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Exhibits Unite Artists For Sampling of Italy

By Diana Kondrashin

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“The Angel of Annunciation” and “The Virgin of the Annunciation,” part of the Pushkin Museum’s Lotto exhibit.

Italy has taken over the Pushkin Museum, with three exhibits that cross five centuries and feature a lesser-known master of Renaissance art, a small piece of the genius of Leonardo da Vinci and a dip into the museum's vast collection of Italian drawings.

The exhibit of 10 paintings by Lorenzo Lotto, on loan from various Italian collections, gives a broad view of an artist who was mostly ignored until the late 19th century.

Lotto was born in Venice in 1480 but spent most of his life in different regions, often in the Marche region in central Italy. He worked in such towns as Ancona and painted mainly altarpieces.

"Lorenzo Lotto represents Italian culture fully," said Gabriele Barucca, the Italian curator

of the exhibition. "He worked in provincial cities and experienced more autonomy as an artist than he could have if he had stayed in such artistic centers as Venice or Florence."

Lotto was one of the artists to break with the formality of Italian painting, edging toward realism and psychological drama. He knew and was influenced by the great German painter of the Northern Renaissance Albrecht Durer.

"The exhibition shows several paintings that are central to Lotto's life and work," he said. "'St. James the Pilgrim' (1511-1513) is one of the major masterpieces [of that period]."

Lotto's work was at the time seen as unfashionable when matched against the two great Venetian painters of the time, Titian and Tintoretto, and he never had great success. He died penniless in 1556 after joining a religious order.

Today, his paintings, with their sharp lines and vivid colors, are seen as more representative of a contradictory time, as the museum writes, marked by war and religious conflict.

In works like "Madonna Crowned by Angels, and Child with Saints Stephen, John the Evangelist, Matthew and Lawrence" (1538), which is on show at the Pushkin, Lotto anticipates the work of Caravaggio, that "artist of reality created by light and color" in his depiction of St. Lawrence, Barucca said.

In the double painting "The Annunciation" (1526-1530), "the sacred story is presented in an intimate way, as if it happened with humans. We even see that the angel has a shadow."

A far larger exhibit of 250 works, which make up the "Five Centuries of Italian Drawings" exhibit can be seen on the second floor.

The drawings are part of the 3,000-plus collection that the museum gathered at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

The museum has recently released a three-volume book devoted to its collection.

And finally, the museum has one precious piece from the hands of Leonardo da Vinci.

The 18 folio pages of his "Codex on the Flight of Birds" were composed around 1505 as da Vinci continued his attempts to build a flying machine. Many of his ornithological observations were hundreds of years ahead of his time.

Visitors can view the codex and look through a digital version on monitors.

Lorenzo Lotto runs till Jan. 27. Five Centuries of Italian Drawings, Codex on the Flight of Birds by Leonardo da Vinci runs till Feb. 17. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, 12 Ulitsa Volkhonka. Metro Kropotkinskaya. Tel. (495) 697-9578.

www.arts-museum.ru

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