

THE NOVELTY OF PAINTING IN OIL ON CANVAS

TO GREAT EFFECT Giorgione mastered the subtleties of the oil medium, which began to replace tempera, the egg-based paint used by early Italian artists, around 1500. Binding color particles together with oil creates brilliant pigments and also gives the painter greater flexibility: oil's longer drying time allows ease in blending colors and reworking compositions. Optical and atmospheric effects of the greatest delicacy and illusionism became possible with the oil medium. Concurrent with the growing use of the oil paints was the adoption of canvas or fine linen as a support. Cheaper than wood panels, canvas was readily available and allowed paintings to get ever larger. These innovative materials enabled a new range of pictorial effects.

Venetian painters of the sixteenth century were fascinated by the poetic potential of the oil-on-canvas medium. They increasingly adopted a new method of execution, spreading the paint in a broader, more gestural manner. In their works, individual brushstrokes often remain distinct, serving more to suggest the movement of the artist's hand than to describe forms, surfaces, and textures. Color also takes on a life of its own, often independent of the objects depicted. Critics of the time faulted *colore*, this particularly Venetian celebration of color and brushwork, for its lack of finish and direct contradiction of *disegno*, the compositional balance and clarity of form so admired in central Italian painting.