

CELEBRATING THE 500TH ANNIVERSARY OF POPE LEO X'S ELECTION

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

Overlapping until August 18 with "Springtime of the Renaissance," the subject of my June/July's "Of Books, Art, and People," but continuing, most appropriately, at the Museum of the Medici Chapels at the Church of San Lorenzo until October 6, is "*Nello Splendore Mediceo: Pope Leo X and Florence*" (Full entrance: 9 euros, every day from 8:15 AM to 4:50 PM, except the 2nd and 4th Sundays and the 1st, 3rd, and 5th Mondays of every month, when it's closed). It tracks the life of Giovanni, Lorenzo the Magnificent's second son and the first of four Medici to be Pope, from his birth in the Palazzo Medici on Via Larga in Florence on December 11, 1475 and his baptism the same day, up to March 11, 1513 when he was elected Pope at only age 38 and chose the name Leo X to emphasize his connection to the lion called the "*marzocco*" which had been the powerful heraldic symbol of Florence since the 14th century, to his brief return home in 1515, and up to his death, so sudden from malaria that the last sacraments could not be administered, in Rome on December 1, 1521. His unnoteworthy tomb and that of Giulio, his illegitimate nephew and immediate successor Clement VII (1523-34), are in Rome's Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

As the second son, Giovanni was by custom destined for a religious life. At the early age of eight he received his tonsure; five years later he became the cardinal deacon of Rome's St. Maria in Domenica. The pontifical bull by Pope Innocent VIII, dated March 9, 1489, meant to be kept a secret because Giovanni was so young, is on display here, as is the ledger documenting his baptism.

At the court of his father, he received the finest education available in Europe; one of his several tutors was Pico della Mirandola. Among his mentors were Agnolo Poliziano, Demetrio Calcondila, and Marsilio Ficino.



Raphael's portrait in the Uffizi Gallery (Florence) of Pope Leo X and Cardinals Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici, later Pope Clement VII, and Luigi de' Rossi, with the Hamilton Bible.

Bottom, *Parato Passerini* or lectern cover used by Pope Leo X during his procession from Viterbo to Florence in 1515



From 1489 to 1491, with his brother Giuliano and his nephew Giulio, he studied theology and canon law at the University of Pisa.

The exhibition's introductory section is dedicated to the House of Medici and includes a dual portrait of members of the family (Piero and maybe Giovanni) by Andrea del Castagno from the Kunsthhaus in Zurich and a marble portrait of Giuliano de' Medici attributed to Michele Marini from the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

The numerous works on display in the first and second sections aim to recreate the rarified cultural climate of Lorenzo de' Medici's humanistic entourage, where young Giovanni met the greatest artists of those times: Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, and the young Michelangelo, among others. They include a *Bust of Lorenzo the Magnificent* on loan from the National Gallery in Washington, and a vase with the Medici-Orsini coat of arms from the Detroit Institute of Art, testifying to the marriage of his parents, Lorenzo and Clarice Orsini.

The third section looks to the return of the Medici, after a nearly 20-year exile, to Florence and up to Giovanni's election as Pope Leo X. The artists whose work is on display here include Pontormo with *Two Warriors*, *A Man Bearing Arms with a Putto*, and the panels from the Carro della Moneta; and Andrea del Sarto with *Two Figures with Arms and Armor*.

The fourth and largest section is devoted to Leo X's 10-year pontificate and its enormous impact on the art scene in Rome, which once again after more than 1,000 years became the cultural center of Europe. On display here are portraits of the Pope by Ludovico Buti and Giuliano Bugiardini and a large terracotta medallion bearing his Leonine emblem by Luca della Robbia the Younger, side by side with a fresco by Raphael, his *Putto* (1511) from the Accademia di San Luca in Rome, and with architectural drawings (also by Raphael)

including a *View of the Pantheon* (where Raphael is buried, by the way), with Antonio da Sangallo the Younger's *Studies for St. Peter's*, and with Giovan Francesco da Sangallo's *Plan of Villa Madama*.

For after the warlike Julius II, the cardinal electors had desired a peace- and pleasure-loving successor. The Venetian ambassador relates that, soon after his election, the corpulent and hedonistic Leo X, always cheerful and over-generous, remarked to his brother Giuliano: "Let us enjoy the papacy, since God has given it to us." He paid little or no attention to the Fifth Lateran Council, undervalued Luther and his Reformation, and lost control of the political dangers threatening the papacy from all parts of Europe. Instead, he gave himself up unrestrainedly to amusements and pageantry that he provided in lavish abundance, not only with Church money, but also with his own. He sponsored the theater, music, art, and poetry, and hosted endless banquets and dances. He even had a pet white elephant named Hanno. "Under such circumstances," the Catholic Encyclopedia's profile relates, "it is not surprising that the large treasury left by Julius II was entirely dissipated in two years. In the spring of 1515, the exchequer was empty and Leo never after recovered from his financial embarrassment... A lampoon proclaimed that 'Leo X had consumed three pontificates: the treasure of Julius II, the revenues of his own reign, and those of his successor.'"

Although a spendthrift, Leo was a holy man and a great benefactor to charity: retirement homes, hospitals, poor students, the sick, and the arts. He reorganized the University of Rome and promoted the study of literature, poetry, and archeology. He accelerated the construction of St. Peter's Basilica initiated by Julius II, had San Giovanni dei Fiorentini on Rome's Via Giulia built, increased the holdings of the Vatican Library, and subsidized famous writers like Erasmus, Bembo and Ariosto. The Venetian typographer Aldus Manutius was one of his protégés. He showed special favors to the Jews and allowed them to erect a Hebrew printing press in Rome.

Many illuminated manuscripts from the libraries of Cosimo the



Bust of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici before he became Pope, attributed to Antonio de' Benintendi.
Bottom, double portrait by Andrea del Castagno of Pietro and Giovanni de' Medici; the latter became Pope Leo X in 1513.
Below, Michelangelo's *Centaureomachia*



Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent, which had been confiscated by the Signoria in 1494, were recovered by Leo X, a bibliophile, after the family's return from exile in 1512, and taken by him to the Villa Madama in Rome (today Italy's Senate) where he lived. Clement VII brought them back to Florence, and they're now in the nearby Laurentian Library commissioned in 1524, designed by Michelangelo, and opened in 1532.

Hands down, however, the greatest achievement, the most enduring claim on posterity of Leo X's papacy was his patronage of Raphael, who finished the *Stanze* begun under Julius II, painted the cartoons for the tapestries of the Sistine Chapel, and worked on the building of St. Peter's Basilica.

Leo X's return to his birthplace on November 30, 1515, gave Florentine artists the occasion to honor their native-son Pope. A marble bust of Leo X opens this fifth section. A video illustrates his itinerary from Viterbo through northern Latium and southern Tuscany to Florence and recreates the ephemeral works of art, most of which no longer exist, but which we know were made by the most famous Florentine artists of the time: Ghirlandaio, Granacci, and Rosso Fiorentino, to name a few, because they're registered along with the sums paid in a ledger on display here. Leo X was of course accompanied by a large retinue of VIPs and cardinals, including his illegitimate nephew Giulio de' Medici who was to become Clement VII, some of whom are shown in portraits here.

Also on display is a magnificent contemporary platter, on loan from London's Victoria and Albert Museum, portraying the procession.

This section is rich in liturgical objects once belonging to Leo X or used by him in 1515 during his trip to Florence. These include his bejeweled miter, silver bishop's crook, an embroidered lectern cover once part of an ensemble of liturgical vestments and hangings known as the *Parato Passerini*, numerous relics, and precious cameos portraying Leo X. On display in Section Six are drawings and manuscripts concerning the history of the New Sacristy in San Lorenzo and in Section Seven, graphics to reconstruct the history of the façade of the Church of San Lorenzo, designed by Michelangelo but never built. ○