The virgin's peculiar breast: Negotiating nudity in devotional painting

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The Virgin's Peculiar Breast: Negotiating Nudity in Devotional Paintings

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Abstract

According to hermeneutics scholar Margaret Miles, during Tuscany's early Renaissance nudity in devotional art produced a tension between sexual (erotic) attraction and religious meaning. Specifically, glimpses of the Holy Mother's exposed breast as she nursed the Christ child could encourage the 'wrong' kind of looking; this disrupted the sacred status of her image and destabilized religious meaning. To manage potential erotic readings while attempting to foster 'proper' (devotional) gazes, painters made specific artistic choices when representing the Virgin's bare breast. Obliging artists turned to the art of an earlier era – art that emphasized the symbolic rather than the naturalistic. This paper argues that employing a pictorial program and style that consciously represented the breast as denaturalized and disembodied transformed it to a symbol which relieved the tension between religious meaning and voyeuristic looking while still communicating religious message(s).

When the Sienese artist Paolo di Giovanni Fei painted his *Madonna and Child* in the 1370s [Fig. 1], he generally followed the standard pictorial conventions of other nursing Madonna, or *Madonna lactans* paintings.[1] Against a plain background, Mary is clothed in a simple blue robe with the hood drawn over her head. She usually sits directly on the floor, or upon a cushion on the floor, and in her arms she holds the Christ Child; sometimes the Virgin is shown standing, as seen in this panel. Mary grips Christ gently but firmly; her right hand supports His bottom and with her left, she cups the Child's shoulder, holding Him to her chest. As He nurses and plays with His foot, He looks out of the picture frame towards the viewer. While these are the common elements found in many contemporary nursing images, there is a peculiarity about the way that Fei has depicted the Virgin's exposed breast. In terms of its representation, it appears flat and cone–shaped rather than portrayed in a more realistic manner, that is, round and full of milk. What is more strange is its location; in this painting, the breast is placed very high on the torso; in fact, it is closer to Mary's shoulder than where a breast ought to be. Also strange is that the Virgin does not seem to have a second breast; there is no volume suggested beneath her mantle.

While this painting could potentially be dismissed as one artist's lack of skills at naturalism, what is surprising are the many other images of the Virgin's denaturalized and disembodied breast made by other Italian painters between c. 1330s and 1420s. For example, there is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's 1330 painting, *Madonna de Latte*; Carlo da Camerino's *The Madonna of Humility with the Temptation of Eve* (c. 1380); Andrea Vanni's *Madonna* (c. 1380s); a *Madonna of Humility* (c. 1420) that Lorenzo Monaco created; there are other nursing images by Fei, such as *Madonna Latte* (c. 1380s) that use the same stylistic approach. From the numerous images illustrating the breast in this specific way, we can assume that these representations were based on a conscious choice by the artists; from the many artists who adopted this convention, one can assume the theme's widespread popularity.

The appearance of these unusual breasts in Tuscan *Madonna lactans* images during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries raises many interesting questions about the interplay between representation and spectatorship. For example, what initiated and propelled this type of depiction? What kinds of messages did the nude breast evoke, and what meanings did the viewer formulate based on their religious convictions? Was the exposed breast interpreted differently by virgins than mothers? How would non–Christian viewers such as devout Jews decode and understand Mary's denaturalized breast? How did Levant slave women who were employed as wet–

[1] While it is not certain for whom the painting was intended, the panel likely stood on an altar in a church's chapel or used in a domestic interior as an object for veneration.

nurses for Tuscan families perceive the nursing Madonna? Because spectatorship is a complex process based on the convergence of numerous factors, it is difficult to examine it thoroughly and in a meaningful way within the space of a few short pages and still point to all the complexities and interconnections. While this paper does not provide a detailed analysis of spectatorship and the role of vision in art, it does acknowledge the importance of looking in relation to understanding why the Virgin's breast is represented as it was. This discussion takes as its focus the need for certain pictorial strategies when portraying nudity in Tuscan devotional imagery. Following Megan Holmes, I believe that artists did indeed make very specific choices when representing the Virgin's bare breast – decisions that carefully negotiated a multitude of factors including satisfying the patron's requests, reflecting Church doctrine while adhering to rules of decorum, and being mindful to use a repertoire of easily recognizable, but powerful symbols. Because the exposed body in religious art could potentially encourage the 'wrong' kind of looking, that is, a voyeuristic or erotic one, artistic solutions were required to foster a devotional gaze. Using specific pictorial programs, iconographical elements, and stylistic choices, artists represented the breast as denaturalized and disembodied, thereby transforming it to a symbol. This allowed the doctrinal messages of the artwork to be communicated while downplaying or diverting gazes that were not purely religious.

When interpreting and discussing representations of the body, it must be understood that it is a site where diverse social, political, cultural, and religious factors converge. Furthermore, the body reflects the values, anxieties, and even the fantasies of a particular society at a specific historical moment. In *Carnal Knowing* feminist hermeneutics scholar, Margaret R. Miles, similarly states that within the Christian West, the naked body was treated and understood in similar ways but with different nuances and emphases within different societies.[2] She summarizes two types of general meanings surrounding nakedness. First, *social* meanings had negative connotations; the naked body was an indicator of powerlessness and was associated with captives, slaves, prostitutes, the insane, and the dead. In relation to martyrdoms, when the persecutors stripped Christians of their clothing, it was intended to humiliate, torture, and punish. In contrast, *religious* meanings of nakedness were positive. When a Christian voluntarily removed his/her clothing, it was an act of shedding the secular (the sinful); it was a sign of one's adamant faith. But what happens to social and religious meanings when the naked body is a female body? According to Miles, religious nakedness must then be revised.[3] Both social and religious responses to the naked female body become negative because it symbolizes sin and sexual lust; in other words, she is a dangerous evil. Interestingly, religious meanings change once again when the (partially) exposed female body is that of the Virgin Mary, specifically, representations of the Holy Mother's breast while she is nursing Christ. Although paintings of Mary breastfeeding functioned as devotional imagery – they were meant to be looked at and venerated – representations that showed her bared breast complicated the viewing process. While the breast, nursing, and the milk itself reflected Christian doctrine, their religious meanings conflicted with interpretations of the exposed female body as sinful and evil. Since female nudity, especially breasts, could encourage lustful thoughts, there was anxiety over any representation of a breast, even the Holy Mother's.

Because the Virgin's body is a constructed and malleable one, it is always in the process of being shaped and re–shaped by the ever–changing needs of the Church, art patrons, and the faithful. As a result, the subjectivity of the historical Mary has been, for the most part, eliminated and replaced by a range of specific representations. She is a figure who, like other notable people in the Church, "have become vehicles of meaning intended to be identified with specific concepts and narratives...their pictorial function is to stand as reinforcing symbols for those concepts and [act] as vivid mnemonics for narratives that are already established."[4] As her roles, positions, and

[2] Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing; Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1989), p. 81.

[3] Ibid., p. 81.

[4] Charles Harrison, 'Giotto and the 'Rise of Painting'', p. 88 in Diana Norman, ed., *Siena,*

importance in the Church were articulated, defined, and even re–defined by the Papacy throughout the course of Christian history, her depictions and iconography were modified to accommodate these changes. For example, during the two centuries prior to the popularity of the *Madonna lactans* paintings, Mary was hailed as the Queen of Heaven, and portrayed as a "Byzantine Empress, luxuriously robed, heavily jeweled, and seated on a throne surrounded by angels and worshippers", and in some paintings, Christ, as an adult human, places a heavenly crown upon his mother's head.[5] Mary's clothing, the location (heaven), and act of crowning are reduced to symbols that were intended to facilitate the faithful's recollection of Christian stories.

Supplanting – and contrasting – the artistic tradition where Mary was the enthroned and glorified queen residing in Heaven, or was wed to her Son in a mystical marriage, was a genre that began in the Trecento and continued for the next 300 years. From the changes in Christian thought initiated by the Franciscan and Cistercian Orders, Mary became more human and an emphasis was placed on her *humilitas* (humility). No longer did she sit upon a starry throne in heaven; rather, she was shown as a peasant mother, sitting cross–legged on the bare earth or upon a cushion on the floor, while holding and/or nursing her Son. This type of painting became known as *Madonna of Humility* and was the forerunner of *Madonna lactans* images. Emphasis was placed on her humanity, her homey simplicity, and unpretentious accessibility.[6] Mary was everyone's Mother; she was approachable, caring, and stood by the faithful, acting as an intercessor on their behalf.

Blending with, and succeeding, the popularity of the *Madonna of Humility* genre were the *Madonna lactans* images. Like the *Humility* paintings, they were another popular theme that artists painted for display and use in churches, monasteries, and in private homes.[7] While still portrayed as a humble woman, there was a new feature: an emphasis on breast–feeding her Son. I would argue that the Church has purified aspects of Mary's pregnancy and delivery by denaturalizing them. For example she was a virgin when she conceived Christ, the conception took place through the power of the Holy Spirit, and during the birth process, her maidenhead remained intact. She was allowed one natural and biological function, that of nursing. The significance of the nursing Madonna and the symbolism of her milk would have been readily understood by viewers as they beheld paintings displaying her breast. In fact, this type of image served as a mnemonic to a number of Christian beliefs and teachings. First, the lactating breast emphasized her humanity and by fourteenth–century standards, the Virgin nursing Christ was the supreme example of her humility and lowliness. Because Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden brought about the Fall, womankind's punishment was to endure all the biological sufferings related to childbearing: menstruation, the birth process, and lactation.[8] Mary was no exception. Secondly, the nursing breast functioned as guarantor of Christ's humanity. As defined and proclaimed by the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, Mary was the *Theotokos*; she was the 'God–bearer' or 'Mother of God'.[9] On a representational level, images of her nursing Christ affirmed that He was born of a woman, and like other children, He required the same nourishment from His mother. In this way, the suckling Christ attested to His full humanity. Third, the breast was interpreted as a symbol for the spiritual nourishment of the faithful. In some versions of *Madonna lactans* paintings, the nursing Christ twists around to look directly at the viewer. This was an established visual device for inviting the viewer to participate in the scene.[10] It

Florence and Padua; Art, Society and Religion 1280–1400, Vol. I: Interpretive Essays (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1995).

[5] Margaret R. Miles, 'The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture', p. 202 in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture; Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986).

[6] Ibid., p. 202.

[7] Ibid., p. 192.

[8] Hayden B. J. Maginnis, *The World of the Early Sienese Painter* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2001), p. 202.

[9] Miles, 'The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture', p. 200.

[10] Michael Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy; A Primer in the Social History*

was believed that the Christian soul was perpetually sustained by Mary's grace; this grace was connected to her breast milk. It is not surprising, then, that depictions of the Virgin were transformed by the Church into the Nursing Mother of many penitents, visionaries, and saints.[11]

While the exposed breast affirmed and reinforced both Mary's and Christ's humanity, and functioned as a source of spiritual nourishment, it also indicated Mary's intercessory authority, that is, it signaled her role as a Mediatrix in the redemption of humanity. The theology on the Virgin's intercession clearly states that she does not have the power to grant requests by herself; rather, she can only intercede on the people's behalf with her Son since God is the only source of salvation. Interestingly, when she is represented as an intercessor, usually the adult Christ also appears with her indicating that her breast is a post–lactating or non–lactating breast based on Christ's age. The power of her breast is no longer based on its actual or symbolic nourishment. Rather, it becomes the locus of power for her role as Salvatrix, a 'bargaining chip' if you will, that she employs when taking the faithful's petitions and prayers to Christ. Mary's use of her breast to persuade Christ to grant the devout's petitions can be seen in an early fifteenth–century painting, *The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin* by Lorenzo Monaco. With one hand, Mary gestures to a group of sinners kneeling before Christ and with her other hand, she cups her breast, which is carefully draped by a diaphanous veil. In the text that bridges the space between herself and Christ, she implores: "Dearest Son, because of the milk I gave you, have mercy on them."

While this discussion has mainly concentrated on the ways that the Virgin's breast and breast milk reflected contemporary religious messages, what still needs to be addressed is the issue of nudity in fourteenth– and fifteenth–century devotional paintings. Megan Holmes summarizes two key positions on this, one from art historian Caroline Walker Bynum and the other from Miles.[12] As Bynum argues, nudity in art would have been perceived metaphorically or allegorically rather than erotically, as in the case of a twenty–first century understanding of erotic as sexual. She also states that this type of imagery was not completely devoid of erotic elements; Bynum concedes that such elements did exist in affective spirituality. For example, in her discussions of Christ's body, she agrees with Leo Steinberg's statement that early Renaissance artists made Christ's penis the focal point of their depictions so as to indicate His humanity. She goes on to state that she does not necessarily believe that Christ is represented with an artfully draped erection underneath His resurrection clothing, Bynum does concur that certain elements were used to ensure that the viewer's primary associations were based on established Christian doctrine, specifically, the recognition of His humanity.[13] By having saints point or gesture towards His exposed genitals or paintings that show the Virgin touching the Christ child's penis, nudity was used to indicate the most obvious evidence of His humanity. With respect to the Virgin's bared breast, Bynum limits discussion to allegorical and metaphorical interpretations of it, discussing it only as nourishment and food, choosing not to address its potential to encourage voyeurism. While it is easy to assume from a twenty–first century perspective that nudity in religious art only served in a negative manner by eliciting undevotional gazes, Miles balances the argument, stating that nudity in fourteenth– and fifteenth–century Tuscan religious art could have been utilized in a positive way. For example, *Madonna lactans* paintings would have assisted mothers in their identification with the Virgin based on their commonality, motherhood, which included lactating breasts.[14] Mary's breast also

of Pictorial Style, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 72 ff.

[11] Maginnis, *The World of the Early Sienese Painter*, p. 198.

[12] Megan Holmes, 'Disrobing the Virgin: The *Madonna Lactans* in Fifteenth–Century Florentine Art', footnote 2, p. 284 in Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, eds., *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997).

[13] Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 39 (1986), p. 407.

[14] However, Miles is quick to add that while visual associations were used to create this connection, it was contradicted by religious teachings and sermons that emphasized Mary's difference from women.

referred to and articulated religious beliefs: it was understood as a guarantor of the Virgin's and Christ's humanity; it could be interpreted as spiritual sustenance; it could be understood as the locus of her power as Mediatrix.

Miles also delves into the complexity of nudity in devotional art and the tension created when viewers saw a peek of the exposed Holy breast. Such glimpses must have produced some level of anxiety because of the potential for carnal pleasure; this must have been of great concern to artists, and to clerics guiding the faithful. To contend with these possible readings while attempting to foster veneration, artists needed to represent Mary's breast in ways that used the customary iconography of the nursing Virgin while being mindful of Church doctrine, and heeding the rules of decorum. *Madonna lactans* thus employed specific pictorial techniques: the Virgin's breast was represented as non–integral and detached from her body.[15] Artists such as Fei, as well as others including Carlo da Camerino, Andrea Vanni, and Lorenzo Monaco intentionally portrayed the breast in this way in order to transform the breast into a symbol. At a symbolic level, it could both communicate religious messages while managing undevotional responses to the nudity. The power of the symbolic works to downplay transgressive gazes while still being able to use nudity to communicate religious messages. In Fei's *Madonna and Child* panel painting for instance, the depiction and placement of the breast positions the viewer to accept that Christ is holding Mary's breast even though there are no visual clues that would link the breast to Mary. It seems to simply appear by his mouth. In fact, the breast appears to belong more to the iconography of the Christ child[16] than to Mary's body because of the way the panel has been painted; His hands and face are painted the same flesh colour as His mother's breast, and this is further highlighted against the dark blue colour of Mary's mantle which visually severs the breast from her body. This results in the connection between her breast and Christ but at the expense of disembodying the breast. Additionally, it has been stylized to such a degree that perhaps, to some viewers, the breast does not even appear to be human which further inhibits a voyeuristic and/or erotic gaze. For instance, the same stylization and representation has been used by Ambrogio Lorenzetti's 1338–9 portrayal of the She–Wolf's teats from which Romulus and Remus suckle in the *Allegory of Good Government* in Siena's Palazzo Publico in the Sala dei Nove (council chambers). The similarities between the representations of the nursing breast/teat are striking. Arguably, in each case the breast/teat does not have to be depicted with great accuracy (naturalism) because the shape and context immediately signals to the viewer what is represented. When fourteenth– and fifteenth–century audiences saw a woman, a child, and a shape resembling a breast placed near the child's mouth, these select iconographic elements symbolized nursing. This audience, drawing upon their visual training as informed by their religious teachings, would have immediately recognized what the image was supposed to portray without having to closely examine what was actually depicted, and without the need for a realistic rendering. Thus the symbolic is able to convey the religious message(s) while tempering voyeuristic gazes.

Another way to negotiate the various demands arising from nudity in religious art was to complicate or somehow impede potential erotic readings by downplaying or diverting a voyeuristic gaze. For instance, in Marco Zoppo's *Madonna Lactans* (1478), the Christ child's head was used to obscure the breast from the viewer's sight. As well, the Child's hand could cover up a large portion of the exposed breast which Ambrogio Lorenzetti employed in his *Madonna del Latte* (c. 1330). Artists depicted the breast so that it was either partially or completely hidden by Mary's veil or by the drapery from her cloak as seen in Andrea di Bartolo's *Madonna and Child*, c. 1415. The Virgin could also participate in hindering glimpses of her breast by discreetly covering it with her hand, concealing all but the nipple, which was a sign of her *pudore* and decorum. To highlight the need for symbolism and distancing techniques in order to deter transgressive gazes, it is useful to compare a detail of Fei's painting of a denaturalized and disembodied breast with the Netherlandish painter Robert Campin and his use of naturalism.

[15] Miles, 'The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture', p. 203.

[16] I would like to credit Angela Andersen for this observation.

Although the painters are from two different regions (Italy and the Netherlands), differing artistic traditions, and the paintings are separated in time by approximately sixty years, the visual comparison highlights how realism forces the viewer to interpret the exposed breast differently than a stylized breast. In Campin's painting titled *The Virgin and Child Before a Firescreen* (1430), Mary's hand is on her breast, positioned to stimulate milk flow rather than to cover it. In fact, the placement of Mary's hand on her breast and the fact that it is pointed directly at the viewer directs attention to it. While the design of the painting was meant to invite the faithful to take spiritual nourishment from the Virgin's breast, the realism with which it is portrayed, positions the viewer to interpret the breast differently than if it was stylized. With the exposed breast naturalistically rendered in conjunction with the way Mary's eyes are averted which makes it easier for the viewer to look without consequence, there is a greater possibility for carnal viewing pleasure than when an artist represents the same subject matter symbolically.

When Italian artists did use heightened realism in their nursing Madonna paintings, they incorporated various techniques in order to downplay the naturalistic breast.[17] When it was exposed, her divinity was accentuated and her humanity was de–emphasized. In Domenico Ghirlandaio's *Madonna in Glory with Saints* (1490–96), Mary's ample breast, purposefully displayed since Christ is about to nurse, is represented naturalistically. Tempering an erotic reading of this naturalistic breast, Ghirlandaio removes Mary from the earthly realm by idealizing her, and aligning her with the aristocracy instead of the peasant class, which is a pronounced change from the *Madonna of Humility* and *Madonna lactans* images. Her location within Ghirlandaio's painting further separates her from the material world: Mary, seated on a heavenly throne, hovers between heaven and earth. Her elevation above the heads of saints and angels accentuates this extraction from the earthly realm. She also seems unaware of anything and anyone except her Son, whose hands reach and frame the exposed breast moments before He suckles. Her eyes are cast downwards and gaze solely upon Christ, oblivious to the saints and angels below her feet, as well as to the viewer. Ghirlandaio has successfully returned Mary to the realm of the symbolic but has done so through the use of realism. Artistic devices that once emphasized the Virgin's humanity and humility have been removed and substituted with symbols referencing her divinity. The impact of visually disconnecting Mary from the viewer's space and situating her in the beyond, frames the interpretation of the breast differently. No longer is it the breast of a human mother; rather, it is the breast of a divinely favoured and idealized woman who is about to nurse the Saviour.

While naturalism was being used during the time when *Madonna of Humility* and *Madonna lactans* paintings were popular, why were artists not embracing realism? Art historian Millard Meiss, in *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death* (1951), claims that the appearance of Tuscan art dramatically changed after 1348, which was the year of the Black Death, and there are obvious changes in both religious and cultural sensibilities which are manifest in the arts. The post–plague generation of Florentine painters rejected, at least in part, many of the accomplishments and qualities of Giotto's artistic legacy which had dominated Florentine painting during the first half of the fourteenth century.[18] This was also happening in Siena where a later generation of artists rejected the achievements of Duccio di Buoninsegna, Simone Martini, and Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti – artists who incorporated naturalism in their work to heighten the narrative by humanizing saints and scriptural figures, thereby evoking a strong reaction from the viewers. Instead of choosing this naturalistic way to represent people and events, Meiss argues that the post–plague artists represented Christ, the Virgin, saints and holy people as iconic and deliberately archaic. He attributes the marked changes in the painting in Florence and Siena to a sequence of economic and natural disasters happening in the middle of the fourteenth century: bankruptcies, famine, war, and as previously mentioned, the

[17] Holmes, 'Disrobing the Virgin: The *Madonna Lactans* in Fifteenth–Century Florentine Art', p. 180.

[18] Diana Norman, ed., *Siena, Florence and Padua; Art, Society and Religion 1280–1400, Vol. I: Interpretive Essays* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), p. 178.

Black Death.[19] These events profoundly affected the people of the time. Interpreting the calamities as punishment for their preoccupation with worldly affairs, people desired religious art that was more intense; this promoted stylistic changes. Meiss states that paintings become "more religious in a traditional sense, more ecclesiastical, and more akin to the art of an earlier time."[20] If Meiss is correct and if his argument can be applied to *Madonna lactans* paintings, this would explain why many of these images look more like Byzantine icons, and seem to be different from the work of Giotto and his contemporaries who used realism. As for *Madonna lactans* images, Megan Holmes notes that in Florence, between 1440s–1470s, this genre begins to go out of fashion, and when it re–emerged in the last quarter of the Quattrocento, it was modified. The paintings were "…less immediate, less accessible to the beholder's appropriating gaze."[21]

As this paper has discussed, when naturalism became the desirable way to represent the body in fourteenth– and fifteenth–century Tuscan painting, an anatomically correct breast had the potential to disrupt the sacred status of devotional images and destabilize religious meaning. Obliging artists adhered to Church doctrines and rules of decorum in order to create paintings that fostered a devotional gaze and moved viewers to greater piety. In order to do so they turned to the art of an earlier era, art that emphasized the symbolic rather than the naturalistic; they embraced the iconic rather than the realistic, and when portraying the Virgin's exposed breast, they represented it as denaturalized and disembodied. Another solution was the emergence of a new devotional genre that did not feature Mary's exposed breast; in the late fifteenth century, *Madonna lactans* images were slowly replaced by paintings of the Adoration of the Child where Mary kneels before and over the Christ child who is laying on the ground. As for her lactating breast, it was safely tucked away and hidden beneath her cloak, perhaps no longer needing to be represented at all.

[19] Ibid., pp. 178–9.

[20] Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena After the Black Death* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1951), p. 70.

[21] Holmes, 'Disrobing the Virgin: The *Madonna Lactans* in Fifteenth–Century Florentine Art', pp. 193–4.

Fig. 1: Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *Madonna and Child,* 1370s. Tempera on wood; gold ground; 87 x 59.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941. (41.190.13). All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Images referred to in essay text (in order of discussion):

Paolo di Giovanni Fei
Madonna and Child, 1370s
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
image:
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/iptg/hod_41.190.13.htm

Ambrogio Lorenzetti
Madonna del Latte, c. 1330
Palazzo Arcivescovile, Siena
image:
http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/l/lorenzet/ambrogio/3m_latte.html

Lorenzo Monaco
Madonna of Humility, c. 1420
Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhagen
image:
http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/l/lorenzo/monaco/diptych1.html

Paolo do Giovanni Fei
Madonna del Latte, 1380s (?)
Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana, Siena
image:
http://www.solarnet.org/Travel/art/Siena.htm

Lorenzo Monaco (Pietro di Giovanni)
The Intercession of Christ and the Virgin, early fifteenth century Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
image:
http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/view1.asp?dep=7&full=0&item=53%2E37

Ambrogio Lorenzetti
Allegory of Good Government, 1338–9
Palazzo Publico, Sala dei Nove, Siena
image:
http://www.abcgallery.com/L/lorenzetti/alorenzetti16.html

Andrea di Bartolo
Madonna and Child, c. 1415
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
image: http://www.nga.gov

Master of Flémalle (Robert Campin)
The Virgin and Child before a Firescreen, 1430
National Gallery, London
image:
http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/m/master/flemalle/2/virgin.html

Domenico Ghirlandaio
Madonna in Glory with the Saints, 1490
Alte Pinakothek, Munich
image:
http://www.kfki.hu/~arthp/html/g/ghirland/domenico/7panel/11pala1.html