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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**MEDIA ALERT**

**FRICK TO PRESENT EXCLUSIVE LOOK AT MORONI AS A PORTRAITIST THROUGH  
PAINTINGS AND OBJECTS FROM INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIONS**

***MORONI: THE RICHES OF RENAISSANCE PORTRAITURE***

February 21 through June 2, 2019



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Isotta Brembati*, ca. 1553, oil on canvas, 63 x 45 1/4 inches, Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo; Lucretia Moroni Collection

standing woman produced in Italy, prefigures the many women that Van Dyck would paint in this format in the following century. The Frick will present some twenty of the artist's most arresting portraits together with a selection of

*Moroni: The Riches of Renaissance Portraiture* is the first major exhibition in the United States to focus on the portraiture of Giovanni Battista Moroni (1520/24–1579/80). A painter of portraits and religious subjects, Moroni is celebrated as an essential figure in the northern Italian tradition of naturalistic painting that includes Leonardo da Vinci, the Carracci, and Caravaggio. This exhibition, to be shown exclusively at The Frick Collection in the winter and spring of 2019, brings to light the innovation of the artist whose role in a larger history of European portraiture has yet to be fully explored. His famous *Tailor* (National Gallery, London), for example, anticipates by many decades the “narrative” portraits of Rembrandt. Likewise, his *Pace Rivola Spini* (Fondazione Accademia Carrara, Bergamo), arguably the first independent full-length portrait of a



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, ca. 1575, oil on canvas, 20 3/8 x 16 3/8 inches, private collection

complementary objects—jewelry, textile, armor, and other luxury items—that evoke the material world of the artist and his sitters. Assembled from international private and public collections such as the National Gallery (London), the Accademia Carrara (Bergamo), and the Kunsthistorisches Museum (Vienna), the paintings and objects will bring to life a Renaissance society—from aristocrats to artists to tradesmen—at the crossroads of the Venetian Republic and Spanish-ruled Milan.

Less than half of Moroni's sitters can be identified, probably a function of the relatively modest social status of many of them. Nevertheless, Moroni's portraits are so lifelike that they give the impression of capturing the sitters exactly as they appeared in the artist's studio. This is the quality for which Moroni is best known. But to fully appreciate his talents as a portraitist, it is essential to keep in mind that his inventiveness and studio practice—such as outfitting a mannequin or stand-in with a sitter's clothes or using an assistant to model a sitter's hands—underlie his distinctive illusion of having captured “reality” in paint.

## THE LIFE OF THE ARTIST

Moroni was born in Albino, near Bergamo, working primarily in these two cities. He trained in Brescia with the painter Moretto da Brescia (ca. 1492/95–1554). In Moroni's time, the region was controlled by Venice; however, Milan was geographically—and, in some ways, culturally—closer. Although his milieu would certainly have been enriched by his proximity to the patrons, art, and luxury goods of Venice and Milan, Moroni spent his entire career in cities considered peripheral to these major artistic centers. Moroni's regional career and the fact that he is not known to have traveled to Florence, Rome, or Venice may be one reason for his relative obscurity in the larger history of western art and may also help explain why Giorgio Vasari did not include him in his seminal *Lives of the Artists*. With this in mind, the exhibition seeks to understand Moroni's innovation in the context of his career: did his service to a milieu outside of the major artistic centers liberate him to experiment with new genres and formats?



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Il Cavaliere in Rosa (The Man in Pink)*, Giovanni Gerolamo Grumelli, dated 1560, oil on canvas, 85 x 48 3/8 inches, Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo; Lucretia Moroni Collection

He traveled to nearby Trent (then part of the Holy Roman Empire) in the late 1540s and early 1550s, during the years of the Council of Trent (1545–63), the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. He first emerged as a portraitist of renown during these visits, receiving significant commissions to paint portraits of the nephews of the Prince-Bishop of Trent. The resulting full-length portrait of Gian Lodovico Madruzzo (Art Institute of Chicago) is an essential precedent for the full-length format to which Moroni would return throughout his life, including in portraits like the remarkable so-called *The Man in Pink* (Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo).

## PORTRAITS OF THINGS

Moroni's portraits are so convincing that they often seem to present portraits of things, like the rapier in *Gabriel de la Cueva* (Staatliche Museen, Berlin), but none of the specific objects with which Moroni's sitters are painted—even in the cases of his noble and aristocratic subjects—is known to survive. As is common in Renaissance portraiture, many objects depicted may be purely symbolic. For example, the sculpture fragment in the background of *The Man in Pink* most likely has allegorical significance, while in *Alessandro Vittoria* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna), a similar fragment held in the hands of the sculptor may have actually existed in his studio. In the exhibition, these portraits and an antique sculpture fragment (Detroit Institute of Arts) will be examined to help determine the place of classical art in Moroni's practice.

Whether actual or imagined, the sitters' attributes are depicted with particular care. The spectacular clothing in *The Man in Pink* and *Isotta Brembati* (Fondazione Museo di Palazzo Moroni, Bergamo) reflects Bergamo's importance as a center of textile production. Though it is depicted with convincing naturalism, the drastic change in scale in the elaborate green and gold pattern of the sitter's dress in *Isotta Brembati*—from bodice to skirt—would have been extremely unusual in an actual sixteenth-century textile. This change of scale likely represents Moroni's artistic license: modifying the sitter's actual dress to achieve a more dramatic pictorial effect. A rare surviving sixteenth-century gilt fan handle (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), similar to the one adorned with pink and white feathers in *Isotta Brembati*, gives a sense of the fine craftsmanship of the sitter's numerous luxury goods. Similarly, the exquisite dress worn by the sitter in *Portrait of a Young Woman* (private collection, New York) is juxtaposed in the exhibition with a surviving example of satin brocade, produced by an extremely laborious and costly technique (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), underscoring the opulence enjoyed by some of his sitters and the technical challenges and opportunities their material world posed for the painter.



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *The Tailor ('Il Tagliapanni')*, ca. 1570. Oil on canvas, 39 1/8 x 30 1/4 inches, The National Gallery, London (NG 697)

The elegantly attired figure in the *Tailor* wields a pair of iron shears poised to cut fabric. This portrait of a man at work has been at the heart of debates about Moroni's patrons: did the artist really paint individuals such as tailors, or are such portraits a figurative enactment of a more complex story and identity? As straightforward as they may seem in their exacting portrayals, Moroni's portraits hold many mysteries.

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## SACRED PORTRAITS

Moroni worked during a period of profound reflection within the Catholic Church on the role images played in worship. The mid-sixteenth century saw persistent disputes over what was appropriate in sacred art. In 1559, for

example, Pope Paul IV ordered the many nudes in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* fresco to be painted over with draperies (since removed). Moroni's religious paintings have been criticized for their dry style and apparent lack of inventiveness, but their didactic quality puts them perfectly in line with efforts to reform Catholic art. The austerity of so many of his portraits—like the extraordinary *Lucretia Agliardi Vertova* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)—aligns with the period's strict ideals of morality. His sitters are portrayed with emphatic dignity.

Moroni also invented a new type of portraiture. Combining a portrait of a contemporary subject with a religious image, his "sacred portraits" present the sitter as if in perpetual devotion to the divine, as seen in the *Two Donors in Adoration before the Madonna and Child and St. Michael* (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond). The type derives from the long tradition of donor portraits, in which the image of a patron is inserted in a devotional image or on the wings of an altarpiece. In Moroni's invention, the portrait is the dominant feature, and the sacred image appears in the background. The portraits bear his characteristic naturalism while the sacred scenes are, by contrast, stylized, abstracted, and clearly not drawn from life. For example, in *A Gentleman in Adoration before the Madonna* (National Gallery of Art, Washington), the sacred figures are based on an engraving of the Madonna and Child by Albrecht Dürer (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Moroni's sacred portraits encapsulate a key theme of his art. For Moroni, naturalism was a way to render the physical world of his experience, things seen by the human eye. A different style conveys the divine, things not seen, but known by faith alone.

Building on recent exhibitions at London's Royal Academy (2014) and in Bergamo at the Museo Adriano Bernareggi, Palazzo Moroni, Chostro di San Francesco, and Biblioteca Civica Angelo Mai (2004) and on a small but significant Moroni exhibition at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth (2000), *Moroni: The Riches of Renaissance Portraiture* is to date the most extensive scholarly assessment of the artist's portraits held outside Italy. The fully illustrated exhibition catalogue will be the most substantial text on the artist's portraits in English and will include complete entries on each painting, as well as essays on Moroni and portraiture in northern Italy in the sixteenth century. The exhibition is organized by the Frick's Associate Curator Aimee Ng with Simone Facchinetti (Curator, Museo Adriano Bernareggi, Bergamo) and Arturo Galansino (Director, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence) and will be accompanied by rich educational programming. Principal support for the exhibition is provided by an anonymous gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden, The Christian Humann Foundation, the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation, and Aso O. Tavitian. Additional support has also been provided by Seymour R. Askin; the Robert Lehman Foundation; Margot and Jerry Bogert; The Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation; Barbara G. Fleischman; and Carlo Orsi, Trinity Fine Art.

## INTERACT

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## BASIC INFORMATION

**General Information Phone:** 212.288.0700

**Web site:** [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

**Building project:** [www.frickfuture.org](http://www.frickfuture.org)

**E-mail:** [info@frick.org](mailto:info@frick.org)

**App:** [frick.org/app](http://frick.org/app)

**Museum address:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

**Hours:** Open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

**Admission:** \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; Pay-what-you-wish hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. **PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS:** Children under ten are not admitted to the museum

**First Fridays:** Museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January and September)

**Subway:** #6 local to 68th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

**Tour Information:** Included in the price of museum admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

**Shop:** The shop is open the same days as the museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

**Group Museum Visits:** Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

**Public Programs:** A calendar of events is available online

**Library address:** 10 East 71st Street, near Fifth Avenue

**Hours:** [www.frick.org/visit/library/hours](http://www.frick.org/visit/library/hours)

**Admission:** Open to the public free of charge

**# 330, July 25, 2018 (Updated December 19, 2018)**

For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Associate Director of Media Relations & Marketing; Phone: 212.547.6866; E-mail: [rosenau@frick.org](mailto:rosenau@frick.org).