

WORLD-FAMOUS PICTURE GALLERIES

THE PICTURE GALLERY IN DRESDEN

Colour slides 1-50

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1. The capital of Saxony. The Dresden Gallery is situated in the historic district practically destroyed by air-raids during World War II. The Baroque palace complex known as the Zwinger was built by M. D. Pöpelman from 1710 to 1720. It became symbolic of Dresden. The Gallery occupies the wing enclosing the court on the north side. This part of the complex dates from the 19th century and is the work of Gottfried Semper.

2. The world-famous Zwinger Gallery also suffered heavy damages during the war. It was restored in 1956, the year marking the 700th anniversary of the foundation of Dresden. The picture shows part of the Zwinger.

3. The collection of the works of art preserved in the Dresden Gallery was started in the 16th century. The great Saxon princes of the 18th century, Augustus the Strong and Augustus III, collected already systematically and at a large scale. — Canaletto: View of Dresden in 1748.

4. The character of the collection was determined by two factors: the diplomatic and trade relations of Saxony and the taste of the feudal court. Large-size decorative Italian paintings were regarded as the most attractive acquisitions. — Paolo Veronese: The marriage in Cana.

5. Works of "splendid craftsmanship produced with meticulous care", like the masterpieces of Netherlands painters, were also highly valued. However, compared to other important collections of the world, as the Louvre for example, the Dresden collection developed somewhat one-sidedly. The number of 14th and 15th century works is regrettably small. — Jan Davids de Heem: Large still life with bird's nest.

6. The cradle of modern European painting was Italy. It was here that the realistic approach was first adopted. The picture by the South-Italian master, Antonello da Messina (about 1430–1479) shows the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. The body of the youth is an excellent study from the nude, rather than the representation of the

saint's anguish. The broken column in the foreground shows the artist's interest in the antique world, while the foreshortening of the body bears witness to his accurate knowledge of the rules of perspective.

7. The Holy Family by the North-Italian master, Andrea Mantegna (1431–1501), is also a work inspired by the art of antiquity. The statue-like figures recall the reliefs of Roman sarcophagi. Modelled almost like stone-carvings, with the heads brought into level, they leave no space empty in the composition which also points to the same source.

8. Medieval artists liked to use gold for their backgrounds to symbolize heaven. In Renaissance art this was superseded by earthly landscapes. It is in a scene of this latter type that Cima da Conegliano (1459/60–1517) represents "The Virgin on her way to the temple".

9. The Florentine artist, Sandro Botticelli (1444/45–1510), painted four scenes of the life of St. Zenobius on the side of a bridal chest. Here he does not apply the then newly discovered optical rules ensuring unified spatial representation and the figure of St. Zenobius appears several times in the scene.

10. The portrait by the Perugian master, Pinturicchio (about 1454–1513), draws attention to the importance of human personality and its distinctive marks; it represents in the Gallery the style of painting so popular in that age. The artist's pleasure in intense and careful observation is manifest not only in the fresh childish features of the youth but also in the delicate forms in nature, although the two are not in complete harmony yet.

11. The baptism of Christ by Cossa's pupil, Francesco Francia of Bologna (1450–1517), leads us from the early to the great period of the Renaissance. The picture is characteristic of the master's later works. The hard outlines are dissolved in soft picturesque transitions; the essence of the represented event is subordinated to the details of the composition.

12. The Ferrara painters, among them Francesco Cossa (1435–1470), worked under the influence of Mantegna. The hard sculptural modelling seen in the works of this master persists in Cossa's "Annunciation". Minute details dominate the accurately symmetrical composition. Secular and material pleasures distract the attention from the mystic nature of the event.

13. The Sistine Madonna is an outstanding work both of the Renaissance and of its great master, Raffaello (1483–1520). The composition centres round the spiritual core of the picture. The unapproachable, yet so human figures of the Blessed Virgin and the Saviour floating above the earthly regions in the clouds, are connected with the mortals in the picture by the figures of St. Sixtus and St. Barbara. The curtains drawn apart only deepen the impression that the Madonna is a phenomenon from another world.

14. While the Sistine Madonna is a characteristic product of contemporary art in Rome brought to perfection in simplicity and conciseness, Andrea del Sarto's (1486–1530) "Abraham offering his sacrifice" shows the harder and more minute treatment typical of Florentine painting. Isaac's figure indicates that the artist had studied thoroughly the sculptural works of the antique world, in particular the Laocoon group.

15. As a result of the pursuit of classical erudition at the courts, mythology provided the main artistic subjects of the age, beside religion. An example of this is "The sleeping Venus" by Giorgione (1478–1510).

16. In view of its subject matter, "The goat for the rates" by Giorgione's pupil, Titian (1477–1576), cannot be ranked among the traditional religious pictures. It is believed that originally it was painted for the door of a wardrobe in the residence of the Duke of Ferrara, and not for a church. The head of Christ and those of the pharisees dominating the picture are designed to illustrate the moral conflict between pure and false, good and bad, rather than a scene from a biblical story.

17. In this picture by Tintoretto (1518–1594) composition and forms threaten to lose balance. The myth of the liberation of Arsinoe gave the painter a literary pretext to represent the armoured man and the naked woman next to each other and thereby exploit the pictorial possibilities of contrast.

18. Animation spread from the composition also to the human body. In his "Birth of Christ" the Parmesan painter, Correggio (1489–1534), foreshortens his figures to emphasize the diagonal movement in the composition in a daring manner. He was also the first to represent his subject in night light which, compared to the quiet light-and-shade distribution of earlier Renaissance pictures, increased the contrast between the forms.

19. The Madonna enthroned with St. George is one of Correggio's later works. The flowers and decorative details enliven the scene in a charming way.

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The new style, the Baroque, which sought more involved forms and increased animation, reigned between the years 1600–1750 and spread to every field of art in Europe. Actually it represented the Catholic spirit against the counter-reformation. But beside the new trend, designed to dazzle the senses and carry man into ethereal spheres, realistic art was also gaining ground. It took the spectator to basements and taverns among beggars, tramps, peasants and simple burghers and set the religious scenes also in such surroundings. The nest of the realistic trend was Naples, then under Spanish suzerainty, where Italian art blended with the Spanish.

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20. The chief advocate of realism, Caravaggio, is not represented in the Gallery. For a long time the picture entitled "The card-sharper" was attributed to him; later it was established that it is the work of Valentin de Boullogne (1594–1632), the French painter who worked under the influence of Caravaggio and the Spanish

master, Ribera. His models are not idealized; he sharpened their features by strong contrasts of light and shade.

21. Realism had an extremely widespread effect. It reached Venice, where Bernardo Strozzi (1581–1664), a master of Genoese origin, was active. Compared to Titian's female figures, his "Woman playing the violoncello" lacks the aristocratic grandeur of the former; yet her association with music lends poesy to her bourgeois appearance.

22. The last bright period of Venetian painting was the 18th century. It was then that Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1682–1754) was active. In his "Boy bearing the flag" he dispenses with every detail that would divert the attention from the evenly sweeping composition and the harmoniously united deeply glowing colours.

23. The relationship between Italian and Spanish art in this age is shown by the works of the Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), who spent most of his life in Naples. Within the Spanish art – which was characterized by just as sharp differences as the Italian – Ribera represented the realistic trend. The model of Diogenes was probably a beggar in Naples whose glance bears witness to philosophical wisdom and the knowledge of the depths of life.

24. Francisco de Zurbaran (1598–1664) was active in Madrid and Seville. In his picture St. Bonaventura learns the name of the new Pope from the angel with the religious fervour characteristic of the Spanish. This mystical spirituality is united with realistic portrayal in his picture.

25. The greatest Spanish master of the 17th century, Velázquez (1599–1660), was a court-painter in Madrid. The major part of his oeuvre consists of portraits painted of the royal family, and members of the court, among them of The Master of the Hunt, Juan Mateos. The sombre greys and blacks used by Velázquez are extremely rich in shade and lend the pictures a fascinating elegance.

Netherlands art, like the Italian, strove at capturing reality, but while the Italians developed physical and spiritual rules of painting, the Netherlands masters started out from the details. They were guided in their work by direct experience, rather than by the rules of composition, perspective and anatomy. The works of the brothers Jan and Hubert van Eyck gave birth to Netherlands painting practically overnight. Satisfying the demands of the rich trading classes it then developed — under reciprocal effect with Italian painting — at a rapid pace.

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26. The products of early Netherlands and German painting are to be found in the Gallery only sporadically, without any continuity or relationship. Netherlands art, which developed from miniature painting, is represented by an altar-piece by Jan van Eyck (about 1390–1441).

27. The portable altar is small in size, measuring only 27,5 by 21,5 cm. The picture shows the centre part representing the Madonna enthroned with Child. The delicate details painted with meticulous care are clearly discernible in the picture.

28. The beginnings of German art are similar in many respects to those of Netherlands art. The great delicacy of the details was coupled for a long time with medieval approach which manifested itself in faulty anatomy and certain disproportions in the composition. "St. Catharine's betrothal" by Lucas Cranach, the Elder (1472–1553), displays these characteristics.

29. The greatest German Renaissance painter, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), had already all the experience German and Italian arts could offer. He made several portraits among which the "Portrait of a youth", executed in 1521, belongs to one of his best periods. It is less decorative than the Italian portraits of the time. Dispensing with all „trappings" he strove at puritan simplicity.

30. Apart from a small number of works showing other subjects, Hans Holbein, the Younger (1497–1543) painted

mainly portraits. From his birthplace, Augsburg, he moved to Basle and later settled in London where his outstanding talent secured him the position of court-painter to Henry VIII. He painted many notable personalities of his age, among them Morette, the London Ambassador of Francis I.

31. The 17th century was the golden age of Netherlands, Flemish and Dutch painting. It is hall-marked by two names: Rubens and Rembrandt. Rubens (1577–1640) is represented in the Gallery by several of his works. "Diana's return from the hunt" dates from 1615.

32. Hosts of lesser masters were active around Rubens making the artistic aspect of the age colourful and variegated. It occurred that several artists worked on one and the same painting. In the picture presented here, for example, Jan Fyt (1611–1661) had painted the dog while the figures of the dwarf and the boy are the work of Erasmus Quellinus (1607–1678). Owing to its subject matter and composition the picture has a somewhat bizarre effect.

33. Although the Dresden Gallery houses one of Europe's largest Rembrandt (1606–1669) collection, the majority of the pictures are from the master's early period. His pictorial devices, deep velvety tones, and golden light passing into soft shadows, were only in a developmental stage at that time. Yet in the portrait of his bride, Saskia, he grasps the serene, playful character of the young girl with unparalleled spontaneity, that bears witness to his peerless knowledge of the human soul.

34. Rembrandt's most highly valued work is his "Self-portrait with Saskia". At the time of painting this picture he was still a man of success, content, well-to-do, recognized by his contemporaries, and living a happy family life. He had not yet come into conflict with the public whose standard taste rejected his soaring poetic imagination later. The picture presented here is a document of wealth, happiness and a full life.

35. Rembrandt, who was a Protestant, often treated religious subjects, like the Catholic masters of the Baroque period. It was, however, the dramatic manifestations of the human soul, rather than the miraculous elements in religion, that he sought to express. The picture shown here is entitled "Samson at his wedding proposes the riddle".

36. From among the authentic works of the Delft-born master, Vermeer (1632–1675), two very important ones are preserved in the Dresden Gallery. His picture "At the bawd's" with its orange, lemon-yellow and red colour-scheme raised him to the rank of the most daring colourist of the period.

37. In the 18th century, when the Duke of Saxony purchased Vermeer's "Woman reading a letter", the work was attributed to Rembrandt. Though the light effects and golden tones make the picture apparently akin to Rembrandt's paintings, the clear brilliance of the colours and the almost geometric purity of the composition distinguish it from his works.

38. "Genre-painting" was one of the favourite forms of art in bourgeois Holland. Yet, just as Vermeer cannot be called a "genre-painter" in the strict sense of the word, the definition does not apply to Gerard Terboch (1617–1689), either for it is not the plot or the event, but the compositional relationship between his figures and their respective pictorial value that he emphasizes in his pictures. A good example of this is his "Officer writing a letter".

39. Gabriel Metsu (1629/30–1667) of Amsterdam painted mostly market scenes. This subject enabled him to place widely different beings and materials next to each other in his compositions and paint them in brilliant colours, essentially in the character of still life. He surrounded the elegant lady of the town with objects of peasant life; by setting the ensemble in the open air, he obtained a special pictorial effect.

40. Adriaen Brouwer (1606–1638) was the most powerful painter of tavern scenes. He observed the grotesque characteristics of unbridled passion which he often increased even to fearful measures.

41. Landscape painting which had been neglected before, became an independent form of art in the 17th century and rivalled in popularity with "genre-painting". Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29–1709) was an outstanding figure among the hosts of Dutch landscape-painters active at that time. His picture entitled "The hunt".

42. While Ruisdael added imagination to his direct experience in his landscapes, his pupil and friend, Meindert Hobbema (1638–1709) was more objective: he hardly departed from what he actually saw. – "The water-mill".

43. Like landscape-painting, the still life also became an independent form of art in the 17th century. One of its characteristic cultivators, Willem Claes Heda (1594–1679) was specially interested in the painting of expensive and precious materials and fine forms, and found great pleasure in detailing their many different picturesque qualities. The "Breakfast table with mulberry pie" is one of his masterpieces.

44. From French art the period between the 17th–19th centuries can be studied at the Gallery. "Flora's realm" by Poussin (1593–1665).

45. Poussin was the most outstanding figure of 17th century French pictorial art. He excelled in historic and heroic landscape-painting. His "Venus" is preserved in the Dresden Gallery.

46. The other great French painter, Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) was active in Rome. He represented the idealistic trend against the realistic Dutch landscape-painting. His landscapes with views to distant seas were imaginary. They formed the scenes of his mythological subjects like in the case of "Acis and Galatea".

47. The greatest French master of the 18th century was Antoine Watteau (1684–1721). The Gallery possesses only two small works by him. In his sickness and poverty-stricken short life he painted the magic dreams of the rococo about youth, idyllic existence, and the feast of love.

48. In the 19th century, like in the 18th, French art played a leading role in Europe. Watteau's painterly ease and esprit was revived by the impressionists. In painting his "Officer" Auguste Renoir (1841–1919) was interested in the pictorial effect of colours filled with light, rather than in the personality of his model. The picture belongs to the master's early period when he did not break up, but only loosened his forms by light.

49. The other great impressionist master was Claude Monet (1840–1926). "The Seine at Lavacourt" represents a later stage of this trend. The drawing and the outlines are absorbed by light; patches of colour occupy their place.

50. The last masterpiece we present from the rich material of the Gallery is the "Two ballet-dancers" by Edgar Degas (1834–1917). At the time the picture was painted the master was interested in the colour effect produced by the artificial lights of the stage and in the flitting lightness of movement. The two counter-parts of this picture predominantly pink in colour are preserved in the Ermitage.

The End