The Themes of the Vault

The vault of the Mirrors Gallery, frescoed by Luca Giordano, includes numerous scenes rich in characters and details. Let's discover them together.

CLICK on the scenes to discover more

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The Cave of Eternity

At the centre of the short end of the room to the **West** is the scene depicting **The Cave of Eternity**; in the background, **Time** is represented with wings and an hourglass. At its feet, the ancient god **Demogorgon** with his veiled face offers a branch to the blindfolded and winged **Fortuna** holding the globe, and a golden globe to **Nature**, who is depicted as a nude young woman who gives off milk from her breast. In the foreground are the **Three Fates** spinning threads of wire that is given to them by **Janus**, surmounted by **Prometheus** holding a torch.

Minerva as Protectress of the Arts and Sciences

At the short end of the room to the **East** is a scene depicting the culmination of progress, symbolised by **Minerva as Protectress of the Arts and Sciences**, who offers a golden key – the symbol of the Riccardi family – to **Intellect** accompanied by the nude **Veritas**; with the other hand, **Minerva** delivers a hammer to two women, personifications of **Industriousness** and **Usefulness**. From above, **Hermes** offers **Minerva** the caduceus and a golden trumpet; behind him, **Amphion** [o **Orpheus**] is luring birds, observed by the she-wolf with **Romulus** and **Remus** – a reference to the **Riccardis**' ancient Roman origins.

Northern long side - Rape of Proserpine

Along the **Northern** long side, we see the **Death** with three souls trying to step onto **Charon**'s boat. Toward the top, **Night and Sleep** cloaked in a blue mantle are surrounded by putti wearing masks and representing dreams. Near the entrance to the Hades, we see the three-headed dog Cerberus, the **Three Erinyes**, and the Judges of the underworld (**Minos**, **Rhadamanthus**, and **Aeacus**) watching the **Rape of Proserpine** abducted by **Pluto**, while the **Harpies** fly high above them.

Northern long side – Mythological Scene of Agriculture

Along the **Northern** long side, near the **Rape of Proserpine**, we find the **Mythological Scene of Agriculture**: **Pomona** removing dried branches from a tree, the winged **Zephyrus** watering the earth, **Vertumnus** holding a spade, and **Flora** crowned with flowers. In the background, **Ceres** and her accompanying deities scatter seeds on the earth together with the demigod **Triptolemus** at the plough. Higher above, **Juno**, the protectress of marriage, flies in a chariot drawn by peacocks.

Southern long side - Death of Adonis

The **Southern** long side opens with the scene representing the **Death of Adonis**, killed by **Mars** turned into a wild boar, and mourned by **Diana**; in the background, **Aci** and **Galatea**. At the centre are **Neptune** and **Amphitrite** surrounded by creatures, horses and three marine deities: **Palaemon** sitting on a fish, **Nereus** and **Glaucus** with **Isis** [or **Thetis**] at their back on a boat.

Southern long side - Triumph of Bacchus

The **Southern** long side continues with, in the background, winds blowing the **Argonauts**, and **Atlas** holding up the world aided by **Heracles**. In the foreground, seated, **Harpocrates** the god of silence, and **Momus** the god of mockery. At their back soars the **Triumph of Bacchus** featuring **Bacchantes**, **Panthers** and **Fauns**.

Justice

In the four corners of the vaulted ceiling are allegories of the **Cardinal Virtues**, accompanied by personifications of their respective opposite **Vices.**

Justice, carrying scales and a sword, accompanied by the ostrich, is crowned by **Fame** holding a Gallery's Themes trumpet, flanked by **Clemency** with a shield and a spear, and by **Quiet** [or **Confidence**] with an anchor and a nest on her head. At the sides of Justice, **Punishment** with a sword, and **Reward** with a cornucopia. At her feet, her opposite vices: **Deceit** with a mask, hook, net, and a tiger; **Conflict** with a snake; **Discord** with bellows.

Prudence

In the four corners of the vaulted ceiling are allegories of the **Cardinal Virtues**, accompanied by personifications of their respective opposite **Vices.**

Prudence is depicted with a mirror, an arrow with a snake twined around it, and the **Deer**, surmounted by **Happiness** [or **Abundance**] holding a cornucopia and a caduceus, by **Health** scattering flowers and holding a key, and by **Wellbeing** [**Health**] holding a painted shield and a goblet with a snake symbolising medicine. The vices at the bottom are **Ignorance** with a donkey head, and **Falsehood** with eagle claws. At the sides are the two ancient Greek philosophers **Archimedes** and **Euclid**, symbolising **Experience** and **Order**: the former is depicted with a quadrant and a pair of compasses, while the latter holds a book and a board featuring geometric signs.

Fortitude

In the four corners of the vaulted ceiling are allegories of the **Cardinal Virtues**, accompanied by personifications of their respective opposite **Vices**.

Fortitude, represented as an armed woman, rests on a column, the symbol of perseverance, and a **Lion**, and is crowned by **Honour**. Above them soars **Victory** with a banner, a pomegranate, and an eagle, and **Peace** holding an olive branch and a torch to burn weapons. Beneath them, we find **Constance** holding a dagger and a burning brazier, and the **Valour**, represented as a primitive man strangling a snake. The opposite vices are **Fear** under a deer skin, and **Misery** trampled by a putto.

Temperance

In the four corners of the vaulted ceiling are allegories of the **Cardinal Virtues**, accompanied by personifications of their respective opposite **Vices**.

Temperance, depicted with a bridle and a clock, is flanked by an **Elephant** and by **Sobriety** holding a key and resting her foot on a marine creature. Behind her is **Meekness** [or **Modesty**] holding a vase of oil. Above them is **Tranquillity** with a kingfisher nest and a closed cornucopia, **Youth** [or **Veneration**] holding a censer and an uroboros, and **Voluptuousness** with exposed breasts, a winged sphere, and deceptive hooks. The vices below are **Hunger** holding a knife in her mouth and a wolf, **Envy** with a snake devouring her breast, and inert **Melancholy**.

Apotheosis of the Medici

At the centre of the vaulted ceiling overlooks the **Apotheosis of the Medici** featuring **Jupiter** enthroned, supported by two figures in the shape of caryatids. To his side, **Cosimo I** is depicted with an arrow with a snake twined around it symbolising Prudence and, on the other side, **Francesco I** holding the fasces symbolising Justice. Beneath them are **Ferdinando II** wearing a lion skin and holding a club symbolising Fortitude, and **Cosimo III** with a brazier and pincers symbolising Temperance, flanked by the young **Ferdinando** and **Giangastone** on horseback.

The Chariot of the Moon

The Chariot of the Moon with **Saturn**, **Mars** and **Venus**, overlooks the **Apotheosis of the Medici**. The throne is approached by the **nude Veritas**, **Hebe** the cupbearer of the gods, the **Goat Amalthea**, and a Putto with the head of **Medusa** symbolising the destruction of evil.

The Chariot of the Sun

At the bottom of the **Apotheosis of the Medici** we see **the Chariot of the Sun** with spleeping **Morpheus** and the **Four Seasons**: **Spring** holding a basket of flowers, **Summer** with a torch, **Autumn** holding a cornucopia, and **Winter** emanating rain.