

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

Student handout

presenter: Leah R. Clark

work: Andrea Mantegna, *Adoration of the Magi*, c. 1495-1505, 48.6 x 65.6 cm, distemper on linen, The Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Was the Renaissance global? In this short film, Dr Leah Clark discusses a Renaissance painting by the Italian court artist Andrea Mantegna, which depicts the *Adoration of the Magi*. Mantegna provides us with one of the first representations of Chinese porcelain in a Western painting, underlining the global dimension to the work and its context. Dr Clark provides a close visual analysis of Mantegna's painterly and compositional techniques, largely drawn from antique sculpture, but she also explains how the painting would have functioned on a number of levels: as a devotional work in a Christian context; as a showcase for the collections of the rulers of Mantua, Italy; and as a reflection of the global reach of diplomacy and trade in the Renaissance.

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/resource/open-arts-object-mantegna-adoration-magi-c-1495-1505-getty-museum-la>

You can find a high resolution image for download here:

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/781/andrea-mantegna-adoration-of-the-magi-italian-about-1495-1505/>

Before watching the film

1. What do you know of the Renaissance as a time period?
2. What do you think the painting depicts? Can you identify any recognisable elements?
3. In what location do you think the painting is taking place? Why?
4. Can you identify what the three people on the right are holding?

After watching the film

1. What effects (aesthetic, social, political etc) do you think the artist and patron were trying to achieve in this work?
2. Has the film helped you define some of the formal elements of the painting? Consider scale, subject matter, medium, and other formal elements.
3. Does the painting 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 the global dimension of the Renaissance? How has the film helped your understanding of the Renaissance as a period? How and why? How has it helped you identify formal elements of a painting? Can you identify elements of what makes this work a Renaissance painting?
5. What is its relevance for today? What might the differences be between a Renaissance interconnected world and today's global world?
6. What skills have you learned or refined by looking closely at this painting? What might the differences be between a Renaissance interconnected world and today's global world?

Comparative analysis

Fill out the table below, considering the following elements: date, subject matter, material, location, function, formal qualities. Use the empty boxes to comment on any other formal qualities or aspects of the works you would like to note.

At the top of the middle column, write down the information related to the painting, and on the left column, the information related to the painting being compared, such as artist, title, date, location. You might compare Mategna's *Adoration with the Magi* with a painting by a Florentine C15 artist, Gentile da Fabriano, of the same subject, the Strozzi Altarpiece, 1423, tempera on wood, 300 x 282 cm, Uffizi, Florence, <https://smarthistory.org/gentile-da-fabriano-adoration-of-the-magi/>

Works of art		
date		
What is it?		
material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location in the Renaissance		
How are the figures depicted?		
Composition		
Condition		
Function		

Online Activity

1. One of the earliest representations of Chinese porcelain in a Western painting is Giovanni Bellini's *Feast of the Gods*, which was owned by the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso d'Este (Isabella d'Este's brother). The painting depicts a complex mythological subject matter (taken from a classical text).

View the painting online on the National Gallery, Washington DC's website:

<https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.1138.html> Zoom in and look closely at the porcelain bowls—there are three, one on the ground just right of the centre of the painting, which holds fruit, and two held by individuals at the centre of the painting. Were you able to see the fine details of the blue and white designs painted on the bowls?

2. The objects that the Magi hold in Mantegna's painting and those depicted in Bellini's *Feast of the Gods* were highly prized collectables in the Renaissance, reflecting an interest in 'Eastern' objects—Chinese porcelain as well as Islamic ceramics that mimicked Chinese porcelain. Try to find similar objects in a museum's collection today. The British Museum's website is a useful resource (go to [Collections Research](#)). Conduct a search for 'Ming China porcelain cup' or 'Ming China porcelain bowl' for example and compare the types of existing objects with the ones depicted in the paintings. Are there similarities in the designs? What about shapes? Can you find one that matches those that are depicted in the paintings?

Further Information:

You can view works by Andrea Mantegna in collections in the UK at the following institutions:

-The National Gallery in London and you can read more about him on the National Gallery website:

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/andrea-mantegna>

-*The Triumphs of Caesar* at Hampton Court

<https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/explore/mantegna-gallery/#gs.DgJz8B0>

You can find out more about some of Mantegna's other paintings here:

<https://smarthistory.org/andrea-mantegna-dead-christ/>

The Ming China exhibition at the British Museum:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/exhibitions/ming.aspx

One of the curators of the Ming China exhibition discusses the painting in relation to the exhibition at the British museum (note she incorrectly states it's an oil painting)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzM87-f80i8>

On Isabella d'Este's collecting practices (at the court of Mantua):

<http://italianrenaissanceresources.com/units/unit-8/essays/isabella-deste-collects/>

http://womenshistory.about.com/od/medievalitalianwomen/a/isabella_d_este.htm

on the court artist:

http://employees.oneonta.edu/farberas/arth/arth200/artist/court_artist.html

On Chinese porcelain between East and West:

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/ewpor/hd_ewpor.htm

On global influences in the Renaissance:

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-renaissance-influences-from-beyond-europe/>

on Renaissance devotional paintings:

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

For an OpenLearn course (free and open access) at the Open University on Venice's relationship with the East:

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

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

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