

The MEDICI DYNASTY

Family Portraits





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Exhibition Project

Contemporanea Progetti, Florence, Italy

In collaboration with

Museo Stibbert, Florence, Italy



MUSEO STIBBERT

Organization

Contemporanea Progetti

Via del Campofiore, 106

50136 Florence, Italy

Tel. +39 055 6802474

contact@contemporaneaprogetti.it

Contact

l_carioni@contemporaneaprogetti.it

j_martinenghi@contemporaneaprogetti.it

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FIorenza



The Exhibition, in brief

The city of Florence was born on the banks of the Arno river in central Italy in ancient times, but it would be the wealth and command of the Medici dynasty that 'ruled' the city for more than three centuries that empowered the city to reach its enduring destiny as 'città d'arte' par excellence.

There are many protagonists in the long history of art, but rarely has one dynasty taken such center stage. Their enormous wealth, initiated in the Medici banks of the 1300s, was consolidated in the 1400s under the leadership of Cosimo the Elder. Their quintessential patronage of the arts was affirmed by Lorenzo, the Magnificent. It was his guidance that gave expression, shape and form to the Italian Renaissance, an intellectual and artistic movement that transformed all of Europe. In the 1500s, their 'de facto' political influence was transformed into hereditary political power by Cosimo I de' Medici. The Medici legacy was embodied in the family's many sons, daughters and descendants – Grand Dukes and Duchesses, Queens of France, Popes and Cardinals – all and always great patrons of the arts.

*Portrait of Giovanni de' Medici, known as Giovanni delle Bande Nere
Paolo Lorenzi, engraver after model of Tiziano Vecellio, known as Titian.*

1857

Etching on paper, 53,5 x 38 cm



Portrait painting was but one of the many genres of art that they embraced for generations. It served them well as they ruled the small city-state of Florence and then the Duchy of Tuscany for generations. Immortalized by many artists – artists such as Agnolo Bronzino and Justus Suttermans - their portraits sustained their power and spread their influence not only at home but also abroad.

This exhibition of ca. 40 original Medici portraits enhanced by graphic and multimedia elements unfolds on parallel paths. On one track, it traces the vicissitudes of this legendary dynasty – stories of war and assassination, stories of love, betrayal and family secrets - stories still reverberate on the streets of Florence today.

On another track, the exhibition investigates and exemplifies the history, purpose and nuances inherent to the genre of portrait painting. This investigation also encompasses the lives of the artists; they too are protagonists of the stories.



About Portraiture, in brief

Portraiture has been an important and publicly popular art form since Antiquity. In the ancient Mediterranean civilizations, portrait art mostly represented the deities, rulers and nobility of the society at that time in the form of sculpture in stone, marble or bronze. The purpose was to pay tribute, but also often to reflect the society's political precepts and religious beliefs.

In ancient Egypt, depictions of the ruling pharaohs and gods were done in a highly stylized fashion with relatively little emphasis on likeness. Greek and Roman portraiture art developed traditions of more resemblance to the subject as demonstrated by the many busts sculpted to portray the successive emperors and the coins they minted.

In the vacuum that followed the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Catholic Church came into dominance in the Middle Ages and precipitated a major shift in portrait styles. Instead of creating portraits as public works and odes to gods and rulers, artists turned their attention to creating religious portraits often as paintings on wood or canvas.

In the Renaissance, partly out of rediscovered interest in the classical art of ancient Greece and Rome, portraits were given an important role in society as depictions of earthly success and status. Indeed, many innovations in portrait painting evolved during this vibrant period.





Despite the ascendancy of the Italian masters, in the 15th century, Dutch painters played a key role in the development of portraiture, representing not only of figures of the court, but also wealthy townspeople.

Technically, portrait painting is a genre of painting where the intent is to represent a specific human subject, and the portrait usually intends to convey a likeness of the sitter. There is some debate as to whether the ideal is to create a very good record of the physical appearance or to show the inner essence of the subject.

Historically, portrait paintings have primarily memorialized the rich and powerful, and portraits often served more as important records of state than as family remembrances. This was certainly the tradition during the tenure of the Medici dynasty in Florence. In keeping with the traditions of the other noble courts of Europe, portraits of the Grand Dukes and other family members were deployed around the Grand Duchy of Tuscany as omnipotent reminders of the Medici's sovereign position. They were also used as ambassadors abroad as a means to communicate the chronicles of life at the Medici court – alliances, coronations, marriages, births of future generations – reassurances of stability in the passage of time and power.

Parallel to the historical narrative, the exhibition investigates the genre of portraiture with a particular focus on portrait painting during the centuries of Medici patronage that encompasses the renowned portrait painters themselves and their busy workshops. Some were considered 'court painters' and enjoyed both privilege and reward for the images they produced of their illustrious subjects.

Structure of the Exhibition, in brief

Meet the Medici
History and Development of Portrait Painting ✂

From Bankers to Grand Dukes
Purposes of Portraiture, Official and Non ✂

Consolidation of Power & Family Scandals
Costume and Symbols in Portraiture ✂

The Next Generations
The Artist's Point of View; ✂
Workshop of Justus Suttermans

Women and Children of the Court
Legacy of Portraits ✂



Meet the Medici



Lorenzo (The Magnificent) de' Medici
(1449 – 1492)

Grandson of Cosimo the Elder

Under his leadership, Florence was the epicenter of the Italian Renaissance due to the philosophers, writers, poets and artists of his circle. His intellectual gifts and complex personality allowed him to function in a myriad of roles – scholar, statesman, patron of the arts and protector of artists. Dedicated to the diffusion of Humanism and the rediscovery of the classical world, he founded a school of sculpture in the Medici Orchards where a young Michelangelo studied.

Although he never held public office within the republic, he was an extremely astute and undisputed political leader. Unfortunately, his death signaled turbulent times for Florence and the Medici dynasty.



Portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici
Unknown
16th century, repainted in 19th century
Oil on wood panel, 58 x 42 cm



Alessandro de' Medici
(1510 – 1537)

Duke of Florence
Grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent

His short life was marked by controversy from the very beginning. Nicknamed 'the Moor' due to his dark complexion, he was officially the son of Lorenzo II de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, however, it was whispered that he was the illegitimate son of Giulio de' Medici and a household servant. Whatever the truth, his life was shaped by the political machinations of Giulio de' Medici who then became Pope Clement VII.

After a period of exile, with the support of the Papacy and the Emperor Charles V, Medici power was re-instated in Florence with Alessandro de' Medici as the figurehead and ennobled as Duke. His tenure was fraught with discord, and in 1537, lured into a trap on the pretext of an amorous encounter, he was assassinated by his cousin, Lorenzino de' Medici.



Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici
Girolamo Macchietti
1585
Oil on canvas, 203 x 118 cm



Cosimo I de' Medici
(1519 – 1574)

*The first Grand Duke of Tuscany
Son of Giovanni delle Bande Nere of the
secondary branch of the Medici family*

Despite his young age, Cosimo I de' Medici was called to Florence to impose order after the assassination of his cousin. He quickly seized power and through military prowess defeated rival city-states. In 1569, he was proclaimed Grand Duke of the Duchy of Tuscany with rights of hereditary succession, forever ending the Florentine republic.

With a pragmatic eye towards the arts, he commissioned the best artists of the day to produce monuments, masterpieces and portraits that glorified his accomplishments and the Medici family.



*Portrait of Cosimo I de' Medici
Giovanni Battista Naldini
ca. 1590 – 1599
Oil on canvas, 64 x 48 cm*



Consolidation of Power & Family Scandals



Francesco I de' Medici
(1510 – 1537)

Grand Duke
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. Under his direction, the Uffizi Gallery was created.

He is also remembered for his notorious love affair. Even prior to his official marriage, he had fallen in love with the beautiful Venetian, Bianca Cappello. She and her husband had fled Venice to escape the opposition there to their marriage. The love affair between Francesco and Bianca began in 1563 and lasted for the rest of their lives. After the death of his wife, they officially married despite opposition from the court and in particular his brother, Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici. So much so that Ferdinando, heir to the throne, was suspected in the mysterious and sudden death of Francesco and Bianca; in 1587, both died within eleven hours of each other.



Portrait of Francesco I de' Medici
Agnolo Bronzino
ca. 1567 – 1570
Oil on wood panel, 58 x 47,5 cm



Ferdinando I de' Medici
(1549 – 1609)

Grand Duke
Second son of Cosimo I

Upon his brother's sudden death in 1587, Francesco I relinquished his life as a cardinal in Rome to assume his role as Grand Duke in Florence. To ensure the future of the dynasty and political relations with the French court, he married Cristina of Lorraine, a granddaughter of the French royal family.

He is considered by history to have been a wise and astute politician, and the 20 some years of his rule as a period of good government. Politics however did not curb his passion for the arts. An avid collector of antiquities, he also supported new artistic developments.



Portrait of Ferdinando I de' Medici
School of Scipione Pulzone
ca. 1590
Oil on canvas, 70 x 56 cm



Maria de' Medici
(1573 – 1642)

Queen of France
Daughter of Francesco I de' Medici

In 1600, her uncle Ferdinando I arranged for her marriage by proxy to Henry IV, King of France in a blatant political alliance, and Maria de' Medici set sail with a huge dowry and many gifts for the French court. Once there, she found unhappiness and betrayal, marked by the frequent and open infidelities of the king. Following his murder, she became the ill-advised regent for her young son who later exiled her when he ascended the throne.

During her reign, however she supported the arts expanding the Louvre and engaging many artists in the decoration of her Palais du Luxembourg, including Pieter Paul Reubens.



Portrait of Maria de' Medici
School of Antoon Van Dyck
ca. 1640 – 1650
Oil on canvas, 67 x 61 cm



The Next Generations



Cosimo II de' Medici
(1590 – 1621)

Grand Duke
First born son of Ferdinando I

For his time, Cosimo II de' Medici was given a very modern, scientific education; among his tutors was Galileo Galilei with whom he forged a lifelong bond. Indeed, Cosimo II is most remembered for his support and protection of Galileo. In 1610, in addition to a professorship at the University of Pisa, the scientist was appointed court philosopher and mathematician. Galileo expressed his gratitude to the Grand Duke by dedicating the *Sidereus Nuncius* to him and calling the four satellites of Jupiter he had discovered “medicea sidera” (Medici stars).

Cosimo II ascended the throne at 19 years-of-age, but due to his precarious health, he only reigned for 12 years, and mostly governed through appointed ministers. His premature death left his young, first-born son as heir to throne with his mother and mother-in-law as regents until he came of age.



Portrait of Cosimo II de' Medici
Filippo di Liagno, known as Filippo Napoletano
ca. 1616–1619
Oil on canvas, 64,5 x 49,5 cm



Ferdinando II de' Medici
(1610 – 1670)

Grand Duke
First born son of Cosimo II

When Ferdinando II began his personal rule in 1628, the regency of his mother and grandmother had been disastrous for the economic health of the Tuscan state and the Medici coffers. In fact, his 49-year reign witnessed the economic decline of Tuscany exacerbated by the calamitous effects of the Plague of 1630.

A man of science, particularly experimental science, like his father, he protected Galileo and offered lifelong asylum to the old, blind scientist after the condemnation for heresy by the Inquisition in 1633.



Portrait of Ferdinando II de' Medici
Justus Suttermans
ca. 1650
Oil on canvas, 68 x 52 cm



Mattias de' Medici
(1613 – 1667)

Son of Cosimo II

Although appointed by his brother, Grand Duke Ferdinando II, to be governor of Siena, Mattias de' Medici distinguished himself in command of the Medici army, especially in Germany in the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Upon his return, he brought many advanced scientific instruments to Tuscany signed by famous architects and suppliers of the most important European collections, giving the Medici collection a more European character.

A lover of hunting, horse racing and worldly pleasures, Mattias was also sensitive to art, music and theater and protected artists such as Justus Suttermans.



Portrait of Mattias de' Medici
Justus Suttermans
ca. 1631 – 1632
Oil on canvas, 64 x 54 cm



Women and Children of the Court



Maria Maddalena of Austria
(1587 – 1631)

Grand Duchess
Wife of Cosimo II

Sister to the Austrian emperor and to the reigning queen of Spain, the marriage of Maria Maddalena of Austria in 1608 to Cosimo II de' Medici was arranged by Grand Duke Ferdinando I to placate the Spanish throne.

She became Grand Duchess one year later. After the premature death of her husband, she dedicated herself to the education of her 8 children and became regent to her first born son who would become Grand Duke Ferdinando II.

Portrait of Maria Maddalena of Austria
Domenico and Valore Casini
ca. 1620–1630
Oil on canvas, 217 x 123 cm



Vittoria della Rovere
(1622 – 1694)

Grand Duchess
Wife of Ferdinando II

Related to the Medici through her mother, upon the death of her father, the Duke of Urbino, Vittoria delle Rovere came to the Medici court in Florence as a young child and later married her cousin, Grand Duke Ferdinando II. As the sole heir to the artistic treasures of the delle Rovere family, her dowry brought an immense number of masterpieces into the Medici collections including many superb paintings by Titian.

By this time, an almost fanatical religious devotion manifested itself in the pomp and ostentation that governed every aspect of life at the court.



Portrait of Vittoria della Rovere
Workshop of Justus Suttermans
ca. 1640
Oil on canvas, 76 x 61 cm



**Grand Prince Ferdinando de' Medici
and Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici
as children with Governess**

*First son of Cosimo III
only daughter of Cosimo III*

The young Grand Prince and heir to the throne, Ferdinando de' Medici and his sister, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, are portrayed with their governess.

Their father, Cosimo III (1642 – 1723) reigned for 53 years. The longest reign in Tuscan history witnessed the economic and political decline of the duchy amid a climate of rigid Catholic morality. His first born son was of a very different character, more interested in the arts, travel and pleasure. He died before his father without an heir.

Anna Maria Luisa was married to the Elector Palatine of the court of Dusseldorf in 1691. Widowed in 1716 and without children, she returned to Florence. She would eventually inherit all of the family possessions, and as the last of the Medici dynasty, she would write the binding Family Pact that left the Medici possessions to the Lorraine dynasty of Austria upon the condition that they not be transported or removed from Tuscany.



*Portrait of Ferdinando and Anna
Maria Luisa de' Medici with
Governess
Justus Suttermans
ca. 1670
Oil on canvas, 206 x 147 cm*



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Twilight of the Dynasty



Gian Gastone de' Medici
(1671 – 1737)

*Last Medici Grand Duke
Second son of Cosimo III*

As it became apparent that his older brother, Prince Ferdinando de' Medici would die of syphilis without leaving an heir, the life of melancholy Gian Gastone de' Medici changed dramatically. Forced to marry a Bohemian country princess against his will and in opposition to his openly homosexual orientation, he turned away from his refined cultural and scientific interests to indulge his worst passions – alcohol, obesity and debauchery. But this unhappy union would fail to produce any heirs and Gian Gastone would be the last Medici Grand Duke.

Per the inheritance customs entrenched among the European ruling dynasties, the Duchy of Tuscany passed into the possession of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. In 1765, the brother of both Marie Antoinette of France and the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II, Pietro Leopoldo of the Hapsburg-Lorraine and his wife were eventually dispatched to Florence as the new Grand Duke and Grand Duchess.

*Portrait of
Gian Gastone de' Medici
Florentine School
ca. 1695 – 1699
Oil on canvas, 130 x 93,5 cm*



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DYNASTY
Family Portraits



Portrait of Pietro Leopoldo di Lorena
Lorenzo Pecheux
ca. 1770
Oil on canvas, 96 x 77 cm



Portrait of Maria Luisa of Bourbon
Lorenzo Pecheux
ca. 1770
Oil on canvas, 96 x 77 cm



About the Stibbert Collection

Frederick Stibbert was born in Florence in 1838, educated in England, the son of a distinguished British citizen and his Italian wife. His grandfather had been the Commander in Chief of the British East India Company in Bengal and governor there for many years in the late 1700s, amassing a great fortune and estate that was inherited by Frederick Stibbert. This enabled Stibbert, an astute and sophisticated financier and collector to dedicate his life to collecting a broad range of arms, armor, works of art, objects and costumes. According to his own criteria, he transformed his hillside villa and park into the museum that is today known as the Museo Stibbert, located in Florence, Italy that conserves a magnificent collection of nearly 50,000 items.

Although the Museo Stibbert is best known for its outstanding collections of arms and armor, Frederick Stibbert was also passionate about his painting collection that encompasses many genres – sacred art, still life, landscape and portraiture. He was particularly interested in paintings that documented historical periods and costume as attested to by his rather extensive collection of portraits by notable artists of the Medici dynasty that so dominated Florentine and Renaissance history. Indeed, he expressly created and built a 'quadreria' (a painting gallery) for his collection adjacent to his prized armory.



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