

FRANCESCO GRANACCI



Adoration of the Child by Francesco Granacci, c. 1500. Art works in the Academy collection will be highlighted during Nativity theme group tours for children in December. Call 538-3693, ext. 255, for information and to schedule a group tour. Dec., 1984

Francesco Granacci (Italian, 1469–1543)

Adoration of the Christ Child, c. 1500

Tempera on wood panel

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1961 (2987.1)

Francesco Granacci trained and worked with Michelangelo on the Sistine Ceiling, though his time on the project was brief, perhaps due to what Giorgio Vasari, a 16th-century biographer, alluded to as an easygoing personality and tendency to avoid unnecessary effort or thought. In his *Adoration of the Christ Child*, which neither confirms nor conflicts with Vasari's characterization of the artist, Granacci depicts the Holy Family and the infant Saint John the Baptist kneeling to adore in adoration to the Christ child. Like Michelangelo and his contemporaries, Granacci looked to classical sculpture to impart The figures appear monumentality to the figures, and, like Michelangelo and his contemporaries, Granacci he used bright and contrasting colors for Mary's and Joseph's robes to heighten the sense of immediacy. Christ reaches out towards his mother in a playful manner, and his gaze meets his cousin's, who, as an adult, predicted the arrival of a messianic figure and baptized Christ in the River Jordan.



FRANCESCO GRANACCI

Italy, 1469–1543

***Adoration of the Christ Child*, ca. 1500**

Tempera on wood panel

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1961
(2987.1)

Using the tondo (circular) format popular in the Renaissance for his composition, Francesco Granacci monumentalized the Holy Family by placing the figures in the foreground on a small rise against a background of receding vistas. The Christ Child lies on the edge of Mary's robe, who kneels above him with a tender, adoring gaze. At left, Joseph is seemingly lost in contemplation of the newborn child; Christ's cousin, St. John the Baptist, as identified by his hair shirt and reed cross, is at right. Although there is no scriptural source for a meeting between the infant Christ and youthful St. John the Baptist, such a family grouping was quite popular in Italy in the 16th century. As the last of the Old Testament prophets and first of the saints of the New, St. John the Baptist was viewed as Christ's forerunner. In paintings such as this, as Christ gestures toward his cousin and their gazes meet, it was traditionally believed that the two acknowledged and accepted their sacrifices and roles in offering Christian salvation.

Adoration of the Christ Child (#2987.1)
Kress Collection
oil on wood panel

Italy
Florentine School
probably c. 1500

ARTIST: Francesco Granacci (1469-1543). "Francesco d'Andrea di Marco, called Granacci....He was trained in the studio of Domenico Ghirlandaio, where he was influenced by his fellow pupil Michelangelo. Fra Bartolommeo, Leonardo, Raphael, and Pontormo also affected his style." Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection, Italian Schools XV-XVI Century, Fern Rusk Shapley, Phaidon Press, 1968, p.123.

SUBJECT: The Holy Family with St. John is a fairly late development in Christian iconography, with few examples before the 15th C. During the Renaissance it was an especially popular subject.

Joseph is here shown as an older man with his staff. The infant St. John is identified by his animal skins which he was to wear much later in life; there is no incident in the Bible where Christ and St. John meet before the Baptism.

In the background is a classical ruin with wooden timbers, suggesting the artist's interest in antiquity and representing the stable. Inside are the ox and ass. In the far left background an angel announces Christ's birth to the shepherds and animals; at the far right

is a more contemporary scene of sailing ships offshore, harkening the Age of Discovery.

MEDIUM: Oil on wood, in tondo format. Tondo panels were popular during the Renaissance, offering the artist the challenge of creating a composition which would rest harmoniously within a circle. The painting is in good condition, with some restoration in the garments and background. Shapley, p.124.

STYLE: The foreground figures are arranged in a triangle, with the head of the Madonna forming the apex, Sts. Joseph and John the sides, and the infant Christ the base. Within this triangle are circular rhythms which refer to the shape of the panel and lead the viewer's eye from one figure to the other. The curves of the bodies and tilt of the heads direct the eye throughout the group, creating a very calm, stable arrangement.

The figures themselves are bulky and weighty, fully modeled, but with a ~~distinct~~^{inert} elegance and refinement typical of Granacci. This last quality is expressed in the sweet idealization of faces, the grace of the hands, and the delicate lines of the soft veil which falls around Mary's face and shoulders. The drapery defines the forms beneath, and the 3 primary hues visually establish the figure group as the center of interest and importance.

In the middle ground, the careful perspective drawing of the building establishes a vanishing point in the area of Mary's hands: Another compositional device which draws attention to her and accentuates the stability of her figure. Inside the stable, the placement of the ox and ass perpendicular to the picture plane further implies a deep, illusionistic space.

At the left, space recedes gradually, culminating with an angel announcing Christ's birth to a group of shepherds. Here, the figure style is far more cursive and suggestive, appropriate for a background scene. The soft, neutral colors are an effective foil for the stronger, more eye-catching colors of the foreground.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: This painting can be used to demonstrate a number of key points about the Renaissance:

- the humanization and idealization of religious figures
- the interest in naturalistically portraying the human body and the ability to show volume and weight
- the development of linear and atmospheric perspective
- the interest in classical antiquity

Compare with the Master of 1518's "Adoration of the Magi." How are they different in terms of figure type, attention to detail, spatial development, etc.?