

Madonna and child paintings throughout history



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Through history, people had used art as a reflection of their religious beliefs and culture values. The illustration of “Madonna and Child” had been one of the most recurring arts in Christianity and European art in general. According to Christian beliefs, Madonna represents the virgin Mary and the child represents baby Jesus. Though these religious paintings and sculptures of The Madonna and Child may be along the same lines in their depiction of Christian iconography and artistic style, each carries a different taste and reflects the different time periods and the different artists that had created them. Three examples of these paintings are Madonna and Child, created by Giotto di Bondone from the Italian Maniera Greca period, Madonna and Child created by Duccio during the Italian Proto-Renaissance, and Madonna and Child with Angels created by Cosimo Rosselli during the Early Italian Renaissance periods. When a viewer observe these three Italian paintings, the viewer would recognize a development that takes place through the three time periods which is from the early thirteenth century to later fifteenth century. Differences in these three paintings include the illustrations of the figures, drapery style, treatment of space, and inclusion or the exclusion of the viewer. Nonetheless, the paintings represent similar religious and cultural values since they all depict the Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus. “Madonna and Child” is a very common Christian iconography that was seen through history since the Byzantine Empire.

The painting Madonna and Child was painted around 1230 during the Italian Maniera Greca period by Giotto di Bondone, “the outstanding painter of the thirteenth-century Lucca” (Museum Label). This painting is tempera on wood

with the two figures on front of a gold background. Madonna is wearing a huge dark blue cloak with golden decorations which covers most of her body and a reddish dress underneath the cloak that can only be seen in her arms. To show her modesty the only things that can be seen from her body are her face, neck, and hands. Her face shows a depressed feeling with the lines around her eyes and her small mouth that depicts a frown. Her hand has an unrealistic look which are elongated and skinny. According to the Museum label, “ Berlinghiero was always open to Byzantine influence, and this Madonna is of the Byzantine type known as the Hodegefria, in which the Madonna points to the child as the way to salvation.” The Hodegefria illustrate the Christian values and the value of the Byzantine art. The Child is wearing an orange cloak that covers most of his body. He is seated on top of one of his mothers hands with his body tilted towards his mother and his head facing the viewer. One of his hand points towards the right and in the other hand he is holding a scroll that represent the religious scriptures, which carries a Christian iconography in which the scriptures represents the bible. Though his is suppose to be a child his face is an adult like face, which also can be a religious iconography that show Jesus as a mature child who leads people to salvation.

Berlinghiero’s Madonna and Child is inorganic and unrealistic when it comes to the drapery of the clothing and the treatment of space. The figures are also set in an awkward way with inorganic style of the body. There are many folds in the figures clothes which extreme for a realist dress. The treatment of space is missing in this painting, where the figures seem to be flat and the light source is not clear in depicting the space and atmosphere. This painting

is similar in its drapery and treatment of space to the painting *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels* which is from the same time period. Though the painting is unrealistic, it is still considered as a very great artistic work that depicts cultural and religious values of that time.

Duccio's *Madonna and Child* was created during the Italian Proto-Renaissance around 1300. Like the Berlinghiero's painting, Duccio's painting is tempera on wood with golden background. Moreover, Madonna is wearing a blue cloak with golden lines on the edges which covers most of her body. Madonna is looking at the Child who is trying to play with her cheeks and holding him with both of her hands. She seems to have a sad look with her tilted head towards her child. The Child or Jesus is also wearing an orange dress with a red cloak over his shoulders. Compare to the child from Berlinghiero's painting, Duccio's child looks more like a normal child. We can see that the depiction of the child has developed to a more realistic and organic one. In this painting not only does the child look realistic in his facial characteristics but with his childish movement while playing with his mother's cheeks. The drapery style is more organic than that of Berlinghiero but is not totally realistic. It has a very heavy and earthy feeling with its huge curves and wrinkles. This painting also lacks the emphasis of space, since the figures look like flat on the golden background. This painting can be compared with Giotto's painting *Madonna Enthroned with Angels and Saints*, which is from the same time period, where we can see similar drapery style and facial characteristics of the child. Furthermore, this painting also shows the continuing religious values of Italian art. This painting, like all the *Madonna and Child* paintings, has the Christian values.

The third painting is the Early Italian Renaissance painting *Madonna and Child with Angels* by Cosimo Rosselli which dates about 1480 to 1482.

Thought this painting is made of tempera and gold on wood, it is much more complex than both of the other paintings. In this painting Madonna is dressed in a light red cloth and a light blue cloak floating over her head and shoulders while the child is shown nude, which is different than that of Berlingiero and Duccio's paintings. The posture of the figures is also different; Madonna is holding the child with both of her hands to make him stand on top of a table. Although, the child's body is a little disproportional, the bodies of both figures are more organic and natural. The bodies do not have a longitude hands and awkward faces like the other two paintings, which show the development in artistic design of the figures. Moreover, Rosselli's painting has a more developed drapery style and space treatment. The drapery is more organic with ordinary looking wrinkles. The treatment of space is also a lot more developed than the other two paintings. Since the other two paintings had the figures as if they are flat, this painting is more organic because the viewer can feel like the figures are close while the background is seems far. This painting also has a vanishing point that gives the painting the feeling of space.

As seen in the three paintings of the *Madonna and Child*, we can see that art develops through the years. Even though the paintings of *Madonna and Child* carries the same religious cultural values, one can see how the style of the painting changes over periods of time in its drapery style, space treatment, figure's characteristics, and even the postures of the figures. As a result, we saw that the depiction of the *Madonna and Child* in the late

fifteenth century is more complex and organic than that of the early thirteenth century.