

Italian masters : educational project

Museum of Modern Art

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The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.

STUDENTS' GUIDE

TO THE EXHIBITION OF ITALIAN MASTERS

LENT TO THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, 11 WEST 53rd STREET, NEW YORK, BY THE ROYAL ITALIAN GOVERNMENT

JAN. - MAR. WEEKDAYS, 10 A.M. - 10 P.M.; SUNDAYS, NOON TO 10 P.M.
REGARDING GROUP ADMISSIONS CALL MR. GRAHAM, Circle 5-8900

Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian died four hundred years ago in Italy but their names are known today to millions of Americans. Through their painting and sculpture these artists are still so much alive that the Museum of Modern Art is delighted to be able to show their work, even though the Museum is first of all interested in the arts of our own time—houses, furniture, movies, photographs, as well as painting and sculpture. An exhibition of "Modern Masters" is in fact being shown on another floor of the Museum at the same time as the Italian Masters, while movies of historic importance are shown in the auditorium.

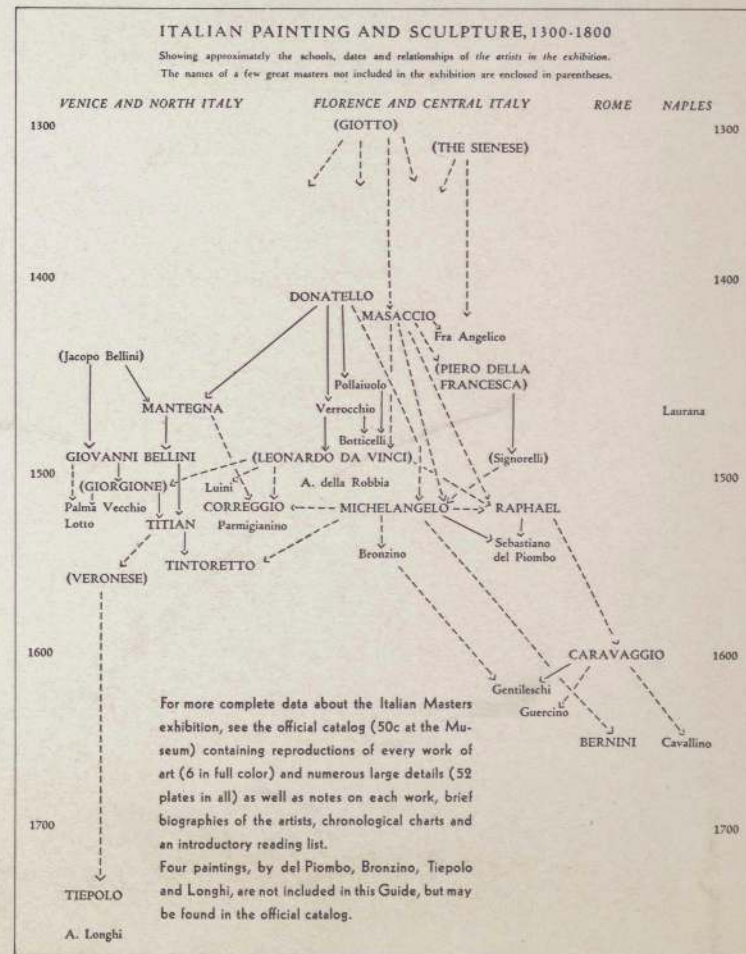
Next to this column is an historical chart showing where and when the artists in the exhibition lived and how the older artists passed on their ideas to their followers so that traditions were formed which have come right down through the years to us today. For instance, Picasso, the most famous living artist, was influenced by Ingres, Ingres by Raphael, (no. xx in "Italian Masters"), Raphael by Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo by Verrocchio, (no. xx), and Verrocchio by Donatello (no. xx).

In the EARLY RENAISSANCE, about 1400 to 1500, artists were excited by new scientific researches in anatomy and movement (Pollaiuolo, Verrocchio), the expression of character (Donatello), of drama (Masaccio), detailed realism (the landscape in Mantegna's *St. George*.) They were also deeply interested in new discoveries in Greek and Roman art and legend (Pollaiuolo, Botticelli).

During the HIGH RENAISSANCE, about 1510, detailed realism and youthful enthusiasm gave way to a new sense of maturity and grandeur such as we find in the work of Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian and Palma Vecchio. But the classic dignity, self-confidence and perfection of the High Renaissance "Grand Style" soon lost its balance and fell to pieces in a number of interesting ways which, taken together, are called MANNERISM. The intimate portraits of Lotto and Parmigianino, the elongated and twisted figures of Tintoretto show two very different aspects of Mannerist art.

A little before 1600 Caravaggio staged a one-man revolution in painting. He was hardboiled both in his art and his life. He painted sensationally realistic pictures with melodramatic lighting and pretended to despise the classic art of both the Greeks and the Renaissance. He was the first great painter of the BAROQUE period, 1600-1750, and greatly influenced the Italians, Cavallino, Guercino, Gentileschi, (nos. xx, xx, xx) as well as far more famous foreign artists such as Rubens, Rembrandt and Velasquez. The foremost Baroque sculptor was the Italian Bernini (no. xx).

Italian Baroque Art died out in the 18th century but the great Italian traditions are carried on today by many of the best living artists, both European and American.



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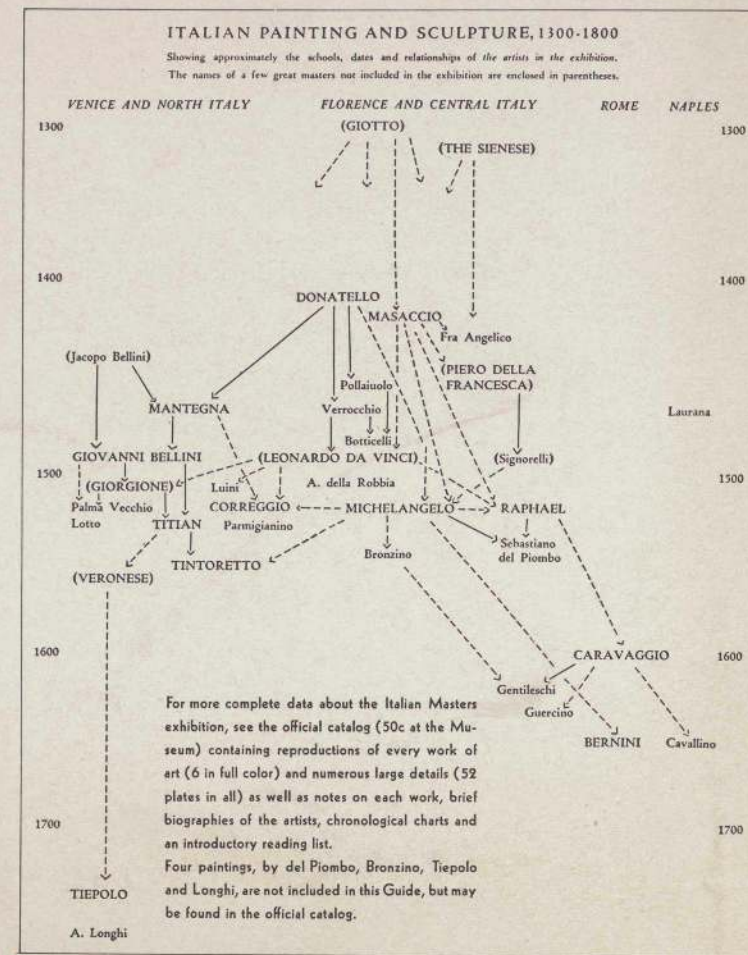
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9. MICHELANGELO

(Mikel-anjelo). Florentine, 1475 - 1564. MADONNA AND CHILD. Made about 1504. Circular marble relief, 38 1/4 inches in diameter. Mother and child roughly compose a pyramid within a circle. Sharp angles of seated body, elbow and knee contrast with surrounding curves of the drapery and child's body. Compare with softly rounding forms of Raphael's *Madonna of the Chair*. Compare, too, the sadness and pride of Michelangelo's Madonna with Raphael's obvious sweetness. The surface is completely finished and you can see the marks of the chisel: do you think this spoils the beauty of the work?



10. RAPHAEL

(Raff-a-yell). Umbrian, worked in Rome, 1483 - 1520. MADONNA OF THE CHAIR. Painted about 1512. Circular panel, 28 inches in diameter. Skillful solution of the difficult problem of composing a group of figures within a circle. The circle and the soft curves within it are stabilized by the strong verticals of the chair and back of Madonna. Compare with Michelangelo's circular Madonna in marble. Study the differences in spirit and feeling as well as in composition. Which do you prefer?

ITALIAN MASTERS EDUCATIONAL PROJECT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



1. DONATELLO

Florentine, 1386-1466. BUST OF A YOUNG MAN. Made between 1440 and 1455. Bronze, height 16 1/2 inches. Beautiful modeling, large planes and details superbly related. Smooth surfaces of face contrast with rough textures and details of hair, eyes and brows. Donatello was a pioneer both in the mastery of anatomical structure and the recovery of classic form; to these he added his own sense of high strung, aristocratic vitality. He was the greatest Italian sculptor before Michelangelo.



3. MASACCIO

(Massatcho). Florentine, 1401-1429. THE CRUCIFIXION. Painted in 1426. Panel 33 1/2 x 25 1/2 inches. Dramatic pathos in the poses and gestures of the figures. Symmetrical composition. Powerful modeling of forms in light and shade, studied realism of the Magdalen's drapery, convincing anatomy of Christ's torso—all technical achievements of a new scientific period. This panel was intended to be seen from below: what striking detail of the picture is explained by this fact?

2. FRA ANGELICO

Florentine, 1387-1455. THE NAMING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. Painted about 1430. Panel, 10 1/4 x 9 1/4 inches. Color plate on cover of Catalog. The gay flower garden colors, the graceful trailing robes, the doll-like tiny-handed figures are medieval (or Gothic) in style, but the perspective of the wall and arched doorway show study of the new scientific realism of the Renaissance. Beneath these outward forms lay the artist's deep Christian piety.



4. POLLAIUOLO

(Pawl-eye-wollo). Florentine, 1429 - 1498. HERCULES AND ANTAEUS. Made about 1460 (?). Bronze, height 17 3/4 inches. The two bent back bodies are held together by the terrific tension of Hercules' grip so that they form a kind of radiating design. Pollaiuolo, a follower of Donatello, specialized in the anatomy of figures in violent action. Naturally he was fond of the Hercules myth. [Do you know why Hercules had to lift Antaeus off the ground?]



19. PARMIGIANINO

(Parmee-jan-ee-no). North Italian, 1503-1540. PORTRAIT OF A LADY. About 1525 or 1535. Oil on canvas. 55 x 33 3/8 inches. Color plate in Catalog. Simple pose, direct intent expression of girl who looks straight at you, beautiful drawing of hands, rich subdued color.



15. CORREGGIO

(Co-rejo). North Italian, 1494-1534. MADONNA AND CHILD. Painted about 1515. Panel 22 3/4 x 17 5/8 inches. Graceful pose, gentle almost too sweet sentiment. Soft forms and contours. Subtle color harmony.

15.

19.

14. LUINI

(Loo-ee-nee). North Italian, about 1475-1531. THE BODY OF ST. CATHERINE BORNE BY ANGELS TO SINAI. Painted between 1520-1525. Fresco (transferred from wall to canvas in modern times). 47 5/8 x 102 1/4 inches. Charming and cleverly composed decoration. Fresco is a method of painting with powdered colors and water on fresh plaster.



14.

18. LOTTO

North Italian, 1480-1556. PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN. Painted about 1525. Oil on canvas. 13 3/4 x 11 inches. Shy uncertainty of character, emphasized by unstable pose of figure. Interesting lighting, subtle color and composition; beautiful painting of hands and collar.



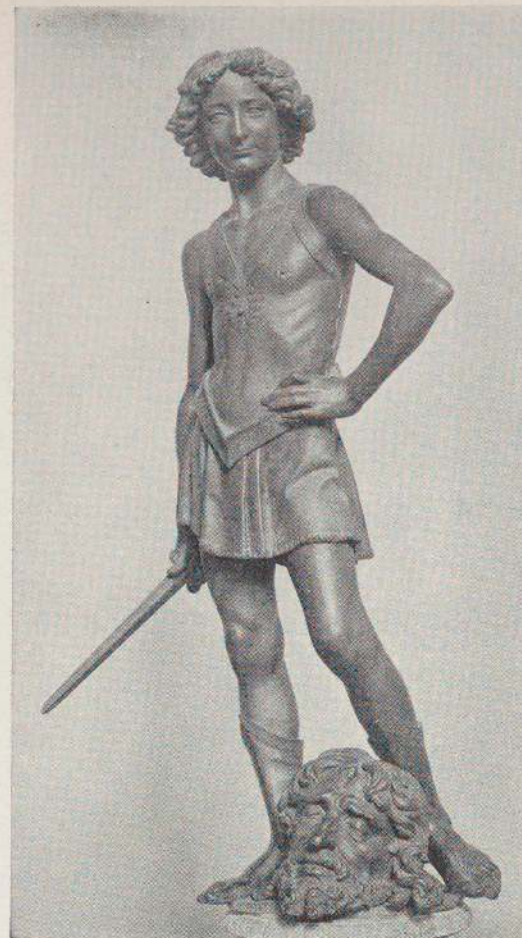
18.



13.

5. VERROCCHIO

(Verrackio). Florentine, 1435-1488. DAVID. Made c. 1476. Bronze, height 48 inches. Awkward grace of body, subtle expression of face, fastidious realism of whole figure. Compare the David with Mantegna's St. George: both works were influenced by the great Donatello. At the time the David was cast Leonardo da Vinci was probably an assistant in Verrocchio's studio.



5.

13. MANTEGNA

(Man-tain-ya). North Italian, 1431-1506. ST. GEORGE. Painted about 1462. Panel, 26 x 12 3/4 inches. The Saint stands in a painted frame with broken lance and dead dragon. He seems sad rather than triumphant over his victory. Behind him rises a minutely painted landscape with tiny people moving up a winding road to a walled town on a hill. (This landscape is illustrated almost full size in the Catalog.)



7.

6. LAURANA

Neapolitan, 1420-1500. PORTRAIT OF A LADY. Made about 1470. Marble, height 17 inches. Underlying globelike form of the head emphasized by the sleek surfaces contrasted with the sharply chiseled features and delicately rendered textures of gown and cap. Apparent simplicity of technique adds to the strange charm of the face. Compare with Donatello's Young Man in technique and feeling. Which do you like more?

7. BOTTICELLI

(Botticelly). Florentine, 1444-1510. BIRTH OF VENUS. Painted about 1485-1490. Tempera or linen, 66 3/4 x 108 1/4 inches. Delicate, poetic sentimentality reflected in the goddess' face and the sad eyes of the puffing winds. Trees and waves treated schematically. Rhythms of figures and draperies move in toward the central figure. A supreme masterpiece of decoration. (There are large details and the head of Venus in color in the Catalog.)

8. ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA

Florentine, 1435-1525. THE ANNUNCIATION. Glazed terra cotta; Virgin 65 inches high. Symmetrical composition, with Virgin and Angel on each side and God the Father and the Dove (Holy Ghost) above. Glazed terra cotta was an inexpensive substitute for marble. Do you remember Andrea's famous Bambini, the bandaged babies in white terra cotta on blue circles which he made for the children's hospital in Florence?



6.



8.



16.

16. GIOVANNI BELLINI

(Jo-vannee Bell-ee-nee). Venetian, about 1430-1516. MADONNA WITH ST. CATHERINE AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. Painted about 1515. Panel 21 3/8 x 30 1/4 inches. Color plate in Catalog. Mood of quiet contemplation. Each figure absorbed in his own thoughts. Behind the figures a landscape bathed in golden light. Simple symmetrical Early Renaissance composition. Compare the later and very different treatment of the same subject by Palma.

17. PALMA VECCHIO

(Palma Veck-ee-o). Venetian, about 1480-1528. HOLY FAMILY WITH ST. CATHERINE AND JOHN THE BAPTIST. Painted 1520-1530. Oil on canvas, 49 1/2 x 76 3/4 inches. Color plate in Catalog. Boldly asymmetric composition, sumptuously rich color. Madonna mature and confident, engaged in courteous conversation with the saints. Compare this composition, the types, the landscape, the spirit with Bellini's painting of the same subject.

20. TITIAN

(Ti'sh'n). Venetian, 1477-1576. PORTRAIT OF POPE PAUL III. Painted in 1543. Oil on canvas, 41 3/4 x 32 1/4 inches. One of the great portraits of the world. Penetrating characterization of head and hands; superb painting, especially in the white sleeve and red velvet chair arm.



20.

21. TINTORETTO

Venetian, 1518-1594. ST. AUGUSTINE HEALING THE PLAGUE STRICKEN. Probably late period. Oil on canvas, 102 3/4 x 68 3/4 inches. Proves Tintoretto's mastery of complex, active composition. An interplay of forces which thrust against one another to form an equilibrium. Powerfully three dimensional. Figures form active units in a dynamic symphony (analyzed in greater detail in the Catalog).



17.



21.

22. CARAVAGGIO

(Car-a-va'jo). Roman, 1573-1610. BOY BITTEN BY A LIZARD. Painted about 1590. Oil on canvas, 25 1/4 x 20 inches. Vivid detail and action, coarse face of boy, theatrical lighting, breadth and vigor of the forms are all characteristic of Caravaggio's aggressive realism.



22.

25. CAVALLINO

(Cavalleeno). Neapolitan, 1622-1654. ST. CECILIA. Painted about 1645. Oil on canvas, 24 x 19 1/4 inches. A small painting, but grand in scale and beautifully painted in contrasting tones of golden brown and blue. Dramatic lighting, pose and gestures typical of Baroque emotionalism.



23.

23. GENTILESCHI

(Gentil-e'sk-ee). Florentine, worked in Rome and London, 1565-1647. VIRGIN AND CHILD. Painted about 1620. Oil on canvas, 39 3/8 x 33 1/2 inches. Color plate in Catalog. Harmonies of gold and blue, luminous shadows, beautiful surfaces. Figures of Virgin and Child form a triangle within the rectangle. Do you like this Madonna as well as Raphael's? Correggio's?



25.

26. BERNINI

Roman, 1598-1680. PORTRAIT OF COSTANZA BUONARELLI. Made about 1625. Marble, height 28 3/8 inches. Vivid portrait, expressing the electric vitality and passion of the artist. Flamboyant design in arrangement of hair and folds of dress; face full and sensual; extraordinary technical skill in cutting of hair, eyes and drapery.



26.

27. TIEPOLO

(Tee-epolo). Venetian, 1696-1770. A COUNCIL OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA, 1748. Oil, 49 1/4 x 76 3/8 inches. Two Italian noblemen are presented to the Grand Master in the great council hall of the Order. A complex problem of composition with many small portrait figures. Tiepolo was the greatest Italian artist of the 18th century.



27.