

Italian Renaissance Learning Resources

In collaboration with
the National Gallery of Art



The Making of an Artist:
Activities

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1. A Week in a Renaissance Workshop

In this activity, students research the practices of a Renaissance workshop and write a journal about their own “experiences” there.

RESOURCES:

Bomford, David, et al. *Italian Painting before 1400: Art in the Making*. London: National Gallery Publications, 1989.

Cennini, Cennino d’Andrea. *The Craftsman’s Handbook: The Italian “Il Libro dell’ Arte.”* Translated by David V. Thompson Jr. New York: Dover, 1960. First published 1933 by Yale University Press.

Cole, Bruce. *The Renaissance Artist at Work: From Pisano to Titian*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

Thomas, Anabel. *The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Wackernagel, Martin. *The World of the Florentine Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Market*. Translated by Alison Luchs. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to research the Renaissance workshop—the roles of master, apprentice, and patron and the types of work performed—and creatively translate that information into an account of day-to-day activities.

PROCEDURE: Have students learn more about the practices and organization of the Renaissance workshop using the resources cited below as a starting point. Have them imagine that they are apprenticed in the shop of an artist they have studied. Ask them to write a week’s worth of journal entries that chronicle the activities, personalities, and comings and goings of the master, his family, the other shop assistants, and patrons. Entries should also include specific information about the materials and processes used and what works of art are in progress. In place of a journal, students could create a blog incorporating images and other types of supporting information.

2. What Does a Signature Signify?

In this activity, students consider what constituted authenticity in a work of art during the Renaissance and what constitutes authenticity today. Activities 2 and 3 can be combined.

PURPOSE: to explore students' ideas about the "authorship" of art by comparing the meaning of a "signed" work from the Renaissance to one made in modern times.

MATERIALS: digital reconstructions of Duccio's *Maestà* (front and back [**fig. 1 and 2**]); images of Duccio's *The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew* [**fig. 3**], Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawing No. 681 C*, and Andy Warhol's *Green Marilyn*. You may also select other images from the sources below.

BACKGROUND: When Duccio completed the *Maestà* he inscribed it, "Holy Mother of God, be the cause of peace for Siena [and] life to Duccio because he painted you thus." The *Maestà* is among the first works of Italian art to bear a signature. The huge, multi-paneled, two-sided altarpiece had been at least three years in the making before it was installed, to the accompaniment of public celebrations, in Siena's cathedral. Documents show that the commission required Duccio to apply his own hand (*suis manibus*), but the

stipulation did not exclude the participation of assistants—in fact, the scale of the project required it. Most scholars agree that shop assistants did much of the painting of the altarpiece's rear panels, including *The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew*.

American artist Sol LeWitt wrote instructions for his paintings and sculptures that were executed wholly by assistants according to his specifications. A work such as *Wall Drawing No. 681 C* will continue to exist as a work of art even after the current installation has been painted over, because it exists in the form of an idea set out in a signed certificate and instructions.

Andy Warhol once famously remarked to an interviewer, "Why don't you ask my assistant Gerald Malanga some questions? He did a lot of my paintings." Beginning in the early 1960s, Warhol increasingly used copying techniques such as stencils to give his work the look of printed materials; in 1962 he settled on a photomechanical silkscreen process based on photographs—on images, that is, not of his own making. Many of the prints, moreover, were produced by assistants including Malanga; the studio itself was dubbed the Factory.

2. What Does a Signature Signify? (Continued)

INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

PROCEDURE: Before beginning discussion, elicit from students words or phrases they associate with “an authentic work of art.” Then consider what was signified (and not by a Renaissance artist’s signature: that a work, like *the Maestà*, was an approved product of a shop that met the master’s standards of quality, not that it was by his own hand. (This is not only a Renaissance phenomenon. You can extend this activity by having students look into the Rembrandt Research Project. See resources below.) Continue to discuss authenticity and works by Sol LeWitt or Andy Warhol. What is “authentic” in these works? Use all these responses to trigger discussion, comparisons, and opinions.

GLOSSARY: authenticity, Duccio, Rembrandt, Sol LeWitt, Andy Warhol

RESOURCES:

Cole, Bruce. *The Renaissance Artist at Work: From Pisano to Titian*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

Thomas, Anabel. *The Painter’s Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Wackernagel, Martin. *The World of the Florentine Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Market*. Translated by Alison Luchs. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981.

White, John. *Duccio: Tuscan Art and the Medieval Workshop*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979.

Sol LeWitt

“**Focus: Sol LeWitt.**” Museum of Modern Art, New York.

“**Sol LeWitt.**” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Teaching Art Since 1950. The National Gallery of Art, Washington. pp. 46–48.

Andy Warhol

Danto, Arthur. *Andy Warhol*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Teaching Art Since 1950. The National Gallery of Art, Washington. pp. 30–32.

The Andy Warhol Museum.

The Rembrandt Research Project.

2. What Does a Signature Signify?: Image Reference



Fig. 1 Duccio
Conjectural reconstruction of the *Maestà*
(*Madonna Enthroned*). (front), 1311
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena
Digital reconstruction by Lew Minter



Fig. 2 Duccio
Conjectural reconstruction of the *Maestà*
(*Madonna Enthroned*). (back), 1311
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena
Digital reconstruction by Lew Minter



Fig. 3 Duccio
The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew, 1308/11
Tempera on panel, 43.5 x 46 cm (17 1/8 x 18 1/8 in.)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Samuel H. Kress Collection
Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art

3. Many Hands at Work

INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

In this activity, students consider collaboration in the making of art, in the Renaissance and today. Activities 2 and 3 can be combined.

PURPOSE: to reinforce students' understanding of the collaborative nature of most Renaissance art and consider some contemporary artists who work collaboratively.

MATERIALS: images for display in class, such as: digital reconstructions of Duccio's *Maestà* (front and back [fig. 4 and 5]); Giotto's *Peruzzi Altarpiece* [see fig. 6]; Neri di Bicci, *Altar Wing with Five Saints*; Jacopo di Cione, *Madonna and Child with Saints* [see fig. 7]; Vittorio Crivelli, *Pietà between the Virgin Addolorata and John the Evangelist* [see fig. 8]; Tim Rollins + K.O.S., *Der Verschollene* [see fig. 9]

BACKGROUND: Tim Rollins and K.O.S. was formed in the early 1980s after Rollins taught workshops with disadvantaged kids in a school in the south Bronx. He and his collaborators work as a team. Rollins typically suggests a work of literature for which the group researches, discusses, and

develops imagery. *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*) was the working title of Franz Kafka's first novel, *Amerika*, published posthumously in 1927.

PROCEDURE: Begin a class discussion on the collaborative aspects of Renaissance art production. Consider, for example, the various artisans and skills required to produce a large painted and gilded work such as Duccio's *Maestà* or Giotto's *Peruzzi Altarpiece*. In addition to the various people involved in the actual painting, there were contributions from (at a minimum) carpenters, wood-carvers, and gilders.

Ask students to research Tim Rollins and K.O.S. starting with the resources cited below. Then discuss what is similar and different about the collaborative practices of a Renaissance workshop and those of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. Who was the master? Was there one? Who executed the work? What were the various roles and contributions?

3. Many Hands at Work (Continued)

INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

GLOSSARY: Women and collaborative practice; Duccio, Jacopo di Cione, Giotto, Neri di Bicci, Vittorio Crivelli, Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

RESOURCES:

Cole, Bruce. *The Renaissance Artist at Work: From Pisano to Titian*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

Thomas, Anabel. *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Wackernagel, Martin. *The World of the Florentine Artist: Projects and Patrons, Workshop and Market*. Translated by Alison Luchs. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981.

Arthur Danto. "K.O.S. and the Art History of Collaboration." *In Amerika: Tim Rollins + K.O.S.*, edited by Gary Garrels, 49–65. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1989.

Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

Prometheus Bound, a work of art for the web.

Kids of Survival: The Art and Life of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. Directed by Dayna Goldfine and Daniel Geller. 1996. [film]

[The Rembrandt Research Project.](#)

3. Many Hands at Work: Image Reference / page 1



Fig. 4 Duccio
Conjectural reconstruction of the *Maestà*
(*Madonna Enthroned*). (front), 1311
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena
Digital reconstruction by Lew Minter



Fig. 5 Duccio
Conjectural reconstruction of the *Maestà*
(*Madonna Enthroned*). (back), 1311
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena
Digital reconstruction by Lew Minter



Fig. 6 Giotto (Giotto di Bondone)
The Peruzzi Altarpiece, c. 1322
Tempera and gold on wood, center panel
60.6 x 44.5 cm (23 7/8 x 17 1/2 in.)
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, Samuel H. Kress Collection

3. Many Hands at Work: Image Reference / page 2



Fig. 7 Jacopo di Cione
Madonna and Child with Saints, c. 1365–70
Tempera and gold on panel,
36.2 x 22.6 cm (14 1/4 x 8 7/8 in.)
Allentown Art Museum, Samuel H. Kress Collection



Fig. 8 Vittorio Crivelli
Pietà between the Virgin Addolorata and John the Evangelist, c. 1490
Tempera on wood panel, 59.5 x 27.8 cm center;
56.7 x 23.7 cm side (23 3/8 x 10 7/8 in. center; 22 1/4 x 9 1/4 in. side)
The University of Arizona Museum of Art, Tucson, Samuel H. Kress Collection



Fig. 9 Tim Rollins + K.O.S.
Der Verschollene, 1990
Black and gold ink on page of book, 21.3 x 14.3 cm (8 3/8 x 5 5/8 in.)
National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Gift of Brenda and Robert Edelson
Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art

4. Your Paragone

ADVANCED

In this activity, students present their own “sides” in a *paragone* debate.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to read and consider the arguments offered by Renaissance writers who compared painting and sculpture; to prompt close looking at a sculpture and a painting; to practice persuasive (or creative) writing skills

PROCEDURE: Have students read the *paragone* selections in this unit (“**Painting versus sculpture**” and “**Leonardo on painting versus sculpture**”; see also resources cited below) and discuss in class the general points presented by artisans of painting and those of sculpture. Then ask each student to select two works (one sculpture and one painting) that have been studied in this or other units. After examining them, students should describe each work in terms of a *paragone* debate, employing the criteria used by Renaissance writers—naturalistic color and play of light, multiplicity of viewpoints, durability, “thingness,” etc.—or criteria of their own devising. Specificity is the key to ensuring close examination and description of the works.

Conclusions can be written up as a dialogue, as in *The Courtier*, or presented in any other form, including such musical options as a duet (e.g., to the tune of “Anything You Can Do”), call-and-response blues lyrics, or rap.

GLOSSARY: **paragone**; **Leonardo da Vinci**, **Baldassare Castiglione**, **Benedetto Varchi**

RESOURCES:

Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of the Courtier*. Translated and with an introduction by George Bull. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976. See especially pp. 98–99.

Farago, Claire J. *Leonardo da Vinci's Paragone: A Critical Interpretation with a New Edition of the Text in the Codex Urbinas*. Brill Studies in Intellectual History. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992.

Mendelsohn, Leatrice. *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's “Due lezioni” and Cinquecento Art Theory*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982.

Pedretti, Carlo, ed. *Leonardo da Vinci, On Painting: A Lost Book (Libro A) Reassembled from the Codex Vaticanus Urbinas 1270 and from the Codex Leicester*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

5. Training Elsewhere

ELEMENTARY / INTERMEDIATE

In this activity, students research artistic training and the status of artists in other cultures or eras, and then make comparisons to the practice in Renaissance Italy.

PURPOSE: to prompt students to look closely at the position and formation of Renaissance artists and how these changed (or did not) between 1350 and 1550; to have students learn about practices in a different time or place

MATERIALS: [worksheet](#)

PROCEDURE: As a class, discuss and complete the questionnaire in relation to artists in Renaissance Italy at two points in time: a) around 1450 and b) around 1550. What changes are reflected?

Then divide students into teams, with each team assigned to research artistic training and status in one of the periods below (or others of your choosing). When the class reconvenes, have each team present the same completed questionnaire, supported by specific information shared with classmates in oral reports. Compare these results with those for the two Renaissance dates.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMPARISON:

Tibet, 12th through 14th centuries

Dutch Republic, 17th century

France, 17th or 18th century

Edo Japan

post-iconoclasm Byzantium

United States, late 20th and early 21st centuries (fine arts)

United States, late 20th and early 21st centuries (crafts, applied arts)