FLORENCE
PALAZZO STROZZI
8 MARCH–20 JULY 2014

curated by
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Both born only a short distance from one another (one in an Empoli suburb, the other in Florence) in 1494 and both trained by the same Florentine masters, 20th century art historians saw Pontormo and Rosso as the twins of the “modern manner”, or rather of “Mannerism” – a much abused classifying formula which has had a huge impact on the way 16th century painting has been interpreted, yet which reveals its ambiguity as soon as we start talking about Pontormo and Rosso. Taking issue with their alleged similarity, this exhibition sets out to highlight the real differences in their careers and states its intention in no uncertain terms in its title: Pontormo and Rosso. Diverging Paths of Mannerism. Their paths began to diverge at the very start of their careers when they were still training in the workshop of Andrea del Sarto, aged seventeen or just over. So while they may have sprung from the same rib, so to speak, they instantly began to look different. Today we might still call them twins, but by no means identical twins.

Their shared schooling is explored in the first room, where their two youthful frescoes from the Annunziata (1513–14) sit alongside the fresco that Del Sarto had painted in the same cloister in 1511. Del Sarto provides us with an initial yardstick by which to judge his two pupils’ gradual marking of distance. Thereafter you follow the two artists’ careers in chronological order to explore their personal preferences, which differed on numerous counts: their stylistic vocabulary, their approach to religion, their interpretation of nature, their take on tradition, their response to foreign influence, their rapport with Classical culture and their reaction to the style of Michelangelo. The exhibition closes with a direct comparison between their two different approaches to the teachings of Michelangelo. Rosso died in Fontainebleau in 1540 while Pontormo died in Florence in 1557, Rosso at the court of King Francis I of France and Pontormo at the court of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici in Florence, thus bringing to a close a period marked by intense freedom of expression and setting in motion the critical fortunes of a new season marked by the views enshrined in Giorgio Vasari’s Lives of the Artists.

Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, curators
Andrea del Sarto was only twenty-three when he began to work in the votive cloister in the Annunziata, Florence’s most popular shrine, painting the Life of Blessed Philip Benizzi in 1509–10 and the Journey of the Magi in 1511. This was the year Rosso and Pontormo, both adolescents, began to frequent the workshop of del Sarto (who though only a little older than them was already a celebrated master in his own right) and probably accompanied him to Rome. But while both took their cue from the Procession, they then set off down different paths. A few years later, in Rosso’s Assumption of the Virgin (1513) and Pontormo’s Visitation (1514) in the same cloister, we detect styles that are distant both from one another and from the classicism whose greatest master in Florence in the early years of the century had been Raphael. These three frescoes from the cloister, the true crucible of the “modern manner” in Florence, open the exhibition together with a panel by Fra Bartolomeo, master of the “school” in the convent of San Marco and Rosso’s spiritual mentor, while Pontormo, at that same “school”, took his inspiration from Mariotto Albertinelli.
ROSSO FIORENTINO
(GIOVAN BATTISTA DI JACOPO; FIRENZE 1494-FONTAINEBLEAU 1540)
*Assumption of the Virgin*
c. 1513
detached fresco
Florence, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Chiostro dei Voti, patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto – Ministero dell’Interno

Servite Friar Jacopo de’ Rossi commissioned the *Assumption* to bring to a close the sequence of stories from the Life of Mary in the Chiostro dei Voti, also known as the Annunziata School. The division into human and divine spheres echoes the approach of Rosso’s master Fra’ Bartolomeo, while the apostles’ drapery and gesticulation hark back to Donatello: an archaism that distinguishes Rosso’s style from the academic style popular in a city ruled once again by the Medici family.

PONTORMO
(JACOPO CARUCCI; PONTORME, EMPOLI 1494-FIRENZE 1557)
*Visitation*
1514–6
detached fresco
Florence, Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, Chiostro dei Voti, patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto – Ministero dell’Interno

Servite Friar Jacopo de’ Rossi also commissioned this lunette. The young Pontormo, who had been studying under Andrea del Sarto for two years after a spell in the workshops of Mariotto Albertinelli and Piero di Cosimo, pays tribute to Raphael’s Stanze which he had admired in Rome, emulating the pose of the old man in the *School of Athens* in the figure of the young boy seated on the steps. Joseph points to the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, above, which foreshadows the sacrifice of Jesus, another innocent martyr.

FRA’ BARTOLOMEO
(BARTOLOMEO DI PAOLO, ALSO KNOWN AS BACCIO DELLA PORTA
BACCIO; SOFFIGNANO, PRATO 1473–PIAN DEL MUGNONE,
FIESOLE 1517)
*Madonna and Child with Six Saints* (*Cambi Altarpiece*)
1510
oil on panel
Florence, Church of San Marco, patrimonio del Fondo Edifici di Culto - Ministero dell’Interno

The name and ancestors of this altarpiece’s patron, Pietro di Niccolò di Giovanni Cambi, a politician and follower of Savonarola, determined the choice of the three saints: Peter Martyr, Nicholas and John the Baptist. The panel was painted when Fra’ Bartolomeo played a leading role in the School of San Marco; the inscription ORATE PRO PICTORE combines the artistic (*pictore*) and religious (*orate*) spheres, reflecting the preaching of Savonarola who argued that art should be the product of a life inspired by God.
Reacting to the work of Andrea del Sarto, regarded during his lifetime as a painter “without error”, the two artists’ paths began to diverge completely within a few short years, reflecting the values of the conflicting factions competing for cultural and political supremacy in Florence: the Medici, and the aristocrats who opposed them. With Andrea del Sarto’s Annunciation (for which Pontormo and Rosso painted a now lost predella) as its focal point, this section explores the first hints of divergence in form and content between the two artists’ work. Pontormo, who was also working on decorations for the feasts given by the Medici after their recent return to the city, was openly influenced by the legacy of Leonardo and by northern European art, while Rosso developed a personal approach to del Sarto’s teaching that reveals an acute interest in experimenting with Quattrocento tradition.
ROSSO FIORENTINO
Madonna and Child with the Young St John the Baptist
1514
oil on panel
Frankfurt, Städel Museum

This panel, from the Gerini collection in Florence, reveals elements peculiar to Rosso’s style such as his brilliant palette, his irregular, rough brushwork, his use of highlights and an angular quality in his figures. The children’s faces reflect the contemporary angels in the Assumption in the Chiostro and we can also detect echoes of Andrea del Sarto’s Annunciation, the predella for which Rosso painted in conjunction with Pontormo. The fleur de lys, jasmine and violets symbolise grace, purity and humility.

WORKSHOP OF ANDREA DEL SARTO (WITH ROSSO AND PONTORMO?)
Madonna of the Belt
1512–3
oil on panel
Rignano sull’Arno, Church of San Michele a Volognano

The inspiration for this altarpiece’s division into two superimposed registers comes from the Madonna di Foligno, on which Raphael was working in around 1511, the year Andrea del Sarto probably visited Rome with Pontormo and Rosso. Andrea is responsible for the figure of the Virgin and the overall composition while Rosso and Pontormo may well have had a hand in the actual execution of the altarpiece, particularly its lower half. It has been suggested that Pontormo may have lent his own features to the figure of his patron saint.
A rapid execution and “classicism” figures suggest that these two monochromes may have been intended for temporary structures, possibly the carnival floats made in February 1513 for the Diamante and Broncone Companies captained by two members of the Medici family: Lorenzo the Magnificent’s son Giuliano, subsequently the Duke of Nemours, and Piero the Fatuous’s son Lorenzo, later the Duke of Urbino. The pictures are reminiscent of work Pontormo may well have seen while staying in Rome in 1511.

This panel’s rapid execution suggests that it may have been part of some temporary structure such as a carnival float, on which Pontormo often worked. Following their return to Florence, the Medici were eager to revive the kind of popular feasts that had been frowned on in Savonarola’s day, using them as a tool to control the populace. The story of Marcus Curtius who, in an effort to save Rome, offered himself as a sacrifice to the gods by throwing himself into a bottomless pit, comes from Livy.

This panel, along with another three by Pontormo, was part of the wooden decoration for a bridal chamber commissioned from Baccio d’Agnolo to mark the marriage of Pierfrancesco Borgherini and Margherita Acciaioli in 1515. The panels, depicting the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt, were entrusted to Andrea del Sarto, Francesco Granacci and Bachiacca. Pontormo adopts a dramatic and original style which contains echoes of both Hellenistic sculpture and northern European engravings.
By around 1517 we can detect a final and very obvious choice of sides in both the style and the religious and philosophical content of the two artists’ work. Andrea del Sarto’s *Madonna of the Harpies* (1517), on which their divergence hinged, may be compared and contrasted in this section with Rosso’s *Spedalingo Altarpiece* (1518) and Pontormo’s *Pucci Altarpiece* (1518). Their diverging paths were to lead Pontormo to opt for a varied, modern style and to become the Medici’s painter of choice, soon to work on the decoration of the Medici villa in Poggio a Caiano. Meanwhile Rosso, with his anachronistic style harking back to the city’s illustrious artistic tradition, was to become the favourite painter of the Florentine aristocrats opposed to the Medici and bent on keeping alive the values of the Republic.

**Andrea Del Sarto**

*Madonna and Child between St. Francis and St. John the Evangelist (Madonna of the Harpies)*

1517

oil on panel

Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

The subject for this altarpiece, painted for the church of the convent of San Francesco de’ Macci in Florence in 1517, was probably suggested by Franciscan theologian Andrea Sassolini, a fervent follower of Savonarola. The rings of smoke rising from the base and the locusts on either side (which Vasari interpreted as harpies, hence the name of the painting) refer to the ninth chapter of the Apocalypse of St. John, a work very much in vogue in an era troubled by relentless apocalyptic preaching.
PONTORMO

Sacra Conversazione
(Pucci Altarpiece)
1518
oil on panel
Florence, Church of San Michele Visdomini

Vasari considered this altarpiece, painted for Giovanni Pucci’s chapel in San Michele Visdomini, to be the “most beautiful altarpiece that was ever executed by this truly rare painter.” Like Andrea del Sarto’s Madonna of the Harpies, this altarpiece echoes the religious tension and yearning for renewal typical of the era. St. Francis plays a leading role, and it falls to him to bear witness to the “light” just as it had previously fallen to St. John the Baptist; indeed the entire composition is marked by “light”.

ROSSO FIORENTINO

Madonna and Child with Four Saints (Spedalingo Altarpiece)
1518
oil on panel
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Leonardo Buonafede, master of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, commissioned this altarpiece from Rosso (possibly his first such work) to comply with the last wishes of a Catalan widow who left the hospital a legacy. Intended for a chapel in Ognissanti, Buonafede rejected it because, as Vasari tells us, he thought “all those saints were devils.” Rosso left the panel unfinished and it was completed, possibly by Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, in a rather slapdash manner: notice Mary’s hands or the Christ Child’s four eyes.
The decoration of the hall in the villa of Poggio a Caiano, which began in 1519, is emblematic of the Medici family’s artistic inclinations, particularly of their interest in drawing from nature. Pontormo became a leading exponent of this new, modern and varied figurative style imbued with harmonious classicism. Rosso, on the other hand – with his pure, anachronistic style echoing the teachings of Savonarola, which were still very much alive in the convent of San Marco where he had spent part of his formative years – never received a commission from the Medici and was forced to leave the city in mid-1519, travelling to Piombino, Naples and Volterra in search of work. In his Volterra pictures, Rosso reaches a peak of abstract archaism never found in Pontormo’s work and which would have been unlikely to have found favour in Florence in the 1520s.

This, one of Pontormo’s earliest known portraits, appears to have been painted under the guiding hand of Andrea del Sarto. While the sitter’s identity is uncertain, we can tell that he must have been a goldsmith from the confidence with which he grips a burin between his thumb and forefinger. The object he is working on, balancing on a table, may be a ring into which he is about to set a stone. The ring is held by two wax balls to offer a pliant surface while the smith works.

The bars on the window suggest that St. Paul is shown here after his release from prison in Macedonia (Acts 16:16–40). The panel may be associated with a group of paintings Pontormo produced towards the end of the second decade of the 16th century. The figure of St. John the Evangelist is a mirror image of the same figure in the Pontormo altarpiece. A date of 1517 or 1518 would explain the lively palette, akin to that of the story of Joseph in Egypt painted for the Borgherini bridal chamber.
PONTORMO

St. John the Evangelist
St. Michael the Archangel
c. 1519
oil on panel
Pontorme, Empoli, Church
of San Michele Arcangelo

Vasari tells us that “Jacopo executed for the men of Pontormo an altarpiece wherein are St. Michael Agnolo and St. John the Evangelist, which was placed in the Chapel of the Madonna in St. Agnolo, their principal church.” Pontormo makes no secret of his various sources of inspiration: Leonardo for the study of expression and Hellenistic sculpture for the heads, the Evangelist’s pose and the chubby, devilish little cherub. He also shows an interest in northern European innovation.

PONTORMO

Adoration of the Magi
(Encounter of the Magi)
1519–20
oil on panel
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina

This was one of the wooden panels painted for the antechamber of Giovanni Maria Benintendi, which also included work by other artists such as Andrea del Sarto. Pontormo’s composition harks back to the most celebrated Florentine interpretations of this popular subject and depicts Florentine architecture. Yet at the same time it contains echoes of prints by Flemish artist Lucas van Leyden, who was influenced by Dürer. The voluminous costumes, nuanced landscape and clear composition all owe a debt to northern European engraving.

ROSSO PIORENTINO

Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist and St. Bartholomew
(Villamagna Altarpiece)
1521
oil on panel
Volterra, Museo Diocesano d’Arte Sacra

This altarpiece, signed and dated in the bottom left corner, was painted for the parish church of Villamagna, close to Volterra, where Francesco di Bartolomeo Maffei, probably a member of the family that commissioned it, was canon at the time. Rosso chose a traditional approach to express an austere religious sentiment, bolstered by his reference to the sculpture of Donatello in the intensity of the Mother and Child’s affection, and in the figure of St. Bartholomew who almost seems to be carved in stone.
The angel is tuning a lute, intoning the sound by plucking the strings. For the altarpiece of which this angel is a fragment, Rosso, an "excellent musician", revived the traditional composition dear to Fra Bartolomeo, with figures intent on playing music at the Virgin’s feet. Reflectography has revealed the presence of the words “R[u]beus florentini. fe[cit?] M.D.xxI” in cursive script, but they may have been added when the picture was dismembered, copying date and signature on the altarpiece.

Rosso here revisits a composition that was extremely popular in 15th-century Florence, allowing each figure only a modicum of compressed space and eliminating all superfluity in an attempt to concentrate the picture’s expressive impact. The painting is damaged, although Rosso may never have taken it to the final stages of completion; in fact it has characteristics of a sketch in oils because we can still make out the underlying black drawing in each figure and in the folds of the drapery.
Pontormo painted portraits not only of many members of the Medici family – he was one of their favourite portrait artists until Bronzino supplanted him in the 1540s – but also of Florentine nobles, who preferred his eccentric, innovative approach to the tradition in portraiture established by Raphael and Andrea del Sarto early in the century. Pontormo’s portraits allow us to track both the development of portraiture as a genre, and Florentine political affairs up to the middle of the century. Pontormo’s hallmark was his meticulous study of his subjects from life, to which he owed his extraordinary ability to capture and to convey the sitter’s inner personality.

**ANDREA DEL SARTO**

*Portrait of a Woman with a Basket of Spindles*

c. 1514–5

oil on panel

Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Attributed to various artists, including Pontormo, before finally being assigned to Andrea del Sarto, this portrait depicts a woman whose complexion is so pasty that it has been suggested she may be dead; and indeed the basket of spindles, traditionally associated with the Fates, appears to bear out this suggestion. The painting merges traditional Tuscan elements with the composition of Raphael’s Florentine portraits, but more than anything, it betrays a strong northern European influence.

**PONTORMO**

*Portrait of Cosimo the Elder*

1518–9

oil on panel

Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Cosimo de’ Medici sits on a throne bearing his name. A young bay tree, with one branch cut and another bearing leaves, has a scroll wrapped around it with the motto “uno avulso non deficit alter” (*Aeneid* VI:143) meaning “when one is plucked away another shall not be wanting”, alluding to the renewal of the Medici Family. The picture may have been commissioned, before his death in 1519, by Cosimo’s descendant Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, whose arms were a branch blossoming anew.
According to Vasari, Pontormo “also portrayed in one and the same picture two of his dearest friends, one the son-in-law of Becuccio Bichieraio.” This dual portrait is one of the most personal pictures of his early maturity. In view of his well-known surliness towards anyone outside his closest circle of acquaintances, it shows he was very close to the sitters – a contention borne out by the letter containing a passage from Cicero’s *De Amicitia* (VI:22).

The young scion of a still unknown Florentine family, formerly identified as Alessandro or Giuliano de’ Medici, is shown in official parade costume. The picture is modelled on Sebastiano del Piombo’s *Portrait of Anton Francesco degli Albizzi* which was sent from Rome to Florence in March 1525 and from which Pontormo took his inspiration for the pose, the composition and the monumentality conferred on the sitter by the ample cape with its puffed sleeves tightening around the wrists.

The sitter wears a bishop’s garb, excluding the proposal that it may be a portrait of Giovanni della Casa, who never rose to that rank in the Church. It may, on the other hand, be Niccolò Ardinghelli, a member of the Accademia Fiorentina, a canon of the cathedral and a leading personality in the papal court who was made bishop of Fossombrone in 1541 and later a cardinal, and of whom Vasari tells us Pontormo painted a portrait. The building in which the sitter is portrayed may well be the Florence cathedral.

One of Pontormo’s last portraits, this picture is crucial to any understanding of his later portraiture. The sitter, possibly a scholar from the Accademia Fiorentina or a member of the Medici court, is dressed in accordance with the advice dispensed by Baldassar Castiglione in his *Courtier*, sporting an austere gown devoid of frills and a small, rather sober hat. The artist follows Castiglione’s precepts, producing an almost monochrome picture enlivened only by the sitter’s lips and shirt.
“HARSHNESS OF FEATURES”. ROSSO’S PORTRAITS

Probably referring to Rosso’s early years before he left for Piombino, Naples and Volterra in 1519, Vasari notes that “in the houses of citizens may be seen several of his pictures and many portraits”, thus hinting at the favour the artist enjoyed with the aristocratic families that subscribed to the values of the Republic and of Savonarola – loyal to a specific cultural rather than political environment – but also at his youthful talent as a portrait artist. Yet not a single one of Rosso’s sitters has been identified with certainty: an anomaly which confirms his role as the champion of a political and religious faction defeated by the return of the Medici in 1530 and destined to be ostracised and consigned to oblivion.

FRA’ BARTOLOMEO
Portrait of Girolamo Savonarola
1499–1500
oil on panel
Florence, Museo di San Marco

The funereal feel of the profile view and the inscription describing Savonarola as a prophet sent by God suggest that the portrait was painted after his death, though perhaps not that long after he went to the stake on 23 May 1498. The “affection” which Vasari tells us Baccio della Porta (who had not yet joined the Dominican order with the name of Fra’ Bartolomeo) harboured for Savonarola allows us to surmise that his features are based on sketches drawn while he was still alive.

ROSSO FIORENTINO
Portrait of a Man
1512–3
oil on panel
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Attributed in the past to both Domenico Puligo and Tommaso Lunetti, this portrait has been assigned to Rosso by Antonio Natali on the basis of a comparison with the features of the apostles at the foot of the Virgin in the Assumption in the Chiostro dei Voti, a comparison complicated by the different media. The similarly sharp, rough features in the unpublished Portrait of a Man with a Letter nearby allow us to attribute both portraits to Rosso, although from slightly different moments in his career.
This previously unpublished portrait is a crucial addition to Rosso’s early career. Typical of his youthful work are the rendering of the damask gown and of the hands, wooden but not yet claw-like, and the cherub bearing a shield, foreshadowing one of the angels in the *Spedalingo Altarpiece*. The coat of arms cannot be identified with certainty on account of the absence of colour, but it appears to resemble the crest of the Trachi, a obscure Florentine family.

This portrait is the only one of the few attributed to Rosso to bear a date. The letter is dated 22 June 1518, a date which must have had some kind of special meaning for the sitter. The picture was painted towards the end of Rosso’s first period in Florence, when – with Andrea del Sarto now in France and Fra Bartolomeo recently dead – the younger artists in the School of the Annunziata stood a better chance of being awarded commissions for portraits.
The identity of the sitter is uncertain. Once thought to be a Florentine priest named Francesco da Castiglione, his headgear is not that of a churchman and he bears a certain resemblance to Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazzaro. Echoing Fra’ Bartolomeo’s Savonarola, Rosso chooses a left profile and a tight approach, underscoring the simplicity of the sitter’s apparel and using a limited palette, possibly to reflect the stringent ethical and aesthetic values so dear to the friar’s followers.

The presence of a ring and of the man’s age may indicate that the occasion for the portrait was a wedding, but there is no hint of the sitter’s identity. He may have been a member of the Pazzi family. The tight composition is typical of Rosso’s style, with the upper part of the hat almost cut off by the top of the picture. The prototypes for the sitter’s bold yet authoritative pose, with his right hand planted firmly on his hip, are the portraits that Raphael painted in Rome.
“SO ANIMATED AND SO LIFELIKE”. PONTORMO’S DRAWINGS

One of the 16th-century’s greatest draughtsmen, Pontormo has left us a considerable number of drawings illustrating the development of his style and revealing both the sources from which he drew his inspiration and his own contribution to Florentine draughtsmanship. Twelve drawings cover his formative years, demonstrating his skill in conveying reality with immediacy, particularly during his Poggio a Caiano and Certosa years: the apprentice sleeping on the workshop steps illustrates this talent beautifully. The drawings also evoke works impossible to display here either because of their size (the Santa Felicita Deposition and Annunciation) or because they have been lost (the Souls Rising Out of Purgatory and the Flood refer to his works in the choir of San Lorenzo). Finally, it is fascinating to track the creative process from drawing to finished work in the Study for the Christ Child in the Pucci Altarpiece, the Pontorme St. Michael and the Carthusian monk in the Supper at Emmaus, all on display here.

PONTORMO
Study for the Christ Child in the Pucci Altarpiece
1518
black pencil on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Study for St. Michael in Pontorme
1519
red chalk, red chalk wash, ink, traces of white lead on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Study of a Seated Nude
c. 1519–20
red chalk, red chalk wash, white lead on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
PONTORMO
Study of a Reclining Nude and a Seated Nude 1519–20
black pencil on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Study of a Nude (Self-portrait?) 1522–5
red chalk on paper
London, The British Museum

PONTORMO
Portrait of a Carthusian Monk for the Supper at Emmaus 1525
red chalk on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Boy Sleeping on a Step c. 1525
red chalk, black chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Study of a Nude for the “Deposition” at Santa Felicita 1525–6
black chalk, black chalk wash, white lead on lightly browned white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
PONTORMO
Study of the Angel for the Annunciation at Santa Felicita
C. 1527
black chalk, diluted ink, squared in red chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Figure of a Male Nude for the Souls Ascending from Purgatory for the Choir of San Lorenzo
C. 1554–5
black chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Study of a Nude
C. 1535–40
red chalk on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

PONTORMO
Studies of Nudes for the Deluge for the Choir of San Lorenzo
1554–6
black chalk with stumping, stylus, white lead on white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi
DRAWINGS OF “BOLD AND WELL-GROUNDED” ROSSO

A keen experimenter, Rosso has left us only a few drawings to illustrate his study of Florentine tradition and his skill in using prints as a means of circulating his free and unconventional figurative style in the rest of Europe. Eleven drawings from different moments in his life and produced in different circumstances allow us to track the development of his style from Florence early in the century to his work at the court of France. Rosso turned for his inspiration to the art of Michelangelo, adding to it a powerfully abstract note occasionally concealed by the sumptuous approach to decoration that he had learnt in Rome. His preparatory study for the figure of St. Sebastian in the Dei Altarpiece, completed shortly before he left for Rome, and the feet in the Study for a Seated Nude, probably drawn after he first saw Michelangelo’s figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, are no longer depictions from life but a pure product of his intellect.
ROSSO FIORENTINO
Study of a Nude for St. Sebastian in the Dei Altarpiece
**c. 1522**
red chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

ROSSO FIORENTINO
Study of a Nude with a Cloth
**c. 1523–4**
red chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

ROSSO FIORENTINO
Virgin Annunciate
**c. 1524–5**
red chalk, black chalk on yellowed white paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

ROSSO FIORENTINO
Study of a Seated Nude
**c. 1525–7**
red chalk on paper
London, The British Museum
ROSSO FIORENTINO

Study of a Nude with His Arm Raised

*C. 1525–7*

red chalk on yellowish paper
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi


ROSSO FIORENTINO

Study of a Nude for Christ in the “Deposition” at Sansepolcro

*1527*

brown ink on paper
Vienna, Albertina


ROSSO FIORENTINO

Our Lady of Mercy

*1528–9*

red chalk, black chalk and white lead on paper
Paris, Musée du Louvre, département des Arts Graphiques


ROSSO FIORENTINO

Project for an Altar

*1529*

den and brown ink, with grey-brown wash, heightened with white
on pale green prepared paper
London, The British Museum


ROSSO FIORENTINO

Project for a Wall with Petrarch’s First Vision of the Death of Laura

*C. 1534*

den and brown ink with grey wash, heightened with white bodycolour, on brown prepared paper
Oxford, Christ Church Picture Gallery, by permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church
With the panels that he painted for the *Borgherini Bedchamber* in 1515, shortly after his formative spell with Andrea del Sarto, Pontormo introduced into Florentine painting the northern European figurative elements that he had discovered in German prints circulating in del Sarto’s workshop and elsewhere. This northern style, so eccentric and extravagant by comparison with local tradition, dominates in his frescoes in the Great Cloister in the Certosa del Galluzzo, harshly criticised by Vasari on account of their distance from the art favoured at the court of Cosimo de’ Medici – an art with which Vasari felt an affinity at the time he was writing his *Lives*. In Pontormo’s work in the 1520s we can detect not merely individual references but a full-scale attempt to capture the spirit of this new style by using the compositional technique of Dürer’s narrative cycles, the *Small and Large Passion*. 

**PONTORMO**

*Madonna and Child with the Young St. John the Baptist*

c. 1523–5

oil on panel

Florence, Galleria Corsini

Long held to be the “picture of Our Lady with the Child in her arms, and some little Angels about her, which is now in the house of Alessandro Neroni” described by Vasari this panel is in fact more likely to be “a Madonna, but different from the one described above and in another manner.” The painting is an excellent example of Pontormo’s style between 1523 and 1525, revealing the influence of Dürer’s prints in the landscape and the fantastical many-towered buildings.
Leonardo Buonafede commissioned this and other work from Pontormo for the Certosa del Galluzzo near Florence. The artist took his inspiration for the composition from Dürer’s woodcut of the same subject, the *Small Passion*, while adding a new naturalism in the portraits of the monks behind Christ. Numerous studies are still extant for the figures of the Carthusian monks. Buonafede is the older monk on the left.

This fresco was removed in 1955 from a tabernacle near the Camaldolese monastery of San Giovanni Evangelista “di Boldrone”, on the outskirts of Florence, for restoration and display in the exhibition on Pontormo held in Palazzo Strozzi the following year. Vasari notes that the “figures, his caprice not being yet satisfied, and the German manner still pleasing him, are not very different from those that he executed at the Certosa.”
GERMAN INFLUENCES OR FLORENTINE TRADITION: ROSSO AND REPUBLICAN FLORENCE

Rosso, who never worked for the Medici, painted several altarpieces in the 1520s for noble families for whom the city’s cultural tradition simply confirmed their ancient role in the history of the Florentine Republic. Thus Rosso and Pontormo pursued experimental paths which were alternative to one another in their figurative vocabulary, fleshing out and influencing the artistic debate in Florence during the years when Protestant ideas were starting to circulate, testifying to the freedom of approach in matters of religion in the city at the time. Pontormo’s Boldrone Tabernacle and Supper at Emmaus may be compared and contrasted in this section with the Marriage of the Virgin (painted for Carlo Ginori, a follower of Savonarola) in which Rosso introduces important iconographic variations such as the youth of St. Joseph, and seeks a horror vacui effect perceived even by Vasari: “He was so rich in invention, that he never had any space left over in his pictures.”

ROSSO FIORENTINO
The Marriage of the Virgin
(Ginori Altarpiece)
1523
oil on panel
Florence, Basilica of San Lorenzo

This altarpiece, specially restored for this exhibition, is signed and dated and also known from documents written by the patron, Carlo di Leonardo Ginori a believer, like Rosso, in the ideals of Savonarola and of the Republic. Those ideals are hinted at by the architecture reminiscent of Cronaca’s portals and by the presence of a Dominican saint, Vincent Ferrer, standing in for Savonarola (whose depiction was banned). St. Joseph’s unusually youthful aspect suggests that his chastity was a matter of choice not age.

BOTTEGA DEL ROSSO FIORENTINO
Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro
1523
oil on canvas
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

Vasari mentions a picture by Rosso “with some very beautiful nudes, representing the scene of Moses slaying the Egyptian.” Commissioned by Giovanni Bandini, a Florentine, then sent to France as a gift for Francis I, it has since been lost, but this appears to be a copy painted by one of Rosso’s assistants to preserve its memory. In the foreground, Moses slays the Midianite shepherds in a scene imbued with Classical culture and echoes of Michelangelo, while Jethro’s daughters are relegated to the background.
PONTORMO IN THE CAPPONI CHAPEL AND ROSSO IN ROME

Given that the Capponi Chapel is an indivisible whole on which work progressed between 1525 and 1528 and with which we felt it best not to interfere, the exhibition hosts a Madonna and Child painted by Pontormo for the centre of the altar frontal and Guillaume de Marcillat’s stained-glass window, both of which were removed from the chapel years ago.

In late 1523 or early 1524, Rosso moved to Rome, possibly, like other Florentines, in the hope of finding work in the major projects begun by the Medici Pope, Clement VII. In the event, the only commission he obtained was to decorate the Cesi Chapel in Santa Maria della Pace (sadly left unfinished after he fell out with his patron), where the theology behind the scheme hints at the only slightly later decoration of the Capponi Chapel. Rosso’s experience in Rome was crucial, prompting him, on discovering Classical sculpture and the innovations of Raphael’s school, to develop a sophisticated painterly style imbued with a subtle formal elegance that was to prove capable of winning over the court of King Francis I of France only a few years later.

PONTORMO
Madonna and Child
1527–8
oil on panel
Florence, Palazzo Capponi alle Rovinate

This is the (reworked) central part of the altar frontal that Pontormo painted for a chapel bought by Lodovico Capponi in Santa Felicita in May 1525. The decoration was commissioned from Pontormo who worked on it with Bronzino for three years, shielded from view by a wall of planks. The overall scheme, which may be interpreted in the light of St. Augustine’s work on the Eucharist, is pulled together by the Body of the Christ Lowered onto the Altar, better known as the Deposition.

GUILLAUME DE MARCILLAT
(LE CHÂTRE BERRY 1468?–AREZZO 1529)
Deposition and Entombment of Christ
1526
stained glass and lead
Florence, Palazzo Capponi alle Rovinate

This glass, painted by Fra Guillaume de Marcillat in Arezzo, was sent to Florence in 1526 for the window of Lodovico Capponi’s chapel in Santa Felicita, where Pontormo was working on the decorative scheme of which the window is an integral part. It has been suggested that this learned friar and glass painter, a Dominican who later joined the Austin friars, may have been involved in developing the chapel’s complex iconology.
ROSSE FIORENTINO

The Death of Cleopatra
1525–7
oil on panel
Braunschweig, herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Kunstmuseum des Landes Niedersachsen

The only secular picture Rosso is known to have painted before he moved to France, this panel also exemplifies his encounter with Classical culture. The composition harks back both to literary accounts of Cleopatra’s death and to the famous Hellenistic statue of the Sleeping Ariadne, thought at the time to depict the Egyptian queen. Rosso probably saw the sculpture, which entered the papal collections in 1512 and was placed in the Belvedere, during his stay in Rome.

ROSSE FIORENTINO

Portrait of a Young Man
C. 1524–6
oil on panel
Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte

This portrait, dating back to Rosso’s time in Rome, reveals the influence of Parmigianino. The two artists, with their similar temperaments, influenced one another after meeting in the Rome of Pope Clement VII. The lively and cultivated company of Clement’s artists was much sought after in the city’s loftiest social circles. The portrait may have been painted while Rosso was staying with the Conte dell’Anguillara in Cerveteri during the summer, a visit reported by the sculptor Cellini.

GIAN GIACOMO CARAGLIO
(Verona 1505 Circa–Cracovia 1565)

AFTER ROSSE FIORENTINO

Labours of Hercules: Hercules and Archelaus; Hercules and Cacus; Hercules and Cerberus, Hercules and the Centaurs; Hercules and the Hydra; Hercules and Nessus 1524
engraving
Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi

Rosso made these six drawings for engravings depicting the Labours of Hercules in Rome in late 1524. He was one of the first to perceive graphic art’s potential as an art form and a medium for communication; in fact, he prepared his move to Rome by sending a series of drawings ahead of him for the express purpose of demonstrating his talent.
This disturbing figure, drawn by Rosso and printed in Rome by Caraglio in 1524, reveals the influence of Baccio Bandinelli and of even older engravings. The opportunity to circulate his creations was of the utmost importance for Rosso because the method suited both his mode of expression and his need to promote his work. His literary education trained him not only to tackle the difficulties but also to seize the opportunities offered by what was still a fairly new art form.

The physical and intellectual effort required to prepare drawings for engravings kept Rosso extraordinarily busy, and indeed he is the Italian artist from the first half of the 16th century who has left us the greatest number of drawings for prints. He found the medium congenial because it offered him the dual advantage of allowing him to make a good living from intellectual work and to circulate his compositional ideas to a broad audience, including outside Italy.

These two woodcuts are part of a series devoted to the Loves of the Gods, the drawings for which – commissioned from Rosso and Perin del Vaga by a printer named Baviero de’ Carocci, known as Il Baviera – were then etched by Caraglio. The woodcuts, which Vasari says show “the Gods transforming themselves in order to achieve the consummation of their loves,” were hugely successful, as we can tell from the numerous copies reprinted right up to the 18th century.

Vasari tells us that “in architecture” Rosso “showed an extraordinary excellence.” Appointed by Francis I of France to the position of supervisor of the royal works, he also assisted Primaticcio with the apparatus erected to celebrate Emperor Charles V’s triumphal entry into Paris in 1540. This engravings shows his familiarity with Classical Roman architecture and with ephemeral architecture: in 1515 he collaborated on thestreet apparatus for Leo X’s triumphal entry into Florence.
Between the Sack of Rome in 1527 and 1530 when Republican Florence yielded to the Medici after being besieged by the troops of Emperor Charles V, Italy was criss-crossed by upheavals and wars that were to trigger irreversible changes in the sphere of art. Pontormo (in Florence) and Rosso (who fell foul of the imperial troops in the Sack of Rome and fled to Arezzo, then to Borgo San Sepolcro and Città di Castello) responded differently to these turbulent times. Two paintings capturing the distance now separating the two artists – Rosso’s Deposition in Borgo San Sepolcro and Pontormo’s Visitation in Carmignano – may be compared in this section, contrasting the peak of pathos, the expression of universal grief, in one, with the mysterious, suspended atmosphere of the other.

ROSSO FIORENTINO

Deposition
1527–8
oil on panel
Sansepolcro, Church of San Lorenzo

The Compagnia di Santa Croce commissioned this panel on the recommendation of Bishop Leonardo Tornabuoni. Rosso develops the theme of Christ’s death, a theme he was to return to throughout his life, in a crowded composition whose gloomy tone reflects the eclipse after the Crucifixion. Aside from the figurative references to the Florentine tradition and to Classical sculpture, the surprisingly feral face of the legionary with the lance may hint at those who, in failing to acknowledge Christ, become like beasts.

ROSSO FIORENTINO

Virgin and Child with St. Julian and a Donor
C. 1527–30
oil on panel
Private collection

The archaic approach, embodied by the patron whom St. Julian is presenting to the Virgin and Child and by the hierarchical scaling of the figures, suggests that this painting may have been commissioned by a provincial patron, thus allowing us to date it to the moment Rosso fled Rome for Sansepolcro before departing for France in 1530. The coiling folds of the drapery and the wiry, almost metallic rendering of St. Julian’s hair are echoed in the Sansepolcro Deposition.
**PONTORMO**  
*Visitation*  
c. 1528–9  
oil on panel  
Carmignano, Pieve di San Michele Arcangelo

The restoration of this panel for the exhibition has improved its clarity, revealing such previously unknown details as a donkey near a house, a figure peering out of a window and the clear sky between the buildings. The two women behind Mary and Elisabeth are their *alter egos* without haloes. The younger figure is clad in the same colours as Mary but in reverse, while the older seems to be Elisabeth seen from the front.

**PONTORMO**  
*Ten Thousand Martyrs*  
1529–30  
oil on panel  
Florence, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria Palatina

Painted for the “Women of the Spedale degli Innocenti” during the imperial siege of Florence, the panel tells the story of the nine thousand Roman soldiers led by St. Acacius who converted to Christianity. The thousand troops sent against them also embraced the new faith and all ten thousand suffered martyrdom. The episode comments on the contemporary situation, referring to the outbreak of plague as well as the determination of the Florentines, who were prepared to die rather than give up their freedom.

**PONTORMO**  
*Virgin and Child with the Young St. John the Baptist*  
c. 1529–30  
oil on panel  
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi

This Madonna was probably painted during the turbulent period of the siege, whose dramatic circumstances may account for the fact that a part of the painting is unfinished. Certain stylistic and compositional elements are inspired by Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo*, and there are also references to Donatello in the tight group that almost has the appearance of painted sculpture. The diffused light causes the figure to emerge powerfully from the dark, unfinished background.

**PONTORMO**  
*The Penitent St. Jerome*  
c. 1529–30  
oil on panel  
Hanover, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover

This unfinished painting, like the *Madonna and Child*, is generally dated to 1529–30 on account of the affinity of both with the *Ten Thousand Martyrs* that Vasari tells us was painted during the siege. Restoration and scientific exams have added to our knowledge of Pontormo’s creative process: using chequering, he would produce a cartoon based on his final drawing, then trace the silhouettes on the panel’s thin layer of priming using a pointed metal chisel.
The Medici returned to power in Florence in 1530, first with Alessandro and then, after 1537, with Cosimo I. Pontormo was still the family’s artist of choice, decorating their villas in Castello and Careggi, and forgoing all other work to devote his energies exclusively to the commission for the now lost frescoes in San Lorenzo. Rosso, for his part, never returned to Florence, seeking refuge along with other exiles of like ideology at the court of Francis I in France, where he succeeded in achieving his dream of becoming a highly valued and well paid court artist, a far cry from the austerity of Savonarola. Both painters subscribed to the new figurative vocabulary in vogue, Pontormo embracing the style of Michelangelo (albeit critically) while Rosso cultivated an increasingly complex and elegant manner. The tapestries which Pontormo designed for Cosimo I and those woven on the basis of Rosso’s frescoes in Fontainebleau illustrate the two artists’ approach to the royal and princely courts of the European Renaissance.

The dramatic, theatrical gesture of the Virgin (she herself a living cross, depicted at the moment of separation from her Son) is the highlight of this picture which Rosso painted for the Connétable Anne de Montmorency. This illustrious figure at the court of Francis I, whose crest appears on the cushions, commissioned the painting for his Château of Écouen. Rosso, who was a “truly excellent” architect, may also have been asked to design the chapel for which the picture was intended.

This picture was painted for the head of the east side of the Grande Galerie in Fontainebleau with its decorative scheme depicting exemplary instances of lust and carnal passion prompting those who fell prey to them to behave brutally. This picture, showing Venus indulging in the pleasures of the flesh with Bacchus, was the key to the entire theme on this wall. Rosso varied his output in France: here, for instance, he abandons the harsh austerity of the style he used for such religious works as the Pietà.
**CLAUDE BADOUIN** (active between 1540 and 1547); cartoon by **ROSSO FIORENTINO**; high-warP TAPESTRY BY THE FONTAINEBLEAU MANUFACTORY

*Combat of the Centaurs and the Lapiths*
1539–44 (drawing and cartoons); 1540–7 (weaving)

Weft: wool, silk, gold and silver

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstkammer

This tapestry is one of a set of six with scenes reproducing the frescoes and stucco work that Rosso made for the south wall of the Grande Galerie in Fontainebleau.

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**PONTORMO**

*Venus and Cupid*

**c. 1533**

Oil on panel

Florence, Galleria dell’Accademia

Vasari tells us that Florentine merchant Bartolomeo Bettini – known for his republican leanings – commissioned from Michelangelo a “cartoon of a nude Venus with a Cupid who is kissing her, in order that he might have it executed in painting by Pontormo and place it in the centre of a chamber of his own, in the lunettes of which he had begun to have painted by Bronzino figures of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio.” Vasari adds that the painting symbolised the perfect work of art, combining Pontormo’s varied palette with Michelangelo’s mastery of drawing.

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**PONTORMO, DRAWING FOR THE CARTOON OF THE SCENE MODIFIED AND/OR COMPLETED BY BRONZINO**

(Agnolo di Cosimo; Monticelli, Florence 1503–Florence 1572) and/or **RAFFAELINO DEL COLLE** (Colle, Sansepolcro 1494/1497–Sansepolcro 1566); **BRONZINO AND WORKSHOP** DRAWING FOR THE CARTOON FOR THE BORDER; **JAN ROST** (Bruxelles, Documented as of 1536–Florence 1564) LOW-WARP TAPESTRY

*Jacob’s Lament*

1545–6 (drawing and cartoons); 1547–53 (weaving)

Weft: wool, silk, silver and gilt silver; warp: wool

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**PONTORMO, DRAWING FOR THE CARTOON OF THE SCENE; BRONZINO AND WORKSHOP, DRAWING FOR THE CARTOON FOR THE BORDER; JAN ROST**

LOW-WARP TAPESTRY

*Temptation of Joseph*

1545–6 (drawing and cartoons); 1546–7 (weaving)

Weft: wool, silk, silver and gilt silver; warp: wool

Rome, Segretariato Generale della Presidenza della Repubblica, Palazzo del Quirinale

Wishing to equal the splendid courts of Europe, Cosimo I ordered “silk and gold tapestries” with the stories of Joseph “for the Hall of the Council of the Two Hundred” in Palazzo Vecchio. To this end he summoned to Florence two Flemish master weavers, Nicolas Karcher and Jan Rost, and set up the Medici tapestry manufactory in 1545. Three tapestries were made to designs by Pontormo, one to a design by Francesco Salviati and sixteen to designs by Bronzino.
People’s perception of Florentine art in the 16th century is still heavily influenced even today by Giorgio Vasari’s Lives. The first edition, printed by Lorenzo Torrentino in 1550, is open at the life of Rosso Fiorentino; the second, published by Giunti in 1568, with each biography preceded by a woodcut portrait of the artist, is open at the life of Pontormo. Particularly in the second edition Vasari celebrated the view of the arts prevailing in Cosimo I de’ Medici’s Florence, praising the literary and figurative style of Florence, lauding Rosso’s success in taking that style to France, and faulting Pontormo for his divergence from the art of Michelangelo celebrated in his Lives – the victors and the vanquished, according to Giorgio Vasari.
This publication brings together the explanatory texts of the exhibition Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino. Diverging Paths of Mannerism.

Florence, Palazzo Strozzi
8 March–20 July 2014

curated by
Carlo Falciani, Antonio Natali

Promoted ed organised by
Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi
Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali
Soprintendenza PSAE e per il Polo Museale della città di Firenze

with
Comune di Firenze
Provincia di Firenze
Camera di Commercio di Firenze
Associazione Partners Palazzo Strozzi
and
Regione Toscana

With the contribution of
Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze

Under the High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic

With the patronage of
Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali