

Portrait of a Young Man

'Portrait of a Young Man', c. 1560
Alessandro Allori (1535-1607)

oil on canvas, 133 x 140 cm

A zoomable image of this painting is available on our website to use in the classroom with an interactive whiteboard or projector.

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Background information

The painting

This rather aloof young man pauses while polishing a medal to show us the medal with its profile head of a woman in classical costume. He has a general air of refinement, sophistication and aristocratic hauteur. His arm rests on an ornate chair with carved and inlaid decoration. A small replica of the antique statue of Apollo Citharoedus stands on the elaborate table; the original statue was in the Della Valle collection.

The young man may be Paolo Capranica who was related to the Della Valle family or he may come from the Conti Palma di Cesnola family, because their motto *Oppraesa Resurgam* appears on a scroll in the table inlay.

This three-quarter length portrait is an example of mid-16th century Florentine taste in portraiture with the austere costume, the cameo medal, the statuette of Apollo, decorated furniture and an incongruous classically-draped nude in the background. All these objects were included to draw attention to the learning of this young collector and specifically to draw attention to his interest in the classical history of Italy.



The artist and historical context

This portrait was painted soon after Allori's return from Rome, where he had studied antique and modern art from 1554 to 1560 and had established himself as a portraitist.

Allori was a pupil of Bronzino and shared his ideal of polished refinement in portraiture. He was one of the last notable Italian exponents of courtly elegant art of Mannerism - a style that was being replaced by a more naturalistic style of art.

The term 'Mannerism' can generally be taken to imply an elegant, refined, artificial, self-conscious, and courtly style of painting. It developed in Florence and Rome around 1520 and lasted until about 1580.