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Press release
Exhibition

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Napoleon Hall

The Springtime of the Renaissance

Sculpture and the Arts in Florence, 1400–1460

Exhibition organized by the Louvre in association with the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, with the exceptional participation of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, on view at the Palazzo Strozzi from March 23 to August 18, 2013.

Eni is proud to be the main sponsor of this exhibition. Additional support is provided by Deloitte.



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Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florentine, c. 1386–1466). *Reliquary Bust of Saint Rossore*, c. 1424–27. Gilt bronze with chased and engraved decoration. Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa.

Following upon major exhibitions devoted to masters of the High Renaissance—Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael—*The Springtime of the Renaissance* deals with the genesis of this major artistic and cultural movement, which first arose in Florence in the early years of the fifteenth century. Sculpture, an essential aspect of this rebirth, is the central focus of this exhibition. Some 140 works are presented, including several monumental ones, grouped into ten thematic sections. In addition to sculptures, the exhibition also features paintings, drawings, manuscripts, silver and gold pieces, and tin-glazed earthenware (majolicas).

Sculptures by Donatello, including monumental works, busts and reliefs, serve as one of the threads running through the exhibition, by way of the presentation of several of the greatest masterpieces by this artist, considered by many as the most creative exponent of the early Renaissance. However, his works do not in any way eclipse the virtuosity of contributions by other illustrious sculptors, including creative geniuses such as Ghiberti, Nanni de Banco, Luca della Robbia, Nanni de Bartolo, Michelozzo, Agostino di Duccio, Desiderio da Settignano, and Mino da Fiesole. Their sheer number and wide-ranging output aptly demonstrate the extent to which the first half of the century was exceptionally rich in artists of the very highest caliber. Each of these sculptors is represented in the exhibition by several works, so that visitors may fully appreciate the contributions and varied nature of each artist's oeuvre. Brunelleschi and Ghiberti's competition panels for the second set of bronze doors of the Battistero di San Giovanni (1401), Donatello's monumental sculptures for Orsanmichele and the Campanile, Luca della Robbia's splendid enameled terra-cotta pieces, and the exceptional series of Florentine portrait busts in the last room of the exhibition are just some of the major works on display that reveal the flowering of artistic creation during this period in Florence. As such, they are among the key elements having established this city as the unparalleled creative hub of the new Renaissance style, giving rise to the persistent legend of Florence across the centuries.

Exhibition curators: Marc Bormand, Chief Curator, Department of Sculptures, Musée du Louvre and Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi, Director, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

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Lorenzo Ghiberti (Florentine, 1377–1446), *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401. Gilt bronze. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.



Andrea del Castagno (properly Andrea di Bartolo de Simone; Castagno c. 1421–Florence 1457). *Saint Jerome's Vision of the Trinity, with Saints Paula and Eustochium*, 1454. Removed fresco. Basilica della Santissima Annunziata, Florence (Patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto, Ministero dell'Interno).

The ten sections of the exhibition form a coherent whole, placing emphasis in some cases on themes and styles, and in others on the social and cultural context serving as the unifying frame joining together the works on display. The major influence of Greek and Roman antiquity is constantly present throughout all of the sections, showing how important works of antiquity had a key impact on artistic creation during this period. The panoply of rich and varied approaches on view, all intimately linked, help unveil the mysteries behind the flowering of the Florentine Renaissance.

This major exhibition, featuring some 140 works in all and consisting for the most part of sculptures, is made possible thanks to exceptional loans by museums and places of worship in Florence and around Tuscany, first and foremost among them those granted by the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, together with other major Italian museums (in Naples, Milan, etc.). The exhibition also benefits from the generous cooperation of several major museums in Europe (London, Berlin, Frankfurt, Lille, Lyon) and the United States (New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Cleveland), whose gracious assistance is no less worthy of mention. Several of the works have been returned to their former glory after a vast two-year restoration campaign led jointly by the Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi and the Louvre, allowing visitors to fully appreciate masterpieces such as Donatello's imposing gilt bronze statue of *Saint Louis of Anjou* (also known as *Saint Louis of Toulouse*, 1425) from the Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce.

The Legacy of the Fathers

The exhibition opens with a sweeping overview of proto-Renaissance artists and their sources of inspiration. Important works from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a period that saw the reawakening by artists to the achievements of Roman and Greek antiquity, are the first to greet visitors in this section. With the marble vessel known as the *Talento Crater (Crater with Bacchic Scene)* from Pisa as its central work, "The Legacy of the Fathers" features proto-Renaissance works by Nicola Pisano, Arnolfo di Cambio, Giotto, Tino di Camaino, and their successors, all greatly influenced by this and other well-known works of Roman antiquity. Sculptures by Giovanni Pisano amply illustrate a heightened expressiveness inspired by Gothic art, particularly its French exponents, which the younger Pisano combined with the classical Roman style.

The Dawn of the Renaissance and Romanitas: Civic and Christian Ideals

The early years of the fifteenth century saw the emergence of a new age in Florence, embodied by a number of exceptional works, especially the two relief panels depicting the *Sacrifice of Isaac* by Lorenzo Ghiberti and Filippo Brunelleschi submitted for the 1401 competition to select the artist who would cast the second set of bronze doors for the Battistero di San Giovanni, together with the city's lasting iconic symbol, Brunelleschi's majestic and unequalled dome for the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore (known as the Duomo), represented here by its original model in wood, the artist's feat made possible by an architectural and technical revolution. The Florentine republic had reached its zenith at this time. Its political successes, its economic power, and its social harmony inspired Florentine humanists to forge the myth of their city as the heir to Republican Rome, the reincarnation of Romanitas at its civic and Christian best, offered as a model for the other Italian city-states.

Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florentine, c. 1386–1466). *Saint George and the Dragon*, c. 1417. Marble. Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence.





Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florentine, c. 1386–1466). *Saint Louis of Toulouse*, c. 1422–25. Gilt bronze (statue); silver, gilt bronze, enamel and rock crystals (tiara). Museo dell’Opera di Santa Croce, Florence (Patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto, Ministero dell’Interno).

It was for the city’s major public buildings, including the Duomo, the Campanile, and Orsanmichele, that artists such as Donatello, Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco and Michelozzo would create their finest masterpieces. These monumental public sculptures eloquently bear witness to the fundamental stylistic transformations at work during the Florentine Renaissance, creating a new artistic language while helping to convey the supreme heights reached by Florentine civilization. By offering the opportunity to view two imposing statues side by side—Ghiberti’s *Saint Matthew* (1419–22) and Donatello’s *Saint Louis of Toulouse* (1422–25)—the exhibition makes clear the extent to which statuary during the Florentine Renaissance acquired a new monumentality and an unprecedented expressive force.

***Spiritelli*, both Sacred and Profane**

Major themes from classical antiquity, as interpreted in particular by Donatello, were gradually assimilated and transformed to create the new artistic language of the Renaissance. In addition, new themes were introduced, renewing the scope of creation. This section shows how *spiritelli*, figures of “little spirits”, first used on sarcophagi in antiquity, began to appear frequently on Florentine monuments, connecting bold vitality with an ethereal presence. They became a visible hallmark of the new style. The two splendid *Spiritelli*, playful and energetic, sculpted by Donatello for the Cantoria, or choir loft, in the Duomo and the elegant *Capital*, which supported the outdoor pulpit of Prato’s cathedral are among the finest works on this theme. In the same room, the *Sprite* in gilt bronze, attributed to a sculptor close to Donatello (Metropolitan Museum, New York), very likely a piece originally part of a fountain, is one of the most remarkable examples of the profane treatment of this same subject.

The Rebirth of the Condottieri

Sculptors of the Florentine Renaissance also sought to emulate the great equestrian monuments of antiquity, which decorated public places to celebrate military virtue. The replica by Filarete of the famous antique statue of Marcus Aurelius (which stood in the Campus Lateranensis in Rome at the time), one of the very first small bronzes of the Renaissance, a genre that would soon enjoy considerable popularity, is presented here alongside the huge *Horse’s Head*, known as the *Protome Carafa*, intended as part of a monument to Alfonso V of Aragon, king of Naples, underscoring in quite spectacular fashion the revival of the large-scale version of this genre, also destined for a bright future.

Sculpture in Paint and History in Perspective

The invention of linear perspective by Brunelleschi and the quest for a rational, mathematical ordering of space are explored in the “History in Perspective” section. Without a doubt, the resulting experiments found their most creative expression in sculpture, here juxtaposed with painted works. Brought to great heights first and foremost in Donatello’s bas-reliefs, this quest notably produced such works as the predella depicting *Saint George and the Dragon* (Museo Nazionale del Bargello), a supreme Renaissance masterpiece, combining linear and atmospheric perspective to achieve an open, rational and infinite space.

This same artist’s relief of *Herod’s Banquet* (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille) is one of the most compelling examples of this spatial revolution. It gives a foretaste of later experiments with the spatial arrangement of figures conducted by artists like Desiderio da Settignano and Agostino di Duccio after 1450.



Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florentine, c. 1386–1466). *Two Spiritelli (Winged Putti) from the Cantoria (Choir Loft) in the Duomo*, 1439. Bronze with traces of gilding; marble bases (not originally part of the sculptures). Institut de France, Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris.



Filippo Brunelleschi (Florentine, 1377–1446) or Nanni di Banco (Florentine, active c. 1405–1421). *Madonna and Child (Fiesole Madonna)*, c. 1405–10. Polychromed and gilt terra-cotta. Diocesi di Fiesole, Fiesole, on loan to the Museo Bandini.



Agostino di Duccio (Florence 1418–Perugia c. 1481), *Madonna and Child (detail)*, 1464. Department of Sculptures, Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Desiderio da Settignano (Settignano c. 1429–Florence 1464). *Marietta Strozzi*, c. 1464. Marble. Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Bode-Museum, Berlin.

Sculpture, and especially statuary, had a considerable influence on the painted works by the period's greatest artists. The section entitled, perhaps paradoxically, "Sculpture in Paint" shows how the most important painters of the Florentine Renaissance—Masaccio, Paolo Uccello, Andrea del Castagno, Filippo Lippi, Piero della Francesca—reinterpreted the spatial configuration of figures invented by the great sculptors of the time. The deliberately sculptural rendering of figures inserted within a two-dimensional canvas is particularly evident with the imposing *Trinity* by Andrea del Castagno (Basilica della Santissima Annunziata, Florence).

The Spread of Beauty and Beauty and Charity

Beginning in the 1420s, the new canons of beauty in sculpture perfected by the great masters gave rise to works of high achievement featured in this section, such as the *Pazzi Madonna* by Donatello, on exceptional loan from the Bode-Museum in Berlin, the *Madonna and Child* by Ghiberti, from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., or the *Madonna and Child*, long attributed to Brunelleschi, from the Diocesi di Fiesole.

These precepts were also disseminated through the massive production of reliefs (in marble, polychromed stucco, enameled terra-cotta) intended for private devotion. These reliefs, presented in the section entitled "The Spread of Beauty," quickly instilled a pervasive preference for this "new" beauty, embraced by all social classes.

At the same time, the greatest artists received numerous commissions for religious art from public institutions with a charitable purpose (hospitals, hospices, brotherhoods or sisterhoods). "Beauty and Charity" shows the central role played by sculpture in the decoration of public buildings. Two masterpieces by the enigmatic sculptor Dello Delli, brought together here for the first time in more than a hundred years, perfectly illustrate this point.

From the City to the Palace, the New Patrons of the Arts

The exhibition closes by highlighting a major transformation. The civic aspect of artistic production in Florence eventually gave way to more prevalent private patronage, which began to play a decisive role with the advent of the wealthy Cosimo de' Medici, founder of the political dynasty that would rule Florence from 1434 to 1537. This period thus saw the transition from Florentine sovereignty and self-sufficiency, or *libertas*, symbolized by public commissions, to a private patronage already colored by the burgeoning hegemony of the Medicis. This ostentatious bent would find one of its most forceful expressions in the fashion for private bust portraits, a new genre that arose at mid-century. Accordingly, the exhibition ends with an impressive assortment of portrait busts "in the Florentine style" including, among others, Mino da Fiesole's monumental *Giovanni de' Medici*, Desiderio da Settignano's wistful and delicate *Marietta Strozzi*, as well as several profile portraits of emperors alongside majolica dishes bearing the coats of arms of great patrician families.

As a worthy pendant to Brunelleschi's dome featured in one of the exhibition's first rooms, the final work on view is the original model in wood of the Palazzo Strozzi, the grandest private residence in Renaissance Florence.



Greek, Late Classical period, *Horse's Head*, known as the *Protome Medici*, mid-4th century B.C. Bronze. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.



Donatello (Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi; Florentine, c. 1386–1466). *Horse's Head*, known as the *Protome Carafa*, c. 1455. Bronze. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples.

Publication

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Exhibition album

The exhibition catalogue, edited by Marc Bormand and Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi (available in Italian, French and English versions and co-published by Mandragora Editore and Éditions du Louvre), includes contributions from many of the world's leading experts on the art of the Quattrocento, in the form of themed essays as well as entries on each of the works presented in the exhibition.

In the auditorium

Symposium

December 6 and 7, 2013 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

with some events held at the Institut National de l'Histoire de l'Art (INHA)

Fifteenth-century Florentine sculpture in the urban environment



Gentile da Fabriano (Fabriano c. 1370–Rome 1427), *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, 1423. Tempera on panel with gold leaf. Department of Paintings, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. 295.