

## Kress Gallery Labels and Text Panels

### Early Italian Art

The paintings in this gallery were made in the service of religion during the twelfth through fifteenth centuries. Each object once formed a part of an altarpiece, either as a single image or ensemble of paintings placed in a church or home. Images of the Virgin and Child, saints, and scenes from the lives of Christ and the Virgin functioned to provide a focus for contemplation, exemplify theological teachings and as an aid to prayer through visualization. Over the course of this period, artists worked towards standardizing the representation of stories and motifs for clarity and instruction. In the profuse use of gold, description of sumptuous fabrics and delicacy of costuming, and other celebratory elements, each work demonstrates a marked concern for ethereal and princely qualities to suggest and honor the Church and the kingdom of heaven.

The paintings in the Kress Galleries were donated by Samuel H. Kress as part of his mission to make art available to a wider public. The Kress gifts significantly augment NOMA's collection to offer a comprehensive view of Italian art from the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries.

Unidentified Artist working in Venice

*The Last Supper*, ca. 1300

Tempera and gold leaf on panel

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.59

This panel was originally part of a group of paintings illustrating the life of Christ. The *Last Supper* was Christ's last meal with his followers, the twelve apostles, before his crucifixion. The apostle at Christ's right leans to accept the wafer of the first communion, which would become common practice in the Catholic Mass.

This unidentified artist is working in the artistic style of the eastern Mediterranean island of Crete, reflecting the dynamic, international artistic community of the port city of Venice. The flat stylization of the drapery folds and expressive white strokes of the men's white hair economically communicate form and movement. Following the Byzantine traditions of Crete, the artist places the scene at a round table. Later Italian Renaissance depictions seat the figures at a rectangular table, in favor of symmetry and clarity.

Bernardino Fungai

Italian, Siena (1460 - 1516)

*St. Lucy Led to her Martyrdom*, 1360s

Tempera on Panel

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.68

This small panel depicts the *Martyrdom of St. Lucy*. After refusing to marry a wealthy suitor, Lucy was subject to repeated trials and tortures, each of which she miraculously survived. She was finally killed by a sword, which we see here. The train of oxen refers to one of her many torments. The priest to her right offers her the wafer of communion and forgiveness before her death.

St. Lucy is usually portrayed holding a tray with her eyes on it, referencing another torment. Because of this association with sight and light she is celebrated in Scandinavia on December 13<sup>th</sup> on the eve of the winter solstice, where she is honored as the harbinger of daylight, spring and rebirth in the time of deepest darkness.

Bartolomeo Vivarini  
 Italian, Venice (ca. 1440 – 1500)  
*The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1640s  
 Tempera and gold leaf on linden wood panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.67

The culminating moment in the life of the Virgin after her assumption to heaven is her coronation as the queen of heaven, where she is crowned by her son Jesus Christ. Angels float above and behind in celebration and hold a cloth of honor behind the seated pair. The cloth works with the protruding ledge and shoes of the figures to push them forward into our space with remarkable immediacy.

Characteristic of Venetian painting in the fifteenth century, the draperies are described by crisp folds complemented by sculptural, dry modeling and dramatic shading, notably different from the more uniform and subtle gradations of tone used in the Siense and Florentine paintings on view in this gallery.

Andrea Vanni (ca. 1330 – 1413)  
 Italian, Siena  
*The Adoration of the Magi*, ca. 1370-80  
 Tempera and gold leaf on panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.61

After the birth of the Christ child, the Holy Family was visited by kings who followed the North Star from the East to pay homage to the new king of heaven. Here, the Christ child receives the gift of a chalice from the kneeling king Jasper, a reference to his ultimate sacrifice.

Vanni is one of Siena's earliest registered painters. He traveled as diplomatic envoy to France on behalf of the city's government and his exposure to art at the Papal court in Avignon is reflected in the lavish costumes of the Magi and exotic headgear of the onlookers, which make reference to their eastern origin, as do the camels.

Vanni was initially trained as a manuscript painter, which is particularly evident in his close attention to detail and ability to fill such a small space with so many figures.

Battista da Vicenza (active ca. 1404-38)  
 Italian, Vicenza  
*Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and Saint John*, 1400-10  
 Tempera on panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.65

The death of Christ on the cross, the Crucifixion, is the central image in Christian art and the visual focus for contemplation.

Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, stands at left and his loyal disciple and childhood friend, Saint John the Baptist is at right, both with extreme expressions of grief. The austere composition is pared down to the barest elements emphasizing Christ's battered body and the complete anguish of Mary and John. Christ exhales his last breath and his wounds bleed from a gaunt body while Mary holds up her arms in disbelief and helplessness.

Follower of Bernardo Daddi (fl. 1320 – 48)  
 Italian, Florence  
*Madonna and Child with Saints*, ca. 1340  
 Tempera on wood  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.60

At the center of this altarpiece, the Virgin and Child share a tender exchange, as he affectionately pulls at her dress and cloak. Flanking the central pair are: a follower of St. Francis dressed in the habit of the order; a Christian martyr with a palm frond of victory; St. Michael holding his sword and the celestial orb as defender of the gates of heaven; and St. Benedict holding the Benedictan rule of his teachings. Taken together, these lay figures and defenders of faith represent the community of the faithful as the cornerstones of the church. The prophets in the pinnacles above reinforce the mission to preach and spread the word.

Bernardo Daddi was Florence's premier artist of his generation. This work was likely made in his large workshop for the prominent, Florentine Rucellai family. It illustrates the master's distinct ability to integrate elegance and dignity.

For more information on this altarpiece, its original location, function, and figures explore the ARTtab located at the room's entry.

Benvenuto di Giovanni (1436 – 1518)  
 Italian, Siena  
*St. John the Baptist, St. Margaret, The Blessed Ambrose Sansedoni*, 1480s  
 Tempera on panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.69

These three panels were originally placed at the corner pillars of a large altarpiece. At left is Saint John the Baptist, who is considered the first prophet of the church. As a cousin of Christ he was the first to identify him as the 'lamb of Christ', the *agnus dei*, which is partially inscribed on the scroll he holds. At center is Margaret, a saint who refused to marry in favor of preserving her virginity. Satan appeared to her in the form of a dragon, here seen underfoot. Using a cross as amulet, Margaret miraculously escaped from the belly of the dragon established her status as the patron saint of childbirth. At right is Ambrose Sansedoni, a Dominican preacher and one of the patron saints of Siena, where he is buried. The saint receives divine inspiration in the form of a dove speaking in his ear.

Benvenuto is admired for a subtle use of light, here demonstrated in the facial highlights and drapery folds where light builds form and solidity and complements movement.

Taddeo di Bartolo (1362/3 – 1422)  
 Italian, Siena  
*A Bishop*  
 Tempera and gold leaf on linden wood panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.63

Taddeo di Bartolo (1362/3 – 1422)  
 Italian, Siena  
*Saint Catherine of Alexandria*  
 Tempera and gold leaf on linden wood panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.64

These two panels, along with two others in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, were originally side panels of a large altarpiece. On the left is an unidentified bishop. He wears the bishop's miter, holds a book and two figures

offered in benediction (or forgiveness) as he would gesture in the mass. On the right is St. Catherine. She is the patron saint of learning and wisdom. Famed for her debating skills, St. Catherine succeeded in besting fifty philosophers sent to test her intellect.

Di Bartolo was the son of a barber. He began as a painter of choir stalls and in time became one of Siena's more prominent artists and was commissioned to work in various Italian cities. The distinctly thoughtful, almond-shaped eyes and remarkably individualized facial features using a wide range of tones are characteristic of his style.

Giovanni del Biondo (fl. 1356-99)  
 Italian, Florence  
*Madonna Nursing Her Child*, ca. 1375-80  
 Tempera on panel  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 31.31

Picturing the Virgin Mary nursing the Christ child is the oldest manner of representing the pair dating back to the third century. The tender act emphasizes the child's fragile humanity as well as Mary's status as compassionate advocate for mankind. The gold star on her shoulder is metaphorical and makes reference to the idea of the coming of the Christ child as the 'bright star of dawn,' heralding a new age.

The base of the frame is original. Note the lozenge at lower middle: it has been repainted, but underneath is a coat of arms, which confirms that the painting was made for a family and served as a private devotional altarpiece in a home, making the intimate moment between mother and child all the more poignant.

Vincenzo Foppa (1427/30 – 1515/16)  
 Italian, Lombardy  
*St. Paul*, ca. 1480  
 Tempera on linden wood  
 The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.70

Vincenzo Foppa worked in Lombardy, north of Florence. In comparison with the other pictures in this room, Foppa's darker palette and dry, defined contours along with the realistic details in Paul's craggy hair and glistening bald head achieve a *gravitas* befitting one of the church's most important saints. The gilded decoration surrounding him uses directional incised lines to create a remarkably convincing barrel-vaulted space above and around our saint, at once situating him in space and projecting him forward, which amplifies the realistic effect of the sculptural painting technique.

St. Paul wrote two books in the Bible and traveled extensively to preach the word of God. His attributes are the sword and the book, symbols of his unwavering faith in the face of persecution and mission to spread the word, also emphasized by the words inscribed along the hem of his cloak.

## Renaissance Art

The Renaissance in Europe (from the mid-fifteenth through late sixteenth centuries) is characterized by a renewed interest in antiquity, investigation of the natural world and science, and inquiry into the nature of humanity, knowledge and the individual. A significant expansion of subjects in art is complemented by a broadening of approaches and techniques in the construction and impression of space, as well as a more precise, empirical study of human anatomy. The introduction of oil painting also allowed artists to produce a wider range of pictorial effects and create realistic worlds with uncanny precision. The paintings in this gallery exemplify these achievements through their empathic, humanizing approach to religious figures, visualization of complex ideas and phenomena and portraits conveying personality and character.

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Francesco Ubertini, called Il Bacchiacca (1494 – 1557)

Italian, Florence

*Portrait of a Young Lute Player*, 1520-25

Oil on poplar wood

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.75

Sitting on a ledge, a lute player contemplates the passing of time, as indicated by the hourglass and delicate flowers beside him. The motto under the hourglass reads: CITO PEDE LABITUR ETAS, or 'Time flies on swift feet.'

The motto comments on the details of the landscape where tales of the dangers of passionate love are illustrated. At middle left is Delilah cutting her lover Samson's hair (and source of his strength). At right, Daphne's arms and head sprout branches and leaves as she transforms into a tree, while Apollo grabs her in vain. These stories of love pursued without regard for reason culminate in the small scene at the upper left where the horse-drawn chariot surmounted by the cupid celebrates the triumph of love over reason, time and earthly possession.

Often opting for unusual colors, Bacciacca's use of coral pink is striking, especially in concert with the teal blues of the lute player's sleeves and the landscape. The coloring, the spiky tree leaves, the otherworldly landscape, and even the strange asymmetries or the musician's face achieve a mystical tone.

Lorenzo Lotto (ca. 1480 – 1556)

Italian, Venice

*Portrait of a Bearded Man*, ca. 1540

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.79

The tight space between the blue curtain, cast shadow of the green wall and the picture's frame are in tension with the hulking outline of this man's cloak, his projected hand and improbably long nose. His wide collar adds to this imposing effect as does his large head and steely gaze. His mannered gesture is one of presentation and he holds a handkerchief of fine linen to signal gentility and status.

Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480/5 – 1532)

Italian, Lombardy

*Adoration of the Christ Child and Annunciation of the Shepherds*, ca. 1525

Oil on panel transferred to canvas

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.77

Through the opening in the upper third of the composition we witness The Annunciation to the shepherds. The delicate archangel Gabriel appears in a halo of light proclaiming the arrival of the messiah to the startled herdsmen. In the foreground, the first shepherd to arrive offers a lamb to the family, symbolizing Christ's future sacrifice for mankind.

Luini worked in and near Milan. His *Adoration* exemplifies north Italian naturalism in the Virgin's solid features, tendency for rounded, full forms, and earthy muted colors, and in the attention to incidental detail like the baby's make-shift straw bed and the carefully described canteen on the back wall. The Virgin's long, serene face and heavily lidded eyes recall the work of Leonardo, who resided in the city in the 1490s and whose work Luini copied and admired.

Benvenuto Tisi, called Il Garofalo (1481 – 1559)

Italian, Ferrara

*Meditation of St. Jerome*, ca. 1515/20

Tempera on panel

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.78

St. Jerome is known as the first scholar of the church and the translator of the Bible into Latin. Jerome is customarily presented either in a private study or in a cave as a hermit. An old legend claims that Jerome took the thorn out of a lion's paw and the animal became his loyal companion.

While this picture is a fictive setting, the small altarpiece of the Madonna and Child on the right offers a fascinating glimpse of how people worshiped in private. Small devotional pictures were common in households.

This painting hangs between works created by artists practicing in Milan (on left) and Venice (on right). This references Garofalo's literal and artist position within these artistic traditions. He embraced the naturalism favored by the Lombard school as well as the crisp, defined form of Venetian realism.

Giovanni Paolo de Agostini (ca. 1490 – ca. 1524)

Italian, Venice

*Portrait of a Man*, ca. 1510-20

Tempera on fruit wood panel

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.76

This portrait was formerly thought to represent a poet, likely owing to its intimate quality. The exclusive focus on the face, slow turning of the head and eyes effect a striking immediacy. In his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, balding pate, thin mouth and flared nose, the artist takes great pains to individualize his sitter.

Giovanni Bellini (1431/6 – 1516)

Italian, Venetian

Vincenzo Catena (1470/80 – 1531)

Italian, Venetian

*Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Peter*, after 1510

Oil on linden wood panel

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.71

The Bellini family of painters pioneered new approaches to the altarpiece in Venice at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and played a central role in the use of oil painting in Italy. The close cropping and the tight grouping of figures at the picture plane illustrates their distinct approach to devotional (or personal) altarpieces.

The lavish, red tapestry with a flower motif hanging behind the figures serves to isolate, honor and highlight the static Virgin and Child, and adds an element of movement. The curvilinear writing on the hanging's border mimics the Kufic script of early Arabic inscriptions typically included on the borders of metalware made in the eastern Mediterranean. This adaptation of traditional carpet patterns references Venice's position as Europe's port to the East and, by extension Jerusalem as location of the origins of the church.

Attributed to Vittore Carpaccio (1460/6 – 1525/6)

Italian, Venice

*Christ Blessing*, ca. 1510-20

Oil on panel on Masonite

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 38.4

Christ holds his crystal orb, representing the celestial and earthly sphere over which he is the savior, in Latin the *salvator mundi*. The frontal composition stays true to the subject's prototype: the Byzantine icon. In typical depictions of the subject Christ holds two fingers up in benediction, but here he points only one finger upward. This unique treatment is a direct reference to Leonardo da Vinci's famous John the Baptist pointing upward toward the creator. Here Christ's orb and gesture make reference to both God's realm in heaven and earth and to Christ's position as intercessor on earth.

This painting is housed in its original 'cassetta' (Italian for small-box) frame, which has evidence of worm holes on the lower right inner edge, attesting to the ravages of time.

Girolamo Romanino (1484/7 - ?1560)

Italian, Brescia and Padua

*Portrait of a Man in Armor*, ca. 1514

Oil on canvas

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.74

This stately man in armor confidently thrusts his sword. The artist revels in describing the varied materials and textures – the sheen of the armor, the flutter of the feathers, the luster of the sword, and fine hairs of his beard. Complementing his assertive stance, the man's side-long glance suggests thought, and his pert lips and slight wink convey pluck and ingenuity.

When Romanino executed this painting he had just moved to Padua, 25 miles from Venice. The sitter's plush, theatrical hat is adorned with ostrich feathers, a common luxury item coming through the port of Venice. The hat features the more common brown feather as opposed to the rarer white from the female birds. The hat's prominence in the picture serves to mark the sitter's cosmopolitanism and rank.

Domenico Beccafumi (1484 – 1551)

Italian, Siena

*Venus and Cupid*, ca. 1530

Oil on linden wood

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.73

None of Beccafumi's works are signed but his highly personal style makes his paintings immediately identifiable. *Venus and Cupid* is a typical example of his bold use of color, pearly statuesque flesh, serpentine poses, and expressive, almost bizarre landscapes. Venus and Cupid stand in the foreground, a cave at left depicts the iron forge of the god Vulcan, and an extensive landscape unfolds at right. Cupid gestures to his mother asking for the arrows she holds, which were made for him by Vulcan. Venus holds the arrows hostage as she gestures to the landscape explaining to her son the weight of responsibility possession of the arrows will bring, for his arrows strike immediate love in humans, nothing to meddle with or take lightly.

The ARTtab at left explores the painting in more detail.

Giovanni Martinelli (1600/4 – 1659)

Italian, Florence

*Death Comes to the Banquet Table*, ca. 1630-40

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs. William G. Helis, Sr. in memory of her husband, 56.57

A feast is interrupted and its participants startled at the arrival of the ghostly skeleton emerging from the darkness. The figures gesture to themselves and others and back away for fear that death has come for them. Martinelli made numerous paintings with themes of transience and death. At a time when the plague periodically swept through Europe, infant mortality was high and medical practices were primitive, a preoccupation with death and uncertainty for the future was common. The stage-lit scene, in tandem with the vivid expressions, elaborate costumes and close attention to still-life elements come together to extraordinary theatrical effect and heightened drama.

Guiliano de Piero di Bugiardini (1475 - 1554)

Italian, Florence

*Saint Sebastian*, ca. 1520

Oil on canvas

The Samuel H. Kress Collection, 61.89

The subject of St. Sebastian was common during the Renaissance. A Roman soldier who suffered torture for his Christian faith under the emperor Diocletian, Sebastian recovered from his wounds. In later centuries, he was invoked against the plague. The tradition of depicting Sebastian nude offered artists the opportunity to meditate upon real and ideal human form, the arrows becoming almost ornamental. As such, Sebastian celebrates beauty as a manifestation of the divine.



Italian, Venice

*Ewer*, ca. 1500-1550

Colorless non-lead glass

Gift of Melvin P. Billups in memory of his wife, Clarice Martson Billups, 69.84

Venice was an important producer of luxury goods and its glassware was highly prized. This exceptional ewer is large by sixteenth century standards. The flower-and-vine strapwork imitates Islamic glassware while the enameling is European in style. The artists and patrons of Venice were familiar with objects from across the Mediterranean and would have fully appreciated these hybrid references.

The Netherlands, probably Amsterdam

*Beaker*, ca. 1680

Non-lead glass

Museum purchase, William McDonald Boles and Eva Carol Boles Fund, 2000.16

This Dutch ceremonial beaker is made in the “*façon de venise*,” or “manner of Venice.” The bright colors and swirling movement are typical of Murano, an island of Venice famed for its glass production.

Italian, Northern Italy

*Jupiter with a Thunderbolt*, ca. 1600-50

Gilded bronze

Gift of Arthur MacArthur in memory of his mother, Celena Kemp MacArthur Pearson, 52.28

Jupiter is supreme ruler of the Greek gods of Olympus. Also the god of the sky, he controls the weather, which is sometimes dictated by his foul moods. Here he wields his thunderbolts of fury and power.

Bronze statuettes were treasured objects displayed in libraries and paintings galleries as symbols of learning and artistic virtuosity. Artists tackled the significant technical challenges of bronze casting to achieve a high finish, elaborate posing and exacting musculature. Their intimate size encouraged handling and contemplation of their technique and splendid, valuable material.