

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## GALLERY HOLDS SPECIAL PETRARCH EXHIBITION TO COMMEMORATE 600TH ANNIVERSARY

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 5, 1974. A selection of over thirty-five early Italian paintings, statues and medals from the collections of the National Gallery of Art will go on view in a special exhibition commemorating the 600th anniversary of the death of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), the Italian poet and humanist who has been widely recognized as a seminal figure of the Italian Renaissance.

The exhibition, Art in the Age of Petrarch, will be on view during the World Petrarch Congress at the Folger Shakespeare Library from April 6 through 12.

The Italian paintings and sculpture in the exhibition are contemporary with Petrarch or earlier, illustrating works similar to those he could have seen in his extensive travels. The qualities in the art coincide with Petrarch's literary style.

The two dominant schools represented in the exhibition are the Florentine and Sienese, as presented in masterpieces by Giotto and Agnolo Gaddi of Florence and Duccio and Lorenzetti of Siena and in sculpture by Nino Pisano of Pisa. The Sienese tradition is also well illustrated by Simone Martini's gilded The Angel of the Annunciation.

(more)

According to tradition, Petrarch died while reading his manuscript copy of Virgil's Aeneid, the frontispiece of which was illustrated by Simone Martini. A facsimile of the manuscript is the focal point of an exhibition on view at the Folger Library through May 5.

Three fifteenth-century medals on view depict idealized portraits of Petrarch, Boccaccio and Dante, the great triumvirate that made Italy for many centuries the literary capital of the world. A lead plaque presents an idealized portrait of Laura, Petrarch's great and mysterious love, who was the poet's ideal of beauty and whom we know only through his poetry.

A symposium for the visiting scholars will be held at the National Gallery April 9 on the theme of Petrarch and the Arts. Guest lecturers will be Gianfranco Contini of the Università di Firenze speaking on Petrarch and the Fine Arts; Denis Stevens of the Accademia Monteverdiana and Columbia University on Petrarch and Renaissance Music; and Jean Seznec of Oxford University discussing Petrarch and Renaissance Art. Informal Work Sessions will be held later in the day to elaborate on Petrarch's influence on Renaissance art and music, conducted by Irving Zupnick, State University of New York, Binghamton; Colin Eisler, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and Bishop Giovanni Fallani, Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art in Italy.

(more)

A performance by the renowned Pro Musica Antiqua, their last performance in Washington before they disband after a distinguished career that has spanned twenty-one years, will be held in the Gallery's East Garden Court at 9:30 p.m. for the Congress. The Pro Musica Antiqua is one of the first groups to feature Renaissance music in modern times.

END

---

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director, or Pamela Jenkinson, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565, area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 224.

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

## Washington

ART IN THE AGE OF  
FRANCESCO PETRARCH, 1304-1374

Galleries 1 and 3  
March 30 to April 21, 1974

This year marks the 600th anniversary of the death of the great Italian humanist and poet Francesco Petrarch. The paintings and sculpture in the exhibition are either earlier than or contemporary with the poet's life; that is, they are examples similar to those Petrarch would have seen. Giotto, Duccio di Buoninsegna, Simone Martini, Bernardo Daddi, Nino Pisano, Lippo Memmi, and Agnolo Gaddi all lived at the same time as the poet.

Francesco Petrarch was born in Arezzo in 1304. His father, a Florentine notary, had been exiled to Arezzo because of his political views. Soon after his birth, though, Francesco was taken to Incisa, a small town outside of Florence. This move proved to be important, for it was there, near Florence, that the writer acquired the pure Tuscan idiom that he used in his works. In 1312 the family settled in Provence in southern France where the father worked for the Papal Court that was located at Avignon between 1309 and 1377. Petrarch then studied law at Montpellier in 1316 and at Bologna in 1320. The death of his father and subsequent family financial reversals, however, caused Francesco to forego his schooling and return to Avignon. Also, Petrarch, who had favored the use of Latin in his writings up to this time, now began composing poems in his native language thereby setting a precedent for later Italian literature. At Avignon, too, he first saw Laura. While her identity has remained forever a mystery, the sonnets Petrarch wrote in her honor evidence that she was his ideal of perfection but his unrequited love.

Already known for his writings, he was crowned poet laureate of Rome in 1340. A great traveler and a keen observer of new people and places,

Petrarch never stayed in one place very long. As he journeyed seeking new audiences for his works, he also became the first scholar since antiquity to make a systematic collection of ancient Latin manuscripts. In fact, his desire to acquire particular manuscripts that existed only in certain regions precipitated visits to such cities as Paris, Ghent, Cologne, and numerous Italian centers. His interest in the antique went much deeper than simply acquiring classical texts, though. Petrarch sought out classical ruins and even wrote in support of the preservation of such monuments. He died in Venice in 1374 and, according to tradition, succumbed while studying Virgil's writings. Simone Martini, one of the artists represented in this exhibition, illuminated the frontispiece for Petrarch's copy of the works of Virgil, a manuscript now in the Ambrosiana, Milan.

The works in galleries 1 and 3 mark the culmination of the Gothic tradition in Italy--a tradition characterized by delicacy of design. In addition, some examples, although they retain Gothic elements, show the beginnings of the Renaissance style based on human actions and emotions. The refined character of fourteenth-century art and its position at the commencement of a new stylistic expression parallel the lyricism of Petrarch's poetry and the place he holds as a literary inspiration for the Renaissance poets.

Three fifteenth-century Italian medals in the exhibition include idealized portraits of Petrarch and the two other great writers of the era, Boccaccio and Dante. The fourth medal is an imaginary portrait of Petrarch's Laura.