



## STORY IN PAINTINGS: ADORATION

In the 1400's, most people could not read the Bible because it was printed in Latin, a language only a few monks and clerics could read. In order to tell the story of Christianity, priests decorated the churches with large pictures of scenes from the Bible.

One popular scene was from Luke, after the angels appeared to the shepherds and proclaimed the Good News of the birth of a Savior. Luke 2:16 then tells of the shepherds who traveled to Bethlehem to adore the new-born Christ child.

**“And the shepherds went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.”** This scene of the shepherds gathered in the stable to worship their new-born King is called “The Adoration of the Shepherds.” In olden times, each church had a painting which showed an artist’s version of how this humble gathering in a Bethlehem stable might have looked.

This exhibit displays reproductions of some of the famous paintings of “The Adoration of the Shepherds.” While these replicas are nearly actual size, the colors and sharpness of the real images cannot be accurately duplicated.

The actual paintings are now in art museums or cathedrals in England, France, Italy, the U.S., and Spain; but we hope that these life-sized pictures will give you an idea of how art was used long ago to tell the story of Christmas.

You should pay particular attention to how paintings looked before and after the Italian artist Caravaggio, who painted from 1595 to 1609. He revolutionized artistic techniques in at least three ways:

### § Use of light and shadows

Before Caravaggio, most scenes were lighted evenly without many shadows or bright spots. Caravaggio used shadows and highlights to add drama, tension, and excitement to his paintings.

### § Use of everyday people for models

Before Caravaggio, most people were painted with perfect and unflawed appearances. Caravaggio painted his people realistically with dirty feet, knarled hands, warts, and all.

### § Smooth depth transitions

Before Caravaggio, most scenes were painted with large images in a flat, close foreground and small images in a remote, faraway background. Occasionally, some middle-distance objects might be shown. Caravaggio painted his objects in true depths that blended smoothly away as the distances increased.

As you study the paintings in this exhibit, take note of these features on the paintings done before 1609 and how they changed after 1609 when Caravaggio forever changed the world of art.

*This exhibit is brought to you by Coastal Habitat Conservancy, LLC in the hope that it may help spread Christmas cheer and a little art history knowledge to you and your loved ones.  
Baker Mitchell, Owner.*

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## Sandro Botticelli, Italian, 1445-1510

Original name: ALESSANDRO DI MARIANO FILIPEPI Florentine early Renaissance painter whose *Birth of Venus* (c. 1485) and *Primavera* (1477-78) are often said to epitomize the spirit of the Renaissance. His religious paintings included work for all the major churches of Florence and for the Sistine Chapel in Rome.

Although he was one of the most original painters of the Italian Renaissance, Botticelli was little-known for centuries after his death. His work was rediscovered late in the 19th century by a group of artists in England known as the Pre-Raphaelites.

Botticelli was first apprenticed to a goldsmith. Later he was a pupil of the painter Fra Filippo Lippi. He spent all his life in Florence except for a visit to Rome in 1481-82. There he painted wall frescoes in the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican.

In Florence, Botticelli was supported by several members of the powerful Medici family. He painted portraits of the family and many religious pictures. Although this example is his *The Adoration of the Magi* from the Book of Mark instead of Luke's adoration of the shepherds, he is too important an artist to not be represented in this exhibition.



Botticelli 1475



Di Lorenzo 1490

## Fiorenzo Di Lorenzo, Italian, 1445-1522

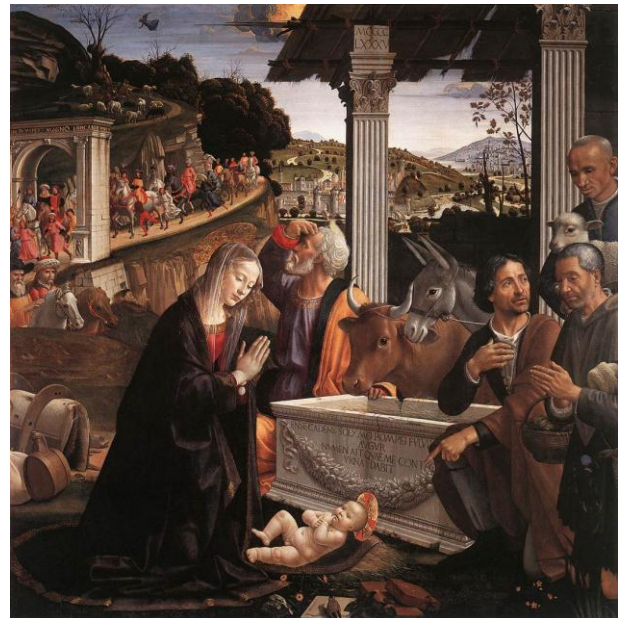
The life of this Italian painter is not well known and some of the paintings claimed to be by him may be by other artists. However, it is known that in the area of his home, he was very well regarded and he influenced many younger artists during the period from 1470 to 1490. There is probably no other Italian master of importance whose life and work so little is known. In fact the whole edifice that modern scientific criticism has built around his name is based on a single signed and dated picture (1487) in the Pinacoteca (Pin-AH-co-teca) of Perugia (Art gallery of Perugia, Italy).

This painting is a fresco painting, which means it was painted directly to plaster on the wall of the Pinacoteca where it is still preserved today. In this adoration scene, the donkey and the oxen on the right are referred to in the Book of Job.

## Domenico Ghirlandaio, Italian, 1449-1494

This version of Adoration of the Shepherds was so successful that other artists frequently copied from it. Ghirlandaio paints himself in the scene, dressed as a shepherd. He is even allowed to come closer to the Christ Child than the magi, who appear in frescoes to the right and left, praying outside the confines of the stable. The artist, who is leading the shepherds, is kneeling and bringing the miracle of the birth of Christ to the attention of both the shepherds and the observers of the picture. His left hand, with which he is pointing to the Christ Child, is finely drawn and is superbly modeled in three dimensions. With his right hand, his painting hand, he is pointing to his chest. As Ghirlandaio is pointing both at the child and the garlands on the Roman marble sarcophagus, it is possible that the gesture is saying: "This holy child was painted for you by me, the garland-maker Ghirlandaio."

An historic event that took place a few years before this work was painted clearly left its mark on Ghirlandaio. An altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes from the Flemish region of Belgium reached Florence in May 1483. Florentine artists saw van der Goes' Adoration of the Shepherds as a shining comet showing new ways of painting. In Ghirlandaio's painting, the shepherds pushing their way into the picture from the right, with their harsh, life-like features, are drawn directly from van der Goes' Flemish model. Ghirlandaio's landscape in the background also displays features from an area north of the Alps where Belgium is located. This painting is an excellent example of how artistic influences can travel over distance as well as over time.



Ghirlandaio 1482

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## Caravaggio, Italian, 1573-1610

*“Who gave the wild donkey his freedom and untied the rope from his proud neck?  
Is the wild ox willing to serve you or spend a night beside your manger?” Book of Job*

One of the most revolutionary artists of all time, the Italian painter Caravaggio abandoned the rules that had guided a century of artists before him. Rather than idealizing the human and religious experience as had his predecessors, Caravaggio selected his models from the streets of Italy and painted them in a fresh, direct, natural and realistic manner.

He was born Michelangelo Merisi on Sept. 28, 1573, in Caravaggio, Italy. As an adult he would become known by the name of his birthplace. Orphaned at age 11, he was apprenticed to a painter in Milan for four years.

About 1595 (when he was 22) he began to sell his paintings through a dealer. The dealer brought Caravaggio to the attention of an important cardinal. Through the cardinal's patronage, Caravaggio's realistic naturalism first fully appeared in three scenes he created of the life of St. Matthew. The works caused public outcry, however, because of their realistic and dramatic nature.

In his “Adoration” a donkey and an ox stand patiently in the wooden barn, fulfilling the verses from JOB. Common items are strewn throughout the scene: straw on the floor, a loaf of bread in a basket, Joseph's carpenter tools, and pieces of cloth. Joseph (in red) introduces the shepherds, in brown and grey, to the young Virgin Mother. Mary cuddles her baby peacefully. Apart from two haloes, only the bare-shouldered man kneeling with hands clasped gives the moment of the child's discovery a hint of its greater meaning. God became man as one of the poor.



Caravaggio 1609

# STORY IN PAINTINGS: ADORATION



El Greco 1619

## El Greco "The Greek," Spanish, 1541-1614

El Greco was born in Greece, and, after studying in Venice under the famous painter Titian, he settled in Toledo, Spain in 1577. He was wildly popular, his emotionally religious paintings being just the ticket for the hometown of the Spanish Inquisition. After his death, his work was largely ignored until the 20th century. Today he is considered one of the geniuses of Western art. His distinctive style highlights bold shapes and colors, with elongated and slightly distorted figures.

El Greco's *Adoration of the Shepherds* is an intensely personal picture, painted towards the end of the artist's life and meant to be placed above an altar next to his tomb. It is a night scene, with the Virgin Mary, St Joseph and three Shepherds gathered around a circle of light radiating from the Christ Child. A chorus of angels and cherubim form a gothic arch above them, their reverent gestures echoing the awe-struck devotion of the humans below.

Light radiates from the Child and the dazzling white cloth on which He lies, illuminating the figures of Mary and the amazed shepherds. From the very outset of his career El Greco had been interested in the problem of light: When he painted *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, light was no longer used for its own sake but as a means to convey an idea. In this painting the theme of Christ as "The Light of the World" is now perfectly expressed.

El Greco depicts himself in the painting as the elderly shepherd kneeling before the Holy Family, humbly asking for Mary's help with God to have mercy on his soul.

In contrast with his earlier interpretations of the same subject, El Greco forgoes any attempt to achieve balanced proportions, harmonious coloring and comprehensible space, transforming the scene into a transcendent and spiritual experience depicted in bright and contrasting colors.

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## Diego Velasquez, Spanish, 1599-1660

Spain's greatest painter, Velasquez, is one of the supreme artists of all time. A master of technique, highly original in style, he may have had a greater influence on European art than any other painter.

As a young man, he became familiar with the work of Caravaggio, and he learned the power of using a very limited range of colors, as is clear in many of his portraits, composed of subtle harmonies of grays and blacks.

Velasquez lived in Madrid as court painter to King Philip IV. His paintings include landscapes, mythological and religious subjects, and scenes from common life. Because of his great skill in merging color, light, space, line, and mass in such a way that all have equal value, he was known as "the painter's painter."

In *Adoration of the Magi*, the artist used his own family in as models: the young king is a self-portrait of the artist, the kneeling king behind him is his teacher and father-in-law Pacheco, and Mary is Pacheco's daughter and Velázquez' wife, Juana.



Velasquez 1620



Lebrun 1690

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## Lebrun, Charles, French, 1619-1690

Lebrun was the leading artist of King Louis XIV's reign. After training with Vouet he went to Rome in 1642 and worked under Poussin, becoming a convert to the latter's theories of art.

When he returned to Paris in 1646 he became one of the King's artists. In 1662 he was elevated to the French nobility and named *Premier Artist for the King*. In 1663 he was made Director of the Royal Art Academy. His lectures provided the official standard for artistic expression and gave authority to the idea that artistic creation can be reduced to teachable rules and principles. His small illustrated book, *Methods for Capturing the Emotions in Art*, again emphasizing the rules of visual expression, was posthumously published 1698.

Lebrun's own talents lay otherwise in the direction of flamboyant and grandiose decorative effects. This tendency is abundantly clear in his *Adoration of the Shepherds*. His portrayal offers a sweeping drama with extravagant and grandeur images of what was, in real terms, a simple stable scene