting. In front of the viewer, a parched and sunless world extends, immersed in a twilight whose pale light is enlivened only by the funeral reverberation of the fires. It is not the end of the world that is represented, but the conquest of life by death, so that, in a certain sense, a way of being is replaced by another form of existence.

The artist depicts Death as a skeleton riding an emaciated horse that, with its scythe, kills anyone who crosses its path, just like the plague that decimated entire European populations. And Brueghel represents his fear, while in the distance we see men hanged, perhaps



Figure 4: The Triumph of Death, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, 1562, oil on panel, 117 × 162 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid.



Figure 5: The Plague, Arnold Böcklin, 1898, tempera, 149.5 cm x 104.5 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

unjustly: they are some Jews accused of causing the serious epidemic.

The painting is therefore like a story that unfolds before the eyes of the viewer in numerous small episodes, in which Death triumphs over man.

The landscape of Brueghel takes on deforming and unreal characters in this picture: in a desolate land, interspersed with dying trees and macabre hangings, the final struggle of men against the Army of Death takes place, composed of disturbing skeletons wrapped in white shrouds. The outcome of the chaotic battle is already decided; the last alive are surrounded by the funeral form, with no possibility of escape. The horizon is obscured by an intense and black smoke, coming from the bonfires of the Hell.

Brueghel probably had the opportunity to learn originally the macabre theme from the fifteenth-century frescoes that stood on the south-facing wall of Palazzo Sclafani in Palermo and which bear the same title as his painting. Today the Palermo fresco has been divided into four portions and repositioned at the National Gallery of Palazzo Abatellis, after having miraculously survived the bombings of the last World War. Again, therefore, preceding Brueghel's masterful brush, Death



Figure 6: St Mark on the throne or St Mark and the Saints, oil on board, Tiziano Vecellio, around 1510-1511, Santa Maria della Salute, Venice.

brings with it various forms of destruction, and among them, not least the pestilence, fatal and unstoppable.

However, even before Brueghel the Elder and the Sicilian frescoes, the theme of the Triumph of Death is found already between 1336 and 1341 in the Camposanto of Pisa, executed by Buonamico Buffalmacco⁴. The fourteenth-century painter is remembered as the protagonist of some short stories by Giovanni Boccaccio in his Decameron and in this work the topic of pestilence returns with the usual paraphernalia of deaths between priests, merchants and nobles whose souls are disputed between angels and demons and on which the signs of putrefaction are already manifesting.

Still in the sixteenth century, the Medici Florence was devastated by the plague in the year of the Lord 1523.

The city is in its full splendor of beauty, culture and art, which make it one of the nerve centers of Europe, and therefore of the world of that time, when sudden, pestilence comes within its walls. Who can leave the town as quickly as possible, seeking refuge elsewhere and one of them is Jacopo Pontormo⁵, who finds shelter from the disease in the Certosa del Galluzzo, where he will spend the most peaceful period of his life constantly

marked by a perennial melancholy. Influenced by the visions of Albrecht Dürer⁶, in those days Pontormo frescoed his cycle called *Stories of the Passion* in the large cloister of the Certosa, but he is not alone, escaping from the plague with him there is also the student and friend Agnolo Bronzino⁷. In that sad predicament instead Jacopo finds himself and discovers the true essence of his life. The plague was therefore benevolent with him, transforming his forced exile into a rediscovery of freedom and inner peace.

Andrea del Sarto⁸ also sought refuge from the black disease, but he did so by going further away from Florence. Thus, one of the greatest mannerists, one of the most eccentric, unprejudiced and unconventional artists who followed the school of the “modern way”, formed in the climate of intellectual freedom of the republic governed by Pier Soderini⁹, sheltered in the monastery of Luco in Mugello, for who paints an altarpiece depicting the body of the dead Christ, naked abandoned on a white sheet that covers the sepulchral stone. Immediately under the lifeless body of Jesus, a mass chalice is painted covered with a paten, on which stands the consecrated host. The death of Christ is therefore the source of eternal life, this is the clear meaning of the work created precisely during the epidemic. Having escaped from the disease of 1523, Andrea Del Sarto, for a mocking joke of fate, however, will die during the subsequent wave of plague that will hit the City of the Lily in 1530.

In those same years, another city among the richest and most important of the peninsula, Venice, the dogale and most peaceful, placed under the aegis of the Evangelist Mark and his winged lion, would be violently affected by the epidemic, perhaps facilitated in this from being that golden gateway to the sea that faces East and West. Perhaps, however, precisely for this reason, the lagoon city was also the first to have a real prevention against diseases, even if this did not preserve it from the epidemic of 1510, during which, once again and as always, the works of art related to miraculous healing grew considerably in number.

In this particular event there is the great ex voto, created by Tiziano Vecellio¹⁰ for the church of Santo Spirito in Isola, entitled *San Marco and the Saints* with good probability commissioned by the Doge himself and by the Senate of the Republic to commemorate the end of the plague.

The composition of the painting follows an invisible design in the form of a pyramid, whose summit is San Marco, or Venice itself, while at the base there are the saints Cosma and Damiano - both doctors who treated the sick without compensation - caught in the act of indicating the wounds of San Rocco and San Sebastiano, the latter always invoked to obtain healing from the plague. The face of San Marco was deliberately painted in the shade by Titian, to remember the sad event that hit the lagoon.



Figure 7: San Rocco heals the plague victims, Jacopo Tintoretto, 1549, 307 × 673 cm, Church of San Rocco, Venice



Figure 8: Yield of Grace after the plague of Naples, Micco Spadaro, 1657, National Museum of San Martino, Naples.



Figure 9: The Triumph of Death, unknown author, around 1446, detached fresco, 600 × 642 cm, regional gallery of Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo.

Today the painting is in the Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute, also built after 1630 to dissolve the vow of having defended the city from the plague of that time.

Also in the city of Leone di San Marco, Jacopo Robusti¹¹, better known as Il Tintoretto, the last of the great Venetian painters of the Renaissance, in just over a decade will paint over fifty sacred canvases for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, an ancient building that became the seat of the school of the brotherhood dedicated to the saint revered for his talents as a thaumaturge. One of these paintings, painted in 1549 for the presbytery of the church annexed to the school, is entitled *San Rocco heals the plague*, painted in oil, it presents in a nocturnal atmosphere, some plague victims who turn their suffering gaze towards the saint by impetrating his Help.

Much further south, in beautiful Sicily, a plague epidemic spread and claimed countless victims in Palermo in 1575. It was the Flemish painter Simone de Wobreck¹²



Figure 10: San Rocco and the victims of the plague, Simone de Wobreck, 1576, oil on panel, 200 x 300 cm, S. Cosma e Damiano, Palermo.

who painted it for what was then the homonymous church today rededicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, showing also San Rocco and the plague victims. In this work, the epidemic is represented as a divine punishment for the sins committed by humanity: At the top, God himself was painted, together with the Christ and the Virgin; the first bearing the signs of the Passion and finally the saints Rocco, Sebastiano, Cristina and Ninfa, who ask them for the grace of the salvation of the people. On the lower part, you can see the procession of the crucifix of Cristo Chiaromonte of the Cathedral, with all the population, among whose people you can recognize the confreres of the Compagnia dei Bianchi.

Instead in alemannic lands, more precisely in Alsace, in Colmar, the work is kept, considered the masterpiece of Matthias Grünewald¹³, the *Polyptych of Isenheim*, painted between the year 1512 and 1516, today at the Musée d'Unterlinden.

This singular “altar machine”, or altarpiece, if you like, is able to offer the viewer three different configurations, but it is only the third that we will analyze, or that relating to the *Temptations of Saint Anthony*.

In a nightmare scenario, the anchorit of the Egyptian desert is subjected to the violence of some demons with horrible and obscene forms that attack him, beating him and mocking him in every way.

However, the most attentive observer will notice a character painted in the lower left corner. At the feet of the hermit saint, on a cartouche we read the Latin phrase “*Ubi eras, Bone Jhesu, ubi eras, quare non affuisti ut sanares vulnera mea?*” or “Where were you or good Jesus, where were you and why didn’t you come to heal my wounds?”. The character of the painting remains shrouded in mystery, and therefore even more disturbing is his presence, but the vulnerable refers to the fact that in the vicinity of Isenheim there existed at that time, a monastery of monks faithful to the Antonian rule¹⁴, whose main task was assistance to Ergotism¹⁵ patients, also known as Fire of Saint Anthony¹⁶, but which at the time did not correspond to the disease known by us with the same name and which is actually *Herpes Zoster*¹⁷. The Fire of Sant’Antonio, or even of San Marziale, of the medieval and later ages, is proba-

bly a set of various ulcerative pathologies that led those who had been affected, to gangrene and from there to a slow and painful death.

Matthias Grünewald was able to reproduce the effects of this disease in such a detailed way, as he could freely access the mortuary of the convent and therefore see with his own eyes the devastating effects of evil on the patients that the monks, with the blue Tau sewn on the habit, they tried to heal by soothing their wounds with lard and feeding them with uncontaminated bread.

The golden age of the Renaissance vanishes, fading into the twisted darkness of the Baroque, in a time much darker than the previous ones and yet still affected by the scourge of the diseases, as happens in Naples in 1656, and Mattia Preti¹⁸ will paint its terrible and bloody atmosphere in his work *The plague of Naples*. Another neapolitan painter, Micco Spadaro¹⁹, will also create a votive picture entitled *Yield of Grace after the plague of Naples* to thank the saints for ending the plague. The rendering of these paintings is documentary, real, no longer immersed in a fantastic context as previously happened. The classic example of this different approach, which characterizes the art of the seventeenth century, is that of the works of Gaetano Zummo²⁰, now exhibited at the Museo della Specola in Florence,



Figure 11: The Plague of Azoth, Nicolas Poussin, 1631, oil on canvas, 148x198 cm, Louvre Museum, Paris.



Figure 12: The Family, Egon Schiele, 1918, oil on canvas, 152.5 × 162.5 cm, Österreichische Galerie Belvedere.

considered not by chance the founder of the renowned Florentine anatomical school.

Of Syracusan origin, Zummo was formed by studying the bodies in the morgues to become the best wax doctor in all of Europe. His most famous work is *La Peste*, probably created in Naples in the year 1690 on the still close memory of the plague of 1656.

The three-dimensional scene created by the artist is simply infernal, with bodies of living and dead tangled together in a chaotic and shapeless mass. Corpses in an advanced state of decomposition are clinging to those who are about to die, in a sort of obscene, hideous multiple embrace, in which bodies corroded by putrefaction and others painfully in agony are intertwined. In the midst of this macabre bedlam, a monk with a hidden face, with superhuman strength, carries the ulcerated bodies towards the funeral pyre that stands out in the background.

Also in the seventeenth century, Nicolas Poussin²¹, also buried in Rome in the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, will perform in 1631 a work entitled *The plague of Azoth*, today in the Louvre, for a nobleman from Palermo, such as Fabrizio Valguarnera, but then purchased by Cardinal Richelieu for his own art collection from which he finally came to that of Louis XIV.

The painting depicts a biblical passage taken from the first book of Samuel, in which God strikes the Phi



Figure 13: The Plague, Gaetano Zummo, 1690, polychrome wax, 76 × 93.5 × 47.8 cm, La Specola Museum, Florence.

listines, guilty of having stolen the Ark of the Covenant from the chosen people, with a terrible plague. Also in this case, an atmosphere of tragedy envelops everything. The ruins of the temple of the god Dagon²², the Ark and other architectural vestiges, are the backdrop for people fleeing the bodies of the plague scattered everywhere on the ground, between mice and the smell of putrefaction. Probably the artist had the opportunity to see the epidemic that killed Milan the year before and was shocked to such an extent that he could reproduce that gloomy and oppressive atmosphere on the canvas.

However the disease will certainly not end with the *Siglo de Oro*, it will simply take other forms, mutant, but always faithful to its man living in this world and here in the field of pictorial art we find it with *La Peste*, a 1898 painting executed in tempera by the Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin²³, one of the greatest exponents of German symbolism, today on display at the Kunstmuseum in Basel.

The work depicts Böcklin's obsessive fear of the apocalyptic nightmares of War, Death and Pestilence which in this case is depicted by a parched skeleton who rides a fantastic and monstrous creature, with membranous wings like those of bats, while fly over a medieval-looking city. The entire pictorial composition is rendered in a tone of acid green and bruise, as if to recall the swollen aspect of the decomposition of the meat.



Figure 14: Isenheim Altarpiece or Isenheim Polyptych, Matthias Grünewald, 1512-1516, oil and tempera on panel, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, Alsace.

Twenty years later, it will be the turn of the Austrian Egon Schiele²⁴ to deal with the theme of pandemic and fatal disease, with his painting *The Family*, dated 1918 and today exhibited at the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in Vienna. One of his last works in which he depicts himself, with his wife and their child in a future projection, since his wife Edith, while he was painting, was in the sixth month of pregnancy.

The terrible flu disease called “The Spanish”²⁵ raged throughout Europe, which killed the world popu-

lation causing the death of fifty million people in a few months, just before the end of the Great War.

The happy scene hoped for by Schiele in his auspicious painting will not take place, as Edith, still with their baby in her lap, will die of that terrible disease on October 28, 1918. Her husband Egon will follow her on October 31, also killed by the pneumonia caused by the pandemic flu virus.

Since then, the step of Time and that taken by humanity, even if rapid, has been too short for substantial changes to take place in the relationship between man, art and social disease, so it is difficult for us to imagine in what way and with what aspects the representation of the epidemic will mark our future in the image, the only immediate example, almost a snapshot is what appears in these days on social media where someone with a fine irony, is having fun to modify the works of art considered iconic, such as Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* for example or *The girl with a pearl earring* by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn and other famous ones like these, making them wear masks and gloves... So here, this strange technological and postmodern man of the contemporary world of the first twenty years of the new century, reacts to the viral attack no longer by creating art, albeit with an apotropaic, devotional or documentary purpose, but with a u this is a digital virality that



Figure 15: The Plague, Gaetano Zummo, 1690, polychrome wax, 76 × 93.5 × 47.8 cm, La Specola Museum, Florence.

perhaps tries, with a bitter laugh, to exorcise the evil, of which it is still afraid, as always.

Endnotes

- 1 Witches are in fact attributed with the powers of evil that also entail the ability to spread diseases thanks to their servitude with the devil, therefore they are accused of poisoning the wells, causing famines and deaths of cattle as well as spreading the infection. All activities punished with being put to death at the stake.
- 2 There are many films that have as a theme a global epidemic infection, among the many we want to remember some of them, for example Paul W.S.'s *Resident Evil*. Anderson, *28 days later* by Danny Boyle, Terry Gilliam's *The 12 Monkeys Army*, John Hillcoat's *The Road*, Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion*, *I am legend* of Francis Lawrence, remake of *The Last Man on Earth* with Vincent Price directed by Italian Ubaldo Ragona and *The city will be destroyed at the dawn* of George A. Romero.
- 3 Pieter Brueghel (Breda, c. 1525/1530 - Brussels, 5 September 1569), was one of the greatest Dutch Renaissance painters, generally referred to as the Elder, to distinguish him from his eldest son, Pieter Bruegel the Younger. The information in our possession on the life of Bruegel is poor, incomplete, and sometimes contradictory because, for example, the exact date and place of birth, they are still unknown and therefore it is known only that in 1551 Brueghel is mentioned for the first time in writing, when he joined the Guild of San Luca in Antwerp qualifying as a master.
- 4 Buonamico di Martino, called Buffalmacco (Florence, about 1262 - 1340), was a Florentine painter, a prominent representative of Gothic painting in Tuscany in the first half of the fourteenth century. Long believed to be only a protagonist of mocking novels of the Decameron, the most recent research has attributed to him the frescoes of the Camposanto of Pisa.
- 5 Jacopo Carucci, better known as Jacopo da Pontormo or more simply Pontormo (Pontorme, 24 May 1494 - Florence, 1 January 1557), was a Florentine painter of early Mannerism. Student of Andrea del Sarto, together with Rosso Fiorentino, he was in turn a master of other artists including Bronzino.
- 6 Albrecht Dürer (Nuremberg, May 21, 1471 - Nuremberg, April 6, 1528), was a German painter, engraver, mathematician and treatise writer, considered the greatest exponent of Renaissance painting in his country. In Venice the artist came into contact with neo-Platonic and therefore esoteric environments that initiated him to hermetic symbols.
- 7 Agnolo di Cosimo, better known as Agnolo Bronzino or simply the Bronzino (Monticelli of Florence, 17 November 1503 - Florence, 23 November 1572), a pupil of Pontormo, lived all his life in Florence at the court of Cosimo I de' Medici. He was among the most refined portrait painters of the early Mannerism, of religious and allegorical subjects.
- 8 Andrea del Sarto, pseudonym of Andrea d'Agnolo di Francesco di Luca di Paolo del Migliore Vannucchi (Florence, 16 July 1486 - Florence, 29 September 1530), was a Florentine painter with a great executive formality and master of Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino, but he was less bold and controversial than they were.
- 9 Pier Soderini (Florence, 18 May 1450 - Rome, 13 June 1522), was a gonfalonier for life in Florence from 1502, a position he maintained only until 1512, coming from an ancient Florentine family who had given many political figures to the city, he was responsible for the decoration of the Salone dei Cinquecento in Palazzo Vecchio, commissioned to the two greatest Florentine artists of the time: Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti.
- 10 Tiziano Vecellio (Pieve di Cadore, 1488/1490 - Venice, 27 August 1576), was the most important painter of the Venetian Republic and an exponent of the Venetian school.
- 11 Jacopo Robusti or perhaps Jacopo Comin, known as Tintoretto (Venice, September or October 1518 - Venice, May 31, 1594), was a painter of the Republic of Venice and one of the greatest exponents of Venetian painting and Mannerist art in general. The nickname derives from his paternal profession, a textile dyer, he was also nicknamed "The furious" or "The terrible" for his character and for the dramatic nature of the perspective and the light that made him believe by critics an anticipator of Baroque art.
- 12 Simone De Wobreck (Haarlem, around 1557 - Palermo, around 1587), was a Flemish painter active in Sicily for more than thirty years, so much so that he was more connected to that island than to Holland.
- 13 Mathis Gothart Nithart, better known as Matthias Grünewald (Würzburg, about 1480 - Halle, 31 August 1528), is one of the greatest and most original German painters, for the visionary drama of his paintings. Doubts about his date of birth and the certain lack of documents also make Grünewald's artistic training problematic. It is not known who his teacher was either.
- 14 In the Middle Ages a religious order arose dedicated exclusively to the care of Ergotism sufferers, known as the regu-

lar canons of Saint Anthony of Vienne which in 1774 was incorporated into the Order of Malta.

- 15 Ergotism would be an intoxication from ergot or the spur of the rooster, in French, already known in medieval times with the name of “Saint Anthony’s Fire” or also “sacred fire” or with the more courtly term of “evil of ardent” up to the most fearsome “Flames of Satan”. The ergot, or *sclerotium*, is horned rye.
- 16 The Fire of Saint Anthony owes its singular appellation to the fact that Saint Anthony the Abbot was invoked for his recovery. Around the remains and relics of the saint, a real thaumaturgical cult arose in 12th century France, which changed it into the unique eponym of the disease, while other saints and the Virgin Mary herself, continued to be invoked as healers.
- 17 *Herpes zoster*, commonly called St. Anthony’s Fire, is a viral disease of the skin and nerve endings, caused by the childhood chicken pox virus. Its name derives from the greek words, “snake” and “belt”, which synthetically describe the painful disease, like a fire snake placed inside the body, which sometimes produces a painful rash with blisters, usually in a belt-like strip.
- 18 Mattia Preti (Taverna, 25 February 1613 - Valletta, 3 January 1699), was a Neapolitan painter also known as “The Calabrian Knight” because he was born in Calabria and later as a Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, by Pope Urban VIII in Rome. Active on the Italian peninsula and on the island of Malta, he was one of the most important representatives of seventeenth-century Neapolitan painting.
- 19 Domenico Gargiulo, known as Micco Spadaro as the son of a sword maker (Naples, 1609/1612 - 1675), was a Baroque painter, active above all in Naples as a landscape painter and known above all for having documented many tragic events in his city such as the insurrection of Masaniello.
- 20 Gaetano Giulio Zumbo, or Zummo (Syracuse, 1656 - Paris, 22 December 1701), was a Sicilian abbot who became famous in the seventeenth century for his works in waxwork and for his nativity scene. The information about this artist trained at the Jesuits and in Bologna, a famous anatomical study center, is scarce and fragmentary.
- 21 Nicolas Poussin (Les Andelys, 15 June 1594 - Rome, 19 November 1665), was a french painter of classical approach who came to Italy in 1624, under the protection of Cardinal Barberini, a wealthy collector and patron and thanks

to his friend the poet Giambattista Marino became the fashionable painter of many wealthy roman families.

- 22 Dagon is an important Mesopotamian deity of the Canaanite fertility with the appearance of a bearded man with the lower part of the fish body, adopted as the main deity by the Philistines, in the *Bible* an episode is mentioned in which the statue of Dagon collapses before the Ark of the Covenant in the Philistine city of Ashdod. In demonology texts, Dagon is the name of a second level demon and finally a supernatural entity with that name appears, in a novel by Howard Phillips Lovecraft, published in the magazine *Weird Tales* in 1923.
- 23 Arnold Böcklin (Basel, 16 October 1827 - San Domenico di Fiesole, 16 January 1901) was a Swiss painter, one of the main exponents of German Symbolism, but who spent most of his life in Rome and Italy, drinking from art Renaissance in the country.
- 24 Egon Leon Adolf Schiele, better known as Egon Schiele (Tulln an der Donau, 12 June 1890 - Vienna, 31 October 1918), was an Austrian painter and engraver who was a pupil of Gustav Klimt. Schiele was the absolute exponent of early expressionism and in particular in the Viennese Secession movement; early talent, he dies at the age of twenty-eight.
- 25 The flu commonly referred to as “Spanish” or also as “The Great Flu” was an unusually fatal flu pandemic that killed tens of millions of people around the world between 1918 and 1920 after infecting nearly five hundred million people, including inhabitants of some remote islands of the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Ocean, ending up causing the death of fifty million people out of a world population of about two billion. This fact made it considered the most serious form of pandemic in the history of mankind, as it made many more victims of the XIV century black plague, even among robust young adults and not, as usually happens, with weaker elderly people.
One of the causes of death of the Spaniard was a rapid progressive respiratory failure whose viral aggression perhaps was enhanced by some particular circumstances such as war, malnutrition, or perhaps the same overcrowded hospitals with widespread poor hygiene.
The flu was given the name “Spanish” because the first to give official news were the Spanish newspapers which, not being involved in the censorship of the Great War, spoke freely of it, contrary to what happened in the belligerent countries where the rapid spread of the disease was hidden from the press, which described it as an epidemic limited to Spain.