

# Art Day 3 - looking at pictures for Holy Week

The Agony in the Garden – two pictures by Giovanni Bellini and Andrea Mantegna



Andrea Mantegna

relevant to its time. We, the viewers, are those sleeping disciples or, worse, Judas seen leading the Roman soldiers on the left of Bellini's picture and the right of Mantegna's.

Each picture is full of symbolism. Bellini's Christ has a vision of a cherub with a chalice and patten – the symbols of Christ's sacrificial body; the fence around the garden evokes an image of the crown of thorns; the bare tree hints at the cross and the tower on the hill points to heaven. Mantegna's Christ sees a group of angels holding the instruments of the Passion; again a bare tree evokes the cross and on its branches sits a raven, the bird of ill omen; the mountains behind the walled city seem to reference the heavenly city in Dante's Paradise.



Giovanni Bellini

These two thoughtful, sombre, depictions of Christ praying in Gethsemane, while the three apostles sleep, both owe their inspiration to a drawing by Jacopo Bellini, Giovanni's father and Andrea's father-in-law. The two younger artists were trained in Venice by Jacopo. Mantegna's painting dates from about 1455 and Bellini's from about 1460. Each painting emphasises the isolation of Christ, placing him in a rocky landscape that underlines the harshness of what is to come and yet is also Italianate, with hill towns that are recognisably Italian, thus making the story immediately

Each artist shows their skill at perspective, particularly with the foreshortened figure, feet forward, of St Peter for Bellini and, even more strikingly, of St James for Mantegna.

Mantegna uses rocks with little vegetation and a very slight, early light emphasising the disquiet and gloom of this terrible time. Bellini's landscape is more tranquil and the rosy dawn suggests a perpetual renewal of life and hope – looking forward to the resurrection.