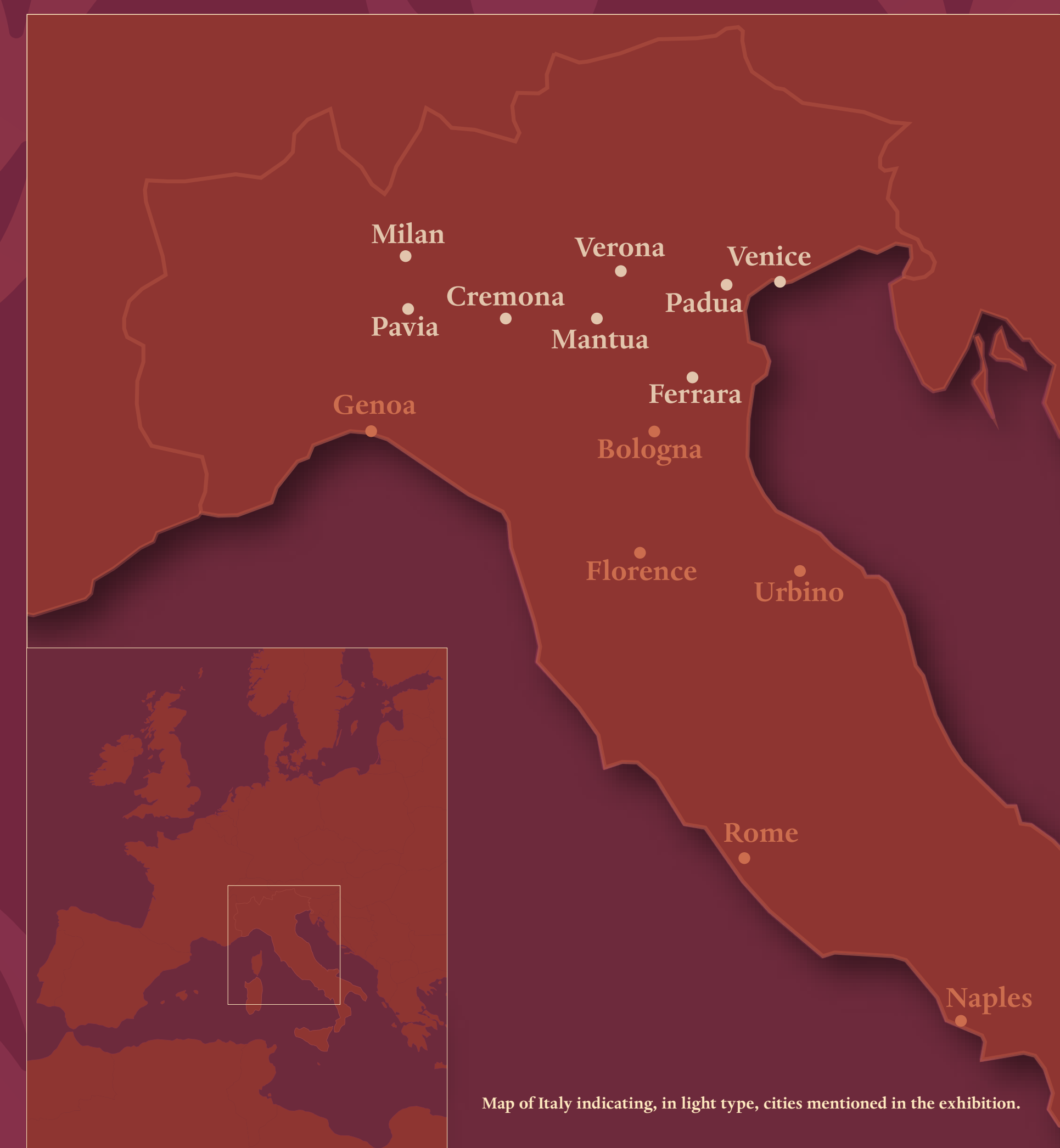


# Renaissance Splendors *of the* Northern Italian Courts

The Renaissance courts of northern Italy, among the wealthiest and most sophisticated in Europe, attracted innovative artists who created objects of remarkable beauty and refinement. Princes, prelates, and courtiers provided painters and illuminators with favorable contracts and social prestige in exchange for lavishly decorated paintings and books. These works prominently displayed their owners' scholarly learning, religious devotion, and elite status. The illuminations that resulted were a combination of the artists' talents and the patrons' tastes. Drawn largely from the Getty Museum's permanent collection, this exhibition celebrates the magnificent manuscripts that emerged from this courtly context—an array of visual riches fit for the highest-ranking members of Renaissance society.

Accompanying this installation is an online virtual exhibition, produced in collaboration with institutions in Ferrara, Mantua, Milan, Venice, and Verona, that allows visitors to view additional illuminated manuscripts by artists active in the northern Italian courts as well as items owned by various patrons who lived there. Take advantage of this special opportunity and expand your journey through the courts of northern Italy at [www.getty.edu](http://www.getty.edu).

Illuminated manuscripts are made of parchment (specially prepared animal skin) painted with tempera and often gold leaf. Because these materials are sensitive to light, the books on view in this exhibition are displayed at low light levels.



# Court Artists

Artists at court were frequently kept on retainer by their patrons, receiving a regular salary in return for undertaking a variety of projects. Their privileged position eliminated the need to actively seek customers, granting them time and artistic freedom to experiment with new materials and techniques, subject matter, and styles. Court artists could be held in high regard not only for their talents as painters or illuminators but also for their learning, wit, and manners. Some artists maintained their elevated positions for decades. Their frequent movements among the Italian courts could depend on summons from wealthier patrons or dismissals if their style was outmoded. Consequently their innovations—among the most significant in the history of Renaissance art—spread quickly throughout the peninsula.

# Court Patrons

Social standing, religious rank, piety, wealth, and artistic taste were factors that influenced the ability and desire of patrons to commission art for themselves and for others. Frequently a patron's portrait, coat of arms, or personal emblems were prominently displayed in illuminated manuscripts, which could include prayer books, manuals concerning moral conduct, humanist texts for scholarly learning, and liturgical manuscripts for Christian worship.

Patrons sometimes worked closely with artists to determine the visual content of a manuscript commission and to ensure the refinement and beauty of the overall decorative scheme. Rulers not only employed artists at their courts but also spent time and money trying to draw popular painters from other centers and evaluating foreign artists' unsolicited applications for work. Altogether these patronly activities reveal the social politics behind the artistic culture at court.

# Courtly Style

Artists, patrons, and works of art circulated among the northern Italian courts at an unprecedented rate during the Renaissance, spreading artistic ideas and tastes. Consequently, paintings on panel and parchment share certain characteristics that suggest a so-called courtly style, or manner of representation fit for and desired by royals, nobles, and others at court. Many of the works on display here exhibit these traits, which include finely graduated bright colors deployed in harmonious combinations; sophisticated figures that gesture and move elegantly across the page; the lavish embellishment of surfaces; and above all, a sense of visual splendor and refinement filling the composition from edge to edge.

This material was published in 2015 to coincide with the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibition “Renaissance Splendors of the Northern Italian Courts,” March 31 - June 21, 2015, at the Getty Center.

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