**ITALIAN ART**

**1400-1600**

**Kress Gallery I: Early Renaissance**

**Italian School (Venetian),  *The Last Supper*, 13th century, tempera and gold leaf on panel, The Samuel Kress Collection, 61.59.**

This tiny painting, the oldest painting in the collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art, has not been satisfactorily attributed to one artist. Scholars have debated its origin, and Cimabue has been suggested as a possible painter. The work depicts a grouping of thirteen men seated around a circular table and encompasses two significant aspects of Christ's final meal with his twelve disciples. The disciples turn to one another in startled amazement and dismay at Christ's prediction of his impending betrayal, while the chalice in the center of the table refers to liturgical significance of the First Communion.

The iconography is typical of other depictions of the Last Supper, yet the table here is round rather than the more common rectangular or half-circles of other works of the period. It is, however, reminiscent of a type which originated in Carolingian manuscript illumination and may be seen as a revival of the earlier form. The figures wear loose fitting draped tunics and are made holy by gold, circular halos. The group is rather animated, with lively gestures and individualized faces. An architectural background is suggested in the uppermost portion of the painting.

**Follower of Bernardo Daddi (Florence, 14th century), *Madonna and Child with Saints* (Ruccellai Polytypch), c. 1340, tempera and gold leaf on linden wood, The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.60**

The polyptych, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, was made for the Rucellai family and was probably intended as an altarpiece for the family chapel in the Church of San Pancrazio in Florence. The polyptych was painted in tempera on wood in Italy during the Gothic period by a follower of Bernardo Daddi, a student of Giotto. Italian artists of the 14th century were inspired by the Byzantine tradition, which could be seen for the first time in many years after Crusaders recaptured Constantinople in 1204. Rather than attempting to recreate the exact physical appearance of objects and of people, Byzantine artists sought to promote Christian beliefs and express religious meaning through standardized images that stood against flat, golden backgrounds representing the timeless and immortal realm of Heaven. Early Renaissance artists were inspired by Byzantine works, yet their attention to modeling the form of the body and creating more naturalistic drapery set them apart from the flattened and angular forms of the Byzantine style.

The Madonna and Christ Child occupy the central panel and are flanked by four saints who are depicted slightly smaller than the Virgin Mary, signifying that they are of lesser importance. Mary is depicted as Queen of Heaven wearing a jeweled crown and patterned garment. St. John Gualbert, who was from a noble Florentine family, joined the Benedictine order after forgiving the murderer of his brother. He wears a monk’s habit and the ringed hairstyle symbolic of the Benedictine order. He carries a staff and is the patron saint of park rangers and foresters. St. Pancras, to the left of the Virgin and Child, wears traditional Roman clothing and holds a martyr’s palm, the symbol of eternal life and triumph over death. At the age of fourteen, he offered himself voluntarily for martyrdom, defending the cause of Christians before the Roman Emperor Diocletian. To the immediate right of the Virgin and Christ is the Archangel Michael who holds an orb, a symbol of imperial dignity and a sword, a sign of his role as the defender of the Church. Finally, St. Benedict at the far right wears a monk’s habit of black, the color of humility, and holds open a book of the Benedictine Orders. The order was known for their humility, charity, and compassion for the young, sick, and elderly.

**Giovanni del Biondo (Florence, active, 1356-1399), *Madonna Nursing Her Child,* c. 1370, tempera and gold leaf on panel. 31.1.**

Images of Mary as the Mother of God are rather limited in earliest Christian art, but the theme grew in popularity after the establishment of church doctrines that established Mary as the Mother of God (Council of Ephesus, 431 CE) and that Mary maintained her virginity after she gave birth to Jesus (Council of Lateran, 649 CE). The Nursing Madonna is one of the oldest types of the mother and child themes and has precedents in Egyptian art. The theme attracted widespread interest in Italy in the 14th century when many churches claimed to have preserved milk of the Virgin as a holy relic. Representations of the bared breast disappeared after the Council of Trent (1545-63) when undue nudity was forbidden in the portrayal of sacred figures.

This panel painting was originally the central panel of an unidentified polyptych. The base of the frame is original, but the coat-of-arms have been repainted. Here the Madonna stands with the Christ Child in her arms. She looks towards the infant and wears a blue robe trimmed in gold bands with a gold star is on the right shoulder. The Child is wrapped in green cloth. The gold leaf background is stamped around the border and the heads of both Mother and Child are surrounded by stamped halos.

**Bernardino Fungai (Siena, b. 1460; active 1482-1516), *St. Lucy Led to Her Martyrdom* c. 1490, tempera on panel, The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.68.**

St. Lucy, whose name means “light,” was a wealthy 4th century martyr and is patron saint of the blind. Lucy, who had secretly become a Christian, refused to marry her pagan fiancé and had her dowry distributed to the poor. When she was denounced to the magistrate and ordered to offer a sacrifice to Emperor Diocletian, she refused. Guards were called to carry her away, but even four oxen were incapable of dragging her. She was finally stabbed in the neck.

Bernardino Fungai worked in Siena and his paintings often have a strong sense of narrative and careful attention to landscape. He has set the events of Lucy’s martyrdom in a pastoral landscape and illustrated the miracle of her execution as the four oxen are unable to move her. The narrative approach to the event differs dramatically from symbolic representations of saints of this period, who are often shown on gold backgrounds with their attributes.

**Taddeo di Bartolo (Italian, c. 1363 – 1422) *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, c. 1405-1418), Tempera and gold leaf on panel, The Samuel Kress Collection, 61.64.**

**Taddeo di Bartolo (Italian, c. 1363 – 1422) *A* *Bishop Blessing*, c. 1405-1418), Tempera and gold leaf on panel, The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.63.**

Taddeo di Bartolo was born and trained in Siena. His activity is first recorded in 1386, and he was apparently a painter of wide renown, he worked in Pisa, Volterra, Montepulciano, Perugio, Padua and Genoa. *St. Catherine of Alexandria* and *A* *Bishop Blessing* are two of four panels that formed the wings of a large polyptych by the artist. Panels depicting St. James Major and St. John the Baptist, now in the Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis, were also in the Kress Collection. These four paintings were the lateral wings, flanking the central panel, *Madonna and Child,* now in the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria was a 4th century princess of Egypt who was very well educated. She became a Christian in her teenage years and, on a visit to Rome, attempted to convince the Emperor Maxentius that he was wrong to persecute Christians. He first ordered that she debate with pagan orators, but she won the debates and converted her opponents to Christianity. The emperor then had her imprisoned, but all who visited were also converted. Maxentius then ordered her to be tortured on a spiked wheel. When the wheel miraculously broke, Catherine was finally beheaded. Catherine is the patron saint of priests and scholars. She is often recognized by her attribute, the broken wheel, but here Taddeo di Bartolo portrays her full figured holding a long quill in her right hand and a book in her left. On her head is a crown signifying her royal lineage.

The Bishop may be a representation of Saint Augustine, one of the four Latin fathers of the church, an influential theologian, and the patron saint of learned men and theologians. He is usually depicted in his role as a bishop, wearing the bishop's mitre (the liturgical headdress) and cope (cloak). Here the bishop raises his right hand in blessing and holds a book in his left hand.

**Kress Gallery II: High Renaissance**

**Giovanni Bellini (Venice, c. 1430-1516) and Vincenzo Catena (Venice, c. 1470-1531), *Madonna and Child with Saint John and Saint Peter*, c. 1500, oil on panel, The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.71.**

This painting was executed by two different artists, and is probably from the studio of Giovanni Bellini, who is credited with the overall composition and with painting the Virgin and John the Baptist. The Christ Child and St. Peter were painted Vincenzo Catena. Giovanni Bellini is probably the best known of a family of Venetian painters (his brother was Gentile and his brother-in-law, Andrea Mantegna). He is remembered as the teacher of Titian and Giorgione. In his early career he used tempera, but his use of oil paints enabled him to bring a new sensitivity in light and color to Venetian panel painting.

*Madonna and Child with Saint John and Saint Peter* demonstrates stylistic characteristics typical of High Renaissance painting: the composition is symmetrical and balanced and the figures are self-contained forms. Saint John wears the leather tunic that refers to his ascetic life in the desert. Saint Peter holds two of his frequent attributes, a book and the key to the kingdom of Heaven. Madonna and Child are seated in the center, anchoring the composition. An x-ray revealed that a male head, on a smaller scale, was originally shown looking at the shoulder of St. Peter at the far right.

**Giuliano Bugiardini (Florence, 1475-1554), *Saint Sebastian*, 1517, oil on canvas, The Samual H. Kress Collection, 61.89.**

A pupil of Domenico Ghirlandaio and Piero di Cosimo, Bugiardini assisted Mariotto Albertinelli in some work in Florence, before Michelangelo called him in 1508 to help in the execution of the Sistine Chapel frescoes. The landscape in this painting resembles those painted by Piero di Cosimo and Albertinelli. The athletic youth, on the other hand, recalls certain early works of Michelangelo, but its soft treatment reflects Piero di Cosimo's style.

St Sebastian is the patron of the Archer's Guild and a favored subject for Renaissance artists. Botticelli and Pollaiuolo, Florentine painters from the golden age of Lorenzo de'Medici’s patronage, painted the martyr standing and tied to a tree. Bugiardini also portrays the Roman soldier bound to a tree and pierced by arrows. In life Sebastian was a member of the Praetorian Guard under the Roman Emperor Diocletian (245- 313) and secretly a Christian. His beliefs were revealed when he gave support to two Christian officers being tortured. The emperor ordered him shot with arrows, an ordeal he miraculously survived. He was finally clubbed to death in a public arena in Rome. Arrows are symbolic of Sebastian's martyrdom.

**Francesco Ubertini, called Bacchiacca (Florence, 1494-1557), *Portrait of a Young Lute Player*, c. 1522, oil on poplar wood, The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.75.**

A pupil of Perugino and Franciabigio, Bacchiacca worked mostly in Florence and was influenced by Andrea del Sarto. In 1540 he became a court painter to Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici where he worked with other important Florentine painters of the day including Pontormo and Bronzino. In his early work, Bacchiacca seems to have absorbed Renaissance elements of balance and measured proportions, but his later work demonstrated traits of the mannerist style.

*Portrait of a Young Lute Player* is a posthumous portrait of the famous fifteenth-century love poet Matta Maria Boiardo (1441 – 1494), author of Orlando Inammorato, the best-known epic poem in the Quattrocento. His identity is illustrated by the background figures who are all thematically linked with the idea of love: Samson and Delilah, famous biblical lovers; and Daphne and Apollo, fabled mythological lovers. Yet the motto beneath the hourglass reads “Ceto pede labitur etas” (Time flies on swift feet), warning that youth and love are but momentary. The sands running through the hourglass and the evanescent flowers reinforce the motto.

This painting is one of a series of six that paired Petrarch’s *Trionfi* (Triumphs) with idealized portraits of literary figures.Two other paintings from the series are known to exist: a pendant portrait with a Triumph of Death in Cassel, W. Germany, and a small fragment of a Triumph of Time, in Switzerland.

**Bernardo Luini (Lombardy, c. 1480-1532), *Adoration of the Christ Child*, c. 1520-1525, oil on panel transferred to canvas, The Samuel H. Kress Foundation Collection, 61.77.**

Bernardo Luini was a member of Leonardo’s circle and established himself in Milan he may have worked in Leonardo’s studio for a time, and some works attributed to him were once thought to be by Leonardo. He is especially noted for the elongation of feminine eyes.

The Adoration and the Annunciation are simultaneously depicted in Luini’s painting. In the foreground, Mary and Joseph gaze at the newborn Jesus. Between the figures, an ox and an ass also gaze upon the baby providing warmth with their breath. Through the window, the angel Gabriel announces the miraculous event to the shepherds in the field in the night.

**Domenico Beccafumi (Siena, c. 1486-1551), *Venus and Cupid*, c. 1530, oil on linden wood panel, 61.73.**

According to biographer Georgio Vasari, Dominico Beccafumi was born a peasant and took the name of a rich Sienese citizen who apprenticed him to a local painter. It is believed that Beccafumi was in Florence when Leonardo was there, c.1504-7 and that he spent several years in Rome, where he saw works of Raphael and Michelangelo. In the 1520’s he became official painter to the Siennese republic.

*Venus and Cupid* represents a popular theme in the Renaissance and reflects the revival of classical learning. Here the narrative concerns the education of Cupid, the god of love. His mother, Venus, commands the winged god to rise to the celestial realm. Yet, Cupid wants only to retrieve his arrows, linked with the frivolous pursuits of the earthly realm populated by hares and birds symbolizing lust and fertility. In the background, Vulcan and Mercury can be seen in a cave.

**Luca Cambiaso (Genoa, 1527-1585), *Vanity of Earthly Love*, c. 1570, oil on canvas, 56.85.**

Genoese artist Luca Cambiaso studied first with his father and was influenced by Tintoretto and the Venetian school of the late Renaissance. He painted many nocturnal scenes and was known as a superb draughtsman.

*Vanity of Earthly Love* is an allegorical painting concerning the brevity of human life. The reclining nude contemplates a skull and a mirror while behind her is an older man who grasps a cupid and an hour glass. The allegorical interpretation is that Time carries Love away, leaving the woman to contemplate old age and death.