

Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Parto* ("Madonna of Childbirth"), a masterpiece of fifteenth-century Italian art, is in many respects shrouded in mystery: we do not know who commissioned it, when it was painted, or even why Piero was chosen to create it. The only connection between the artist and Monterchi is that it was where his mother, Monna Romana, was born. Indeed, this detail has led to some rather romanticized interpretations that in its theme see a tribute to her death. Be that as it may, the date of its completion is uncertain. Scholars have traditionally posited somewhere between 1450 and 1475; considering the style, however, today it is considered to be even older.

It was painted for a church between the villages of Monterchi and Citerna called the Church of Santa Maria a Momentana or "in silvis" (a name emphasizing its wood-like and secluded character, as the area had been known for its fertility-related traditions and rituals since antiquity). Partially destroyed by an earthquake in 1785, the bishop allowed Monterchi to rebuild the chapel in the cemetery; the result was a three square-metre chapel where, on the back wall, Piero's fresco could be found. In 1910 the fresco was removed, restored, and then returned to the same place. In the spring of 1944 the Ministry of Public Instruction ordered many Italian masterpieces, including Piero's Madonna, to be put into storage to protect them from possible war damage. The local population protested and kept the painting from being touched, not for cultural reasons but for spiritual ones: the painting was their Madonna, the one to which they had been praying for as long as they could remember and to which they gave thanks for maternity and for children in general.

In the early 1990s the Superintendent of Arezzo began to have the chapel restored and then the painting, which had been moved to the town's former primary school: the place, later transformed into a museum, where it can still be found today.

OPENING

April 1 – November 1

Open Daily 9.00 · 13.00 | 14.00 · 19.00

2 November – 31 March

Close On Tuesday 9.30 · 12.30 | 14.00 · 17.00

From December 26 To January 6

Open Every Day | Closed December 25th

TICKETS

Full € 6,50

Reduced € 5,00

- Students 14–25 Age
- Groups Over 15 People
- Valtiberina Casentino Card
- Ecclesia Card
- Pilgrims

Free Entry

- Pregnant Women
- Kids Under 14
- Disabled With Carer
- Touristic Guides
- Journalists

Musei civici Madonna del Parto

Tel: + 39 057570713

www.madonnadelparto.it

e-mail: info@madonnadelparto.it



MADONNA DEL PARTO

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA
COMUNE DI MONTERCHI

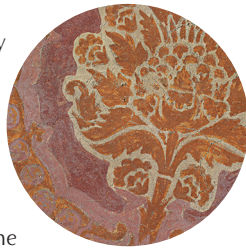
Piero della Francesca

Madonna del Parto [Half of xv century]



In the fresco we see two angels holding open the flaps of a tent to reveal a pregnant Mary, who at the same time is partially opening the folds of her gown to reveal her swollen abdomen, or in other words the Saviour to come. The iconographical theme refers to that of the angels opening a drape to reveal the tabernacle with the Eucharist inside: Mary is carrying the body of Christ within herself in the same way as the tabernacle in the liturgy.

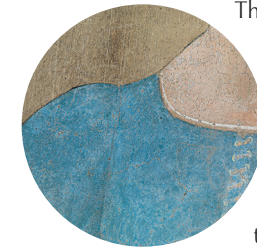
The tent is richly woven. The outside is made of yellow and red damask and embroidered with a pomegranate motif, a symbol of fertility and plenty; the inside is completely lined with squirrel hair. Various interpretations have been made regarding the space depicted: the Virgin may be at the centre of the tent or even at its edges.



The two angels, which were drawn from the same piece of paper, are dressed in reversed colours: the one primarily in red has green stockings and wings; the other, a mirror image of the first, is in green and has red wings and feet. This chiasmic motif amplifies the hieratic aspects of the symmetrical composition without, however, flattening it out in a mere repetition of form.



Mary's hair is blonde and has been gathered together in minute plaits that are tied with ribbons of white fabric. Her face is a perfect oval, in accordance with Piero's interest in pure, methodical forms. Here we see a young pregnant woman other pregnant women could identify with, while at the same time a woman selected by God for humanity's salvation.



The gown's characteristics, the billowing sleeves that taper down to the wrists, the neck and narrow waistline that open out into cascading folds, reflect women's fashion of the time and, according to scholars, have a pictorial precedent in Beato Angelico's painting *The Naming of John the Baptist*, in the Museum of St. Marco in Florence.

The figure in the fresco was painted in just seven working days; only the virgin's gown was completed *secco*.

The drawing was made on the surface of the plaster using large "dust" cartoons: pieces of paper covered with pin pricks which could then be rubbed with powder or dust to create the image.



For a long time the chequer-work of the halos was thought to be a reflection of the pavement, as if it were made of extremely shiny metal discs. More recent interpretations, however, have demonstrated that it most likely has to do with the use, over the centuries, of gold leaf systematically applied around the paint in squares.