

FAMILY GUIDE

Italian Art at the National Gallery of Art



ages
6 and up



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Learning Stories from Art

Imagine it is 1435. You live in Siena, Italy. Unless you are a noble or a monk, you cannot read. You learn stories from sermons and the art around you—such as sculptures on church doors and painted altarpieces.

Find the altarpiece panels that tell the story of Saint Anthony, a monk who abandoned wealth for a life of fasting and prayer. In the left panel can you **spot** the wealthy Saint Anthony (shown twice)? What is he doing?

In the middle panel Saint Anthony is a changed man. **Choose** the clues that reveal his transformation to a pious man.



setting **Saint Anthony's habit** **his feet**

his posture **his walking stick**

The third panel shows Saint Anthony on a journey to find Saint Paul, the first monk to leave society for prayer. How does the artist show you the passage of time? Does the journey look easy?



Find these other details in the story:

- Iron rods to hang awnings (protected people against the summer sun)
- A blind man and his guide
- The crest of a powerful Sienese family
- The only thing Saint Anthony takes with him (not even shoes!)
- A centaur (a mythical beast that is half man, half horse)
- The cave where the hermit Saint Paul lived

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Portrait of Matteo Olivieri



Roman portico



**Ceiling lines converge
to create depth**

New Spirit in Art

Does this room feel like a different world?

In the 1400s in Florence many people believed they lived in a new age—later called the Renaissance (“rebirth”). Inspired by ancient Greek and Roman culture, Florentines began to explore nature and history. Artists painted pictures to look like windows onto the real world, with believable space and people.

Explore this gallery together and **look** for these Renaissance hallmarks:

- **portraits** (paintings of citizens had not been commissioned since Roman times)
- Greek and Roman **architecture** (think columns and arcades)
- **volume** (people look like they have real weight and could move)
- **depth** created by artists’ use of perspective

Can you see where one artist scored his painting as a guide to help him create depth?

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Can you find this?



Another famous portrait
by Leonardo, in Paris



Enlarged image of
Leonardo's fingerprint

A Portrait by Leonardo

Before you is a portrait of Ginevra de' Benci—the only painting in North America by Leonardo da Vinci, one of the most famous Renaissance artists. Who was Ginevra?

Challenge yourselves as a group to decide:

Adventurous or scaredy cat? Artistic or athletic? Outdoorsy or just pictured outside? Her age? An event this painting might celebrate?

Here are some hints:

A line remains of her poetry: “I am a mountain tiger.”

The juniper bush (behind Ginevra) is a pun on her name—juniper is “ginepro” in Italian.

Women were married as young as fourteen.

She is *sedici anni*—*sei* (6) + *dieci* (10).

Where is Leonardo in this portrait? **Look closely**—maybe you can catch him. Not with his signature, but with a print of his finger that he used to blend the oil paint for subtle light and shadow contrasts. It is just visible above Ginevra's left shoulder.

Create Your Own Portrait

Now that you have investigated Ginevra's portrait, **create** a two-sided portrait of yourself. Use the following questions as guides:

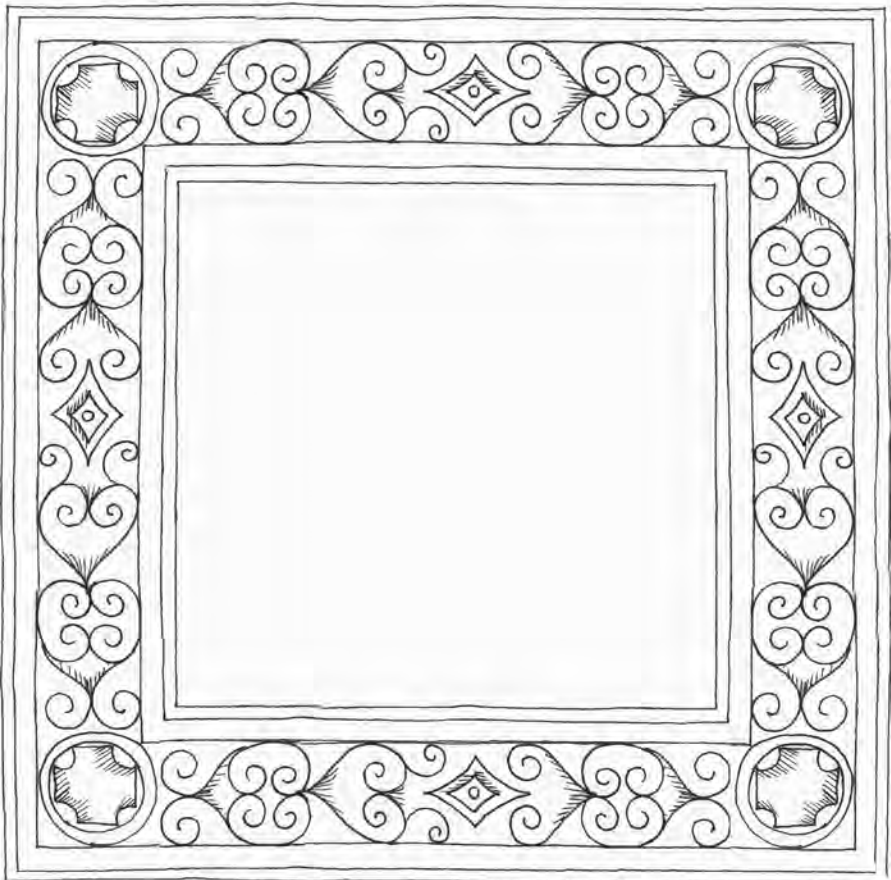
Front (*recto*)

Do you want to be in profile or facing front?

What expression describes you best?

What clothing captures your personality?

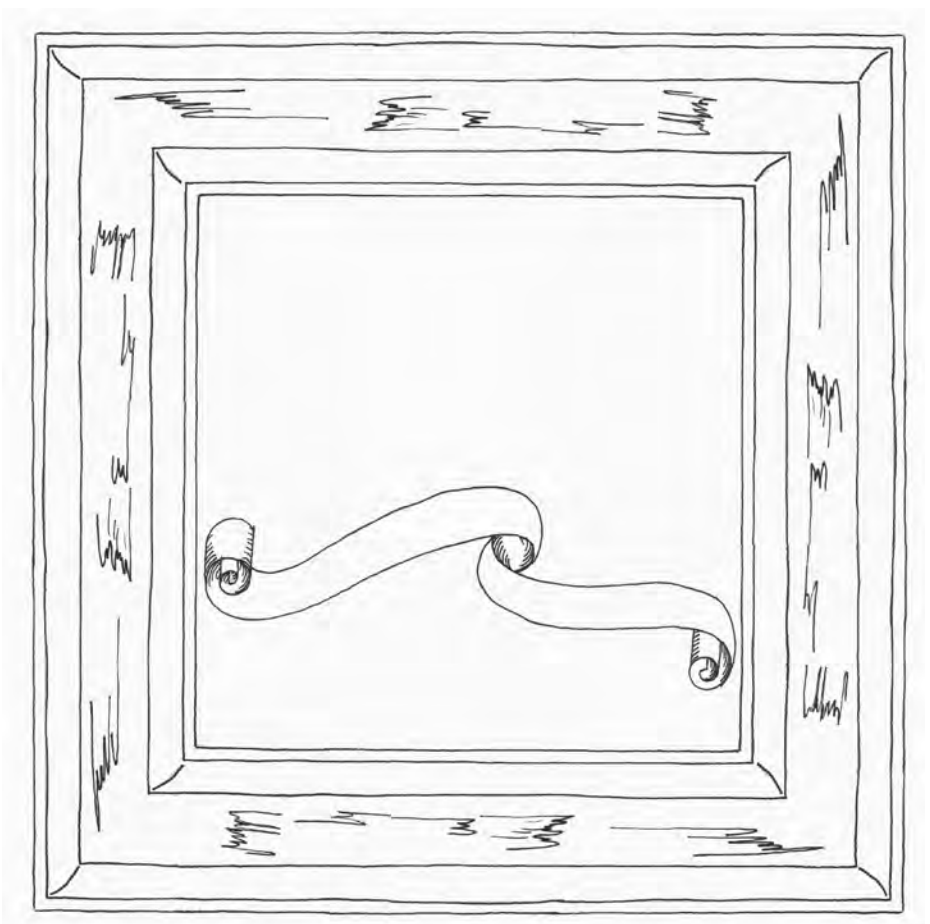
Think about the background of your portrait;
what is your favorite place?



Back (verso)

What are two objects that could represent you?
Animal? Hobby? Plant?

Fill in the scroll with your own motto describing how you live your life. (The Latin inscription on the back of Ginevra's portrait translates as "Beauty adorns virtue.")



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Mother and Child

Perhaps the most popular image in Italian art is the Madonna and child. During the Renaissance, depicting their human bond was especially important. Jesus is shown as a baby either in his mother's lap or reaching up for her warm embrace. Mary tenderly watches her baby's every move.

Choose the Madonna and child painting you think best shows this bond. **Explain** your choice to your group.

Is it Mary's expression?

Baby Jesus sweetly seeking his mother?

The gaze between mother and child?

The setting around them?

Identify these symbols of Mary in works in this room:

- blue cloak** (blue for heaven; blue was also the most costly paint)
- white veil** (white for innocence and purity)
- strawberry plant** (symbolizing the Incarnation of Christ; humility)
- halo** (a fine ring of gold encircling the head to signify holiness)

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Portrait, in Siena,
of the young Raphael



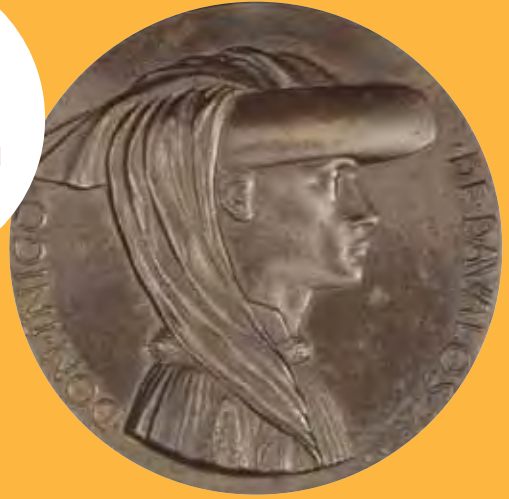
Raphael's *Madonna*

In his own time Raphael was called “the prince of painters.” He is best known for his grand frescoes in the Vatican (Rome) and for his many paintings of the Madonna. One of his most famous representations, recently restored to its original beauty, is called *The Alba Madonna*.

Think about what makes this round painting (tondo) both humble and grand. How would you describe the details below?

	Humble	Grand
The Madonna seated on the ground, not on a heavenly throne	_____	_____
Figures occupy almost the entire space	_____	_____
Relaxed mood and natural colors	_____	_____
Roman <i>campagna</i> (countryside) background	_____	_____
Figures engage with one another rather than look out at us	_____	_____
Crucifix and scripture	_____	_____
Wash of heavenly blue across canvas	_____	_____
Tiny plants around the figures	_____	_____

Renaissance
portrait medals
like this one were
inspired by Greek and
Roman coins.



Raphael
(pictured here)
began working in art
studios by age 11.

The 2004
restoration of *The Alba
Madonna* removed old,
yellowing varnish and
overpainting to bring back
the painting's original
pastel color tones.



The Alba Madonna
before it was restored

Captions

All images in this booklet are details from the following works of art:

Cover

Florentine 15th Century, *Matteo Olivieri* (?), 1430s, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Fra Carnevale, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445/1450, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

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Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?), *Saint Anthony Distributing His Wealth to the Poor*, c. 1430/1435, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?), *Saint Anthony Leaving His Monastery*, c. 1430/1435, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

Master of the Osservanza (Sano di Pietro?), *The Meeting of Saint Anthony and Saint Paul*, c. 1430/1435, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

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Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Feast of Herod and the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, 1461–1462, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

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Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* [reverse], c. 1474/1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, 1503–1506, Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York, Louvre, Paris, France

Leonardo da Vinci, *Ginevra de' Benci* [obverse], c. 1474/1478, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund

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Filippino Lippi, *The Adoration of the Child*, c. 1475/1480, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Pierre Joseph Redouté, *Frasier à bouquets—Strawberries (Fragaria)*, from “Choix des plus belles fleurs,” by Redouté, Paris: 1827, pl. 83, The LuEsther T. Mertz Library, NYBG/Art Resource, New York

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Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Scenes from the Life of Pius II: Canonization of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 1502–1508, Scala/Art Resource, New York, Libreria Piccolomini, Duomo, Siena, Italy

Raphael, *The Alba Madonna*, c. 1510, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

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Pisanello, *Don Inigo d'Avalos, d. 1484, Grand Chamberlain of Naples from 1442* [obverse], c. 1448/1449, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection

Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Scenes from the Life of Pius II: Canonization of Saint Catherine of Siena*, 1502–1508, Scala/Art Resource, New York, Libreria Piccolomini, Duomo, Siena, Italy

Raphael, *The Alba Madonna* (pre-restoration), c. 1510, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

Back cover

Raphael, *The Alba Madonna*, c. 1510, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection

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