

# *ISS E. Majorana Bari*



## **Water in art**

*ERASMUS+ "SAVE WATER"*

*KA220-SCH-000085699*





Water, an essential element in human life, has fascinated entire generations of artists, becoming the protagonist of numerous works. From rock graffiti depicting places linked to water to Renaissance painting in which it becomes a symbol of purity through the rite of baptism, from Monet's impressionist movement to modern and contemporary art.

Of the four elements, the liquid one is certainly one of the most fertile from the point of view of artistic inspiration, both for its characteristics of transparency and fluidity, and for the strong symbolic meaning that has always been attributed to it in philosophy and mythology.

## ANCIENT ART

In the iconography of Ancient Egypt, the element of water was represented as two deities with anthropomorphic characteristics: the Nile, the water of the floods that restored fertility to the land, and the Nun, the primordial ocean that gave rise to all forms of life. In Greek mythology, however, all waters, whether salty or fresh, were direct descendants of the god Oceanus, son of Uranus and Gaea; Oceanus was identified as a great river that surrounded the Earth and gave rise to all watercourses.





## ANCIENT ART

Aphrodite herself, goddess of love, was depicted as a beautiful woman born from the sea foam on the island of Cyprus. The mural painting in Pompeii in the house known as the Venus of the Shell is famous. The most important aquatic deity is certainly Poseidon, the Neptune of the ancient Romans, who reigns over minor deities such as Triton, Glaucus, Proteus, Ioreus and Nereus.

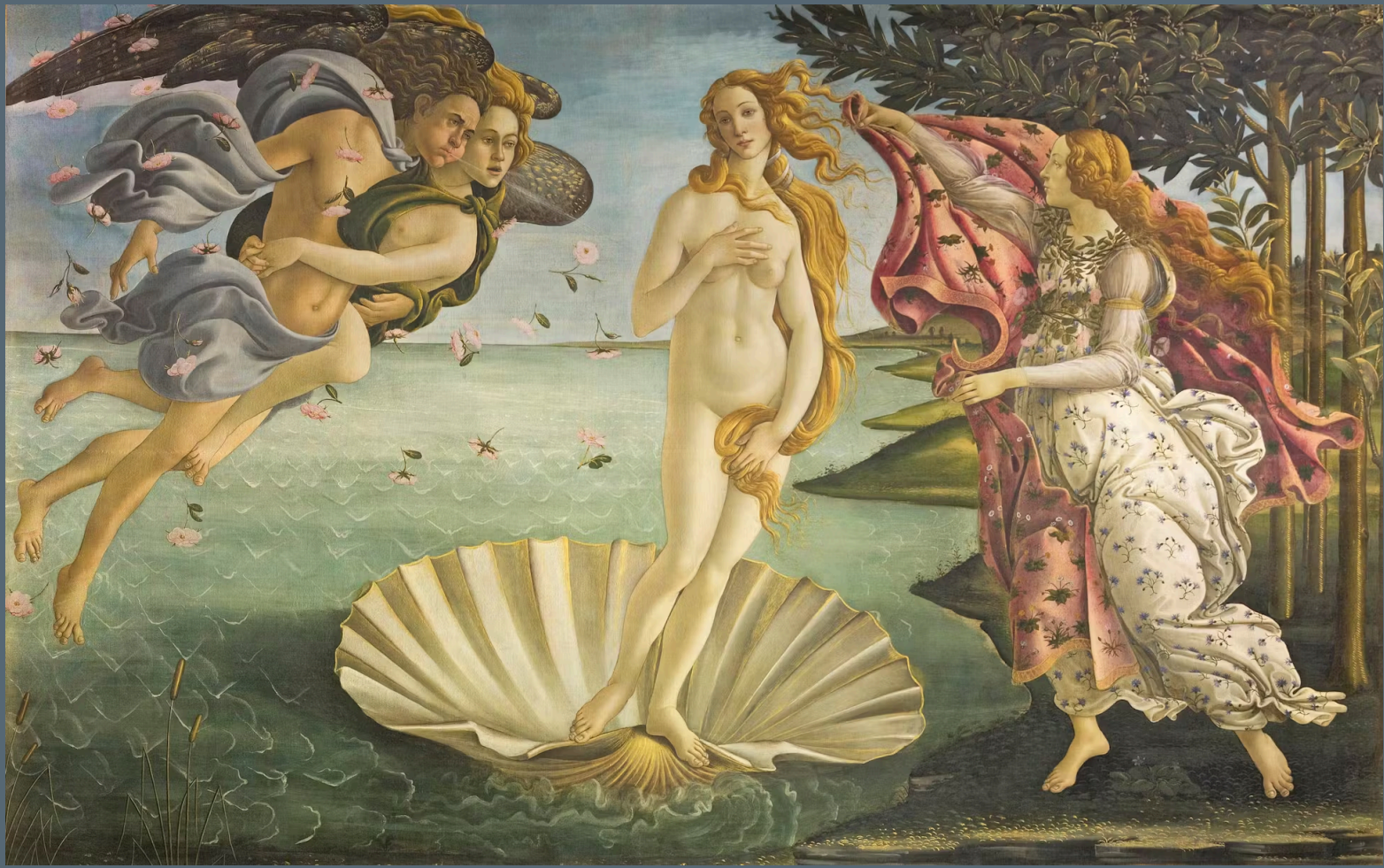
<https://pompeiiisites.org/en/archaeological-site/house-of-venus-in-the-shell/>

# FROM GIOTTO TO THE RENAISSANCE

In Western art between the 9th and 10th centuries, water tends to be identified with the act of baptism and thus becomes a symbol of purity. Extremely evocative is the fresco by Giotto in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua in which the baptism of Jesus is depicted. Also in the "Baptism of Christ" by Piero della Francesca the composition of human figures is built around Christ in the act of receiving the sacrament. The colors are clear and create small luminous contrasts between the clothes, the transparency of the sky and the sparkle of the holy water.

<https://www.cappelladegliscrovegni.it/index.php/en/>





## FROM GIOTTO TO THE RENAISSANCE

This painting "Birth of Venus" preserved in the Uffizi in Florence, brings water back as the protagonist of profane subjects; in this canvas, which has become an icon of the Italian Renaissance, in which Venus is seen advancing lightly on a shell along the surface of the sea rippled by the waves: the perspective is given by the water itself which takes on different shades in the distance and which represents the origin of life.

<https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/birth-of-venus>



## FROM GIOTTO TO THE RENAISSANCE

In Titian's painting "Sacred and Profane Love", the two female characters, Venus and Proserpina, assist the cupid who mixes the water contained in the casket-sarcophagus, transforming death into life. Finally, the interpretation of the myth of Narcissus in Caravaggio's painting is exemplary, depicting the boy bent over a body of water intent on gazing enchanted at his own image.

<https://www.raiscuola.rai.it/storiadellarte/articoli/2021/10/Caravaggio-e-Narciso-allo-specchio-6f53305d-8b27-403b-a2a9-d1ddefcb1627.html>



## The impressionists

In impressionist painting, water is often present and permeates a good part of the painting thanks to its ability to create suggestive plays of light. In Manet's painting of the pier of "Boulogne-sur-Mer", the water that envelops the two piers at the mouth of the Liane is rendered by soft brush strokes in pearly grey tones that create an extraordinary chromatic contrast with the dense network of poles that are reflected in it. "Impression soleil levant", the extraordinary work by Monet from which the artistic movement takes its name, depicts the port of La Havre at dawn with a fishing boat in the foreground returning from night fishing; water is the dominant element also thanks to the effect of the light of the rising sun that is reflected in it and generates an almost anomalous brightness, capable of giving a supernatural character to the canvas.

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-jetty-of-boulogne-sur-mer-edouard-manet/3wGXQtcmom0Bw?hl=en>



## The impressionists

From the sea water to that of the pond which, in the series of paintings dedicated by Monet to the bridge of the “Garden of Giverny” and to the even more famous water lilies, is increasingly nuanced, with an almost mother-of-pearl iridescence, and becomes the true subject of the painting.

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/monet-the-water-garden-at-giverny>

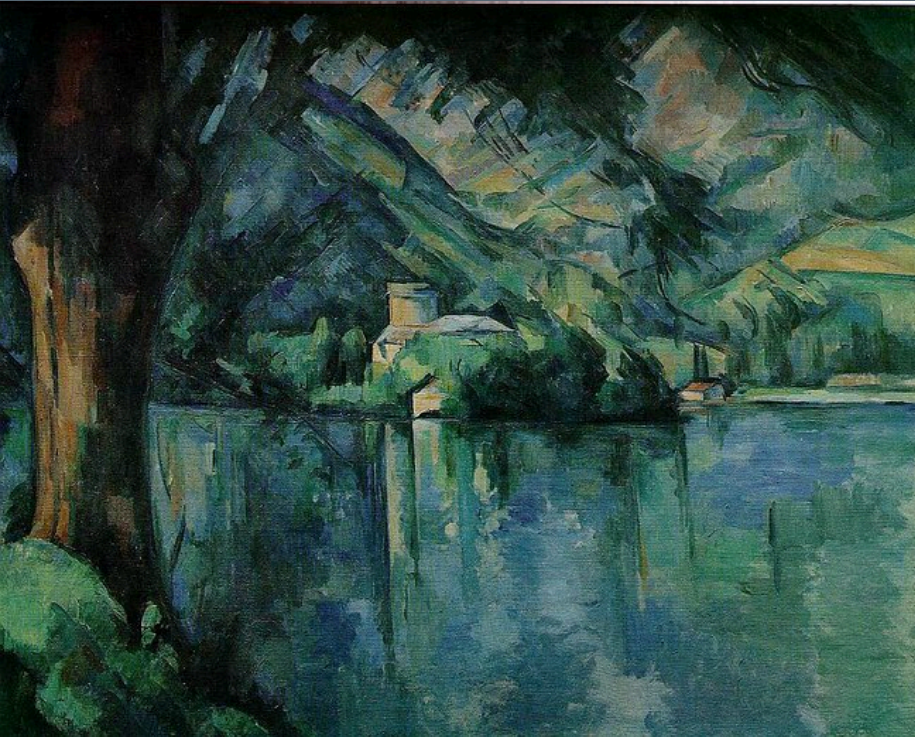
<https://www.artandobject.com/news/explore-claude-monets-iconic-garden-giverny>

## SHAKESPEARE AND CLASSICISM IN THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

Completely different outcomes compared to the water lilies loved by the Impressionists are those characterizing the Pre-Raphaelite painting in which the pond and the watercourse take on magical and mythological connotations. In the late nineteenth-century paintings of the British artist John William Waterhouse, two different strands stand out that act as a common thread throughout his works: the classical one and the Shakespearean one. “Hylas and the Nymphs” for example, in which the young Hylas is depicted just before being kidnapped by the nymphs who will drag him into the depths of the pond, belongs to the first strand while “Ophelia”, Hamlet’s unhappy lover who will commit suicide for love by drowning in the placid waters of the lake, belongs to the second.



<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506/story-ophelia#:~:text=The%20weeping%20willow%20tree%20leaning,Ophelia's%20right%20hand%20represent%20innocence.>



## CÉZANNE, PICASSO AND MAGRITTE

From Monet's Impressionism to Van Gogh's Post-Impressionism with his "Starry Night Over the Rhone". The painting, considered one of his masterpieces, is entirely played on the reflection of the starry sky against the dark waters of the river and the lights of the town of Arles in the distance. For Paul Cézanne, color prevails over line as can be seen in the painting "Lake Annecy" and the presence of the water element is based on the chromatic differences in the tones of blue and green mixed with touches of yellow and violet to give a perspective depth to the lake landscape. "Les demoiselles d'Avignon", painted by Picasso in 1908 and exhibited at the MoMadi New York, is one of the symbolic paintings of Cubism and depicts a group of women around whom the water element can only be traced back to the tones of blue behind them.

<https://www.analisdellopera.it/pablo-picasso-les-demoiselles-d-avignon/>



## CÉZANNE, PICASSO AND MAGRITTE

A totally surrealist vision of water is finally proposed by René Magritte with his “Inverted Mermaid”, a hybrid creature, half woman and half fish, languidly stretched out on the shoreline; behind her we can glimpse the undertow of the wave that flows with its dark blue into the brightness of the horizon.

[https://www.academia.edu/4589755/Death\\_of\\_a\\_Mermaid\\_A\\_study\\_on\\_Ren%C3%A9\\_Magritte\\_s\\_Invention\\_Collective\\_Collective\\_Invention\\_Honza\\_Zamojski\\_Fishing\\_with\\_John\\_Nero\\_Publishing\\_Milan\\_2013\\_pp\\_131\\_143](https://www.academia.edu/4589755/Death_of_a_Mermaid_A_study_on_Ren%C3%A9_Magritte_s_Invention_Collective_Collective_Invention_Honza_Zamojski_Fishing_with_John_Nero_Publishing_Milan_2013_pp_131_143)



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