

Cosimo I de' Medici: Art and Dynasty

18 November 2026 – 21 March 2027



FREE Display

For many people, mere mention of the name 'Medici' automatically evokes associations with wealth, intrigue, and power – and rightly so. From the end of the 14th century, the Medici rose from provincial bankers to *de facto* rulers of Florence and surrounding Tuscany, with popes, grand dukes and even royalty among the scions of this remarkable family.

In its latest, focused display - *Cosimo I de' Medici: Art and Dynasty* - the Wallace Collection puts the spotlight on one family member who contributed significantly to their rise to fame.

Through a group of five magnificent objects, including paintings, arms and armour and *maiolica* (earthenware), the exhibition explores how Cosimo I de' Medici (1519–1574), Duke of Florence, first Grand Duke of Tuscany and one of the 16th century's most powerful Italian princes, fashioned himself to legitimise his rule, express the magnificence of his court, and further establish the power of the Medici dynasty.

At the heart of the display is a monumental wine cooler made in the prolific Urbino workshop of Flaminio Fontana in 1574, just before Cosimo's death. It is one of few *maiolica* objects that can be firmly associated with Cosimo by the inclusion of his personal emblem, a turtle with a sail – a witty interpretation of his celebrated motto *festina lente*, or

'make haste slowly' – and infused with references to classical antiquity. Supporting the bowl of the cooler are two monstrous-looking satyrs who appear to be struggling to support its weight. The cooler's sheer size (over 70cms long) and pictorial richness reflect a court that fused artistic patronage with great spectacle.

Two pieces drawn from the museum's world-famous arms and armour collection are other major highlights of the display. One of these is a short sword (or falchion) from around 1550. Engraved with Cosimo's heraldry and with a lion's head pommel, referring to the ancient hero Hercules, the falchion was both a functional weapon and fashionable piece of parade armour. Its symbolism placed Cosimo in direct comparison with the gods of the classical world.

In 1539, Cosimo significantly reinforced his financial and political position by marrying the daughter of the viceroy of Naples, Eleonora di Toledo (1522–1562). Visitors will come face to face with Cosimo's politically astute wife in the form of an arresting portrait of her. It is thought that the painting was made just after her death (1562), in the studio of her favourite artist, Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572).

As the objects in the exhibition show, Cosimo proved to be a cunning politician who was adept at manipulating public opinion, as well as a master of appearances. Building on the ideal of the 'Medici dynasty', he actively drew close connections with his ancestors in order to give a sense of continuity, dynastic power and legitimacy.

When seen together, the works in *Cosimo I de' Medici: Art and Dynasty* offer a fascinating glimpse of Renaissance splendour and the ways images and objects were harnessed to secure dynastic ambition.

Curatorial Assistant and curator of the display, Dr Julia van Zandvoort, says: "*These splendid objects related to Cosimo's court show how design and image can be choreographed to project dynastic authority. This display helps visitors 'read' historical objects as instruments of power, not just things of beauty.*"

Dr Xavier Bray, Director of the Wallace Collection, says: "*Cosimo's Florence demonstrates how art projected authority across a dynasty. Together, they open the museum to new conversations and invite visitors to look again at creativity as a force that shapes public life.*"

NOTES FOR EDITORS

IMAGES:

Wine Cooler, Workshop of Flaminio Fontana, 1574 © The Wallace Collection

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About the Wallace Collection

As one of Britain's preeminent cultural institutions, the Wallace Collection is home to one of the most significant ensembles of fine and decorative arts in the world. Highlights include oil paintings from the 14th to the late 19th centuries by artists such as Titian, Velázquez, Rubens and Van Dyck; princely arms and armour; and one of the finest collections of 18th-century French paintings and decorative arts. Visitors can also enjoy superb medieval and Renaissance objects, including Limoges enamel, maiolica, glass and bronzes. Displayed at Hertford House, former home to Sir Richard and Lady Wallace, this outstanding collection is displayed in a manner designed to evoke the lives and tastes of its founders, creating a special ambiance that remains an essential part of its charm.

www.wallacecollection.org

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