

LUST, LOVE, and LOSS

IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE



TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE

IA&A INTERNATIONAL
ARTS AND ARTISTS

LUST, LOVE, and LOSS

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Passion, violence, and virtue emerge in this exhibition as fundamental, intertwined elements in the art of Renaissance Europe. The objects on view—created for enjoyment and edification in private homes—offer glimpses into the lives of artists and their audiences. Painters, printmakers, and craftsmen, inspired by popular literary sources including Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and the Bible, interpreted their stories for everyday settings. Their artworks both codified and confronted social expectations about the duties and relationships of men and women. Such objects played an essential role in intimate experiences, while also shaping and responding to the profound intellectual, political, and religious shifts throughout Europe between 1400 and 1700.

COVER IMAGE Master of the Apollo and Daphne Legend, *Daphne Found Asleep by Apollo*, circa 1500, Oil formerly on panel, transferred to canvas, 34 9/16" x 62.13" x 3 1/4", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.

1. Lucas Cranach the Elder and Workshop, *The Judgment of Paris*, circa 1518-22, Oil on panel, 24 1/8" x 15 5/8", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.

Many of the works featured in *Lust, Love, and Loss* attest to the centuries-long popularity of certain narratives and themes throughout the European continent, while others represent more localized cultural traditions. Fifteenth-century Italy saw an explosion of objects and images tied to familial rites of passage, including marriage and childbirth. Domestic artworks, such as painted panels and ceramics, commemorated these momentous life events, yet their narratives were often not overtly festive. Their imagery might lament the dire fates of mismatched lovers, revealing societal anxieties about fidelity and paternity. Meanwhile, the Northern European interplay between virtue and vice manifested in innumerable engravings and woodcuts showing even happy and passionate couples faced with the inexorable progression of time. Images of hapless lovers pursued by menacing skeletons starkly confronted viewers with their own mortality. Artists working and traveling north and south of the Alps produced vibrant canvases and complex print series that echoed these ideas in grander formats, purposefully highlighting the consequences of moral trespass or opportunities for redemption. Taken together, the featured works of art illuminate the myriad roles Renaissance objects played in the cultural rituals





and consuming desires through which relationships were formed, celebrated, and extinguished.

Originally curated at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art under the Feitler Center for Academic Inquiry, *Lust, Love, and Loss in Renaissance Europe* brings together approximately 45 paintings, prints, sculptures, and ceramics from over fifteen collections and institutions throughout the United States. The exhibition comprises four sections. "At Home in the Renaissance" features domestic artworks, such as painted *deschi da parto*, or birth trays, and investigates the alignment between private life and public obligation. "The Realm of Venus" illustrates how tales of the classical goddess of love and beauty captivated artists for centuries, whether as a tantalizing source of inspiration or as a cautionary lesson about unbridled passion. "Paragons of Virtue" considers other stories of exemplary women from classical mythology, ancient history, and the Bible, along with the ways artists allegorized women's bodies as sites of conflicts about virtue and desire. The final section, "Morality and Mortality" examines images of Death personified, and the correlations artists made between erotic love and punishment throughout an era of exceptionally innovative printmaking in Northern Europe.

While this new version of the exhibition continues these same themes, it also offers a more explicit focus on women's experiences as makers, viewers, and owners of artworks. In addition to featuring objects created by female artists, *Lust, Love, and Loss in Renaissance Europe* explores the experiences of female audiences through their engagement with the kinds of artworks on display, as well as with one another, through gift-giving and patronage.

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2. Onorio Marinari, *The Penitent Magdalene*, 1690, Oil on canvas, 35" x 47 ¾", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.

AT HOME in the RENAISSANCE

Artworks acquired for betrothals, marriages and births, and to solidify relationships, once surrounded Renaissance families in their homes. At times of celebration, middle- and upper-class families would commission a wide range of objects, while those of lesser means might buy things ready-made from craftsmen, acquire them on the secondhand market, or borrow them. Although familial rites of passage could certainly offer personal joy and fulfillment, they were primarily occasions to satisfy societal duties. Accordingly, the artworks that commemorated marriages and births emphasized themes of responsibility and virtue. Yet, the delightfully ribald or dramatically gruesome narratives that adorned these objects could entertain as much as instruct. Several of these artworks offer insights into the social, sexual, cultural, and visual experiences of Renaissance women in particular. While much of women's lives revolved around their families, their homes were also places where objects helped them form external social bonds.



3



4

3. Workshop of Orazio Fontana, *Birth Bowl* (front), circa 1570, Polychrome tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica), 2 3/8" x 8 1/2", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.
4. Workshop of Orazio Fontana, *Birth Bowl* (back), circa 1570, Polychrome tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica), 2 3/8" x 8.50" x 8 1/2", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.

THE REALM of VENUS

As the classical goddess of love and beauty, Venus offered artists an endless source of inspiration. Beginning with the late-fifteenth-century excavations of ancient sculpture, Venus's virtues as well as her indiscretions captivated painters and printmakers. They depicted her in a variety of poses and circumstances motivated by her amorous escapades recounted in ancient epics such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She could be a doting mother to her son Cupid, a temptress, a woman swayed by seduction, an ideal of feminine beauty, or a metaphor for art itself. Renaissance artists vied with their classical counterparts to render ever more enticing interpretations of the goddess, offering lifelike painted flesh in place of austere white marble.



5. Francesco Fanelli, *Venus and Cupid*, circa 1635, Cast bronze, 15 1/4" x 8", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.



6. Master of the Apollo and Daphne Legend, *Daphne Fleeing from Apollo*, circa 1500, Oil formerly on panel, transferred to canvas, 35 1/2" x 62.13" x 3 1/4", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.



7. Antonio Palma, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, circa 1545, Oil on canvas, 10 ½" x 35", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.

PARAGONS of VIRTUE

Exemplary women from the Bible, mythology, and ancient history furnished Renaissance artists with dramatic, and often poignant and allusive, subjects for their artworks. As the objects of unwanted and misdirected desire, these celebrated figures faced tragedy and violent death—whether their own or another’s. Their bodies served as sites of conflict about virtue and desire that frightened, but also inspired and enlightened audiences. By adding contemporary settings or clothing to their scenes, artists connected these women’s stories to the political, religious, and cultural upheavals of the time. Far from simply pitting victims against perpetrators, these stories reveal the complex and nuanced range of thought that Renaissance viewers brought to the uneasy liaison of violence and virtue.

8. Artist Unknown after Francesco Albani, *Actaeon Surprising Diana and Her Nymphs*, circa 1617, Oil on canvas, 28 3/8" x 32.75", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.





10

9. Domenic Beccafumi, *Allegory of Fortune*, 1510, Oil on panel, 32 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 20 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.
10. Virginia Vezzi (Virginia da Vezzo), *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, 1623-1625, Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{1}{8}$ " x 29 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.

MORALITY and MORTALITY

Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artists, particularly those in Northern Europe, generated an ever-growing number of images of Death personified. These scenes, which sharply contrasted the youth and beauty of lovers with grotesque skeletons, warned viewers against the sins of lust and excess. Artworks evoking these *memento mori* themes—based on the Latin dictum “remember that you will die”—reflected the anxieties of a population confronted with waves of plague, war, and famine. Despite the seemingly secular nature of many of the works shown here, the connection between erotic love and punishment is, at its core, biblical. These haunting images allude to the Renaissance European view that human mortality is the ultimate consequence of the original sin of Adam and Eve, which first and forever linked desire and death.

11. Georg Pencz, *The Triumph of Chastity*, plate two from *The Triumphs of Petrarch*, 1539, Engraving in black on ivory laid paper, 14 7/8" x 18.88" x 1 1/4", Photograph © 2023 courtesy of The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, The University of Chicago.





12. Hans Burgkmair, *Lovers Surprised by Death*, 1510, Color woodcut (three blocks), 8 3/16" x 5 3/4", Image Courtesy of Armin Kunz, © C.G. Boerner.
13. Albrecht Dürer, *Coat of Arms with a Skull*, 1503, Engraving, 8 5/8" x 6 1/8", Image Courtesy of Armin Kunz, © C.G. Boerner.

ABOUT the CURATOR

Nora Lambert is the 2022-2024 Kress Foundation History of Art Institutional Fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome and a PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at the University of Chicago, where she specializes in late medieval and early modern Italy. Her essay on Pinturicchio's depiction of crusading in his frescoes at the Piccolomini Library in Siena Cathedral was published by Ashgate Press in 2015. From 2021-2022, she was a Fulbright Fellow affiliated with the Center for the Art and Architectural History of Port Cities in Naples, Italy. She has held positions at museums including the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and several New York City collections. Nora was the inaugural 2020-2021 Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow at the University of Chicago's Smart Museum of Art, where she originally curated *Lust, Love, and Loss in Renaissance Europe*. She is also a member of the 2020 cohort of the Center for Curatorial Leadership's Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Seminar in Curatorial Practice.

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14. Jan Brueghel the Younger and Hendrick van Balen, *Allegory of Abundance: Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres*, circa 1631-1632, Oil on copper, 29 9/8" x 41 1/4", Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.



Detail Artus Wolffordt, *Esther in the Women's House of Ahasuerus*, 1620, Oil on panel, 19 ¾" x 29 ½", Photographed by Glenn Castellano, Courtesy of Robert Simon Fine Art.

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

Number of Works

Approximately 45 objects

Requirements

Moderate Security; 2,500 - 3,500 square feet

Participation Fee

Please inquire

Curator

Nora S. Lambert, PhD Candidate

Shipping

IA&A makes all arrangements; exhibitors pay outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous US

Booking Period

12 weeks

Tour

Beginning early 2027

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