



YOUR RENAISSANCE

8 Steps to Embrace Your True Self and Renew Your Life

Maura Garau





Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio,
Daily rebirth of the sun. Apollo riding his chariot, 1526,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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and Renew Your Life***

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*to Barbara
and the will to get up again and again*

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Preface

“Traslocare”.

To move.

From the Latin “trans” (to go beyond, through) and “locus” (place).

Move away from a place.

Move.

Externally and internally.

Sometimes a move marks the beginning of a new life, but in the rating scale for pain, it is in second place after mourning. My first move was when I was five years old and my father died. I later studied, worked and lived in different cities. From ancestral Sardinia to medieval Bologna, from trendy Milan to shining New York and to Rome with its many layers of history. But each move reactivated an ancient disorientation and discomfort, and I always felt out of place.

I needed to understand what was happening and to find my place and my self. But how could I do that? I turned to the great masters of the Renaissance. Through their example, by comparing the difficulties of their lives and how they faced them, and by combining the knowledge I had acquired through the study and practice of Oriental disciplines, I managed to create a path of growth and awareness that proved to be a solid way to find my self and “take my place”.

This book came out of the desire to share my path with anyone who wants to understand themselves, embrace their true self, get up again and renew their life.

There are moments in our lives when we feel the need to stand up again, find ourselves, embrace our self, renew our own life, find happiness. This can be for many reasons: the desire for change, our restless soul, a professional disappointment, a crisis in a relationship or the desire to obtain more from our life. Sometimes we need to stop and reassess our current situation. Understand who we are, where we are going and where we want to go.

This book is a journey that allows us to pause and dwell upon the lives and works of some of the greatest Renaissance artists, be inspired by them, connect with our inner self, reflect, explore and rediscover the tools we have to reorient our existence, embrace our self and renew our lives.

The book is formulated as a journey through art, which has always spoken directly to the human heart, and through the Renaissance, which encompasses the idea of rebirth, of a renewal, of getting up again and finding our true self.

Many imagine the Renaissance as a period when life was easy and its protagonists could devote themselves to art and beauty. The reality, however, was quite the contrary. During the Renaissance, Italy was at the mercy of foreign armies and local lords. One lived on the border between life and death. Diplomacy was rampant as well as deception.

Nevertheless, despite the chaos, violence, suffering and uncertainty, the Renaissance was one of the greatest periods

of research for humanism, beauty and study. Art flourished and multiplied. The Pope, the gentry, princes and nobles were often patrons and supporters of the arts and of the artists who conveyed importance, prestige and fame to the powerful. It was the era of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian and many other famous masters. A magnificent period during which the human being, with all their abilities and potential, returned to being the center of attention of society and of artists. This is what we are preparing to do now, in the midst of our lives and perhaps, our restlessness: turn our attention to our own being, rediscover our potential and activate our inner resources. To reclaim ourselves through art.

We will take a journey through the following eight chapters (Steps), starting with the portrait and arriving at the self-portrait. In each of these eight steps, the lives and works of great artists will become a model to help us reflect profoundly, embrace our true self and renew our lives. There are a few tips at the end of each step to stimulate our inner listening, reflection, awareness and the desire to take care of our self.

Find a quiet place where you can relax without any external distractions, and take the time you need to complete each step by reading each chapter and its tips. Take notes or highlight what is of interest to you so that, once you've read the book, you will quickly be able to review your journey in its entirety, capture important insights from your reflections, and implement the necessary steps to take care of and find yourself and, if you like, renew your life.

Enjoy reading!

Step 1

The Portrait *Your Image*

The great art historian Giorgio Vasari, in his book written in 1568 on *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, tells us about a dramatic episode in the life of friar Filippo Lippi, an excellent painter who lived between 1406 and 1469.

Traveling on a boat across the Adriatic Sea, Fra Filippo was captured by pirates and forced into slavery by North African Moors. One day, after having taken charcoal from the extinguished embers of the fireplace, he drew a portrait of his master on the wall. Immersed in an iconoclastic culture, when the Moor saw the artwork he was amazed at the likeness, the detail of the fabric and the realism of every particular. All were fascinated by the magical portrait, from the master and family members to the slaves. By virtue of his skill, Fra Filippo was released and was able to return to Florence. Such was the power of that portrait: it was able to change people's lives.

Fra Filippo had an eventful existence. He was orphaned at the age of eight and was sent to the Carmine convent because his aunt, who was the only relative he had left, could not support him. Unresponsive to studying, given that he enjoyed drawing in his books and in those of his companions, the prior

encouraged him to learn the art of painting and to practice by following the great and revolutionary Masaccio, who, at the time, had frescoed a chapel at the convent. Fra Filippo became a highly respected painter, and was sought after as a portraitist.

During the Renaissance, the art of portraiture began to spread. It was a specific tool used to confirm one's own existence and importance to the world. In earlier times, the portrait had mostly a purely honorary and didactic use, dedicated to religious figures, rulers or nobles. From the fifteenth century it became an instrument of power not only for the elite but also for the bourgeoisie and allowed the image to evolve from a simple description to a psychological representation.

Fra Filippo was commissioned to paint several works, including the *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement*. Historically, this seems to be the first example we have of a portrait in which we see the subject in a domestic environment with the landscape in the background. The profiles of the protagonists are inexpressive and rigid, heir to a serious and didactic tradition of portraiture, still tied to the past and to the inanimate profiles on ancient coins. At the same time, however, in the work of Fra Filippo, the background and the details give life to the image and provide us with much information.

The woman is dressed luxuriously and the man wears an imposing hat and a precious ring on his finger. They are looking at each other but at the same time their emotions are contained. The portrait was probably commissioned on



Fra Filippo Lippi, *Portrait of a Woman with a Man at a Casement*, ca. 1440, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

the special occasion of their engagement. We can see the coat of arms of the Florentine house on the windowsill. The architectural perspective of the room, with its refined wood paneling, opens into a harmonious and well-kept garden. Everything suggests that the woman comes from a rich and illustrious family.

Renaissance artists spent time specifically researching how they could represent the world around them realistically, how to render perspective, dynamics and the art of portraiture.

At that time, Europe was filled with painted faces. Many portraits traveled from court to court when an arranged marriage was being prepared and one wanted to show the image of the promised spouse or bride. Other portraits were designed to exalt the members of a powerful family.

Religious works were no longer stereotyped as they were during the Middle Ages, where the image was symbolic and the faces were inanimate and without personality. The Renaissance artist, in search for truth and authenticity, often drew people from life to depict the faces of saints and Madonnas. Here we can admire a *Madonna* by Fra Filippo Lippi. The skin of her face, the rosy cheeks, the shy glance. Everything suggests that this is the portrait of a young woman who really existed.

However, it was Fra Filippo's desire to paint from live models that caused him to become involved in a great scandal. We must remember that Filippo's religious vocation was forced upon him when he was given to a convent as a young orphan. He grew up under the monastic rule but remained a whimsical and irrepressible man who had a persistent passion for women.



Fra Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and child*, detail, ca. 1440,
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

One day, while working on the altar at the monastery of Santa Margherita in Prato, he saw a novice and he fell in love. He did everything to gain the permission of the abbess to be able to portray the young woman as a model for Santa Margherita. It was after permission was granted, when the scandal broke out. Fra Filippo and the girl had time to get to know each other and to fall in love, and shortly after they organized her fake kidnapping. We can only imagine the dishonor and outrage this caused. The powerful Medici family, patron and supporter of the arts, thought highly of Fra Filippo, tried to mitigate the scandal and was able to protect the two lovers. Fra Filippo and the young Lucrezia went to live together and had a son, Filippino, who also became an excellent painter.

Within a generation, from friar Filippo to his son Filippino, we notice that the images gain strength. There are no longer inanimate, shy timid countenances, but determined faces, proud to show themselves. The viewer is no longer the simple person from archaic or medieval times for whom a scene had to be presented didactically. They are refined interlocutors who are involved or even provoked by art. The depth of the soul begins to emerge.

In the *Portrait of a Youth* by Filippino Lippi, personality and sensuality are brought to light and they involve us in a psychological game. The gaze of the person portrayed is fixed insistently on the viewer, in an infinite reflection of glances. It is no longer the one who views the painting who wonders about the person portrayed, but it is the person portrayed who challenges the viewer and asks: **who are you?**



Filippino Lippi, *Portrait of Youth*, 1485,
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Your image

Imagine being in a beautiful snowy clearing, or if you prefer, on a wonderful beach. The snow has embroidered the trees around you, the sand merges with the sky and the sea. Everything is calm, clear, and serene. At some point, you let yourself fall softly backwards, into the snow or onto the sand. You lie down, laugh, and look up at the sky. When you get up again, you look at the imprint left by your body.

You are invited to think about yourself. Now. What kind of shape did you leave? What does it look like? Define it better by choosing a portrait of your own. It can be a photo, a selfie, a drawing or a collage; whatever image represents you in this moment.

Give yourself time to choose your image and to look at it. What does it tell you? Who are you? Does it allow your spirit to make itself known? What information does it give about you? Does it show what you want?

Play. If it helps, write a series of words and thoughts related to your appearance. Focus on who you are and what you want. Visualize what you want and write it down. It is said that writing down what we want is the first step to making it real.

If you are still not sure about who you are and what you want, that is fine. We are not always ready and we don't always have all the answers. Sometimes we have to let time come to fruition. However, feel your presence. Look at yourself. This is the starting point. We always start with ourselves.

Every Step in this book is designed to explore a different side of yourself. As you continue reading, you will be able to focus better on who you are, what you want and what your path is.

Tips to embrace your true self and renew your life

- Make observing and listening become a habitual practice in your life. These are the starting points for embracing your self and for every path of renewal.
- Visualize what you want. If you feel like it, write it down. Make it as concrete as possible. Observe how what you want will develop throughout the reading of this book.

END OF STEP I.

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NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maura Garau - following the Renaissance tradition of Eclecticism and intellectual curiosity - is constantly expanding her knowledge through study and research ranging from language and communication, to art, oriental disciplines, zen meditation, history, philosophy, music and much more. An author, artist and educational producer - she founded CyberItalian.com not only for the teaching of the Italian language online but also to share and further humanistic values and culture throughout the world. Her WellnessDayByDay.com project is based on a core belief that to improve the world we must begin with ourselves. The @maura_imagesandwords profile on Instagram encourages the free circulation of public domain images of artworks, and aims to increase sensitivity and awareness on the influence that images have on our life.



“When you finish reading and you stop. A state of the soul.”
Angel leaning on a closed book. Baldassare Franceschini, 1690.
Courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.
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