

Path 2 – The second path deals with works made by male homosexual artists or those close to this group



1
Donatello [ca. 1386–1466]
**David with the Head of Goliath,
mid-15th c.**

Bronze, 54 x 10,5 x 10,5 cm

Inv. Nr. 2262

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In the 14th century a new cultural model focusing on the revival of classical Antiquity – humanism – arose in Italy and rapidly spread throughout Europe. A new reading of ancient literature together with a fresh interest in classical art, philosophy, and science considered humankind the measure of all things. The world was now conceived in terms of human values and, as a result, medieval Theocentricism (God as the central aspect to human existence) began to decline.

2
Andrea del Verrocchio [1435/36–1488]
Sleeping Youth, ca. 1475/80

Terracotta, 36 x 67 x 25 cm

Inv. Nr. 112

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The subsequent debate over questions like virtue, desire, sensuality, and sexual liberties, which reduced Christian condemnation of worldly pleasures, had a tremendous cultural influence at the time. By returning to the classical past for inspiration, writers and artists also took an interest in homosexuality, given its prominence in art, chronicles, and the pagan narratives of the gods (known as myths). Even though not every humanist was homosexual, many of them showed an interest in dealing with homoeroticism.

Homosexual artists certainly existed before humanism. But it wasn't until the 14th century, for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire, that Western society was flexible enough to accept openly homoerotic artistic productions and, despite social and religious opposition, to at least tolerate homosexuality, including that of artists.

Humanism, as a current of thought, reached its culmination around 1500, the time of the Renaissance, a term



3
Leonardo da Vinci [1452–1519]
[or circle]

Flora, 16th c.

Wax, 67 x 44 x 37 cm

Inv. Nr. 5951

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für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen
zu Berlin / Jörg P. Anders

which literally refers to the »rebirth« of the Greek and Roman cultures. Its artistic origin was in the city of Florence, one of the most dynamic European centres of the time. Florence also seems to have had a well-known homosexual subculture during the 14th and 15th centuries, widespread among all classes of people. In Germany, for instance, the word »Florenzer« was used as synonym for the homosexual male.

Artists like Donatello (ca. 1386–1466), Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) and Michelangelo (1475–1564) were influ-

enced by the theories of the philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), translator of the text *Symposium* written by the Greek philosopher Plato (428/427–348/347 BC) and initiator of the current known as Neo-Platonism. According to Ficino's complex interpretation of Plato's work, love is the product of the desire for beauty, whose pursuit would ultimately lead to the Divinity (God). Desire would therefore carry a religious connotation. Moreover, for Ficino a man would naturally be more attracted towards men than to women, as in this way he would be

reminded of his own inner beauty. With this thesis, Ficino helped to legitimize homosexuality and contributed enormously to the search for androgyny in the development of Renaissance art: the physical union of fortitude and grace.

Donatello is considered one of the fathers of the Renaissance. In his sculpted work, he coupled classical sensuality with Christian morality and humanism, illustrating for the first time the Neo-Platonic approach to the notion of love in his depictions of the biblical figure of David.



4

After Michelangelo

**Samson Defeating Two Philistines,
1601-1615**

Bronze, 36,3 x 17,4 x 14,7 cm

Inv. Nr. 2389

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In the version housed in the Bode Museum, David is covered with only a cloak and a very short tunic, which leaves his right leg almost completely nude up to the hip. The focus on his beautiful male body is underlined by the position of a slightly twisted waist and the lifting of the left leg (fig. 1).

According to the Old Testament, David was a young shepherd who killed Goliath, the chieftain of the Philistines confronting the Israelites. Immediately after this episode took place, David developed an

intimate friendship with Jonathan, son of King Saul, which is recounted in the Bible as follows: »the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul«. Jealous of David's success in the battle and of his influence over his own son, King Saul ordered the murder of David. The young man was forced to flee and left Jonathan after they had »kissed one another and wept

with one another, David weeping the most«. Later on, when David was informed of Saul's and Jonathan's deaths, he would lament on the latter, as his »love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women«.

Considering David's historical and religious relevance, being one of the leading figures in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, those biblical passages were often highlighted and his relationship with Jonathan – homosexual or not – was frequently used to portray same-sex desire in

art. Donatello, who according to several sources may have been a homosexual himself, was certainly not the first artist to represent the king, but he was indeed the first one depicting him as an attractive and androgynous adolescent.

Leonardo da Vinci – artist, engineer, scientist, and inventor – is considered the paradigm of the »Renaissance man«, a person whose expertise spans a large number of different areas. He started his career in Florence with the openly homosexual painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio (1435/36–1488), owner of a workshop characterised by artistic experimentation. Verrocchio's *Sleeping Youth*, for instance, is an impressive analysis of the male body (fig. 2).

In 1476, Leonardo was twice accused of homosexual activity because of his closeness to a young male model. Although these charges were dismissed, a reputation as a homosexual accompanied him until the end of his life. Da Vinci's works of art and his approximately two thousand pages of notes have been widely analysed with regards to his supposed homosexuality, among others by the Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939).

In his artistic production, Leonardo focused on the search of the androgyne, a merging of masculine features and rounded feminine forms. This was the case of the sculpture of the Roman goddess *Flora*, probably the work of one of his close followers (fig. 3). Flora, symbol of the blooming of flowers and the spring season, is recognisable as a woman because of her breasts, but her toned arms and shoulders educe a masculine body. Her features and even her curls follow those in Leonardo's painting *Saint John the Baptist* (today in the Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv.



5

Hans Daucher [ca. 1485–1538]

Allegory of the Virtues of Dürer, 1522

Solnhofen Limestone, 23,8 x 16,8 x 3,2 cm

Inv. Nr. 804

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6
 Albrecht Dürer [1471–1528]
Willibald Pirckheimer, ca. 1503
 Drawing, silver pencil on grounded paper,
 21,1 x 15 cm
 Inv. Nr. KdZ 24623
 © bpk / Kupferstichkabinett, SMB / Dietmar Katz

Nr. 775), whose model could have been a male apprentice in Leonardo's workshop known as »Salai« (little devil).

In the High Renaissance period (1490s–1530s), popes like Clement VII (1478–1534) and Julius II (1443–1513) invested an enormous amount of money in converting Rome into the new cultural capital of the Western world. Consequently, Florence lost part of its previous artistic prominence, even though

artists like Michelangelo contributed a great deal to the grandeur of both cities. Michelangelo was a sculptor, painter, architect, and poet, pivotal to the development of Western art and still considered as one of the greatest artists of all time.

Because Michelangelo was a devout Christian, his homosexuality was in conflict with his fear of its punishment. This dilemma between religion and forbidden sexual desires seems to have contributed to his introspec-

tive and tormented character. His search for beauty in the male body drove him, in contrast to Donatello or Leonardo, to produce works of extreme virility. Muscularity and tension can be found in most of his compositions, even when portraying women.

In a sculpture kept in the Bode Museum, an anonymous artist set in bronze an original drawing by Michelangelo (fig. 4). This drawing was meant to serve as a model for a



7

Greece

Pan in Foliage, 11th c.

Marble, 62,5 x 49 x 6 cm

Inv. Nr. 6436

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monumental sculpture of the biblical Israelite hero Samson fighting against the Philistines, where Michelangelo portrayed three men intertwined in a kind of spiral embrace. The intensity of their movements, their exposed nudity, and the tension of the bodies are certainly closer to a sexual scene than to combat.

Although not necessarily homosexuals themselves, other artists in the Renaissance showed an interest in expressing homoeroticism. A particularly prominent case is that of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528).

Dürer was the central painter, printmaker, and draftsman of the German Renaissance. His work also inspired other German artists like Hans Daucher (ca. 1485–1538), who even depicted Dürer in his relief *Allegory of the Virtues of Dürer* (fig. 5). Here, Dürer is represented

exhibiting his characteristic well-cared-for long hair and dressed with one of the elegant costumes he liked to wear. He is defeating an opponent personifying Envy in the presence of eight witnesses, Hercules and King David among others.

Dürer was married and never acknowledged any homosexual tendencies. However, his correspondence with a friend, the humanist scholar Willibald Pirckheimer (1470–1530), contains caustic comments on the subject. For instance, while Dürer made fun of his friend's fondness for Italian soldiers and German girls, Pirckheimer presumably annotated »with a man's prick up your anus« in Greek on a sketch by Dürer, kept today in the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (fig. 6). Some of Dürer's drawings and prints portrayed the homosexual humanist subculture to which he

must have been acquainted during his two trips to Italy (in 1494–1495 and 1505–1507).

Homosexuality also features in the oeuvre of Vincenzo Pacetti (1746–1820). Pacetti is particularly important for the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin because around 10,000 drawings from his collection are now housed in the Kupferstichkabinett. Today, however, we are interested in his work as a restorer of antique sculptures.

In 1620 one such sculpture, probably made in the 3rd century BC, was found in Rome: the work now known as *The Barberini Faun*. Despite extensive damage – for instance, the right leg and the left arm were missing – it was soon regarded as one of the masterpieces of antique sculpture. For a long time the Faun was owned by the famous Roman Barberini



8

Vincenzo Pacetti [1746–1820]

The Barberini Faun, 1799

Clay, 86,8 x 63,4 x 50,5 cm

Inv. Nr. M 290, Property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein

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family, hence its title, and is now kept in the Glyptothek in Munich (Inv. Nr. 218). Fauns and their Greek precursors, the satyrs, were a recurrent motif in Antiquity and have their origin in the Greek mythological figure known as Pan. In Roman mythology, they were traditionally seen as drunken, eccentric companions of Bacchus, the god of wine.

As in the Byzantine relief fragment with *Pan in foliage* (11th century), fauns were often depicted dancing (fig. 7), but they were also often shown suffering from the consequences of their excessive lifestyle. The latter is the case of the *Barberini*

Faun, who lies probably drunk or resting after sex, with closed eyes, relaxed, his right arm under his head and the left one hanging to the side. His open legs show his complete nudity and his well-toned torso. We could certainly say that he is shamelessly enjoying the moment.

When in 1799 the sculpture came temporarily into the possession of Pacetti, he took the opportunity to alter some of the restored missing parts, which had already been reworked several times before. By clearly lifting the right leg, Pacetti further strengthened the Faun's already distinctly erotic pose. It was in this

context that a terracotta model of the Faun was created, which is now in the Bode Museum (fig. 8).

Bans on homosexual behaviour had a deep impact on the lives of all the artists mentioned above. It constrained their social relations as well as the practice of their professions. Their proximity to homosexuality, whether themselves homosexuals or not, was crucial to their artistic production and even to their proximity to the patrons. However, this essential part of their biographies is still largely ignored in most art history writings.