

*Metamorphosis and Malice:  
Pontormo's Three Monochrome Paintings from Renaissance Florence and Related Works*

August 3–December 17, 2023  
Bowdoin College Museum of Art | Brunswick, Maine

Exhibition Labels

This exhibition brings together three rare monochromatic paintings by Jacopo Carucci, also known as Jacopo da Pontormo (1494–1557), from the collections of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, the Samek Art Museum at Bucknell University, and a private lender. It explores how Pontormo and his contemporaries engaged with themes of the supernatural, violence, and the destabilizing force of unchecked desire. These artists gravitated towards scenes from the Old and New Testaments, as well as works by the Roman poet Ovid, during a historical moment characterized by dramatic social and political change on the Italian peninsula.

A leading painter in sixteenth-century Florence, Pontormo apprenticed with Leonardo da Vinci and Andrea del Sarto. His most celebrated works often involve contortions of the body and a sense of supernatural energy over grounded physicality. They mark a profound stylistic departure from the perspectival regularity, balance, and tranquility of his High Renaissance forbears. These three monochromatic paintings, created early in his career, anticipate this turn. Related drawings, prints, and other works from artists in the Florentine School and elsewhere help to contextualize the subject matter and style of Pontormo's work.

This exhibition was curated by Ingrid Astley '24, with support from Frank H. Goodyear, Co-Director of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, and Susan Wegner, Associate Professor of Art History at Bowdoin College.

DANIEL HOPFER  
German, ca. 1470–1536

*Portrait of Pope Leo X and Giuliano de' Medici*, ca. 1513  
etching

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of Marvin S. Sadik H'78  
1991.75

This etching depicts Pope Leo X (born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici) and his brother Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici, both members of the powerful banking family who had ruled Florence for generations. The Medici were temporarily ousted and forced into exile in 1494 but returned in 1512 after an alliance with Pope Julius II helped expel French forces from Florence. The following years marked the high point of Medici influence in Europe, due in part to Giovanni's accession to the papacy in 1513. German printmaker Daniel Hopfer conveys here the union of ecclesiastical and political power held by these two brothers. At the center of the double portrait is the Medici coat of arms presented by three winged *putti*. The coat of arms was reproduced throughout Tuscany and appeared on public buildings, churches, and carnival chariots, becoming a symbol of the Medici's political power and prestige.

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ARTIST UNIDENTIFIED

*Giuliano II de' Medici*, 1513  
bronze

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of Amanda Marchesa Molinari  
1966.104.8

Inspired by ancient Roman imperial coins, portrait medals were common in Italian princely courts during the early modern period. This profile portrait of Giuliano de' Medici was likely created for a ceremony performed by his brother, Pope Leo X, commemorating Giuliano's receipt of Roman citizenship in 1513 during the papal procession. Its small size suggests that it was struck for distribution to the public crowds. Other similar medals were commissioned by Giuliano for the Florence Carnival in 1513, which celebrated the Medici's triumphal return to the city after an eighteen-year exile. In addition to portrait medals, Giuliano and his nephew Lorenzo commissioned seven extravagantly decorated chariots, designed and painted by some of the most notable artists in the city, including Pontormo. In 1520, author and diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli wrote that the aim of these elaborate festivities was to "keep the city in abundance, the people united, and the nobility honored."

Attributed to FRA ANGELICO (GUIDO DI PIETRO)  
Italian, ca. 1395–1455

*Scenes from Boccaccio's "Il Ninfale Fiesolano,"* ca. 1415–1420  
tempera on panel

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation  
1961.100.1

Guido di Pietro, known posthumously as Fra Angelico, or "the Angelic Painter," was a pioneering painter of the Early Renaissance in Florence, who paved the way for subsequent generations of artists such as Pontormo. His approach to narrative painting, his modeling of forms with light and shadow, and his rendering of spatial perspective broke new ground in early fifteenth-century Florence. Attributed to Fra Angelico, this panel once formed the front of a cassone, a chest used in Florentine households for storage and often included in a woman's bridal dowry.

The painting depicts four scenes from Giovanni Boccaccio's poem *Il Ninfale Fiesolano* (*The Nymphs of Fiesole*), written around 1343. The poem explores the young shepherd Africo's pursuit of Mensola, a nymph in the entourage of the goddess Diana. At left, Diana holds court in a verdant garden, warning the nymphs to beware of men. The heroine Mensola, in a red dress, points to the second scene in which Venus, goddess of love, appears nude hovering above Africo's bed. In the next scene, Africo's parents warn him not to pursue Diana's nymphs. In the final scene, Africo seizes Mensola while swimming and she flees from his touch. Bodily transformation, predatory behavior, and gendered power dynamics are central to Boccaccio's poem, which shares many similarities with the story of Apollo and Daphne as related in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

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WORKSHOP OF RAPHAEL

Italian, 1483–1520

After DONATELLO

Italian, ca. 1386–1466

*Miracle of the Miser's Heart*, ca. 1505–1520

pen and brown ink on laid paper

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; bequest of the Honorable James Bowdoin III

1811.6

Created by a member of Raphael's workshop, this drawing reproduces several figures from Donatello's bronze relief *Miracle of the Miser's Heart*, executed in 1446–1448 for the Basilica di Sant' Antonio in Padua. The drawing depicts a scene in the life of Saint Anthony who, during a sermon on the evils of greed, insists that the chest cavity of a recently deceased wealthy man be opened to reveal that the heart is missing. The man's heart is then discovered in a box along with his gold, confirming the passage from the Gospel of Luke that "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34). The drawing does not feature the actual postmortem examination but rather the astonished and fearful onlookers, which include men, women, and children, depicted partially nude or wearing classical drapery.

PERINO DEL VAGA (PIERO BUONACCORSI)

Italian, 1501–1547

*Design for a Ceiling Decoration*, ca. 1516–1547

pen and brown ink and wash over traces of black chalk

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; Museum Purchase with funds contributed by George and Elaine

Keyes and an anonymous donor

2020.5

This drawing lays out an ambitious decorative plan for an expansive and ornate ceiling, exemplifying the sumptuous decorative programs for which Perino del Vaga was best known. While scenes in individual fresco panels are not represented, the drawing captures the elaborate architectural ornament that would have been crafted in stucco and painted. The ceiling for which this design was prepared has not been identified and may not have been realized. Born in Florence, Perino traveled to Rome in 1516, where he was recommended to the workshop of Raphael. He went on to become a leading fresco painter with important commissions in Genoa and Rome. Of note, he served as the principal decorator for Pope Paul III, the head of the Catholic Church from 1534 to 1549, whose pontificate was characterized by the Counter-Reformation and religious wars.

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MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI  
Italian, 1480–1534

After RAPHAEL  
Italian, 1483–1520

*The Dance of Cupids*, ca. 1515–1520  
engraving

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, gift of Judith Keenan  
2007.22.22

This engraving by Marcantonio Raimondi depicts two winged Cupids holding hands and dancing in a circle with seven other children. In classical mythology, Cupid was the son of Venus, Roman goddess of love, and Mars, Roman god of war. As such, Cupid is often associated with eroticism and romance, on the one hand, and with violence and cruelty, on the other. Typically depicted as a winged child, Cupid can be a force for good or for mischief, helping people fall in love or forcing people to feel desire or disgust against their will. Raimondi was an important Rome-based engraver known for making reproductions from drawings and paintings to aid their wider dissemination. This engraving is after a drawing by Raphael, which may have served as a preparatory study for a cycle of ceiling frescoes in the Villa Farnesina in Rome that depicts the life of Psyche.

JACOPO DA PONTORMO  
Italian, 1494–1557

*Apollo and Cupid*, 1513  
oil on canvas

Samek Art Museum, Bucknell University

Pontormo's *Apollo and Cupid* is part of a series of monochromatic paintings that depict scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The grisaille color palette is meant to convey the illusion of a sculpted marble relief. Commissioned in 1513 by the Medici family, the series decorated a Carnival chariot that celebrated the Medici's own political metamorphosis as a ruling dynasty. In this scene, Pontormo figures an encounter between the gods Apollo and Cupid, the former depicted in classicizing armor and the latter as a nude, winged adolescent. Apollo has just slain the monster Python and now rebukes Cupid, saying "you should be intent on stirring the concealed fires of love with your burning brand, not laying claim to my glories!" Insulted by this, Cupid seeks revenge on Apollo by shooting him with an arrow to make him fall in love with Daphne, whom Cupid also shoots with a lead arrow to make her impervious to love.

JACOPO DA PONTORMO  
Italian, 1494–1557

*Daphne and Apollo*, 1513

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oil on canvas

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation  
1961.100.9

Adorning the Medici's triumphal chariots, Pontormo's *Daphne and Apollo* conveys the violence at the heart of the mythological story recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Struck by Cupid's arrow, Apollo chases Daphne through the woods. Ovid described Daphne's flight as "the way a sheep runs from the wolf, a deer from the mountain lion, and a dove with fluttering wings flies from the eagle: everything flies from its foes." When Apollo finally catches up to her, Daphne calls on her father, the river god Peneus, for help. Hearing her cries, Peneus transforms his daughter into a laurel tree so as to escape Apollo's advances. In memory of the elusive subject of his desire, Apollo adopts the laurel branch as his emblem. With this painting, Pontormo thus makes a nod to the Medici, for whom the laurel branch served as a long-time emblem, signaling the return and renewal of their dynasty.

Why do you follow me?—  
Any moment I can be  
Nothing but a laurel-tree.

Any moment of the chase  
I can leave you in my place  
A pink bough for your embrace.

Yet if over hill and hollow  
Still it is your will to follow,  
I am off;—to heel, Apollo!

Edna St. Vincent Millay  
"Daphne" (1920)

Although created 400 years apart, Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Daphne" and Pontormo's painting *Apollo and Daphne* produce a compelling dialogue on the theme of sexual violence. Whereas Pontormo drew inspiration from Ovid's description of Daphne and Apollo, Millay's poem offers a powerful counter-narrative from Daphne's perspective, inviting viewers to reflect on the complexities of this mythological tale and its enduring relevance.

GIOVANNI BATTISTA SCULTORI  
Italian, 1503–1575

After GIULIO ROMANO  
Italian, 1499–1546

*David Cutting Off the Head of Goliath*, 1540  
engraving

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Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of Judith Keenan  
2007.22.11

Artists in sixteenth-century Italy frequently depicted scenes of violent conflict, both from the Bible and classical antiquity, often pitting young and idealized male heroes against brutish and monstrous antagonists. Art patrons enthusiastically commissioned such scenes to convey a sense of masculine power and martial prowess. In Scultori's interpretation of Giulio Romano's fresco in Mantua, the young man David draws his arm back to behead his fallen enemy, the Philistine giant Goliath, whom he has subdued with his slingshot. Notably, the tale of David and Goliath carries deep resonance in Florentine politics, as a potent symbol for civic duty and governance employed by both the Medici and the Republic of Florence alike. In this representation of the Old Testament narrative, the hero straddles the armored body of his grotesquely contorted foe, brandishing his enemy's own massive sword.

GIRALAMO FRANCESCO MARIA MAZZOLA (PARMIGIANINO)  
Italian, 1503–1540

*The Entombment*, 1529–1530  
etching

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gift of David P. Becker '70, in honor of Katharine J. Watson  
1990.63

A representative of the Mannerist style in northern Italy, Parmigianino was influential in the development of Italian printmaking and is now celebrated for his explorations into the expressive potential of etching. In this print, considered the artist's masterpiece in the medium, Christ's followers mourn his death as they prepare his body to be interred. Parmigianino movingly captured the mourners' varied responses with his delicately etched lines. The artist compressed eleven figures into the middle third of the print, heightening the emotional charge of the scene. Mary Magdalene gently lowers Christ's frail, nude body onto the stone of unction (anointing), where it will be readied for burial. Even as Christ's form slumps in death, his slender ankles cross elegantly. Christ's mother, the Virgin Mary, gazes sorrowfully at her dead son.

UGO DA CARPI  
Italian, ca. 1480–1532

After RAPHAEL  
Italian, 1483–1520

*The Death of Ananias*, 1518  
woodcut

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; bequest of the Honorable James Bowdoin III

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1811.72

Credited as the first Italian artist to employ multi-block woodcuts to achieve the effect of chiaroscuro ("light and dark") in prints, Ugo da Carpi was one of the most important printmakers of his era. He created this print in 1518, which represents the biblical story of the death of Ananias, following a famous tapestry cartoon (preparatory drawing) by Raphael. In 1515, Pope Leo X had commissioned the tapestry for the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. It draws on a passage from the New Testament in which Christ's apostles persuaded various families to sell part of their property and distribute the funds to the poor. Ananias secretly withheld some of the proceeds from a field he had sold, even though he falsely claimed to have donated the entire amount. Rebuked for his deceitfulness by Peter, who gestures from atop the altar stairs, Ananias falls dead. Ananias is depicted at center left on the ground amidst a shouting and gesturing crowd.

JACOPO DA PONTORMO  
Italian, 1494–1557

*Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel*, 1515  
oil on canvas

Private Collection, New York

This painting depicts the first human family from the Old Testament book of Genesis. At left, Eve sits atop a rocky pedestal while Adam stands at right. At their feet are their two sons, Cain and Abel. The latter sits, examining an object in his lap with the faint indication of a halo surrounding his head. The figure of Cain is positioned frontally with his face obscured behind his arm, potentially forecasting the future when his face will be hidden from God as part of his punishment for the murder of his brother. As in Pontormo's other grisaille paintings, the monochromatic color palette here mimics sculpted marble. The masterful modelling of the figures' musculature and lighting effects can be linked to Pontormo's use of small clay models assiduously crafted by the artist. This painting may have been made with a series in view; however, no other examples have come to light.

HENDRICK GOLTZIUS  
Dutch, 1558–1617

*Pan Pursuing Syrinx, Who Is Changed into a Reed*, ca. 1589  
*Phaeton's Sisters Changed into Poplars, and Cygnus into a Swan*, ca. 1590  
*Daphne Changed into a Tree*, ca. 1589  
engravings

Bowdoin College Museum of Art; gifts of Charles Pendexter  
1997.2.18, 1997.2.24, and 1997.2.14

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Widely recognized as a leading printmaker of his era, Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius created some of his most admired engravings during the 1580s, including this series inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Goltzius originally planned to make some 300 images referencing stories from all fifteen books. However, he was only able to realize the forty scenes from Books I and II, as well as several others from Books III and IV. Like Pontormo, Goltzius also depicted the story of Daphne and Apollo, in addition to numerous other accounts of supernatural bodily transformation, including the tale of Pan's pursuit of Syrinx, who is changed into a reed; the tale of Phaeton's sisters, who are transformed into poplar trees; and Cygnus, who becomes a swan. Throughout the series, as in the original myths, stories of love are often fraught with violence enacted against women.

**Painted Enamels by Pierre Reymond from Sixteenth-Century France**

Since the twelfth century, Limoges, a city in central France, has been a center for enamel production. Made by melting powdered glass to a base of metal or ceramic, enamel is characterized by its smooth vitreous surface. In the mid-sixteenth century, Pierre Reymond managed a large workshop there that specialized in tableware decorated with scenes drawn from the Bible and classical mythology. In this case are four examples of his work: an ewer (large jug), a tazza (shallow cup), and two ornamental plaques. Reymond was celebrated for his grisaille enamels. While Reymond and Pontormo likely did not know each other's work, these enamels provide another example of a wider artistic interest during this period in using different materials to imitate stone.

All works in this case have been generously lent by the Wyvern Collection.

PIERRE REYMOND  
French, 1513–1584

*Limoges Painted Enamel Ewer*, ca. 1560–1565  
painted enamel

PIERRE REYMOND  
French, 1513–1584

*Limoges Painted Enamel Tazza of the Wise Man with the Good Heart*, 1558  
painted enamel

Attributed to PIERRE REYMOND  
French, 1513–1584

*The Flagellation of Christ*, ca. 1550–1560  
grisaille painted enamel and copper gilt