

Art Day 6 - looking at pictures for Holy Week

Lamentation over the Dead Christ by Andrea Mantegna



This picture was painted in around 1480, using egg tempera on canvas. Mantegna continued to favour egg tempera at a time when most other leading painters were turning to the newly introduced oil paints and this accentuated the statue like quality of his pictures. This stark study of Christ, lying on a marble slab, is unusual in that the three mourners are shown crowded in at one side of the figure, having no contact with the body, unlike in the many pieta studies. St John and Mary are clearly seen, with Mary now an old woman, wiping her tears away, while a third, scarcely seen, face is believed to be Mary Magdalene. The limited colour palette and seemingly small space heightens the sense of grief and hopelessness. The nail marks

clearly show on Christ's hands and feet and there is a laceration mark on his chest. His face shows marks of suffering in the deep lines around his mouth and between his eyes, but it is also beautiful, serene and at peace. The muscular body is partly covered by a cloth that looks almost sculpted rather than painted. But it is the extraordinary angle of the painting that draws the eye inward, the extreme foreshortening suggesting that it should be looked at from below. It is a picture to contemplate as it draws one in to weep with Christ's mother and disciple.

Mantegna may have painted this for his own meditation as he never sold it but kept it in his studio. It was sold after his death to help clear his debts.