



# Huntsville Museum of Art



**Educational Guide**

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## **DONATO GIANCOLA:** *Adventures in Imagination*

October 30, 2022 — January 22, 2023

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# About the Exhibit

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Considered the most successful sci-fi/fantasy illustrator working today, Donato Giancola creates engaging paintings that bridge the worlds of contemporary and historical figurative arts. His impressive client list ranges from major book publishers in New York to concept design firms on the West Coast, including The United Nations, National Geographic, Scientific American, CNN, The US Postal Service, Microsoft, Time/Warner, The SyFy Channel, and many others.

Exclusive to the Huntsville Museum of Art, *Adventures in Imagination* includes a range of thematic subjects, including paintings and drawings based on the popular HBO series, *Game of Thrones*, J.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and the fantasy tabletop role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*. Also included are works created to illustrate the covers and stories of recent fantasy novels, as well as other surprises.

While the exhibit will feature subject matters with which many students will be familiar, students will be challenged to analyze each work apart from its popular culture subject. Students will make literary connections, determine abstract themes, witness historical figurative art with a contemporary twist, and much more.

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**ABOUT THE EXHIBIT:** Donato Giancola. *Construct of Time*. 18" x 27". Oil on Panel. ©1993. — Donato Giancola. *Obi-wan Kenobi*. 48" x 36". Oil on Panel. ©2008. — Donato Giancola. *Burdens of the Past*. 22" x 30". Oil on Panel. ©2018.

## About the Artist

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**D**ONATO GIANCOLA was born in 1967 and raised in Vermont. He was a skilled artist as a child, and enrolled in his first art class at age 20. After 3 years at Syracuse University and graduating with a BFA in Painting in 1992, he moved to New York to immerse himself in the inspired and varied art scene.

His formative years in the early 90s were spent as studio assistant to a renowned figure painter, Vincent Desiderio, as well as study in the many museums of New York, sparking his love and appreciation of classical figurative art. He continues his training to this day, visiting museums regularly, learning from and copying original paintings by Rembrandt or Rubens, attending life drawing sessions with illustrator friends, and constantly challenging himself with new projects.

In his work, Giancola balances modern concepts with realism to bridge the worlds of contemporary and historical art. Giancola recognizes the significant cultural role played by visual arts and makes personal efforts to contribute to the expansion and appreciation of the narrative genre that extend beyond his clients and exhibitions. His client list includes: major book publishers and collectors in New York, The United Nations, LucasFilm, National Geographic, CNN, DC Comics, Microsoft, The Village Voice, Playboy Magazine, US Postal Service, Wizards of the Coast, Scholastic, Simon&Schuster, Tor Books, Random House, Time/Warner, The Syfy Channel, Milton-Bradley, and Hasbro.

Visit the artist's website at: [donatoarts.com](http://donatoarts.com)



Photo by Patrick Scalisi. Donato Giancola. Caltrider, Donny. "Donato Giancola Land Panorama." Hipsters of the Coast. December 14, 2018. [www.hipstersofthecoast.com](http://www.hipstersofthecoast.com)

# Alabama State Education Standards

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## VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

Students visiting the Huntsville Museum of Art will be challenged to analyze, interpret, and evaluate works of art on display, fulfilling the **RESPONDING** anchor standards found in Alabama’s Visual Arts Education Course of Study. Through conversation and questions, students must thoughtfully relate knowledge, ideas, and themes in the artworks presented to personal feelings and experiences, social events, and historical significance to fulfill the **CONNECTING** anchor standards. To fulfill the **CREATING** anchor standards, the Huntsville Museum of Art offers additional art making sessions in which students create their own artwork to correspond with the themes and style presented during the tour. The Museum also offers additional worksheets and on-site activities to incorporate the **PRESENTING** anchor standards for students.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

Viewing works of art challenges students to think critically and analyze the work thoroughly to determine theme, subject, emotions, and other ideas which the artist conveys through his work. In doing so, students can meet several English Language Arts education standards by applying critical thinking and reading skills to interpret works of art.

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-RI.7** — Analyzing and interpreting images and illustrations. Consider the relationship between the illustrations and the text of a story, understand the difference in authors’ and illustrators’ roles in telling stories, and use information gathered from both images or graphics and the words in a text.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-RI.7** — Comparing the same work in different media. Describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear, use illustrations to describe characters and events in a story, explain how illustrations contribute to a story’s interpretation, make connections between written text and visual depictions, and compare and contrast the experience of reading with a visual presentation of the same story.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-SL.2** — Understand information via both text read aloud and other visual media. Ask and answer questions about key details, recount key ideas and details from multiple media, paraphrase information presented in multiple formats, interpret information presented in multiple formats and explain how it enhances the understanding of a topic, and determine the purpose of information presented in multiple formats.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-SL.5** — Use audio and visual arts to enhance understanding and development of main ideas and themes.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-CCRA.R.1** — Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. In this standard, visual arts can be analyzed and “read” as a text to make inferences, cite specific evidence, and draw conclusions.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-CCRA.R.6** — Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text. In this standard, visual arts can be interpreted as a text to assess point of view as it shapes content and style.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-CCRA.R.7** — Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY-CCRA.SL.5** — Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

# Alabama State Education Standards \_\_\_\_\_

## MATHEMATICS STANDARDS

Mathematics is an integral aspect of visual arts. Each docent-led tour will accomplish the following Mathematics standards.

- **CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP2** — Reason abstractly and quantitatively. When viewing art, students must be able to decontextualize information to determine symbolic meaning and logically discern the work’s subject matter and composition.
- **CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP3** — Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others. Students will be able to form and defend a plausible argument about a work by understanding its context and composition.
- **CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP7** — Look for and make use of structure. Students will be able to recognize the significance of shapes, lines, patterns, and perspective in the composition of art.

## SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Artwork is often a commentary on historical or current events, emotions, or actions. While Donato Giancola focuses largely on contemporary subjects, his composition is influenced by historical figurative arts. His works also include personal interpretations of historical events. Tours of Giancola’s work will meet **HISTORY** standards by allowing students to engage in historical analysis and interpretation, evaluate intricate connections among the past, present, and future, and engage in decision making using historical knowledge and analysis. Students will also understand the style and composition of historical figurative arts and make comparisons to contemporary art and subjects.

# Figurative Art

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Figurative art is any work of art which depicts a real world subject, such as a person or event<sup>1</sup>. However, the style in which figurative art is presented has changed over the years.

## HISTORICAL FIGURATIVE ART



Giotto di Bondone. *The Lamentation of the Death of Christ*. 1304-1306. Fresco. Image credit: <https://artincontext.org/lamentation-of-christ-by-giotto-di-bondone/>

Historical figurative artwork often depicts specific people, historical events, and Biblical narratives<sup>2</sup>. These works often focus on minute details to present the most accurate portrait possible. Works which are considered figurative art began to emerge during the Pre-Renaissance era. Giotto di Bondone is credited as the bridge between two-dimensional art and humanistic, three-dimensional art which would become figurative art<sup>3</sup>. His work, *The Lamentation of the Death of Christ*, often marks the style change into realistic figurative art<sup>4</sup>.

Figurative art became popular during the Renaissance era. Some of the most famous Renaissance artists, such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, were figurative artists<sup>5</sup>. Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and Michelangelo's *Pieta* are both examples of figurative art. The artists focused heavily on emotion, form, expression, physiology, and realism to portray their subjects<sup>6</sup>. Artists emulated Renaissance realism for centuries. Artists focused on accuracy in both form and expression in their portraits and historical scenes.



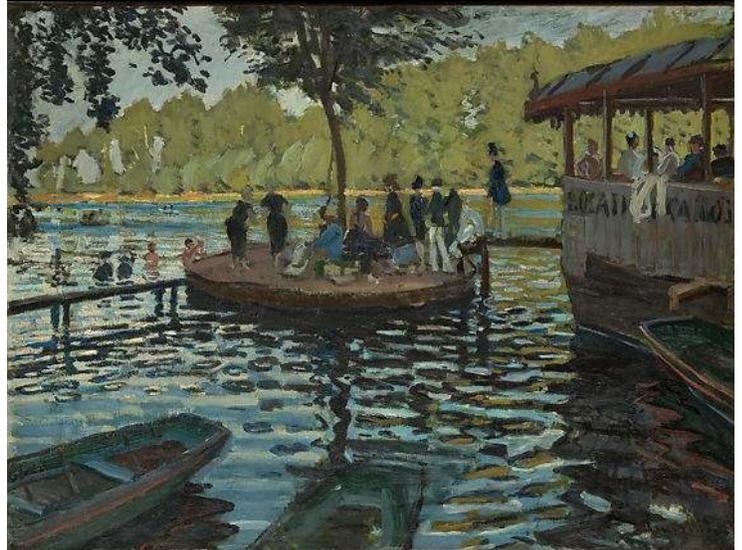
Leonardo da Vinci. *Mona Lisa*. 1503. Image credit: <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/18/world/europe/mona-lisa-the-theft/index.html>

# Figurative Art

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## CONTEMPORARY FIGURATIVE ART

Historical figurative art became less popular among artists during the turn of the 20th century<sup>7</sup>. Realistic figurative arts were abandoned in favor of Impressionism. Impressionist art gives the “impression” of real life but does not portray it exactly<sup>8</sup>. While historical figurative art works to portray accurate and realistic emotion and humanity, Impressionist art is more abstracted, leaving the viewer to interpret the work independently. Popular Impressionist artists from this period include: Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, and Camille Pissarro.



Claude Monet. *La Grenouillère*. 1869. Image source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437135>



Caroline Walker. *Vanity*. 2018. Oil on board. Image source: <https://www.contemporaryartissue.com/discover-the-best-25-british-contemporary-figurative-painters/>

The trend towards abstraction developed into a new form of contemporary figurative art. Contemporary figurative art is any art created within the 21st century which depicts real-life people, places, or events<sup>9</sup>. However, unlike historical figurative art, the contemporary style is not always an example of realism. The modern figurative art movement embraces abstraction, combining historical figurative realism with 20th century Impressionism<sup>10</sup>. Contemporary figurative art may depict fictional subjects without a live model or historical event<sup>11</sup>. Contemporary figurative artists encourage the viewer to think critically about the figures presented and make inferences about their actions. While borrowing the ideas from historical figurative art, contemporary artists have developed a new means of depicting similar subjects. It is within this new genre of contemporary figurative art in which Donato Giancola works and draws inspiration.

# Figurative Art

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is historical figurative art and contemporary figurative art different? How is it the same?
- Looking at Donato Giancola's work, does his art most resemble historical or contemporary figurative art? Explain.
- How did artists use the Impressionist style to create figurative art?

## ACTIVITY

Impressionism marked the turn away from historical figurative painting. Show students Claude Monet's *La Grenouillère*. Discuss how Monet used a literal subject and abstraction together to create something different from historical figurative works (such as the *Mona Lisa*). After discussing the differences between historical figurative painting and Impressionism, provide each student with water color paper and markers. Have each student create a realistic artwork using the markers (large strokes work best for this activity). Take time to discuss the realism in each student's work. After discussing realistic figurative art, take a spray bottle and lightly spray each work (make sure each part of the paper gets damp, but do not soak the paper). The marker colors will begin to bleed and blend, creating an abstracted version of the scene students created. Discuss how the scenes look different and might be interpreted differently as an abstraction instead of realistic.

# Portraiture

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Portraiture is Donato Giancola's preferred artistic genre<sup>12</sup>. Many of Giancola's works are portraits. However, these portraits do not represent real individuals but characters from television shows, books, or games. While these works depict fictional characters, Giancola desires to tell stories through his art which can be understood by all. "I feel the work must address [these] issues by itself, contain its own internal truths, even if those truths lead to no certain conclusion<sup>13</sup>."

Giancola's works tell a story which the viewer must read. His portraits provide a glimpse into a specific moment of an individual's life. Donato typically selects a specific moment in time to build a narrative that conveys the inner psyche of his characters. While these individuals may be tied to a specific film or book,



Giancola uses emotion and location to tell a story which surpasses the initial context. A viewer does not need to be educated in popular culture to draw conclusions about the subject matter. Even individuals who are not familiar with the popular culture reference will be able to read and interpret Giancola's work. To remove specific references to the book or movie he is portraying, Giancola states that he: "twist[s] the specificity from that of the details of the references into a focus upon the emotional content<sup>14</sup>."

Each individual Giancola paints has a story and a specific motivation, not to the reference material, but to the moment and emotion which he captured. Viewers can make a personal connection to the range of emotion and storytelling seen in each of Giancola's works. Giancola views realistic art as the best means by which to connect with his audience<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, Giancola uses realistic figures and settings to portray fictional scenes and abstract ideas<sup>17</sup>.

Donato Giancola. *Burdens of the Past*. 22" x 30". Oil on Panel. ©2018.

# Portraiture

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways does Donato Giancola's portraits resemble portraits by Leonardo da Vinci or Rembrandt? How do they resemble contemporary figurative arts?
- Why do you think Donato Giancola paints fictional characters as realistic portraits?
- How does Donato Giancola use emotion in this painting?
- How does Giancola use both realism and abstraction in his paintings?

## ACTIVITY: REALISM VS. ABSTRACTION

One of the major differences between historical and contemporary figurative art is the emphasis on realism versus abstraction. Have students list differences between characteristics of realism and characteristics of abstraction. Look at *Burdens of the Past* and other works by Donato Giancola. How does Giancola use both realism and abstraction in his paintings? Using the blank face worksheet (Appendix A), divide the face in half and have students create a face in which one side is realistic and one side is abstracted. For younger children, use two separate worksheets for each student— one for realism and one for abstraction— instead of dividing the face in two.

# Illustrations and Book Covers

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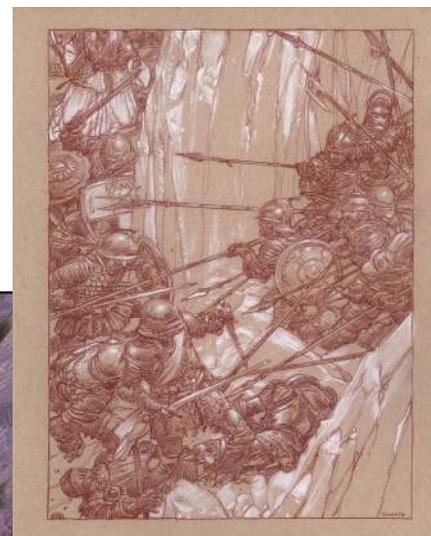
Donato Giancola started his art career as a book illustrator, receiving a commission to illustrate the cover of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*<sup>18</sup>. Since his beginning in book illustration, Giancola has created illustrations and book covers for dozens of science fiction and fantasy books. Since these illustrations are bound to a specific plot and emotion, these works vary from Giancola's portraits in their composition.

Creating artwork for books requires Giancola to rely on the book's text. While reading a manuscript, Donato Giancola creates quick sketches which correspond with key plot points or emotional moments. Giancola then creates more detailed drawings, combining some ideas or plots to develop a more comprehensive image. After this, the book's author sees the sketches, offers suggestions, and approves a full-scale illustration. Giancola then creates a detailed, full-scale "cartoon." For book covers, color is also added to the work<sup>19</sup>.

The book cover illustration is a viewer's first impression of the novel. Therefore, it is important that the illustration conveys the story while inciting interest in the novel. The illustrations throughout the book also serve to complement the plot and emphasize key moments in the story. The illustrations play an important role in how a viewer relates to the story and engages with the plot.



Donato Giancola. Cover "Uprooted." 2018. Oil on Panel. 24 x 36 in., 30 x 42 in. framed.



Donato Giancola. *Uprooted*,  
*The Breach*. 2018. Watercolor pencil  
and chalk on toned paper.  
14 x 11 in., 24 x 20 in. framed.

# Illustrations and Book Covers ---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do illustrations impact how you read or think about a book?
- How is Giancola's *Uprooted: The Breach* different from his painting *Burdens of the Past*?
- Both of these images are illustrations for a novel, *Uprooted*, by Naomi Novik. What can these illustrations tell us about the book, even if you have not read it? What do you think Giancola could have added which might tell us more about the story?

## ACTIVITY: ILLUSTRATE A BOOK

Discuss the importance of book illustrations and their role in a story. For younger students, choose a story to read together as a class. Have each student create an illustration for the book. Have a presentation time where each student presents their illustration and describes which scene from the book they created. For older students, divide students into groups. Give each group the name of a novel (novels should be books with which most students are familiar). Students should create the cover art and at least one illustration for their story. Have a presentation time where each group presents their cover and illustration and have students guess which novel they illustrated. Instead of guessing which novel students illustrated, each group can write their own short story which they must illustrate followed by a presentation.

# Donato Giancola and Historical Realism \_\_\_\_\_

Donato Giancola does not only paint fictional subjects. Following the example of painters like Rembrandt, Giancola creates scenes from historical events. These paintings depict real events and people; however, the artist did not see these events. Therefore, like his fictional paintings, Giancola must imagine how those events might look.

When creating *Joan of Arc*, Donato Giancola attempted to bridge historical facts and the unknown intent and sequence of events. Giancola researched Joan of Arc, the political events which occurred during her life, and religious thought and practice. Joan of Arc appears alongside political figures, military leaders, and religious symbolism throughout Giancola's work. However, there are multiple manners in which one might interpret the intentions of each figure. Giancola states: "it was my intent to use ambiguity to stress the complexities of political forces which shaped Joan of Arc<sup>20</sup>."

Giancola emphasizes emotion and storytelling within his work. However, unlike his other paintings, his historical realism works seem to tell multiple stories simultaneously, allowing the viewer to understand both the individual and the historical event.



Donato Giancola. *Joan of Arc*. 2012. Oil on Panel. 24 x 43 in., 32 x 51 in. framed.

# Donato Giancola and Historical Realism \_\_\_\_\_

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who is Joan of Arc?
- Who do you think is portrayed in this portrait (other than Joan of Arc)?
- What is happening in this portrait?
- Why did the artist paint Joan of Arc this way?

## ACTIVITY

Since artists cannot see the historical event which they are painting, they must create their own interpretations of the event. Show students *Joan of Arc in the Battle* by August Gustave Lasinsky (see below). Ask students discussion questions two, three, and four again, this time in reference to the Lasinsky portrait. Discuss how the artists depicted the same subject in different manners. For older students, have each student write a compare and contrast essay about Giancola's *Joan of Arc* and Lasinsky's *Joan of Arc in the Battle*.



August Gustave Lasinsky. *Joan of Arc in the Battle*. 1852. Image credit:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:August\\_Gustav\\_Lasinsky\\_Johanna\\_von\\_Orl%C3%A9ans\\_in\\_der\\_Schlacht.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:August_Gustav_Lasinsky_Johanna_von_Orl%C3%A9ans_in_der_Schlacht.jpg)

# Glossary

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**Abstract Art:** art which is either completely non-representational, or which converts forms observed in reality into patterns which are read by the spectator primarily as independent relationships, rather than with reference to the original source.

**Cartoon:** a full-scale preliminary design for a painting or tapestry.

**Figurative Art:** art which portrays, in however altered or distorted a form, things perceived in the visible world.

**History Painting:** a type of figure painting which illustrates historic or legendary incidents in a deliberately grand and noble way.

**Impressionism:** French 19th century art movement which tried to use contemporary scientific research into the physics of color to achieve a more exact representation of color and tone. They also believed in painting out of doors, and in trying to catch a particular fleeting impression of color and light rather than making a synthesis in the studio.

**Realism:** art which aims to reproduce reality exactly.

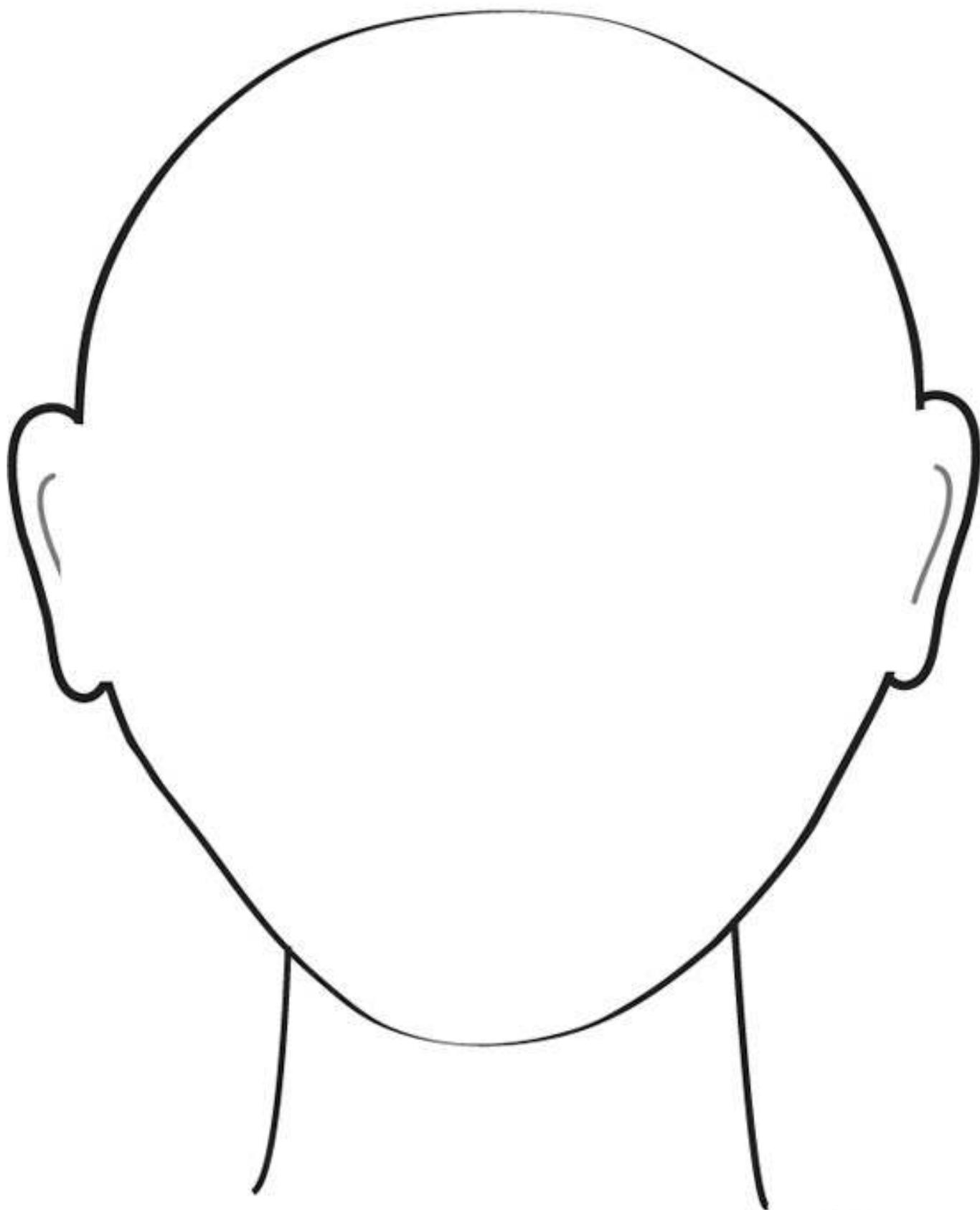
**Renaissance:** the classically inspired revival of European arts and letters which began in Italy in the 14th century. Renaissance in Italy lasted from the 14th century until about 1580, and is dominated by Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo in his earlier phases.

# Endnotes

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2. Tate Museum, "History Painting," Tate, 2022, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/h/history-painting>.
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4. Art in Context, "'The Lamentation of Christ' by Giotto di Bondone—An Analysis," *Artincontext*, August 19, 2022, <https://artincontext.org/lamentation-of-christ-by-giotto-di-bondone/>
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7. Priyanka Thakur, "Tracing the Rise and Fall of Figurative Paintings," *Indian Art Ideas*, 2022, <https://indianartideas.in/blog/figurative-art/tracing-the-rise-and-fall-of-figurative-paintings>
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9. Julien Delagrangé, "Contemporary Figurative Painting: A Complete Overview and List," *Contemporary Art Issue*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.contemporaryartissue.com/contemporary-figurative-painting-a-complete-overview-and-list/#:~:text=Contemporary%20figurative%20painting%20can%20be,the%20physical%20world%20or%20reality>.
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12. Donato Giancola, "Portraiture," *Muddy Colors: Art, Education, Community*, October 13, 2011, <https://www.muddycolors.com/2011/10/portraiture/>
13. Giancola, "Portraiture."
14. Giancola, "Portraiture."
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16. Giancola, "Gesture in Composition."
17. Giancola, "Gesture in Composition."
18. Donato Giancola, "FAQ," *Donato Arts*, 2022, <https://www.donatoarts.com/faq>.
19. Donato Giancola, "Book Cover Illustration," *Donato Arts*, 2022, <https://www.donatoarts.com/book-cover-illustration>
20. Donato Giancola, "Joan of Arc," *Muddy Colors: Art, Education, Community*, January 5, 2012, <https://www.muddycolors.com/2012/01/joan-of-arc/>

*Appendix A: Face Worksheet* \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B: Art References ---



Donato Giancola. *Star Wars Galaxies*. 33" x 45". Oil on Panel. ©2003.



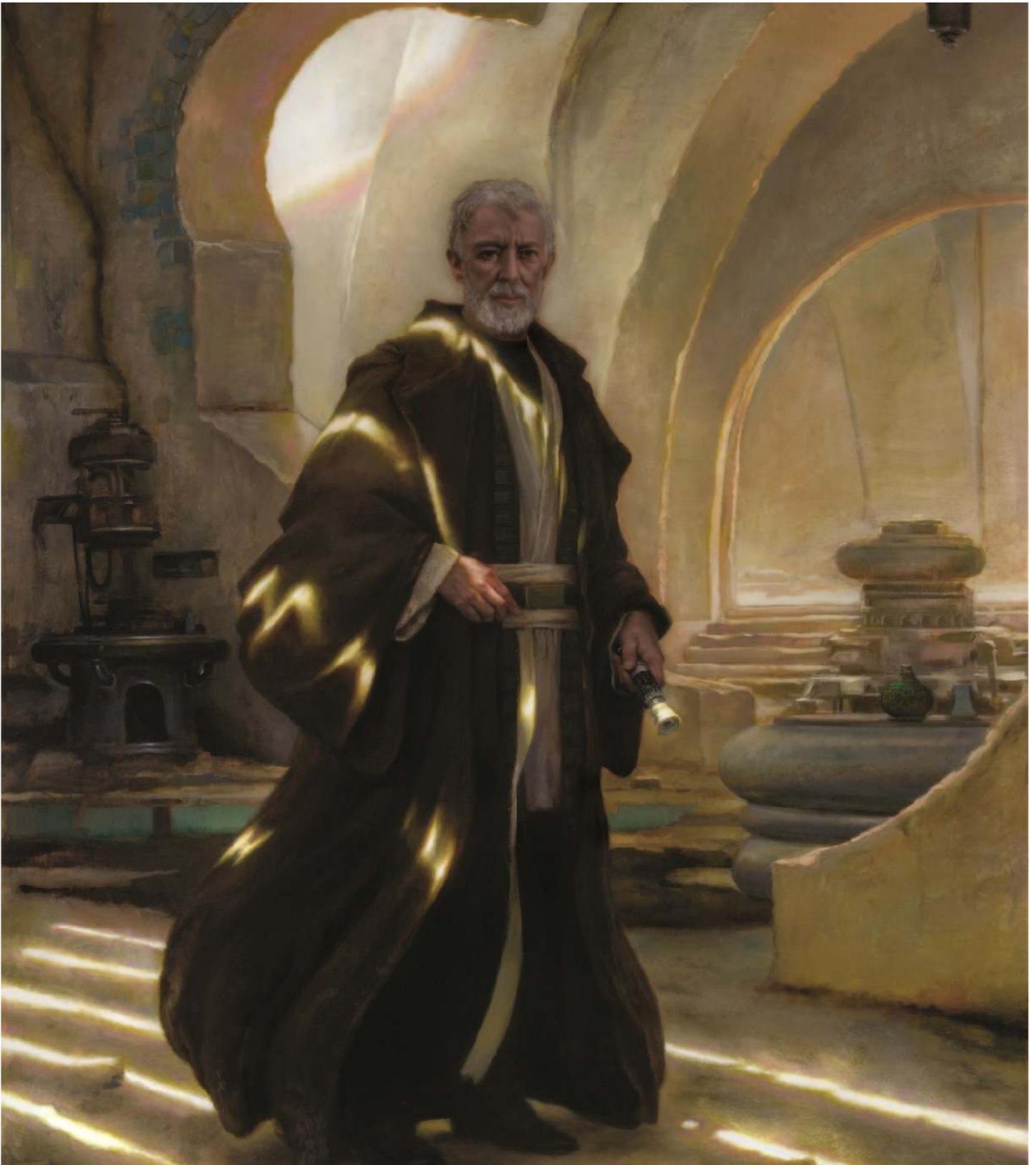
Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. *Construct of Time*. 18" x 27". Oil on Panel. ©1993.



Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. *Obi-wan Kenobi*. 48" x 36". Oil on Panel. ©2008.



Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. *Burdens of the Past*. 22" x 30". Oil on Panel. ©2018.



Huntsville Museum of Art



Photo by Patrick Scalisi. Donato Giancola. Hipsters of the Coast. December 14, 2018. [www.hipstersofthecoast.com/2018/12/donato-giancola-land-panorama/](http://www.hipstersofthecoast.com/2018/12/donato-giancola-land-panorama/)



Huntsville Museum of Art



Giotto di Bondone. *The Lamentation of the Death of Christ*. 1304-1306. Fresco. Image credit: <https://artincontext.org/lamentation-of-christ-by-giotto-di-bondone/>



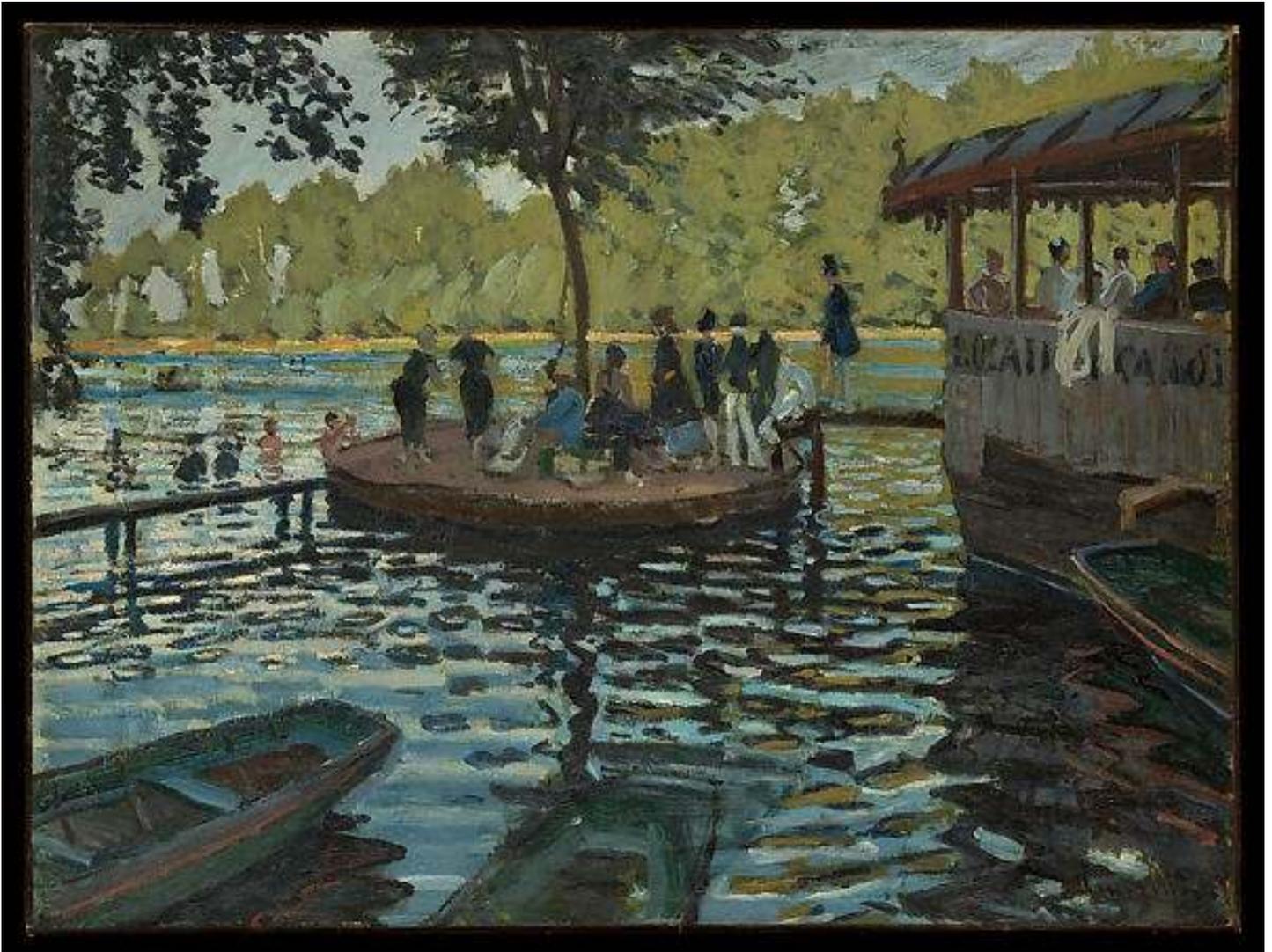
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Leonardo da Vinci. *Mona Lisa*. 1503. Image credit: <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/18/world/europe/mona-lisa-the-theft/index.html>



Huntsville Museum of Art



Claude Monet. *La Grenouillère*. 1869. Image source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437135>



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Caroline Walker. *Vanity*. 2018. Oil on board. Image source: [www.contemporaryartissue.com/discover-the-best-25-british-contemporary-figurative-painters/](http://www.contemporaryartissue.com/discover-the-best-25-british-contemporary-figurative-painters/)



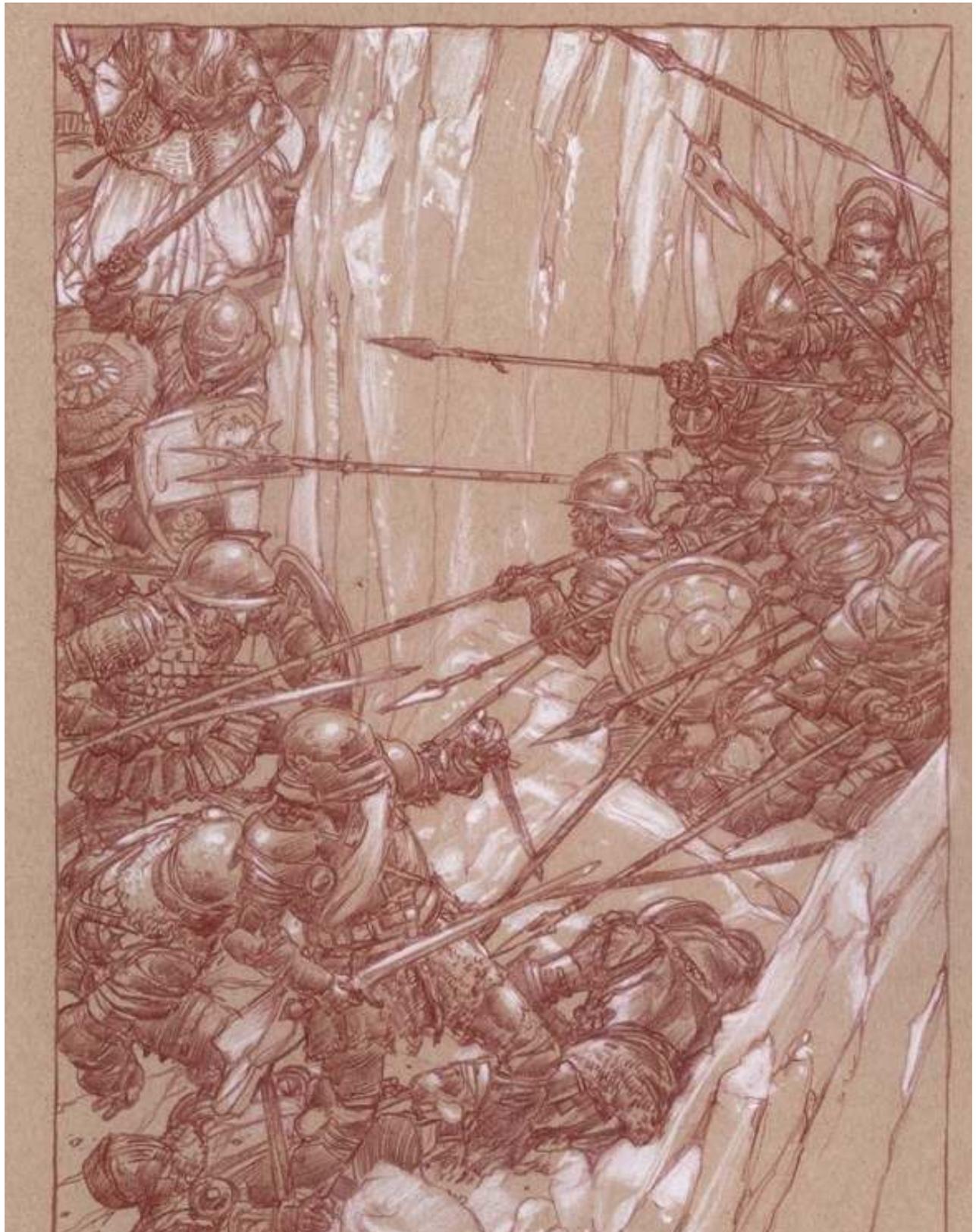
Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. Cover *"Uprooted."* 2018. Oil on Panel. 24 x 36 in., 30 x 42 in. framed.



Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. *Uprooted, The Breach*. 2018. Watercolor pencil and chalk on toned paper. 14 x 11 in., 24 x 20 in. framed.



Huntsville Museum of Art



Donato Giancola. *Joan of Arc*. 2012. Oil on Panel. 24 x 43 in., 32 x 51 in. framed.



Huntsville Museum of Art



August Gustave Lasinsky. *Joan of Arc in the Battle*. 1852.

Image credit: [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:August\\_Gustav\\_Lasinsky\\_Johanna\\_von\\_Orl%C3%A9ans\\_in\\_der\\_Schlacht.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:August_Gustav_Lasinsky_Johanna_von_Orl%C3%A9ans_in_der_Schlacht.jpg)



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