



The Renaissance Portrait: From Donatello to Bellini (Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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In the words of cultural historian Jacob Burkhardt, fifteenth-century Italy was "the place where the notion of the individual was born." In keeping with that idea, early Renaissance Italy was a key participant in the first great age of portraiture in Europe. As groundbreaking artists strove to evoke the identity or personality of their sitters—from heads of state and church, military commanders, and wealthy patrons to scholars, poets, and artists—they evolved daring new representational strategies that would profoundly influence the course of Western art. More than a mere likeness, the fifteenth-century Italian portrait was an attempt to wrest from the unpredictability of life and the shadow of mortality and image that could be passed down to future generations.

The Renaissance Portrait, which accompanies a landmark exhibition at the Bode-Museum, Berlin, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, provides new research and insight into the early history of portraiture in Italy, examining in detail how its major art centers—Florence, the princely courts, and Venice—saw the rapid development of portraiture as closely linked to Renaissance society and politics, ideas of the individual, and concepts of beauty. Essays by leading scholars provide a thorough introduction to Renaissance portraiture, while individual catalogue entries illustrate and extensively discuss more than 160 magnificent examples of painting, drawing, manuscript illumination, sculpture, and medallion portraiture by such artists as Donatello, Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Verrocchio, Ghirlandaio, Pisanello, Mantegna, Antonello da Messina, and Giovanni Bellini. With abundant style and visual ingenuity, these masters transformed the plain facts of observation into something beautiful to behold.

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