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National Gallery: Rhode Island Exhibit (1962): Correspondence 04

Grose Evans

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

TELEPHONE: REPUBLIC 7-4215
CABLE ADDRESS: NATGAL

May 14, 1962

Miss Isabelle Leeds
418 Federal Building
Providence 3, Rhode Island

Dear Miss Leeds:

Enclosed is a carbon copy of the write-up on the paintings, which I am having mimeographed today and will forward you 3000 copies shortly. I am sorry that this has been delayed but, of course, it had to wait for approval by members of our staff and Senator Pell's office. The exhibit will be shipped today by Associated Transport, Incorporated to Mayor Walter H. Reynolds at City Hall, and I believe should arrive in time for showing on the 21st.

If we can help you in any other way,
please let us know.

Very sincerely,

Grose Evans
Curator of the Index
of American Design

GE:jh
Enc.



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

TELEPHONE: REPUBLIC 7-4215
CABLE ADDRESS: NATGAL

May 15, 1962

Miss Isabelle Leeds
418 Federal Building
Providence 3, Rhode Island

Dear Miss Leeds:

We sent off today the write-ups on
the Italian painting reproductions. I sent
about 200 to Mayor Reynolds.

I hope they meet with your approval.

Very sincerely,

Grose Evans
Curator in Charge of
Extension Service

GE: jh

Reproductions of
ITALIAN PAINTINGS IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

At the suggestion of Senator Claiborne Pell, the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., is glad to offer this collotype exhibition of Italian paintings to be circulated throughout the State of Rhode Island.

Italy's most splendid period of art, the Renaissance, was a time of rapid intellectual growth and artistic experimentation. The two dominant interests that emerged to conclude the Middle Ages were classical culture and the world of contemporary man. These happily complemented each other and were expressed in the almost unparalleled productivity of Italian artists.

The dawn of the Renaissance can be seen in the humanism implicit in DUCCIO's small picture, a part of his famous altarpiece from the cathedral in Siena. While its golden sky, symbolizing heaven, and its rudimentary landscape sustain medieval traditions, its figures of the disciples responding to Christ's call seem vividly alive. Again, ROBERTI's portraits of the grim ruler of Bologna and his unhappy, scheming wife further reveal the emergence of that interest in human nature and character which distinguished the Renaissance from previous ages. Roberti's crisp linear style, common to fifteenth-century painters, is admirably suited to such analytical portraiture. Working in this same manner, BOTTICELLI

added a rhythmic grace to his outlines. Probably his Adoration of the Magi was painted in 1481-82 when he was in Rome. Botticelli, as an artist of the Renaissance, loved the ruins of Antiquity and recalled them in painting the stable of Bethlehem. Such classical ruins were often included in pictures dealing with the infancy of Christ; they symbolize the decline of pagan culture with the rise of Christianity. Botticelli epitomizes the artistic achievement of the fifteenth century in the rich variety of his forms composed in perfect balance.

At this same period in Venice BELLINI painted his Madonna and Child in a Landscape. He shows delicately observed details and a new feeling for light and air. The remarkably realistic landscape, with its unusual cloud formations, sets the painting apart from the more intellectualized Florentine style of Botticelli. Bellini was influenced by Flemish art, which exhibited a strong love of nature early in the fifteenth century. A similar concern with natural appearances led Bellini's pupil, GIORGIONE, to create a glowing vista, lit with early-morning sunlight, as setting for The Adoration of the Shepherds. The cave, mentioned in an apocryphal gospel as the place of Christ's birth, has afforded Giorgione the chance to present this idyllic pastoral scene. His work heralds the High Renaissance in Venetian art for it contains the synthesis of earlier artistic inventions that marks the best

painting of this age. Outlines are absorbed in light and shadow that convincingly model the forms; figures are plausibly and gracefully articulated, and space is skillfully expressed in aerial perspective. Over all exists a mood of serenity which reflects man's self-assurance at the opening of the sixteenth century.

? In Umbria and Tuscany PERUGINO's are^t foreshadowed a similar accomplishment, which his pupil, RAPHAEL, brought to fruition. Saint George and the Dragon, an early work by Raphael, displays his precocious mastery; its spirited horse tells that he had carefully studied the exacting drawings of Leonardo da Vinci. The Small Cowper Madonna named to distinguish it from a larger one also once owned by Lord Cowper, contains the new monumentality in its figures that was essential to the later development of Italian painting. In it the faces present a happy mean between the austere ideal of classical sculpture and the warmth of living humanity. Contemporary with Raphael's most noted frescoes in the Vatican, The Alba Madonna is among his finest works. Its composition contains strong movements of the figures but these are so neatly counter-balanced that the total effect is restful.

Admiring the perfections of Raphael's style, BRONZINO echoes it, but the serenity of the High Renaissance is replaced by an uneasy tension in his taut forms. His portrait shows a courtly Florentine lady and her son in superbly painted clothing; but

both seem introspective and wary, for they live in troubled times. Like Rome, Florence had lost its independence to the Spanish Hapsburgs by the time this was painted about 1540. Court customs had reverted to unenlightened medieval ways and consciences were oppressed by the spiritual upheaval of Reformation and Counter Reformation. TINTORETTO's Christ at the Sea of Galilee gives striking evidence of the curious Mannerist style of painting that met the needs of this period. Elongation of the figures contributes supernatural distinction and nature itself is ^Rchanged with unnatural violence. The resolution of this manner into a bold, self-confident materialism occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

TIEPOLO's brilliant Madonna of the Goldfinch, wherein the Child clasps the bird symbolic of the human soul, as playfully as if it were a pet, shows the Baroque return to normative standards. So sensuously appealing that it seems secular, this picture is a climax to the theme of humanism in Italian painting. Tiepolo's Apollo Pursuing Daphne, also painted in optimistic, sparkling tones recalls the love of classical lore that stimulated so many minds during the Renaissance. Tiepolo gives a vivid illustration of Apollo's astonishment as he sees his first love, the nymph Daphne, changed into a laurel tree by the magic of her father, Peneus the river-god, while Cupid laughs at his plight. Tiepolo's century saw the rise of the veduta, or view, painters, who were especially

popular in Venice where tourists eagerly flocked to enjoy the many pageants, concerts, and sights of the city. CANALETTO's precise perspective scenes were most in demand as souvenirs of the Grand Tour. Temporarily they overshadowed GU^ARDI's more imaginative, picturesque, and lively works. Guardi's view of the Cannaregio shows an unfashionable district in the north of Venice and contrasts with the glitter of Canaletto's pictures of San Marco's Square and the Grand Canal.

Italy sustained cultural leadership in Europe for over four centuries and, especially in her painting, created one of the greatest chapters in the history of art.