

Gallery 5 – Art for the Home in Renaissance Italy, 1400-1550

Main talking points – CHOOSE ONE OR TWO OF THE OBJECTS TO DISCUSS

- This gallery evokes the *camera grande* (“large bedroom”) within an elite Italian Renaissance *casa* (“house”). Typically located on an upper floor of the home, the *camera* was the hub of domestic life in which a variety of activities took place, including sleeping, washing, devotional practice, textile work, and informal dining. This was a semi-private space open to close friends and relatives of the family. It was also the setting for major life events – conception, birth, and death.
 - Furniture – Important pieces of furniture (ie: marriage bed, *lettuccio*, *cassone* (“marriage chests”)) were often commissioned on the occasion of marriages to begin the couple’s new life together.

- ie: The *lettuccio* was a daybed which also functioned as a sofa and storage container (with its hollow bench). Many were commissioned on the occasion of marriages, along with a full-sized bed.



- ie: *Cassoni* were large chests typically commissioned in pairs by the bride’s male family members. Made to celebrate the marriage, *cassoni* were used to carry the bride’s trousseau to her new home. They were placed in the *camera* for the storage of household goods like clothing and linens. These chests were highly adorned with gilt carving and highly detailed panel paintings. Many of these chests were disassembled in the 19th century for their elaborate narrative paintings which were sold off individually as “Old Master” paintings.

- ie: *A Battle Between Romans and Gauls* or *The Siege of Naples* by Alfonso I



- Devotional objects – Devotional objects were often used in religious practice for the purpose of intercession between heavenly and earthly individuals, protection from evil and instruction of moral values. Images of the Virgin and Child, a patron saint, or a narrative story were often the subject matter of these small, intimate objects.

- ie: Domenico Ghirlandaio’s *Madonna and Child* would typically hang high on the wall, casting their protection over the whole room. This picture is called a *tondo*, owing to its round shape. *Tondi* were made almost exclusively for the *camera*.



Text Labels – Gallery 5

Domenico Ghirlandaio and workshop

Italian, 1449-1494, active in Florence and Rome

Madonna and Child with Saint John and Three Angels, c. 1490

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 20



Images of the Virgin and Child were used for religious devotion in the Renaissance home. They were typically hung high on the wall, casting their protection over the whole room. In this elevated position, they also seemed to provide a glimpse into the heavenly realm. The background landscape here is an accurate view of Venice. Unusual in a Tuscan painting, this suggests that the work may have been made for a Venetian patron.



Jacopo del Sellaio

Italian, c. 1441-1493, active in Florence

The Penitent Saint Jerome, c. 1480-90

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 17

A popular figure in the fifteenth century, Saint Jerome (d. 420) was a bishop who retired to live as a penitent in the desert. Here, Jerome kneels before a crucifix in a rocky wilderness, beating his bare torso with a rock in emulation of Christ's earthly suffering. Jerome was the patron saint of learning and scholarship: observe the inkpot and quill in the rocks above him and the books beside his feet. Devotional images like this one were often made for domestic settings, particularly for homes belonging to scholars.



Florentine

A Battle Between Romans and Gauls, 1460s

Tempera and gold on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 13

This panel once adorned a *cassone* – Italian meaning “large chest.” Made in pairs to celebrate marriages, *cassoni* were carried in bridal processions and then placed in bedrooms where they stored household goods like clothing and linens. This panel shows a battle between Romans (identified by their banners bearing the initials SPQR) and Gauls. Banners and shields emblazoned with black roosters identify some Gauls, while others are naked wild-men. Medici family heraldry appears on the bridle of a white horse at the left suggesting that the *cassone* was made for a Medici patron or ally.



Florentine

The Siege of Naples by Alfonso I, 1460s

Tempera and gold on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 14

Alfonso of Aragon laid siege to Naples in 1441, just a few years before this painting was made. The attack on the city walls is shown as a confusion of soldiers, horses, banners, and weapons. On the left is the military encampment; on the right, the capitulation of the king, René of Anjou. With his military victory, Alfonso secured the crown of Naples for himself. This rare subject may have been commissioned by a Florentine family with diplomatic or military ties to Alfonso. This panel once adorned a *cassone* – Italian for “large chest.”



After a Model by Guglielmo della Porta

Italian, Roman, ca. 1500–1577

The Deposition, c. 1570-85

Gilded bronze

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 7181

This exquisite, small-scale relief made for use in private devotional practices shows the Deposition of Christ, the moment when the dead Christ is lowered from the cross. His most important followers surround him. Mary Magdalene lifts his left hand and applies a tender kiss. The fainting Virgin, located just above Christ, is steadied by mourners who rush to her side. This relief is known in multiple versions, attesting to its popularity among pious patrons of the arts.

Filippo Mazzola

Italian, c. 1460-1505, active in Parma

The Madonna and Child, c. 1490

Oil on panel

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 51



Andrea della Robbia

Italian, 1435-1525 or 1528, active in Florence

Virgin and Child, c. 1490

Glazed terracotta in a painted and gilded frame

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 1393



Images of the Virgin and Child were virtually everywhere in the Renaissance home. In the 1300s and 1400s representations of the Virgin and Child became increasingly tender. Images like these emphasize the relationship between mother and child and promote the Virgin's role as intercessor for the salvation of humankind. The relief sculpture here is meant to recall carved marble, rather than the more inexpensive terracotta of which it was made. The sculptural quality of the figures in the painted image also point to the artist's interest in three-dimensional, sculpted models.



Venetian

The Annunciation, 1600s

Reverse painting on glass (*verre églomisé*)

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN1513

In a lavishly appointed domestic interior, the Virgin bows modestly as the Archangel Gabriel rushes to bring her the news that she will bear the Son of God. In the left corner, God appears in a burst of clouds, raising his arm in a gesture of blessing. Prized for its ability to imitate the luminosity and clarity of gemstones, *verre églomisé* is a type of glass decoration whereby a piece of glass is painted, gilded, or engraved on the reverse. The technique is similar to that of engraving, and many compositions done in this style can be traced directly to prints that were circulated widely in the early sixteenth century. This Annunciation is based on a print by Marco Dente da Ravenna (1486–1527).



Venetian

A Triumph, 1600s

Reverse painting on glass (*verre églomisé*)

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 1189

The subject and composition of this *verre églomisé* (reverse painted and gilded glass) ultimately derive from an engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi (Bolognese, ca. 1470/82–1527/34). In it, the interest in antiquity that played a fundamental role in the Renaissance is evident: the subject is a classical triumph, several figures are copied from antique sources, and the treatment of the figures and the composition recalls ancient relief sculpture. A piece like this would have been a splendid decoration in an elite Renaissance home.



Florentine

Lettuccio, 1500s

Carved, inlaid, and gilded woods (mainly walnut)

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 1514

A *lettuccio* is a daybed, a precursor to the modern sofa, which also functioned as a storage container (its bench is hollow). Many were commissioned on the occasion of marriages, and along with the bed, the *lettuccio* was the most prominent and expensive piece of furniture in the *camera*, owned only by the very wealthy. This elaborately carved example might have been commissioned to celebrate the marriage in 1508 of two prominent Florentine citizens, Filippo Strozzi and Clarice de' Medici. The families' symbols, such as the Strozzi crescents, are present in the carving.



Italian, probably Florentine

Bust of a Man, c. 1500

Terracotta with traces of paint

Bequest of John Ringling, 1936, SN 5388

Portrait busts of both men and women were important adornments in the Renaissance *camera*. Busts could portray the house's living inhabitants or commemorate deceased ancestors. They were typically installed over doorways. From this lofty vantage point, they cast a protective gaze over the entire room. They were also a constant reminder of one's familial role and dynastic obligation: the production of children. After all, it was in the *camera* that conception took place.

According to an inscription on the base of the bust on the left, the sitter is meant to be Francesco Guicciardini, a prominent Florentine politician and historian who lived between 1483 and 1540. His principal achievement was the *Storia d'Italia*, a comprehensive history of Florentine political life between 1492 and 1534.