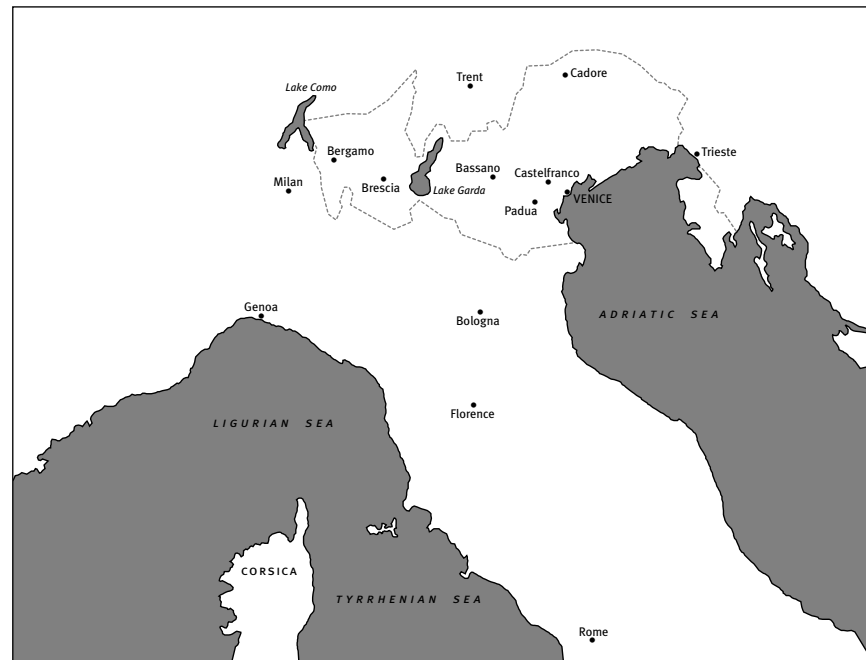


Venice and the North

Many of the works in this room were painted by artists from northern Italy, areas in modern-day Lombardy and the Veneto that were largely under Venetian control in the sixteenth century. Only one of these painters—Sebastiano del Piombo, who left for Rome in 1511—was actually born in Venice, but most of the others studied or worked there at least temporarily. In some measure, the look of Venetian painting, captured in the rich colors of Titian or the lyricism of Giorgione, remained an important influence on all of them.

Other factors affected their styles as well. In Lombardy in particular, patrons and painters shared a preference for detailed, realistic works. In part this may reflect the conservatism of provincial buyers who were unfamiliar with sophisticated and “progressive” urban styles, or it may simply express a more rural—literally, a more down-to-earth—sensitivity. People in these areas just south of the Alps were also accustomed to the precise, minute style of paintings from Germany, the Low Countries, and other parts of northern Europe. Engravings of these works, as well as those by artists working in central Italy, were readily available from the many publishing houses that recently had been established in Venice.

Geographic position also put northern Italians closer to the activity of the Protestant Reformation, and this may be reflected in the intensely personal and direct emotional tenor of the region’s religious painting. These works must also be considered, however, in light of reforms within the Catholic church itself initiated by the ecclesiastical councils convened between 1545 and 1563 in Trent, northwest of Venice. In these sixteenth-century pictures from northern Italy it is possible to find indications of what Italian Counter-Reformation art would later become.



Venetian territory,
about 1500



Cariani
Venetian, 1485/1490–1547 or after
A Concert, about 1518–1520

This is widely considered to be Cariani’s masterpiece. Born in Bergamo, Cariani trained in the Venetian studios of Giovanni Bellini and Giorgione. Not surprisingly, Cariani’s painting style alternates between those of Venice and areas farther north and west. Matter-of-fact details, such as the crumpled cloth used for wiping the fingers and the extra string in its little box, stem from Cariani’s northern roots, as does his simple arrangement of solid figures.

The subject, on the other hand, is one Giorgione introduced in Venice. For sophisticated patrons, concert themes represented the transportative quality of music and its ability—akin to love—to delight the senses. A second type of picture developed by Giorgione is also evident here: the teacher with his tutor. The strong characterization of the faces suggests that these must be portraits from life. On the left, the prim tutor holds his book, while his charge, on the right, attracts our attention with his outward gaze. The two are separated by the singer, who dominates the moment. Absorbed in a search for inspiration, he is a figure of overly large presence, almost comic in his bulk, extravagant hat, and perhaps too-passionate concentration.

Oil on canvas, .920 x 1.300 m (36 1/4 x 51 3/16 in.).
Bequest of Lore Heinemann in memory of her husband,
Dr. Rudolf J. Heinemann 1997.57.2



Moretto da Brescia
Brescian, 1498–1554
Pietà, 1520s

Moretto’s careful realism and emotional intensity reflect the influence of painting from north of the Alps, but he also assimilated the rich coloring of Venetian painters.

The Bible does not explicitly describe this scene, in which the Virgin, John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene grieve over the body of Christ at the tomb. This composition evolved not from a narrative at all, but from other images. The figures are those linked with the Crucifixion, while Christ’s upright body resembles scenes of the Deposition, and Mary’s sorrowful embrace recalls the Pietà. Moretto’s inventive combination creates a new type of devotional picture—one that elicits powerful emotion and concentrates the viewer’s meditation on the suffering of Christ.

The austere composition focuses attention on the intense grief experienced by the simple figures, whose faces are drawn in sorrow. The pathos is increased by Mary Magdalene’s embrace of Christ’s feet. Christ’s sacrifice and sacramental nature are underscored in other ways. His limbs echo the shape of the cross, and his wounds are visible. Moretto was a lifelong member of a religious confraternity devoted to the sacrament of communion.

Oil on panel, 1.758 x .985 m (69 1/8 x 38 3/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.2.10



Sebastiano del Piombo
Venetian, 1485–1547

***Cardinal Bandinello Sauli, His Secretary, and Two Geographers*, 1516**

A tiny inscription on the bell identifies the seated man as Bandinello Sauli. Appointed cardinal by Pope Julius II in 1511, Sauli stood at the height of his considerable influence when this group portrait was painted. Two years later this noted patron of letters was dead and disgraced, having been implicated in a plot to poison Pope Leo X. A small fly at his knee may have been added after Sauli's death to signal the impermanence of life. (It is so realistic that printers have sometimes mistakenly removed it from modern photographic reproductions.) The fly is less *in* the scene than *on* it, as if it had landed on the painting. Such virtuosic tricks called attention both to the painting as an object itself and to the artist as its creator.

Sebastiano moved to Rome from his native Venice in 1511 and was eventually made Keeper of the Papal Seal (*piombo*, in Italian). When he completed this painting, it was the most ambitious easel portrait ever attempted in Rome. The composition, however, remains a bit awkward, seeming more like two double portraits than one unified, natural grouping. Its artificiality is underscored by the rhetorical gesture of the man on the right, his finger raised as if to emphasize a point in their discussion of geography or exploration. This figure might be the humanist scholar Paolo Giovio, a historian who became famous for his own portrait collection.

Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 1.218 x 1.504 m (48 x 59 1/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.37



Sebastiano del Piombo

***Portrait of a Humanist*, about 1520**

Unlike the sitters in many similar portraits who are shown in front of an open window, this man wearing the simple black robes of a scholar is posed in an enclosed, quiet place appropriate for study and concentration. His three-quarter pose was newly introduced around 1520. Restricted colors in the clothing and face leave the small arrangement on the left as the brightest area of the composition. Our attention is drawn to the tools of his scholarly pursuit: books, writing implements, and a globe. (Maps were first applied to spheres in the early sixteenth century.) It has been suggested that the sitter might be Marcantonio Flaminio, a noted scholar and poet who was a friend of the artist.

Sebastiano must have painted this in Rome, although its style retains traces of his Venetian training. This is particularly evident in the richness of its pigment—even the somber tones have luxurious texture—and in the slight melancholy that distinguishes the man's face. (Admittedly, such melancholy would have been expected of a gentleman poet.) The use of light, however, shows the new influence of artists in Rome: rather than infusing the scene, light sculpts the figure with strong three-dimensional form. Sebastiano had always modeled his figures more emphatically than most other Venetian painters, and his natural inclination was reinforced by contact in Rome with Michelangelo.

Oil on panel transferred to hardboard, 1.347 x 1.010 m (53 x 39 3/4 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.38



Giovanni Girolamo Savoldo
Brescian, about 1480–1548 or after

***Elijah Fed by the Raven*, about 1510**

Elijah, sturdy and peasantlike, looks with reflective intensity at a black bird perched above his head, grasping a large hunk of bread in its beak. The word of the Lord had come to him (I Kings 17:3–4): “Go away from here, go eastward, and hide yourself. . . . I have ordered the ravens to bring you food.” It was an absolute act of faith and love to obey the command, trusting only in God's provision for his survival.

From the earliest days of Christian monasticism, Elijah was regarded as the prototype of all those who “dwelt in the desert,” either alone as hermits or in communities with other holy men. In the living tradition of monasticism, the authority and spiritual wisdom of one abbot is passed down to the next. This transfer of power began when Elijah first handed his cloak to his successor Elisha, an episode depicted in the background of this painting. In a small cloud, Elijah is taken heavenward in a fiery chariot as proof of God's call.

This painting, along with a companion work showing the two hermit saints Anthony and Paul, was possibly commissioned for a Carmelite church in Savoldo's hometown of Brescia. Elijah held special significance for the Carmelites, who, as their name suggests, traced their origin to Elijah in the Jordan valley. The faith and moral austerity of these men could have appealed to many other patrons as well.

Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 1.680 x 1.356 m (66 1/8 x 53 3/8 in.).
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1961.9.35



Giovanni Battista Moroni
Bergamo, about 1525–1578

***Gian Federico Madruzzo*, about 1560**

Moroni studied painting with Moretto in Brescia before he settled in nearby Bergamo, where he remained for most of his career. He also seems to have spent some time in Trent. The subject of this portrait is usually identified as Gian Federico Madruzzo, a nephew of the prince-bishop of Trent. The full-length portrait format was relatively new in Italy and perhaps had been inspired by examples from the north. Its imposing formality is especially suited for public portraits, and here the subject wears a diplomat's robes. However, the presence of a small dog, traditionally a symbol of loyalty, suggests this painting may have been intended for a domestic setting.

Moroni's realistic depictions have ensured his reputation as one of the finest portraitists of the sixteenth century. His religious works, however, have usually been viewed as bland reiterations of themes he learned from Moretto. In recent years, scholars have begun to reconsider them in relation to the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which was convened to address the Protestant challenge. Reformers in the Roman Catholic church stressed the role of mental images as a focus for meditation and urged painters to produce religious art that was clear and direct, the sort of explicit image seen, for example, in Moroni's painting *Gentleman in Adoration before the Madonna*, also in this room.

Oil on canvas, 2.019 x 1.168 m (79 1/2 x 46 in.).
Timken Collection 1960.6.27