

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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**"VIRTUE AND BEAUTY: LEONARDO'S *GINEVRA DE' BENCI*
AND RENAISSANCE PORTRAITS OF WOMEN"
ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART,
SEPTEMBER 30 – JANUARY 6, 2002**

Botticelli, Young Woman (Simoneetta Vespucci)
in Mythological Guise, c. 1480/1485



Washington, D.C. – Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* and Renaissance Portraits of Women, the first exhibition on the subject ever organized, surveys the phenomenal rise of female portraiture in Florence from c. 1440 to c. 1540. On view in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art from September 30, 2001, through January 6, 2002, the exhibition comprises 47 works, some never before seen in this country, including panel paintings, marble sculptures, medals, and drawings. The works presented are not only rare and beautiful but also offer the opportunity to examine the social role of women during the Renaissance and the evolution of their portraiture.

"The Gallery is pleased to present this remarkable exhibition that brings together some of the most outstanding examples of Florentine portraits of women from the mid-15th and 16th centuries," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Presented to a large audience for the first time, this exhibition provides an in-depth look at a time when portraiture expanded beyond rulers and their consorts to celebrate the beauty and virtue of merchant class women."

CORPORATE SPONSOR

The exhibition is made possible by generous support from Airbus.

"Airbus is honored to sponsor this unprecedented and prestigious exhibition that provides a rare opportunity for Gallery visitors to see many of the finest works, on loan from European and American museums, that illustrate the rise of female portraiture during the Renaissance," said Noël Forgeard, President and Chief Executive Officer of Airbus. "As a global leader in the manufacture of civil aircraft, Airbus is committed to supporting the arts and promoting the exchange of the shared heritage between the United States and Europe."

THE EXHIBITION

Renaissance panel portraits, depicting women independent from their husbands, were almost exclusively produced in Florence. This exhibition brings together all of the most significant examples of the genre, with the exception of a few panel paintings that could not safely Travel. The works are presented in loose chronological order and in subgroups by medium.

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In addition to panel portraits, there are a smaller number of medals, drawings, and marble busts. Florentine artists that are represented include Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Verrocchio, Leonardo, Domenico Ghirlandaio, and Bronzino. Works on display by masters such as Pisanello, Rogier van der Weyden, and Jacometto Veneziano provide further insight into the development of female portraiture outside Florence.

Two major themes are highlighted in this exhibition—virtue and beauty as they relate to female portraiture, and the broad shift from the aloof painted profile to the more communicative three-quarter or frontal view.

Ruler Portraits: Independent portraits of women were rare prior to the mid-15th century. They often depicted a prospective partner for a royal or noble marriage. More common for the time were ruler portraits depicting both husband and wife. These portraits were likely executed in the traditional profile view because of its association with ancient coins and medallions. Examples of this portrait type can be seen in the beginning of this exhibition.



Filippo Lippi, *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1450-1455

Early Florentine Profiles: As the 15th century progressed, portraits of females, independent of men, increased in popularity. Filippo Lippi created portraits of women that were the first of their kind in Renaissance Florence. The exhibition features his two surviving masterpieces of the genre, Woman with a Man at a Window (c. 1438/1444), and Profile Portrait of a Young Woman (c. 1450-1455). Both works depict the sitter facing left, establishing the standard profile type for portraying Florentine women. An additional early Florentine profile in the exhibition, A Young Lady of Fashion (c. 1460/1465), is attributed to Paolo Uccello and exemplifies the mid-15th century treatment of female portraits in which the sitter's individuality is suppressed in favor of the social ideals for which she stands.



Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino, *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, c. 1486

Medals: Portrait medals, reflecting the ancient tradition of commemorative medallions and coins, flourished in the courts of northern Italy. Representations of female sitters, mostly the daughters and wives of rulers, were common. Pisanello (Antonio Pisano), whose medal Cecilia Gonzaga (1447) can be seen in the exhibition, is credited with inventing this art form. The practice of medals reached Florence in the 1470s. One of the most graceful of all the Florentine medals created is on view, Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni (c. 1486), attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino. It can be compared to Domenico Ghirlandaio's portrait of the same sitter, also in the exhibition.



Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci*, c. 1474-1478

Leonardo: This exhibition includes the only portrait by Leonardo da Vinci in the Western Hemisphere, Ginevra de' Benci (c. 1474-1478). The front side depicts a simply dressed woman in a landscape, while the reverse depicts a wreath of laurel and palm encircling a sprig of juniper. A scroll, entwined around the plants, bears the Latin inscription "Beauty Adorns Virtue," exemplifying a major theme of the exhibition. Ginevra's portrait was shortened and may have originally included her hands. Leonardo's Study of Hands (c. 1474), on view, was used to reconstruct the possible original format of the painting.

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Breaking with the Florentine tradition of the bust-length profile, Leonardo was influenced by Verrocchio's Lady with a Bunch of Flowers (c. 1475–1480), the first 15th century sculptural portrait to show the sitter in half-length with arms and hands. Verrocchio's bust is here reunited with Leonardo's portrait for the first time since they were created in Florence more than 500 years ago.

Rogier van der Weyden, Portrait of a Lady, c. 1460



Northern Analogues: Several northern European works in this exhibition are included for comparison. An especially beautiful example is Rogier van der Weyden's Portrait of a Lady (c. 1460) in which he abandons the traditional profile and depicts the sitter in three-quarter view. The artist also utilizes a half-length format, allowing him to include the sitter's hands in a pose which captures the dignity and modesty of the lady. A pair of devotional panels by Petrus Christus, Portrait of a Male Donor (c. 1455) and Portrait of a Female Donor (c. 1455), also utilize the more progressive three-quarter view and demonstrate the growing international character of 15th century portraiture in northern Europe and Italy.

Sandro Botticelli, Woman at a Window (Smeralda Brandini?), c. 1470/1475



Botticelli Group: The exhibition includes four works by Sandro Botticelli. The earliest, Woman at a Window (Smeralda Brandini?) (c. 1470/1475), depicts the sitter in informal dress and hairstyle standing before a window. In an attempt to convey the physical and psychological presence of his sitter, Botticelli, like Leonardo, has departed from the more traditional profile in favor of the three-quarter view. His portrait Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise (c. 1480/1485) appears to portray a legendary beauty who tragically died young. Her features—golden tresses, partly loose and partly braided, and pearly white skin, reflect the ideal type of female beauty for the time. The Botticelli group also contains two striking male portraits, Giuliano de' Medici (c. 1478/1480) and Young Man Holding a Medallion (c. 1485), that are both related to the female portraits.

Domenico Ghirlandaio, Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni, c. 1488/1490



Ghirlandaio Group: Like Leonardo and Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio was committed to the three-quarter view, which he used for the Portrait of a Lady (c. 1480/1490), and the Portrait of a Young Man (c. 1490), part of a diptych portrait which also includes a female in profile. Ghirlandaio, however, retained the traditional profile view for what is perhaps the most admired and discussed of all the Florentine portraits, his Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni (c. 1488/1490). This portrait repeats the profile of the same sitter in a fresco scene painted by the artist in the Tornabuoni Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Both likenesses are posthumous, representing the sitter after her tragic death in childbirth. This special circumstance may explain Ghirlandaio's departure from the three-quarter view.

Life Drawings: Renaissance portraits were not direct likenesses completed in the sitter's presence. They involved life studies that were made in preparation of the painted portrait. Recording the subject's physical features, such drawings were more likely to capture the sitter's actual likeness than the completed, idealized painted portrait. Life drawings in this exhibition include Pietro Perugino's Bust of a Young Woman (c. 1480/1490), Domenico Ghirlandaio's Head of a Woman (c. 1486/1490), and Raphael's Young Woman in Profile (c. 1504).

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Bronzino, *A Young Woman and Her Little Boy*, c. 1540



Early 16th Century: By the early 16th century the style for portraits of women had evolved. The Renaissance concept of virtuous beauty remained the same but the three-quarter view, established by Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* (c. 1474–1478), and the frontal view, together with a larger format, now became the standard for female portraiture. Particularly imposing examples of this new type in the exhibition include Giuliano Bugiardini's *Portrait of a Lady ("La Monaca")* (c. 1516) with its painted cover, and Ridolfo Ghirlandaio's *Lucrezia Sommaria* (c. 1530–1532). Agnolo Bronzino's portraits, *Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1533) and *A Young Woman and Her Little Boy* (c. 1540), both reflect a new type of aristocratic portraiture emphasizing the dignified demeanor and elegant dress of the sitters that would be favored in courts throughout Europe.

CURATOR, CATALOGUE, AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The exhibition curator is David Alan Brown, curator of Italian Renaissance paintings at the Gallery.

A beautifully illustrated exhibition catalogue, with an introduction by the curator and four informative essays by other experts on Renaissance art, will be published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with Princeton University Press. The publication will be available September 2001 for \$55.00 (hardcover) and \$35.00 (softcover) in the Gallery Shops and through the Web site at www.nga.gov/shop/shop.htm. To order by phone, call (202) 842-6002. Support for the catalogue was provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

A range of education programs, including a two-day symposium sponsored by The Solow Art and Architecture Foundation, will be offered in conjunction with the exhibition. Further information and a complete schedule of gallery talks, lectures, films, and programs for families is available on the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov/programs/programs.htm.

NATIONAL GALLERY INFORMATION

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden, located on the National Mall between Third and Ninth Streets at Constitution Avenue, NW, are open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is free. For information, call (202) 737-4215; Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176; or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov.

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National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* and Renaissance Portraits of Women
September 30, 2001 - January 6, 2002

Checklist

- Slide available
- ◇ J-peg image available

*measurements are given in centimeters with inches in parentheses.

1. Franco-Flemish Artist
Profile Portrait of a Lady, c. 1410
tempera and/or oil on panel
53 x 37.6 (20 7/8 x 14 13/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection
- 2a. Ercole de' Roberti
Ferrarese, c. 1455/1456-1496
Giovanni II Bentivoglio, c. 1475
oil on panel
53.7 x 38.1 (21 1/8 x 15)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
- 2b. Ercole de' Roberti
Ferrarese, c. 1455/1456-1496
Ginevra Sforza Bentivoglio, c. 1475
oil on panel
53.7 x 38.7 (21 1/8 x 15 1/4)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
3. Filippo Lippi
■ Florentine, c. 1406-1469
◇ *Woman with a Man at a Window*, c. 1438/1444
tempera on panel
64.1 x 41.9 (25 1/4 x 16 1/2)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Marquand Collection, Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889
4. Filippo Lippi
■ Florentine, c. 1406-1469
◇ *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman* (obverse), c. 1450-1455
tempera on panel
49.5 x 32.7 (19 1/2 x 12 7/8)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
4. Filippo Lippi
Florentine, c. 1406-1469
Fictive Marbling in Black and Brick Red (reverse), c. 1450-1455
tempera on panel
49.5 x 32.7 (19 1/2 x 12 7/8)
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

5. Attributed to Paolo Uccello
■ Florentine, 1397-1475
◇ *A Young Lady of Fashion*, c. 1460/1465
tempera on panel
44.1 x 31.5 (17 3/8 x 12 3/8)
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston
6. Antonio del Pollaiuolo
Florentine, 1431/1432-1498
Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1470
tempera and oil on panel
48.9 x 35.2 (19 1/4 x 13 7/8)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Edward S. Harkness, 1940
7. Pisanello
Verona, c. 1395-1455
Cecilia Gonzaga (obverse), 1447
lead alloy
diameter: 8.6 (3 3/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
7. Pisanello
Verona, c. 1395-1455
Innocence and Unicorn in Moonlit Landscape (reverse), 1447
lead alloy
diameter: 8.6 (3 3/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
8. Mantuan artist, possibly Giancristoforo Romano
■ Mantuan, c. 1465-1512
◇ *Giulia Astallia* (obverse), c. 1485
bronze
diameter: 6.1 (2 7/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
8. Mantuan artist, possibly Giancristoforo Romano
Mantuan, c. 1465-1512
Phoenix on a Pyre Looking at the Sun (reverse), c. 1485
bronze
diameter: 6.1 (2 7/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
9. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
Florentine, 1430-1514
Maria de' Mucini (obverse), c. 1475
bronze
diameter: 9 (3 9/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
9. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
Florentine, 1430-1514
Falcon with Dog and Lamb (reverse), c. 1475
bronze
diameter: 9 (3 9/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

10. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
Florentine, 1430-1514
Lodovica Tornabuoni (obverse), 1485/1486
bronze
diameter: 7.5 (2 15/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
10. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
Florentine, 1430-1514
Unicorn Before a Tree (reverse), 1485/1486
bronze
diameter: 7.5 (2 15/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
11. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
■ Florentine, 1430-1514
◇ *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni* (obverse), c. 1486
bronze
diameter: 7.8 (3 1/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
11. Attributed to Niccolò Fiorentino
■ Florentine, 1430-1514
◇ *The Three Graces* (reverse), c. 1486
bronze
diameter: 7.8 (3 1/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
12. Bertoldo de Giovanni
Florentine, c. 1430/1440
Lorenzo de' Medici and the Pazzi Conspiracy (obverse), 1478
bronze
diameter: 6.6 (2 5/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Fund
12. Bertoldo de Giovanni
Florentine, c. 1430/1440
Giuliano de' Medici and the Pazzi Conspiracy (reverse), 1478
bronze
diameter: 6.6 (2 5/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Fund
13. Rogier van der Weyden
■ Netherlandish, c. 1400-1464
◇ *Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1460
oil on panel
37 x 27 (14 1/8 x 10 5/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection
- 14a. Petrus Christus
Bruges, active c. 1444-1472
Portrait of a Male Donor, c. 1455
oil on panel
42 x 21.2 (16 1/2 x 8 3/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

- 14b. Petrus Christus
Bruges, active c. 1444-1472
Portrait of a Female Donor, c. 1455
oil on panel
41.8 x 21.6 (16 1/2 x 8 1/2)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
- 15a. Hans Memling
Bruges, active c. 1465-1494
Young Woman with a Carnation, c. 1485/1490
oil on panel
43.2 x 18.7 (17 x 7 1/8)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949
- 15b. Hans Memling
Bruges, active c. 1465-1494
Two Horses and a Monkey in a Landscape, c. 1485/1490
oil on panel
43.5 x 18 (17 1/8 x 7 1/16)
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam
16. Leonardo da Vinci
■ Florentine, 1452-1519
◇ *Ginevra de' Benci* (obverse), c. 1474-1478
oil on panel
with addition at bottom edge: 42.7 x 37 (16 13/16 x 14 9/16);
original panel only: 38.1 x 37 (15 x 14 9/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund
16. Leonardo da Vinci
■ Florentine, 1452-1519
◇ *Wreath of Laurel, Palm and Juniper with a Scroll* (reverse), c. 1474-1478
tempera on panel
with addition at bottom edge: 42.7 x 37 (16 13/16 x 14 9/16);
original panel only: 38.1 x 37 (15 x 14 9/16)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund
17. Leonardo da Vinci
■ Florentine, 1452-1519
Study of Hands, c. 1474
metalpoint over black chalk with white heightening on buff-colored
paper
21.5 x 15 (8 7/16 x 5 7/8)
Lent by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
18. Leonardo da Vinci
Florentine, 1452-1519
Lady with a Unicorn, c. 1474
pen and brown ink over stylus indentations on paper
unframed: 9.4 x 8.1 (3 3/4 x 3 1/4)
Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
- 19a. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Alvise Contarini (obverse), c. 1485-1495
oil on panel
11.8 x 8.4 (4 5/8 x 3 5/16)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975

- 19a. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Chained Deer (verso), c. 1485-1495
oil on panel
11.8 x 8.4 (4 5/8 x 3 5/16)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975
- 19b. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Portrait of a Lady (obverse), c. 1485-1495
oil on panel
10.2 x 7.1 (4 x 2 13/16)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975
- 19b. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Female Figure in a Landscape (reverse), c. 1485-1495
oil on panel
10.2 x 7.1 (4 x 2 13/16)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975
20. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Portrait of a Man (obverse), c. 1480/1485
oil on panel
26 x 19.1 (10 1/4 x 7 1/2)
The National Gallery, London
20. Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Inscription and Sprays of Laurel (reverse), c. 1480/1485
oil on panel
26 x 19.1 (10 1/4 x 7 1/2)
The National Gallery, London
21. Attributed to Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Portrait of a Lady (obverse), c. 1480/1490
oil on panel
34 x 27.5 (13 3/8 x 10 13/16)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, The John G. Johnson Collection
21. Attributed to Jacometto Veneziano
Italian, active c. 1472-1497
Inscription and Sprig of Plant (reverse), c. 1480/1490
oil on panel
34 x 27.5 (13 3/8 x 10 13/16)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, The John G. Johnson Collection
22. ■ Andrea del Verrocchio
Florentine, c. 1435-1488
Lady with a Bunch of Flowers, c. 1475-1480
marble
60 x 48 x 25 (23 5/8 x 18 7/8 x 9 13/16)
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

23. Andrea del Verrocchio
Florentine, 1435-1488
Bust of a Lady, 1480s
marble
47.9 x 48.7 x 23.8 (18 7/8 x 19 3/16 x 9 3/8)
The Frick Collection, New York, Bequest of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
24. Circle of Andrea del Verrocchio
A Lady, c.1470
marble
53 x 48.8 x 19.9 (20 7/8 x 19 1/8 x 7 3/4)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
25. Sandro Botticelli
■ Florentine, 1444/1445-1510
◇ *Woman at a Window (Smeralda Brandini?)*, c. 1470/1475
tempera on panel
65.7 x 41 (25 7/8 x 16 1/8)
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
26. Sandro Botticelli
■ Florentine, 1444/1445-1510
◇ *Young Man Holding a Medallion*, c. 1485
tempera on panel
58.4 x 39.4 (23 x 15 1/2)
Sheldon H. Solow and The Solow Art and Architecture Foundation
27. Sandro Botticelli
■ Florentine, 1444/1445-1510
◇ *Giuliano de' Medici*, c. 1478/1480
tempera on panel
75.6 x 52.6 (29 3/4 x 20 5/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
28. Sandro Botticelli
■ Florentine, 1444/1445-1510
◇ *Young Woman (Simonetta Vespucci?) in Mythological Guise*, c. 1480/1485
tempera on panel
81.5 x 54.2 (32 1/16 x 21 5/16)
Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main
29. Domenico Ghirlandaio
Florentine, 1449-1494
Portrait of a Lady, c. 1480/1490
tempera on panel
56 x 37.6 (22 1/16 x 14 13/16)
Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts
30. Domenico Ghirlandaio
■ Florentine, 1449-1494
◇ *Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, c. 1488/1490
tempera on panel
77 x 49 (30 5/16 x 19 5/16)
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

- 31a. Attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio
■ Florentine, 1449-1494
Portrait of a Young Man, c. 1490
tempera on panel
51.8 x 39.7 (20 3/8 x 15 5/8)
The Arabella Huntington Memorial Collection, The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens,
San Marino
- 31b. Attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio
■ Florentine, 1449-1494
Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1490
tempera on panel
51.8 x 39.7 (20 3/8 x 15 5/8)
The Arabella Huntington Memorial Collection, The Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens,
San Marino
32. Pietro Perugino
Umbrian, c. 1450-1523
Bust of a Young Woman, c. 1480/1490
metalpoint on gray prepared paper
37.7 x 24.3 (14 13/16 x 9 9/16)
The British Museum, London
33. Domenico Ghirlandaio
Florentine, 1449-1494
Head of a Woman, c. 1486/1490
black chalk, pricked for transfer
36.6 x 22.1 (14 7/16 x 8 11/16)
The Duke of Devonshire and The Chatsworth Settlement Trustees, Bakewell, Derbyshire
34. Raphael
■ Umbrian, 1483-1520
Young Woman in Profile, c. 1504
black chalk over stylus, partly reinforced in pen and ink, with
traces of white heightening
25.5 x 16 (10 1/16 x 6 5/16)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Florence
35. Girolamo di Benvenuto
Sieneese, 1470-1524
Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1508
tempera and oil (?) on panel
60 x 45.4 (23 5/8 x 17 7/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection
- 36a. Giuliano Bugiardini
Florentine, 1475-1554
Portrait of a Lady "La Monaca", c. 1516
oil on panel
65.1 x 47.9 (25 5/8 x 18 7/8)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
- 36b. Attributed to Giuliano Bugiardini
Florentine, 1475-1554
Portrait Cover with Mask and Grottesques, c. 1516
oil on panel
73 x 50.3 (28 3/4 x 19 3/4)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

37. Bacchiacca
Florentine, 1494/1495-1557
A Lady with a Nosegay, 1520s
oil on panel
57 x 43.8 (22 7/16 x 17 1/4)
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston
38. Ridolfo Ghirlandaio
■ Florentine, 1483-1561
◇ *Lucrezia Sommara*, c. 1530-1532
oil on panel
62.9 x 45.7 (24 3/4 x 18)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection
39. Agnolo Bronzino
■ Florentine, 1503-1572
◇ *Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1533
oil on panel
90 x 71 (35 3/8 x 28)
Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main
40. Pontormo
Florentine, 1494-1556/1557
Maria Salviati with Giulia de' Medici, c. 1538
oil on panel
88 x 71.3 (34 5/8 x 28 1/16)
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore
41. Agnolo Bronzino
Florentine, 1503-1572
A Young Woman and Her Little Boy, c. 1540-1545
oil on panel
99.5 x 76 (39 1/8 x 29 7/8)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection



It is with particular pleasure that Airbus provides support for *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*. The provocative theme of this exhibition brings another dimension to the appreciation of these exquisite works of art. It explores the question of what metaphysical elements beyond the skill of the Renaissance masters might contribute to their enduring impact and distinction.

Leonardo embodied the spirit of the Renaissance with his infinite curiosity about everything in the universe and superior gifts in all the domains he touched. Although he is best known for his unique contribution to our artistic heritage, magnificently represented by his portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, an important part of his life was spent serving the rulers of Florence as a military architect and exploring new horizons of engineering. Leonardo imagined a flying machine and put the design to paper centuries before the first aircraft took flight. As such, he can definitely be considered the founder of our industry.

Airbus lives from this legacy. It was born of this same spirit of curiosity and determination to master challenges of civil aviation through an ingenious combination of design and engineering. Today Airbus is a global leader in the manufacture of commercial aircraft. The Renaissance ideal of beauty embodying an ideal remains our standard, and Leonardo's talent and genius our inspiration.

Virtue and Beauty is the second major exhibition that Airbus has sponsored at the National Gallery, the first being *Portraits by Ingres* in 1999. We hope to continue this very special U.S. - European relationship, demonstrating that the highest values of creation and beauty are jointly prized on both sides of the Atlantic. The first year of this millennium is one of many milestones for Airbus and its partners in the United States. We have been proud to celebrate these partnerships with support for other distinguished U.S. institutions, the National Geographic Society and the Library of Congress.

Noël Forgeard

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noël Forgeard".

President and Chief Executive Officer

Printed from the catalogue *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*.
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Introduction

David Alan Brown

This exhibition focuses on the extraordinary flowering of female portraiture in Florence from c. 1440 to c. 1540. It was in Florence during this period that portraiture expanded beyond the realm of rulers and their consorts to encompass women of the merchant class, who figure in scores of panel paintings, medals, and marble busts. Although scholars have conducted considerable research on this phenomenon, the exhibition aims to present it for the first time to a larger audience. The independent portraits exhibited here, as opposed to donor portraits in frescoes or altarpieces, are autonomous, freestanding works that typically depict the sitters bust length or half-length in profile, three-quarter, or frontal view. The exhibition brings together nearly all the most significant examples of the genre, with the exception of a few panels that could not safely travel. Including several male portraits as well, the works are presented in the exhibition and the catalogue in roughly chronological order and in subgroups by media. Aside from the panel portraits, there are smaller numbers of medals, drawings, and busts, together with a selection of courtly precedents, Northern analogues, and a few works specifically related to Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci*. In this way, progressing through the exhibition or perusing the catalogue, the viewer/reader can observe a broad shift from the painted profile to the three-quarter or frontal view. Over time the portraits of women also became larger in scale, more elaborate, and more communicative with the viewer.

Just as the portraits represent a conjunction of the patron, the sitter, and the artist, so the catalogue is the product of collaboration between historians and art historians. The first section includes two essays placing the works in their historical and cultural context, followed by a survey of female portraits not limited to Florence, and an analysis of clothing and jewelry worn by women of the period. The catalogue entries dealing with individual works explore how portrait conventions were interpreted by different artists. At a time when art is being studied contextually, the entries remind us not to lose sight of the artist's contribution.

Renaissance portraits differ in many ways from the notion of portraiture commonly held today. They are not direct likenesses completed in the sitter's presence but

involve life studies (cats. 32, 34), of which only a few survive, transformed in the process of becoming portrait images. Above all, they lack the psychological dimension—the revelation of the inner self—characteristic of modern portraiture. Insofar as the portraits represent the sitter's individual nature, they reflect a different conception of identity. In the case of women in particular, the individual was seen in light of her social status and familial role as wife and mother. Character did not mean a unique complex of psychological traits but rather moral being and behavior which an individual shared with other women of the same class. The female portraits in the exhibition are, in this sense, individual variants of the society's paradigm of the "ideal woman." Such a concept was constructed visually as a more or less recognizable likeness of the sitter in contemporary dress, amplified or completed by a presentation of her character either in the form of visual metaphors or attributes or of a portrait reverse or cover employing mottoes or emblems. Many of the portraits in the exhibition, both medals and paintings, have such reverses.¹ Rather than being comprehended instantly, the portraits disclose their meaning as they are viewed first on one side and then on the other. Unlike the small bronze medals, held in the hand or worn around the neck, the panel portraits did not retain their double-sidedness but were later reframed and treated like easel paintings with the result that the labels or seals attached to their reverses may still be seen today.

Judging from their portraits, visitors to the exhibition might well conclude that Florentine women of the time all had long necks, golden hair, pearly white skin, sparkling blue eyes, and rosy lips and cheeks. But the similarity in their appearance is not simply a matter of cosmetics; it reflects a canon of corporeal beauty derived from literature. Poetic descriptions of women from Dante and Petrarch to Lorenzo de' Medici defined an ideal subsequently codified in treatises on female beauty, such as Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (1548). Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, in particular two sonnets in praise of Simone Martini's (lost) portrait of his beloved Laura, became the primary source for depicting women in art and literature.

The relevance of the poets' metaphors to visual representations of women has been well established by Elizabeth Cropper and others in terms of how the images were conceived and viewed.² Portrayals of women were praised for being both lifelike and beautiful, implying that the subjects were truly beautiful. At the same time women, like men, had to be worthy of commemoration in the form of a portrait. Renaissance attitudes toward women differed sharply. There was, on the one hand, the deep-seated belief, going back to Aristotle, in the biological inferiority of women, who were weak, passive creatures composed of the basic elements of water and earth rather than fire and air, which animated men. An extreme view held that women were subhuman. Women also harked back to Eve, the temptress, and if a wife was not wily, her vanity and extravagance would be her husband's ruin.³

Unlike the misogynists who denigrated women, poets and artists celebrated the exemplary virtues of their female subjects. Qualities considered appropriate to women, as opposed to heroic male *virtù*, included modesty, humility, piety, constancy, charity, obedience, and, above all, chastity, the preeminent virtue of a woman in a society dominated by men.⁴ Though they may have been in tension or even in conflict in real life, female beauty and virtue were linked in Renaissance thought and art. The classical equation of the good and the beautiful, in particular the Neoplatonic notion that physical beauty signified an inner beauty of spirit, was expounded by the Florentine humanist Marsilio Ficino. The concept of virtuous beauty posed a problem for the artist, however. Women who were not beautiful still had to look so in order to appear virtuous. The necessity of a convincing likeness had to be reconciled, in other words, with the need to present a suitably idealized image of the sitter. Artists asserted the moral significance of beauty by idealizing their subjects in poetic terms, as we have seen. Another way to express virtuous beauty was by means of the mottoes and emblems depicted on the reverse of medals (cats. 8, 11) and paintings, like *Ginevra de' Benci* (cat. 16), which make an explicit connection between the sitter's outward appearance and inner nature.⁵ In Leonardo's case, the portrait reverse depicts a wreath of laurel and

palm encircling a sprig of juniper. Entwined around the plants is a scroll with a Latin inscription meaning "Beauty Adorns Virtue." Closely similar emblematic reverses are found in double-sided portraits by Jacometto Veneziano, several of which (cats. 19–21) are compared with Leonardo's in the exhibition.

The images of Renaissance women confronting us here are clearly not straightforward portraits of individuals. And yet that is how they were seen by the great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, whose *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* of 1860 was enormously influential in shaping modern attitudes toward the period.⁶ The book's chapter titles, "The Development of the Individual" and "The Discovery of the World and of Man," mirror the author's concern with outstanding individuals, not society as a whole. Burckhardt's concept of the individual, moreover, was applied to women as well as men, based on his belief that "women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men" since "the educated woman, no less than the man, strove naturally after a characteristic and complete individuality."⁷ Generalizing from a few exceptional figures like Isabella d'Este or Vittoria Colonna, Burckhardt exalted women of the Renaissance, and in the English-speaking world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, his view was popularized by an outpouring of biographies and histories with such titles as *The Women of the Renaissance* (1905), *Women of Florence* (1907), and *The Women of the Medici* (1927).⁸

Burckhardt's concept of the individual was also applied to portraiture, which, according to one author, joined in "the search for character, amounting to a passion that, in art, drew the individual out... and set him on a pedestal or in a frame..."⁹ Female portraits, no less than those of men, were seen as quintessential expressions of Renaissance individualism, as when one writer characterized the subject of Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a Lady* in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan (Woods-Marsden essay, fig. 2) as a "shrewd, practical lady, sharp-witted... and certainly not without passions."¹⁰ This description and others like it suggest that, aside from Burckhardt, modern psychological novels, like Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881),

1
Domenico Veneziano, *Saint Lucy Altarpiece* (detail), Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence (photo: Alinari / Art Resource, N.Y.)



2
Thomas Wilmer Dewing, *Lady with a Lute*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Walter Timme



3
Wilhelm von Bode with Botticelli profile, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kunstbibliothek (photo: Dieter Katz)

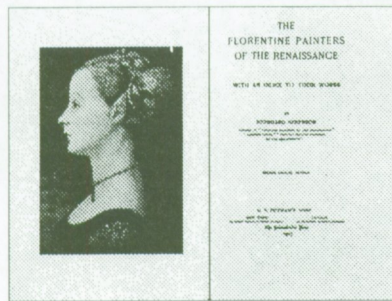
may have played a role in “reading” Renaissance portraits of women. Prevented like the fictional heroines of James or Edith Wharton from participating in business or politics, upper-class Florentine women might also have pursued individuality in private life, or so it seemed from their portraits.

The affinity felt by the Victorians and their successors for the Florentine portraits of women was not just a matter of literary parallels, however. The female profiles in particular exerted a direct appeal that reflected their origins. In the early Renaissance, the profile favored for portraits of men and women alike was practically synonymous with virtue. Especially for medals imitating ancient coins, the profile was universally preferred to commemorate the sitters for posterity. In the case of painted portraits of women, the profile had, in addition, long been adopted for donor portraits. It also served to associate the sitter with profile depictions of the Virgin or female saints (fig. 1).¹¹ Even without these classical and religious associations, the modestly averted gaze and stiffly upright bearing of the ladies in profile would have marked them as virtuous. The charm of the portraits, one writer explained, was due to the “extreme purity and simplicity of the profile seen against the sky” and to the “fresh and innocent grace” of the sitters.¹² The Renaissance vision of the ideal young woman resonated strongly among art lovers on both sides of the Atlantic. American painters such as Thomas Dewing or Albert Herter created profile portraits of women which, in their content and style, echo those of the fifteenth-century Florentines. Dewing’s *Lady with a Lute* (fig. 2) of 1886, in the National Gallery of Art, for example, uses the musical instrument par excellence of the Renaissance, together with the profile, to invite comparison with the past.¹³

The vogue for the Renaissance profiles of women, however influential for the creation of newly minted portraits, had an even greater impact in the field of collecting. Early in the nineteenth century, the English began to acquire examples of the genre, mostly in Florence, and their efforts proved hugely successful. Early Italian paintings in general are scattered throughout the world, with many still in Italy, but almost all of the female profiles found their way north of the Alps. Only two or three remain in their



place of origin; the others are concentrated in London, Berlin, and New York. Baldovinetti's *Portrait of a Lady in Yellow* (Orsi Landini and Bulgarella essay, fig. 3) in the National Gallery, London, offers an example. Apropos of this portrait, one writer noted how well the profile expressed the "charm and freshness of youth."¹⁴ The painting, still in its original frame, was purchased from a Florentine dealer in 1866.¹⁵ Like so many of the female profiles, the London picture was attributed to Piero della Francesca until Roger Fry discovered its true author. The sitter, too, was fancifully identified, on the basis of the heraldic device on her sleeve, as a countess Palma of Urbino.¹⁶ Another artist credited with the authorship of this and many other profile portraits (cat. 5) was the ever-popular Paolo Uccello, but among the quattrocento Florentines, it was Botticelli who most beguiled the Victorians. The Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti purchased *Woman at a Window (Smeralda Brandini?)* (cat. 25) in 1867, when Botticelli was being rediscovered by Ruskin and Pater.¹⁷ Championing his work from very different points of view, these two critics



4
Frontispiece to Bernard Berenson,
Florentine Painters of the Renaissance
(New York, 1912), showing Antonio
del Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a Lady*

were largely responsible for the cult of the artist in nineteenth-century England. There and in Germany a group of imaginary portraits of a beautiful young woman with rippling hair (cat. 28), similar to Botticelli's mythologies in the Uffizi, were eagerly sought by aesthetes and collectors. In them Botticelli may have given tangible form to Simonetta Vespucci, the beloved of Giuliano de' Medici, whom Ruskin and Pater fondly believed to be the artist's mistress. Simonetta, if it is really she whom Botticelli portrays in these works, died of consumption at the age of twenty-three in 1476, leaving behind a memory of her beauty which soon became a myth. Hers is not the only portrait in the show that is tinged with melancholy.

In its quest to acquire early Italian paintings, the National Gallery in London had a formidable rival in Wilhelm von Bode, director of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin. Bode (fig. 3), shown here with one of the "Simonetta Vespucci" depictions on his desk, took a keen interest in the art of quattrocento Florence, not just painting but sculpture and the decorative arts as well.¹⁸ He succeeded in acquiring for Berlin another "Simonetta Vespucci" painting in 1875, Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Profile of a Lady* (see cat. 6) in 1894, and Filippo Lippi's *Profile Portrait of a Young Woman* (cat. 4) in 1913. A scholar/curator, Bode addressed the attributional problems posed by the profiles in a series of articles spanning the first two decades of the twentieth century.¹⁹ Bode had a rival, too, in Bernard Berenson, the American expatriate who quickly established himself as an authority, largely through the impact of his four volumes on the Italian painters of the Renaissance, with their lists of pictures the author accepted as authentic.²⁰ The frontispiece (fig. 4) to Berenson's *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, originally published in 1896, featured Pollaiuolo's masterpiece in Milan, which must have whetted the appetite of American collectors. Bode and Berenson came into open conflict over Piero Pollaiuolo's *Woman in Green and Crimson* (see cat. 6), which Isabella Stewart Gardner (1840–1924) acquired for her museum, Fenway Court, in Boston in 1907.²¹ Having nearly succeeded in purchasing the picture in Florence in the mid-1870s, Bode obtained it for the Hainauer collection in Berlin about 1885, only to lose it

again to Mrs. Gardner, who bought it from the famous art dealer Sir Joseph Duveen, on Berenson's recommendation, for the extraordinarily large sum of more than fifty-eight thousand turn-of-the-century dollars.

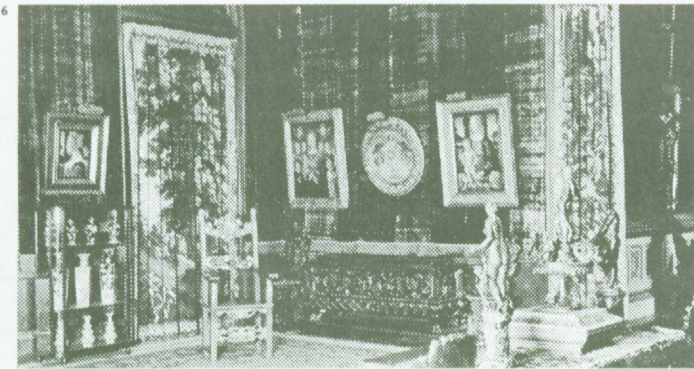
Mrs. Gardner was upstaged by another collector, J. Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), who played a key role in the reception and collecting of the Florentine female portraits in America. Consumed with acquiring art on a grand scale but coming late to the task, Morgan wisely chose to buy whole collections. He got the choice of the paintings belonging to Rodolphe Kann, for example, when Duveen bought the Parisian collection in 1907. Among the early pictures, the prize was Ghirlandaio's portrait of *Giovanna Tornabuoni* (cat. 30), which Morgan purchased for no less than thirty-eight thousand English pounds (receipt on file at the Morgan Library). Just as the inscription in the picture echoes Petrarch, so the painting itself, when in the Pandolfini collection in Florence, was thought to represent the poet's beloved Laura.²² The sitter was correctly identified in the nineteenth century as a posthumous likeness of Lorenzo Tornabuoni's wife. For Morgan, the portrait may even have had a poignant personal meaning, as the collector had lost his own first wife, Amelia Sturges, with whom he was deeply in love, only a few months after their marriage in 1861.²³

Before Ghirlandaio's painting was disposed of by the Library in 1935, it was displayed on an easel in Morgan's study (fig. 5), known as the West Room. The setting of furniture and decorative arts was meant to evoke the sort of palatial interior from which the picture was believed to have come. During this period, which has been called the American Renaissance, bankers and manufacturers like Morgan spent their vast fortunes on art and in so doing considered themselves the heirs of the Renaissance.²⁴ For his concern with commerce and culture Morgan was even celebrated as an "American Medici." Far from being just an art object, then, Ghirlandaio's painting, together with the other works in the room, the red brocade walls, and the carved wooden ceiling, transported its owner to an ideal past of which the portrait was a potent symbol. The affinity with the Renaissance, particularly with Florence, where many art-minded

Americans visited or resided, was such that other female profiles were similarly sought out and displayed in Renaissance-style interiors.²⁵ Arabella Huntington (1850–1924), for example, though purchasing a number of works from the Kann collection, missed out on the *Giovanna Tornabuoni*, which went to Morgan. The lady had to content herself with a pair of male and female portraits attributed to Ghirlandaio (cats. 31A and B), which she acquired from Duveen in 1913 for the astonishing sum of \$579,334.43. Now (with the receipt for their purchase) at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, the portraits were originally hung on velvet-covered walls in a neo-Renaissance room in the family mansion (fig. 6) on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Seventh Street in New York.²⁶

Another *Portrait of a Lady* attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio (cat. 29) was offered to Morgan by the Florentine dealer Elia Volpi in 1911.²⁷ Already in possession of the *Giovanna Tornabuoni*, Morgan declined, allowing Singer sewing machine heir Robert Sterling Clark (1877–1956) to acquire the picture in Florence two years later. Clark and his brother Stephen had engaged the American sculptor George Gray Barnard to act as their guide on an art-buying trip to Europe. For the portrait Clark paid the princely sum of one hundred and ten thousand dollars, including a commission to Barnard, who got a painted ceiling in the bargain.²⁸ Attributed to Botticelli in the Chigi Saracini collection, Siena, the picture came with a puzzle attached. Old photographs (fig. 7) reveal that it bore the attributes of Saint Catherine: the sitter wore a coronet and halo, and a spiked wheel was painted over her sleeve in the lower right.²⁹ By the time Clark bought the picture, the sanctifying additions had been removed. A faithful copy, including the saint's attributes, probably made by the master forger Federico Ioni to replace the original, still belongs to the Chigi Saracini collection today, while a modern fake, without the attributes, is in the museum in Geneva.³⁰

This account of the vogue for the Florentine female portraits in America, however brief, would be incomplete without mentioning a few more of the numerous works of doubtful authenticity it inspired. To judge from the objects





or from photographs, which is how many of them are known today, these paintings and sculpted busts are mostly outright fakes made to satisfy the demand for such portraits once the supply of the originals had dwindled or dried up. Showing what it was that collectors admired in the originals, the fakes together form a minor but intriguing episode in the history of taste and collecting. American millionaire collectors typically sought masterpieces by famous artists, and they relied on experts like Bode or Berenson for advice. In the case of the female portraits, however, collectors coveted a certain type of image with a different appeal: the youthful sitters, usually shown in profile, are charming, richly dressed, and elaborately coiffed. If these works look flagrantly inauthentic today, how do they betray themselves? The *Portrait of a Lady* (fig. 8) in the Museum of

Fine Arts, Boston, was acquired in 1940 as a work by Piero della Francesca because of its resemblance to the artist's hieratic profile of Battista Sforza before a landscape (Woods-Marsden essay, fig. 10) in the Uffizi.³¹ Deceptively painted in the Renaissance medium of tempera on panel, the portrait actually replicates the head of an attendant of the queen of Sheba in Piero's fresco cycle of the True Cross in the church of San Francesco, Arezzo.³² Another portrait of *A Young Woman* (fig. 9), acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1936 as a work by Verrocchio or Leonardo, is revealed as a probable forgery by its anachronistic materials and unorthodox construction. The Institute's director W. R. Valentiner, who made a special study of the young Leonardo in Verrocchio's workshop, compared the portrait, particularly the sitter's curls, to *Ginevra de' Benci* (cat. 16), now in the National Gallery of Art, and to the *Bust of a Lady* (cat. 23) in the Frick Collection.³³ Later scholars either supported this attribution or proposed an alternative.³⁴ But after a recent technical examination, the picture turns out to have been painted on what appears to be photographic paper applied to a wood panel that was repaired before it was readied for painting.³⁵ And at least one of the pigments employed—zinc white—is modern. Further investigation might reveal that the small-scale portrait was actually painted over a photograph of the Frick bust, formerly in the Dreyfus collection, Paris, in profile to the left. A polychromed bust from the same collection (fig. 10), formerly called a portrait of Giovanna Albizzi by Desiderio da Settignano, now in the National Gallery of Art, has been recognized as a characteristic product of Giovanni Bastianini (1830–1868), the Florentine forger of Renaissance sculpture.³⁶

When the profile portraits of women began to be collected in the nineteenth century, nearly all of them were attributed, first, to Piero della Francesca, whose profile of Battista Sforza, already mentioned, graces the Uffizi, and, later, to Domenico Veneziano or Paolo Uccello.³⁷ Like the pictures, the women portrayed also needed names, for while the portraits were painted to preserve their memory for posterity, their identities had been lost with the passage of time. Vasari's mention of portraits of Medici women,

8
Imitator of Piero della Francesca,
Portrait of a Lady, Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston, Lucy Houghton Eaton Fund,
1940



9
Imitator of Verrocchio, *A Young Woman*,
Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders
Society Purchase, Edsel B. Ford Fund
and General Membership Fund
© 1996 The Detroit Institute of Arts



10
Giovanni Bastianini, *Portrait of a Lady*,
"Giovanna Albizzi," National Gallery
of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon
Collection



10

identified as Lucrezia Tornabuoni and Simonetta Vespucci, by Botticelli offered two candidates.³⁸ Another was Isotta da Rimini, well known for her romance with Sigismondo Malatesta.³⁹ Though the names of famous artists and women attached to the portraits obviously served a market function, the misattributions and fanciful identifications were eventually abandoned in a process of critical deconstruction that has continued to the present day. The more accurate connoisseurship reflected in Berenson's lists and in monographs on Renaissance artists demonstrated that the portraits were by different hands.⁴⁰ Sober reassessment also showed that the sitters, lacking any real clues to their identity, are mostly anonymous. Subsequent scholarship, culminating in John Pope-Hennessy's *The Portrait in the Renaissance* of 1966, further demonstrated that the female profiles, hitherto treated as a group, are actually a series dating over more than half a century.⁴¹ The portraits were linked artistically as the artists who painted them responded to the solutions of their predecessors and contemporaries. This was especially the case with *Mona Lisa*, in which Leonardo established a compelling precedent for nearly all early sixteenth-century portraiture of men and women (see cat. 36).

Stylistic analyses, no matter how perceptive, did little to alter Burckhardt's century-old assumptions about the individualism of Renaissance portraiture. It was not until the advent of feminism and its application to historical studies in the 1970s that a radically new approach to the female portraits arose. In a seminal article of 1977, feminist historian Joan Kelly reexamined the position of women in the Renaissance and concluded that, contrary to Burckhardt, they did not enjoy equality with men.⁴² Kelly's investigation and those of other feminist scholars showed that, while women of the period were the center of the home and family, they were systematically excluded from the public sphere. The ideal celebrated by Burckhardt masked the reality of the vast majority of women's separate but unequal status. It would not be too much to say that the feminists rediscovered the Renaissance woman, and their revisionist view was soon applied to representations of women in the visual arts. The fact that the Florentine portraits depicted ordinary and now mostly forgotten women made them

ideally suited to the task. The leading exponent of the feminist viewpoint is Patricia Simons who, in a series of important articles published between 1987 and 1997, analyzed the female profiles in the context of contemporary attitudes toward women and their (limited) role in society.⁴³ Observing the lack of individuality in the profiles, Simons took their stereotyped quality as a sign of the privileged but unempowered status of the sitters in a male-dominated society. The women were not just portrayed as decorative objects, moreover; reflecting the relation between the sexes, their profiles were subjected to the voyeuristic "male gaze."

Feminist interpretations of the Florentine portraits are open to several criticisms. Isolating female portraits as a separate category, for example, and treating the choice of the profile as a gender issue ignores the fact that men were portrayed in the same manner. Nor was the audience for the portraits exclusively male but included the sitter's family and friends of both sexes. Likewise, the patrons, the artists, and even the sitters may all have believed in the subservience of women, but the portraits were surely commissioned to commemorate, not denigrate, their subjects. Personal relations—ties of affection and respect about which we know very little but which we can presume to have existed—and not only social norms and forces must have shaped the portrait images, which in that sense are more than products of gender inequity. It is hard to believe, for example, that Ghirlandaio's hauntingly beautiful portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni portrays her merely as her husband's property. Like the nearly identical image of the lady in Ghirlandaio's fresco of the Visitation in the Tornabuoni chapel in Santa Maria Novella in Florence, the portrait is a posthumous commemoration of Giovanna who died, during her second childbirth, in 1488. A decade later the portrait is still recorded in her husband's bedchamber in the Tornabuoni palace, where it would have served as a poignant reminder of his companion. As a posthumous likeness of a young woman who succumbed to the perils of childbirth, Ghirlandaio's portrait is by no means unique. The art theorist Leon Battista Alberti claimed that portraiture made the absent present and brought the dead to life, and his comment may well apply to other female portraits in the show as well.⁴⁴

Viewed from a feminist perspective, the portraits lost much of the allure they once had for earlier generations of art lovers and collectors. And yet the feminists revolutionized the understanding of these works by reexamining them in a social context and demonstrating the concern they exhibit with women's character and conduct. Feminists also opened up the discussion to a younger generation of scholars who pursue it from a less ideological standpoint.⁴⁵ Interest in the female portraits presently centers on their relation to the most important event in the life of a Renaissance woman—her marriage.⁴⁶ Even before the function of the portraits began to preoccupy art historians, they were thought to be somehow connected with the sitters' betrothal or marriage. The women portrayed in profile are nearly all young and richly dressed. And marriage would have provided a motive for commissioning the portraits, just as *cassoni*, or wedding chests, were ordered to contain the bride's trousseau and *deschi da parto*, or birth trays, were made to carry gifts or refreshments to the mother of a newborn child.⁴⁷ The pictures are being scrutinized in the context of marriage rituals for clues as to who might have commissioned them—the bride's father, husband, or father-in-law—and what role, if any, they may have played in the different phases of the marriage alliance. The high point of the marriage ceremonies was the procession of the bride, dressed in all her finery, through the streets of Florence to the new household she would manage. If the portraits were not actually part of the marriage, they may well mark the occasion by fixing the sitter's image at the moment of her greatest social importance. The bride's lavish costume and ornaments displayed the families' wealth and status; the clothes and jewelry worn in the portraits are being studied, accordingly, not just from a fashion standpoint but also to determine what they signify about the sitter's social rank.⁴⁸

Virtue and beauty, as it relates to female portraiture, is one of the main themes of the exhibition; another is the shift from the profile to the three-quarter or frontal view. At the very moment that the profile reached its apogee in the work of Antonio Pollaiuolo (cat. 6), two younger artists, both pupils of Pollaiuolo's rival Verrocchio, broke with the profile tradition and represented their subjects in three-

quarter view. Botticelli and Leonardo were evidently responding to examples of Flemish portraiture, which typically showed the sitter turned at an angle to the picture plane, revealing more of the face. Both artists were also undoubtedly impressed by one of the most innovative female portraits of the quattrocento—Verrocchio's *Lady with a Bunch of Flowers* (cat. 22) in the Bargello, Florence. The sculptor's half-length treatment of the sitter, with hands, was taken over by his pupils, who placed their subjects, Smeralda Brandini and Ginevra de' Benci, in interior or exterior settings. The three-quarter view, which rapidly became *de rigueur* in the workshops of other artists, like Ghirlandaio, was adopted not only for aesthetic reasons: as Joanna Woods-Marsden explains in her essay, it lent the subject a greater physical and psychological presence and permitted a more intimate engagement with the viewer, who, in effect, exchanged the sitter's glance. It was a natural step, then, to the frontal view, widely adopted for the large-scale portraits that became common in the sixteenth century. The portraits from this period, catalogued by Elizabeth Cropper, also reveal another basic change with respect to the quattrocento profiles: while the Petrarchan ideal of beauty still applied, the sitters appear more mature. In an article on *Mona Lisa*, Frank Zöllner has argued that Lisa was portrayed to celebrate the birth of a child.⁴⁹ Two other portraits in the exhibition, by Pontormo (cat. 40) and Bronzino (cat. 41), include likenesses of children, in the latter case painted in after the picture was completed. These portraits and others like them are concerned with the second crucially important (and recurring) event in a woman's life—motherhood—and lineage, and they further exhibit the more courtly and aristocratic tone of Florentine society around the time that Cosimo de' Medici became duke of Florence in 1537. And yet despite all these changes, the sixteenth-century portraits, like the earlier ones, still present an ideal: they depict real women but not the intimate reality of their experience. In place of the complexities and contradictions of their private lives, the sitters are shown in their public role as ideally beautiful and virtuous young women. The actual and the ideal may well have been in conflict—it can hardly have been otherwise—but of that the portraits are silent.