


EARLY ITALIAN ROOM • NORTH WALL

 **200** This room introduces Isabella Gardner’s love of Italy and of Italian Renaissance art, which became the core of her collection. Created mainly in the 14th and 15th centuries, the paintings exhibited here demonstrate two aspects of the Early Renaissance: religious works and images showing the period’s new interest in ancient mythology.

Surrounding the paintings are furniture and other decorative objects created in many different periods and cultures reflecting interests sparked by Gardner’s travels to Europe, Egypt, the Middle East, and Asia. This mingling of east and west characterized her favorite Italian city, Venice.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti
Italian (Siena), 1285–about 1348
Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, about 1335–40
Tempera and gold on wood

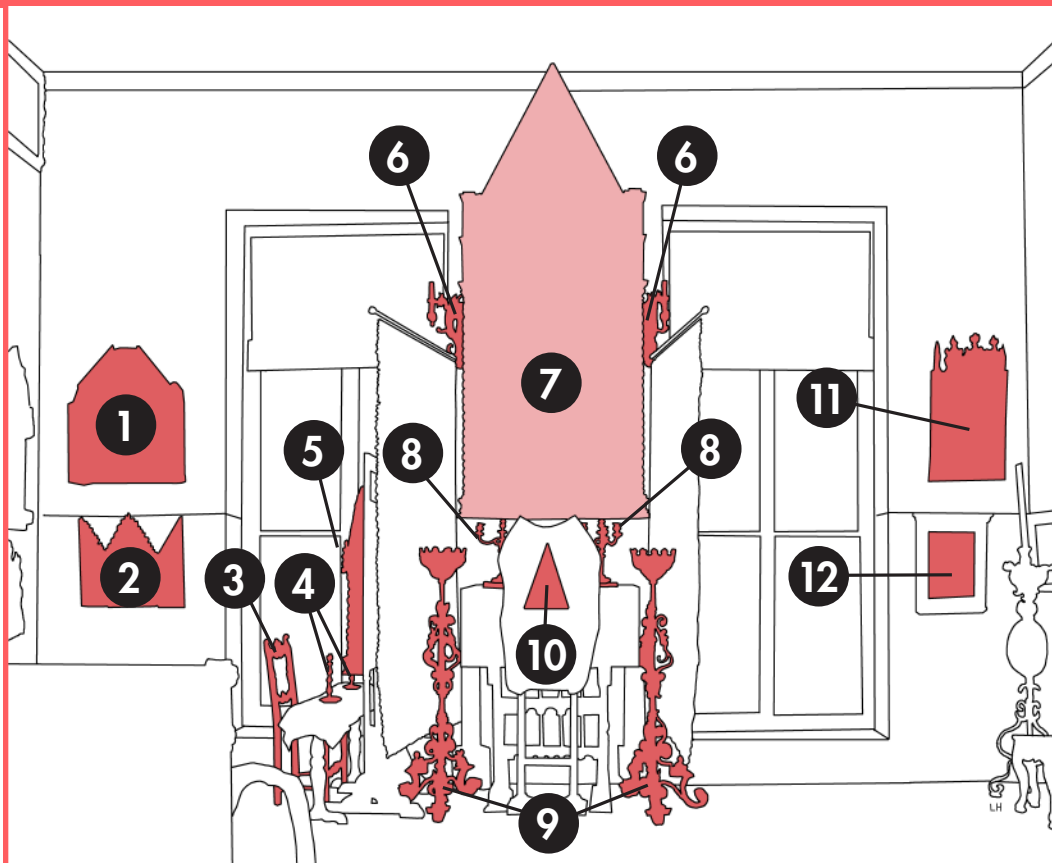
Elizabeth (1207–1231), daughter of the king of Hungary, was devoted to prayer and pious observances. At the age of fourteen, she married a German nobleman and became the mother of three children. When her husband died six years later, she renounced the world to devote herself to caring for the sick and the poor, and supported the building of a hospital. She died at age twenty-four, and her grave became a popular pilgrimage site for those seeking healing.

This painting formed one of the pinnacles

(triangular points) of a much larger altarpiece that was taken apart. Isabella Gardner placed the painting on an easel before a French chasuble (a priest’s stole) so that the floral pattern of the chasuble echoes the flowers the saint holds in her cloak.


Towering over the small painting of St. Elizabeth is an enormous image of St. Anthony Abbot painted by a different artist, Nicolò Gevini. Around these two paintings, Gardner arranged curtains, candlesticks, and pieces of furniture. Gardner created her own personal work of art by assembling unrelated elements into a harmonious whole. Viewers are invited to imagine connections and relationships of their own.

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- 1. Virgin and Child and the Crucifixion.** Italian, about 1350–1400. Tempera and gold on wood
- 2. The Crucifixion with Saints,** about 1400. Andrea Vanni (Italian, about 1332–about 1414). Tempera and gold on wood
Underneath painting: Bench. Italian, late 19th century. Walnut
- 3. Rush-bottom Chairs** (three in this room). Italian (Veneto), mid-18th century. Gilded and painted walnut
- 4. Candlesticks** (two). Indian, 19th century. Silver
- 5. Virgin Enthroned with Saints and Angels** (central panel of an altarpiece with original frame), 1355–60. Bartolomeo Bulgarini (Italian, active 1337–1378). Tempera and gold on wood
- 6. Dragon Bracket** (two). Italian (?), 19th century. Metal
- 7. Saint Anthony Abbot,** late 1300s. Nicolò di Pietro Gerini (Italian, active 1368–1415). Tempera and gold on wood
- 8. Pair of Candelabra.** British, 19th century. Silver plated copper (Sheffield)
- 9. Torchères** (two). Italian, 19th century. Metal
- 10. Saint Elizabeth of Hungary** (a pinnacle from a dismantled altarpiece), about 1335–40. Ambrogio Lorenzetti (Italian, 1285 – about 1348). Tempera and gold on wood
- 11. Virgin and Child before a Rose Hedge,** 15th century. Follower of Gentile da Fabriano (Italian, Venice). Tempera and gold on wood
- 12. The Crucifixion,** 1525–28. Alesso di Benozzo (Italian, born 1473). Tempera on wood

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14  Piero della Francesca
Italian (Umbria), about 1415–1492
Hercules, about 1470
Fresco

Identified by his club and lion’s skin, Hercules gazes out with an ambiguous expression—is it confidence or indecision?

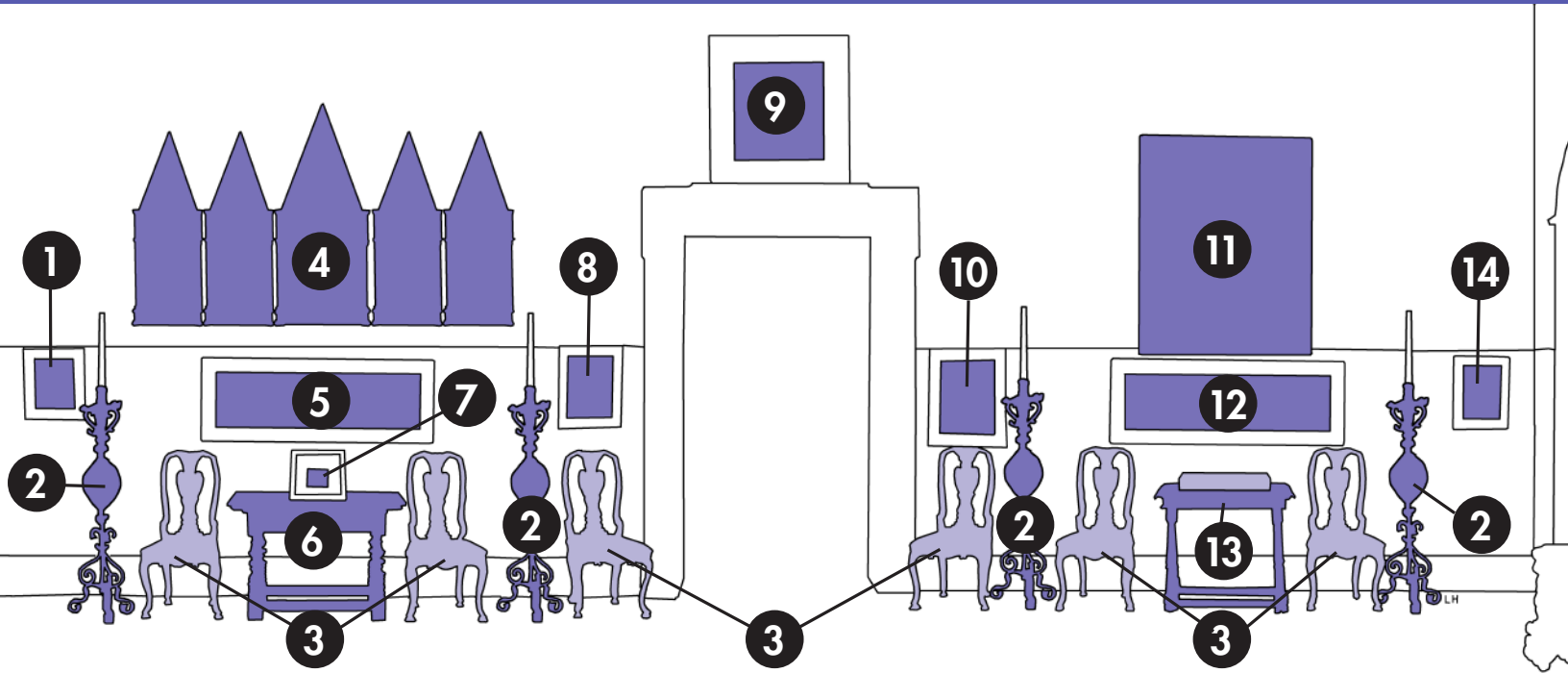
The nude became a central theme of Italian Renaissance art as artists began to study examples of ancient Roman sculpture. Here, Piero chose to portray the nearly life-size Hercules as a young man rather than as the bearded, muscle-bound figure familiar in ancient sculpture. In another departure from classical versions, Piero used a strategically placed knot to avoid full frontal nudity.

The painting originally decorated the upper corner of a room in the artist’s house in Borgo San Sepulchro, Italy, which helps to explain the steep perspective (look, for example, at the dramatically foreshortened club Hercules holds). Painted on plaster, the work was detached with a portion of the supporting wall and later purchased by Isabella Gardner. This is the only fresco by Piero outside Italy.

Simone Martini
Italian (Siena), about 1284–1344
Virgin and Child with Saints Paul, Lucy, Catherine, and John the Baptist, about 1320
Tempera and gold on wood

Martini was among the foremost artists of 14th-century Italy, and this is one of the earliest altarpieces in the museum. Delicate and otherworldly, with its finely tooled gold background, this polyptych (a multi-paneled altarpiece) comes from the Church of the Servites in Orvieto, Italy. Above the Virgin and Child is a victorious and blessing Christ, displaying his wounds; the saints to either side carry identifying attributes. On the pinnacles above the saints, angels hold symbols of the Crucifixion and summon the Last Judgment with their trumpets.

EARLY ITALIAN ROOM • EAST WALL



1. A Bishop Saint (part of a dismantled altarpiece), about 1450. Michele Giambono (Italian, active 1420–1462). Tempera on wood

2. Torchère (four). Spanish, 15th century. Iron

3. Chairs painted with exotic figures (twelve in this room). Italian (Rome), 1760s or 1770s. Painted walnut

4. Virgin and Child with Saints Paul, Lucy, Catherine, and John the Baptist, about 1320. Simone Martini (Italian, about 1284–1344). Tempera and gold on wood

5. The Triumphs of Love, Chastity, and Death (from a cassone), about 1450. Francesco Pesellino (Italian, 1422–1457). Tempera and gold on wood

6. Table. Italian (Bologna), 17th century. Wood

7. Seated Scribe, 1480. Gentile Bellini (Italian, 1429–1507). Photographic reproduction of a drawing

8. A Boy in a Scarlet Cap, about 1490s. Lorenzo di Credi (Italian, about 1456–1536). Oil on wood

9. Coat of Arms. Italian, 18th century (?). Silk with embroidery

10. A Lady with a Nosegay, about 1525. Bacchiacca (Italian, 1494–1557). Oil on wood

11. Hercules, about 1470. Piero della Francesca (Italian, about 1415–1492). Fresco, from the artist's home in Borgo San Sepolcro


12. The Triumphs of Fame, Time, and Eternity (from a cassone), about 1450. Francesco Pesellino (Italian, 1422–1457). Tempera and gold on wood

13. Table. Italian, about 1580–1600. Walnut
In the display case on the table: amber, amethyst, agate, carnelian, and colored glass Rosaries and other beads, Chinese, 19th century; crystal Egg, Japanese, 19th century

14. Man in a Turban, about 1425–27. Masaccio (Italian, 1401–1428). Tempera on wood




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16  Fra Angelico
Italian (Florence), about 1400–1455
The Death and Assumption of the Virgin,
about 1432
Tempera and gold on wood

With vibrant colors and shimmering gold, Fra Angelico depicted two episodes from the life of the Virgin Mary. In the lower part of the painting, the twelve apostles attend the Virgin’s death. In the center, Christ holds a child that represents Mary’s soul. According to Christian tradition, the Virgin ascended into heaven three days after her burial, and in the painting’s upper section, we see a dramatically foreshortened Christ opening his arms to welcome his mother into heaven.

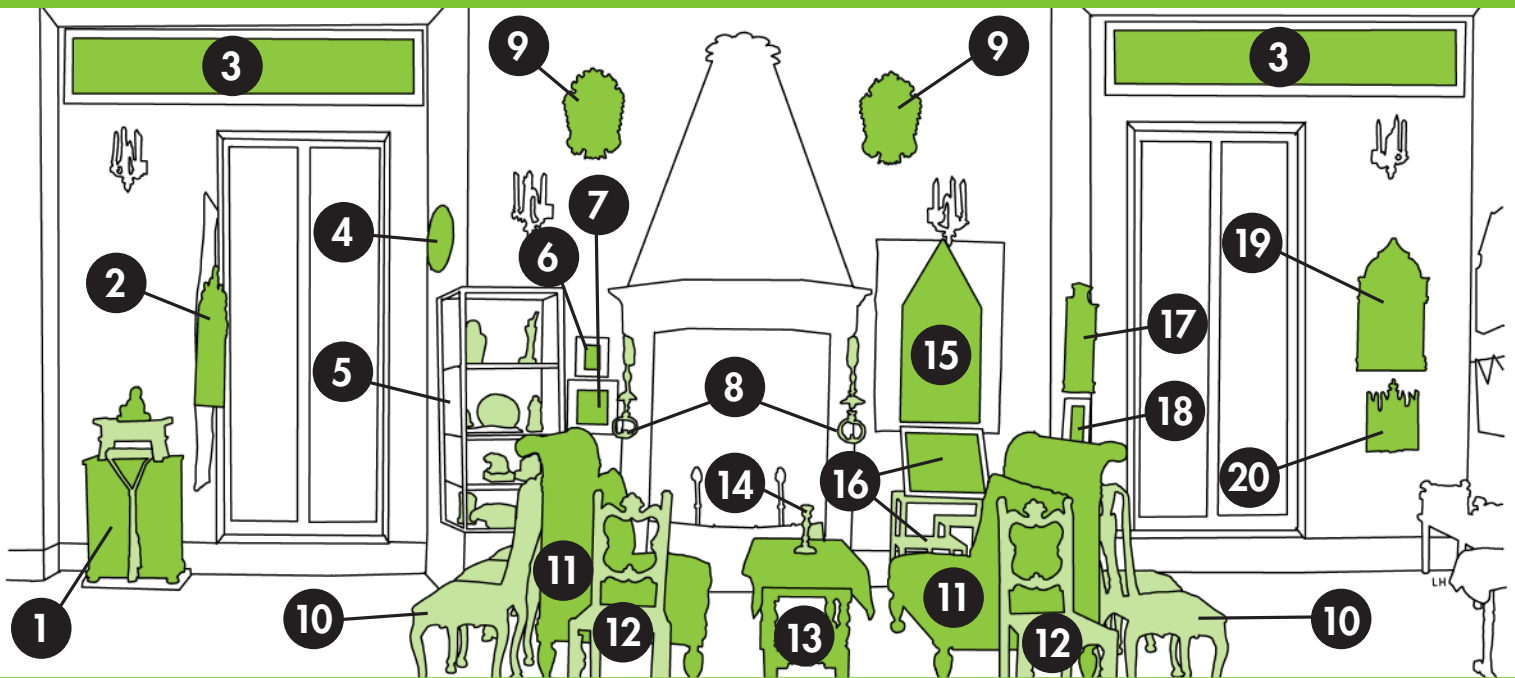
Fra Angelico cleverly contrasted the two worlds—earthly and heavenly. The deathbed scene appears rooted in reality; framed by a gray wall, the apostles are weighty figures, feet planted firmly on the ground. Above, the Virgin’s pale robes create a sense of weightlessness, as she floats against a gold background, surrounded by music-making angels.



Twelve chairs painted with exotic figures
Italian (Rome), 1760s or 1770s
Painted walnut

As you walk through the museum, don’t forget to admire the furniture—there are more than 450 pieces in the collection. Each of the richly decorated chairs in this gallery has a different image painted on its central splat. You will find classically attired men and women, imaginary Chinese scenes, and people wearing costumes of ancient Rome, Sicily, and the Islamic world. These chairs were cleaned and restored in the 1990s, except for two left untouched for comparison. Look at the uncleaned chairs, their white side panels still covered with yellowed varnish, to see how an object’s appearance changes over time.

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1. Cabinet. Italian (Alpine), mid-18th century. Painted wood

On the cabinet: ceramic **Li Po** (Chinese poet), Japanese, early 19th century; lacquered wood **Temple Table**, Japanese, mid-18th century; **Hanging Amulet Box**, Japanese, early 19th century

2. Madonna of Humility with a Donor, 15th century. Workshop of Gentile da Fabriano (Italian). Tempera and gold on wood

3. History of Joseph (two of a series), about 1575–1600. Workshop of Palma il Giovane (Italian). Oil on canvas

4. Basin. Italian, about 1800. Tin-glazed earthenware

5. Case: alabaster **Canopic Jar**, Egyptian, 1570–1085 BC; bronze **Harpocrates**, Egyptian, 1st–3rd century; glass **Vase**, Chinese, late 18th century; ceramic **Plate: A Courtly Couple**, Iranian (Kashan), about 1200; pewter **Ewer in the form of a Daoist Immortal**, Chinese, early 19th century; jade **Scepter**, Chinese, early 18th century; steatite **Seal**, Chinese, mid-19th century; bronze **Mat Weights in the form of bears**, Chinese, about 206 BC–9; gilded metal and lapis lazuli **Scepter**, Chinese, early 18th century; two gilded bronze, teakwood, and jade **Incense Burners in the form of ancient ritual vessels**, Chinese, late 18th century; **Incense Burner in the form of an elephant**, Korean, 18th century, granite

6. Three Women. Italian, 15th century. Tempera on wood

7. Christ Disputing in the Temple, late

1450s. Giovanni di Paolo (Italian, active about 1420–1482). Tempera on wood

8. Temple Lamps with lotus motif. Japanese, early 19th century. Bronze. Suspended from **Dragon Headed Pole Ornaments**, Japanese, early 19th century

9. Mirrors (two). Italian, 18th century. Glass

10. Chairs painted with exotic figures (twelve in this room). Italian (Rome), 1760s or 1770s. Painted walnut

11. Upholstered Seats (two). Italian, 19th century. Wood

12. Rush-bottom Chairs (three in this room). Italian (Veneto), mid-18th century. Gilded and painted walnut

13. Table. Italian (Bologna), 17th century. Walnut

14. Candlestick. English, about 1850. Silver

15. Virgin and Child, about 1342. Bernardo Daddi (Italian, active about 1280–1348). Gold and tempera on wood

16. Shelves. Chinese, 19th century. Teakwood

In the case on top: Renaissance objects including a **Lock, Bolt, Crucifix, and Portrait Medals**

17. The Death and Assumption of the Virgin, about 1432. Fra Angelico (Italian, about 1400–1455). Tempera and gold on wood

18. Virgin and Child, 1490s. Bernardino Pintoricchio (Italian, about 1454–1513). Tempera and gold on wood


19. Virgin and Child with Saints, about 1435. Bicci Di Lorenzo (Italian, 1373–1452). Tempera and gold on wood

20. Madonna of Humility with Saints. Venetian, early 15th century. Tempera and gold on wood

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Cosmè Tura
Italian, about 1430–1495
The Circumcision of Christ, 1470s
Oil on wood

Tura set the circumcision of the infant Jesus in a compressed space filled with overlapping figures and furniture. Seated on his mother's lap, the child twists away from the *mohel*; Joseph and the prophetess Anna witness the scene. Notice the energy generated by the long, expressive hands of each figure and the sharp, agitated folds of their clothing.

Cosmè Tura achieved a great reputation working for the rulers and wealthy families of Ferrara (his home town). This painting was part of a large altarpiece commissioned by the Roverella family.

The painted coral beads draped over the top of the carved tablet in the background are echoed in a nearby case of real beads. As you explore the galleries, look for other examples of arrangements created by Gardner that invite unexpected visual connections between works of art.

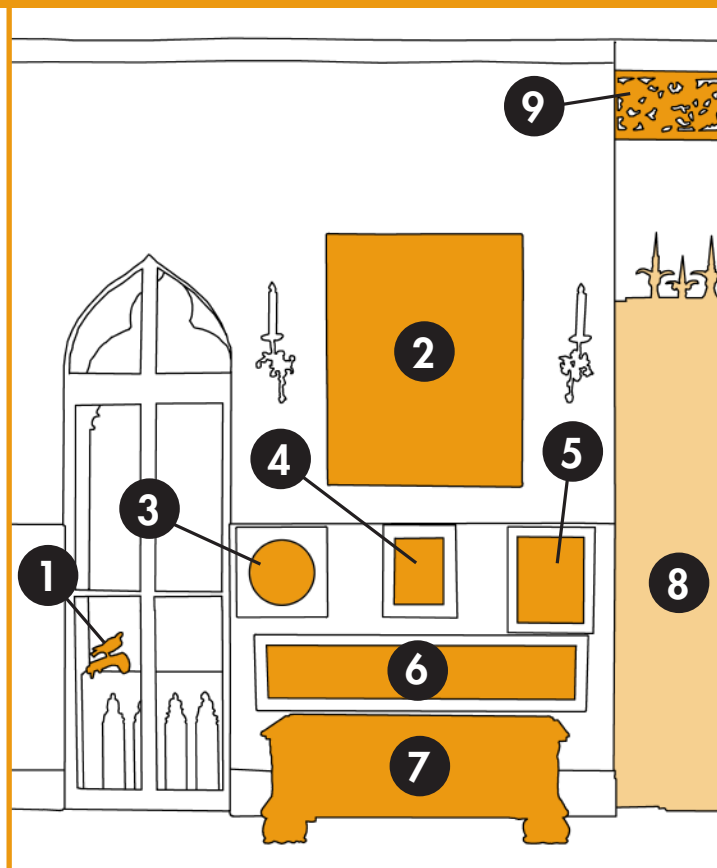


Doorway
Italian (Florence), 15th century
Walnut with intarsia decoration

This monumental doorway serves as a symbolic portal into the first of Gardner's formal galleries. It also makes clear that Gardner's vision for her museum included not only painting and sculpture but also textiles, furniture, decorative arts, and architectural elements.

Notice the intricate geometric designs along the sides of the door and the sumptuous floral design that scrolls across the top of the doorframe. Requiring consummate craftsmanship, the intarsia technique creates decorative images by assembling small pieces of cut-wood veneers and gluing them into channels in the wooden frames. This doorway was made at the time when intarsia reached its height of popularity and complexity.

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1. Roof tile with a dove. Japanese, 19th century.
Painted wood

2. The Annunciation, about 1385–90. Lorenzo di Bicci (Italian, about 1350–about 1427). Tempera on wood

3. The Circumcision of Christ, 1470s. Cosmè Tura (Italian, about 1430–1495). Oil on wood

4. Saint Lucy and Saint Eutychia at the Shrine of Saint Agatha, about 1480s. Follower of Cosmè Tura (Italian). Oil on wood

5. Virgin and Child with John the Baptist and Saints, about 1495. Andrea Mantegna (Italian, 1431–1506). Tempera on wood

6. The Dormition of the Virgin, with a Nun, about 1490. Giovanni di Francesco (Italian, 1412–1459). Tempera on wood

7. Cassone (wedding chest). Italian (Tuscany), 1580s. Walnut

8. Doorway. Italian (Florence), 15th century.
Walnut, with intarsia decoration

9. Ramma (decorative screen) carved with peony blossoms. Japanese, late 17th century. Painted and gilded wood