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## Complete Survey of Renaissance Medals Collections at the National Gallery of Art Now Available



Pisanello

Veronese, c. 1395 - 1455

Obverse: *Leonello d'Este, 1407-1450, Marquess of Ferrara 1441*

Reverse: *Lion Being Taught by Cupid to Sing*

1444

bronze

diameter: 10.3 cm (4 1/16 in.)

Samuel H. Kress Collection

Washington, DC — The most important public collection of Renaissance-era medals in the United States resides at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and is the focus of a new publication, *Renaissance Medals*. The first comprehensive catalogue of this collection is available as a two-volume set covering 957 medals acquired through 2003. Of these, 163 are currently on view at the National Gallery of Art in the West Building ground floor sculpture galleries.

The catalogue, compiled over more than twenty years, offers the most detailed art historical and scientific assessment of the collection available to date, including technical information such as the alloy composition of each medal. Volume one features Italian medals, including dozens of masterworks by Pisanello, who essentially invented the medium of portrait medals. Volume two focuses on French, German,

Netherlandish, and English medals, including works by Guillaume Dupré, Albrecht Dürer, and Jacques Jonghelinck, and continues through the Baroque and later periods.

"The *Renaissance Medals* systematic catalogue required years of laborious effort from a dedicated team of researchers," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "Their work will help scholars worldwide achieve a better scientific and cultural understanding of these important works of art, offering a better sense of what medals symbolized for artists and patrons in Europe."

### **The Renaissance Medals Collection**

The nucleus of the National Gallery of Art's medal holdings is a 1957 gift from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. It also contains important gifts from the Joseph E. Widener (1942), and Leonard Baskin and Lisa Unger Baskin (1992–2006) collections. In addition, the National Gallery of Art has purchased many significant medals, especially of 15th-century work, including one recording the Pazzi conspiracy in Florence of 1476. A medal commemorating Lorenzo the Magnificent by Niccolò Fiorentino represents one of the last images of this important Italian statesman and founder of the Medici library.

Some 163 medals are on view in the Gallery's renovated sculpture galleries, which reopened in 2002. Medals are installed in classically detailed, freestanding wood and glass cases that allow visitors to see both sides of the object.

### **The Catalogue**

This catalogue expands upon *Renaissance Medals: from the Samuel H. Kress Collection at the National Gallery of Art*, which was released in 1967. The one commonality between the two books is John Graham Pollard, who was co-author of both the 1967 catalogue with G.F. Hill, and the new catalogue with the assistance of National Gallery of Art associate curator of sculpture, Eleonora Luciano, and his wife, researcher Maria Pollard.

The vast majority of the works in the catalogue are portrait medals, featuring a face in profile on one side. The reverse side usually includes a portrayal of an event or emblem

relevant to the sitter's character and achievements. The medals typically include inscriptions on both sides that identify the sitter and describe his or her deeds, illuminating the purpose of the medal. The cast-in inscriptions also provide invaluable historical evidence.

In volume one, masterpieces by Pisanello include a medal from 1444 commemorating the marriage of Leonello d'Este to Maria of Aragon, the illegitimate daughter of the King of Naples. The portrait side features a profile image of Leonello, and the reverse features an exquisite rendering of a lion being taught to sing by Cupid, suggesting that Leonello—whose name means "little lion"—had been tamed by love. The reverse of another Pisanello medal dating from 1446 offers a stunningly detailed image of a pelican feeding its young. On the portrait side, the medal features the scholar-teacher Vittorino de'Rambaldoni da Feltre.

Volume two expands beyond the Italian Renaissance to present German medals of the 16th century, French Baroque medals, and later examples from the Netherlands and England. On *The Waterloo Medallion* (1819/1848) by Benedetto Pistrucci, the four rulers who defeated Napoleon appear in a sequence of profiles. They are wearing laurel wreaths and surrounded by mythical warriors, gods, and horses. The reverse is an extremely detailed rendering of Jupiter destroying nineteen giants.

In the catalogue's introduction, Pollard describes the composition and production of medals including the drawings on which they were based, the models for medals, how production differed from country to country, and how medals were faked. He also provides an overview of some of the world's most outstanding collections.

After the introduction in each volume, medals are listed by country and era, and within that by schools and specific artists. In an appendix in volume one, Lisha Deming Glinsman and Lee-Ann Hayek explain their use of a non-invasive process called X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) to determine the elemental compositions of medals. Their work makes a significant contribution to developing a database of Renaissance metal alloy compositions. Each volume provides an extensive bibliography, concordances, index of inscriptions, and a general index.

## How to Order

Oxford University Press is distributing the volumes, which contain 1120 pages, 1745 duotones, and 66 color illustrations. The two volumes are available through the National Gallery of Art bookstore for \$99 each by phone at (202) 842-6002 or (800) 697-9350.

## Lecture

On Sunday, January 20, 2008, the Gallery's Sunday lecture series presents "Fame and Fortune: Renaissance Medals at the National Gallery of Art." Philip Attwood, curator in the department of coins and medals at The British Museum; Alison Luchs, curator of early European sculpture, National Gallery of Art; and Eleonora Luciano, associate curator of sculpture, National Gallery of Art, will discuss the medals collection and the systematic catalogue. Limited seating at the event will be first come, first seated. The lecture starts at 2 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium.

## Other Systematic Catalogues

The two volumes of *Renaissance Medals* bring to 17 the number of systematic catalogues released by the National Gallery of Art. Other volumes in the series and their publication dates are:

*American Naive Paintings*, 1992

*American Paintings of the Eighteenth Century*, 1995

*American Paintings of the Nineteenth Century*, Part I, 1996

*American Paintings of the Nineteenth Century*, Part II, 1998

*British Paintings of the Sixteenth through Nineteenth Centuries*, 1992

*Decorative Arts, Part II: Far Eastern Ceramics and Paintings; Persian and Indian Rugs and Carpets*, 1998

*Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, 1995

*Early Netherlandish Painting*, 1986

*European Sculpture of the Nineteenth Century, 2000*

*Flemish Paintings of the Seventeenth Century, 2005*

*French Paintings of the Nineteenth Century, Part I: Before Impressionism, 2000*

*German Paintings of the Fifteenth through Seventeenth Centuries, 1993*

*Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Centuries, 2003*

*Italian Paintings of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, 1996*

*Spanish Paintings of the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Centuries, 1990*

*Western Decorative Arts, Part I: Medieval, Renaissance, and Historicizing Styles including Metalwork, Enamels, and Ceramics, 1993.*

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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