

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

Student Handout

Presenter: Leah R. Clark

Ercole de' Roberti, Este Diptych (*The Adoration of the Shepherds and The Dead Christ*), c. 1490, National Gallery, London

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-ercole-de%E2%80%99-roberti-este-diptych-adoration-shepherds-and-dead-christ-c-1490>

In this short film Dr Leah Clark examines a small devotional image belonging to Duchess Eleonora D'Aragona of Ferrara from the fifteenth century. Once covered in velvet with clasps to close it, the painting is examined as a luxury object in the art collections of Eleonora d'Aragona but also as a devotional work. The painting drew on contemporary religious practices in Ferrara and Eleonora's close ties with the Corpus Domini convent. Painted by the court painter Ercole de' Roberti it is also discussed in terms of its complex composition, which spoke to humanist and religious practices at the court of Ferrara. Although very small, the painting inspired copies by artists in the Renaissance as well as today, including Michael Landy.

Before watching the film

Before watching the film, you can locate the work online and download an image of the two panels here:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/ercole-de-roberti-the-este-diptych>

1. What do you know about devotional images?
2. What do you think this work depicts or represents? Describe what you see on the screen. How big do you think it is? (you might think of things like scale, how a viewer might interact with the object, or even use it)

Can you identify any recognisable elements (plants, humans, animals, landscape features, architectural details, forms)?

3. Where do you think this work would have been viewed originally?

4. What function do you think this work might have served?

After watching the film

1. What effects do you think the artist was trying to achieve in this work?

2. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the work? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements.

3. Does it have a recognisable purpose or function? Does this relate to the time period in which it was made?

4. How has this film helped your understanding of devotional images?

5. What is its relevance for today?

Online Activity

1. Watch the film of Landy's sculptures and contemplate how the artist has conveyed the ascetic practices of saints in his works.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLlEXJSRFi4>

2. The diptych was recently featured in an exhibition on *Building the Picture* at the National Gallery. How was the painting situated within that exhibition with the emphasis on architecture?:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/building-the-picture-architecture-in-italian-renaissance-painting-30-april-2014-0000>

3. We know the diptych was in Eleonora's collections because of an inventory. What is the importance of primary sources? You can find primary sources and a number of resources at the National Archives online here: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/sessions-and-resources/?time-period=early-modern>

Resources online

On Renaissance devotional paintings:

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/units/unit-1/>

Art and religion at the National Gallery in London (link to a variety of resources):

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/art-and-religion>

The Domestic Devotions project at Cambridge: <http://domesticdevotions.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

Renaissance Resources online

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the National Gallery in Washington, DC

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/r/renaissance/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the Victoria and Albert Museum

Bibliography

Clark, Leah R. 'Replication, Quotation, and the 'Original' in Quattrocento Collecting Practices.' In *The Challenge of the Object / Die Herausforderung des Objekts*, edited by Georg Ulrich Großmann and Petra Krutisch, 136-140. Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum Press, 2014. [specifically on the Este diptych and downloadable free here: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/38040/>]

— — —. *Collecting Art in the Italian Renaissance Court: Objects and Exchanges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. [Chapter 3 specifically deals with the Este diptych]

Amanda Lillie, 'Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting' Online exhibition catalogue: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture>

Comparative analysis

Compare the diptych with Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi* at the Met, NY as well as a contemporary copy of one of the panels of the diptych in Rotterdam: <http://collectie.boijmans.nl/en/maker/11602/Gian-Francesco-de-Maineri>.

Another possibility for comparison would be to compare the painting with Landy's contemporary sculpture.

Alternatively, compare it with another devotional image from the Open Arts Objects film series such as Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi* at the Getty or Bellini's *Madonna*:

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-mantegna-adoration-magi-c-1495-1505-getty-museum-la>

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-giovanni-bellini-madonna-meadow-c-1500-national-gallery-london>

Works of art	Ercole de' Roberti, Este Diptych (The Adoration of the Shepherds and The Dead Christ), c. 1490, National Gallery, London	Your choice here
date		
What is it?		
Material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location in		

the Renaissance		
How are the figures depicted?		
Composition		
Condition		
Function		