

Henry Morris Memorial Trust

Renaissance Bookshelf Project

By Vaatsalya Kamaraju

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Introduction

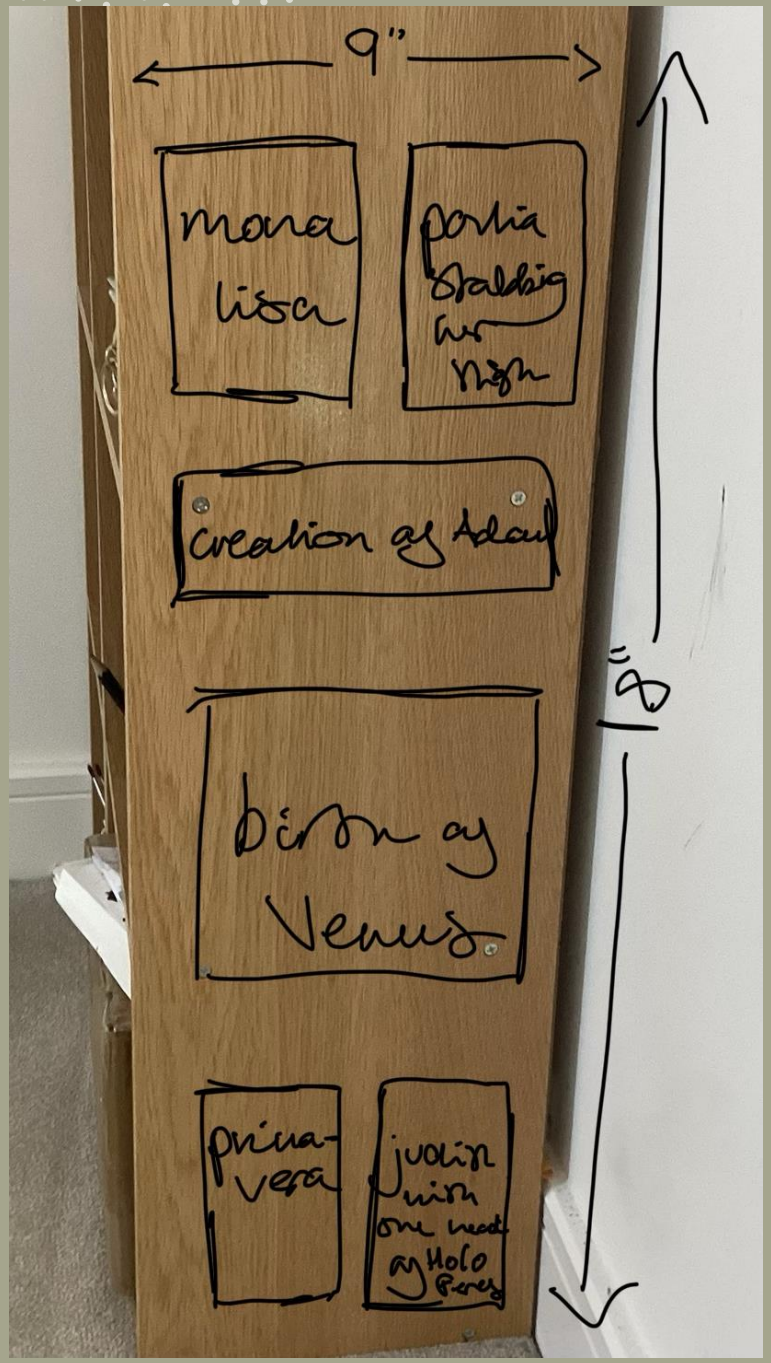
After receiving £50 from the Henry Morris Memorial Trust to purchase supplies, I decided to buy Akoya White Synthetic Brushes from Jackson's Art, Daler-Rowney Glaze Matt Medium, and a three-pack of large brushes from Hobbycraft, along with additional spare supplies such as paints and brushes.

The bookshelf I was planning to paint measured 18" by 9" and was made of wood. I quickly realised that my original plan to use oil paints would not work. Most oil paints designed specifically for wood are intended for large, solid areas of colour rather than the intricate paintings I had planned, while the oil paints used for portraiture were not suitable for painting on wood. Because of this, I decided to switch to acrylic paints and save oils for a future project.

Setting up

I started by moving the bookshelf away from the walls and placing it on a protective sheet, before removing all of the items from the shelves. I then gathered my paints, palette, water bowl and brushes, along with any other materials I thought I might need.

Using a digital photo of the shelf, I roughly sketched out which paintings I wanted to recreate and where I wanted to place them on the bookshelf. While planning the layout, I kept in mind the size of my brushes, the borders around each image and the amount of detail I wanted to include. I selected particular sections from each painting and ended up with a good mixture of portraits and studies of hands, both of which required similar colours for creating skin tones.

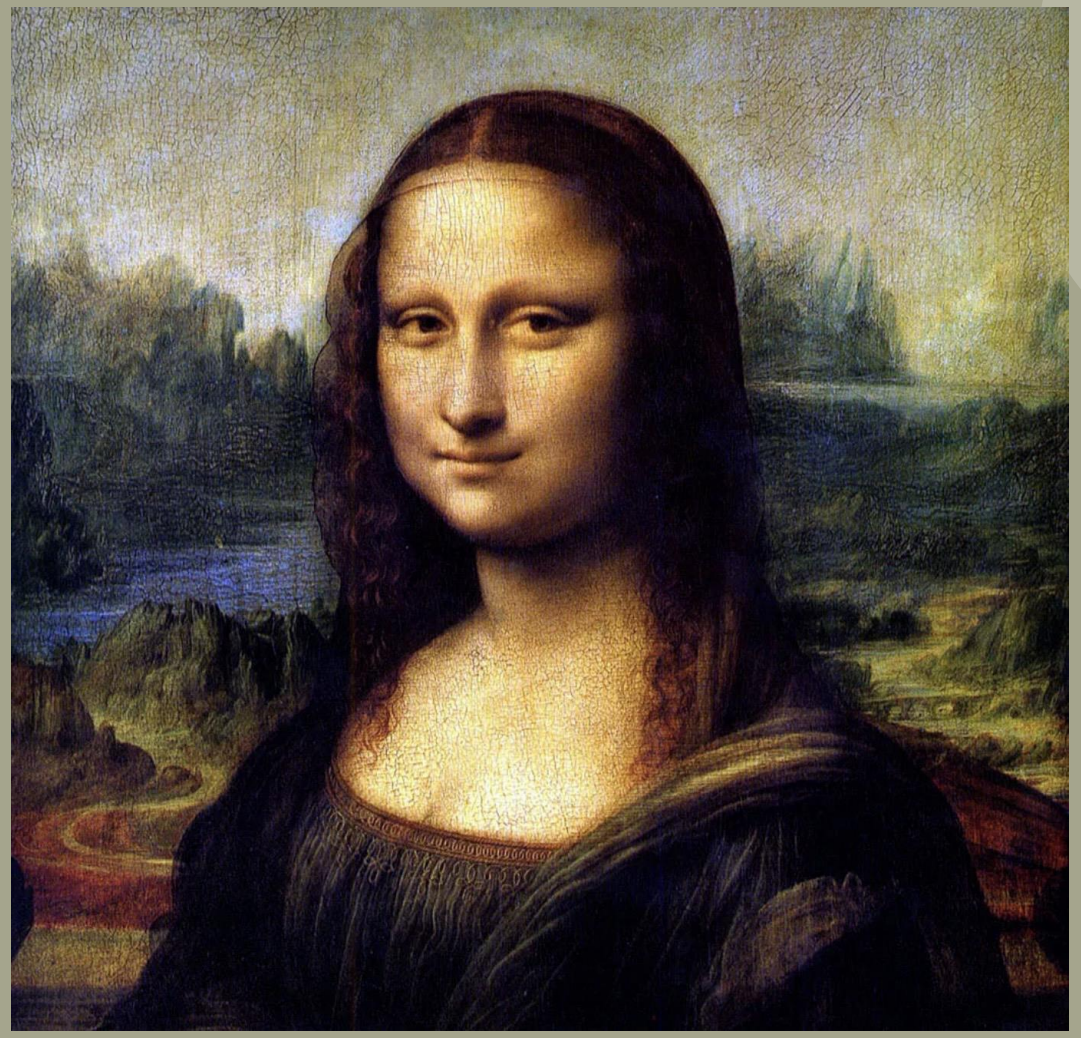


Painting No.1: Mona Lisa (results at the end)

I decided to begin with the famous Mona Lisa. Leonardo da Vinci used oil paints, creating the smooth and naturals blending to her skin since oil paints dry much slower than acrylics. This meant for me to paint it (on a much smaller scale as well) would make the end result more textured and abstract than the reference.

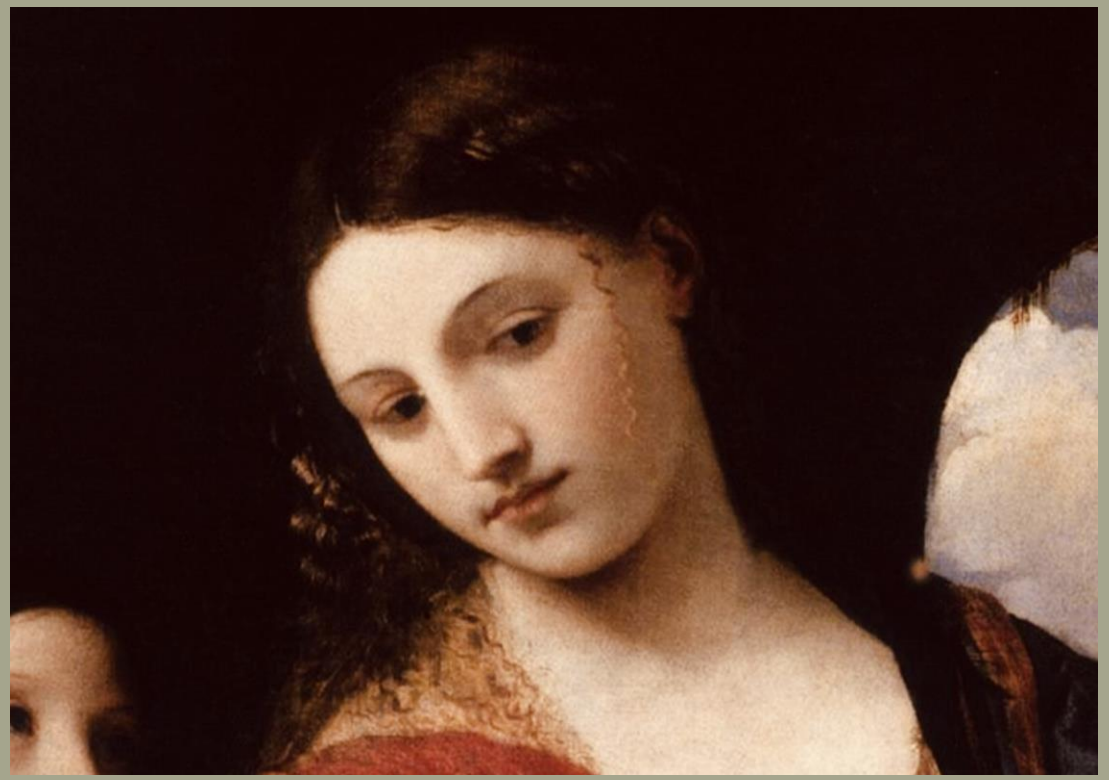
First, I used gesso to prime the wood for paint and roughly sketched where the main figure would be, working out shapes instead of the finer details which would come with the paintwork. I used mainly ochre yellow, white, black and burnt sienna. I began by blocking out the colours before going in with a finer brush for the details like the facial features and details in the hair and clothes.

Once finished with the main figure, which took a few weeks, I decided on a pale blue background, gradually lightening it the closer to the figure it gets. Then I used a metallic, gold paint for a border. The paint itself was very sheer so I layered it multiple times, making the finish opaque but quite chunky which luckily smoothed out with the matte finish I used over it once completed.



Mona Lisa (Leonardo da Vinci, 1503)

Painting No. 2: Salome



Salome (Titian, 1515)

Originally, I was planning to do the dagger from Portia Stabbing her Thigh but decided to do another portrait to even up the ratio between faces and hands. This particular painting was painted by Titian and is one of the many painters to use Salome as the subject. This, like all of the other paintings I did, was a skilful oil painting.

I did the same process as the Mona Lisa but I played around more with bolder shadows on the face and adding highlights to the hair to show the texture and light.

For some reason, the paint dried much quicker than usual making the blending much harder. To keep the paint wet, I mixed it with water which, while preventing it from drying out as quick, thinned out the paint meaning I had to use several layers to show the true colour instead of the dull, greyish finish.

The subject filled up the space more than the other one meaning the background was much less prevalent so I kept the background a pinkish-red with no gradient and I stuck with the good border.



The Creation of Adam (Michelangelo, 1512)

Painting No. 3: The Creation of Adam

This particular part of the painting may be one of the most well known renaissance paintings, second to the Mona Lisa. This was the first hands painting and came easier to me compared to the portraits. The sketch was quite easy to do, mostly rounded rectangles and circles and the proportions were easy to draw.

For this one, I added cadmium red to go from the weathered, yellowed look of most renaissance paintings to more skin toned and a rosy finish.

If I could redo it, I would shift the image more to the right as Adam's hand shows a good portion of the wrist whereas God's hand cuts off directly where the writs would begin.

Painting No. 4: The Birth of Venus

This painting is the largest of them all and maybe because of that fact, this painting gave me the most trouble.

I began this painting during the heatwave meaning the paints dried faster than any other painting with the fan and heat contributing to it and making the blending very difficult, lifting the paint beneath rather than smoothly mixing with it.

Another issue was the pigment in my particular burnt sienna was purple meaning whenever I mixed it with yellow ochre, black or white it would turn into a greyish, bruised purple. The brown alone was far too dark and the other browns I had were either too cool toned or too orange.

I improvised by making the shadows far less pronounced than in the reference, a very subtle change in saturation and using darker shadows for the eyelids and directly below the neck. Although the finish came out more auburn than golden orange, the hair was much easier and blended nicely altogether.



The birth of Venus (Sandro Botticelli, 1480s)

Painting No. 5 and No. 6: Primavera and Judith

These paintings were the final two and, being very similar and relatively simple, I decided to paint them both in tandem, using most of the same paints.

Despite being simple and straightforward, the fingers in the first painting were difficult to paint in such a small scale and to differentiate each separate finger.

The second painting was much easier, the fingers being easier to individualise and separate. Despite the skin tone of the right painting being less pale and more yellowed, I used the same paints for both to create some more cohesion and to make them a pair of sorts to finish the full bookshelf.



Primavera (Sandro Botticelli, 1470s)

Judith with the Head of Holofernes (Vincenzo Catena, 1520s)











Final Paintings (slide 1/3)

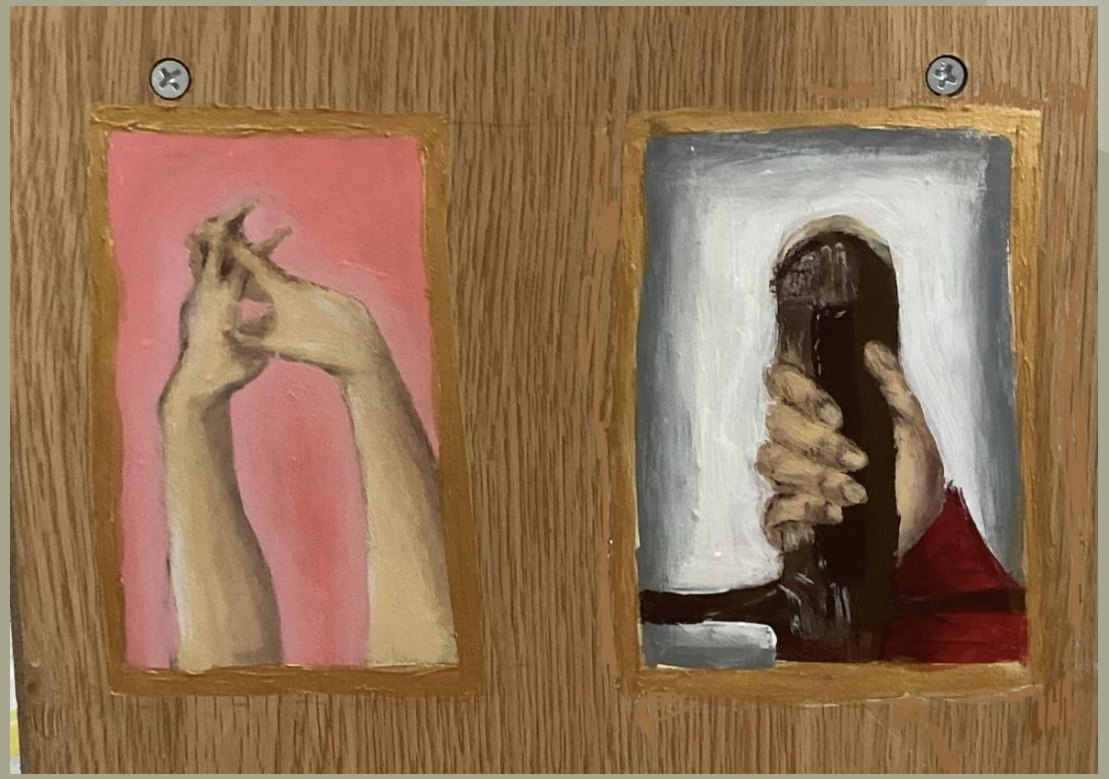
Final Paintings (slide 2/3)

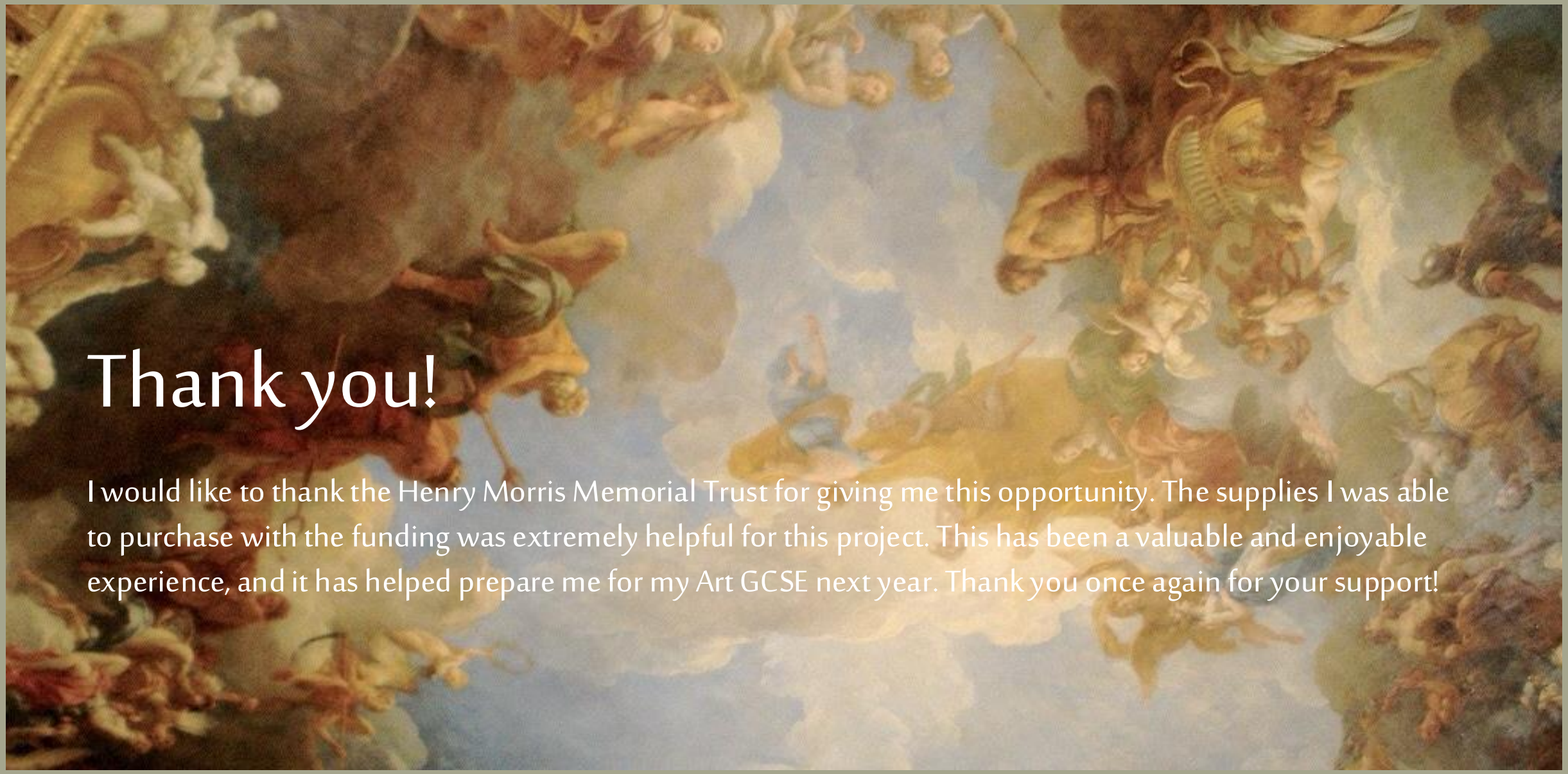




Final Paintings (slide 3/3)







Thank you!

I would like to thank the Henry Morris Memorial Trust for giving me this opportunity. The supplies I was able to purchase with the funding was extremely helpful for this project. This has been a valuable and enjoyable experience, and it has helped prepare me for my Art GCSE next year. Thank you once again for your support!