

Sample essay on madonna and child

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



The relationship between the Madonna and the Christ child has been a subject of myriad works by a number of important artists, particularly in the decadent Italian Renaissance with its emphasis on the exploration of the divine. Of particular import and beauty is Filippino Lippi's rendition of the Madonna and Child, in which the Madonna holds her child on her lap as he plays with a Bible. This subgenre of Renaissance painting inspires numerous questions and approaches to a variety of subjects, from man's relationship to nature and God to a mother's loving relationship with her child. The juxtaposition of the bright, vibrant colors and naturalism of the Madonna and Child and their fascination with contemporary Florentine literature (and the architecture which surrounds them) shows Lippi's intent in Madonna and Child to showcase their loving relationship and divinity in this Renaissance setting.

Madonna and Child was painted in 1485 by the Italian Florentine master painter Filippino Lippi (Fossi 56). The work has lived in the Metropolitan Museum since the year 1949. The painting beautifully shows the love and affection of a mother towards her child, with the Madonna and Child interacting in a domestic setting. In the background, a window reveals a landscape of a flowing river under a bridge and a very Florentine town. Lippi's artwork can be defined through his use of warm colors, as well as a sense of animation in his use of form and line, bringing figures to vibrant life within their environments. The animated and vibrant nature of the Madonna and Child in this setting, as is typical of the artist's style, demonstrates the Madonna's love for her child.

In order to understand the formal elements of the painting, the empirical

elements of Madonna and Child must be elucidated upon as well. The medium used is Tempera, oil, and gold on wood and the size is 32 x 23 1/2 in. The wood itself has survived in largely good condition, though the painting has been subject to substantial restoration over time. Some slight warping can be seen on the edges of the painting. Tempera was one of the paints used in this painting, which was made up of ground up pigments mixed in with egg yolk to create a consistency that would adhere well to the gesso prepared wood panel. However, it was the usage of oil paint that created a luminous quality that brought on richness of color that tempera alone could not simply achieve. Lippi used a glazing technique to apply a thin; multiple layers of thinned out oil paint so that each layer was translucent and gave off incredibly deep rich colors, creating intensity and depth. This allowed him to produce rich, luminous incredibly subtle light. With Oil painting, soft modulation of light and shadow can be performed. For example, light comes in through the room and moves across from Christ's front left arm that helps it project forward, to the shadows of the back side that help it move back in space.

As with many of Lippi's works, the brushstrokes are extremely short and very detailed, with a great emphasis on texture and depth of shadow. Colors are bright with substantial shading to show contrast in the folds of the Madonna's dress, the lamp just behind Madonna's right side, as well as the beams of sunlight that shine partially over the room through the arched, columned Florentine window. The shadows help to create a sense of volume and mass, making both Madonna and Christ feel as if they are here in front of us, as solid forms in space help make connections between us.

The subject of the painting is very rich and vivid as Lippi paints his subject with great detail and precision. Christ looks much more like a baby than in other works, which show him as an adult. Instead, he is cute and cherubic, and has a head that is appropriate in scale to his body. Christ's curly hair brings out an innocent sensuality that is inspiring to the viewer, eliciting the same kind of adoration in us that the Madonna feels in herself. As we look upward from Christ's curly hair, we notice a halo around of the head of Christ (as well as Madonna) in a form of transparent bubbles. The halos are significant to indicate the divineness of the character as he is portrayed. Here, Lippi creates a symbol of holiness with the use of halo, but in a mild way which keeps the reality and naturalness of the painting. In this way, Christ is shown in a slightly more innocent, human manner than elsewhere in Renaissance painting, giving his interactions with the Madonna a more relatable touch and centering their relationship as the focus of the painting. The sense of momentum in the painting is immense and affecting, as the posture of the lady holding her child helps the viewers' attention flow smoothly from the mother towards the child's posture and then to the activity of the child. Lippi also makes great use of parallel gaze, with both Madonna and Child's eye lines meeting the Bible. By the way Lippi precisely depicts Child's slanted laying down position, it is hard to imagine that Lippi could have painted this without actually having a mother hold up a child in a tilted angle so he could observe what happened to the muscles and skin folds of the baby's body in the way that they would lay on the right side of his body. The way that Madonna holds her child invokes a subtle feeling of the love of the mother towards her child, and portrays Child's dependency

on his mother. Even so, there is also a growing sense of independence in the boy as he tries to read through the Bible. The mother allows the child to explore his surroundings, indicating a desire to explore the realm of man just as he does nature and the work of God. This gesture is a simple but effective way to demonstrate just how much the Madonna loves her child.

Turning our gaze back to Madonna, perhaps the most brilliant attributes of the work itself is its use of color—the brilliant blazing colors of the Madonna's ultramarine blue dress, combined with the light sky blues of the Florentine backdrop, emphasize her angelic, divine status as the mother of Christ (Bischoff, 2011). The Madonna is practically a luminous figure as her light shinning bright and illuminating the comparatively drab interior of this Florentine room. The use of rich colors in the dress of the Madonna, compared to the relative drab, earth-colored nature of her room, provides a luminous, divine attribute to the Madonna's appearance. The ribbon-like folds on her headdress also evoke a halo, and frame her serene, affectless face in a particularly spiritual manner. The calm that the Madonna's face demonstrates is enhanced by the bright colors of her clothing, rather than acting as a distraction.

The process by which this effect was achieved is impressive - Filippino painted an additional layer with lead white before glazing the mantle of Madonna with ultramarine. This was done to allow the light to reflect on the painting with a peculiar depth and vividness that could be highlighted through the glaze. The highest quality of ultramarine was costlier than gold at that time, and was prepared from lapis lazuli (Cennini 36). The use of red on the Madonna's gown also evokes the crushed raspberries used to make it,

and the dark folds of the gown provides an added sense of elegance to the Madonna, furthering her sense of divine mastery.

While the other elements of the painting are not as colorful, their sense of form and structure evoke a different sense of appreciation in the viewer.

Behind the book, a sliced pomegranate is kept at one corner of the table to signify the Catholic Church. Examining the interior, the viewer's attention is drawn towards the outside background through the open windows, showing a beautiful naturalistic rendering of landscape with a flowing river and two men fishing on the bridge in the city in blurred surrounding outside. The architectural beauty of the painting is well defined with the round arches in the background interior, as well as the rounded columns evenly spaced in the window of the room. The background perspective and use of space and depth gives the impression of scale with the Madonna's surroundings. until the view is attracted by the beautiful landscape outside the window. Looking back at the whole painting, Madonna and Child practically fills up the whole space, but the figures do not feel cramped. Because of this, the viewer feels a sense of immense, divine scale and importance for the two figures, as well as the importance of their love for each other.

Lippi's Madonna and Child is a masterwork of artistic vision and purpose, utilizing vibrant use of color and movement to showcase the love of a mother toward her child. The near-angelic glow of the Madonna provides a divinity to her and the Christ child, and yet Lippi embraces humanism as he creates an emphasis on the humanity and emotion of this experience. Lippi creates a accurate space in which to place those human figures, with a very convincing sense of mass, volume and proportion and anatomy, as well as

emotion. By placing those figures in a space that makes sense to us, it is apparent that Lippi is interested in humanism—this notion that man can observe, understand and, to some extent, control his world in the service of God.