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**TIMELESS:** (Clockwise from far left) Paintings by Raphael, Botticelli, Titian and Bellini will be on show at the National Gallery in Canberra from next month.

## Visited by a golden age

Renaissance art of a standard never seen in Australia will grace our national gallery this summer, writes **Roger Allnutt**

THE National Gallery of Australia in Canberra is gaining a reputation for its blockbuster exhibitions over the summer holidays.

Two years ago, the *Masterpieces from Paris* exhibition brought to Australia 114 paintings from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris and last year it was the *Ballet Russes: The Art of Costume* exhibition, both of which drew large crowds to Canberra.

From December 9 this year to April 9 next year, the gallery will display more than 70 Italian paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries in the exhibition *Renaissance – 15th & 16th-*

*Century Italian Paintings from the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.*

It will be the first exhibition in Australia dedicated to Renaissance paintings and will feature works by Italian masters such as Raphael, Botticelli, Bellini and Mantegna.

The Renaissance was a golden age in which learning and the arts flourished and the 15th and 16th centuries of Italian art are the foundation of the grand tradition of European painting.

The genius of artists such as Raphael, Botticelli and Titian is well-known, but visitors will also discover

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CANBERRA

### The exhibition

The gallery will have timed ticketing in place from the start of the exhibition. Visitors can choose a time and day to visit and view the exhibition at their leisure once they have entered. Timed entry will minimise queues. Tickets are available from the front desk of the NGA or at [ticketek.com.au](http://ticketek.com.au)

For a range of accommodation packages for the exhibition, see [visitcanberra.com.au/renaissance](http://visitcanberra.com.au/renaissance) or ph 1300 889 024.

the talents of less well-known painters such as Tura, Crivelli, Lotto, Vivarini, Carpaccio, Perugino and Moroni.

None of the works have left Europe before. They are only able to be borrowed by the NGA because the Accademia in Bergamo is renovating its display spaces and is closed.

The city of Bergamo is in the province of Lombardy in northern Italy, near Milan.

“Renaissance is an unparalleled opportunity for Australians to see works of extraordinary quality created by masters of the early and high Renaissance period, without having to travel overseas,” NGA director Ron Radford says.

“There has never been an exhibition in Australia that has included 15th-century Italian art, and this period is barely represented in Australian collections.”

The paintings emanate from cities and courts of Renaissance high culture. In Venice, Florence, Bergamo, Padua and Siena, the church and private patrons commissioned religious scenes as well as magnificent portraits.

Some of the paintings in this exhibition were originally sizeable church altarpieces, the likes of which have rarely been seen in Australia, but the majority are intimate devotional panels that were commissioned for private use.

NGA senior curator of international painting and sculpture Christine Dixon, who is co-ordinating curator of the exhibition, says: “The Renaissance exhibition will provide visitors with an intriguing view of the beliefs and lifestyles of both the elite and the ordinary Italian citizen of the time.

“The gallery is proud to present such a unique show, which will allow visitors to appreciate the beauty of these 500-year-old works, which still speak to us today.”

The paintings on display highlight the transition from the use of tempera on wood to oil on canvas.

The typical gold backgrounds of the works using tempera progress to the brilliance and vitality of the colours of the oils, which are particularly dramatic, with blues dominating.

Some of the paintings show the classical architecture of the period as background and there is a progression from devotional paintings to more secular images and portraits of local people – particularly mothers and children.

Of particular note are two works by Sandro Botticelli, including the very large tempera on wood panel *The Story of Virginia the Roman* circa 1500.

Raphael’s *Saint Sebastian* and Titian’s *Madonna with Child in a Landscape* are both oil on wood panel and date from the same period.

Moroni’s *Portrait of a Child of the House of Redetti* is a stunning oil on canvas from later in the 16th century.

As part of the exhibition, the gallery is again having the Family Activity Room to provide children with hands-on activities and educational experiences.

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