BOWERS MUSEUM

DOCENT RESOURCE PACKET
FOR TOUR DEVELOPMENT

Gems of the Medici

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N. 36 Bacchus and Ariadne in Naxos inv. n. 14458

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GEMS OF THE MEDICI DOCENT RESOURCE PACKET

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PRESS RELEASE

THE MEDICI:
GEM COLLECTORS OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Gems of the Medici, an acclaimed international exhibition, highlights some of the oldest and most unique pieces of the Medici collections, including antiquities dating from the 1st Century BCE, as well as a cornelian which was part of the Seal of Nero. This touring exhibition will transport visitors to 15th century Italy and beyond by experiencing the captivating world of one of history's most intriguing families. Comprised of 100 objects on loan from distinguished institutions in Florence, Italy, ***Gems of the Medici*** features precious gems, carvings, sculptures, and other works of fine art from the extensive collection of the Medici family.

In the mid-1400s, many celebrated artists, goldsmiths, silversmiths and engravers were attracted by the abundance of wealth in the city of Florence, but the most important factor in this gathering of talent was the presence of the Medici family. For almost three hundred years, generation after generation of Medici dominated city affairs and steered the course of art history.

It was the Medici family who funded the workshops of these artists and artisans, who commissioned and collected the masterpieces of art and antiquity. This ceaseless collecting ultimately resulted in their collection becoming a source of study for scholars and an important historical record of the developments in the creation of gems and various types of jewelry. From the founding father to the last Grand Duke, the immense power and wealth of this great dynasty was invested in its legendary collections, of which the collection renowned as the ***Gems of the Medici*** is perhaps the finest in the world.

Gems of the Medici is an international exhibition in partnership with the Houston Museum of Natural Science. This specially-ticketed exhibition is organized by Contemporanea Progetti, Florence, Italy in collaboration with Museo degli Argenti, Palazzo Pitti and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale Firenze. Funding at the Bowers Museum is provided by The Margaret A. Cargill Foundation and the Frank and Eileen DeSantis Family.

Gems of the Medici – Introductory Article

Author: Gail Larsen Peterkin
Modified by Liliana Leopardi

*Gems of the Medic*i, displays approximately 80 truly magnificent exemplars of the world-famous Medici collection of engraved gemstones and cameos as well as other original works of art collected over three centuries by the infamous Medici family of Florence. This collection of intricately detailed artifacts includes pieces that date from antiquity through the Renaissance, and the superb craftsmanship highlights a variety of advanced artistic techniques for carving hard stone.

The collection on view is only a small part of the Medici cultural patrimony. Bankers and politicians, the Medici bankrolled the Italian Renaissance. The family sponsored the most famous artists of the Italian Renaissance—Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Michelozzo, Uccello, Alberti, Lippi, Gozzoli, Verrocchio, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Cellini, Bronzino, Vasari, Giambologna, and Santi di Tito, among others.

The family also supported humanists and intellectuals, including writers, poets, philosophers (such as Ficino and Pico della Mirandola), and scientists. Ferdinand II (1610-1670) and his brother Leopoldo (1617-1675) founded the Accademia del Cimento (Academy of Experiment), a forerunner of modern scientific academies, and Galileo Galilei tutored three generations of Medici children.

Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (1360-1429) is considered the father of both branches of the Medici dynasty, through sons Cosimo the Elder (1388-1464) and Lorenzo the Elder (1395-1440).

The family had an elite, but not royal, origin. With their wealth based on the wool trade and textiles, Giovanni di Bicci founded the Medici Bank in Florence, the first truly international bank. When the Medici Bank became the official bank of the papacy in Rome, its success was ensured. As "God's banker," the family was, for a time, the wealthiest family in Europe.

Giovanni di Bicci invented limited liability through a network of regional franchises, and the bank was the first to use double-entry bookkeeping in their general ledger system, an accounting practice still employed today.

As the family's financial influence grew, they became embroiled in the politics of Florence and Tuscany. Based on the motto "amici degli amici" ("friends of friends"), the Medici were the de facto "godfathers of the Renaissance;" they gained, and retained, their powerful position through scheming, bribery, corruption, and violence. They struggled with other prominent Florentine families (Albizzi, Pazzi, Strozzi), often resulting in murder and mayhem. On Easter Sunday, 1478, the Pazzi family staged an attack on brothers Lorenzo (1449-1492) and Giuliano de'

Medici (1453-1478) at the Florence Cathedral, in front of 10,000 worshippers. Giuliano was killed; Lorenzo was wounded, but survived. A "benevolent dictator," Lorenzo was the prototype for Machiavelli's The Prince. In 1537, Duke Alessandro de' Medici (1510-1537) was assassinated in his bed under the ruse of an assignation. Poison was an important part of the Medici repertoire, and several documents housed in the Medici archives implicate members of the family in poisoning plots—both within the family and outside the family.

The family's personal appetites and indiscretions were also legendary. Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici (1475-1521), Pope Leo X, liked young boys—especially when they jumped out of cakes!

He also painted a young boy gold and paraded him through the streets of Florence, as a symbol of the golden age; the child died, poisoned by the body paint. Many Medici males sired children out of wedlock. Giulio de' Medici (1478-1534), Pope Clement VII, was himself illegitimate; as pope, he fathered a child with his mistress, a black slave. His son, the assassinated Duke Alessandro, was called "Il Moro;" he was the first black head of state. In toto, the family produced four popes—Leo X (1513-1521), Clement VII (1523-1534), Pius IV (1559-1565), and Leo XI (1605). They married into the royal houses of Europe, and two Medici daughters reigned as queens of France: Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589), wife of Henry II, and Marie de' Medici (1575-1642), wife of Henri IV.

The first gem collection began under Cosimo the Elder (1389-1464) during the early fifteenth century. His son, Piero the Gouty (1416-1469), established a special place in his study to house the family's growing collection. Cosimo's grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492), amassed an amazing collection of gemstones, including the engraved carnelian "Seal of Nero" and the "Tazza Farnese," a cameo cup of four-layered sardonyx agate. His remarkable collection survived the family's exile and remained under Medici control until Duke Alessandro's widow,

Margaret married Ottavio Farnese, the Duke of Parma, in 1538. Lorenzo's magnificent collection was part of her dowry.

Alessandro's cousin from the "junior" branch of the family, Cosimo I (1519-1574), assumed the title Duke of Florence and was eventually named Grand Duke of Tuscany. He and his wife, Eleonora of Toledo, lavished attention on the renovations of the Palazzo Vecchio and the Pitti Palace; they also constructed the Uffizi office complex and the Vasari corridor that connects the two palaces over the Arno River. Cosimo I rebuilt the Medici collection at great personal expense. Benvenuto Cellini was one of their far-ranging "purchase agents," and he is attributed with the gold restoration of a fragmentary Hellenistic cameo depicting a male chariot driver.

Several important pieces entered the collection at this time, including the carving of Girolomo Savonarola by Giovanni delle Opere—also known as "delle Corniole" because of his preference for working in carnelian.

After Cosimo I's death, his two sons continued to acquire both ancient and modern cameos and carvings. Francesco I (1541-1587) asked architect Buontalenti to enclose the loggia over the upper floors of the Uffizi offices to house the family's growing art collection, creating the museum that we know today. When he died, his brother Ferdinando I (1549-1609) gave up his position as a cardinal in Rome and returned to Florence, bringing his art collection with him. He founded the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, which specialized in the carving and inlay of hard, semiprecious stones. It continues today as part of the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage; the institute is a world leader in restoration and conservation and is one of two state conservation schools in Italy.

The Baroque Period includes Cosimo II (1590-1621), the eldest son of Ferdinando I; Ferdinando II (1610-1670), the son of Cosimo II; and Cosimo III (1639-1723), Ferdinando II's son. The family faced financial hardship at this time, although they continued to acquire gemstone carvings and cameos. Pieces were added to the family collection through marriage: from Maria Maddalena

d'Austria, wife of Cosimo II, and from Vittoria della Rovere, wife of Ferdinando II. The collection also grew thanks to Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, who was an avid collector of cameos, carvings, and small, hard-stone sculptures in the round. When he died in 1675, his grandnephew Cosimo III inherited his collection of over 900 pieces. Many of the pieces acquired during this period were mounted or framed in gold.

The arrival of Vittoria della Rovere, a dour religious fanatic, cast a pall over the Medici family. She influenced her grandchildren, the three children of Cosimo III. Although all three married, none had children; they represent the last generation of the Medici. Gian Gastone (1671-1737) was the last Grand Duke. Cosimo III's daughter, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (1667-1743), was the last member of the Medici family. She lived in relative isolation in the Pitti Palace, still collecting art. Her last will and testament prohibited in perpetuity the dissolution of the vast Medici artistic collections or the removal of any of the collections from Florence or the Grand Duchy—thus ensuring that Florence would remain an important artistic center.

By the early 1700s, word of the spectacular Medici collection spread throughout Europe and made Florence a mandatory stop on the Grand Tour. To accommodate these "cultural tourists," impressions were made of the most spectacular cameos and gemstones. Some of these souvenir pieces are on display in the exhibition, along with stone samples and some of the instruments, machines, tools, and equipment used to carve the cameos and other small, hard-stone pieces.

Gems of the Medici is organized by Contemporanea Progetti, Florence, Italy, in collaboration with Museo degli Argenti, Palazzo Pitti, and the Museo Archeologico Nazionale Firenze. Photos are courtesy of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, Rome, Italy.

Collecting and Types of Objects in the Medici Collection

Author: Jody Vaughan
Modified by Liliana Leopardi

Beautiful hard stone carvings including intaglios, cameos, seals, miniature busts, statues, bowls, urns, vases, and other carved objects of art are the core of the spectacular *Gems of the Medici* collection and exhibit. Other artifacts include placchette (small plaques) and coins. A sprinkling of mosaics from the Grand Ducal workshops may also be on view. Carved busts and painted images of the Medici, plus storyboards will round out the exhibit.

Collecting and Collections: A Historic Overview

For thousands of years, kings and emperors - the wealthy and powerful - have commissioned beautiful, petite carved, hand-worked, and molded works of art. And for almost as long, religious institutions, royals, and power brokers have coveted and collected them! One of the earliest documented collections of carved hardstones, 4th century BC, belonged to Alexander the Great.

Roman Rulers such as Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, his wife Livia, and their successors, followed suit. Some of these exalted leaders (and fellow collectors) appear on exhibit artifacts.

By the 15th century, these beautiful carved works were sought by kings, queens, princes, popes, and cardinals! Renaissance collecting was not only for art's sake but considered a sign of high intellect. It became very competitive, sometimes causing nasty disputes between buyers who were willing to spend "big bucks" for desired pieces.

The Medici displayed their extraordinary miniature masterpieces to their guests and to artists who drew inspiration from them. Many were intricately set or reproduced as molded plaquettes by the finest goldsmiths, silversmiths and craftsmen. As collectors died or fell out of power, and as new alliances were formed (often through marriage), collection sizes waxed and waned. Some pieces changed hands many times.

The oldest Medici "antique" artifact displayed in our exhibit dates from the 1st Century BC. The Medici also collected "new pieces" which were made during the Renaissance. Under the **patronage system**, the Medici assembled the finest artists of the day and provided the funding, quality materials, tools, and workshops required to create fine works of art. Fascination with Classical Greco-Roman art reemerged, particularly in the acquisition or recreation of scenes depicting the ancient gods and stories from classical literature.

During the dark and middle ages, the church banned and even destroyed art depicting the ancient mythological gods, considering it pagan worship. Some pieces in the exhibit are fragments, yet still considered very collectible. In a few cases, Medici master artists could skillfully restore the completeness of a scene by recreating the "missing" part - casting it in gold using the wax casting technique, and then integrating the gold and stone portions of the scene together.

Hardstone Carvings

The term "glyptics" or "glyptic arts" refers to small carved stones, including cylinder seals and inscriptions, particularly when used in archaeological context. The oldest known carvings were made from soft stones. This changed as the art of stone carving evolved and technology improved. By the Classical Greek period stone carving with a drill and cutting wheel was well established, and by the so called "Golden Age" of the Classic period (5th to 4th cen. BC), use of hardstones was common. In gem carving, a hardstone is rated 6 to 7 or above (with 10 highest) on the Moh's scale of hardness. Carved softstones don't tend to weather the test of time as well!

Greco-Roman carvers often used quartz family stones, including semi-translucent chalcedony and orange to brownish carnelian, clear rock and purple amethyst crystal, multi hued and layered agates, and uniquely patterned jaspers. Softer azurite and malachite were popular for their blue and green colors, although not as durable. Alexander the Great's eastern campaigns (4th cen. BC) introduced the Greek world to many new gemstone materials. A favored new hardstone for carving - sardonyx - was introduced from India and Arabia. Sardonyx (quartz family) was composed of straight and parallel alternating bands of semi-translucent onyx and sard - a deep orange-red to brownish variety of chalcedony. Sardonyx usually included layers in the following colors: white, orange-red to brown layers, and sometimes black or gray. When carved well, lighter images stood out against the darker background. Colors from up to 5 layers could be incorporated into an image by varying the depth of carving when engraving cameos. Many Medici artifacts were carved from this material. Note: Although similar in look, sard usually appears to be darker than carnelian.

In Greco-Roman times, the use of engraved stones was not restricted to specific ranks or classes – except by cost. Ancient Greeks and Romans often wore images of favorite gods as amulets – for protection, courage, or support. Greeks usually carved figures of gods, literary characters, and soldiers in the nude – displaying well defined muscles and tension – in the prime of life. As Rome gained power, many Greeks artists were imported (as freemen and slaves) to carve stones.

Whereas most Greeks still carved figures as nudes, native Roman carvers usually preferred to clad their figures in beautifully draped robes. By Renaissance times, the images were no longer created to be worn as amulets - but to be appreciated for their artistic and intellectual value. Alexander the Great also introduced a new phenomenon – the cameo portrait. Greco-Roman rulers were exalted above all others or considered to be deities. They were portrayed with god or goddess-like features as well as deity symbols (i.e. Zeus's ivy crown), so we are not truly sure what they looked like. During the Renaissance the Medici and others continued the cameo portrait tradition, but with realistic depictions (true images) of the subjects rendered.

Cameos and Intaglios

Gemstone engraving on Classical Greek and-Roman intaglios and cameos, considered miniature sculptural art, concentrated major drama into a minute space. These pieces have sometimes been characterized as "messages in hardstone." In ancient times they served as storyboards depicting ethics and morals, affirmation of faith, or as a talisman for protection. As historic references, they have provided a record of philosophies, events, and people of the past.

These two carving styles are discussed below.

Intaglio: Intaglio (in-tal-yoh) is a form of carving in which the artist engraves down into the surface of the stone to hollow out a recessed image. The earliest intaglios preceded cameos by thousands of years. They could be engraved with either pictures, words, or both. They made wonderful seals. When you pressed an intaglio into wax or some form of malleable material, it filled the stone's hollowed out image(s) or words, leaving a raised mirror image imprinted in the wax when the intaglio was lifted. On the other hand, a cameo would leave a recessed image when pressed into the wax. Most people liked the raised wax imprint and preferred intaglios as seals.

The beautiful intaglio of Hercules demonstrates the importance of stone choice when carving an intaglio. The translucency and lovely purple color of the amethyst make the image really 'pop' and show to good advantage.

Cameo: The word cameo in its truest sense is used to describe a relief image raised higher than its background and carved from one piece (of stone or other medium). The image itself is actually part of the stone which has not been carved away - stone around it was removed to make the image appear raised. If a relief image and other layers are pieced and glued together, it is sometimes referred to as a composite cameo.

Historians widely hold that the birthplace of the cameo, particularly in the shape and style we recognize and copy today, was in Alexandria - the town founded by Alexander the Great at the mouth of the Nile in Egypt (332 BC). Sardonyx from India and Arabia and multilayered stones helped carvings stand out. Layered stones, with their difference in colors and shades, became the medium of choice.

A cameo portrait of Alessandro de' Medici, 1510-1537, shows the face carved in black stone. He is thought to have been the son of Giulio de' Medici (later Pope Clement VII) and his mistress, a Moorish (black) servant of the Medici household. Alessandro, who became duke of Florence from 1530-37, was assassinated by his cousin. Some experts think that carved Renaissance cameos featuring Ethiopian/Moorish women may have been sparked by the Pope's mistress.

Today intaglios and cameos can be made from just about any material, even latex or plastic, but the most popular are made of stone, coral, shell, and glass. The earliest common use of shell, with its characteristics of translucency (light showing through) and layers of different colors, began in the latter Renaissance (15^{th} -16^{th} cen.). It was a softer, easier to carve, readily available option when quality layered hardstones were difficult or cost prohibitive to obtain. The most common shells used at the time were mussel or cowry shells.

Seals: The earliest forms of seals predated intaglios and cameos, but they would become the most common form of seal during Classical times. Seals were widely used in the average household to protect goods and pantries. They were also used to identify, protect, authorize, or tax goods. Both the seal and the mark produced by it are called a seal. A mark was placed on an item by pressing the carved seal (signet ring) into wax, clay, or paper pulp in a strategic place on the item, thereby leaving a seal on the opening. Sometimes seals were just brushed with ink and used to mark an object. Intricate, finely detailed seals set in gold signet rings became the choice of the elite of Greece and Rome. Most important to Kings, Emperors, and other powerful entities – unbroken wax seals were proof that correspondences and documents hadn't been tampered with. If seals were broken prior

to an item reaching its intended recipient, punishment could be swift and harsh. Plus, the mark of an intricately carved, unique seal made forgery difficult (distinctive personal signatures did not exist at the time).

The exhibit includes a carnelian (also spelled cornelian) stone which was part of the Seal of Nero. The carved scene on the stone depicts the story of Apollo and Marsyas. He challenged Apollo to a flute playing contest, which was judged by Midas who proclaimed him the Victor. Apollo not taking kindly to this loss cursed Midas and punished Marsyas by having him flayed alive.
The clear message is DO NOT challenge the one with the power! An interesting tidbit - carnelian was a favored stone for seals because hot wax didn't usually stick to it.

Placchetta (Plaquette): A number of artifacts in the exhibit are described as placchette (plural of plachetta), a.k.a. plaquettes. A placchetta (Italian) is a small bas relief plaque or plaquette, a form of molded sculpture made of metal -particularly bronze, gilded base metal with gold or silver overlay, and a select few made of silver or gold. They depicted mythological/story scenes, historic and important events, powerful people, decorative designs, and/or written words. They were created to commemorate occasions, given as gifts, or just used for decoration or identification. They might be worn as a personal token of allegiance or displayed to show one's ties to the great and powerful. They might be found on the front of a book, or marking a vase (urn), sword, and many other items.

The principal means for "sharing" the iconography reproduced on the cameos and carvings of Lorenzo were bronze plaques, obtained through the fusion of wax casts taken directly from the originals. A few "copies" were made to be studied by artists, scholars, and select friends. Copies were kept to a minimum so as not to dilute the value of the collection.

Coins: (NOTE: Some coins may be in the exhibit, plus, Renaissance hardstone carvings, especially intaglios and cameos, were often fashioned from or inspired by images on ancient coins.)

Since their inception, coins have been collected – for their monetary and historic value as well as for their artistic beauty and worth. Coin collecting became so popular and historically important it was given its own impressive sounding name - numismatics! And try this one on for size . . . a coin collector is a numismatist!

Money travels and talks – in more ways than one! Coins not only told someone you could afford to buy their wares but they were the best form of advertisement and proof of power for ancient rulers. Coins spread far and wide quickly. New rulers immediately had coins minted with their image on one side; gods, battles, deeds, or people they wished associated with themselves on the reverse. An example of ancient artifacts collected by the Medici is three coins minted by Nero. He appears on the obverse (heads side). Apollo, his favorite associated god, is most often seen on the reverse portraying one of his many important roles. Coins depicting female royals sometimes had goddesses and priestesses on the reverse. As an example, records show that a Medici cameo featuring a Bacchante (Priestess of Bacchus) was fashioned from an ancient coin.

Using these classical, small, often detailed and beautiful coins as models for Renaissance art reproductions was a fairly common practice.

Vases, Urns, Ewers, Coolers, Reliquaries: Early on, starting with Cosimo, Piero and Lorenzo, the Medici collected exquisite hardstone carvings in the form of containers such as vases, urns, ewers, bowls and reliquaries. Many were carved from opaque hardstones (no light comes through) such as beautifully colored and patterned jaspers or azurite with its lovely blue color and an interesting matrix of pyrite and other inclusions. Other pieces were carved from transparent rock crystal or amethyst with beautifully rendered scenes depicted. Translucent stones such as moss agate were employed as well. Some pieces had bases, handles and other richly detailed decorative additions made of fine metals and jewels. Many analogous items were donated to the Treasury of the church of San Lorenzo by Medici Popes, Leo X and Clement VII.

Mosaics (Pietra Dure): The gems collected by Cosimo, Piero and Lorenzo, were enhanced by the spectacular decorative art schemes commissioned by the Medici. The palaces and Medici buildings were filled with carved stonework, beautiful enameling, and mosaics.

The mosaic inlay technique used was known as pietra dure meaning "hard rocks" in Italian. Cut and highly polished hardstones were fitted together to create an image. Pietra Dure reached its height of artistry in the Grand Ducal workshops of the Medici. Intricate, colorful scenes or geometric designs were created as individual prepared stones were loosely assembled on a substrate (backing) and then each glued down individually. Pieces of stone fit so perfectly, it appeared seamless. The undersides of the stones were grooved and interlocked, kind of like a jigsaw puzzle, with everything held in place by a frame. Many different colored and patterned stones were used in the array including hardstones mentioned earlier in this paper, many colors of marble, and other semiprecious or precious stones. While pieta dure panels were usually flat, the Medici workshops created a few examples with images in low relief.

EXHIBITION STORYLINE

Introduction: *Meet the Medici Family*

Even before Rome conquered the ancient world, the City of Florence was born on the banks of the Arno River in central Italy, but its destiny as a "city of art" began in the 14th century. The city skyline is still dominated today by the fabled Dome of Brunelleschi, completed in 1434. The city's streets and alleys still resound with the stories of the celebrated artists and their immortal works – stories of Ghiberti, Donatello, Botticelli, Michelangelo - architects, painters, sculptors but also goldsmiths, silversmiths, engravers as well. The prosperity of Florence was certainly a factor in this gathering of talent, but most important was the presence of the Medici dynasty in Florence. For three hundred years this one family, generation after generation dominated city affairs and steered the course of art history. It was for the Medici that the artists came to Florence, it was the Medici who funded their workshops and it was the Medici who commissioned and collected the masterpieces of art and antiquity today conserved in the museums of Florence. From founding father to the last Grand Duke, the immense power and wealth of this great dynasty was invested in their legendary collections of which, the collection renowned as the *Gems of the Medici* is perhaps the finest in the world.

The story of the Medici begins with **GIOVANNI DI BICCI DE' MEDICI (1360 - 1429)** founder of the Medici dynasty. His sons would sire the two historical branches of the family.
The prosperity of medieval Florence in the late 1300's induced Giovanni (di Bicci) de' Medici to abandon agriculture and engage in commercial activities, namely banking in Florence. Little interested in politics, he was first of all a businessman and soon proprietor of a bank with branches throughout Europe, credited with the first truly international banking system.
Later in life he proved himself both a philanthropist and patron of the arts.

Upon his death, his son became head of the family, **Cosimo (The elder) de' Medici (1389 - 1464);** proclaimed *Pater Patriae* (Father of the Fatherland) upon his death. Cosimo the Elder embraced politics to extend the family's power and influence. Financial shrewdness and political astuteness established him as the supreme arbitrator of Florentine affairs however he would first endure imprisonment and exile. Summoned back to Florence in 1434, he wisely consolidated power. As his banking empire expanded so did the coffers of the family fortune. Under his guidance, Florence experienced the beginning of the Renaissance. All the great painters, architects, and artisans of the day were busy at work. For Cosimo the Elder, the first Renaissance palace was built. And it was Cosimo, the Elder, who began the Medici gem collection in the first half of the 1400s; his passion and preference for engraved gemstones was inherited by his son, Piero il Gottoso, (The Gouty) who dedicated a special place to the collection in his celebrated study in the family palace, displaying them alongside coins, medals, sculptures, jewels, vases in semi-precious stone and books with precious bindings.

Section 1: *The Gemstone Collection of Lorenzo, the Magnificent: Origins and Dispersion of a Princely Treasure*

LORENZO (THE MAGNIFICENT) DE' MEDICI (1449 - 1492)

Grandson of Cosimo the Elder, son of Piero de' Medici.

Under his leadership, Florence was the epicenter of the Renaissance, thanks to the intellectuals and artists of his court - Verrocchio, Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci - as well as philosophers, writers and poets. His intellectual gifts and complex personality allowed him to function in a myriad of roles - scholar, statesman, collector of antiquities, patron of the arts and protector of artists. He founded a school for sculpture in the Medici Orchards where the young Michelangelo was discovered. Dedicated to the diffusion of Platonism, he expanded the family collection of ancient manuscripts that became the core of the Biblioteca Laurenziana and the collection of cameos and gemstones. He spent lavishly on the construction and embellishment of the Medici villas situated in the Florentine hillsides. Although he never held public office within the republic, he was an extremely astute political leader. Unfortunately, his death in 1492, the year Columbus discovered America, signaled turbulent times for Florence; his heir was incapable of governing and the family was exiled. Much admired by Niccolò Machiavelli as the perfect example of a benevolent dictator, he was the model for Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Section Background:

This first section of the exhibition is dedicated entirely to the figure of Lorenzo, the Magnificent (n. 1-2) and his collection of gemstones, composed of pieces of great worth and prestige, such as the intaglio in chalcedony of *Diomede and the Palladium* (n.8), today lost, but known by its casts and copies, and the splendid cornelian with *Apollo, Olympos and Marsyas* (n.16) – the so-called *Seal of Nero* – very much admired by 15th century humanists and artists. Both of these exemplars became part of the Medici treasure after the death of Pope Paolo II Barbo (n. 9), the most important collector of cameos and carvings of all the Renaissance, and owner of an extraordinary collection of more than 800 gemstones of inestimable value. In the figure of this pontiff, admirably portrayed in an cornelian carving from the Museo degli Argenti, Lorenzo found the inspiration for the creation of his own treasure, spending considerable sums to acquire pieces of great value; to do this, he benefited from the financial activities of the Medici bank that under his direction was transformed into a formidable instrument for the acquisition of rare and precious objects. The exemplars of his collection exercised an enormous fascination on contemporary artists of the time. The principal means for the diffusion of the iconography reproduced on the cameos and carvings of Lorenzo were bronze plaques (nn. 7, 13, 15, 17), obtained through the fusion of wax casts taken directly from the originals.

Contrary to what happened to other collections of the era, the death of the Magnificent did not cause the immediate dispersion of his gems; they continued to be kept in the Medici palace in Via Larga by his son, Piero, until the Florentine government exiled the Medici family in 1494. Overall, the descendents of Lorenzo, well aware of the enormous cultural prestige derived from the possession of the gem collection, managed to preserve it intact until 1537. The assassination of Duke Alessandro (n. 27-28) signified that the collection would pass to his young widow, Margherita of Austria who in 1538, would give it to her new consort, Ottavio-Farnese, as part of her dowry.

Section 2: *The Rebirth of the Medici Collection: Cosimo I, Francesco I, Ferdinando I*

COSIMO I DE' MEDICI (1519 - 1574)

The first Grand Duke; son of the secondary branch of the Medici family.
Called to Florence to impose order after the assassination of his cousin, he quickly consolidated power and through military prowess defeated rival city-states. In 1569, he was proclaimed Grand Duke with rights of hereditary succession, forever ending the Florentine republic. His building plans were equally ambitious. Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of city government, was renovated into a family residence by his favorite architect, Giorgio Vasari. His wife, Eleonora of Toledo purchased the Pitti Palace on the other side of the Arno River, entrusting its massive renovation into a royal palace to Bartolomeo Ammanati while Niccolò Pericoli known as Tribolo created the surrounding Boboli Gardens. Vasari was also commissioned to construct the *Uffizi*, (offices) to administer the duchy and the Vasari Corridor that spans the river over the boutiques of the Ponte Vecchio and connects the two palaces. With a pragmatic eye towards the arts, he commissioned the best artists of the day – Bronzino, Santi di Tito, Cellini, Giambologna – to produce portraits and masterpieces that glorified his accomplishments and the Medici family.

FRANCESCO I (1541 - 1587)

First born son of Cosimo I. He succeeded his father as Grand Duke in 1574. More scholar than sovereign, his interests were in the natural sciences, chemistry and alchemy. He hired architect Bernardo Buontalenti to enclose the loggia of the upper floors of the Uffizi to create a gallery to house the family art collections, in effect creating the museum that today is known as the Uffizi Gallery.

FERDINANDO I (1549 - 1609)

Second son of Cosimo I. Upon his brother's death in 1587, Ferdinando I would give up his life as a cardinal in Rome to assume his role as Grand Duke in Florence bringing with him his collection of Greek statues. To ensure the future of the dynasty, he married Cristina of Lorraine; their wedding celebrations would be the finest ever seen in Florence. For twenty two years he would prove to be an accomplished statesman. Despite his passion for antiquities, he also followed new artistic developments and founded the Opificio delle Pietre Dure (still operating today) specializing in the cutting and inlay of hard stones.

Section Background:
This section is dedicated to the beginnings of what would become the grand ducal collection. After the definitive removal from Florence of the Lauretian collection, Cosimo I de' Medici (n. 29-30) took on the formation of a new collection. According to documents registered during that time, the new Duke and his wife, Eleonora di Toledo, did not spare any expense to acquire gems of great value, both modern and antique. In their acquisitions, the couple was guided and counseled by a network of external agents, ready to satisfy their every request, and the consultation of trusted artists such as Benvenuto Cellini to whom the splendid restoration in gold of a Hellenistic cameo with a chariot driven by a masculine figure is traditionally attributed (n. 37). Among the pieces that entered the Medici treasure with Cosimo, stands out the excellent cornelian carving with the effigy of Girolomo Savonarola (n. 34), the work of the celebrated engraver Giovanni delle Opere, nicknamed "delle Corniole" (of the cornelian) due to the type of stone he preferred for his work. In 1562, stands out the acquisition by Eleonora of an amethyst of notable dimensions engraved with great mastery and depicting the head of Hercules (n. 31), mythological hero of grand importance to the Medici as he was considered a founder of the city of Florence. Relevant to this period was the production of "fake" antiquities, in response to the demand for such pieces on the antiquities market. Due to the type of mount and style of the re-figuration, both the large cameo, *Iphigenia in Tauris with Orestes and Pylades* (n. 48) and the onyx relief, the *Bust of Agustus* (n. 33), inserted into a precious frame of enameled gold, dating to the first half of the 1500s, can be attributed to this period.

After the semi-retirement of Cosimo I, his sons Francesco I (n. 40) and Ferdinando I (n. 45) continued the collecting and commissioning of cameos and carvings begun by their father. Francesco, in particular, heir to all his father's passions from mineralogy to alchemy – of which he was a zealous and constant practitioner – was a great patron and shrewd collector, particularly in the Roman market. There, for example in 1574, he commissioned a cameo portrait of his parents from the engraver, Domenico Compagni (n. 42).

Section 3: *Baroque Splendours, Cosimo II, Ferdinando II, Cosimo III*

COSIMO II (1590 - 1621)
First born son of Ferdinando I. Only seventeen when he ascended the throne, the family coffers were empty and he closed the Medici bank, yet once again the Pitti Palace was renovated through tax revenue. His most significant cultural act was the protection and patronage extended to Galileo Galilei whose controversial observations were making enemies among the inquisitional followers of Church doctrine. He nominated Galileo as "Head Mathematician of the Grand Duke".

FERDINANDO II (1610-1670)
First born son of Cosimo II. Like his father, he would protect Galileo after his condemnation and sentencing to house arrest by gifting the Villa at Acetri to the old scientist. Married to Vittoria della Rovere, a dark forbidding religious fanaticism descended upon the family yet the family art collection was particularly enriched by the works of art brought in 1631 by Vittoria delle Rovere from the Court in Urbino as her dowry, including works by the Venetian master Renaissance painter, Titian, in particular *The Venus of Urbino***.**

COSIMO III (1639 - 1723)
Son of Ferdinando II. Due to irreconcilable differences, his wife would return to her native France. He would live for eighty-one years, but his three children, the last generation of the Medici, were subject to the fanaticism of their grandmother. Although all three would marry, all would remain childless.

Section Background:
From the end of 1630s, documents related to the grand ducal collection of gems register a significant increase in cameos and carvings. That increase can be partly accredited to the assets joining the Medici collection coming from Maria Maddalena d'Austria, wife Cosimo II (n. 58), and Vittoria della Rovere, who married Ferdinando II (n. 59) in 1623. An inventory conducted by Ferdinand II registers more than 500 exemplars, many of which mounted in rings or in simple frames of gold with eyelets that served to attach the gems with ribbons to numbered trays in the special cabinets placed in the Tribune of the Uffizi.

Between 1675 and 1680, the collection was enriched by the important nucleus of gems belonging to Cardinal Leopoldo de'Medici (n. 79), esteemed art export and tireless collector of antiquities, paintings, drawings, sculpture, miniatures and medallions. It was he who acquired the entire collection of the celebrated antiquarian Leonardo Agostini, Commissioner for Antiquities of Rome for Pope Alessandro VII. Beyond a large number of cameos and carvings, Leopoldo also brought together various exemplars of small sculpture in hard stones, crafted totally in the round, for which he developed a true passion. Examples are the precious *Herm with bust of Hercules* (n. 82) that once belonged to Agostini, and *Female Bust* (n. 85) of the late 16th century. On other occasions, it was the rarity of the material used that attracted his attention as in the case of the large cameo, *Hercules with the Nemian Lion* (n. 80) made from the very rare "stone stellaria"

Upon his death in 1675, the over 900 exemplars of his collection were inherited by his nephew, Grand Duke Cosimo III (n. 60-64). During his reign, the artisan workshops of the court, wisely guided by Giovanni Battista Foggini, played an important in the training of new engravers. Giuseppe Antonio Torricelli who was taught in the laboratories of the Galleria dei Lavori, was the most important engraver of hard stones in the service of Cosimo III (n. 68), and head of a noted family

of artisans active in Florence in the first half of the 1700s. Re-confronting the work of masters in the grand ducal manufacture of the early decades of the 1600s, Toricelli sought to adhere the difficult art of sculpture to that of the mosaic in pietre dure, creating reliefs, figurines and busts composed of different stones, worked separately and then assembled to form an integrated whole.

Section 4: *Twilight of a Dynasty – Grand Duke Gian Gastone and the Electress Palantine Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici*

GIAN GASTONE (1671 - 1737)
The last Grand Duke. Upon the death of his older rebellious brother, the second son of Cosimo III, the melancholy Gian Gastone would become the last Grand Duke until his death in 1737.

ANNA MARIA LUISA DE' MEDICI (1667 - 1743)
Daughter of Cosimo III and the last of the Medici. Upon her brother's death, the Grand Duchy passed to Francis of Lorraine (Austria) as territorial possession but the family possessions passed to the seventy year old sister of the last Grand Duke, widow of the Elector Palatine. She would live out her life in relative seclusion in the Pitti Palace, ever the Medici, working to complete the Chapel of the Princes and collecting still life. Upon her death in 1743, her last testament expressly prohibited in perpetuity the dispersion of the vast patrimony of the Medici from Florence and the Grand Duchy.

Section Background:
With Gian Gastone (n. 86), the last Grand Duke of the Medici dynasty, the acquisition of gems became more rare and sporadic. None-the-less, the Grand Duke was interested in certain collections that came on the market, and succeeded in merging them into the family collection. Without a doubt, the most important collection acquired by Gian Gastone was that of the Abbot, Pietro Andrea Andreini, comprised of 300 pieces, many signed by the famous engravers of Antiquity. From the Adreini collection came such small masterpieces as the cameo, *Amore riding a Lion* (n. 87), bearing the name in Greek of Protarchos, and the carving in amethyst, *Hercules and Iola* (n. 88), signed by Taurus, both engravers of the 1st century BCE.
With the re-entry to Florence of the Electress Palatine, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (n. 90), in 1717, it can be verified that 3 cameos and 37 carvings, more-or-less mythological in subject, from her personal collection entered the grand ducal collection. Of these gemstones, many now conserved at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Florence, outstanding are the head of *Medusa* (n. 91) in chalcedony zaffirino of notable dimensions and a small relief in gold-leaf that surrounds a gemstone in chalcedony depicting *Apollo* (n. 92).

In the early decades of the 1700s, the fame of the Medici collection spread throughout Europe and was soon a part of the must-see wonders of Florence for travelers on the Grand Tour. The

notoriety of the collection among erudite and cultured visitors contributed in a significant way to the circulation of a series of impressions in "sulfur" taken from the most prestigious gemstones and specially made by the workshops of the court (n. 96-97).

In preparation of the passage of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany to the royal house of the Lorraine, (Austria) the gem collection, like all the other Medici treasures, was included in the so-called Family Pact, the agreement by which the Electress Palatine imposed the obligation that none of the her family's art collections could be removed from Florence or other locations of the Grand Duchy. None-the-less, after her death in 1743, the major part of the gemstones was deprived of their golden frames and precious stones. Today, as testimony to the extraordinary magnificence of the collection of the Medici court, there remains only a limited quantity of exemplars still blessed with their splendid original mountings which are now presented in this exhibition for the first time to the American public.

Section 5: *How They Were Crafted: Materials and Technique*

The final section is comprised of instruments and stone samples from the Galleria dei Lavori, the celebrated workshop specializing in hard stones (pietra dure) founded by Ferdinando I de' Medici in 1588. The selection of instruments (n. 102-103-104), mainly from the 18th century, illustrate the technical processes, machines and tools employed to create the cameos, carvings and other objects in hard stone of such small dimensions and minute detail.

Artists and Art Patronage Under the Medici

Author: Kathleen Eakin (original 10/14/2012) – modifications by Liliana Leopardi March 2013
Submitted by Jody Vaughan and Gail Larsen Peterkin 12/12/2012

Art and Attitudes in Renaissance Italy: The hallmark of the Renaissance was its emphasis on humanism, with its focus on the value of the individual and intellectual individual achievement. Artists began signing their works and were recognized for their personal efforts. In art, as well as across society, the myths and arts of ancient Greece and Rome underwent a revival. Artists reintroduced the concept of perspective and three-dimensionality that had been lost since antiquity. Their work followed the precepts of the Greco-Roman world in their regular, balanced compositions, which were commissioned by prominent individuals, families, and civic-minded organizations that wanted to show piety and gain influence by showing off their wealth. There was a real interest in learning in general, including art, music, books, and science among the citizens of Florence and other city-states.

Training and the Guilds: Guilds were organizations established to support their members, which included apprentices and master craftsmen, economically (by influencing the tax laws), to train artists-to-be, and to control the quality of works of art. Apprentices usually trained under the supervision of a master artist for five or six years, starting at age seven to fifteen A contract was drawn up between the father of the artist-to-be and the master artist, specifying exactly how long the young man would live with the master learning his trade. (The requirement that they live with the master impeded the entrance of young girls into the system.)

There were three steps to complete their training: apprenticeship, certification, and providing post-certification assistance to a master artist. An apprentice to a painter would grind pigments, apply plaster for frescoes (paintings done on wet board), and get panels ready for painting or gilding. A sculptor's apprentice would mold stone, terra cotta (baked clay), bronze, or wood into the general shape of a statue designed by his master. Later, he would move on to more difficult work. After apprenticeship, the artist-in-training would become a member of a specific guild. For example, a painter would join the apothecaries' guild, since they ground pigments. A sculptor would join the stoneworkers' guild. Because gold and silk threads were often wound around one another in weaving, a goldsmith would become a member of the silk guild. This certification by a guild would enable a budding artist to be an assistant to a master artist; it would be difficult for a young artist to attract commissions. A newly certified assistant would do background work on a painting, block in architectural structures, and give final touches to decorative work, while the master would paint the most important figures. At times, the master would delegate the painting of lesser figures to an assistant, who would work directly under his master's watchful eye. Only then would a young artist be able to establish a workshop and produce works of art of his own on commission and become a master artist himself.

Commissions and Contracts: Patrons vied for the best artists. Without commissions offered by wealthy patrons, we would have few if any of the masterpieces of the Renaissance. Artists created their works of art, not only to satisfy their own creativity, but also to meet the requirements of their clients. Together, the ability of these artists and the money of the Medici were responsible for some of the greatest artworks of all time.

When a commission was offered and accepted, a service contract would be drawn up between the artist and patron that stipulated:

That drawings, models, or designs had to be approved by the patron.

That the artist himself had to work on the piece of art (not just assistants).

The size of the panel (if it was for a painting).

Whether or not the artist would undertake other commissioned artwork during this time.

The types of pigment and amount of gold or other precious metals or gemstones.

The date the work was to be completed.

Terms of payment—an annual salary and/or a specified amount, such as 150 lire, for the work itself. (Sometimes an artist would only be paid for the days that he himself worked on the piece.) A patron might or might not provide materials. The artist would only be paid if his work was acceptable to the patron.

Consequences if the artist did not abide by terms of the contract. (The artist would not be paid, would be paid less, or would receive no more commissions from that patron.)

Family Chapels: Wealthy families provided money for chapels for their own exclusive use, near the altar of a church, separating the family from the rest of the elite. The Peruzzi, Baroncelli, and Bardi families, who were rivals of the Medici, funded chapels inside Santa Croce. The Brancacci family funded decorative work in Santa Maria del Carmine. Even wealthier, more powerful families built their own chapels next to, but separate from, churches. The Medici Chapel (Old Sacristy) sits adjacent to San Lorenzo and the Pazzi Chapel is next to Santa Croce. These chapels were used for religious services and as burial sites for the family.

Biographies of Renaissance Artists

Michelangelo Buonarroti

Although Michelangelo was a painter, poet, sculptor, engineer, and architect, he thought of himself primarily as a sculptor. He believed that there was an idea already inside a block of stone. By chipping away at the rock until everything superfluous is cut away, only that idea or image remains. Unlike Leonardo, who felt that painting took more skill and offered more variety in a work of art (i.e., with its use of color), Michelangelo believed that sculpture rose above painting because it involved the creation of a life-like, three dimensional form, not an illusion on a two-dimensional surface.

Soon after Michelangelo's birth, his father returned to his Florentine villa next to a large quarry worked by stonecutters and sculptors. There, Michelangelo was nursed by a stonecutter's wife.

Later, after being put in a school not to his liking, he rebelled; and, to his father's dismay, he insisted on drawing and learning about design. Fortuitously, he met another young artist-to-be, who was already an apprentice to the master painter, Domenico del Ghirlandaio. At the age of fourteen, Michelangelo joined Ghirlandaio's workshop to study there with his friend.

Michelangelo's aptitude for drawing so astounded Ghirlandaio that, when Lorenzo (the Magnificent), asked him to send his best pupils to a new school he was establishing in his palace garden, he sent Michelangelo to start his apprenticeship modeling clay figures under the tutelage of the sculptor, Bertoldo. Lorenzo recognized Michelangelo's talent, and, a year or two later, he took Michelangelo into his own household. With a room and his own place at the family table, Michelangelo was privy to all the erudite discussions about art—and to all the intrigue. When Lorenzo died, a broken-hearted Michelangelo went home. But Piero de' Medici kept in touch whenever he wanted to buy "antique" cameos and intaglios (contemporary works made to look old). Michelangelo excelled at fooling the experts.

The importance of the human body in Renaissance art cannot be overstated. Like Leonardo, Michelangelo dissected dead bodies to learn about anatomy. He used his knowledge to create sculptures such as the Pieta, his rendering of the dead Christ lying in his mother's arms, and David, his depiction in marble of the biblical character as a muscular hero looking warily toward his enemy and sizing him up, with all the pent-up energy and tension that come when a warrior is on the cusp of battle. David was commissioned by the Florence Cathedral Building Committee and set up before the Palazzo della Signoria as a symbol of Florence.

After the death of Pope Julius II, for whose tomb Michelangelo had created sculptures, the artist began taking commissions from the Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII. In addition, for Giuliano de' Medici's tomb, Michelangelo portrayed the deceased as an ancient Roman Emperor, complete with armor. Reclining nudes, representing day and night, duck and dawn.

However, Michelangelo had not escaped the life of a painter. Before Julius' death, he had commissioned Michelangelo to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The artist, who had always had a stormy character, resisted, not wanting to take time off from his real work—sculpting. He finally acceded and began painting a narrative of individual scenes, starting with the genesis of humanity, through the fall from grace, and ending with redemption. Over 300 characters populate this space. On a central panel, the creation of Adam, a reclining Adam begins to come alive thanks to God's creative spark. This simple gesture has a parallel in Greek and Roman mythology, when mortals had dialogues with the gods.

Filippo Brunelleschi

Brunelleschi trained as a goldsmith, but is now primarily known as an Early Renaissance architect. Well versed in ancient Roman building methods, he constructed a dome on Florence Cathedral. However, his development of mathematical linear perspective was his greatest contribution to drawing and design. Artists had earlier used intuitive linear perspective, in which they would approximate the accurate placement of objects in a picture. (Objects that were at a distance would appear smaller and close-up objects, larger.) But, in Brunelleschi's system, artists would find a horizontal line somewhere in the picture plane to represent the horizon line. Then, they would pick a point, which could be anywhere on the line—but often was in the center—and draw diagonal lines from the edges of the picture to that point on the horizon line, thereby establishing a grid on which

figures, objects, or buildings could be placed to make the setting look natural. This mathematical linear perspective was in no small part responsible for the uncannily realistic look of Renaissance paintings.

Brunelleschi was also a sculptor who took part in a competition sponsored by the wool merchant's guild to decide who would have the honor of designing and creating bronze panels for the east doors, later called the Gates of Paradise, of the baptistery in Florence. (Not all commissions came from the Medici.) The subject was the biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac.

Brunelleschi's design was an emotionally charged scene frozen in time at the moment an angel stops Abraham, who is forcefully leaning toward Isaac, with weapon in hand. However, there was another competitor whose work would have to be considered. His name was Lorenzo Ghiberti.

Lorenzo Ghiberti

Ghiberti's entry in the guild's competition, in contrast to Brunelleschi's, resembled Greco-Roman relief sculpture, with its serene, regularly structured design in the depiction of Isaac. In his entry, Abraham, ready to strike, hesitates as though to reconsider his actions. This is possibly the first classical nude since the time of ancient Greece and Rome. It shows Ghiberti's interest in human anatomical mechanisms that make it possible for the human body to move.

Ghiberti was trained in painting and metalwork. He was a talented goldsmith, proven by his precise handling of the gilded bronze. Ghiberti cast his bronze panel in just two pieces—fewer than Brunelleschi used. The guild committee preferred Ghiberti's careful technique and classical style to Brunelleschi's more dramatic rendition of the scene. Also, since Ghiberti only used two panels, less bronze would be needed, and the doors would be lighter. In the eyes of the committee, the realization that the whole project would cost less put Ghiberti over the top. The commission was his.

Donato di Niccolo Bardi (Donatello)

Donatello's *David* was the first male nude, freestanding sculpture produced since antiquity. Unlike Michelangelo, Donatello shows a youthful, slender David after the battle with Goliath, standing contrapposto (standing with weight shifted to one leg), all tension drained from his body. This contrapposto posture revealed Donatello's rediscovery of the ancient Greeks' knowledge of the human body in motion. Moving requires that the weight be shifted from one leg to the other. A figure standing contrapposto implies movement, making the sculpture seem less static. The statue was commissioned by the Medici and placed inside the Medici Palace, at the center of the inner courtyard in Florence (nominally the Republic of Florence). The statue was exhibited with a motto that read: "The victor is the defender of the fatherland God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Triumph, oh citizens!"

In the era before the Renaissance, the classical style had not yet been rediscovered, and the depiction of David as a nude would have been shocking. In a strictly moralistic work of art, sinners might have been shown as nudes—but that was the only exception.

In the *Feast of Herod*, a gilded bronze relief panel on the baptismal font of Siena Cathedral, the story of Salome, Herod, and the head of John the Baptist play out in the foreground, behind which two

sets of arches framing courtyards recede into the distance. Returning to freestanding sculpture, the linen guild commissioned Donatello's gargantuan (7'9") statue of *Saint Mark*. The robes of the saint fall naturally around him in billowing folds of fabric, suggesting movement. In an age that emphasized individualism, portraits became more popular. Donatello drew his inspiration for *Gattamelata*, a bronze equestrian statue of a Venetian military leader, from ancient Roman statues.

Sandro Botticelli

The painter most often given commissions by the Medici, Botticelli created Primavera for the wedding of a cousin of Lorenzo (the Magnificent). For this painting, he used tempera on wood. Venus and her companions are clothed in flowing, sometimes transparent, garments, with Cupid flying over Venus' head in this ode to love in spring. In Birth of Venus, in tempera on canvas, Zephyrus (the west wind) blows the goddess of love to the sacred island of Cyprus. Botticelli painted Venus as a nude standing on a cockleshell after her birth out of the sea. As she is blown across the water, a nymph comes to greet her. The scene is full of movement, with windswept garments on the peripheral figures and Venus' flowing hair.

Botticelli's natural temperament would not have led him to such lyricism but the Medici chose the subjects and Botticelli gave them what they wanted. Botticelli had a many-faceted personality. Most of what is known of Botticelli's life comes from the fifteenth-century artist and art historian, Giorgio Vasari. According to Vasari, Botticelli strangely came under the spell of Girolomo Savonarola, a fanatical monk who condemned the lifestyle of Renaissance Florentines, with their love of learning, spirit of independence, fascination with art, and their jewelry and other personal adornments considered to be the trappings of hedonism. He sent the Medici and other prominent families into exile, became a dictator, condemned people to be burned at the stake, and burned artwork, books, and other frivolities in a "bonfire of the vanities." Botticelli even burned some of his own paintings. Fortunately for the development of the Renaissance, Savonarola's rule was brief.

Vasari scolds Botticelli for taking time off later from painting to illustrate Dante's Divine Comedy. Botticelli's Illustrations for The Inferno section of Dante's work purportedly inspired the bust of Savanorola by Delle Corniole (in the "Gems of the Medici" exhibit). Botticelli distanced himself from the classical view of the world and from his former colleagues when he became a follower of Savonarola's. Still, by the end of the sixteenth century, he had established a large workshop. In the end, in spite of his poetic genius and fine technique, he was eclipsed by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Antonio del Polaiuolo

Polaiuolo, whose name means "poulterer" (his father's occupation), trained as a goldsmith and sculptor in Ghiberti's workshop. By 1459, he had his own studio. He also designed for embroidery and did enamel-work and engraving. Engraving provided a way to copy great works of for wider distribution centuries before the advent of photography—but engravings were also works of art in their own right.

Pollaiuolo's engraving, Battle of the Ten Nudes, depicts male nudes in frenzied action, with every muscle taut, as they fought. Artists no longer confined themselves to relaxed motion. But Pollaiuolo did not realize that muscles are not all contracted to their fullest at the same time, as they appear to be in his engraving. A later artist, Leonardo da Vinci, would recognize that different groups of

muscles contract and relax at different times.

One of the works Pollaiuolo is best known for today is a bronze statuette, 18" tall, called Hercules and Anteus, in which Hercules battles the son of the earth goddess. Hercules finally pulls Anteus upward, off the ground, every muscle straining, and holds him in midair. Deprived of his contact with the earth, the source of his power, Anteus can easily be defeated.

Pollaiuolo, however, was better known during his own lifetime as a goldsmith. He, along with two other artists, created a silver crucifix for the Florentine baptistery. He and Betto Betti made a reliquary to hold it. The two pieces together are considered a masterpiece of Early Renaissance art. Pollaiuolo also made a silver relief sculpture of the Birth of St. John the Baptist for a baptistery. Many of his works in gold and silver were lost or destroyed; some were melted down a century after he made them.

Benvenuto Cellini

Cellini was a Florentine goldsmith, musician, painter, sculptor, and author. As a goldsmith, he used techniques and subject matter of Etruscan (pre-Rome) and Mycenaean cultures. He was apprenticed to the goldsmith, Andrea di Sandro Marcone. Later, problems started. He was banished from Florence for brawling and, upon his return, was prosecuted again, jailed and sentenced to death. From there, he escaped to Rome and worked for Pope Clement VII, a Medici pope, until problems erupted again. He dashed from city-state to city-state and from Florence and Rome to France, trying to outrun his enemies or the authorities. He was pardoned by Pope Paul III for killing another goldsmith. Next, after wounding a notary, he escaped the authorities; before he was through, he was accused of embezzlement and put in prison. While in jail he believed he was being poisoned with the dust of finely ground diamonds. After his release, he went to France.

Most of Cellini's works were lost; a morse (or clasp) made for the pope was melted down. The designs, however, are extant. Only one of his works as a goldsmith survives. He received a commission for this work from Francis I of France, who paid Cellini an annual salary plus a fee for his work. The cost of the gold and enamel Saltcellar of Francis I itself was 50 percent more than Cellini's annual salary. This large decorative saltcellar for the table featured reclining figures of Neptune, the god of the sea (and its salt), and Tellus, the goddess of land, or the earth.

An ebony base with representations of dawn, twilight, night, and the four winds in relief support a boat on one side between Neptune and Tellus, into which salt would be poured. There was a triumphal arch for the pepper. The Mannerist style that had entered Late Renaissance art is evident in this piece in the elongated figures of Neptune and Tellus. In antiquity, Tellus was depicted as a heavier, older woman, not the thin goddess of Cellini's Saltcellar.

More is known about Cellini's personal life than that of any other personage of that era. His autobiography tells the story of his colorful life. As great an artistic talent as Cellini was, he is probably better known for this autobiography than for his art.

Alchemy- The Precursor to Modern Science

Author: Jennifer Gerbode
Modified by Liliana Leopardi

Alchemy is defined in today's terms as a chemical science and speculative philosophy that aims to do the following things: transmute something common into something special by breaking it down into its original material and reconstructing it into another substance, finding universal cures for diseases, and discovering methods to prolong life. The term was first used in the 14th century, and during the Renaissance time, "chemia" or chemistry, and "alchemia," alchemy, were almost synonymous. It would not be until the 17th century that practical alchemy would be considered chemistry and begin to evolve into science we know today.

So how does this fit in with the Medici?

Alchemy was the science of the time during the Medici family's reign, and records show that they actively participated in its advances. While no member of the Medici family was a scientist, a handful of them had interest in the field. Francesco I de Medici is known have had an alchemical laboratory, he was highly interested in both chemistry and alchemy. The Studiolo of Francesco I in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence was where he tinkered with alchemy as well as stored his "cabinet of curiosities," though most of it was cabinet paintings. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the view of alchemy as an occult magic began to shift to more of an actual science, thanks to the studies of Paracelsus. He is the one that said: "Many have said of Alchemy, that it is for the making of gold and silver. For me such is not the aim, but to consider only what virtue and power may lie in medicines."

Some of the 'big names' in alchemy during the Medici's reign include:

Nicolas Flamel (1330 or 1340- 1418?)

Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519)

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535)

Renaissance Men - Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo Galilei

Authors: Jennifer Gerbode and Monica McHam; Modified by Liliana Leopardi

The Renaissance Period

While some scholars mark the beginning of the Renaissance in 1401, some believe we may see the period's distinguishing characteristics as far as back as the year 1300. The very word Renaissance means a renewal or revival, revival of classical culture in particular. This period of renewal, roughly the 14th through the 16th century, is considered to mark the transition from medieval to modern times. Those scholars who mark 1401 as the beginning of the Renaissance generally acknowledge its birthplace as Florence, Italy, for those who mark 1300, as the beginning of a Renaissance culture, signs may be found first in the northern University town of Padua, which showed early signs of a humanistic revival of classical art, architecture, literature, and learning (known as Humanism or school of Humanistic Thought). From Italy, the Renaissance spread north and west to the rest of Europe.

Artists and learned men and women in every area struck out in new directions and experimented with new ways of writing, building, painting, conducting business, dress, and music. In short people threw off the restraints, which had dictated every facet of life prior to the Plague and freely experimented with a fresh creativity. This new freedom and creativity was seen in the arts, science, and in society in general.

Classical languages were translated and widely read. For example, The Platonic Academy commissioned the entire works of Plato to be translated and made the translations available to all. Advances in printing made literature widely available to the public. Heavy Gothic architecture gave way to soaring arches, slender columns, and magnificent domes like Filippo Brunelleschi's in the Florence Duomo. Ghiberti, also a master goldsmith, won the commission to cast the glorious bronze doors for the baptistery. Music was no longer restricted to the sacred. Musicians produced works that displayed more artistic freedom and individualism. The distinctive music of the Renaissance was a smooth, imitative, polyphonic style, as seen in the music of Orlando de Lassus.

The Renaissance Man

Renaissance Man, sometimes called a polymath, is used to describe a person who is well educated or who excels in a wide variety of subjects or fields. The concept emerged in Renaissance Italy from the notion elegantly expressed by one of its most accomplished polymaths, Leon Battista Alberti. He wrote that "men can do all things if they will." This is the essence of Renaissance Humanism, which considered man empowered, limitless in his capacities or development, and led to the notion that people should embrace all knowledge and develop their capacities as fully as possible. Most ancient scientists were polymaths by today's standards.

Some of the most renowned Renaissance Men include Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Galileo Galilei, and later Nicolaus Copernicus, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and Thomas Jefferson.

Leonardo Da Vinci – The Ultimate Renaissance Man

Leonardo Da Vinci: artist, painter, scientist, mathematician, inventor, engineer, anatomist, cartographer, writer, musician, anatomist. There was almost nothing that escaped his curiosity. It is this dabbling in everything that has earned Leonardo the title of polymath, or "Renaissance Man."

Born April 15, 1452 in Vinci, Florence Leonardo was the illegitimate son of notary Ser Piero di Antonio and a peasant woman, Catarina. He would live with his father and his father's wife for most of his young life, being adopted into the family when there were no other children. Around 1467, an early teenager Leonardo traveled to Florence, where the Italian Renaissance was in full swing. He, like many other painters of the period enrolled in art school. It was here that Leonardo came under the tutelage of Andrea del Verrocchio. Verrocchio was a sculptor and artist who was known for crafting the marble tombs of both Piero and Giovanni Medici. The two would work on numerous projects together.

One writer, the "Anonimo" Gaddiano claims that in 1480 he was living with the Medici family and working in the Garden of the Piazza San Marco in Florence, a Neo-Platonic academy of philosophers and artists that the Medici had established. It was also through the Medici family and Academy that Leonardo would come into contact with some of the older humanist philosophers of the time as well as other Renaissance contemporaries of his, including Sandro Botticelli, an artist under the patronage of the Medici family. One of Leonardo's first commissioned paintings was The Adoration of the Magi requested by the Chapel of St. Bernard in 1478. This painting would never be finished, because in 1482, Leonardo traveled to Milan
in order to win favor with Ludovico il Moro, the Duke of Milan. There he worked for the Duke as a "do-it-all" man.

During his adult life, Leonardo was seen as someone with many quirks. He had many projects started, but few of them would ever be completed. We wrote in a 'mirror-style,' writing from right to left with the letters backwards. He was also left-handed, a sign of impurity in a time where everyone was forced to write with their right hands. Regardless of his quirks, it was during his time in Milan that Leonardo began expanding his studies into architecture and engineering. In1499, Leonardo left Milan in order to escape from the invading French, just one year after completing one of his well-known paintings, The Last Supper. He would travel between Venice and Florence as control switched between Italy and France over the next fifteen years. During this time in Florence, Leonardo was asked by Francesco del Giocondo to paint a portrait of his wife. This portrait would later become one of the most infamous paintings in the world: the Mona Lisa. Leonardo ended up in Rome in 1513, working for Giuliano de Medici. In October 1515, Francis I of France recaptured Milan. Leonardo was commissioned to create a mechanical lion for Francis, which was to walk forward, then open up to reveal a group of lilies.

Later in life, he was invited to Amboise, France to work for King Francois I. While he was still abto draw, he did not paint during this time. He tested some of his ideas for water machines, boats, and similar mechanisms. After suffering partial paralysis of his body due to a stroke, he died in Amboise on May 2, 1519 at the age of 67.

Galileo Galilei – Scientist, Medici Teacher, Renaissance Man
Galileo is called the "father" of many things: science, observational astronomy, modern physics, and modern science. His studies covered a wide variety of subjects, earning him the title of "Renaissance Man." Galileo was born February 15, 1564 in Pisa, Italy as the first of six children to Vincenzo Galilei and Giulia degli Ammannati. The family moved to Florence in the early 1570s. While the family was considered nobility, they weren't the richest on the block.

In 1581, Galileo began his studies at the University of Pisa. It was during this time he would begin

to make the observations that would bring him both infamy and ridicule. He begins watching a pendulum and making notes, allowing him to discover in 1602 that the time it takes for a pendulum to swing back and forth doesn't depend on the arc of the pendulum's swing. It was also during his time at the University that Galileo began studying the Aristotelian view of physics, which believes heavier objects fall faster through a medium. He performed numerous experiments and wrote his findings in a book called De motu or On Motion. While the book was never published, he was able to assert the fact that all objects, regardless of weight, will fall at the same speed through a vacuum.

During his time at the University of Pisa, Ferdinando I of the Medici family appointed Galileo Professor of Mathematics. This began a relationship between Galileo and the Medici family that would last until Galileo's death. He would tutor Ferdinando I's son, Cosimo II in mathematics.

Galileo's time at Pisa came to an end in 1592, when he was appointed as a professor of mathematics at the University of Padua. During his time there, he began to study mechanical devices and nautical technology, especially the type being used at The Arsenal, the famous Venetian ship yard renown throughout Europe for its technological advances. It was also during his time at Padua that he entered into a relationship with a woman named Marina di Andrea Gamba. Three children would come out of this relationship: Virginia who would later become Sister Maria Celeste, Livia who would later become Sister Arcangela, and son Vincenzio.

In 1609, Galileo invented his telescope. By the time he was done, the telescope could magnify something up to twenty times its normal size. He observed many of the celestial bodies, including the moon, the phases of Venus, even the satellites of Jupiter. He recorded his findings in the published work, Sidereus Nuncius or The Sidereal Messenger. Galileo dedicated this book to Cosimo II and his family, which lead to Cosimo II offering Galileo a position in the Medici family court shortly after. He left Padua, Marina, and Vicenzio behind, putting Virginia and Livia into convents.

While a part of the Medici family court, Galileo began to notice his discoveries proved the Copernican system of thought, which stated that the universe was heliocentric (everything revolves around the sun). This was a problem, considering that the theory of a geocentric universe was widely believed, accepted, and defended by the Catholic Church. Trouble began around 1615, when the Inquisition tried to silence Galileo's defense of the Copernican system.

The Inquisition lightened up slightly in 1624, saying that Galileo could write about his ideas only if he made it sound like mathematical theory. The final step was when Galileo published Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems. He was summoned to Rome in 1633, where he faced the Inquisition once again. The ties he had with the Medici family weren't enough to keep him from a guilty verdict and a sentence of house arrest for the rest of his life. Galileo died on January 8, 1642 in his home just outside Florence.

While Galileo's life had ended, his ties with the Medici family didn't end until 1737. Gian Gastone, the last of the Medici line, built a memorial for the Renaissance Man at the Church of Santa Croce, where his remains were interred.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Antique a relic or object of ancient times

Antiquity

- ancient times; *especially* **:** those before the Middle Ages
- the quality of being ancient

Artisans workers who practice a trade or handicraft

Baroque irregularly shaped —used of gems

Busts sculptured representations of the upper part of the human figure including the head and neck and usually part of the shoulders and breast

Cameo an engraved gem with positive relief – the image appears to be raised above the stone

Cast something that is formed by casting in a mold or form

Cathedral a church that is the official seat of a diocesan bishop

Commissioned to order to be made

Currency something (as coins, treasury notes, and banknotes) that is in circulation as a medium of exchange**;** a common article for bartering

Dowry the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage

Dynasty a powerful group or family that maintains its position for a considerable time

Engrave

- to impress deeply as if with a graver <the incident was *engraved* in his memory>
- to form by incision (as on wood or metal)
- to cut figures, letters, or designs on for printing; *also* **:** to print from an engraved plate <an *engraved* invitation>

Generation a body of living beings constituting a single step in the line of descent from an ancestor

Glyptics the art or process of carving or engraving especially on gems

Impression

- the effect produced by impressing: as
- *a* **:** a stamp, form, or figure resulting from physical contact

Intaglio an engraved gem with a negative relief; that is, the image is cut into the surface

Mural a painting applied to and made integral with the surface of a wall or ceiling

Patron a wealthy or influential supporter of an artist or writer

Patronage the support or influence of a patron

Portrait a pictorial representation of a person usually showing the face

Reign to possess or exercise sovereign power

Renaissance rebirth, revival

Tribune an unofficial defender of the rights of the individual a dais or platform from which an assembly is addressed

Curriculum Connections: State of CA Content Standards

History

Grade 6

6.4 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.

4. Explain the significance of Greek mythology to the everyday life of people in the region and how Greek literature continues to permeate our literature and language today, drawing from Greek mythology and epics, such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and from Aesop's Fables.

8. Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences (e.g., Hypatia, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Thucydides).

6.7 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures during the development of Rome.

8. Discuss the legacies of Roman art and architecture, technology and science, literature, language, and law.

Grade 7

7.11 Discuss the exchanges of plants, animals, technology, culture, and ideas among Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the major economic and social effects on each continent.

7.8 Students analyze the origins, accomplishments, and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance.

1. Describe the way in which the revival of classical learning and the arts fostered a new interest in humanism (i.e., a balance between intellect and religious faith).

2. Explain the importance of Florence in the early stages of the Renaissance and the growth of independent trading cities (e.g., Venice), with emphasis on the cities' importance in the spread of Renaissance ideas.

5. Detail advances made in literature, the arts, science, mathematics, cartography, engineering, and the understanding of human anatomy and astronomy (e.g., by Dante Alighieri, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo di Buonarroti Simoni, Johann Gutenberg, William Shakespeare).

7.10 Students analyze the historical developments of the Scientific Revolution and its lasting effect on religious, political, and cultural institutions.

1. Discuss the roots of the Scientific Revolution (e.g., Greek rationalism; Jewish, Chrisian and Muslim science; Renaissance humanism; new knowledge from global exploration).
2. Understand the significance of the new scientific theories (e.g., those of Copernicus,Galileo, Kepler, Newton) and the significance of new inventions (e.g., the telescope, microscope, thermometer, barometer).

3. Understand the scientific method advanced by Bacon and Descartes, the influence of new scientific rationalism on the growth of democratic ideas, and the coexistence of science with traditional religious beliefs.

Visual Arts

Grades 9-12

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of the Visual Arts

Students analyze the role and development of the visual arts in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting human diversity as it relates to the visual arts and artists.

Role and Development of the Visual Arts

3.1 Identify contemporary styles and discuss the diverse social, economic, and political developments reflected in the works of art examined.

3.2 Identify contemporary artists worldwide who have achieved regional, national, or international recognition and discuss ways in which their work reflects, plays a role in, and influences present-day culture.

Diversity of the Visual Arts

3.3 Investigate and discuss universal concepts expressed in works of art from diverse cultures.

3.4 Research the methods art historians use to determine the time, place, context, value, and culture that produced a given work of art.

English/Language Arts

Grades 9 and 10

READING

1.3 Identify Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology and use the knowledge to understand the origin and meaning of new words (e.g., the word narcissistic drawn from the myth of Narcissus and Echo).

Science

Grade 4

4. The properties of rocks and minerals reflect the processes that formed them. As a basis for understanding this concept:

a. Students know how to differentiate among igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks by referring to their properties and methods of formation (the rock cycle).

b. Students know how to identify common rock-forming minerals (including quartz, calcite, feldspar, mica, and hornblende) and ore minerals by using a table of diagnostic properties.

About Dr. Liliana Leopardi

Dr. Liliana Leopardi holds an M.A. in Psychology from the California Graduate Institute and an M.A and a Ph.D. in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She currently is an Assistant Professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. Dr. Leopardi has taught at Cooper Union, Colorado College, the University of Georgia Athens, and Chapman University.

Her current research interests lie in ornament, precious and semiprecious gemstones, magic, material culture, fetishism and the construction of masculinity in the Renaissance. Her work has been presented at the College Art Association (the national body of art historians and art practitioners); the Renaissance society of America; and the International Medieval Conference held in Kalamazoo. Her latest essay, "Ornamentis secundum condecentiam sui status": New Criteria for Assessing the Ornato in Crivelli's Paintings", was published in January 2011, in *New Studies on Old Masters*, edited by John Garton and Diane Wolfthal Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies Press).

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