cincinnati 🛠 art museum

Girl Scout Marian Medal Leader Guide



Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist (ca.1520) Artist, Antonio del Ceraiolo Italy (Florence) oil on panel accession #1954.138

An Introduction to the Image of the Virgin Mary in Art

Madonna is a medieval Italian term for a noble or important woman, in this case Mary, either alone or holding the Baby Jesus. "Madonna" translates to "my lady." Most often, She is seated, holding the baby Jesus, shown in half-length or full length.

For over a thousand years, Byzantine, Medieval and Early Renaissance artists were attracted to the image of the Virgin Mary out of either personal devotion, to demonstrate their own artistic abilities or to meet the visual needs of their patrons for spiritual

expression. Mary's image has helped many Christian faithful focus their prayers and intentions during their devotional practices.

No other image permeates Christian art, more than that of the Madonna and Child. To manage the huge volume of these images, art historians and religious scholars have identified five classifications or groups of Madonna images

based on their physical structures as well as three themes or classifications which examine the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child.

These classifications include the physical structure of a painting or sculpture; the time of the work; or the relationship and attitude toward the Christ Child that is being represented.

These five classes are:

- 1. The Portrait Madonna the figure(s) in half-length against an indefinite background, the most popular form chosen by the artists of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Full-standing images of the Madonna more frequently included the infant Jesus, and were usually found in sculpture form.
- 2. The Madonna Enthroned where the setting is some sort of a throne or dais. This style dates from the Byzantine period, widely used in Medieval and Renaissance times, often found in large altarpieces.
- 3. The Madonna in the Sky or Madonna in Gloria where the figures are set in the heavens, as represented by light or clouds, in the company of cherubs or angels, or an elevation about the earth's surface.
- 4. The Pastoral Madonna is in relation to Mary painted within a landscape.
- 5. The Madonna in a Home Environment is where Mary is placed in an interior space.



When studying the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child, the works can be divided within the following three themes:

- A. The Madonna of Love the relationship is maternal. The emphasis is upon the mother's natural affection shown towards her child.
- B. The Madonna in Adoration the mother's attitude is one of humility, in awe of her child, often sitting on the ground, or a cushion. It was the most popular presentation among styles of the early 1300s European artistic period.
- C. The Madonna as Witness the Madonna is wearing the honors of her proud position as witness to her son's great destiny.

Suggested Group Gallery Activities

Consider the following exercises at the start of you visit as you view a selection of the art. You may want to work as a group, team or individually.

EXERCISE #1

Identify and discuss:

What is Mary's role in the scene or sculpture?

In what environment does the artist place Mary?

What are Mary's emotions based on her gestures and facial expressions?

Was the art used for personal or public devotion?

Can you find religious symbolism within the composition?

Does the image of Mary offer a lesson to you and other young women of today?

EXERCISE #2

Find an artwork(s) that...

- Spans 33 years of Christ's life.
- Shows Mary as a grieving mother.
- · Is a recreational scene set in an outdoor environment.
- · Shows Mary with Angel Gabriel and the Dove of the Holy Spirit.
- Presents Mary as the Queen of Heaven.
- · Presents Mary as a young woman.
- · Shows Mary as an aging woman.
- Narrates a story about a procession of travelers, following a star.

Consider the following exercises after you have viewed the artworks. You may work as a group, a team or individually.



EXERCISE #3

Select the artwork that you like best. Write three or four sentences about why you like the piece.

EXERCISE #4

Put yourself in Mary's place and try to imagine what she might have been thinking when she was 'sitting' for this painting or sculpture. Discuss.

EXERCISE #5

After learning about the religious symbolism in several of the artworks, discuss why these visual clues may have helped the faithful (many of whom could not read or write) recognize: the various saints; an event behind the image of an object; elements in a landscape, etc.

Images of Mary in the Galleries Gallery #201



Virgin (ca.1130)
France
artist unknown
wood with polychromy
accession #1946.8

- Statue rigid/regal frontal pose.
- Made of multiple wood pieces; lightweight/inexpensive.
- Cloister craft object created in monastic/religious workshops.
- Used within church/carried in processions/liturgical celebrations.
- Throne of Wisdom image Mary holding Christ Child (see Intro), now missing from Mary's lap.
- Madonna Enthroned (see Introduction).
- Mary's attributes authority/spiritual presence.
- If Mary were to stand up, she would be very tall and somewhat out of proportion.

Continued on the next page.





Virgin and Child (second quarter of the 14th century) Italy artist unknown ivory with traces of polychromy accession #1971.553

- Small personal devotional statuette.
- Figures naturalistic/realistic.
- Made of ivory– fine grain, smooth texture/creamy light color/soft luster; ivory suggests attributes
 of purity/chastity.
- Emotional connection Virgin/Christ Child.
- Figure of Mary contrapposto pose/folds of fabric swing gracefully S-curve.



Crucifixion (ca.1310)
Anonymous artist (known as the Master of Monte Oliveto)
Italy
wood panel and tempera with gold leaf
accession # 1953.220

- Personal devotional painting home/small chapel.
- Narrative Crucifixion of Christ on the Cross.
- Dramatic/emotional/naturalistic.
- Gold-leaf surface glistened in candle light to represent "light of heaven."
- Mary slumping under the weight of her sadness.
- Emotion/drama permeates every gesture/facial expression of the witnesses.
- Figure of Christ center of composition; his image is pale, illuminated, thin and elongated.



Adoration of the Magi (ca.1480-85)
Artist, Master of the Legend of Saint Lucy
oil and tempera on panel
accession #1927.380

- Narrative story of the Epiphany; Christ Child presented to Gentiles in persons of Magi.
- Placement/size of Holy Family diminutive; Mary appears overwhelmed/humbled.
- Magi found Christ through skills in astrology/dream interpretation.
- Gift giving common practice.
- There are a few changes in composition can you find them? Hint, look head-to-toe!

Continued on the next page.





Madonna and Child with the Infant Saint John the Baptist (ca.1520)
Artist, Antonio del Ceraiolo
Italy (Florence)
oil on panel
accession #1954.138

- Mary attentively nursing Christ Child Madonna Lactans.
- The Madonna of Love (see Introduction).
- Public concern for nourishment/breastfeeding during famine/food shortages in Europe.
- Three figures wearing halos reminding viewers of their divinity.
- Mary ideal/a woman, poetic beauty/perfect mother.
- Christ Child is unclothed, suggesting God's presence on earth in human form.
- Young Italian Renaissance girls used Mary as a role model when guiding their behavior.

Gallery #204



Madonna and Child with Angels and Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Nicholas of Tolentino (early 1470s)
Artist, Matteo de Giovanni (ca.1435-1495)
Italy
tempera and oil on wood panel
accession #1956.89

- Small private image individual's spiritual inspiration.
- Christ child faces viewer innocent/unaware.
- Mary's downcast eyes suggest knowledge of Christ's Passion.
- Images of the two male saints "clues" to identities.
- Mary loving mother, innocent/pious Christian, regal queen/saint.
- Display of intimacy/affection between Christ/Mary through gesture.
- Mary wears inscribed halo; Latin phrase: Ave Maria Gratia "Hail, Mary full of grace."



Madonna and Saint John the Baptist Adoring the Christ Child (ca.1490s)
Artist, Workshop of Francesco Botticini (1446-1497)
Italy
tempera on panel with arched top
accession #1956.309

- Mary enjoying being outside with her son and nephew.
- Mary Pastoral Madonna and Madonna in Adoration (see Introduction).
- Similar skin tones/hair color two young male cousins.
- Mary wearing traditional red dress/blue mantle/gauzy veil.
- Saint John's attributes simple-textured/earthy-colored robe/holding long slender reed.
- Christ's gaze is to the heavens, not to his mother.
- Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, where this work was painted.



Madonna and Child (1370-1380) Artist unknown Italy, wood with polychrome accession #1953.151

- Large wood sculpture, rare material used in Italian art.
- Probably housed in a public setting; used in liturgical ceremonies, painted regularly to appear fresh.
- Colors of Mary's clothing symbolic meaning.
- Lack of intimacy/tenderness between Mary/child.
- Mary Queen of Heaven, Madonna in Gloria (see Introduction); Mary expresses grace/humility.



Madonna and Child (ca.1500) Giovanni della Robbia, 1469-1529 Italy (Florence) glazed terracotta accession #1949.142

- In bas-relief, like this work, figures project from a shallow background.
- Increased demand for public/private commissions were made during the 15th century in Florence.
- Robbia's terra cotta (clay) was inexpensive/strong/could mimic pricier materials/luminescent.
- Mary kneels, gazing at Christ in awe/adoration.
- Why was luminescence (naturally emitted light) desirable in 16th century churches?



Madonna and Child (ca.1530-1535) Artist, Joos van Cleve, ca.1485-1540/41 Flanders oil on panel accession #1981.130

- Passionflower, a symbol of Christ's Passion: nails, 5 drops of blood, crown of thorns.
- Mary in a maternal role, observes Christ's fear of the passionflower.
- Christ's pudgy, solidly formed body.
- Find symbols of Christ's sacrifice and of original sin in this work.



The Annunciation (ca.1500)
Artist, Juan de Flandes, active 1496-1519
Spanish (born in Flanders)
tempera on panel
accession #1958.88

- Flandes, a court painter for Spain's Queen Isabella, painted Mary to look like Isabella.
- Symbolism: lilies sign of purity/virginity; Dove sign of the Holy Spirit.
- This work was probably part of a multi-panel retablo (altarpiece). Find another retablo in this gallery. How has the artist demonstrated Mary's humility?





Madonna and Child (ca.1520) Artist, Lorenzo di Credi, ca.1456/1459-1536) Italy (Florence) oil on canvas (transferred from panel) accession #1927.388

- Mary, a loving/nurturing mother, sits within a pastoral setting, nursing her child.
- Madonna Lactans, paintings of Mary nursing Christ, were popular in 12th century Florence.
- Popularity for this theme was revived in the 14th century, following severe food shortages in Italy.
- Credi's art is appealing for its gentleness/human simplicity/attention to nature. Based on subject matter, this artwork was probably a private devotional piece.



The Tendilla Retablo (Altarpiece with Scenes from the Old and New Testaments (ca.1550),

Artistm Studio of Jan Sanders van Hemessen (1500-1556/7) with Caterina van Hemessen (1528-1587), Antwerp, Flanders oil on wood panel accession #1953.219

- Altarpieces were meant to inspire piety/to educate (few people could read in 1550) panels, painted by four or more artists, feature a variety of personal/current art styles.
- Find two coat-of-arms atop the retablo showing the lineage of the person who commissioned the work.

The Annunciation and God the Father and His Angels (The Tendilla Retablo)

- The figures of Angel Gabriel and Mary are muscular/robust associated with Italian Renaissance style (see Identifying Artistic Styles).
- Gabriel holds lilies symbol of Mary's virginity and blesses her with his right hand the crescent moon, seen above Mary and Gabriel symbol of fertility.
- Mary looks directly at Gabriel, steadfast in her commitment to God's will.
- Compare/contrast Mary's demeanor in this work with her demeanor in The Annunciation by Juan de Flandes in this gallery.

The Visitation (The Tendilla Retablo)

- Mary and Elizabeth share gratitude for their blessings of pregnancies.

The Nativity (The Tendilla Retablo)

- Mary is humble and in adoration of her Child.

The Crucifixion (The Tendilla Retablo)

- Mary bears the honors of her position, witnessing Christ's destiny.

The Lamentation (The Tendilla Retablo)

- A calm Mary grieves/accepts Christ's destiny.

The Ascension (The Tendilla Retablo)

- Mary's hands reach toward heaven, rejoicing at Christ's ascension.





The Lamentation (ca.1500)
Artist, Pedro Berruguete, 1450-1504
Paredes de Nava (Spain)
oil and tempera on panel
accession #1959.19

- The Crown of Thorns (lying on tile floor) is green symbol of life and of the Resurrection.
- Work was created for a church.
- Mary, supported by John the Evangelist, grieves but is calm/accepts Christ's fate.
- The scene is set in Jerusalem. Why do you think that the artist used European clothes and architecture to tell the story?



Madonna and Child with Breviary (after 1475)
Francesco Botticini, 1446-1498
Italy (Florence)
tempera on circular canvas (transferred from panel)
accession #1948.201

- Mary's face and Christ's gaze suggest their knowledge of the Passion.
- This work was probably a private devotional piece of art.
- Open (religious) book symbol of Mary's piety and learning.
- An affectionate Madonna is with her child in a pastoral setting.
- There are two tondos (circular shaped artworks) in this gallery. Can you find the other? Compare and contrast these two works.