

Renaissance Portrait

A portrait is a representation of a specific individual, such as the artist might meet in life. A good portrait does not merely record someone's features, however, but says something about who he or she is, offering a vivid sense of a real person's presence.

The traditions of portraiture in the West extend back to antiquity and particularly to ancient Greece and Rome, where lifelike depictions of distinguished men and women appeared in sculpture and on coins. After many centuries in which generic representation had been the norm, distinctive portrait likenesses began to reappear in Europe in the fifteenth century. This change reflected a new growth of interest in everyday life and individual identity as well as a revival of Greco-Roman custom. The resurgence of portraiture was thus a significant manifestation of the Renaissance in Europe.

Federico da Montefeltro (1422-1482) Duke of Urbino, in central Italy, was one of Renaissance Italy's most sought-after condottieri (mercenaries) as well as a prominent patron of the arts and Humanism. His portrait with his son Guidobaldo by Spanish artist Pedro Berruguete represents him as an intellectual, a sovereign and a military leader, by surrounding him with objects telling about his power and his interests.

The duke sits on a sort of throne, and is reading a codex, an expensive item for the time, allusion to his humanist interests. Federico owned one of the greatest libraries in fifteenth-century Europe with more than 1000 manuscripts, including studies in astrology, geography, history, poetry and theology as well as works in Latin, Greek, Arabic and Hebrew and he was patron of great Renaissance artists such as Piero della Francesca

The sideways position of the sitter refers to Roman classic tradition, clearly showing the shape of his nose that was hit during a battle. Federico's profile reminds of Emperors profile on Roman coins and by doing so associates his figure with their power.

The armor, partially covered by a precious mantle with a stoat collar, refers to his primary role as a warrior. Further military hints include the necklace of the Order of the Golden Fleece, as well as the helmet and the command baton on the ground. His left leg show the Garter given by him by the King of England. Other official symbols to his international status is the mitre with pearls on the shelf at the left upper corner, which was a personal gift of the Ottoman sultan.

Near to Federico is his young son Guidobaldo, the future duke of Urbino, holding a command baton, symbol of his father hereditary power and his own future position as a ruler of the dukedom.

If the Italian Renaissance is characterized by classicism, Dutch and Flemish painters during the fifteenth century created clear-eyed, dispassionate paintings whose realism exceeded that of many Italian virtuosi.

Compared to Italian artworks, their paintings were more down to earth, expressing the taste for precious materials typical of a society of wealthy traders. The discovery of oil paint, permitting endless reworking of the picture and thus tremendous clarity of detail.



Pedro Berruguete, *Federico da Montefeltro and his Son*, 1480-81
oil on panel, 134 x 77 cmvGalleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino