

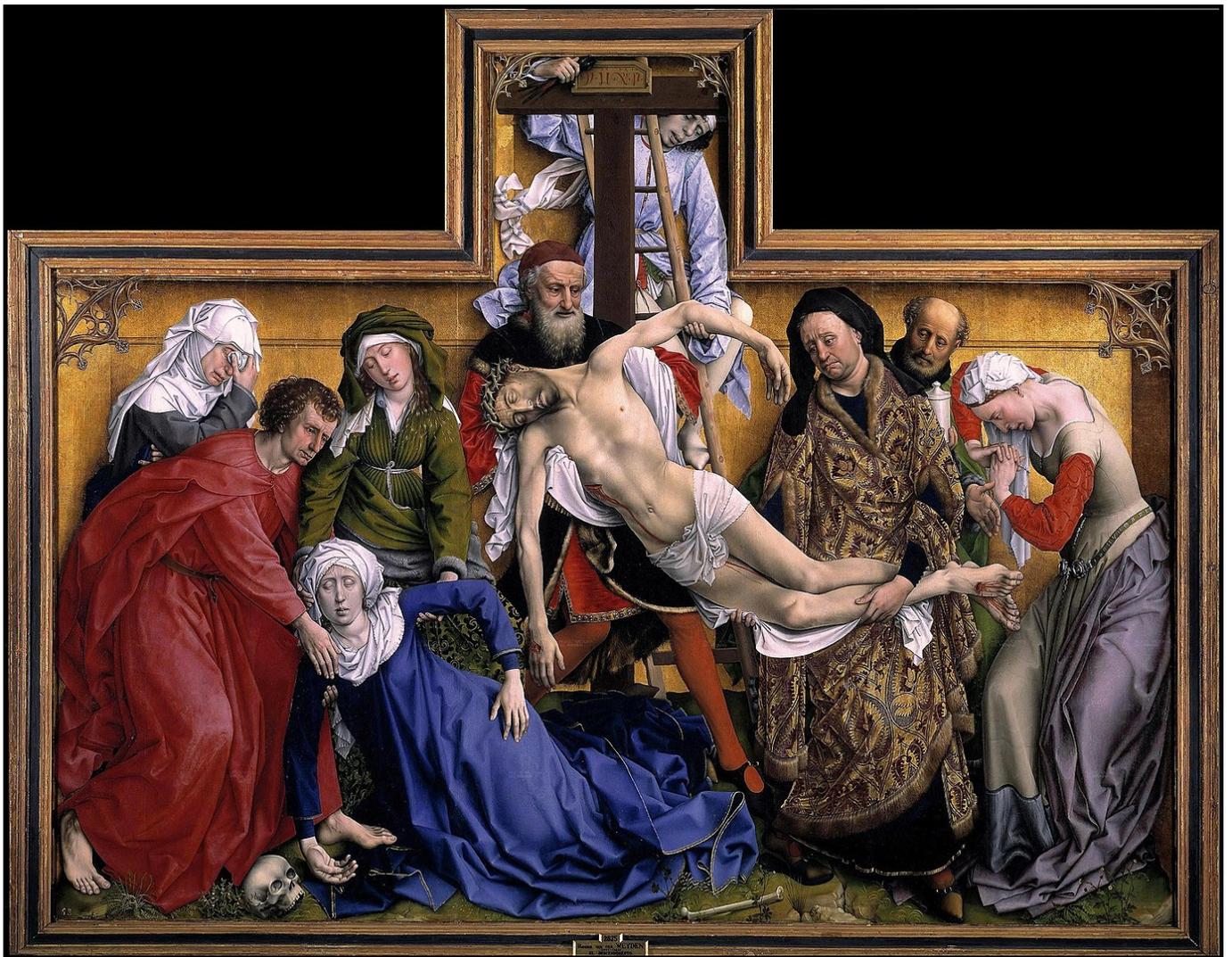
## Art Agency, Partners

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## The Dream Team

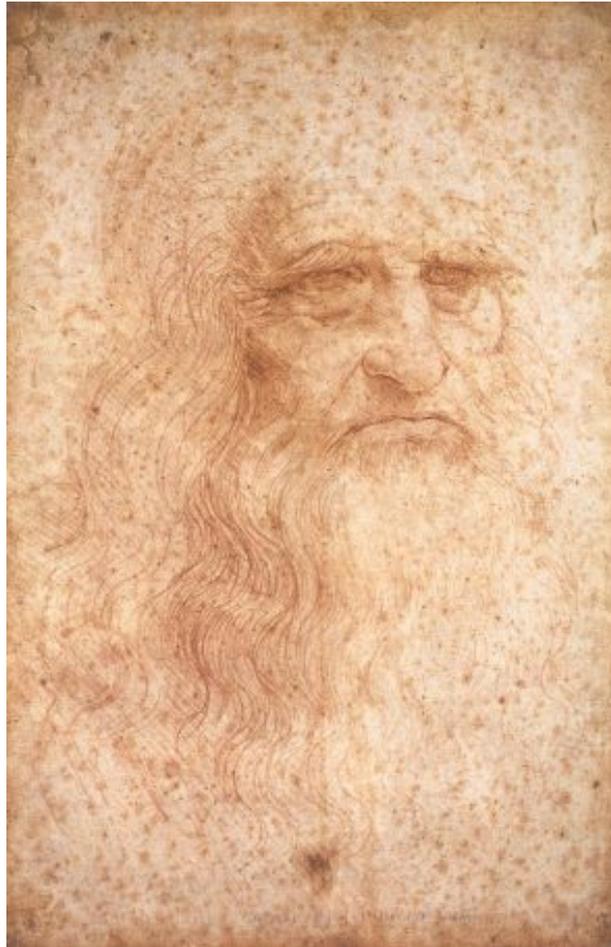
### My all-time top ten artists



Rogier van der Weyden, *The Descent from the Cross* (c. 1435). Museo del Prado, Madrid

By Allan Schwartzman

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Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of Man in Red Chalk* (c.1512)

No Frieze or Fiac for me this year (though more on that [elsewhere in this issue](#)). I have been thinking about the bigger picture, in part through a game of fantasy which, most recently, we played in Brazil. There are many variations on it. The slant of the last version of it was: if you could live with works of art by your favorite artists, who would the top ten be? And so here goes my most recent version, mostly in chronological order.

**Rogier van der Weyden.** Northern Renaissance painting has always spoken to me more than the Italian. I think it's that combination of grace and human emotion—felt more than spoken—and the jewel scale of so many of its masterworks, that has always drawn me in, with an intimacy in which I lose sense of time and scale. I am *in* the pictures, no matter how improbable that may sound. I might just as easily have listed [Jan van Eyck](#), [Hugo van der Goes](#), or [Hans Memling](#), but for me Rogier is perfection.

I could say a lot of the same for why **Piero della Francesca** is next on my list. There are so many genius artists of the Italian Renaissance but, as with van der Weyden, Piero speaks to me in a way that no other artist could. I have never been able to adequately describe that enigmatic aura of space and selfhood, but I believe I have experienced it, or at least would find solace in that psychological world.



Talk about enigma! Giorgione, *The Tempest* (1506-08).

Every time I play this game, for which there are no predetermined rules, a friend will ask: “Can it be any artist? It couldn’t be an artist like [da Vinci](#), whose work is so out of reach, technically and metaphorically.” And I always answer: “It’s a fantasy. Name any artist you want.”

And so, even while I confess to the same humble gluttony in myself, this time I am claiming him for myself: Leonardo. At first I thought [Raphael](#), as Raphael is possibly a little less gumptious than Leonardo. I didn’t care much for Raphael when I was a student. But then the father of a friend of mine told me that he didn’t begin to appreciate Raphael until he was middle-aged. And sure enough, somewhere around that point in my life, Raphael clicked for me as well. But since this is a fantasy, and I am only entitled to a list of ten, I am calling dibs on Leonardo.

We decided to play this version by artists, rather than artworks. But for the next artist on my list I am choosing the artist by a specific work: [Giorgione’s \*The Tempest\*](#) (1506-8). Talk about enigmatic! This is a painting that I actually get to view again every two years when I go to Venice, and nearly every time I see or read something else in it. I have dissected it from so many angles of interpretation, and still it is a painting I feel one can never fully understand. Are you seeing a pattern here? I guess I am most drawn to the things I feel you can never fully understand. Isn’t that your hope for all truly great art—that it’s something that even if you own it, you cannot fully possess?



Diego Velázquez, London 2017, *Las Meninas* (1656)

There has been so much analysis of the work of my next artist—**Velázquez**—that maybe art history has fully unfurled the messages behind the stories he depicted in his paintings, their references, analogies, and metaphors—their mastery of the mysteries of the frame, the artist, and the subject. But I still can't get enough of them. **Las Meninas** (1656) takes the chess game of meaning to a level where each time you view it you can be captured by another gaze.



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne* (1622-25) at the Galleria Borghese in Rome

Oh my gosh, the last time I was in Rome and made a beeline for the [Galleria Borghese](#), I only had eyes for **Bernini**. There is so much in them to take in, that I was in a state of ecstasy. Setting aside for the time being the brilliance of his architecture, where trickery can become some parallel, perverse form of natural experience, *Apollo and Daphne* (1622-25) is one of the most impactful works of art I have ever viewed—how the artist captures transformation and the fleeting nature of desire. I will never cease to be amazed by how he depicts the gentle touch of hand to flesh, and by capturing the moment in carved marble! Bernini nailed desire—how it can lure and torment, and how it can remain one step from reach.

Now that I have named my first sculptor, I digress art historically to add my wildcard: **Donatello**. Every such list should have its disruptor—that artist, song, or destination that you don't fully know how to evaluate. I have never really focused on Donatello, but that casual twisty, bendy contrapposto of his *David* (1440s) is implanted in my visual recall all these years since Art History 101 at Vassar College, for all the reasons that the artist reimagines this archetypal posture of figurative art, releasing the figure from the pose while at the same time embedding him in the material of his creation—bronze.



"The lusty, back-street sides of desire"—Caravaggio, *The Conversion of Saint Paul* (1601)

Speaking of the Borghese, next for me comes **Caravaggio**. I could say much of the same for Caravaggio, though on the more lusty, back-street sides of desire, the touch of flesh swapped for the rot of ripened fruit.

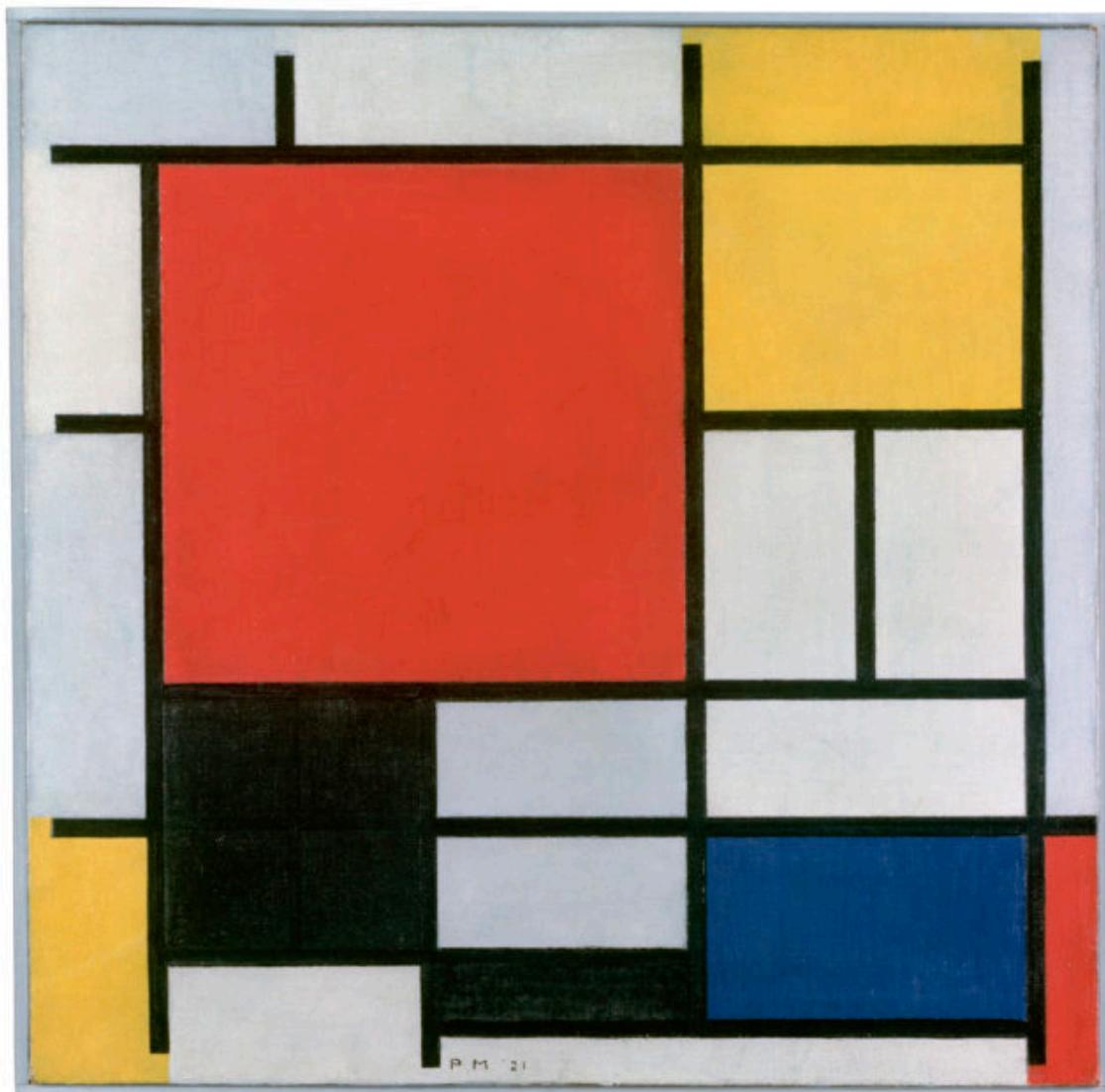


Constantin Brâncuși, *Mademoiselle Pogany [I]* (1912). Courtesy the Philadelphia Museum of Art. © 2018 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

And so having spent so much time in the Renaissance and Baroque, I rush to the Modern, bypassing, regrettably, so many favorites—[Botticelli](#), [Bosch](#), [Bruegel](#), [Mantegna](#) and [Titian](#). [Goya](#), [Manet](#), all of Impressionism, Fauvism, the Russian Avant-Garde. No [Picasso](#), [Matisse](#), or [Munch](#). Maybe because as I just saw at the exquisite new collections installations at [MoMA](#), I can always go see them a mile from home.

Which brings me to the 20th century with one sculptor and one painter: [Brancusi](#) and [Mondrian](#). Need I say more? I am going for perfection, bypassing so many trophies, geniuses, and transformers of visual language, of that which we call art. This is a game of what I would most want to live with and, in the end, for all of my talk, most of the time about the provocative and the progressive, I guess that if I could live with the work of any ten artists of my choice, I choose the gentler human expressions of passion, the mysteries, meaning, and the self.

Now mind you, this round didn't leave any room for a Cycladic or Bactrian figurine, a Classical Greek statue, Khmer bodhisattva, Kongo power figure, or Benin bronze. Those are fantasies for another day.



Piet Mondriaan, *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue Painting* (1921). Gemeentemuseum Den Haag

But, since we are talking about a kind of restrained gluttony here, and since my fellow players in Brazil turned to me to define boundaries, I will violate a sacred one and opt for an 11<sup>th</sup> artist—[de Kooning](#)? [Pollock](#)? [Newman](#)? [Bourgeois](#)?

When I was in my mid-teens I would occasionally find myself wandering into MoMA and going straight to **Barnett Newman's** *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950-51). I am not certain of when or how I first encountered it, and I knew nothing about art at that age, but that painting had placed a hypnotic spell on me—when I found myself in Midtown, it was the Plaza for Teuscher's and MoMA for Newman. I can still envision the route up the staircase and a few bends to the right. But this time, I am choosing **Rothko**. Or, should I take a step outside of the sublime, and jump right to the next giant leap forward—to **Warhol**? I think I'll jump to Warhol. It makes sense to end my list on a cliffhanger: the last great disruptor, who changed the course of art, and whose masqueraded wisdom saw the writing on the wall about where art and civilization would go, truths we continue to play out and continue to play with us.