

Lavinia Fontana

Marriage Portrait of a Bolognese Noblewoman (Livia de' Medici Bandini?)



Dear Dowry

The sumptuous garments and jewels adorning this woman in her wedding portrait are part of her dowry—the wealth she brings to her marriage. Unlike this sitter and other women of the day, Lavinia Fontana did not require one because of her earning potential as an artist.



Marriage Portrait of a Bolognese Noblewoman (Livia de' Medici Bandini?), ca. 1589

Take a closer look

The nobility of Bologna, Italy, sought **Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614)** for portrait commissions. Her ability to portray fabric textures and intricate jewelry—seen clearly in this work—appealed to her status-conscious patrons.

Something to talk about

During the Renaissance, portraits were never simply created to represent the likeness of the sitter. Consider Fontana's handling of costume, expression, and pose. What do such details communicate about this young woman's character, mood, and social standing?

Who knew?

Several symbols suggest this sitter embodied qualities of an ideal 16th-century bride. The marten pelt suspended from her waist signifies fertility—this animal reproduces prolifically. The cross pendant, high collar, and affectionate dog represent piety, modesty, and loyalty.

Lavinia Fontana, *Marriage Portrait of a Bolognese Noblewoman (Livia de' Medici Bandini?)*, ca. 1589; Oil on canvas, 45¼ x 35¼ inches; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay; Photograph by Lee Stalworth

