

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

Student Handout

presenter: Leah R. Clark

Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*, c. 1500, National Gallery, London

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-giovanni-bellini-madonna-meadow-c-1500-national-gallery-london>

What function did devotional images serve in the Renaissance?

In this short film, Leah Clark explains the role of devotional images in the Renaissance by exploring a well-known work by Giovanni Bellini. By looking closely at the painting, Leah discusses how the work can shed light on the cultural approaches to images in the Renaissance. Rather than a religious painting depicting a narrative or story from the Bible, this work functioned as a contemplative piece. Such images were used for devotion, but they were also integral to everyday life. The Madonna and Child became the most ubiquitous religious imagery in the Renaissance. Found in the home, such images would form the backdrop to the everyday activities of the family; mothers and expectant mothers could look on the Virgin as a model of piety, a good wife and mother, while children would look to Jesus as an example of good behaviour.

Before watching the film

1. What do you know about devotional images? How would you define secular vs religious space?
2. What do you think this work depicts or represents? Describe what you see on the screen. (you might think of things like scale, how a viewer might interact with the object, or even use it) Can you identify any recognisable elements (plants, humans, animals, landscape features, architectural details, forms)?
3. Where do you think this work would have been viewed originally?

4. What function do you think this work might have served?

After watching the film

1. What effects do you think the artist was trying to achieve in this work?
2. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the work? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements
3. Does it have a recognisable purpose or function? Does this relate to the time period in which it was made?
4. How has this film helped your understanding of devotional images?
5. What is its relevance for today?

Online Activity

1. Search the image/collection of database of a museum to look for other images of the Madonna and Child and see how the format and rendering of the composition and relationship between Jesus and Mary has changed over time.
2. Watch some of the films from the Madonnas and Miracles exhibition at the Fitzwilliam and take down notes on the different types of objects associated with devotion in the home:
<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/madonnasandmiracles>
Or consider how an exhibition sets out to support a particular argument through the examples of works of art the curators choose.
3. Read the catalogue entry on the suggested work for comparison at the National Gallery by Duccio to discuss the technical evaluations of the painting:

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/national-gallery-catalogues/duccio-di-buoninsegna-the-virgin-and-child-with-saint-dominic-and-saint-aurea-and-patriarchs-and-prophets>

Resources online

On Renaissance devotional paintings:

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/units/unit-1/>

For an OpenLearn course (free and open access) at the Open University with a section of Bellini's devotional images:

<http://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/visual-art/art-renaissance-venice/content-section-0>

Art and religion at the National Gallery in London (link to a variety of resources):

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/art-and-religion>

The Domestic Devotions project at Cambridge: <http://domesticdevotions.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

Renaissance Resources online

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the National Gallery in Washington, DC

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/r/renaissance/> : This is a comprehensive site on a number of different issues related to the Renaissance provided by the Victoria and Albert Museum

Bibliography

Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion, edited by Ronda Kasl and Keith Christiansen, Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2004

Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World, edited by Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin, Intersections (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming)

Maya Corry, Deborah Howard, Mary Laven eds, *Madonnas & Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: Philip Wilson Press, February 2017)

Bibliography at the Domestic Devotions site, with an open access article:

http://domesticdevotions.lib.cam.ac.uk/?page_id=846

Comparative analysis

Compare this image with an earlier *Madonna and Child* by Duccio in the National Gallery:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/duccio-the-virgin-and-child-with-saints-dominic-and-aurea>

For a catalogue entry as a downloadable pdf see:

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/national-gallery-catalogues/duccio-di-buoninsegna-the-virgin-and-child-with-saint-dominic-and-saint-aurea-and-patriarchs-and-prophets>

You might also consider comparing this with another religious image discussed in the Open Arts Objects films such as Mantegna's *Adoration of the Magi*, the Este Diptych or a Byzantine icon.

Works of art	Giovanni Bellini, <i>Madonna of the Meadow</i>, c. 1500, National Gallery, London	Duccio di Buonisegna, <i>The Virgin and Child with Saint Dominic and Saint Aurea</i>, and <i>Patriarchs and Prophets</i>, about 1312–15(?), NG, London
date		
What is it?		
Material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location in the Renaissance		
How are the figures depicted?		
Composition		
Condition		
Function		