THE RENAISSANCE GALLERIES

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For the first time in the Museum's long history visitors are able to see the renaissance collections arranged in a logical sequence. As now presented to the public, they suggest the vast extent of that extraordinary resurgence in Western art following the close of the Middle Ages.

The great resources of the Museum have been drawn upon to present this development as clearly and dramatically as possible. To this end sculpture and the decorative arts (woodwork, textiles, metalwork, glass, ceramics, and the like), which come under the charge of the Department of Renaissance and Modern Art, have been supplemented by the addition of a few choice pieces from the Departments of Medieval Art, Paintings, Prints, Arms and Armor, and Music.

Of the galleries now opened, part (1-6) are on the fringe of the rehabilitated area and part (11, 12, 21, 22) are in that area. Although the rooms on the fringe have not undergone the drastic renovations that distinguish the other half, even so they represent a considerable advance. For they have for the first time been effectively lighted—thanks to the added electric current now brought into the whole area—and they also have been generally refurbished.

The first exhibit (Gallery 2) is no novelty, if indeed the Gubbio studiolo can ever be other than a novelty. It is still where it has been since it opened early in 1941, as the most perfect Italian "period room" in existence. It is complete within itself, all its furnishings being represented on its walls of intarsia in trompe-l’œil; and it remains exactly as it was when first occupied about the year 1480 by the celebrated humanist and condottiere Federigo da Montefeltro in his Ducal Palace at Gubbio. This miracle of quattrocento artistry and craftsmanship forms a fitting approach to the series of renaissance galleries.

Next is the small gallery (3) of which three walls are lined with sections of sixteenth-century choir stalls from South Italy. This walnut panelling, handsomely decorated with carved grotesque designs of a type inspired by ancient Roman models, forms an effective setting for one of the Museum’s prime examples of renaissance statuary—the marble Adam by Tullio Lombardo. Since this sculpture originally stood in the church of the Servi in Venice as part of the Vendramin tomb—it was carved just before the close of the fifteenth century—its present choir-stall setting seems highly appropriate.

Gallery 4 proclaims the early Renaissance, above all the Renaissance as it first appeared in Florence, the place of its birth. Outstanding among the sculptures is the lovely marble version of the Madonna and Child by Benedetto da Maiano, which was once in the collection of the Duke of Montpensier in Bologna and which came to the Museum as the bequest of George Blumenthal. Another notable relief is that of Christ returning from his dispute with the Doctors, a sensitively wrought work by that rare master, Agostino di Duccio. The collection of medals exhibited in a vitrine gives us stirring likenesses of a number of eminent personages of quattrocento Italy. These miniature sculptures are nearly all from the Morgan collection.

Of the paintings one is the vigorously designed fresco of Saint Christopher, well known to all past visitors to the Museum. It is probably a copy of the fresco (now destroyed) by Antonio Pollaiuolo on the façade of San Miniaturo fra le Torri in Florence and is one of the few important large-scale frescoes of the Florentine Renaissance in this country. Then there are two colorful altarpieces, one of the Assumption of the Virgin, by the Sienese master Benvenuto di Giovanni. It was made in 1498 for the embellishment of the convent church in Grangia, Tuscany, and its present setting suggests its original purpose. The other altarpiece, the Death of the Virgin, is a signed work by Bartolommeo Vivarini and is the recent gift of Robert Lehman.

Gallery 7 is devoted to the more sumptuous
arts of the late Renaissance and the following baroque period. Its over-all effect, accordingly, is rich and colorful, befitting the times it undertakes to represent. Handsome tapestries cover the walls; statuary and furniture, together with a variety of objects in crystal, goldsmiths' work, and maiolica, give rich evidence of the splendor of their times.

As you enter the room you are faced with the life-size marble group of Alpheus and Arethusa set against a background of Brussels tapestry. Originally the piece occupied a very different position: it stood over a fountain in the grotto of Alemanno Bandini's villa Il Paradiso on the outskirts of Florence. It is the masterpiece of Battista Lorenzi, a sculptor who worked on Michelangelo's tomb in the Florentine church of Santa Croce, and it was made between 1568 and 1584. For many years it stood near the top of the great stairway in the Bargello Museum in Florence as a loan from the Niccolini family of Carmignano, from whom it was acquired by the Museum.

One wall of the gallery is hung with three rare grotesque tapestries. The central hanging bears the arms of the Doria family of Genoa, and it may well have been made in Florence for the great admiral Andrea Doria; the two smaller flanking pieces are said to have been woven in Brussels as bed hangings made for Margaret of Parma, daughter of Charles V and regent of the Netherlands from 1559 to 1567.

The farther side of the gallery is given over to the seventeenth century. A bronze bust of Pope Innocent X from the workshop of Alessandro Algardi stands against a Flemish tapestry from a series of the Story of Anthony and Cleopatra, which shows the Egyptian queen on her barge drifting down the Nile in operatic splendor. Everything in the tapestry, Cleopatra herself included, seems amply baroque in form and scale. Other objects in this room, the sculptures, a Roman harpsichord made for the Colonna family, goldsmiths' work and the like, further testify to the sweep and magnificence of this uninhibited age.

Gallery 5, which connects with the Medieval Tapestry Hall (Medieval Gallery 4), is devoted to the Spanish Renaissance. Although the forms of the pieces here exhibited are based largely on the Italian, the idiom of expression is thoroughly Spanish. The walls are hung with a carpet, two embroideries, and a tapestry. The embroideries are from a rare series from the end of the sixteenth century known as the History of Galcerán de Pinós, a medieval Spanish hero, and are the recent gift of Charles Zadok of Milwaukee.

The painted wood relief of the Holy Family is typical of the best in Spanish sculpture and is believed to have been carved by Diego Siloé about the middle of the sixteenth century. It was left to the Museum by Helen Hay Whitney. Among the other sculptures shown here is a bust of the moody Philip II, from the workshop of Leone Leoni, a Milanese artist long in the service of Spain.

In all of the pieces exhibited in Gallery 6, the gallery of the French Renaissance, we are made aware of the eternal French concern with matters of decoration and elegance. We particularly note this in the field of woodwork, which is here represented by several commanding examples. The oak panels from the Château de Gaillon, for instance, which are among the earliest examples of the renaissance style in France, are carved with extraordinary finesse. They were executed about 1510 on the order of Georges, Cardinal d'Amboise, the powerful minister of Louis XII, whose portrait appears on one of them together with that of the cardinal, and they follow ornamental forms current in Italy. They are from the Morgan and Blumenthal collections.

One of the principal treasures of the Museum is the wainscoting from the chapel of the Château de la Bastie d'Urfé. At a later stage in the progress of renovating the Museum galleries, the entire wainscoting of this celebrated French chapel will be set up in its original form. Until this installation can be made, the samples presently shown must serve to indicate its presence here in the Museum. This extraordinary work, the gift of the children of Mrs. Harry Payne Whitney in accordance with her wishes, is a happy combination of intarsia and relief carving, partly Italian and partly French. The intarsia panels were executed in Bologna just prior to the middle of the sixteenth century by Fra Damiano da Bergamo, cited by Vasari as a
master of his craft, and by Francesco Orlandini of Verona. The low relief work is French, in the style of the school of Fontainebleau. Since Claude d’Urfé, for whom the paneling was executed, represented the French king at the meetings of the Council of Trent which were held in Bologna, it must be assumed that his Italian visit resulted in the commissioning of the work.

The relief portrait of Francis I, from the Château of Sansac near Loches, executed in white-glazed terracotta, gives us one of the most vivid likenesses of the monarch. Evidently modeled by a member of the Della Robbia family of Florence, it also comes from the Blumenthal collection. The Metropolitan, incidentally, recently presented a cast of this portrait at their request to the Museum of Fontainebleau, where so many pieces relating to Francis I are preserved.

Three paintings add a further dimension to this group of French renaissance masterpieces. One of them shows the Dinteville brothers appearing before Francis I as Moses and Aaron before Pharoah, a work by Félix Chrétién, dated 1537. This picture, which for several centuries bore a false signature of Holbein, was commissioned as a pendant to the latter’s celebrated panel of The Ambassadors. It is an allegory of the Religious Wars by one of the rare Protestant painters of the French Renaissance. The Birth of Cupid is a superb example of the mannered classicism of the school of Fontainebleau while the large equestrian portrait of Henry II is a rare and notable example of official court portraiture.

We pass by the Sagredo bedroom (Gallery 9) and the gallery of eighteenth-century Italian decorative arts (10) with its impressive series of frescoes by Tiepolo. These galleries will be described in detail in the May issue of the Bulletin.

Adjoining the last-mentioned room is the North Lounge (Gallery 11), the walls of which are lined with vitrines containing a number of the Museum’s most distinguished renaissance bronzes. The room is furnished with comfortable settees. Here the visitor may relax and gaze out over the American Wing garden upon an architectural gem of the Federal period—the façade of the United States Branch Bank (later the Assay Office) formerly at 15 Wall Street, which was once a landmark of downtown New York.

The North Lounge leads into the Renaissance Sculpture Hall (Gallery 12). This area in which plaster casts of sculptures and models of architecture were formerly shown—who will ever forget the miniature Notre-Dame?—has suffered a sea change. In its rehabilitated form it now houses a number of the Museum’s most important European sculptures.

Two remarkable monuments, unique in this country, dominate the gallery’s center. They are altarpieces that came, as gifts from J. Pierpont Morgan, from the Château de Biron in southwest France. They were commissioned by Pons de Gontaut, Seigneur de Biron, who accompanied Charles VIII on his expedition to Italy in 1494 and who therefore was one of the first of the French to come into contact with the new renaissance style. The Pietà, the earlier of the two groups, owes comparatively little to the Renaissance, its lineaments being mainly medieval. It shows Pons with his brother Armand, who was Bishop of Sarlat, kneeling at either side of the anguished Mother of God, who supports her dead Son upon her knees. This and the even more striking Entombment, set up directly opposite, may be related to the school of Michel Colombe. In details of ornamental decoration the Entombment group clearly shows the renaissance touch. This piece is indeed a magnificent example of the work of the French sculptors when at the dawn of this new age they first responded to the antique-inspired fashions developed by the Italians, examples of which appear elsewhere in this gallery.

Another monumental work is the altarpiece of the Assumption of the Virgin in blue and white glazed terracotta, the work of Andrea della Robbia. It was acquired in 1882 as the gift of Henry G. Marquand and during the course of years has been shown in several places in the Museum, but never, it seems, has it appeared to such good advantage as in its present location. It rests upon a handsome travertine altar table and, well lighted, positively sparkles.

Among the gallery’s single pieces are the lovely Angel of the Annunciation by Matteo Civitali and the painted terracotta relief of the Madonna and Child by Andrea del Verrocchio. A new ar-
rival to our collections is the marble bust of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of Pope Paul V and founder of the Villa Borghese collection in Rome. This fine example of the work of Alessandro Algardi actually came from the Borghese collections, having appeared in the famous sale at Rome in 1892.

Next in the sequence of galleries—just west of the Medieval Sculpture Hall—is that devoted to the English sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Gallery 22). Two canopied beds dominate the room, one a new and most welcome arrival in our collections, the gift of Judge Irwin Untermyer. With its massive front posts, ceiling, and headboard of carved oak, it is a particularly effective example of Elizabethan furniture. It came from Cumnor Place in Berkshire, a country house which in the period when the bed was created was occupied by Amy Robsart, first wife of Robert Dudley, later the Earl of Leicester. The lady died there under mysterious circumstances, although not in this bed, for she was pushed or fell downstairs. Rightly or wrongly, her death was linked up with the ambitions of her husband, a favorite of Queen Elizabeth, and has become one of the legends of the age. The other bed, furnished with its original velvet hangings, is from Rushbrooke Hall, Suffolk, and is of the period of Charles II.

Then there are the painted terracotta busts of Saint John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Sir Henry Guildford, Equerry to Henry VIII. These and a companion portrait of Henry VII now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are believed to have formed part of the furnishings of the main room over the Holbein Gate, once a famous London landmark, erected in Whitehall during the reign of Henry VIII and long since torn down. They are presumably the work of Pietro Torrigiano, an able representative of the Florentine school, who is best known for having permanently disfigured Michelangelo’s nose during a boyhood fracas. Torrigiano worked for a number of years in England, and his busts of Fisher and Guildford are among the Museum’s most telling specimens of renaissance portrait sculpture.

Two examples of the art of the English armorier add their distinguished presence to this representation of the English Renaissance. The suit made for George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland, has been called “the best-preserved armor of the Greenwich school in existence.” It is certainly one of the most attractive. Made probably for the earl’s installation as Champion to Queen Elizabeth, an event which occurred in 1590, it came from Appleby Castle, Westmoreland, by way of the Clarence Mackay collection.

Two great tapestries and several English paintings are on the walls. The tapestries are from a series of the Story of Herse and, although they are of Brussels manufacture and not English, are of a type commonly used in that country, for such hangings were as much at home in Italy, Spain, France, and England as in their native Netherlands. The two Herse tapestries, which could hardly have been more richly woven in silk, gold, and silver threads, represent the epitome of luxuriousness in tapestry weaving. They actually came from Spain, where they were in the collection of the Duke of Medinaceli, and are part of the Blumenthal bequest.

The adjacent West Lounge is another of the occasional rooms planned by the Museum as a place of relaxation for the visitor. It, too, has been equipped with comfortable settees, and its wide windows offer a view of a pleasant Central Park landscape. Not that the gallery itself is devoid of art. The marble fountain that plays so merrily in the room’s center is well worth more than a casual glance, for it is actually the earliest existing renaissance fountain, having been made for the garden of the palace of Jacopo Pazzi in Florence sometime during the third quarter of the fifteenth century. As early as the end of that century it was attributed to the great Donatello, who died in 1466. It is yet another of the many fine pieces from the Blumenthal collection.

In conjunction with the opening of the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries four magnificent Brussels tapestries of the early sixteenth century are exhibited in the Great Hall. They are a series representing the Twelve Ages of Man, and each tapestry includes three incidents illustrating one of the four seasons in man’s life. These spectacular hangings have just been presented to the Museum by the Hearst Foundation in memory of William Randolph Hearst.
Detail of the Gubbio Room, the private study of Federigo da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, from his palace at Gubbio. The intarsia wainscot with its trompe-l'oeil decoration was probably designed by the Sienese Francesco di Giorgio. Late XV century. Rogers Fund, 1939.
Gallery view with a marble figure of Adam by Tullio Lombardo (about 1475-1532), from the tomb of Doge Andrea Vendramin. Venetian, late 15th century. Fletcher Fund, 1936. This gallery also has a series of carved walnut choir stalls with grotesque ornament. South Italian, second quarter of the 16th century. Rogers Fund, 1907

Carved and inlaid walnut chair with the Strozzi arms, from the Strozzi palace, Florence. Late XV century, Fletcher Fund, 1930.
Gallery view with a marble group of Alpheus and Arethusa by Battista Lorenzi (d. 1594). Florentine, second half of the XVI century. Fletcher Fund, 1940

RIGHT: Gold cup with enamel and pearls, known as the Rospigliosi Cup. Attributed to Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571). Florentine, middle of the xvi century. Bequest of Benjamin Altman, 1913.
Bronze medals. ABOVE: Ludovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, by Pisanello, 1447 or 1448; Carlo Grati of Bologna, by Sperandio, about 1485. BELOW: Lorenzo de’ Medici, the Magnificent, by Niccolò Fiorentino, about 1490; Giovanni de’ Medici delle Bande Nere, by Francesco da Sangallo, about 1570. Blumenthal Fund, 1950
XVI century Italian goldsmiths' work. Above: Gold and enamel hat ornaments: left, John the Baptist and Mary Magdalen before a shrine containing Saint Veronica's veil; right, a jeweled representation of the Entombment. Below: Gold and enamel pendants with pearls: left, a portrait of the emperor Charles V, with bloodstone and lapis lazuli; right, a figure of Prudence, with chalcedony and jewels. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917
Limestone Pietà from the Château de Biron. On the left is the figure of Armand de Gontaut, Bishop of Sarlat; on the right his brother Pons, Seigneur de Biron, the donor. French, early xvi century. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1916. The views on these pages are from the Renaissance Sculpture Hall.
Gallery view with an Elizabethan bed of carved oak from Cumnor Place, Berkshire. English, xvi century. Gift of Judge Irwin Untermyer, 1953
Marble fountain in the West Lounge. Florentine, xv century. Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941