

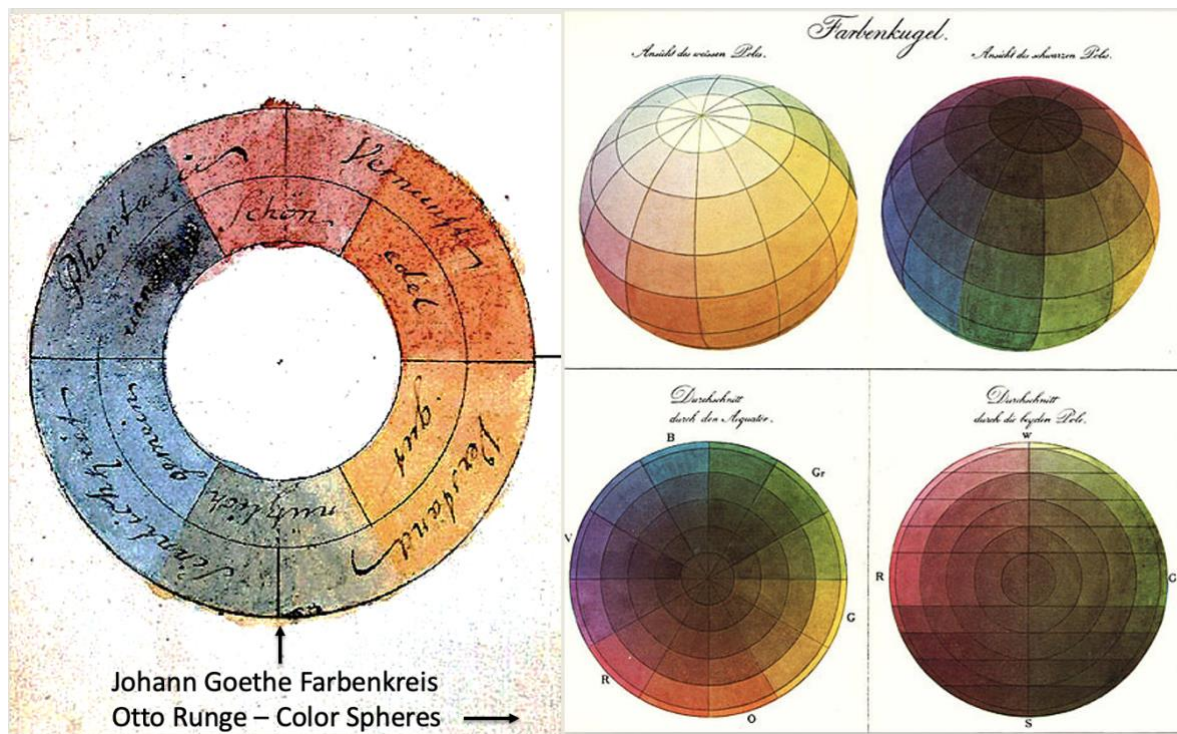
THE DEEPER MEANING OF ASTROLOGY REPRESENTED IN ART

By Ursula Stockder

The alchemical language expressed through a painting and an astrological chart have much more in common than we acknowledge at first glance.

Both share a variety of symbols, hidden messages and vibrating colors full of a significance that can't be explained in a linear manner.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe was a German writer and poet, contemporary to Isaac Newton. He was one of the first who systematically explored color, how colors were perceived and how they interact among them. Goethe disagreed with Newton's theory. His theory was inclined more towards art and philosophy than science. He argued that color was shaped by perception as well as elements of light and darkness, and refuted Newton's idea that color was determined solely by light and the color spectrum.



Goethe created his color wheel and explored the impact of colors on emotions. He was really seeking a psychological theory of colors and not a physiological. He didn't see darkness as an absence of light, but rather as polar to an interaction with light. Color

resulted from the interaction of light and shadow. "Yellow is a light which has been dampened by darkness. Blue is a weaken darkened by light".

Goethe associated his color wheel to an allegorical, symbolic and mystic symbolism, establishing a kind of color psychology and, in an even earlier sketch, Goethe assigns sensual and character qualities to colors, such as good, powerful and gentle. Newton, in his Optics from 1704, designs a symmetrical order, proposes a color circle, that he duly cuts into uneven cake slices to represent his seven prismatic colors in accordance with musical scales.

Artists and Astrologers tend to think of color, light and symbols as circular or concentric in structure and shape, based on a circular order. They can also highlight the close connection between color vision and the human eye, expressing notions of completeness and perfection.

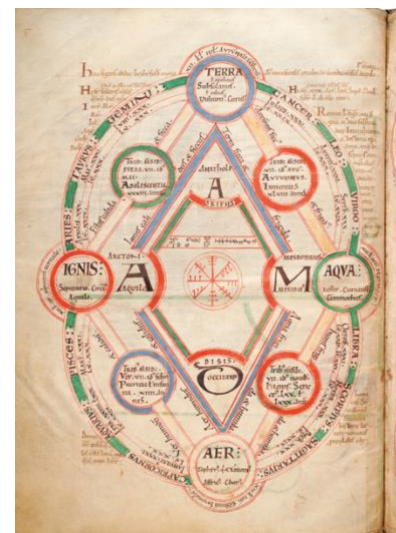
Rudolph Steiner, 1897 gave the flowing analogy on his theory:

"Modern natural science sees darkness as complete nothingness. According to this view, the light, which streams into a dark space, has no resistance from the darkness to overcome. Goethe visualizes that light and darkness relate to each other like the North and South Pole of a magnet. The darkness can weaken the light in its working power. Conversely, the light can limit the energy of the darkness. In both cases color arises".

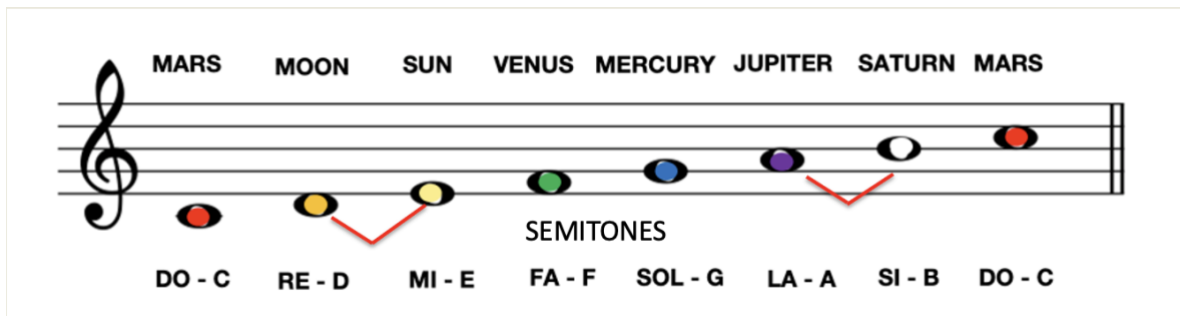
Wassily Kandinsky, whose work on the spiritual element in art and the three tasks of the artist was greatly influenced by Goethe's color theory, wrote: "to harmonize the whole is the task of art". Astrology resonates to a whole spectrum of different kinds of vibrations: color, sound, numerical, visual, symbolic and allegorical interpretations. Astrology is a tool that helps us relate to ourselves, that gives order to our mind and that helps us understand the symbolic language of the universe expressed through all kinds of vibrations.

In his Manual called "The Mysteries of the Universe", Byrthferth (c. 970 – c. 1020), an Anglo Saxon monk who lived at Ramsey Abbey, was one of the first who related colors to the 4 Greek humors, stations of the year and astrological signs.

Art and astrology have a very close relation; each sign has a color or a musical note that resonates with its energy, the same as a color chromo somatic color wheel or a music scale. Color should be understood in a global sense rather than an analytical one and music harmonizes rhythm and harmony.



The Color Scale defined by Isaac Newton



During the "Renaissance", art, alchemy and all the ideas of beauty of the Greek and Roman culture returned, as did the divinity portrayed in their Gods art.

Greek mythology is the most known of all mythologies, the one who is closest to the occidental mind, but what in particular did the Renaissance period look for?

Although Plato speaks of the seduction of the senses and oratory when he refers to art, the practice of fine arts in ancient Greece was limited to the professional artist. The artists were called "Demiurge" a term signifying persons whose works promote the beautiful, the good and useful among the people.

Astrologers had a big influence during the Renaissance; each color was related to a different planet and the day of the week. Color and astrology had such an influence during that time, that people used to dress according to the energy of different colors related to each planet and days of the week; for example, black was one of the most popular colors, signifying melancholy.

Girolamo Cardano, born on the 24th of September 1501, was one of the most influential Italian mathematicians, astrologers, astronomers and philosophers of the Renaissance of his time. He wrote more than 200 works on science and made a table relating colors, flavors and planets.

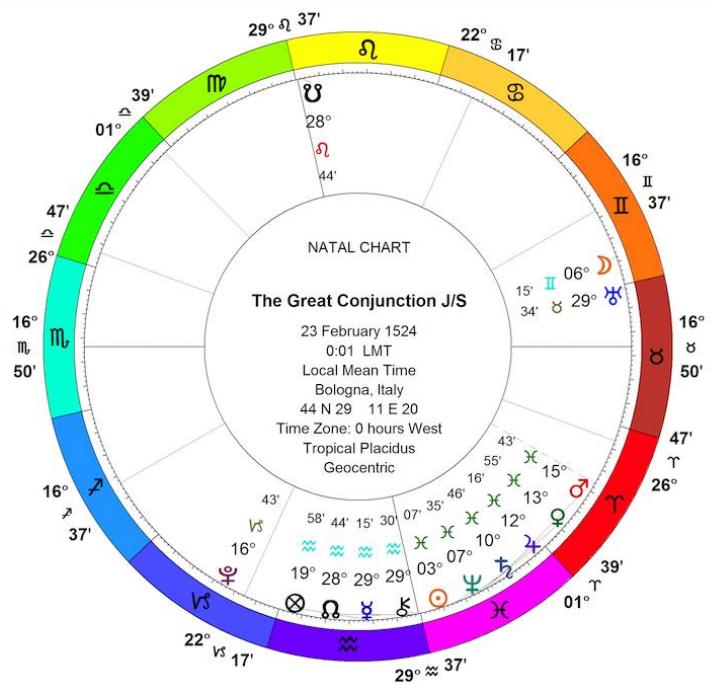
WHITE	SWEET	VENUS
YELLOW	STRONG	JUPITER
RED	ACID	MOON
PURPLE	SOUR	MERCURY
GREEN	SPICY	SUN
BLUE	SALTY	MARS
BLACK	BITTER	SATURN

But not only in Italy painters were greatly influenced by astrology. The historian Bartolomeo Fazio wrote one of the first descriptions that we know about the art of Jan van Eyck. He stated that this renowned painter wasn't an analphabet and that when he painted his famous painting about the "Arnolfini Wedding", he was greatly influenced by the books about Leonardo Da Vinci's theory about light, color and its relation with the Sun, Moon and the Planets.

Iconography is one of the many disciplines , which have a close relationship with mythology and it is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, as Erwin Panofsky describes it in his *"Iconography and Iconology"* and to the study of **Renaissance Art**. However, he came to the conclusion that making an iconographic interpretation wasn't enough and he developed an iconological interpretation that required something more than a familiarity with specific themes or with concepts as transmitted through literary sources. He proposed a systematic method in which the formal or technical part in paintings was not as important as the meaning transmitted through allegories and the hidden messages and symbolism portray through art.

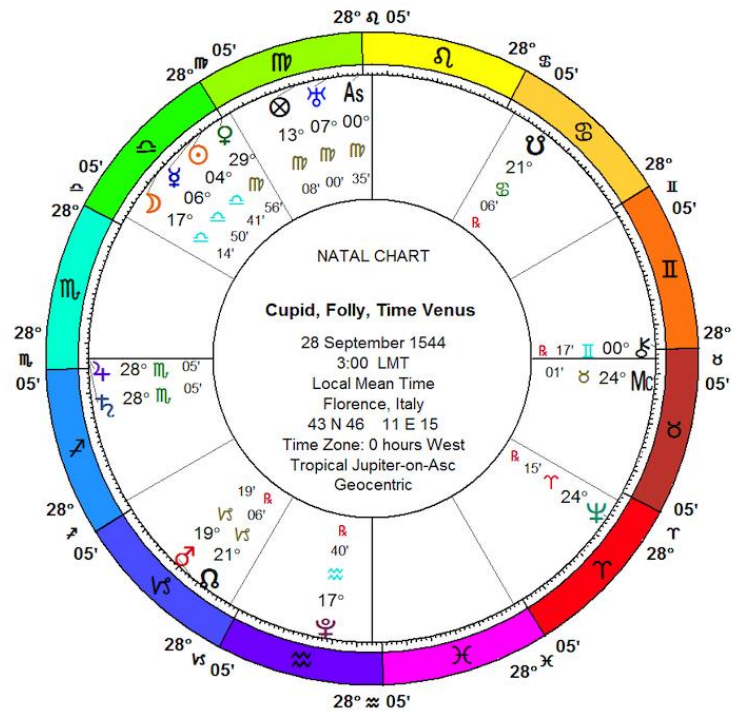
Iconology refers to the hermetic interpretation of images and mythology to the hermetic interpretation of texts and here is where the astrologer's influence played a great role during this time.

Those who were able to read the stars and celestial phenomena were accorded great status and power, and astronomers played a fundamental role at courts, large and small, throughout Italy. This was a time, of course, when many still believed in predictions and divinatory practices. **An exceptional alignment of the planets such as the one that occurred in 1504**, the appearance of comets and other unusual celestial events were viewed with concern. The image of an astronomer clutching sheets of paper and instruments recurs frequently in early 16th century painting, especially in Italy and Germany.

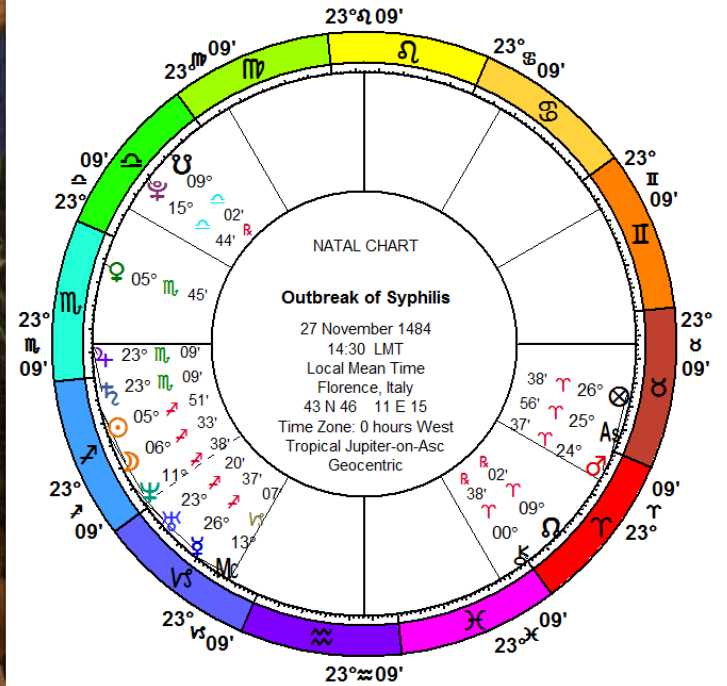


The sense of anticipation identifies the three astronomers as the Magi, in this painting by Giorgione called the Three Philosophers, witnessing the first appearance of the star and versed in interpreting the movements of the heavenly bodies, as confirmed by the charts and instruments held by two of the men.

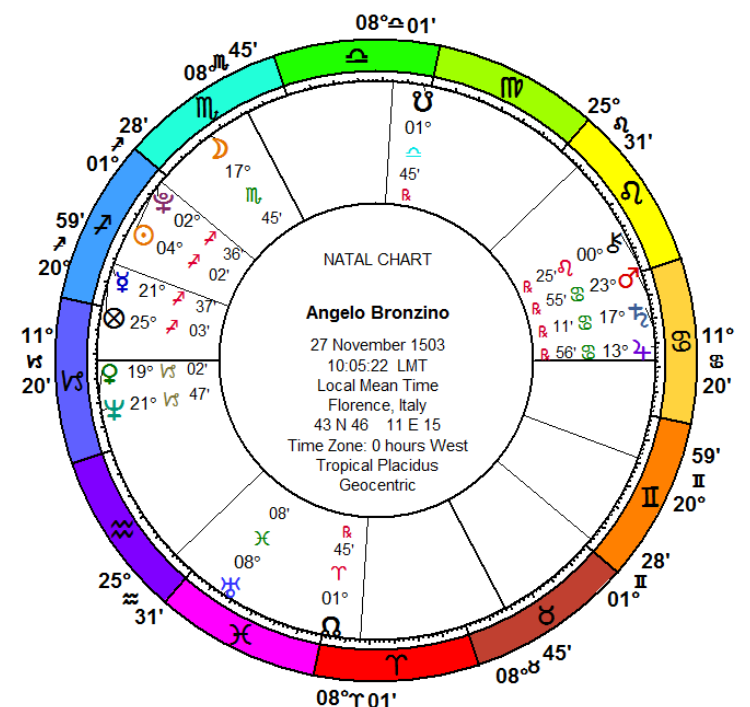
Although most of these paintings with a Greek mythological theme were inspired by Ovid's texts, the meaning could also be the other way around where a painting inspired a text or an interpretation, like it happened with **Angelo's Bronzino painting "Venus, Cupid, Follie and Time" painted between 1540 – 1546.**



Bronzino was Cosimo De Medici's painter who was greatly influenced by the astrologer Bartolomeo de la Rocca, also known as Cocles, who was born on March 19, 1467 and died on September 9, 1504). In Della Rocca's *Anastasis* (1484) he related the astrological control of Scorpio over the genitals, basing his predictions for further outbreaks of syphilis on similar planetary conjunctions. Della Rocca also presented the usual list of negative physical and mental characteristics assigned to the Scorpio native, such as fraudulence and hypocrisy.



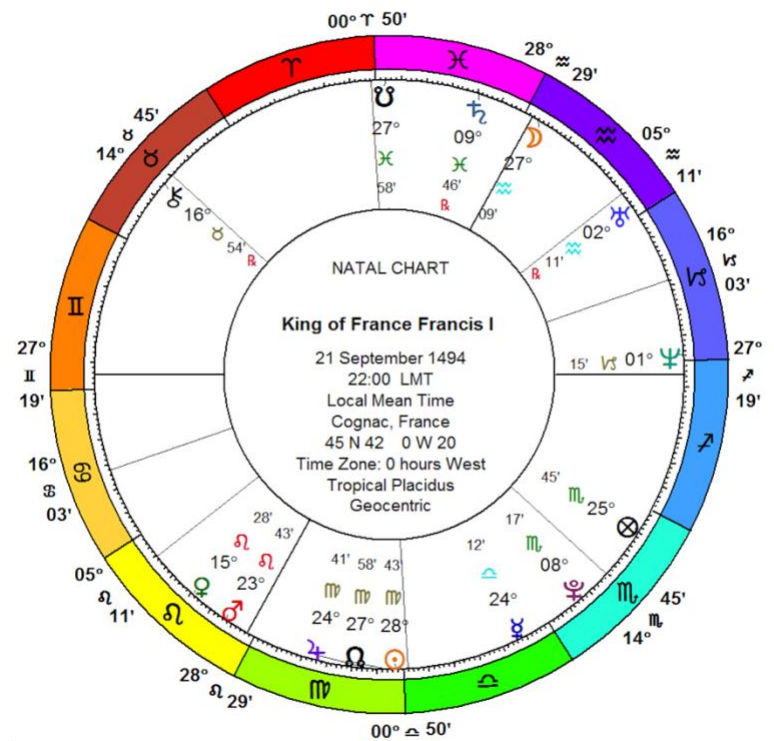
Bronzino was born with the Jupiter/Saturn conjunction in the sign of Cancer and finished his Venus, Cupid and Folly during the same conjunction in the sign of Scorpio referring precisely to the outbreak of Syphilis portrayed in the women on the bottom left corner with her mask, the sick toothless person with the greenish colored skin and the masks representing hypocrisy on the bottom right corner.



(Astrodienst Source Notes: Fagan quotes biographer Albertina Furno "La Vita E Le Rime Di Angiolo Bronzino", "born 12 hours after sunset of November 16, 1503 OS. " By the Florentine calendar, the day of November 16 began at sunset, therefore 12 hours after sunset of the 16th is Nov. 17th by modern calculations, OS, plus 10 day to convert to NS. Blackwell calculates 12 hours after sunset as 4:23 AM LMT)

As soon as Bronzino finished the "Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time" painting of singular beauty and obscure environment it was sent to King Francis I **in France**, a great art collector and lover, specially of the Italian Renaissance, a present of **Cosimo Grand Duke of Tuscany**.

Louise of Savoy, mother of King Francis I, believed profoundly on the influence of the stars and thanks to her diary we have the exact time of birth of his son.



Cosimo was married to Eleonora but had several mistresses and children out of marriage. One of them was Bia, the girl represented in this painting.

At the time, France was trying to take over Florence (for the last time) and the Italians weren't happy about it. French people had an eccentric taste and a liberal attitude towards love, so Cosimo De Medici decided to send them this Bronzino painting with a hidden message, a puzzle to figure out the real meaning of what was wanted to be said in words. It was a test to the French kings intellect.



Apple: Expresses love, marriage and courtship, discord).

Tiara: The three tiers are symbols of the Trinity or the three estates of the Church: Rome, Christendom, Spiritual Sovereignty, and the prerogatives are to teach, govern, sanctify.

Arrow: Cupid's arrows, one with a sharp golden point (love) and the other with a blunt tip of lead (lack of love).

Pearl: highlights different themes, they can symbolize wisdom but also materialism.

Laurel leaves: was said to communicate the spirit of prophecy and poetry.

If we analyze the different elements in this painting according to the symbols used during the Renaissance, we have these different interpretations:

APPLE: In Greece throwing an apple is a sign to express love, or to make an offer of marriage. In considering the apple as a love gift. In many paintings we can see the goddess of beauty and love represented with the golden Apple although the connection of the goddess with fruits, points also to the cult name under which Aphrodite Urania was worshiped at Athens. For the Greeks the apple was and is used in courtship.

TIARA: Headdress of a Pope. The three tiers are symbols of the Trinity or the three estates of the Church: Rome, Christendom, Spiritual Sovereignty, and the three prerogatives or mandates of the Church: to teach, to govern, to sanctify. It has a long history but was first known in its present form in 1315. In art, the tiara is an attribute of St. Gregory the Great and St. Sylvester.

ARROW: Cupid carries two kinds of arrows, one with a sharp golden point, and the other with a blunt tip of lead. A person wounded by the golden arrow is filled with uncontrollable desire, but the one struck by the lead feels aversion and desires only to flee.

MASK: Is an object normally worn on the face, typically for protection, disguise, performance, or entertainment. Masks have been used since antiquity for both ceremonial and practical purposes.

PEARL: The pearl is a complicated symbol it highlights different themes; they can symbolize wisdom acquired through experience. But they also indicate materialism because they attract wealth. The pearl is the oldest known gem, and for many centuries it was considered the most valuable. Unlike gems, the pearl is organic matter derived from a living creature – oysters and Mollusks.

There are many folklores and traditions about the pearl. In fact, so much history accompanies this stone that five months claim it as birthstone – February, April, June traditional, July and November.

The pearl is an astral stone for the signs Gemini and Cancer, and astrologers link it to the Moon. It was said in some early cultures that the pearl was born when a single drop of rain fell from the heavens and became the heart of the oyster. Pearls have been called the “teardrops of the moon”. Some believe that pearls were formed by the passage of angels through the clouds of heaven.

LAUREL LEAVES: Laurel was said to communicate the spirit of prophecy and poetry. Laurel leaves were commonly put under pillows at night to gain inspiration through dreams and intoxicating properties are associated with prophetic and poetic inspiration. Laurel leaves surrounded the temple of Apollo to cleanse the soul before entering. It's associated with purification and was seen as a plant with powers of immortality. Laurel supposedly awakens awareness and past life memories, stimulates psychic awareness, health, and the powers of divination.

BLUE CLOTH: Blue is related to the father figure, so Cronos removes the blue cloth signaling the lack of spirituality.

HOURLASS: Forces us to acknowledge the cycles, balance and ever changing nature of our lives. In alchemy they used the hourglass to symbolize the cycles and need of balance in our times. The triangles balancing each other representing two aspects of nature: the upper being the sky and the lower equating with earth. Energy passes between the two sides of the hourglass giving us the idea of inevitability. All events in nature run on cycles and there are some that just cannot be stopped.

When it comes to sexuality, nothing is more feminine and luscious than an hourglass figure. The curvaceousness of the shape directly references the female and the specific and the specific cycles of maiden to mother to crone. It channels all the female energies into a single object that also happens to do with the passing of time. The balancing aspect of the hourglass brings about the concept of duality. Yin and yang, sun and moon, life and death demonstrated in the physical composition of the shape as well as the specific positioning of each element. One triangle is erect while the other is inverted. Together, they represent the gender specific body parts, with the erect triangle mimicking a phallic nature and the inverted representing a womb. Certainly, these two triangles together convey the undeniable connection between male and female bodies as well as their spiritual energies. The hourglass encourages us to not take our lives for granted.

LION: Is a symbol of power, majesty, wisdom, tyranny, viciousness, dignity, and leadership. The lion represents both Jesus Christ as well as Satan, a wise king, or a tyrant.

There is also a lion known as Marzocco (possibly derived from Mars, the god of war) used as a symbol of Florence. In the Marzocco sculpture by Donatello in 1419 Florence, the lion carries a shield with the heraldic charge of a lily, another Florentine symbol. The name Florence comes from the Latin word for Flower, so having a Giglio or lily as the heraldic charge is fitting on many levels. It is possible that Donatello's sculpture Marzocco replaced an earlier medieval lion which was, for many years, the only sculpture in the main plaza of Florence. That lion was crowned and has an inscription stating:

DRAGON: The astrological explanation for the "outbreak" of syphilis in 1484 was only one of the theories proposed, but the literature attests its widespread acceptance. This did not contradict the usual moral accusations recruited by the Judeo-Christian tradition to explain plagues and epidemics as the scourge of God brought against the sins of man. The negative moralizing aspects of Scorpio related astrology and its ready-made identification with venereal disease created an inevitable link between Scorpio and syphilis. Conway's identification of Bronzino's syphilitic depictions was based on the medical diagnosis of symptoms as described in the literature, but he did not notice that other visual allusions in the painting also support his theory.

Descriptions in astrological and medical treatises provide evidence for the Scorpio-syphilis which outbreaked with the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Scorpio of 1484 link which is fundamental to Bronzino's Allegory.

We have to keep in mind that the Greeks are in a way the promoters of perspective, which developed much later in the Renaissance, because they are going to start to approach works of art not from the point of view of the object but from the point of view of the subject who sees it.

Bibliography:

Art Secrets: Rose Marie & Rainer Hagen

Wassily Kandinsky "Concerning the Spiritual in Art

Theory of Colors Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Goethe on the Psychology of Color and Emotion Brainpicking

Jstor

Wikipedia

Animals as Disguised Symbols in Renaissance Art by Simona Cohen Angelo Bronzino -

Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time - National Gallery, London Color and Culture by John Gage