

*The Natural World, the Body, and the Divine*, February 3, 2006-April 16, 2006

A vigorous rediscovery of natural forms characterized Western art from the Renaissance through the 18th century. By the early 1400s, artists in Italy and Northern Europe had begun to abandon the flat, frontal, simplified forms that had characterized Gothic painting and sculpture, replacing this visual language with new ways of representing nature, the human body, and the concept of "the divine."

Over the next five centuries, classical forms related to ancient Greek and Roman sculpture would dominate representations of the human figure. Religious subjects depicting Old and New Testament characters were as likely to reveal physical aspects of the figure in motion as were narrative depictions based on legends of pagan gods. Landscape, which had not previously been valued as a subject in itself, took on greater importance as artists demonstrated the interdependence of man and his physical environment.

This selection from the Museum's permanent collection includes both frequently exhibited objects and works that are rarely on view. Together they suggest the variety of technical, compositional, and narrative solutions that "Old Master" artists used to represent nature in art during this long and fertile period.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Domenico Gagini, Italian, ca. 1425-1492; ca. 1420 - 1492

Antonello Gagini, Italian, 1478-1536

*Tabernacle*, ca. 1460-1470

Marble

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 06.057



A ciborium is an architectural structure designed to frame an object of veneration. In this example, which would have been installed against a wall in a chapel, the ciborium takes the form of a marble sculpture. A small panel painting, perhaps of a Madonna and Child, might have filled its opening.

Antonella Gagini was a leading Sicilian sculptor who had worked with Michelangelo in Rome. Although the format of the ciborium limited invention, Gagini incorporated elements that demonstrated his full understanding of Renaissance perspective and classical sculptural forms. Through the use of incised lines and the carving of angels in both low and high relief, he suggests measurable space in the approach to the empty doorway. The carved forms of the angel's

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limbs are revealed beneath the rhythmic folds of the gowns,  
humanizing their appearance and emphasizing their movement.

Francisco Collantes, Spanish, 1599-1656  
*Hagar and Ishmael*, ca. 1640  
Oil on canvas  
Gift of Manton B. Metcalf 18.096

The Spanish painter Collantes specialized in landscapes and in biblical and mythological subjects. A successful painter of large figures, he also devised compositions that included small expressive figures set against masses of trees in wide, luminous landscapes. In *Hagar and Ishmael* the setting dominates the composition, dwarfing and threatening Hagar and her child as they rest of their flight. This representation contrasts dramatically with Adriaen van der Werff's interpretation of the story, which focuses on the figures of Hagar and Ishmael at the moment when they are banished by Abraham.



Bartolo di Fredi Cini, Italian, active in Siena by 1353  
*Madonna and Child*, ca. 1380  
Tempera and gold on panel  
Anonymous gift 20.207

Late 14th-century Sienese painting espoused a decorative Gothic style in which figures were set in harmonious fields of color and pattern that obscured their physicality. A brilliant gold ground and trefoil-pierced arch help to establish an architectural but other-worldly setting for this *Madonna and Child*. In spite of their restrained frontal poses, the *Madonna and Child* reveal a common humanity. Their gazes seem to seek a relationship with the viewer. In the centuries that followed, even divine figures would be liberated from static representations and portrayed in relationship to each other and to the natural world.



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Hendrick van Steenwyck the Elder, Flemish, ca. 1550-1603  
*Interior of Aachen Cathedral*, 1575  
Oil on panel  
Gift of Drs. Arnold-Peter C. and Yvonne S. Weiss 2000.25

Although few paintings by van Steenwijk are known, he is recognized as a creator of a special genre of architectural painting that became popular in the Netherlands toward the end of the 16th century. Exalting the refined appreciation of perspective for which Renaissance painting was renowned, he renders the interior of the cathedral at Aachen as an octagon, seen naturalistically as a measurable interior space. He emphasizes transition between light and shadow through which small figures pass, conveying a sense of human presence and scale without reference to a narrative role. In this view architecture becomes a metaphor for the divine and creates a sense of awe and sanctity without referencing an incarnate deity.



Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton, Flemish, ca. 1668-1754  
*Forest Still Life*, ca. 1735  
Oil on copper  
Gift of Drs. Arnold-Peter C. and Yvonne S. Weiss 2003.140

Karl Wilhelm de Hamilton, called "Thistle-Hamilton," was the son of a Scottish painter active in Brussels. He and his two brothers spent their careers as court painters in central Europe, where they specialized in animal and still-life pictures. Karl was famous for small, brilliant, highly detailed paintings in which reptiles, amphibians, and insects are carefully staged as predator and prey amid forest foliage. Human presence is completely absent in this scene of forest life, where the unfolding cycle of nature is revealed by a skilled combination of precise draftsmanship and acute scientific observation.



Salomon van Ruysdael, Dutch, ca. 1600-1670  
*The Ferry Boat*, 1645  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Appropriation Fund 33.204

Salomon van Ruysdael was one of the creators of what we consider to be the classic 17th-century Dutch landscape painting: a low horizon, massed clouds, a cluster of trees and houses, and the placid waters of a canal or harbor. A human element is introduced without



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particular narrative and is typically represented by small, unidentifiable figures going about their daily activities. In this instance a group of travelers is huddled on a ferryboat. They inhabit the landscape as integrated components of nature, no more or less important than other phenomena of the physical world.

Domenico Fetti, Italian, ca. 1589-1623  
*Christ Ministered To by the Angels*, ca. 1620  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Appropriation Fund 36.003

Domenico Fetti was born in Rome but prospered in Mantua under the patronage of Cardinal Ferdinand Gonzaga. His numerous religious works were painted in a Venetian manner strongly influenced by Tintoretto and Veronese. It was typical of Fetti to place biblical scenes in imaginative landscape settings. In his small paintings, gracefully modeled figures were harmoniously scaled to their surroundings. Lively brushstrokes and shimmering color juxtapositions heightened the sense of movement in both figural and landscape elements of his compositions. This painting ostensibly depicts angels ministering to Christ after he had fasted for 40 days in the desert and had been tempted by the devil. Surprisingly, its delicate handling and silvery light serve to challenge that theme, instead emphasizing the delight of a summer repast in a natural setting. It has recently been suggested that RISD's version was copied from a larger work by Fetti's studio assistant Dionisio Guerri (1601 – ca. 1630)



Paul Bril, Netherlandish, ca. 1554-1626  
*Self-Portrait*, ca. 1595-1600  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Appropriation Fund 39.046

Bril proclaims his artistic and cultural achievement in this self-portrait from the end of the 17th-century. He focuses on his musical ability and also depicts one of his landscape paintings, nearly completed but still tacked to his easel. Bril appears convinced of the excellence of his method and the importance of the landscape genre, which in this example is concerned with a well-ordered view of the countryside depicted with small silvery strokes and close observation of detail.



Giambologna, Flemish, 1529-1608

*River God (The Virile Age; The Euphrates)*, ca. 1575

Terracotta

Museum Works of Art Fund and Museum Special Reserve Fund  
44.674

Throughout his career Giambologna excelled at the creation of sculptural models, which were often used to present ideas to patrons. Born in Douai in French Flanders, he traveled to Rome to study classical sculpture around 1550. While returning through Florence he gained the patronage of the Medici family and in the ensuing years established himself as one of the great Mannerist sculptors of the 16th century.

This fully realized terracotta model represents one of three river gods that Giambologna designed for the *Fountain of the Ocean*, a multifigural monument for the Boboli Gardens behind the Pitti Palace in Florence. Below a standing Neptune are three male figures designated as the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Ganges Rivers. These also symbolized the three ages of man. From each of the three figures water gushes forth and splashed below in a cast marble basin. RISD's sculpture, representing the Virile Age, pours water from a jug held between his legs. Seated on a narrow ledge, he projects energy throughout his muscular frame while balancing precariously on one foot. Typical of Mannerist composition, the figure of the river god is contorted, creating an impression of confined and exaggerated physical strength.



Francesco Bassano II, Italian, 1549-1592

*The Birth of the Virgin*, ca. 1588

Oil on canvas

Mary B. Jackson Fund 52.318

The nocturnal setting and sketchy quality of this painting are typical of the Venetian naturalism that young Bassano appropriated in his father's studio. His composition is broadly conceived and incorporated a sequence of activities, narrating the birth of the Virgin in a familiar, domestic setting that conveys tenderness and human interaction. He constructed the event in a loose and suggestive manner, drawing the figures with wide brushstrokes on a dark ground. This study is related to a commission for the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo in which Francesco painted monumental images of the life of the Virgin.





Domenico Tintoretto, Italian, 1560-1635  
*Sketch for a Battle Scene: Tancred and Clorinda*, ca. 1586-1600  
Oil on canvas  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 53.122

Domenico Tintoretto has drawn his subject from Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Jerusalem Liberated* (1575), a story of the First Crusade (1095-99). This oil sketch depicts the combat of the European knight Tancred and Muslim warrior. Unbeknownst to Tancred, his opponent is his beloved Clorinda disguised as a man. The painting reveals key elements of 17th-century Venetian technique as practiced by Domenico's father, Jacopo. The loose compositional structure enlivened by rapid sketching of lights over darks serves a dramatic purpose, conveying the intense physical action and heightened emotion in this subject from contemporary literature.



Nicolas Poussin, French, 1594-1665  
*Venus and Adonis*, ca. 1628  
Oil on canvas  
Walter H. Kimball Fund, Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund, Mary B. Jackson Fund, Edgar J. Lownes Fund and Jesse Metcalf Fund 54.186

Poussin's work was the fruit of years of intensive study of the literature, philosophy, and art of the ancient world. He was concerned above all with interpreting his subject and telling its story with a maximum of visual and emotional effect. In this depiction of the story of Venus and Adonis, Venus has been pierced by Cupid's arrow and has fallen in love with the beautiful hunter. He joins her at rest in the shade as cherubs play about them, but will soon return of his favorite activity – witness the gamboling dogs – and to his eventual death after being gored by a boar. A languid river god reclines above them, symbolic of the passage of time and a portent of Adonis's fate.



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Francesco Primaticcio, Italian, 1503-1570  
*Andromache Learning of the Death of Hector*, ca. 1570  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Works of Art Fund 56.083

This painting represents the scene from The Iliad in which Andromache faints after seeing the body of her husband Hector, who had been slain by Achilles and dragged from his chariot around the walls of Troy. It is not Andromache, however, but the monumental backs of two female attendants who dominate the composition. Their large scale, muscularity, and exaggerated poses are elements of the vibrant Mannerist style that succeeded the more restrained classicism of the High Renaissance during the 16th century.



Employed by four French kings, the Italian painter Primaticcio was the leading designer of the decorative programs for the Palace of Fontainebleau. His vast artistic undertaking was destroyed in the late 18th century, and his frescoes are primarily known from the work by Primaticcio himself, may instead be an early copy that represents a keen understanding of the original. When RISD acquired the painting in 1952 it had been heavily restored, reportedly by the great British artist Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92). A decision was made to remove the overpainting, but this process revealed significant areas of loss; thus the canvas is seldom on view. In spite of its abraded appearance and unresolved attribution it remains a rare and compelling reference for Primaticcio's painted decorated at Fontainebleau.

Jacopo Tintoretto, Italian, 1519-1594  
*Daniel in Judgment of the Elders*, ca. 1575  
Oil on canvas  
Anonymous gift 57.159

According to the Old Testament, Susannah, the virtuous wife of Joachim, was accused of adultery by two elders who advances she had refused. Usually represented at her bath, unaware that she was the subject of the elders' lust, she is depicted here as a witness to Daniel's judgement of her accusers. In a surprising shift from tradition, the center of attention becomes the two muscular figures who whirl furiously as they raise their arms to cast stones. Stripped and humiliated, the elders are delivered the punishment prescribed for adulterous women. Tintoretto's brilliant use of color, along with his handling of compressed space, figural exaggeration, and heightened movement, are elements of Venetian Mannerism. Inverting concepts of classical restraint, the emphasis on the



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persecutors forces the action of the painting toward the front of the composition, involving the spectator in the emotion of the event.

Giuseppe Cesari, Italian, 1568-1640  
*Perseus and Andromeda*, ca. 1592  
Oil on slate  
Anonymous gift 57.167

A fine draftsman and colorist, Cavaliere d'Arpino became the principal painter of Pope Clement VIII in 1592. His decorative frescoes graced the rooms of the Vatican, and his small, highly finished cabinet paintings of erotic mythological subjects were much in demand by private patrons. This painting depicts the moment in which Perseus, the son of the god Zeus and the mortal Danae, spies Andromeda, who is to be sacrificed to quell the anger of a sea monster. Chained to a rock, she is so pale and motionless that only her flowing hair reveals to Perseus that she is not a statue. The artist heightens the nude maiden's vulnerability by situating her within a strange and threatening landscape. This sense of the fantastic is further enhanced by Perseus's flying steed and by the grotesque head of the dragon.



Possibly; Netherlandish  
*Madonna and Child with Saint Barbara and Saint Catherine*, ca. 1525  
Oil on panel  
Museum Works of Art Fund 58.196

This elegant group is composed of three female figures who represent the nursing Madonna with the infant Christ, Saint Barbara (known by her book and tower), and Saint Catherine (represented by her sword and spiked wheel). An angel offers a dish of figs, a fruit that symbolically prefigures Christ and also alludes to the Virgin birth. In contrast to the Sienese painting on the opposite wall, which was created over a century earlier, this painting is characterized by naturalism, clean spatial organization, use of perspective, and concern for physical beauty. It represents a High Renaissance style in which the body and the natural world are considered appropriate visual models for the divine.





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The identity of the artist who painted this panel painting is unresolved. Distinctive elements of Leonardo's style were widely adopted by other artists in the early 16th century. Numerous Northern Italian painters, including Bernardo Luini, to whom this painting has been attributed, emulated Leonardo's modeling of forms, in particular the soft shading of faces that characterized both his religious and secular portraits. The inscription on the hem of St. Catherine's robe suggests a Northern European master or patron, but the brilliant realism of the costumes and architecture was also typical of many Italian painters who practiced in the region of Milan.

Adriaen van der Werff, Dutch, 1659-1722  
*The Expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael*, ca. 1699  
Oil on canvas  
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 59.063

After Sarah, the aged wife of 100-year-old Abraham, miraculously gave birth to Isaac, she forced her husband to cast out her servant Hagar and Hagar's son Ishmael, fathered by Abraham. This subject was a favorite of van der Werff, who painted it several times. In this composition, Hagar is seen from the back as she departs with Ishmael. Van der Werff depicts her as a beautiful young woman in a diaphanous costume. Her pose is reminiscent of a classical sculpture representing a daughter of the mortal Niobe who flees the arrows of the angered goddess Artemis.



Jacob Jordaens the Younger, Flemish, 1593-1678  
*Return of the Holy Family from Egypt*, ca. 1615-1616  
Oil on canvas  
Museum Works of Art Fund 60.094

Returning from Egypt at nightfall, Mary, Joseph, and the child Jesus are protected by a whirling party of angels and led by their faithful spaniel. This crowded, decentralized composition presents the young mother as a charmingly attired Flemish maiden who holds the hand of her golden-haired toddler. Joseph's coarse brown robe and travel provisions suggest the duress of their flight, but his weariness is eased by the loving gaze of the child. Jordaens uses broad and fluent brushstrokes, brilliant color, and dramatic lighting to emphasize the movement and forms of the figures. For the delight of his prosperous patrons, he presents the Holy Family in a scene of familiar tenderness, equating the divine with the beauty of the body and of nature.



Michele Pace del Campidoglio, Italian, ca. 1610-ca. 1670  
Abraham Brueghel, Flemish, 1631-1690  
*Still Life with Figure*, ca. 1660  
Oil on canvas  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 60.107

The origin of still life in Western art dates back to the wall paintings of ancient Greece and Rome. During the Renaissance, fruits and flowers maintained their humble place as decorative elements in larger compositions, but by the 17th century they had become the focus of virtuoso treatment in paintings. The work of Roman artist Michele Pace de Campidoglio acknowledges the importance of Caravaggio, but also reflects the influence of Netherlandish painters in Italy. Pace's overflowing cornucopia lavishes attention on upper torso of a voluptuous peasant women aptly mimics the ripeness of the fruits and vegetables. Her curious placement on a ledge near the base of a column indicates a later compositional adjustment. She was not the first inhabitant of the picture, but was painted over the figure of a boy, perhaps at the request of the painting's owner.



Joachim Antonisz. Wtewael, Dutch, 1566-1638  
*The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis*, 1610  
Oil on panel  
Mary B. Jackson Fund 62.058

Wtewael's depiction of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis dramatizes a climactic moment at the wedding feast. Hercules and the immortal Olympians have assembled in celebration; the newlyweds, seated behind the table, are served by Mercury, while Apollo signs the future deeds of their unborn son Achilles. Eris (Discord), who was not invited, appears at the upper left of center, about to throw down a golden apple inscribed "for the fairest." This act ultimately leads to the Trojan War.



The painting typifies late Dutch Mannerism in several respects: the crowded, dynamic composition; the complicated poses, glowing skin, and exaggerated muscularity of the figures; extreme contrasts in scale; and the dramatic effects of color, light, and shadow. Classical form is transmuted in the imagination of the artist into a riotous representation of the natural world, the body, and the divine.

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Francesco Foschi, Italian, fl. ca. 1750

*Winter Landscape*, ca. 1750

oil on canvas

Mary B. Jackson Fund, Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund, Jesse Metcalf Fund, Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund, Edgar J. Lownes Fund and Walter H. Kimball Fund 85.029

The unusual subject matter of winter in the Apennines distinguished Francesco Foschi from other 18th-century Italian view painters. Foschi was born in Ancona, but settles in Rome. His signature compositions were purchased as mementos of their journeys by visitors from the north who arrived in Italy by way of mountain passes. The landscape dominates these picturesque views, but each contains glimpses of local activity that charmed Foschi's patrons by recalling scenes they had encountered en route. Here, a carriage has stopped to take on water from a shallow pool. Two men stand in the foreground, gesturing in the direction they appear to be headed. At the house above, a peasant takes his horse from the stable, which another man passes on foot. Foschi's landscape sense is both imaginative and accessible. As in van Ruysdael's *The Ferry Boat*, hung nearby, nature accommodates man, and it requires no elaborate native to justify its painterly depiction.

