

The Madonnas of Modern Art



As far back as history goes the theme of mother and child appealed to the human heart as nothing else has ever done. In ancient Greek art the mother of all the living was represented with a shining nimbus about her head. The holy child is prominent in Egyptian mythology.

The word madonna is Italian, meaning "my lady." The madonna appears early in the symbolism of the primitive Christian church. The first representation of her is in the Byzantine paintings, at first without an infant, alone, with arms extended, praying. The image of the virgin mother of the first centuries of Christianity was merely a crude, flat painting upon wood, gold upon a dark background, and that was all there was of her, no idealism to beautify her and appeal to the imagination. She was merely an icon.

In the year 431 the Christian church council at Ephesus proclaimed the Virgin Mary officially the Mother of God, she holding her child

in her arms, should be enthroned and employed in church symbolism. From that time religious legend and art began to cluster around the holy mother and infant, the ideals ever increasing in beauty and sanctity till the pictured representation of the mother and the child reached its culmination in the Dresden gallery. Its ideal is not Mary, mother of the Christ child, but Mary, the queen of heaven, corresponding more nearly to the ancient conception of the mother of all the living as an object of adoration.

Of the world's most famous madonna pictures there are eleven, painted by nine great artists. These are in the order of time in which their great madonnas were finished, Bellini, Perugino, Titian, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Correggio, Hans Holbein, Rubens and Murillo. Six of these inspired artists were Italians. Bellini was German, most celebrated of

Flemish painters. Murillo was Spanish. It is notable that the nimbus which surrounds the head of the virgin during the Byzantine period and for a thousand years afterward is omitted from about the heads of both mother and child in Raphael's great painting. Murillo painted many pictures of the Virgin Mary, the subject of four of them being the immaculate conception. Of these four the most noted is that in the Louvre, Paris. It is second in fame and favor only to Raphael's Sistine Madonna. Engravings and photographs of it are numerous even in our land where apparently art is so little cared for. It shows the virgin of the world in the heavens, her foot resting upon the crescent moon. She is surrounded by radiant child angels of indescribable beauty. In her uplifted face is really the look of one who has caught glimpses of things supernal and not to be told.

A remarkable fact in connection with the depicting of madonnas is that all but one of the great pictures of the virgin mother were painted within one

century. The period began with Bellini's work the middle of the fifteenth century. By the middle of the sixteenth had been finished all the world's great madonna paintings except that of Murillo.

The death of Murillo occurred in 1682, and with him apparently passed the great madonna period in art. No modern attempts to depict the virgin mother and holy child have come anywhere near the achievements of the middle age masters, who devoted themselves mostly to religious art. Not many modern artists have tried to exploit this great theme. Perhaps the noblest modern madonna is that of Bouguereau, the French artist, painted about a generation ago. It is a large picture, called "Our Lady of the Angels." It represents the holy mother holding the child in her arms, his back toward her, his arms extended outward at the sides, so as to form a cross. Child angels are grouped around the feet of the mother. Both Mary and the child have around their heads the ancient conventional halo—broad,

round and heavy. The Bouguereau painting is in this country, having been purchased by Charles T. Brush of Cleveland.

Several others of the best known madonna pictures by nineteenth century artists are photographed on this page. A famous one is the "Madonna of the Grotto," by Carl Muller. The mother sits upon the ground, the child upon her knees, his face toward her, his lips close to hers. Mother and child are gazing into each other's eyes. This picture is quite modern, no nimbus around the heads, with ferns growing about the spot where the mother sits. This is a picture which appeals powerfully to the woman with the mother heart. There is far more of the tender mother in it than of the ascetic.

Some of the modern artists give their madonna mothers the faces of nuns on a low diet. None of the old masters did that. They knew better. Only the modern painter depicts the holy mother and child as consumptive looking and suffering from a wasting away of vital force. Certainly physical weakness and

disease are not naturally associated with the childhood of one who came more abundantly. There is nothing suggestive of holiness or spiritual uplift in mere physical decay.

A striking example of the consumptive modern madonna ideal is seen in the picture by an Italian artist, Barabino. Here the mother appears almost corpse-like. Her head is swathed like that of an Arab woman of the present day. A large ring about her head represents the traditional halo of light.

The "Madonna of Deliverance," by Hilbert, shows the face of a young modern Italian woman. The holy child sits upon her knees. Both mother and child are very beautiful, except for the heavy nimbus, which looks like a huge, starched circular ruff about the mother's head.

One more modern madonna is a German holy mother and child, by Grosse. Here the mother has a serious face, but the whole picture suggests entirely healthy, sweet, wholesome motherhood and babyhood. The lusty, plump,

strong limbed infant reaches for a white rose from a bush growing near, while the mother bends toward him the branch bearing the rose. The Grosse Christ child is more of a sweet human baby than any of the other modern artists have painted.

One rather curious fact in connection with paintings and sculptures of the Christ infant is that he is almost invariably represented with curling hair. One wonders why. Are children with curly hair more beautiful than others?

A few years ago Joseph Gray Kitchell, the artist of Indianapolis made the photograph of a composite madonna. There are some 300 famous madonna pictures. Securing photographs of all these, Mr. Kitchell undertook the task of combining them and from them producing the world's typical holy mother. The result was profoundly interesting. A draped head was produced, with a face full of noble beauty, wide eyed, large browed, rather full, but softly rounded, the radiant, loving countenance of the ideal mother of the race. LILLIAN GRAY.

AMERICA HAS A CHANCE TO MAKE CHINA'S BOOTS.

It seems capable of demonstration that an enormous market will eventually be developed for what may be termed army boots. These boots are cut on the same pattern as those for ordinary wear, but are made mostly of leather. The soles consist of two pieces of thin leather with a third piece inserted at the heel to give a spring while

walking. Above this is a layer of rag or paper, and cotton cloth is placed next to the foot. Smooth, well-tanned leather, presumably imported, is used and, like all other footwear worn by the natives of China, these boots are handmade. The retail price is \$3.50 (Mexican) a pair, but a reduction is made when wholesale orders are placed.

In recent army maneuvers near Tientsin it was estimated that there were 8,000 Chinese troops in the field. This was regarded as the nucleus of a standing army which the empire purposes to maintain in the future. The size

of this army it is obviously impossible even approximately to estimate, but it may be safely assumed that it will be sufficiently large to make a calculation as to the minimum number of pairs of boots that will be required and the amount that will be expended thereon annually both interesting and instructive to American manufacturers.

The importance of an immediate investigation of this market by an expert cannot be too strongly emphasized. If his knowledge of the cost of production, transportation, handling and incidental expenses convinces him that

boots and shoes, similar in all respects to those now used in China, could be laid down there at a price comparing favorably with that now paid, no time should be lost in introducing them.

It may be set down as an incontrovertible fact that in the opening up of a market in China for new goods of whatever description of foreign manufacture the first "chop" or trademark in the field meeting the tastes, the requirements, the whims, the prejudices and the purchasing power of the natives will become so firmly established and so popular that subsequent

attempts to dislodge it by competing nations will be a long, tedious and in all probability an unsuccessful task.

The feasibility of the introduction of American-made boots and shoes of Chinese patterns for Chinese wear was freely admitted by the business men of the empire, irrespective of nationality, and they found it difficult to comprehend why experts had not already made a more thorough investigation of the conditions with a view to taking advantage of this enormous and constantly expanding market.

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