

What is Foreshortening?

In drawing, the term "foreshortening" refers to a method of representing an object in a picture in depth. For example, imagine how a standing man looks in terms of dimensions, seen from the front. Now imagine that this figure has been allowed to fall gently backwards, until stretched lengthways on the ground, with his feet pointing towards you and his head furthest away. If you wish to sketch this figure, the law of linear perspective dictates that, since his head is further away than his feet, you should make it appear smaller, so as to convey the illusion of 'depth' in the drawing - i.e. that it is receding away from the viewer into the picture space. Conversely, since the feet are now closer, they should appear larger. Most importantly, the figure's torso and limbs should be compressed or 'shortened' in the sketch, to give effect to the optical illusion that an object appears shorter than it actually is when angled towards the viewer. Foreshortening was first studied during the 15th-century by painters in Florence and Spain.

An excellent example of this type of foreshortening in fine art painting is *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (c.1470-80, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan) by Andrea Mantegna (shown to the right). Notice how the artist shortens the length of Christ's chest and legs in order to represent perspective or depth in the picture space.



Types: Artistic Foreshortening vs. Photographic Foreshortening

A sketcher or painter is likely to shorten objects slightly differently from a camera. This is because, while a camera never lies, an artist may not wish to replicate the full brutal effect of foreshortening. Instead, he will often reduce the relative dimensions of the nearer part of the object (in the case of *The Lamentation*, the feet) so as to make a slightly less aggressive assault on the viewer's eye and incorporate the truncated image more harmoniously into the overall composition. Indeed, this is exactly what Mantegna did in *The Lamentation*. He deliberately reduced the size of Jesus's feet so as not to block our view of the body. Whereas, if a photograph was taken from the same angle, the feet would have been so big that they would have obscured more of our view of the legs and torso.

Illusionistic Ceiling Frescos

Shortening an object is essentially an illusionistic device to simulate depth in a picture. This enables a painter to suggest three-dimensionality and volume in his figures. This leads to a noticeable increase in realism. The same applies to landscapes, where foreshortening adds considerably to the naturalism of the view. However, the most visually stunning application of foreshortening is in architectural decoration, such as illusionistic fresco painting, especially on ceilings. This type of mural painting uses techniques such as perspective *di sotto in su* ("seen from below") and *quadratura* (ceiling paintings that simulate the extension of real architecture into an imaginary space), in order to create the illusion of three-dimensional depth in an otherwise two-dimensional ceiling surface above the viewer.



Andrea Mantegna di sotto in su in Camera degli Sposi

Foreshortening in Landscapes

This technique is most commonly associated with figures or objects, although in fact it is also used regularly in landscapes. The road that will appear relatively long if it runs straight ahead of us up a tall mountain, will be much shorter if it stretches away on a flat plain in front of us. Rivers and bridges will also seem shortened or compressed if sketched at anything like ground level.

The Thames Below Westminster (1871, National Gallery, London) by Claude Monet



History of Foreshortening

This illusionist technique was first pioneered during the Early Renaissance. As well as Paolo Uccello (1397-1475), and Vincenzo Foppa (c.1430-1515) (many of whose works have been lost), Andrea Mantegna (1430-1506) was perhaps the greatest early exponent, and his method is exemplified in the *Lamentation* and the *di sotto in su* ceiling oculus in the *Camera degli Sposi* frescoes (*Camera Picta*) of Ludovico Gonzaga's Ducal Palace in Mantua. A younger contemporary of Mantegna was Luca Signorelli (1450-1523), noted for his frescoes of the *Last Judgment* (1499–1503) in Orvieto Cathedral.

The next great practitioner was Michelangelo (1475-1564) during the High Renaissance, whose Sistine Chapel frescoes (1508-12) - notably the picture of *The Separation of Light from Darkness* in his Genesis Fresco - in which he makes God appear as if he is rising above the viewer by shortening his body.

After Michelangelo there was Correggio (1489-1534), the great painter of the Parma school, whose illusionistic methods and dramatic foreshortening - see for instance his incredible *Assumption of the Virgin* in the dome of Parma Cathedral (1530) - influenced a number of succeeding artists. Along the way, Paolo Veronese's ceiling paintings for San Sebastiano, the Doge's Palace, and the Marciana Library, established him among his Venetian contemporaries as a master of foreshortening able to combine the figurative subtlety of Correggio with the heroic figuration of Michelangelo.



The greatest Rococo exponent of foreshortening was Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) whose fresco paintings in the state dining room (*Kaiseraal*) and the ceiling of the Grand Staircase (*Trepnhaus*) of the Wurzburg Residenz proved to be the greatest masterpiece of his career. The focus of the work is the soaring image of *Apollo Bringing the Bride* (1750-1) in the centre of the *Trepnhaus* ceiling, which exemplifies Tiepolo superb draughtsmanship, foreshortening and perspective, as well as his shimmering luminosity of colour. These architectural decorations of the Wurzburg *Residenz* effectively bring to a close the Italian tradition of fresco painting initiated by Giotto (1270-1337) four hundred years earlier.

Information taken from <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/painting/foreshortening.htm>



The Marriage of St. Catherine

Paolo Veronese (1528 – 19 April 1588)
PAOLO CALIARI was born in Verona, hence he was known by the name Veronese. He studied with Antonio Badile while living in Verona, before moving to Venice in about 1553. With Titian and Tintoretto, Veronese dominated the Venetian art scene. His use of color differed from that of other painters of the Venetian school, and hints of his training in Verona can be seen in his distinctive yet harmonious coloring.

Veronese often painted religious scenes, placing them in an incongruous Venetian setting with the saints dressed in finery and jewels. Although he was censored for this decorative element which some viewed as sacrilegious, it enabled him to portray the splendor of life in the rich and triumphant city state of Venice.

During the early years of his career in Venice, Veronese painted frescoes for the great architect Sanmicheli. As a result, many of his works convey a lasting impression of the detail of architecture, including *The Marriage Feast at Cana*, where the feast takes place against a magnificent backdrop of sweeping Classical colonnades. The architectural setting intensifies the illusion that the painting is a scene from a play - sixteenth-century theaters often had two such flanking flights of stairs. Veronese has included a self portrait of himself playing the viola da braccio; beside him are fellow artists Titian and Tintoretto.





Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine



Battle of Lepanto

There are many more examples of Veronese's artwork out there, so you can do a search on his name and see many, *many* more.