

Royal Academy of Arts

Giovanni Battista

Moroni



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List of Works

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Audio points for 1



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Madonna and Child on a Throne,
1536–37 (cat. 1)



Portrait of Count Martinengo,
c. 1545–50 (cat. 4)



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Gentleman in Contemplation,
c. 1555 (cat. 8)



The Trinity, c. 1552–53 (cat. 7)



Portrait of Lucrezia Vertova Agliardi,
1557 (cat. 13)



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Portrait of Gabriel de la Cueva,
1560 (cat. 19)



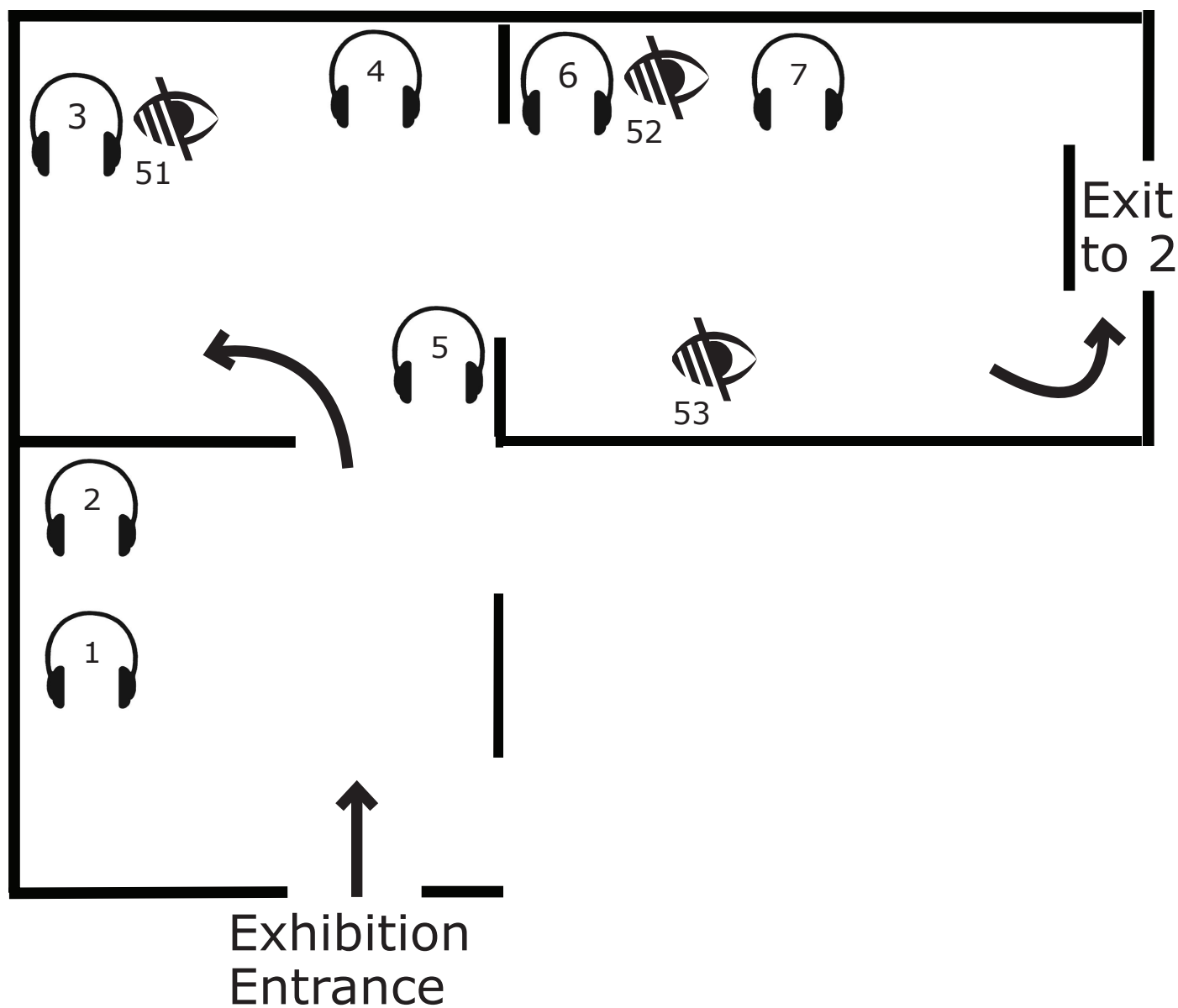
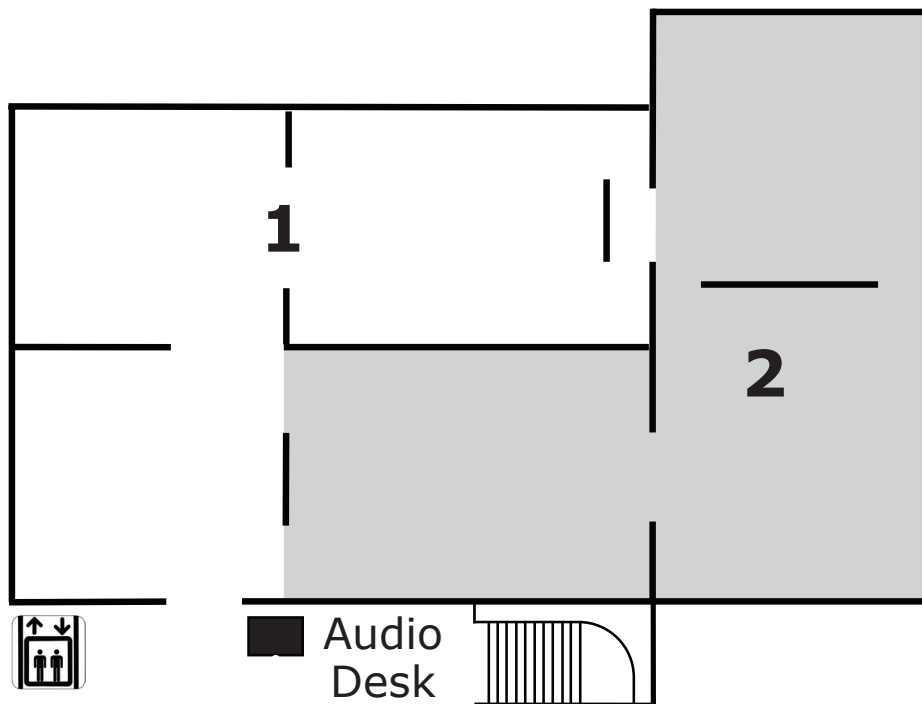
Portrait of Isotta Brembati, c. 1553
(cat. 16)



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Portrait of Lucia Albani Avogadro,
c. 1555–6 (cat. 15)

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Giovanni Battista Moroni

25 October - 25 January 2015

In the Sackler Wing of Galleries, Burlington House.

This exhibition has been organised by the
Royal Academy of Arts, London.

2009-2016 Season
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Introduction

The son of a stonemason, Giovanni Battista Moroni (c. 1520/24–1579/80) was born in Albino, near Bergamo, in the foothills of the northern Italian Alps. He was in his day the leading painter in Bergamo and one of the main figures of Lombard art, a school that traditionally favoured a true representation of reality over idealisation and artifice. The artist is now widely considered to be one of the greatest portraitists of the Italian Cinquecento.

Moroni depicted members of the society in which he lived. His particular genius lay in his ability to capture not only their exact likeness but also their character and inner life with a rare and penetrating insight. His portraits evoke a tangible presence and are remarkable for their vitality, directness and immediacy.

Critical appreciation of Moroni's talent has fluctuated over the centuries. Successful during his lifetime, and praised and collected until the seventeenth century, the artist was subsequently neglected. Various factors help to explain this decline in fortune.

In Moroni's time, Bergamo belonged to the Venetian Republic, whose capital drew the leading Bergamese artists. Moroni instead chose to remain in his native Lombardy and for this reason he has sometimes been accused of provincialism.

Titian (c. 1490–1576), then the foremost Venetian painter, allegedly recommended him as an artist who painted portraits "from nature", a quality that has since been interpreted both as a strength and limitation. Giorgio Vasari's failure to visit Bergamo led to Moroni's omission from the seminal 'Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects' (1568),

the first comprehensive chronicle of Italian art, and this weighed heavily on his posthumous reception. Moroni was rightly reappraised in the nineteenth century, when his unique skills were again admired and his works avidly sought by major private collectors and museums, especially in England.

This exhibition is the first large-scale survey of Moroni's artistic output to be displayed outside Italy. It presents him as both a distinctive portraitist and also in his lesser-known role as a religious painter.

Moroni's portraits – varied in their formats, poses, composition and handling – establish him as one of the major specialists in the genre, and reveal an innovative pictorial mastery that places the artist at the summit of Italian painting in the sixteenth century.

In his altarpieces, Moroni successfully developed a new model of sacred subject informed by the spiritual renewal brought by the Counter-Reformation.

If you would like to know more about Moroni's art, times and legacy, join us for free exhibition tours on Tuesdays at 2.30 pm and Fridays at 7 pm (final week excluded).

Moretto: Moroni's Teacher

As a boy, Moroni left Albino and became apprenticed to Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto (c. 1492/95 –1554), one of the most distinguished painters working in nearby Brescia.

Moretto's highly individual style is recognisable in his 'Madonna and Child on a Throne between Saints Eusebia, Andrew, Domneone and Domno' (cat.1); this altarpiece combines both Central Italian classicism and Venetian colour with the silvery tones and realism of Lombard painting.

Vasari recorded in his 'Lives' the painter's ability to "imitate natural things". He particularly praised the naturalism of Moretto's heads and noted how the artist seemed to delight in simulating all kinds of fabrics.

Moretto's consciously faithful approach to the world that surrounded him also finds expression in the same altarpiece in the still-life of fruit placed on the marble floor, a forerunner of 'Basket of Fruit' (c. 1599) by Caravaggio (1571–1610).

Moretto's 'Madonna and Child' became an essential model for Moroni, who over the years borrowed numerous elements from it in his own paintings.

The realistic and innovative style of Moretto's portraits was also to prove influential on his pupil. 'Portrait of Count Martinengo' (cat.4) shows the highly successful stratagem Moroni adopted for the composition of his later portraits: the head and shoulders are placed at a diagonal with the head slightly turned to one side and lowered; the eyes gaze across the canvas to meet those of the spectator.

The interior setting is reduced to its essentials, focusing attention on the physical appearance of the model, above all the face. Many of these stylistic devices are visible in Moroni's early 'Portrait of M.A.Savelli' (cat.5), whose setting also echoes Moretto's altarpiece.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

3

Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto

Portrait of an Ecclesiastic
(Gerolamo Martinengo Cesaresco?)
c. 1540-45

Oil on canvas

Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Bayerische
Staatsgemäldesammlungen.

Wittelsbacher Ausgleichsfonds

(continued over)

The sitter shown here in ecclesiastical robe and the three-cornered hat then commonly worn by the doctors of the church may be Gerolamo Martinengo Cesaresco, a member of a prominent Brescian family and commendatory abbot of a local monastery.

Gerolamo later entered the service of Pope Paul III in Rome and acted as his envoy in Poland, Vienna and at the court of Queen Elizabeth I. In the early nineteenth century the portrait was thought to be by Moroni.



Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto

Madonna and Child on a Throne
between Saints Eusebia,
Andrew, Domneone and Domno
1536-37

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di Sant'Andrea Apostolo, Bergamo

This 'sacra conversazione' was commissioned from Moretto between 1534 and 1536 to adorn the church dedicated to the Apostle Andrew in Bergamo. The saint carries a heavy wooden cross, the instrument of his, and Christ's, sacrifice. He is accompanied by three early Christian martyrs from Bergamo, each holding the palm of martyrdom.

This altarpiece proved highly influential on Moroni, who regularly ransacked it, among others, for individual ideas to incorporate into his own work. See, for instance, the broken column he reprised in 'Portrait of M. A. Savelli' (cat. 5).

Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto

Portrait of Count Martinengo
c. 1545-50

Oil on canvas

Museo Lechi, Montichiari

The identity of this proud-looking and superbly attired young gentleman portrayed by Moretto is based on the provenance of the painting, linked to the Palazzo Martinengo in Brescia.

The portrait's format, almost monochrome palette and absence of preparatory underdrawing are characteristics also found in Moroni's paintings, including his 'Portrait of M. A. Savelli' (cat. 5).

5

Portrait of M. A. Savelli c. 1545-48

Oil on canvas

Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon.

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Moroni probably painted this portrait during his first prolonged visit to Trent. In 1546 many distinguished members of the Savelli family gathered in the episcopal city and it is likely that the sitter belonged to the diplomatic corps present for the first part of the Tridentine Council.

Long believed to be by Moretto, the work was later re-attributed to Moroni as an earlier canvas in which the influence of his teacher can still be seen.

Early Works

After his training, Moroni was briefly active in Trent, staying there in 1548 and in around 1550–51. These visits coincided with the Council held in the episcopal city between 1545 and 1563. It was here that the Catholic Church formulated its response to the Protestant Reformation. Following his stay, the artist returned to Lombardy and settled in Bergamo.

Moroni's devotional works from this period illustrate in a crisp and unaffected manner the fervent forms of piety and doctrinal content favoured by the Counter-Reformation church as it sought to revive the Catholic faith.

The style of religious imagery that was now expected involved a conscious return to established models, and we see Moroni freely interpreting works by previous masters such as his teacher Moretto and the Bergamese artist Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480–1556/57).

(continued over)

The young artist developed a genre of painting in which portraiture and religious subject matter are combined. In

'Gentleman in Contemplation of the Baptism of Christ' (cat.9) a devout sitter witnesses a sacred scene by employing mental prayer, a meditative practice recommended by St Ignatius of Loyola in his 'Spiritual Exercises', which was sanctioned by Pope Paul III in 1548.

Meanwhile, Moroni's solemn and true-to-life portrayals of role models such as Lucrezia Vertova Agliardi (cat. 13) anticipate the opinion later articulated by Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597) that only those individuals "whose moral goodness or Christian saintliness [were] an incitement to virtue" should be depicted in portraiture, with no attempt at idealisation.

Whether painted in a bright or monochrome palette, Moroni's early works exude a quiet intensity.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

10

Portrait of a Carthusian Friar c. 1555-57

Oil on canvas

Städel Museum, Frankfurt

The sitter in this painting appears from his dress to be a Carthusian friar. The portrait may have been commissioned to commemorate the cleric's exemplary deeds, and it probably adorned a communal space in a monastery.

Small, swift strokes applied with great confidence heighten the friar's fleeting expression, and the painting's tonal precision – enhanced by Moroni's adroit perception of light – is remarkable.

11

The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine c. 1545-50

Oil on canvas

The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

The size and domestic setting of Moroni's tender 'Mystic Marriage of St Catherine' suggest that the painting was intended for private devotion, perhaps for a young girl who might have identified with the teenaged saint.

The view seen from the window appears to be of Brescia. The painting therefore probably dates from the years when Moroni was working there, in the studio of his teacher Moretto.

2

Alessandro Bonvicino, known as Moretto

Devout in Contemplation of
King David

c. 1535-40

Oil on canvas

Kinnaird Castle, Brechin. The Southesk Collection

King David, who holds a 'lira da braccio' (a form of viol) with a richly inlaid neck, directs the attention of the young cleric to the source of light through which God reveals Himself.

Moroni drew on Moretto's naturalistic and imaginative devotional compositions such as this when painting works in a similar vein, as can be seen from his 'Gentleman in Contemplation before the Madonna and Child' (cat. 8).

9

Gentleman in Contemplation of the Baptism of Christ c. 1555

Oil on canvas

The Collection of Gerolamo and Roberta Etro

"A half figure illustrated in a ravishing landscape, where to be seen at a distance is St John the Baptist, who is baptising the Lord, a work worthy of great admiration" is how the Bergamese art historian Francesco Tassi described this work in his 'Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects of Bergamo' (1793).

In accordance with St Ignatius of Loyola's recommendations in his 'Spiritual Exercises' (1548), the worshipper kneels in prayer and envisions a significant episode of the life of Christ.



Gentleman in Contemplation before the Madonna and Child c. 1555

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Samuel H. Kress Collection

This elegantly dressed young man painted in profile, with his hands clasped, is shown envisioning the Madonna and Child. The painting follows a compositional model set by Moretto (in cat.2), where no ledge hierarchically separates the devout from the object of his vision, both of whom are naturalistically portrayed.

Moroni reversed the proportions of the set of figures, making the Madonna and Child appear like a living sculptural group.

6

Lorenzo Lotto

The Trinity

c. 1519-21

Oil on canvas

Museo Adriano Bernareggi, Bergamo

This painting originally adorned the high altar of the church of the Trinità (now demolished) in Bergamo, the headquarters of a confraternity of Flagellants.

Christ bears the visible marks of the Passion, which members were enjoined to review during their prayers according to an exhortation said to have been made by Jesus: "Your eyes, your ears, your mind extend to my agony, and learn to suffer from me." Executed by one of the most important painters of the sixteenth century, the altarpiece served as a model for Moroni.

The Trinity

c. 1552-53

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di San Giuliano, Albino

Moroni's painting 'The Trinity' in Albino was commissioned by a confraternity of Flagellants on the example of Lotto's altarpiece, painted in Bergamo approximately 30 years before (cat.6).

Here the Trinity is likewise represented in a theatrical celestial setting that contrasts with the realism of the landscape below. Obvious differences in style illustrate the purist and crisply naturalistic approach of Moroni following his sojourn in Trent.

12

Portrait of Fra Michele da Brescia 1557

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This painting was probably commissioned to commemorate the mediating role played by Fra Michele da Brescia in the bloody feud that broke out between the Spini family of Bergamo and the Pulzini family of Albino between 1550 and 1551.

The intervention of the Augustinian friar ultimately led to their reconciliation, as the Latin inscription painted on the ledge suggests: "I protected the Church with justice, and brought peace to enemies 1557".

13



Portrait of Lucrezia Vertova Agliardi 1557

Oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915

The inscription on the ledge on which the elderly sitter rests her hands reveals her identity and good deed: “Lucrezia, daughter of the most noble Alessio Agliardi, wife of the most esteemed Francesco Cattaneo Vertova, personally supervised the building of the church of Sant’Anna at Albino, 1557”.

The commissioning of this official portrait of the foundress of the monastery at Sant’Anna was probably occasioned by her approaching demise.

Aristocratic Portraits

Following his move to Bergamo in the early 1550s, Moroni became the portraitist of choice among the leading aristocratic families of the city. He created a magnificent series of paintings depicting members of the political and literary élite in the prestigious full-length format reserved for state portraiture.

Moroni showed himself to be an attentive observer of social nuance, self-representation and contemporary dress codes. The renowned local poetesses Lucia Albani and Isotta Brembati (cats 15 and 16) are depicted regally seated in luxurious clothing, albeit without the usual books or manuscripts that were used to indicate intellectual aspiration when men of letters were portrayed (such as in cat.21).

Moroni's aristocratic male patrons are typically depicted either standing elegantly against a ruined wall framing a fragment of sky, or casually leaning against a stone plinth inscribed with a motto.

The artist's penchant for naturalism and his mastery of colour, applied with rapid strokes and all the brilliance of Venetian painting, culminate in 'Portrait of Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli', with his dazzling pink costume (cat. 17). The more sombre suits of black cloth worn by the men in Moroni's subsequent portraits reflect changing fashions.

Bergamo was part of the Venetian Republic but its proximity to the Duchy of Milan – then dominated by Habsburg Spain – and the formal ratification of Spanish control of Italy in 1559 meant that Moroni's sitters were frequently more sympathetic to Imperial Spain than to Venice.

Opposing Spanish and Venetian factions within the city led to the murderous feud that broke out between the Brembati and Albani families, which included his most prominent patrons.

Hostilities reached a climax on 1 April 1563 when Count Achille Brembati was assassinated in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

18

Portrait of Prospero Alessandri c. 1560

Oil on canvas

The Princely Collections, Vaduz-Vienna

The inscription on the plinth identifies the sitter as a noble gentleman, son of Gerolamo and husband of Isabella Gozzi. Further biographical information (painted on the canvas as a later addition) indicates that Prospero became a member of the city council of Bergamo around 1575.

The motto written in Spanish on the plinth, "Between fear and hope", perhaps refers to the level of preoccupation betrayed by the sitter's intense gaze.

19



Portrait of Gabriel de la Cueva 1560

Oil on canvas

Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Gabriel de la Cueva was appointed Viceroy of Navarre in 1560 and took the title 5th Duke of Alburquerque in 1563. A high-ranking official of the Spanish Empire, he was Governor of Milan from 1564 to 1571.

In this portrait his apparently calm demeanour hides his braggart's temperament, revealed by the presence of the sword at his side and suggested by the Spanish motto: "I am here without fear and have no dread of death".

16



Portrait of Isotta Brembati c. 1553

Oil on canvas

Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo.

Lucretia Moroni Collection

Isotta Brembati was a leading member of Bergamese society and a poet famed in her lifetime for compositions in Italian, Latin and Spanish. It may be in deference to the established virtues of chastity and honour that Isotta chose to be painted in the garb of matron and wife, with no reference to her literary activities.

After the death of her first husband Elio Secco d'Aragona di Calcio, she married her brother-in-law Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli (cat. 17).

17

Portrait of Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli ('The Man in Pink') 1560

Oil on canvas

Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo.

Lucretia Moroni Collection

Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli was a scion of the aristocracy of Bergamo. The commissioning of this portrait when he was 24 may be connected to his marriage to Maria Secco d'Aragona di Calcio in 1560. Scarcely a year later, having been widowed, Giovanni Gerolamo took as his second wife Isotta Brembati (cat. 16).

The dominant colour of his magnificent outfit – perhaps chosen for its heraldic connotations – has earned the painting the title 'The Man in Pink'.

21

Portrait of a Gentleman (‘The Unknown Poet’) 1560

Oil on canvas

Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia

Dressed entirely in black, this gentleman stands out against the ruined wall of grey stone and brick, a setting typically used by Moroni for such sitters. The books present in the portrait pinpoint the exact literary interests of their unidentified owner, who was perhaps a poet.

All three were published in Italy in the 1550s and take as their subject the affections and love in their most varied forms – including love of God.

22

Portrait of Pietro Secco Suardo 1563

Oil on canvas

Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Soprintendenza Speciale per il patrimonio storico,
artistico ed etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale
della città di Firenze

Pietro Secco Suardo pursued a diplomatic career in Venice, where he held the rank of ambassador from 1545. He is shown pointing to a brazier resting on a plinth inscribed in Latin with the words: "What should I desire if not to burn?"

Flames were a constant feature in the heraldry of the Suardo family.

Furthermore, the translation of "VT ARDEAT" into Italian corresponds to the words "su arda", in other words, to the family name.

20

Portrait of Giovanni Pietro Maffei c. 1560-64

Oil on canvas

Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

The genial-looking sitter holding a missive is Giovanni Pietro Maffei, nephew of the Zanchi brothers – Giovanni Crisostomo (cat. 25), Dionigi and Basilio (possibly cat. 26) – all leading members of the Order of Lateran Canons.

Maffei studied in Rome and was a frequent guest at the Vatican court. He left Rome in 1563 and moved to Genoa, first as a teacher of rhetoric and oratory, and later as Secretary of the Republic.

14

Portrait of Faustino Avogadro (‘The Knight with the Wounded Foot’)

c. 1555-60

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London

Count Faustino Avogadro, husband of Lucia Albani (cat. 15), is shown with discarded armour at his feet, suggesting participation in a tournament. The traditional title draws attention to the brace stretching from the foot to the knee of the left leg (now believed to be a support for a congenital defect of the ankle).

Faustino was involved in the feud between the Albani and Brembati families, and one of his servants was sentenced to death for the assassination of Count Achille Brembati

in 1563. Faustino and his wife escaped to Ferrara to avoid the risk of vengeance or legal repercussions. He died the following year after falling into a well when drunk.

Portrait of Lucia Albani
Avogadro ('The Lady in Red')
c. 1555-60

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London

This painting depicts Countess Lucia Albani Avogadro, wife of Faustino Avogadro (cat. 14) and daughter of Giovanni Gerolamo Albani (cat. 41). A descendant of one of the most powerful families of Bergamo, Lucia was also a well-known poet, celebrated for her literary talent, her manners and her beauty.

In 1563 she followed her husband to Ferrara to escape the repercussions of the feud between the Albani and Brembati families, which involved her husband, brother and father.

Your feedback, please

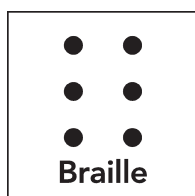
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Molly Bretton, Access Officer



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Giovanni Battista

Moroni



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List of Works

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Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Portrait of a Girl of the Redetti Family, c. 1570–73 (cat. 44)



Portrait of a Lateran Canon, c. 1558 (cat. 26)



The Last Supper, 1566–69 (cat. 32)



Crucifixion with St Bernardino of Siena and St Anthony of Padua, c. 1574–75 (cat. 34)



Portrait of an Elderly Man Seated with a Book, c. 1575–79 (cat. 42)

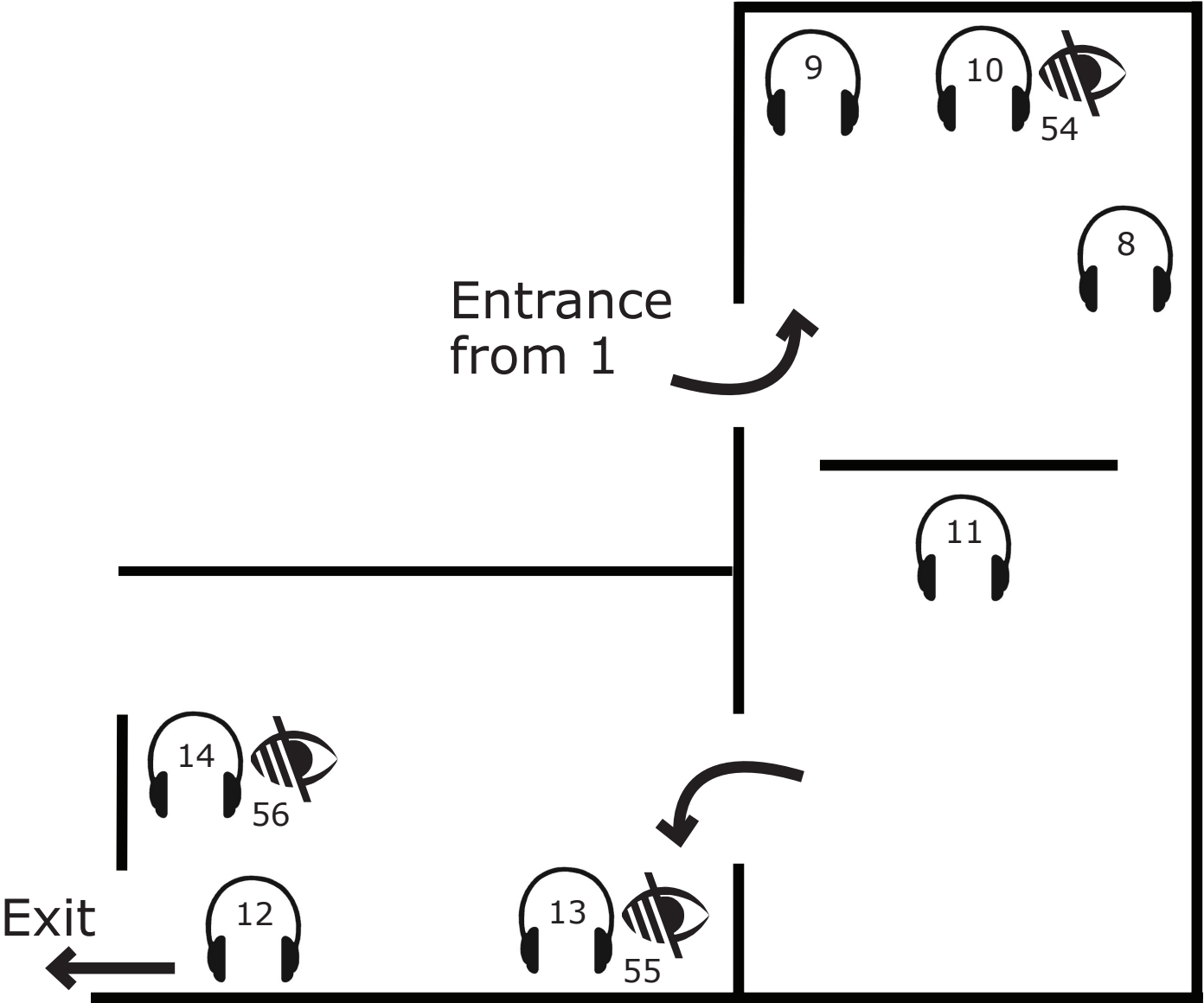
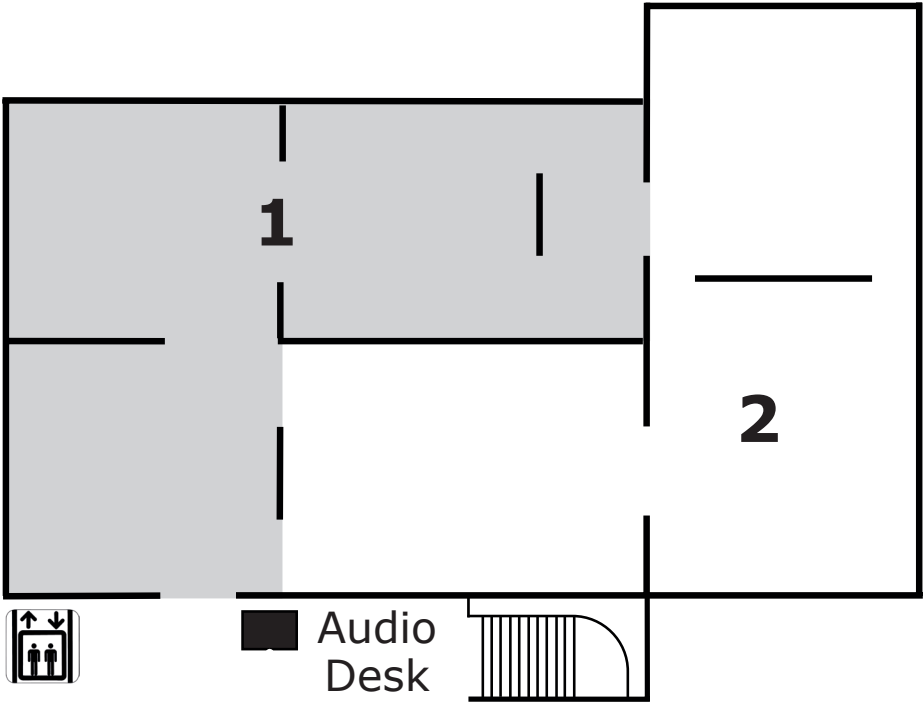


Portrait of Podestà Antonio Navagero, 1565 (cat. 28)



Portrait of a Tailor, c. 1570 (cat. 36)

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Giovanni Battista Moroni

25 October - 25 January 2015

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Portraits from Nature

For sitters of more modest means drawn from the local bourgeoisie and clergy Moroni used the appropriate and affordable format of the bust-length portrait. Painted close-up and from life, without recourse to preparatory drawings, these portraits are striking for their directness, sobriety and level of psychological penetration.

Such qualities are most notable in 'Portrait of a Lateran Canon' (cat.26), possibly depicting Basilio Zanchi, who was described in a contemporary Venetian account as "a man of about forty years old; dark in colouring and satisfied with his tranquil life; he has no regrets". Moroni's technique of depicting his subjects from the side with their heads slightly turned towards the viewer, as if pausing only briefly for the painter, creates a sensation of movement and spontaneity.

(continued over)

Light falling from above suffuses the grey-green background and illuminates the sitter's head, giving the face a three-dimensional quality. The artist's tight brush strokes and subtle blending of skin tones further contribute to the portrait's naturalism.

After the bloody outcome of the feud in Bergamo, Venice tightened its control of the city and its wayward aristocratic families, which may explain the gradual diminution in important commissions that Moroni experienced at this time.

With his star waning in Bergamo, Moroni decided to move to his native Albino, where he remained for the rest of his life. The artist still received commissions from Bergamo; in such works he once more used the intimate bust-length format to portray ladies of the town dressed in the latest and most expensive fashions.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

23

Portrait of Lucia Vertova Agosti c. 1557-60

Oil on canvas

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes

This painting of an elegant lady looking fixedly towards an unknown point beyond the picture frame was first mentioned in 1856, when it was sold as a Veronese portrait of Bianca Cappello, wife of Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany.

In 1900, Louis Gonse re-attributed it to Moroni, as "a magnificent piece" from "this rare and skilful portrait painter". He also identified the sitter as Lucia, wife of Gerolamo Vertova.

25

Portrait of Giovanni Crisostomo Zanchi c. 1559

Oil on canvas

Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

Giovanni Crisostomo Zanchi was a leading light in the Order of Lateran Canons. Like his brothers Dionigi and Basilio (the latter may be depicted in cat. 26) he entered the Congregation in 1524. Besides occupying important posts within the Order, he made his mark as a scholar, author and poet, and was particularly gifted as a linguist.

26



Portrait of a Lateran Canon (Basilio Zanchi?) c. 1558

Oil on canvas

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

The sitter may be Basilio Zanchi, a member of the Order of Lateran Canons, who – after a successful career in the literary world – was appointed to serve as supernumerary curator of the Vatican's library.

He was later sentenced to life imprisonment for his support of Lutheranism. Basilio seems to have stopped all of a sudden to pose for his portrait and, in turning, gives a timid smile.

24

Portrait of a Man with a Red Beard

c. 1558-59

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This unknown sitter was probably a member of the middle class; no signs suggest that he belonged to the nobility, or pursued any particular trade or profession.

The outfit he wears was popular throughout the entire social spectrum in his day. The portrait is striking for its naturalism and vitality, achieved largely through Moroni's technique of painting from the model, with preparation limited to a few summary lines drawn directly on the canvas.

32



The Last Supper 1566-69

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di Santa Maria Assunta e San Giacomo
Maggiore, Romano di Lombardia

'The Last Supper' was commissioned from Moroni by the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament in Romano di Lombardia, near Bergamo.

Christ is shown at the last meal He shared with the Apostles before his Crucifixion. The man who stands behind the table and acts as the host has been identified as Lattanzio da Lallio, the parish priest. The intensity with which he looks out at the spectator suggests that the biblical scene may be his vision.

30

Head of a Young Man

c. 1565

Black and white chalk on grey-green paper

Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Galleria degli Uffizi,
Florence

This drawing is a rare study by Moroni made in preparation for a painted portrait. The work was executed with rapid strokes in dark chalk, the areas on which the light falls heightened with white chalk.

The liveliness and impression of movement conveyed by the face are achieved through the shrewd pose: while the head is tilted backwards to the left, the eyes look down towards the opposite side.

29

Portrait of a Young Man of Twenty-nine 1567

Oil on canvas

Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

This composition follows a formula used quite frequently by Moroni for some of his portraits of the local middle class: a bust-length figure with head slightly turned, set against a neutral background.

In this case a band along the lower edge bears an inscription in Roman capitals providing the age of the sitter. The text does not reveal his identity, confirming that the painting was executed for private enjoyment.

44



Portrait of a Girl of the Redetti Family c. 1570-73

Oil on canvas

Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.

Guglielmo Lochis Collection, 1866

Moroni's typical neutral-grey background leaves the viewer to concentrate their attention on the sitter's physical appearance.

The little girl wears her best dress and, despite her youth, seems to have adopted a pose that was popular with adults during the period; similarly, her grey-blue eyes suggest self-assurance beyond her years. She clutches her necklace, drawing attention to the coral bracelet on her wrist, worn for its apotropaic powers.

45

Portrait of a Young Lady

c. 1575

Oil on canvas

Private collection

A tilt of the head and a piercing, almost inquisitorial, gaze accentuate the severity of this young woman's expression.

She seems completely unintimidated by the painter and perfectly at ease in her opulent garment of pink brocade with its stylish open sleeves. The figure is painted close-up, against a grey-blue background brightened by suffused light around the head.

43

Portrait of a Young Lady with a Fan c. 1575

Oil on canvas

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Purchased with the support of the Vereniging
Rembrandt

No detail in this painting can distract from the intense look fixed on the spectator by the young woman. Her dress is embellished with magnificent jewellery and her hair very carefully styled, with curls arranged along the front hairline to form a point in the centre of her forehead, a style fashionable in Lombardy in the 1570s.

The lustre of the image and the brilliance of Moroni's palette are typical of the artist's final years.

Altarpieces

Moroni was active in the local government and public affairs of Albino, but this civic involvement ceased in the middle of the 1570s when he became completely absorbed by the production of Counter-Reformation altarpieces.

These works were to adorn churches in the vicinity in anticipation of the apostolic visit of the great religious reformer Cardinal Carlo Borromeo. This frenzy of activity, carried out without the help of assistants at a time when Moroni was no longer young, may well have hastened his death in 1579/80.

The style and doctrinal content of Moroni's altarpieces found favour with a church busy reforming religious imagery in the face of criticism from the Protestant world.

Touchingly simple and often severe in their formal arrangement, they lucidly underscore such contested Catholic dogmas as transubstantiation, the intercessory role played by the Virgin and saints, and the relationship between good works and man's salvation.

To make his images more compelling, Moroni often introduces in the foreground the portrait of a donor, who witnesses and points to the sacred scene he has conjured up through the power of his mental prayer.

In 'The Last Supper' (cat.32), painted for Romano di Lombardia, the artist goes one step further by placing the portrait of the parish priest within the biblical narrative.

This lifelike figure carries a cruet of wine and wears over his outfit a white stole, a vestment worn during Mass. He draws attention to Christ, who looks directly at the viewer as he proffers a piece of bread

on the altar-like table. According to Catholic belief, the bread and wine used during the sacrament of the Eucharist are miraculously changed into Christ's flesh and blood. Thus Moroni expounded like never before the doctrine of transubstantiation.

List of works (clockwise in order of hang)

33

A Man in Contemplation Before the Crucifixion with St John the Baptist and St Sebastian

c. 1575

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di Sant'Alessandro della Croce, Bergamo

The man portrayed turned towards the spectator in the foreground points to a painted scene of Christ on the Cross, who is venerated by St John the Baptist and St Sebastian, shown holding the arrows with which he was wounded.

The religious portion of the composition is perhaps the fruit of mental prayer accomplished in accordance with St Ignatius of Loyola's instruction. The identity of the donor and the painting's provenance are unknown but the work may have initially adorned the altar of a private chapel.

34



Crucifixion with St Bernardino of Siena and St Anthony of Padua c. 1574-75

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di San Giuliano, Albino

The saints in this painting are proportionally much larger than Christ, indicating to the viewer that he or she is contemplating a vision of the Crucifixion.

St Bernardino of Siena is clutching to his chest a disc bearing the holy initials of Jesus while St Anthony of Padua holds a lily, symbolic of his purity. A storm is about to break on the dramatic landscape, and the grey skies render the unusual yellow-orange of Christ's loincloth even more startling.

31

The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine c. 1565-70

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di San Bartolomeo, Almenno San Bartolomeo

The chapel in the church of San Bartolomeo in Almenno in which this painting ordinarily hangs was commissioned by one Francesco Losetti, who had died by 1575, when a weekly Mass was instigated in his memory.

Its subject matter is described by the Latin inscription on the scroll affixed to the step: "Catherine you came as the immortal bride of Christ". The saint leans on the spiked wheel of her martyrdom and holds the crown emblematic of her royal birth.

35

St Gotthard Enthroned with St Lawrence and St Catherine of Alexandria 1574-75

Oil on canvas

Chiesa di San Pancrazio Martire, Gorlago

St Gotthard traditionally wards off natural disasters; in particular he defends crops against hailstones. A Latin inscription in capital letters on a marble plaque invokes his protection: "Oh Gotthard, make the thundering peak kindly towards the people".

On one side of the throne, St Lawrence rests against the symbol of his martyrdom, the grille; and on the other St Catherine, holding a palm and a crown, elegantly supports a fragment of wheel.

The Beginnings of Modern Portraiture

The 1560s and especially the 1570s, Moroni's final decades, spent in Albino, were a period in which the artist made further remarkable achievements in portraiture.

He again employed the three-quarter and full-length formats, but to portray an even wider range of sitters that included not only members of the local aristocracy, but also the new bourgeoisie – the respectable professional and artisan classes.

These portraits show the evolution of his style, frequently more atmospheric in treatment, and his yet greater power of characterisation. One notes the bonhomie of the Venetian official Antonio Navagero, the knowing gaze of the provincial noble

Bernardo Spini, the weary look of Giovanni Gerolamo Albani, and the steely countenance of 'Portrait of a Lady in Black' (cats 28, 39, 41 and 37).

Moroni's life-sized depictions give the viewer the illusion of standing before the actual sitter.

He places his subjects in simple settings, often consisting of nothing more than a grey wall and basic furnishings, so that their engaging expressions and air of approachability become the main foci for our attention and interest. We seem almost to enter into a relationship with Moroni's patrons, and this is perhaps where the apparent modernity of his portraits lies.

This strong sense of encounter is particularly notable in 'Portrait of an Elderly Man Seated with a Book' (cat. 42) and 'Portrait of a Tailor' (cat. 36), his most iconic painting.

The very subject of a tailor at work, a man working with his hands yet portrayed by Moroni with great respect and individuality, was thoroughly revolutionary.

With their startling realism, tonal effects and strong characterisation, these portraits anticipate the work of such seventeenth-century artists as Caravaggio and Velázquez, through to Ingres, Manet and Degas in the nineteenth century.

List of works (anti clockwise in order of hang)

28



Portrait of Podestà Antonio Navagero 1565

Oil on canvas

Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

Antonio Navagero was born in Venice in 1532 and appointed 'podestà' (governor) of Bergamo from 1564 to 1565. Relaxed and benevolent, he wears his formal uniform, a doublet in brilliant red silk, here enhanced by a cloak lined with lynx fur.

He was described in an official report to the Doge of Venice as "truly a very intelligent and prudent gentleman, both in matters of justice and in keeping the city calm; he has always kept watch with the greatest care and diligence".

37

Portrait of a Lady in Black (Medea Rossi?)

c. 1572-73

Oil on canvas

Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo

The lady dressed in black, possibly the mother of Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli (cat. 17), exudes a tremendous sense of control. She is seated on a chair, placed diagonally to give the painting a feeling of depth.

The white ruff and cuffs stand out from the chrysalis of her black dress and draw attention to her head and hands, one of which holds a small book. Perhaps she has interrupted her reading to pose for the artist.

41

Portrait of Giovanni Gerolamo Albani

c. 1568-70

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This is one of the rare portraits by Moroni in which the sitter faces directly out at the viewer. Giovanni Gerolamo Albani, here seated in such impressive majesty, was a leading member of the aristocracy of Bergamo.

Following his son's involvement in the assassination of Count Achille Brembati, Giovanni Gerolamo lost his post as 'generale collaterale' of the Venetian Republic and was forced into a five-year exile.

42



Portrait of an Elderly Man Seated with a Book (Pietro Spino?) c. 1575-79

Oil on canvas

Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

This elderly sitter, dressed in a heavy black jacket lined with fur, seems to have sunk into his comfortable Dantesca chair. He has stopped reading his book, with its precious leather cover, and turned slowly round to meet the spectator's eye. His own gaze is searching, almost hypnotic.

Comparison with another portrait indicates that he may be the humanist Pietro Spino (1513-1585) from Albino.

36



56



14

Portrait of a Tailor c. 1570

Oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London

Moroni's dignified portrayal of this comfortably-off tailor at work is unique in sixteenth-century painting. The elegance of the artisan's clothes and nobility of his bearing have led various authors to identify him as an aristocrat who has turned to selling fabrics. It was not uncommon, however, for such clothing to be worn by wealthy tailors at the time.

The work's unusual immediacy and its range of colours splendidly combining silvery tones with warm browns mark it as the masterpiece of Moroni's late portraiture.

38

Portrait of a Gentleman and His Two Daughters ('The Widower') c. 1572-75

Oil on canvas

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Very little here detracts from the direct, searching gaze of the sitter, who is protectively embracing his two young daughters.

The extraordinary rendering of the flesh and the skin tones is typical of Moroni's technique in his final years, while vibrant yellow and coral in the girls' skirts serve to relieve the painting's dark sobriety.

The name of the town of Albino, which is written on one of the letters, is all we know of the sitter.

39 & 40

Portrait of Bernardo Spini

c. 1573-75

Portrait of Pace Rivola Spini

c. 1573-75

Oil on canvas

Accademia Carrara, Bergamo

The identity and dates of these two figures can be gleaned from the inscriptions on the canvases.

Bernardo and Pace Rivola Spini, husband and wife, are portrayed full length in an undecorated architectural setting that may be the interior of Palazzo Spini in Albino.

Elegantly dressed and posed, Bernardo looks rather pleased with himself.

Pace Rivola cradles an ostrich- feather fan and has removed both her gloves in order to show off her rings. Although she appears pregnant, there are no records that indicate their marriage produced legitimate children.

27

Portrait of a Doctor (‘The Magistrate’) 1560

Oil on canvas

Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo, Brescia

The sitter wears a cape lined with lynx fur and a three-cornered hat identifying him as a ‘dottore’. He has been interrupted as he reads a letter – addressed to him and signed by the artist – and turns in his chair.

The friendly confidence of his glance implies a close acquaintance with the artist and removes the overlay of formality and etiquette usually adopted in an official portrait.

Your feedback, please

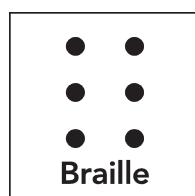
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