

# RENAISSANCE

15th & 16th century Italian paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

Secondary School  
exhibition worksheet

A

## *Renaissance: 15th and 16th century Italian paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo*

The works of art in the *Renaissance* exhibition are on loan from the Accademia Carrara, the art gallery of the City of Bergamo in Northern Italy. As you enter the exhibition there is a large photograph of the old part of Bergamo, the walled medieval hilltop town known as the *Città alta*.

All the paintings in the exhibition were created in the Renaissance era, between 1400 and 1600, in some of the great cultural centres of Italy such as Venice, Florence, Milan and Siena. Artists were commissioned to paint religious scenes not only by the Church but by private patrons too, and individual portraits became increasingly popular. The term Renaissance, which literally means 'rebirth', is the period in European civilisation immediately following the Middle Ages that is characterised by a renewed interest in Classical learning and values.



### MAESTRO DEI CARTELLINI

*Saint Peter [San Pietro]* c 1458

*Saint Paul [San Paolo]* c 1458

**These panels are just two sections of a very large altarpiece that was originally located in a church in Bergamo. Looking at them side by side: what are the similarities? what are the differences?**

The attributes held by the saints have been rendered in a technique known as *pastiglia*, where layers of wet paper and glue are laid onto the wood panel so that the objects appear three-dimensional. The books represent their writings—found in the New Testament. The open pages of Saint Paul's book are actually paper stuck onto the surface of the painting. This is called a *cartellino*; and because the name of the artist is not known, the altarpiece has been attributed to the Master of the Cartellini.

**What do you think the impact would be on the viewer looking at these life-sized images on the altar of a church in the fifteenth century?**



### Carlo CRIVELLI

*Madonna and Child [Madonna col Bambino]* c 1482–1483

**Luxurious gold, rich red and abundant nature dominate this painting. How many types of fruit can you identify?**

It was common during the Renaissance for symbolic imagery to be used to convey meanings and messages in works of art. The various symbols in this painting include fruit and flowers—such as the apple representing original sin and the carnation representing ardent love.

**Discuss why you think Crivelli has represented the landscape background differently on either side.**



### MATTEO di Giovanni

*Madonna and Child with Saint Sebastian and Saint Catherine of Siena and two angels [Madonna con Gesù Bambino, i santi Sebastiano e Caterina e due angeli]* c 1480

**Discuss this composition—its depth and colour.**

Matteo's depiction of the Madonna and Child is painted with egg tempera. The medium involves combining egg yolk and a little water with pigments so that they adhere to the wooden panel. Tempera dries very quickly, producing a tough, waterproof opaque layer that is impossible to blend. Consequently egg tempera works are built up of overlapping layers of paint. This medium reached its height of popularity in the early Renaissance.

**How has the artist treated the background between the overlapping figures?**



### Giovanni BELLINI

*Madonna and Child (Alzano Madonna) [Madonna col Bambino, detta di Alzano]* c 1488

**Describe the detailed landscape behind the Madonna and Child.**

During his long life Bellini painted hundreds of images of the Madonna and Child—two are in the exhibition. This later work is painted in oil. Increasingly towards the end of the fifteenth century, artists began to use oil as their paint medium. Rather than the opaque layering of tempera, oil paint, when layered, enabled artists to achieve greater depth and contrast. It gave them more freedom to blend colours and, because oil paint is slower to dry than tempera, a longer time to work on the one painting.

**Compare this work with Bellini's earlier Madonna and Child in Room 2, which is painted in tempera. Do you notice differences in the artist's application of paint?**

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## Sandro BOTTICELLI

*The story of Virginia the Roman [Storia di Virginia romana] c1500*

### Where is the action in this painting taking place? What details suggest this?

Botticelli is known for his careful draftsmanship and the well balanced composition of his paintings. Here, in three distinct scenes, he presents a complex Classical narrative about innocence and lust, where the schoolgirl Virginia becomes the victim of a high-ranking Roman, Appius Claudius Crassus.

The story reads from left to right: the first scene shows the attempted abduction of Virginia; in the middle section Virginia approaches the thwarted Appius, who takes revenge by declaring her a slave; on the right we see Virginia being killed by her father to save her from her shame.

**Find Virginia in all three scenes.**



## TITIAN

*Madonna and Child in a landscape [Madonna col Bambino nel paesaggio] c1507*

### How does the artist's application of paint affect the overall appearance of this painting?

Titian was considered the greatest painter of the Venetian school, renowned for his experimental use of colour and light-filled atmospheric landscapes. His skilled use of oil paint enabled him to create figures that are soft, without harsh angles or outlines.

### In what way has Titian emphasised the intimate relationship between mother and child?

**Discuss how he has created depth in this painting.**



## Lorenzo LOTTO

*Holy family with Saint Catherine of Alexandria [Sacra famiglia con santa Caterina d'Alessandria] 1533*

### What are the shapes that make up this composition?

Lotto has painted a devotional image known as a Holy Conversation, with the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and Saint Catherine emotionally bound together in a discussion about the future of the Christ Child.

The intimacy of the foreground scene is emphasised against the expanse of the background, with the foliage creating a framed window to the landscape beyond.

**Describe the landscape. Do you think the scene is located in Italy? Or is it in the Middle East where the events might have taken place?**



## Paolo CAVAZZOLA

*Portrait of a lady [Ritratto di gentildonna] c1515–1517*

### What is your first impression of this woman? What does her posture, clothing and expression tell us about her?

Although her clothes look particularly fancy, this is the traditional dress of a Northern Italian Renaissance gentlewoman, as is her hairstyle—not her own hair, but a type of woven wig bound with ribbons, called a *capigliara*. In the exhibition you will find other portraits of women wearing a *capigliara*.

**Is the spectacular dress a distraction from her melancholy expression as she looks into the distance? Who, or what might she be thinking about?**

**What purpose do you think portraits served during the Renaissance?**



## Lorenzo LOTTO

*The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria [Nozze mistico di santa Caterina d'Alessandria] 1523*

### How would you describe the relationship between the three central figures?

This painting depicts the moment when the infant Jesus, accompanied by the Virgin Mary, came to Saint Catherine in a dream and placed a ring on her finger to symbolise her marriage to Christianity.

The man holding his right hand in blessing is Lotto's landlord. He commissioned the painting for the sum of a year's rent that Lotto otherwise would have paid him. His clothing is a dark contrast against the richly coloured robes of the Virgin and Saint Catherine.

**Notice in the background that a section of the composition is missing. What do you think might have been painted there?**