

Virgin Portraits

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Foreword

“During the Renaissance, Italian painters would traditionally depict the wives of their patrons as Madonnas. The artists would often overstate the beauty of their models, rendering them more beautiful than they actually were. The contemporary representation of the Mother of Christ, however, tended to remain unchanged. With the passing of time, Mary gradually lost some of her spiritual characteristics and became more humane, more accessible to human sentiments.”

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The Crowned Virgin

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1859
oil on canvas, 69 x 50 cm. Tamenago Gallery, Tokyo

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Mary Cassatt

Frida Kahlo

Berthe Morisot

Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo

Filippo Lippi

Filippo Lippi

Bernardino Luini

Teresa Ly

Teresa Ly

Andrea Mantegna

Carlo Maratta

Carlo Maratta

Simone Martini

Simone Martini

Masaccio

Quentin Matsys

Hans Memling

Lippo Memmi

Michelangelo

Paula Modersohn-Becker

Paula Modersohn-Becker

Paula Modersohn-Becker

Evelyn de Morgan

Berthe Morisot

Bartolomé Estebán Murillo

Bartolomé Estebán Murillo

Bartolomé Estebán Murillo

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Alice Neel

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Gian Battista Piazzetta

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Jacopo Pontormo

Nicolas Poussin

Raphael

Raphael

Raphael

Raphael

Rembrandt

Nicholas Roerich

Nicholas Roerich

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Peter Paul Rubens

Peter Paul Rubens
Andrea Sacchi
Andrea del Sarto
Andrea del Sarto
Luca Signorelli
Juan Valdes Leal
Giorgio Vasari
Giorgio Vasari
Diego Velázquez
Lorenzo Veneziano
Paolo Veronese
Leonardo da Vinci
Leonardo da Vinci
Leonardo da Vinci
Leonardo da Vinci
Simon Vouet
Mikhail Vrubel
Antoine Watteau
Adriaen van der Werff
Rogier van der Weyden
Francisco de Zurbarán



The image of the Madonna has been embedded in the arts of the Western World for nearly two thousand years. She embodies the purest form of unconditional love and is perceived as the compassionate and forgiving nurturer of all Christian people. The Madonna is also seen as the loving mother, and the protector of all humanity.



Mary with the Child Jesus between
Constantine and Justinian

Anonymous, Xth century
lunette mosaic
Hagia Sophia, Constantinople
(Istanbul)





Her followers believe that only she can fully understand human grief, passions and happiness; she forgives, mediates, and consoles, and she is the connection between human beings and their God. She has been venerated as the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of All, and as the embodiment of compassion.



The Virgin of Vladimir

Anonymous, XIIIth century
tempera on wood, 78 x 55 cm
Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow





She is seen as selfless, humble, and caring, and represents the feminine spirituality within Christianity. For many centuries the Madonna has inspired thousands of artists who laboured innumerable hours creating her images using different styles, materials, and techniques.



Rucellai Madonna

Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1285
tempera on wood, 450 x 290 cm
Uffizi, Florence





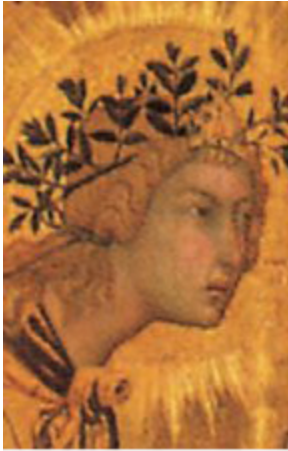
This huge body of artwork, a cultural legacy of major proportions, represents a social system that still dominates the world. Art museums, galleries, palaces and private collections are filled with her icons. Through the centuries, images of the Virgin were created according to the religious interpretations of beliefs, myths, iconography and symbolism prevalent at the time.



Madonna of Mercy

Simone Martini, 1308-1310
tempera on wood, 154 x 84 cm
Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena





The presence of Mary in the heart of Western civilization has a long theological history of transformation. Scholars concur that during early Christianity there were other paramount feminine faces of spirituality, such as Sophia, who was understood to be the feminine aspect of the complex Christian God.



The Annunciation, with Saints
Ansanus and Margaret and
Four Prophets

Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi,
1333
tempera on wood, 184 x 210 cm
Uffizi, Florence





Hagia Sophia represented the Divine Wisdom and was celebrated as a co-creator, together with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of Christianity, particularly in Eastern Europe, the Holy Ghost was understood as female. Yet, it usually was Sophia who was celebrated as the feminine aspect of the divine.



The Virgin and Child

Lorenzo Veneziano, 1356-1372
painting on wood, 126 x 56 cm
The Louvre, Paris





As Sophia's popularity among the dogma-generating clergy waned, the popularity of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, gradually increased.

During the sixth century, the presence of the Mother of God was reaffirmed within the Christian religious dogma all over Europe, including the Byzantine Empire.



Madonna and Child

Luca Signorelli, c.1390
oil on wood, 170 x 117.5 cm
Uffizi, Florence

