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## **Botticelli's Adoration of the Magi: The Power and Beauty of Individual**

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# Botticelli's Adoration of the Magi: The Power and Beauty of Individual

## Abstract

Adoration of the Magi in Uffizi was a commission from banker Guasparre dal Lama for his chapel in Santa Maria Novella. The altarpiece was painted by the famous artist Sandro Botticelli. It illustrates one of the most famous scenes in the Bible: The Epiphany of the three Magi greeting the birth of Jesus who would bring salvation and peace to the world of sins. This beautiful piece now resides in Uffizi Museum in Florence. Adoration of the Magi represents the peak of Renaissance art, and carefully reflects the political message of Florence in the 15th century through the figures of the Medici. The impeccable details of each portrait in the painting not only praised who was included in it but also honors the humanism of the Renaissance.

## Keywords

Renaissance, Sandro Botticelli, Adoration of the Magi, Medici, Florence, Individualism

## Disciplines

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | Painting

## Comments

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# Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*: The Power and Beauty of Individual

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## Abstract

*Adoration of the Magi* in Uffizi was a commission from banker Guasparre dal Lama for his chapel in Santa Maria Novella. The altarpiece was painted by the famous artist Sandro Botticelli. It illustrates one of the most famous scenes in the Bible: The Epiphany of the three Magi greeting the birth of Jesus who would bring salvation and peace to the world of sins. This beautiful piece now resides in Uffizi Museum in Florence. *Adoration of the Magi* represents the peak of Renaissance art, and carefully reflects the political message of Florence in the 15th century through the figures of the Medici. The impeccable details of each portrait in the painting not only praised who was included in it but also honors the humanism of the Renaissance.

## Style and theme

- The painting is inspired by one of the most common Biblical themes of Renaissance artwork in the 15th century
- The name of the patron, Guasparre, was the same as the one traditionally attributed to one of the three Magi; therefore, this explains the choice of the iconographic subject for the Lama chapel
- The artist incorporated Classical Ruins, *Sacra conversazione* (meaning: The Holy Conversation) compositions, linear perspectives, and naturalism central in human expressions and anatomy to promote the humanism of the painting.

## The Patron Guasparre dal Lama

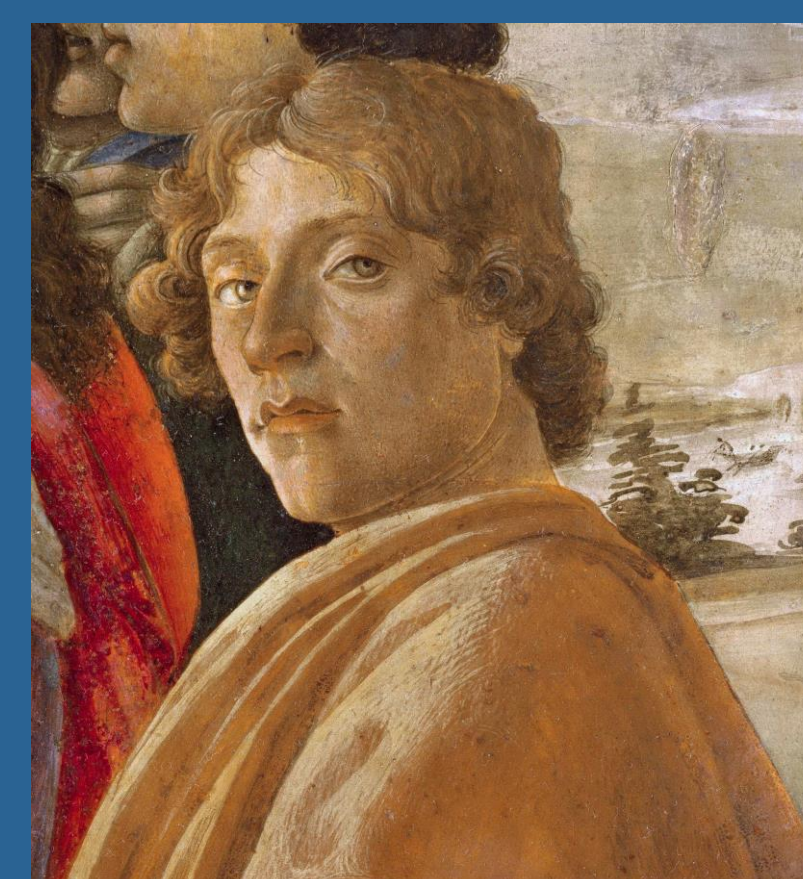


Guasparre dal Lama

- He came from a family of humble origin and became so wealthy that he could afford a chapel in Santa Maria Novella, one of the noblest chapels in Florence, and had risen so high on the social scale that the homage he paid to the Medici.
- It is suggested by Rab that Guasparre and Lorenzo were acquainted as Guasparre belonged to Compagnia di Gesu Pellegrino, which was later joined by Lorenzo in 1466; therefore, the meteoric career that Guasparre achieved might be due to the involvement of the Medici.

## The Artist Sandro Botticelli

- The fact that Botticelli included his self-portrait raised the radical shift in the perception of painters during that time. Botticelli did not view himself as a craftsman who simply did his job; he viewed himself as the friend of powerful figures.
- The artist was familiar with the Medici family since the mid-1470s as we previously mentioned. Artists being commissioned are of high opinion of their profession and their social role, and their clients were willing to grant them commensurate visibility and public recognition.



Sandro Botticelli

## The Medici

- The Medici were merchants, and they earned money through trading, then exchanging florins (Florentine currency in the Renaissance era) with foreign currency, and vice versa.
- They opened the bank system, with independent companies with their own directors, under the observation and control of the headquarters company in Florence.
- With the growing money from the bank, the relationship with the priest and pope in churches, and their huge patron for art, the Medici gained significant power in finance, politics, art, and even religion that made them the ruler of Florence.



*Adoration of the Magi* in Uffizi by Sandro Botticelli in early 1470s

"The Adoration of the Magi, Sandro Botticelli, c. 1475, Tempera on Panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy." by Emme Debi is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

## The Medici in the painting



Cosimo de' Medici as the oldest Magus

Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici as the middle Magus

Piero di Cosimo de' Medici as the youngest Magus

Giuliano di Piero de' Medici

Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici

The Artist Botticelli used the real-life figures of the Medici, the ruler of Florence in his painting.

## The Influence of the Medici on Florence

### Religious life: Compagnia dei Magi

- Compagnia de Magi - the noblest companionship that held a lot of important religious "festas" and masses, for example, the Feast of the Epiphany feast, a public celebration of the Magi's visit to Jesus, and of John the Baptist, patron saint of Florence, for baptizing Christ in the Jordan.
- As soon as the Medici became its patron, the Compagnia di Magi became one of the three confraternities with its quarters at San Macro. The family held the production of Festa de' Magi in 1466, with its purpose to "distract men's minds from unpleasant realities."



The School of Athens (1509–1511). Fresco, 550 x 770 cm (18 x 25 ft). Raphael Rooms, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City (Public Domain)

## Individualism

- Sandro Botticelli illustrated the individuality and self-confidence of the men in power at that time. Through the clothes and the emotions expressed in the painting, "Medici and Magi were joined together, triumphant witnesses of the fact that life belongs to man, that he is free to enjoy, to be self-confident, to wander without barriers ecclesiastical or feudal, and to search diligently for new spiritual hope."

## Art

The Medici not only strengthened their household but also make the beauty of Florence - a flourish of the architecture and the beauty of the buildings not only outside but inside them decorated with lots of ornaments, in every quarter shares in the beauty of the city.



Procession of the Youngest King in Cappella dei Magi, Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence.

Benozzo Gozzoli, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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