

# Virgin Portraits

Page 4:

*The Crowned Virgin*

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1859

oil on canvas, 69 x 50 cm. Tamenago Gallery, Tokyo

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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.”



# Contents

Jacobello Albergono . . . . .	23	Jacques-Louis David . . . . .	189
Mariotto Albertinelli . . . . .	71	Nicolas Dipre . . . . .	69
Alessandro Allori . . . . .	125	Dosso Dossi . . . . .	93
Fra Bartolomeo . . . . .	89	Rosso Fiorentino . . . . .	103
Pompeo Batoni . . . . .	183	Lavinia Fontana . . . . .	117
C. Bosseron Chambers . . . . .	221	Jean Fouquet . . . . .	33
Sandro Botticelli . . . . .	41, 47, 53, 57, 59	Artemisia Gentileschi . . . . .	129
Francesco Botticini . . . . .	49	Domenico Ghirlandaio . . . . .	65
François Boucher . . . . .	185, 187	Luca Giordano . . . . .	155, 167
Agnolo Bronzino . . . . .	107	Matteo di Giovanni . . . . .	37
Duccio di Buoninsegna . . . . .	13	Toscano Giuseppe e Altri . . . . .	245
Giovanni Battista Caracciolo . . . . .	135	Benozzo Gozzoli . . . . .	29
Caravaggio . . . . .	127	El Greco . . . . .	119
Annibale Carracci . . . . .	115	Jean Hey . . . . .	39
Mary Cassatt . . . . .	209, 213	Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres . . . . .	195, 203
Ch'hang ju' c'j . . . . .	247	Jean Jouvenet . . . . .	169
Correggio . . . . .	97, 133	Frida Kahlo . . . . .	227, 231
Piero di Cosimo . . . . .	75	Filippo Lippi . . . . .	31, 55
Lucas Cranach the Elder . . . . .	101	Bernardino Luini . . . . .	121
Lorenzo di Credi . . . . .	45	Teresa Ly . . . . .	233, 243
Salvador Dalí . . . . .	229, 235, 237, 241	Andrea Mantegna . . . . .	61



Mary Cassatt

Frida Kahlo

Berthe Morisot

Carlo Maratta . . . . .	163, 165	Nicolas Poussin . . . . .	175
Simone Martini . . . . .	15, 17	Raphael . . . . .	77, 79, 81, 87
Masaccio . . . . .	25	Rembrandt . . . . .	147
Quentin Matsys . . . . .	123	Nicholas Roerich . . . . .	223, 225
Hans Memling . . . . .	63	Dante Gabriel Rossetti . . . . .	197, 199
Lippo Memmi . . . . .	17	Peter Paul Rubens . . . . .	131, 139
Michelangelo . . . . .	73	Andrea Sacchi . . . . .	141
Paula Modersohn-Becker . . . . .	215, 217, 219	Andrea del Sarto . . . . .	91, 95
Evelyn de Morgan . . . . .	211	Luca Signorelli . . . . .	21
Berthe Morisot . . . . .	205	Juan Valdes Leal . . . . .	159
Bartolomé Estebán Murillo . . . . .	149, 151, . . . . . 153, 157, 161, 171	Giorgio Vasari . . . . .	109, 111
Alice Neel . . . . .	239	Diego Velázquez . . . . .	137
Masolino da Panicale . . . . .	25	Lorenzo Veneziano . . . . .	19
Parmigianino . . . . .	105	Paolo Veronese . . . . .	113
Antonio de Pereda . . . . .	173	Leonardo da Vinci . . . . .	35, 43, 51, 85
Perugino . . . . .	67	Simon Vouet . . . . .	143
Gian Battista Piazzetta . . . . .	191	Mikhail Vrubel . . . . .	207
Pierre-Auguste Pichon . . . . .	201	Antoine Watteau . . . . .	179
Sebastiano del Piombo . . . . .	83	Adriaen van der Werff . . . . .	177
Jacopo Pontormo . . . . .	99	Rogier van der Weyden . . . . .	27
		Francisco de Zurbarán . . . . .	145



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.

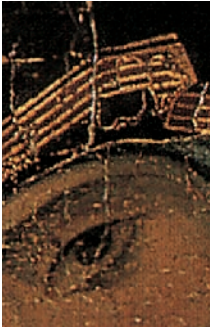
Mary with the Child Jesus  
between Constantine and Justinian

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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, XIIth 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

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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

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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

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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

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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.



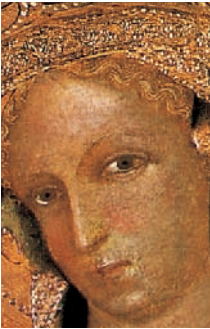
### Madonna and Child

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







This affirmation effectively neutralized the threat of a competing religion, that of the Great Goddess Isis of Egypt. During early centuries A.D. the image of Mary was frequently equated to and even confused with the image of the Egyptian goddess whose religion had been in existence for several thousand years.

### Madonna of the Misericordia

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Jacobello Albergno, c.1394  
Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence







Like the Madonna, the Goddess Isis also had a divine son, Horus, and artists often depicted her tenderly holding her precious infant on her lap and suckling him. One of her main characteristics was that of a nurturing mother. She was, like Mary, a compassionate and loving divinity, ultimately dedicated to her people's well-being.

### The Virgin and Child and Saint Anne Metterza

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Masolino da Panicale and Masaccio, 1424  
tempera on wood, 175 x 103 cm  
Uffizi, Florence







During the eighth century, the iconoclastic movement banned all sacred images located within the Byzantine empire, believing that the worshippers were venerating the actual images instead of the spiritual beings. However, this decision was permanently reversed by the following century, and the creation of icons dedicated to the Virgin Mary resumed with fervour.

### Saint Luke Painting the Virgin

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Rogier van der Weyden, c.1450  
oil on wood, 138 x 110 cm  
Alte Pinakothek, Munich