



2020 Columban Art Calendar

Art Guide

Front Cover



The Madonna del Velo; Madonna di Loreto Oil on panel, mid-16th century Copy after Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), The Holy Family

The image of the Holy Family of Jesus was held in much devotion by Italian families, particularly during the Italian Renaissance. The Madonna del Velo (the veil) depicts a centralized figure of the Virgin Mary, who lovingly extends a transparent veil toward the infant Christ Child. Jesus gleefully lifts his hands in interactive play with his mother. Nearby in the shadows, Joseph adoringly gazes upon the joyful child.

The Virgin's youthful beauty, the child's chubby well-fed body, along with the exchange of affection, work to enhance the sense of the Holy Family as ordinary, and above all, deeply human. This poignant and domestic glimpse of the Holy Family points to the emphasis on Jesus's humanity in popular devotion, an enduring legacy that emerged with the teachings of St Francis of Assisi some three centuries earlier.

This painting is an important copy of Raffaello Sanzio's much loved depiction of the Holy Family. It conveys the strong influence of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci in Florence, particularly evident in the solid figures, flowing light-reflective drapery, and soft smoky shadows. The rich palette of green, orange and turquoise brings an exoticism to this otherwise domestic scene. Yet divine light emanates from the Christ child, which in turn illuminates the mother's face and creates a luminous sheen in the fabrics. Raphael's numerous paintings of the Madonna and Child express a profound serenity and deep humanity, which epitomized the High Renaissance values of ideal beauty and harmony.

January 2020



The bloody coat of Joseph. (colour litho), Coypel, Antoine (1661-1722) (after) ©Purix Verlag Volker Christen/Bridgeman Images

The bloody coat of Joseph Oil on canvas by Coypel, Antoine (1661-1722)

Antoine Coypel was an acclaimed history painter and emerged as an important influence in developing the Baroque style in French art. The Old Testament story of Joseph inspired the imagination of European artists like Coypel, with its dramatic focus on complex emotion. This painting portrays the climax of the Biblical narrative when Joseph's splendid 'robe of many colours', which had been dipped in goat's blood, is shown to the old father Jacob, to convince him that his favourite son was dead: "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe or not." (Genesis 37:32). Instead, Joseph had been deceitfully sold into slavery by his jealous brothers who present the bloodied garment to their father, the aged patriarch Jacob. In recognizing the special cloak, Jacob slumps into his chair with limp arms, expressing his anguish on hearing the deceptive news that a wild beast had killed his favourite son.



In this dramatic visualization of the story, the physical reactions of the participants are forcefully depicted. While the patriarch Jacob, the central focus of the picture, is shown to express genuine grief, the three brothers convey varying states of pretence and doubt. The setting of the drama is intensified for the viewer by bringing the action close to foreground of the picture.

The story of Joseph inspired the imagination of European artists, not only for the adventurous exploits of the young leader, but also for the jealousies, deceptions and betrayals that mark the complex narrative of his life.

February 2020



The Finding of Moses, 1638 (oil on canvas), Poussin, Nicolas (1594-1665)/Louvre, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images

The Finding of Moses Oil on canvas, 1638 by Poussin, Nicolas (1594-1665)

Nicolas Poussin was born in France, but like many European artists of his generation, spent most of his working life in Rome. This canvas relates to the group of Old Testament subjects painted by Poussin that belongs to the category of types or pre-figurations of Christian Salvation. Thus the waters of the Nile to which the infant Moses is consigned by his mother in 'an ark of bulrushes', following Pharaoh's order to drown all the male Israelite babies (Exodus 1:2), were likened to the waters of baptism. On the rock to the left of the scene is a classically inspired river god, the personification of the Nile in Egypt. The baby in the basket resembles the Christ Child blessing the Magi or the shepherds in Bethlehem. This episode is also a portent of the Flight into Egypt, when the Holy Family escaped from Herod's massacre of the innocents. Moses is thus shown to be a prefiguration of Christ, where a child is rescued from death and through him an entire people is saved.



Poussin is also interested in the figural composition where the group of women all play a role in the drama: Pharaoh's daughter, dressed in white and gold satin robes, is commanding and compassionate as she instructs her companions to rescue the infant Moses; her maids are curious and delighted. The humbler figure, who reaches out to hold the baby Moses, may be his sister who recommended their mother to Pharaoh's daughter as a wet nurse.

March 2020



The Annunciation: Virgin Mary, 1481 (fresco), Botticelli, Sandro (Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi) (1444/5-1510)/Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Tuscany, Italy/ Tarkler/Bridgeman Images

The Annunciation: Virgin Mary (detail) Fresco, 1481 by Botticelli, Sandro (1445-1510) Uffizi gallery

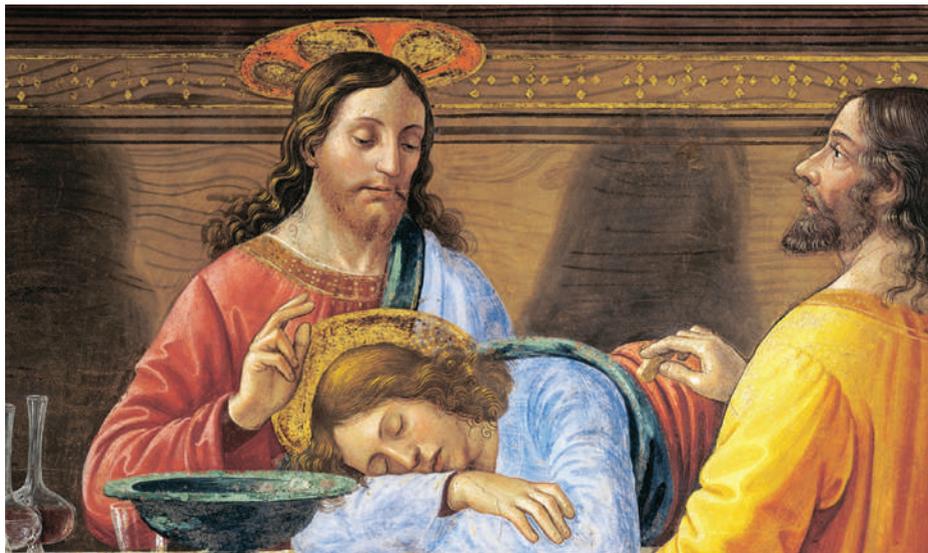
Sandro Botticelli's painting is a hallmark of the Florentine Renaissance in the fifteenth century, during the age of Medici rule under Lorenzo the Magnificent. This fresco or wall painting of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary originally hung over the entrance of San Martino della Scala, a hospital in Florence for those stricken with the plague. It was taken down in 1920 for restoration, and subsequently moved to the Uffizi gallery in Florence.

This detail of the surviving fresco depicts the Virgin in the privacy of her bedroom at Nazareth, while she kneels in prayer at her wooden prayer desk (prie dieu). It also heralds the very moment of the Incarnation when the Archangel Gabriel announced that she would conceive and become the mother of Jesus, the Jewish messiah and Son of God (Luke 1:28-35). Mary lowers her eyes and gestures her humble acceptance of and submission to the will of God, responding with the words, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38). The momentous event in Christian salvation history is observed on 25 March each year with the Feast of the Annunciation.



Botticelli conveys all the delicate beauty and elegant grace of the Virgin with a characteristically Florentine Renaissance aesthetic. Mary's red-orange hair cascades from beneath a transparent silk veil; and her red velvet dress under the blue cape, echoes the fashionable clothing for ladies of the day.

April 2020



Jesus and St John, detail from Last Supper, Italy, Florence, Refectory of Convent of San Marco, 1485, by Ghirlandaio Domenico (1449-1494), fresco/Museo di San Marco, Florence, Italy/De Agostini Picture Library/N. Grifoni/Bridgeman Images

Jesus and St John (detail from the Last Supper) Fresco, c.1480 by Ghirlandaio, Domenico (1449-1494)

This poignant image of Jesus with a sleeping St John, and the betraying Judas at table is a detail from the monumental wall painting of the Last Supper located in the refectory of San Marco in Florence, Italy. The refectory, or dining hall for monks and friars, in this case invited the gaze of the Dominican friars and their guests, when also at table.

Domenico Ghirlandaio was one of the most popular Florentine Renaissance artists of his time. The San Marco example is one of three Last Supper frescoes painted by the artist, the others being for the Badia di Passignano and for the Convent of the Ognissanti.

The layout of the supper scene presents the apostles sitting in a shallow U-shaped room, reflecting



the shape of the actual refectory in San Marco. John the Apostle is characteristically at Christ's left and has fallen asleep. Judas Iscariot, by contrast, sits apart on the near side of the table, as is common in early depictions of this biblical event. The bright yellow garment worn by Judas is a traditional symbol of cowardice and deceit. Jesus raises his right hand as he gazes down to John the beloved. Judas, on the other hand, presents an unfocused gaze and ambivalent gesture of the hand. This moment of contemplation reflects upon the words of Jesus: "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?" (Matthew 26:17-30).

May 2020



St. Philip, (oil on canvas), Batoni, Pompeo Girolamo (1708-87)/Basildon Park, Berkshire, UK/The Illife Collection/National Trust Photographic Library/John Hammond/ Bridgeman images

St Philip Oil on canvas, c.1743 by Batoni, Pompeo Girolamo (1708-87) Collection of Basildon Park, W. Berkshire UK

Pompeo Batoni was born in Lucca, Italy, the son of a distinguished goldsmith. From about 1740 Batoni had an established reputation as the leading portraitist in Rome of visitors from abroad, especially English aristocrats on the Grand Tour.

This oil painting of St Philip the apostle and martyr belongs to a group of pictures now in the Basildon Park, Berkshire Collection that comes from a set of twelve images of God the Father and the Apostles. The series was originally painted for the town palace of Count Cesare and Fra Giuseppe Merenda in Forlì, Italy, who were Batoni's most dedicated patrons.



St Philip bears a Latin cross on his right arm, his usual attribute of martyrdom. According to tradition, he used the power of the cross to banish a serpent that had become the object of cult worship in the Temple of Ares, located at classical Phrygia. The saint had ventured to south-western Anatolia to carry the Gospel to the pagan inhabitants. On being seized by the priests of that cult, Philip was crucified upside down in the ancient town of Hierapolis. Philip intently gazes toward heaven from which divine light emanates to illuminate his face. His verdant green robe is a further symbol of his triumph of life over death. Philip was a fisherman, thus the rope, apart from its reference to the nature of his martyrdom, also recalls his trade when Christ called him to discipleship.

June 2020



Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery, (oil on panel), Cranach, Lucas the Younger (1515-86)/State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia/Bridgeman Images

Christ and the Woman taken in Adultery (Oil on copper transferred from wood after 1532) by Cranach, Lucas the Younger (1515-86)

This painting, now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, explores the significance of the Gospel episode from John 7:53-8:11, in the light of the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe during the 16th century. The artist Lucas Cranach the Younger was born in Wittenberg, Germany in 1515, where the Reformation had began in the same year. His father, the acclaimed painter Lucas Cranach the Elder, was a friend of Martin Luther and became known as a leading producer of Protestant artistic propaganda.

Cranach the Younger's interpretation of Jesus' encounter with an adulteress draws the viewer's



attention to the moral issues of law and punishment. The Protestant concept of Law and Gospel emphasizes salvation through the forgiveness of sins, in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The viewer is thus presented with the moment of moral decision when the adulterous woman is brought before Pharisees and scribes, who asserted that the law of Moses required that she be stoned. In addition, Roman law stated that capital punishment was a Roman privilege. Crowded around Jesus with hands raised in debate are the bearded Jewish elders alongside the governing Roman soldiers dressed in chainmail, the one to the left of the picture being already poised to cast the stone. Jesus is thus presented as the final and ultimate adjudicator, pointing with authority to the woman as he utters the words, "he that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone at her" (John 8:1).

July 2020



Daniel in the Lions' Den, 1872 (oil on canvas), Riviere, Briton (1840-1920)/Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool/Bridgeman Images

Daniel in the Lion's Den Oil on canvas, 1872 by Riviere, Briton (1840-1920)

The British artist Briton Rivière exhibited a variety of paintings at the Royal Academy, where he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1878. However Rivière devoted much of his later life to the painting of animals and is particularly acclaimed for his depiction of the Jewish prophet

Daniel in a den of lions. In an article for Chums Boys Annual, Rivière wrote: "I paint from dead animals as well as from live ones. I have had the body of a fine lioness in my studio ... I have done a great deal of work in the dissecting rooms at the Zoological Gardens from time to time."



Rivière's oil painting draws on chapter six of the Book of Daniel, recalling the moment when Daniel was confronted with a pack of hungry lions, yet was saved by an angel of the Hebrew God who closed the lions' jaws. Daniel had been raised to high office at the royal court under Darius, mentioned in the Book of Daniel as the king of Babylon. The theme of the story relates to the jealousy of non-Jews towards successful Jews, and an imperial edict that required the Jews to compromise their religion. It concludes with divine deliverance, along with the king's acclamation of the greatness of the Hebrew God. From the early Christian period, the survival of Daniel in the den of lions was interpreted as a portent of the resurrection of the soul.

August 2020



Jesus with the Doctors, from a series of Scenes of the New Testament (fresco), Barna da Siena (fl.1350-55)/Collegiata di Santa Maria Assunta, San Gimignano, Italy/ Bridgeman Images

Jesus with the Doctors Fresco, c.1340 by Lippo Memmi (c.1291 – 1356)

This scene is part of an extensive New Testament cycle of frescoes lining the right aisle of the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria Assunta in San Gimignano, central Italy. The church is acclaimed for its fresco cycles and is described by UNESCO as “works of outstanding beauty”.

The episode meditates on the Gospel passage from Luke 2:39-52, as the singular account of Jesus’ childhood years: ‘Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. . . . When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished.’



This fresco scene by Lippo Memmi captures the moment of concern and exchange: “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them.’

September 2020



The Holy Family with St. Elizabeth, St. John the Baptist and Three Noblewomen, c.1557 (vellum), Clovio, Giorgio Giulio (1498-1578) Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris, France/Bridgeman Images

The Holy Family with St Elizabeth, St John the Baptist and Three Noblewomen Illumination on vellum, c.1557 by Clovio, Giorgio Giulio (1498-1578)

Giorgio Giulio Clovio was an illuminator, miniaturist, painter and priest born in the Kingdom of Croatia, and is considered by Giorgio Vasari as one of the greatest illuminators of the Italian High Renaissance. The word 'illumination' refers to a painting in a devotional manuscript that usually accompanies hand-written text, and which has been painted on parchment (vellum is calf-skin), as the traditional support for an illuminated manuscript. Paint was made by combining coloured pigments ground to powder form, with gum Arabic as the binder to make paint. Clovio renders the drapery of the figures in soft harmonizing pastels of orange, blue, green and pink, utilizing the popular medieval pigments of vermillion and azurite blue.



This subject traditionally illustrated the prayers or chants in honour of the Holy Family, and was created under the patronage of cardinal Alessandro Farnese of Rome. Clovio portrays the closely-knit group of holy figures within a domestic setting, and a window reveals an outdoor view of an Italian Renaissance cityscape with hills in the distance. The Virgin Mary interacts with her cousin Elizabeth, who is depicted with the weathered face of age. Saint John and his cousin Jesus huddle in an affectionate embrace, and are shown as the mirror-image of each other. The intimacy of the extended holy family of Jesus is further enhanced by their tight grouping in the foreground, in contrast to the female noblewomen and servant who hover behind them as disparate figures who avert their gaze.

October 2020



The Marriage of the Virgin, 1500-04 (oil on panel), Perugino, Pietro (c.1445-1523)/Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen, France/Bridgeman Images

The Marriage of the Virgin (detail) Oil on panel, c.1500 by Perugino, Pietro (c.1445-1523)

This large altarpiece was originally assigned to the cathedral of San Lorenzo in Perugia, Italy, and displayed alongside the holy relic of the Virgin Mary's "sacred ring". Initially commissioned to Pinturicchio, the Italian High Renaissance master Pietro Perugino took over the work to its completion. Later, in 1797, the picture was looted by Napoleon and is now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Caen, France.

The story of the espousal and wedding of the Virgin Mary to St Joseph is not mentioned in the canonical Gospels but is covered in several apocryphal sources, with later redactions in the 13th century Golden Legend. This detail of the painting focuses on the moment of espousal between the Virgin and St Joseph, when the high priest of the Jewish temple offers Mary's



hand to receive the wedding ring from Joseph. Borne above Joseph's head is a flowering rod, which according to the Golden Legend, was the sign that revealed Joseph to be the divinely chosen spouse of Mary.



The painting evokes the setting of an ideal Italian Renaissance piazza, with an imposing octagonal building in the background, referring both to the Jewish temple and the ideals of classical harmony and proportion. By contrast, the wedding party is grouped together close to the viewer, with animated expressions of reaction and exchange. To enhance the sense of identification with 16th century viewers, the Virgin's attendants at the ceremony are conceived as fashionable ladies of Perugino's day.

November 2020



The Return of the Prodigal Son. 1823 (oil on canvas), Stapleaux, M. S. (1799-1881) and David, J. L. (1748-1825) Private Collection/Photo ©Bonhams, London, UK/ Bridgeman Images.

The Return of the Prodigal Son Oil on canvas, 1823 by Stapleaux, M. S. (1799-1881) and David, J. L (1748-1825)

Michel Guislain Stapleaux was a pupil of the acclaimed French painter Jacques-Louis David. The Return of the Prodigal Son conveys the legacy of David as a pre-eminent artist in the Neo-classical style, with its noble simplicity, heightened expression of feeling, and belief that art should express ideal virtues that could transform society.

The painting captures a poignant moment in the Gospel of Luke 15:30-32 when the wayward son, returning home after wasting his inheritance, kneels before his father in repentance. He begs for forgiveness and a renewed place in the family, as the father receives him with a gesture of unconditional love. Covering to the right behind a stone fountain is the older brother, who in the parable, objects to the father's compassion for the sinful son: "Behold, these

many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed a commandment of yours, but you never gave me a goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this, your son, came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him." To cement the moral of the parable the father replied, "But it was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found".



The painted landscape includes naturalistic details such as the decayed wooden fence on the outskirts of the prosperous stone farmhouse, reiterating the parable's notions of decadence and neglect, juxtaposed with the hope of restitution and personal renewal.

December 2020



The Nativity, (tempera and oil on panel) (post cleaning), Ghirlandaio, Domenico (Domenico Bigordi) (1449-94)/Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. UK/ Bridgeman Images

The Nativity (detail)

Tempera on panel, c.1492 by Ghirlandaio, Domenico (1449-94)

The subject of the Adoration of Christ is based on an episode following the Nativity, when Mary kneels in silent prayer over her newborn son. Joseph, shown balding and with a curly white beard, sits upon the ground behind the Christ Child. The ox and ass observe the baby from their derelict shelter in reference to the prophecy of Isaiah 1:3 'The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.' Also recalled are the humble beginnings of the Redeemer's birth in an animal's stable near Bethlehem: Mary '... placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available ...' (Luke 2.8). By contrast, the Florentine artist Domenico Ghirlandaio has represented the background as a verdant landscape with lakes, hills and villages reminiscent of his native land of Tuscany. Emerging from the distant path and painted in miniscule detail, is the entourage of the Three Magi journeying from the East.



Ghirlandaio's painting emphasises the sheer humanity of the holy family, with their adoring gazes and expressions of wonder at the birth of Christ. The artist also seeks to convey an idea of perfect beauty in the mother's child-like face. Divine light emanates from the sleeping child, illuminating Mary and Joseph as they gaze upon the God in their midst. Dressed in fashionable velvet cloth trimmed with gold-thread embroidery, the young mother also represents the ideal of womanhood and motherhood for the contemporary female viewers of the day.

The 2020 Columban Art Calendar - Art Guide has been compiled by Dr Ursula Betka, Art Historian, Teacher and Iconographer.

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