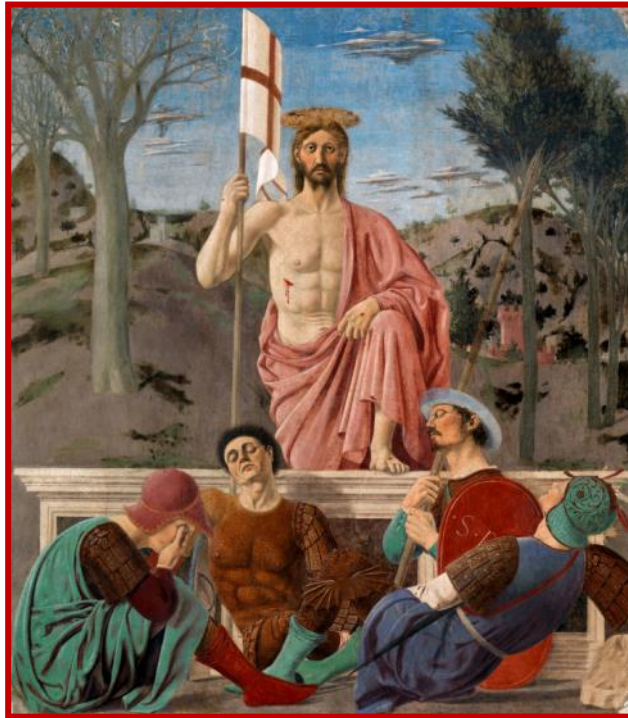


Art Day 7 - looking at pictures for Holy Week

Piero della Francesca - Risen Christ!

This fresco was painted around 1460 on the wall of the Civic Hall in Pietro's home town of San Sepolcro in Umbria. It narrowly escaped destruction in the war as a commanding officer in the British army had read Aldous Huxley's comment that this was the 'best painting in the world'. It is not hard to understand this view.



This is not a comfortable view of the Resurrection. Jesus' face stares out with eyes that have clearly seen the horrors of hell, reminding us of what he has done for us in the three days since his death. The light is cold, absorbing colours rather than reflecting them, the chill light of early dawn, which again suggests discomfort but also the hope of a new day. Not a breeze stirs the flag. The trees on the right are in full leaf, while those on the left are bare, symbolising life coming to men through the resurrection.

The composition is intensely mathematical: Piero was a renowned mathematician and wrote a major treatise on perspective, showing how it is created through geometry. The harmony is achieved through the isosceles triangle from Christ's head to the edge of the tomb and the soldiers' heads. The picture is framed by the horizontal sarcophagus and the almost symmetrical straight trees, which echo the straight flag pole. Yet this perfection is pierced by the slanting lance held by the

soldier – giving the picture an immediacy by creating an opposing triangle framing the castle in the background. Piero used two vanishing points: the soldiers are seen from below, with a vanishing point in the middle of their feet; Christ is seen straight on, in a different element from the soldiers, with the vanishing point behind

his head, thus emphasising his mastery of death and of the scene. He is stepping from the tomb using both his left leg and the pole of the flag to raise himself fully, the effort shows in his muscles and by the creases across his stomach, he is fully human as well as divine.

The sleeping soldiers are oblivious to the momentous event happening above their heads. The head of the soldier in brown just touches the pole, symbolising the connection of man with the divine. The soldiers' faces are real people, one of the earliest pictures to use portraits in this way, and the head of the soldier in brown is believed to be Piero himself. Despite the reality of their faces, however, their poses are unreal (the soldier in red appears to have no legs) but they are arranged so as to create true harmony. It works.---

Glass doors enable one to see this picture even when the Hall is closed. Its intensity compels absorption in this moment frozen in time and one can sit and stare at it for hours.