DRESDEN, GERMANY

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister: Masterpieces

From Raphael's Sistine Madonna to Canaletto's Venice: a selection from Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister grew out of the collections of the Saxon rulers, and several of its pictures were bought because they were already highly valued in their own day. The gallery is best known for Raphael and Vermeer, and both are here: Raphael with the Sistine Madonna, Vermeer with the girl reading a letter at an open window and with The Procuress.

The rest of the selection includes Giorgione's Sleeping Venus, Cima da Conegliano's Presentation of the Virgin, Cranach's martyrdom of Saint Catherine, Van Dyck's drunken Silenus, Claude's Acis and Galatea and Poussin's Adoration of the Magi, along with pictures by Mateo Cerezo and Bernardo Strozzi. Rembrandt appears in his own costumed double portrait with Saskia. He also appears at one remove, as the name behind a portrait catalogued as the work of a follower. Canaletto's Venetian views make a small group of their own and are best looked at together. Among the less familiar works are portraits by Rosalba Carriera, Marcello Bacciarelli and Angelica Kauffman. They show a count surrounded by the trappings of his rank, a named woman painted in pale tones and an unnamed woman cast as a vestal virgin.

The paintings were chosen independently from the museum's documented holdings. Being included here does not mean a painting will be on view. Uncertain attributions and approximate dates keep the qualifications given in the linked records.

Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/old-masters-dresden

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12. The Viola da Gamba Player
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13. Heinrich, Count von Brühl
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14. Barbarina Campanini
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15. Man with a Hat Decorated with Pearls
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01 / 20

Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window

Johannes Vermeer

1657 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Johannes Vermeer. Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

A young woman stands at an open window reading a letter. Daylight fills the room, yet Vermeer keeps the moment private.

The back wall has a history of its own. A painting of Cupid on that wall lay hidden for a long time under later overpainting, and restoration has since uncovered it. The reproduction in this guide shows the earlier state, with the Cupid still covered, so recent photographs look noticeably different. The change is more than a matter of furnishing. With a Cupid on the wall behind a woman absorbed in a letter, it is hard not to suppose that the letter is about love, though the painting never lets us read it.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

The Procuress

Johannes Vermeer

1656 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Johannes Vermeer. The Procuress. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title does some of the explaining. Hands meet above a richly patterned covering, and the exchange there is more concentrated than the crowded group of faces might suggest. The textile is worth looking at for its closely worked surface. It also lies across the foreground like a barrier, so the figures are close to us but on the far side of something solid.

The picture is close in date to the letter reader, but its company could hardly be more different. She has the room to herself, while here a cluster of faces gathers round a single transaction.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

Acis and Galatea

Claude Lorrain

1657 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Claude Lorrain. Acis and Galatea. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/claude-lorrain/acis-and-galatea-1657 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Claude gives the mythological lovers only a small part of his landscape. Trees shelter them, while water and a bright distance open out beyond. A viewer who does not know the story of Acis and Galatea loses less than might be expected, because the setting has a movement of its own, from enclosure to openness.

Object source · Open artwork

04 / 20

Adoration of the Magi

Nicolas Poussin

1633 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Adoration of the Magi. WikiArt; Nicolas Poussin. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Claude leaves his lovers little room, but in Poussin's picture the figures carry the meaning. They bend and gesture towards Mary and the child, and their bright robes keep each person distinct within the shared act of homage. The architecture gives the group a framework without drilling it into a line. Devotion shows in posture, as each body adjusts to the next.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

Entrance to the Grand Canal, Looking East

Canaletto

1725 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Canaletto. Entrance To The Grand Canal Looking East. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/canaletto/entrance-to-the-grand-canal-looking-east-1725 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Open water fills a broad area in front of the buildings, and the small boats crossing it do more than decorate it. They measure the monumental architecture against everyday traffic, and they make the canal a working route as well as a view. Without them, the façades could look like a set of detached architectural elevations.

Object source · Open artwork

06 / 20

The Grand Canal towards the Rialto Bridge

Canaletto

c. 1725 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Canaletto. Grand Canal: Looking North East toward the Rialto Bridge. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/canaletto/grand-canal-looking-north-east-toward-the-rialto-bridge · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Here the waterway bends, so the façades come into view at different angles. One stretch of canal therefore holds several architectural rhythms instead of a single orderly recession into the distance. Boats are scattered across the water between the banks.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

The Grand Canal from Palazzo Balbi

Canaletto

c. 1726 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Canaletto. Grand Canal: Looking from Palazzo Balbi. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/canaletto/grand-canal-looking-from-palazzo-balbi · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Seen from Palazzo Balbi, the canal is wide enough to compete with the buildings. Fairly open water separates the long rows of façades, and the boats are dotted across it rather than crowding it. None of the other canal views here gives the distance between the banks as much weight.

Object source · Open artwork

08 / 20

Drunken Silenus

Anthony van Dyck

1621 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Silenus Drunk. WikiArt; Anthony van Dyck. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Silenus leans his heavy body against the figures holding him up, and they visibly bear his weight. The title explains why he needs them. The painting is about what follows: being drunk is his affair, but keeping him upright falls to everyone else, and in the crowded space that is a practical problem of balance. Warm flesh and red cloth hold the group together.

Object source · Open artwork

09 / 20

San Giacomo di Rialto

Canaletto

1725 - 1726 · Oil on canvas · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Canaletto. San Giacomo de Rialto. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/canaletto/san-giacomo-de-rialto · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Here the open space is a paved square rather than water. The church façade, with its prominent clock, gives the scene a fixed centre, and the surrounding buildings frame the square. The small figures crossing the foreground do much the same job as the boats in the canal views, adding movement and showing how big the buildings are.

Object source · Open artwork

10 / 20

The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine

Lucas Cranach the Elder

1506 · Oil on panel · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Lucas Cranach the Elder. The Martyrdom of St. Catherine. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/lucas-cranach-the-elder/the-martyrdom-of-st-catherine-1506 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Rich clothing and a crowd of faces turn Catherine's ordeal into a public spectacle, while the broken wheel and a troubled sky add to the turmoil. Cranach does not clear an empty space around the saint. She kneels, comparatively still, in the middle of it all, and her stillness is what singles her out.

Object source · Open artwork

11 / 20

Saint John the Baptist

Mateo Cerezo

c. 1665 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Mateo Cerezo. Saint John thet Baptist. Image credit: Mateo Cerezo. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A staff and a partial drape of cloth identify the saint, and the setting adds little else. Cerezo turns the head towards a brighter area above. Nothing in the surrounding darkness competes with that upward look, which is the picture's main action.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: GK 476

12 / 20

The Viola da Gamba Player

Bernardo Strozzi

1635 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Bernardo Strozzi. Gamba Player. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title names her only by her instrument, so we cannot tell whether this is a particular woman or simply a player. The viola da gamba is large, and it reads as something she is doing rather than a prop added to identify a sitter. Above its curved body she looks straight out at the viewer, and Strozzi gives that direct gaze and the instrument's solid bulk equal weight.

Object source · Open artwork

13 / 20

Heinrich, Count von Brühl

Marcello Bacciarelli

c. 1753 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Marcello Bacciarelli. Heinrich Graf Von Brühl. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/marcello-bacciarelli/heinrich-graf-von-bruhl-1753 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The title gives the sitter's rank, and the painting spells it out. Red and blue clothing, a table and an architectural setting all present the count's status, which comes across through pose, costume and surroundings at least as much as through the face.

Object source · Open artwork

14 / 20

Barbarina Campanini

Rosalba Carriera

1739 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Rosalba Carriera. Portrait of Barbarina Campani. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Pale blue and white clothing keeps the portrait light against a muted background, and jewellery and flowers add small accents near the face. Carriera's transitions are soft, yet the sitter stays distinct. Slight differences between pale surfaces define her, not hard edges.

Object source · Open artwork

15 / 20

Man with a Hat Decorated with Pearls

Rembrandt van Rijn

1667 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Portrait of a Man in the Hat Decorated with Pearls. WikiArt; Rembrandt van Rijn. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

The title promises a hat decorated with pearls, yet much of that hat is lost in darkness. The light goes instead to the face and the decorated chest.

The picture is catalogued as the work of a follower of Rembrandt, not of Rembrandt himself. Picking a face out of the dark was a way of handling light that could spread beyond one painter, and a resemblance in handling does not by itself establish who painted a picture.

Object source · Open artwork

16 / 20

Woman as a Vestal Virgin

Angelica Kauffman

1787 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Angelica Kauffman. Portrait of a Woman as a Vestal Virgin. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The title calls the sitter simply 'Woman', so we are given her role rather than her name. Pale drapery and a small vessel make her a figure from antiquity, though no ancient story is told around her. She turns towards the viewer as directly as the subject of a likeness would, while her costume and gesture present her as a vestal virgin. She is a portrait sitter and a classical figure at once.

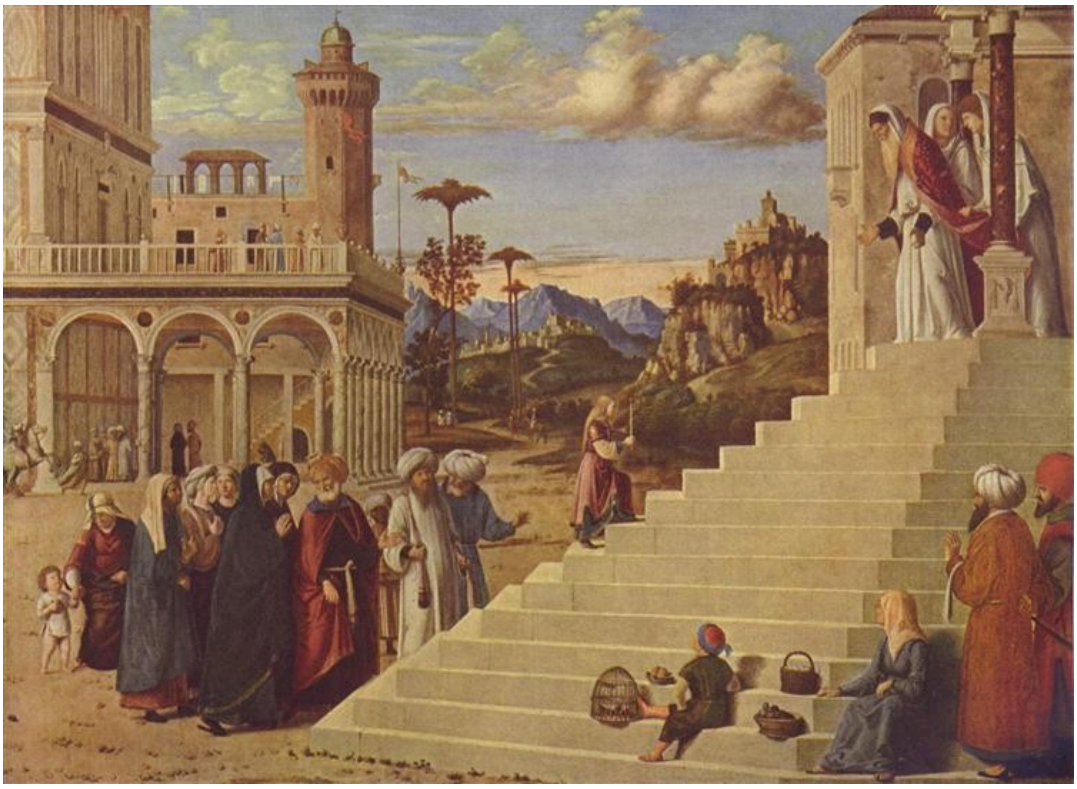
Object source · Open artwork

17 / 20

Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple

Cima da Conegliano

1500 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Cima da Conegliano. Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The staircase lets the viewer measure the child's climb. Its long, open flight separates the small figure from the one waiting at the top and from the onlookers below. Cima uses the architecture to give a modest physical action ceremonial weight. Because the steps are empty, the distance is visible, and a child climbing stairs stands out from the surrounding crowd.

Object source · Open artwork

18 / 20

Rembrandt and Saskia in the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Rembrandt van Rijn

1635 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Rembrandt van Rijn. Self-Portrait with Saskia in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

With a raised glass and a broad smile, the pair act out a lively scene. The sitters are recognisably Rembrandt and Saskia, but the title casts them in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Costume, gesture and warm light make it a performance rather than a record of their home life, and the parts they play need not match their own.

Object source · Open artwork

19 / 20

The Sistine Madonna

Raphael

1513 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Raphael. The Sistine Madonna. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Parted curtains reveal the sacred group, as though it had only just come into view. Below, a ledge with two small angels marks a second boundary between the painted space and the viewer's side. Raphael brings Mary and the child forward but frames their approach twice over. The familiar angels are part of that framing, placed on the boundary itself.

Object source · Open artwork

20 / 20

The Sleeping Venus

Giorgione

1508-1510 · Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister



Giorgione. The Sleeping Venus. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

The long horizontal outline of the body is echoed by the rising and falling ground beyond, and pale cloth lies between the sleeper and the landscape. The title names a goddess, but no story is told. Body and land are linked only by their shapes.

Object source · Open artwork

Reproductions and captions

Images of these paintings are easy to find, though not all of them are recent. For the letter reader, the back wall tells you which state an image shows. If the Cupid is visible, it records the painting after restoration. If the Cupid is covered, it records the earlier state. Captions elsewhere may also leave out the qualifications kept here, such as the 'c.' before some of the Canaletto dates, the span of years given for the Sleeping Venus, or the word 'follower' in the attribution of the man in the pearl-decorated hat.

Further reading

Dutch Paintings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Volumes I and II

Walter Liedtke · Read online or download · English

Walter Liedtke's catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum's Dutch paintings gives detailed accounts of individual pictures, including works by Vermeer and Rembrandt, with background on how they were made and what they depict. Its entries cover the Metropolitan Museum's own paintings. For the Dutch pictures in this selection, its value lies in what it explains about the painters' methods and subjects.

Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12
