**Bellini, Giovanni**

**Bellini, Giovanni** (1430?-1516). The founder of the Venetian school of painting, Giovanni Bellini raised Venice to a center of Renaissance art that rivaled Florence and Rome. He brought to painting a new degree of realism, a new wealth of subject matter, and a new sensuousness in form and color.

Giovanni Bellini was born in Venice, Italy, in about 1430. Little is known about his family. His father, a painter, was a pupil of one of the leading 15th-century Gothic revival artists. Giovanni and his brother probably began their careers as assistants in their father's workshop.

In his early pictures, Bellini worked with tempera, combining a severe and rigid style with a depth of religious feeling and gentle humanity. From the beginning he was a painter of natural light. In his earliest pictures the sky is often reflected behind human figures in streaks of water that make horizontal lines in narrow strips of landscape. The Agony in the Garden was the first of a series of Venetian landscape scenes that continued to develop for the next century. Four triptychs (a triptych is a set of three panels used as an altarpiece) in the Venice Accademia and two Pietas, both in Milan, are all from this early period. Bellini's St. Vincent Ferrer altarpiece, which is still in the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice, was painted in the mid-1470s.

In his later work Bellini achieved a unique religious and emotional unity of expression. His method of using oil paint brought not only a greater maturity but an individual style. He achieved a certain richness by layering colors in new and varied ways.

In 1479 Bellini took his brother's place in continuing the painting of great historical scenes in the Hall of the Great Council in Venice. During that year and the next he devoted his time and energy to this project, painting six or seven new canvases. These, his greatest works, were destroyed by fire in 1577.

As his career continued, Bellini became one of the greatest landscape painters. His ability to portray outdoor light was so skillful that the viewer can tell not only the season of the year but also almost the hour of the day. Bellini lived to see his own school of painting achieve dominance and acclaim. His influence carried over to his pupils, two of whom became better known than he was: Giorgione (1477?-1510) and Titian (1488?-1576). His younger contemporary, the German painter Albrecht Durer, wrote of Bellini in 1506: "He is very old, and still he is the best painter of them all." Bellini died in Venice in 1516.