

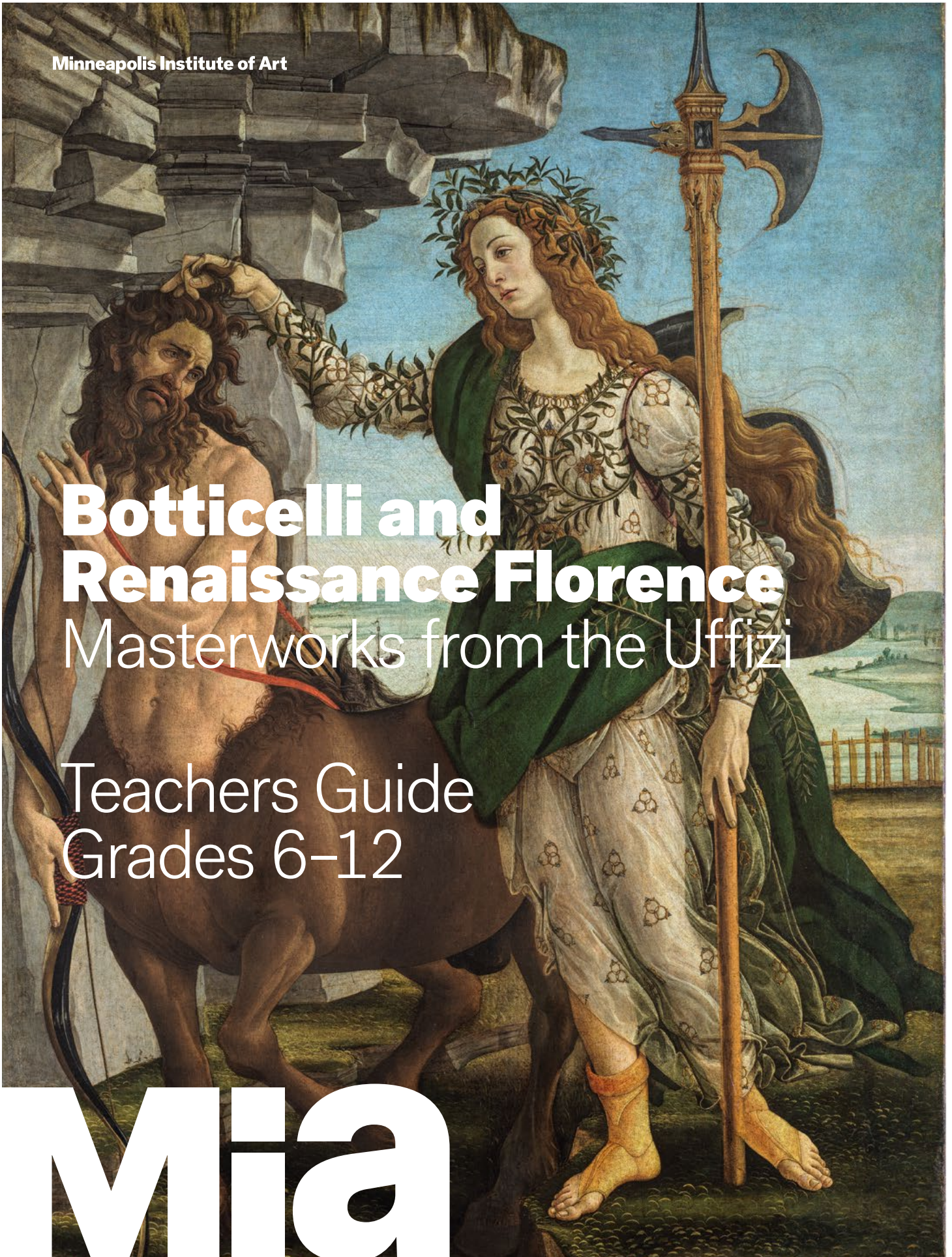
Minneapolis Institute of Art

Botticelli and Renaissance Florence

Masterworks from the Uffizi

Teachers Guide
Grades 6-12

Mia



Teachers Guide

For Teachers and Students Grades 6–12

Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the Uffizi

October 16, 2022–January 8, 2023

This teachers guide accompanies the special exhibition, “Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the Uffizi.”

This guide is designed to facilitate conversations in the classroom before a museum tour or between chaperones and students on self-guided visits. It introduces the special exhibition’s main themes in preparation for a visit to Mia, and it contains projectable images and discussion prompts. Discussions begin with close looking, with more complex questions to follow. We recommend you review the content and plan your lessons or tours in alignment with your particular students.

Looking to visit the exhibition with your students? [Simply request a free guided school tour here.](#) To register your group of 10 or more students for a self-guided experience, please call or email our Visitor Experience staff prior to your visit at 612.870.3000 or visit@artsmia.org.

We look forward to seeing you at Mia soon!

Sandro Botticelli (Florence, 1445–1510) was a leading artist of the Italian Renaissance, a time characterized by a new awakening of art, culture, and learning. In Botticelli’s hometown of Florence, this rebirth was inspired by a desire to reconnect with the human-centered ideals of the classical past. Botticelli, with great imagination and an independent spirit, created a new visual language by adapting Greek and Roman art and antiquities to 15th-century art forms and subjects, including Christian themes.

“Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the

Uffizi” captures the atmosphere of creativity among artists in 1400s Florence and the financial support of the arts by the wealthy. For the first time, paintings and drawings by Botticelli are displayed with the ancient sculptures that inspired them. The exhibition aims to go beyond the surface of his most famous works, allowing the visitor to enter the cultural, social, and domestic climate of the time.

These works explore the major themes of the exhibition, including ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, Florentine interiors and portraiture, and religious iconography.

This exhibition is organized by the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Uffizi Galleries.



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Sandro Botticelli (Italian, 1445–1510), *Pallas and the Centaur* (detail), c. 1482, tempera on canvas, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence

Exhibition Themes

**Art all'antica:
Virtue, Passion, and Pleasure**

**The San Marco Sculpture Garden and
Antiquities in Renaissance Florence**

Sacred Beauty

**The Renaissance Interior:
A Setting of Virtue and Magnificence**

**From Life:
Florentine Faces and People**

Cover: Sandro Botticelli, Florence 1445-1510, *Pallas and the Centaur* (detail), c. 1482, Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on canvas, 81 ½ x 58 ¼ in. (207 x 148 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria della Statue e delle Pitture, Inv. Depositi no. 29

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Theme 1

Art all'antica: Virtue, Passion, and Pleasure

During the Renaissance, artists in Florence were inspired by the art and ideas of the ancient Greeks, bringing new life to the art and culture of their own time. They reinterpreted mythological subjects to create works of art rich in symbolism and laden with philosophical meaning.

Many works in “Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the Uffizi” demonstrate artists’ interest in antiquity. Some Renaissance artists had direct access to antiquities to inspire them, while others learned through drawings, prints, and the work of other artists.

Sandro Botticelli, *Pallas and the Centaur*, c. 1482

Pallas and the Centaur is a perfect example of art *all'antica*, or art “in the manner of the ancients.” The painting depicts a maiden warrior stopping a centaur before a gate. The woman grabs the centaur by a lock of hair, directing him with little effort. The interaction between woman and beast celebrates the power of female virtue to stop irrational, unconscious passions from disturbing the peace.

The exact identity of the female figure remains a mystery. She is traditionally identified as Pallas Athena/Minerva, goddess of wisdom and war, and might be seen here as taming uncivilized nature and disorder to foster peace, wisdom, and the arts. One record suggests the female figure is instead Camilla, a warrior princess described in Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Camilla’s strength and beauty are shown not only through her pose, but also through her clothing and attributes. Botticelli was very familiar with Florence’s textile industry and used that knowledge to characterize his figures using emblems, colors, and plants.

Camilla, for example, wears a day dress made of silk, covered in a pattern of interlocking diamond rings (a well-known emblem of the Medici family). Camilla’s mantle, the garment draped over her dress, is a green that is associated with physical and spiritual benefits.

Questions

1. Look closely at this painting. What do you see? What is going on in the picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Interlocking diamond rings are just one of the symbols in this painting. What else might be a symbol? What do those symbols remind you of?
3. What do you notice about the female figure’s pose? What emotion or attitude does it suggest? What about her facial expression? Imagine she is across the room; how does her presence make you feel? Why?
4. Observe the interaction between the female figure and the centaur. What does this interaction suggest about gender roles at the time? What do you see that makes you say that? If you were painting this scene today, how would your representation be different? What would you want to say about gender roles today?



Sandro Botticelli, Florence 1445–1510, *Pallas and the Centaur* (detail), c. 1482
Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on canvas, 81 ½ x 58 ¼ in. (207 x 148 cm)
Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria della Statue e delle Pitture, Inv. Depositi no. 29

Theme 2

The San Marco Sculpture Garden and Antiquities in Renaissance Florence

Lorenzo de' Medici, known as il Magnifico (or "the Magnificent"), was the unofficial ruler of the Florentine Republic. As the heir of a banking empire, he held power in both politics and finance. Lorenzo was an avid collector of Greek and Roman sculpture, which he gathered in the San Marco Garden not far from his palace.

The garden was not only a place to display his collection, but an informal academy where artists like Leonardo da Vinci and a young Michelangelo could study antiquities under sculptor Bertoldo di Giovanni, himself a student of the Florentine sculptor Donatello. We can assume that Botticelli also knew the collection well, due to his close relationship with Lorenzo. The impact of the sculptures he studied in the San Marco Garden are evident in Botticelli's imagery, adapted for Christian subject matter.

Ancient Roman, Cinerary urn with dedication to Decimus Aemilius Chius and Hortensia Phoebe, 50–100 CE

Ancient urns, altars, and sarcophagi offered Renaissance artists tons of inspiration, because they contained so many decorative motifs. This cinerary urn is a great example of the symbolism Renaissance artists admired. A ram's head is on either corner, and a garland with leaves and berries is draped from each ram's horn. The ram's head was a common motif in urns and altars as a symbol of protection. The garlands demonstrate the desire to surround burial places with living plants and flowers. They are made of laurel, an evergreen, alluding to immortality. Underneath, birds peck at the berries. At the center is the head of a Gorgon (a creature from Greek mythology; Medusa is a well-known example), surrounded by eagles and sphinxes.

This urn once contained the ashes of Decimus Aemilius Chius and Hortensia Phoebe, who are named in the dedicatory inscription. Their relationship is not described, but it is thought that they were husband and wife. Their Greek surnames suggest they were once enslaved, but the elaborate funerary monument indicates that they later gained their freedom.

Questions

1. Describe this sculpture. What do you see? What do you wonder about?
2. Many of the images on the urn, including the ram's head, floral garlands, and even the Gorgon's head, are borrowed from the ancient Greeks and Romans. How do you feel when you look at these images? What about the images make you feel this way? Where else have you seen ancient symbols like these? Think about some buildings, coins, and public statues that include ancient Greek and Roman figures.
3. What kind of symbols and creatures would you choose to decorate your own space? Why would you choose those? How might you want other people to feel when they see and experience them?



Ancient Roman, Cinerary urn with dedication to Decimus Aemilius Chius and Hortensia Phoebe, 50-100 CE, Marble, 18 ¾ x 11 ½ x 7 ¾ in. (48 x 28 x 19.4 cm), Inscription: dis manib[us]/d[ecimi]aemili/chi et/bortensiae/phoebes (To the deified souls of the late Decimus Aemilius Chius and Hortensia Phoebe), Minneapolis Institute of Art, The John R. Van Derlip Fund 62.20a-b

Workshop of Filippino Lippi (Master of Memphis, probably Bernardo di Leonardo), *Two Muses (Erato and Melpomene)*, early 16th century

In Greek and Roman mythology, there were nine muses who embodied and inspired the liberal arts and sciences. This panel shows two of them: Erato, the muse of Music, and Melpomene, the muse of Tragedy. Erato plays a lyre while Melpomene leans on the base, holding the mask that helps identify her.

This painting was likely done by a member of Filippino Lippi's workshop now known as the Master of Memphis, who painted many works based on Filippino's drawings. He added bright colors and simplified drapery folds. The size and subject indicate it was made to be displayed in a scholar's study. The panel expresses a central interest of the Renaissance: to express values celebrated in Christianity through figures inspired by antiquity.

Questions

- 1.** Look closely at the painting. What is going on in the picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What do you wonder about the picture? Based on what you see, what arts might the two muse figures symbolize?
- 2.** What do you notice about the facial expressions of the two muses? How would you describe their poses? If possible, try these poses yourself. How do you feel in these poses? Why do you suppose the artist made them this way?
- 3.** If you are familiar with ancient Greek and Roman art, how do you see ancient ideas represented in this painting?



Workshop of Filippino Lippi (Master of Memphis, probably Bernardo di Leonardo), Active in Florence, late 15th century–16th century, *Two Muses (Erato and Melpomene)*, Early sixteenth century, Oil and tempera on panel 11 x 8 ½ in. (28.1 x 21.4 cm), Minneapolis Institute of Art, The Putnam Dana McMillan Fund 67.28

Theme 3

Sacred Beauty

Many homes in Florence were decorated with artworks made for private devotion and consumption. Small religious panels hung in bedrooms and were meant to bring the inhabitants plenty of children and a happy continuation of the family line. These works contained exquisite scenes full of narrative episodes, with artists looking to the San Marco Garden's collection to model figures after.

Botticelli and his workshop, *Adoration of the Child with Angels (Madonna of the Roses), 1490–1500*

Tondi—circular paintings or reliefs—were used in antique Roman architecture as a type of sculpted decoration. The circular shape became popular in the Renaissance, often in works of marble, terracotta, and painted wood. Tondi were displayed in the bridal chambers of Florentine palaces and showed subjects that bode well for fertility.

In this work, Botticelli portrays the Madonna (Mary, mother of Jesus) adoring her baby in a garden of delights. The child reclines, accompanied by four angels, in front of a rose bush. The rose bushes seem to grow from the angels themselves, sheltering the child from the world. The roses symbolize the purity of Mary, while the thorns represent her sorrows. The grand symbolism in this piece makes the work suitable for displaying in a domestic setting, and was perhaps meant to mark the birth of a child.

Questions

1. Who do you notice first in this image? What draws you to that figure?
2. What's going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. Think about the size of this tondo. At 43 ¼ inches, it is about 3.5 feet in diameter. Why might the artist have made it this large? How might its impact change if it were smaller?
4. This painting's design may have been made with the use of cartoons, which were full-size preparatory drawings. Botticelli also had a workshop of helpers who knew his style well and could imitate it. How might these factors make it easier to complete the painting? How might they have made it more difficult?



Sandro Botticelli and workshop, Florence, 1445-1510, *Adoration of the Child with Angels (Madonna of the Roses)*, 1490-1500, Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on panel, diameter 43 ¼ in. (110 cm)
Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria Palatina, Pitti Palace, inv. 1911, Oggetti d'arte no. 750

Theme 4

The Renaissance Interior: A Setting of Virtue and Magnificence

During the Italian Renaissance, upper-class homes were well decorated. Sculpted busts adorned doorways and portals, representing family members or portraying religious figures as models of virtue. Easily transported on trips to use in prayer, small-scale paintings with sacred subjects were made for private devotion. Chests were used to store clothes, objects of value, and family documents. Such pieces were usually commissioned in pairs by the father of the bride or by the husband for a wedding, displayed in bedrooms. Many works in “Botticelli and Renaissance Florence: Masterworks from the Uffizi” help viewers understand the typical interiors of Florentine homes.

Jacopo del Sellaio, *The Banquet of Queen Vashti*, c. 1485

The Banquet of Queen Vashti, along with another fragmentary panel (Fig. 1), once decorated a wedding chest (*cassone* or *forziere*), a type of large chest used to store clothing.

Wedding chests were painted with scenes of classical mythology, biblical episodes, or conflict. The most popular subject, however, were tales of love that celebrated qualities valued in a bride, such as loyalty. According to this story, Ahasuerus (a Persian king) hosted a banquet for the citizens of the city and requested his wife, Queen Vashti, to join him. The panel shows the queen attending a different banquet, thus disrespecting her husband. This led to Vashti being stripped of her robes and crown and expelled, which is shown in the center of the panel. Ahasuerus eventually married Esther, who did attend his banquet.

With the two halves combined (Fig. 2), the panels contrast two models of behavior—the shameful Vashti and the virtuous Esther—who respectively serve as a warning and a model to the bride.

Questions

1. Look closely at this scene. What seems to be happening here? What do you see that makes you say that? If you were to describe the scene to someone who hasn't seen the work, what would you say? What details would you be sure to include? Why?
2. Jacopo del Sellaio relied a great deal on the use of contrast in this painting. What do you notice about the artist's use of light and dark? Smooth versus rough surfaces? Round versus sharp objects? What might he be trying to get viewers to understand with these techniques?
3. If you were to make an artwork about relationships today, what messages would you want to include? What medium would you choose? Would you create your artwork for a private or public space? Why? How might this decision influence how you showed your messages?



Jacopo del Sallai, Florence, c. 1442–1493, *The Banquet of Queen Vashti*, c. 1485, Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on panel, 17 ¾ x 32 ¼ in. (45 x 92 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture, inv. 1890 no. 492



Fig 1. Jacopo del Sellaio, Banquet of Ahasuerus, probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on panel, 17 ½ x 27 ½ in. (44.5 x 62 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture, inv. 1890 no. 491



Fig 2. Reconstruction of the forziere by Dora Sallay, showing *The Banquet of Ahasuerus* (left) and *The Banquet of Queen Vashti* (right) (from Sallay 2019, 74, fig. 7)

Sandro Botticelli, *Saint Augustine in His Study*, c. 1494

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was an early Christian bishop, writer, doctor of the church, and celebrated theologian. Botticelli sets Saint Augustine in an idealized Renaissance *studiolo*—a small study in which to carry out intellectual activities. He is engrossed in thinking and writing, seated at his desk in an elegant vaulted space inspired by the architecture of ancient Rome. The space is decorated with garlands, medallions picturing Roman emperors, and a relief depicting the Virgin Mary and Child. Books line the shelves, and Augustine is absorbed in his writing, the discarded papers on the floor revealing the struggle of the author.

In the mid-1490s, the republic was led by friar Girolamo Savonarola, who gave sermons attacking the moral and spiritual decline of society. He held public burnings of luxury goods, musical instruments, and artwork that he deemed inappropriate. Savonarola's sermons provoked fear and doubt about life and religious thought in Botticelli and many other contemporaries.

Questions

- 1.** What's going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that?
- 2.** How would you describe the relationship between Saint Augustine and the interior space? How does Augustine look and feel? Why do you suppose Botticelli chose to represent the early Christian saint in a Renaissance interior?
- 3.** Small Christian paintings like this one were intended for private devotion, fundamental to life at the time. How does this painting encourage a worshipper in the exercise of prayer? How would you describe Augustine based on what you see here? Why? How does this help you understand the religious climate of Botticelli's Florence in the 1490s?



Sandro Botticelli, Florence, 1445–1510, *Saint Augustine in His Study* (detail), c. 1494, Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on panel, 16 1/8 x 10 5/8 in. (41 x 27 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture, inv. 1890, no. 1473

Theme 5

From Life: Florentine Faces and People

The portraits and paintings in this exhibition immortalize a few men, women, and children who lived in Florence over 500 years ago. Many of their identities are now lost, but their faces were meticulously recorded for patrons wishing to celebrate these particular individuals—a family member, friend, political ally, workshop assistant, or even oneself. Portraiture emerged as an independent genre in Florence in the Renaissance, when the individual was celebrated. In the early 1400s, the subject was often shown in profile, as Roman emperors were on ancient coins. In the second half of the century, under the influence of northern European realism, Italian artists started to paint portraits in three-quarter views, showing deeper insight into the sitter and creating a relationship between subject and spectator.

Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1470-75

The Adoration of the Magi is the biblical story of three magi (or kings) who follow a star to find the newborn Jesus. Botticelli's depiction of the scene includes some of the most important people in Florence, shown personifying the sacred characters. There are likenesses of living people—members of the Medici family portray the three kings—posthumous portraits, and even Botticelli himself. Standing off to the right, Botticelli appears to introduce us to the scene.

This work is widely admired for its variety in figures—different attitudes, angles, and expressions in the young and the old—as well as its coloring, *disegno* (drawing or design), and composition.

Questions

1. What is going on in this painting? What do you see that makes you say that? Who do you notice first? What draws you to them?
2. What are some similarities you notice between the figures? What are some differences? Why might Botticelli have rendered some figures in greater detail than others, or even put them in more daylight or shadow than others?
3. What do you notice about the landscape in the background of this painting? How are the people interacting with this landscape (or how are they ignoring it)? What does the relationship between the figures and the landscape suggest to you about Renaissance ideals?
4. Botticelli depicts himself as handsome and confident, even slightly aloof. What does this tell you about him? Why do you think he chose this work to insert himself? How would you want yourself to be portrayed in a portrait?



Sandro Botticelli, Florence, 1445–1510, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1470–75, Probably tempera and oil (tempera grassa) on panel, 43 ¾ x 54 in. (111 x 137 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture, inv. 1890 no. 882

Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1480

Portraits of Florentine women presented daughters, wives, and, most commonly, brides. Laws were in place to restrict excessive spending, so unless a husband declared and paid a fine for his wife's expensive clothing and jewelry, married women could not be pictured if their clothing might be viewed as a display of privilege.

This young woman's face demonstrates conventional feminine beauty of the period: a high forehead, pale skin with touches of blush, and an angelic smile. A string of pearls shows off her long neck, and her hair is woven into a thick cord and banded, with wavy curls on top. A pearled brooch (*fermaglietto*) with a ruby center holds a three-stringed pearl-beaded headband (*frenello*) in place. The hairstyle is covered in a gauzy veil, pressed tightly on her earlobe and the back of her neck to contain her hair. Her face shows joy in her hairstyle, dress, and jewelry; she seems pleased with her virtue and elegance.

The pomegranate pattern on her sleeve was a symbol of fertility, and her loose-fitting clothing may allude to pregnancy. This painting might have been commissioned to celebrate her place in society as a wife and mother.

Questions

- 1.** Look closely at this portrait. What do you think the artist was instructed to include when it was commissioned? What do you think he may have added himself? Why do you think that?
- 2.** The young woman seems to have a personality. How do you think the artist felt about the subject he was painting? What about the way she is portrayed makes you think that?
- 3.** In Renaissance Florence, women were not allowed to be pictured in expensive clothing and jewelry unless their husband paid a fine. Today, anyone can be the subject of a portrait; we can even take self-portraits with our cell phones. Have you ever made a self-portrait—or selfies—using a camera or another medium? How did you present yourself? If you had a professional portrait done today, what would you want it to look like? Why?



Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Florence 1431/32-1498 Rome, Piero del Pollaiuolo, Florence 1441-before 1496 Rome, *Portrait of a Young Woman* (detail), c. 1480, Tempera on poplar panel; 21 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 13 $\frac{5}{8}$ in (55 x 34.5 cm), Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence, Galleria delle Statue e delle Pitture, inv. 1890 no. 1491