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.
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 sensationly 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.
Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian died four hundred years ago in Italy. But their names are known today to billions of Americans. Through their paintings 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—books, furniture, photography, 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 through down the years to us today. For instance, Filippo, the most famous living artist, was influenced by Inigo, Ingres by Raphael, [nos. 61 in "Italian Masters"], Raphael by Leonardo da Vinci, Leonardo by Verroccio, [nos. 61, 66, and Verroccio by Donatello [nos. 61]. During the HIGH RENAISSANCE, about 1450 to 1500, artists were excited by new scientific researches in anatomy and movement (Pollaiuolo, Verroccio), the expression of character (Donatello), of drama (Masaccio), the realization of the landscape (Montagna'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 1450, doleful 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 while, 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.

Italy, in 1530, Caravaggio staged an oval-shaped revolution in painting. He handled both in his art and his life, but painted emotionally realistic pictures with melodramatic lighting and pretended to dismiss the classic art of both the Greeks and the Renaissance. He was the first great painter of the BAROQUE period, 1600-1750, as well as far more famous foreign artists such as Rubens, Rembrandt and Velasquez.

During the HIGH RENAISSANCE, about 1450, doleful 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 while, 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.

Italia Ricordata. Florence, 1475-1564. MADONNA AND CHILD, about 1514. Circular, marble relief. 38½ inches in diameter. Mother and child roughly compose a pyramid within a circle. She angles of button 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 Madonnas with Raphael's obvious sweetness. The surface is completely finished and you can see the tools of this artist do you think his spells the beauty of the work?

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1. DONATELLO
Florentine, 1386-1466; BORN OF A YOUNG FAMILY, scholars date between 1445 and 1486. Bronzes: FOUR DANCERS, 1452. Delicate, linear figures play large roles in Donatello's compositions. Acting, very small details, swift, sure draperies. He was the first great Italian sculptor before Michelangelo.

2. FRA ANGELICO
Florentine, 1387-1455. THE ANNUNCIATION. Painted in 1439. Panel, 9½ x 11 inches. Beige drapery, bright color, sense of high pictures, design.

3. MASACCIO

4. POLLAIOLO
Florentine, 1431-1497. HERCULES AND AMPHITRYON, about 1460-70. Bronze, height 18½ inches. The two barefoot statues are laid together by the touch of Masaccio's simplification and their form is a kind of radiating design. Pollaiuolo, a follower of Donatello, specialized in the anatomy of figures in violent action. Do you know why Hercules had to lift Antaeus off the ground?

5. MICHELANGELO
(Scultore). Florence, 1475-1564. MADONNA AND CHILD, about 1504. Circular, marble relief. 38½ inches in diameter. Mother and child roughly compose a pyramid within a circle. She angles of button 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 Madonnas with Raphael's obvious sweetness. The surface is completely finished and you can see the tools of this artist do you think his spells the beauty of the work?

10. RAPHAEL
(Raffaello), Umbrian, worked in Rome, 1483-1520. MADONNA OF THE CHAIR. Painted about 1512. Circular panel, 28 inches in diameter. Difficult solution of the difficult problem of composing a group of figures within a circle. The circle and the fall curves within it were established by the strong verticals of the chair and back of Madonna. Compare with Michelangelo's circular Madonnas in morsels. Study the differences in spirit and feeling as well as in composition. Which do you prefer?
5. VERROCCHIO

Florentine. Painted about 1475-1480. DAVID. Marble, height 77 inches. Powerfully realistic, this is a study of young man in the studio.

6. LAURANA

Neapolitan. 1420-1430. PORTRAIT OF A LADY. Made about 1429. Marble, height 77 inches. The sitter's face is shown in profile with a delicate, refined expression.

7. BOTTICELLI

Florentine. 1465-1510. THE ANNUNCIATION. Oil on canvas. This painting depicts the moment of the Annunciation, a key event in the life of the Virgin Mary.

8. ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA

Florentine. 1435-1498. THE ANTONELLO. Painted about 1445-1449. Tempera on canvas. This work is a portrait of the famous Italian artist, Antonio de' Rossis.

13. MANTEGNA

(Verrocchio). Florence, 1431-1494. DAVID. Marble, height 77 inches. The David is a classic example of the Italian Renaissance style.

16. GIOVANNI BELLINI

(Venice). 1430-1516. MADONNA WITH ST. CATHERINE AND ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST. Panel 25 x 30 inches. This painting features a Madonna and Child, with figures rendered with meticulous detail.

17. PALMA VECCHIO

(Venice). 1580-1628. ST. AUGUSTINE HEALING THE PLAQUE. Oil on canvas. 51 x 60 inches. A complex painting, this work shows St. Augustine healing a patient.

20. TITIAN

(Venice). 1477-1576. PORTRAIT OF POPE PAUL III. Painted about 1545. Oil on canvas. 49 x 76 inches. This portrait captures the likeness of a powerful figure in early modern art.

22. CARAVAGGIO

(Venice). 1571-1610. BOY BITEN BY A LIZARD. Oil on canvas. 39 x 33 inches. A dramatic painting, this work shows a boy being bitten by a lizard.

23. GENTILESCHI

(Florentine). 1563-1639. VIRGIN AND CHILD. Oil on canvas. 39 x 33 inches. A sweet and tender depiction of the Virgin and Child, this painting is noted for its delicate brushwork.

26. BERNINI

Rome, 1598-1680. PORTRAIT OF COSTANZA BUCCHIARELLI. Made about 1645. Oil on canvas. 49 x 39 inches. This portrait captures the likeness of a noblewoman from the 17th century.