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Summary Article: **Bellini, Giovanni (1430-1516)**
from *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*

Venetian painter, considered the greatest of the group known as *Madonnieri* (Madonna Painters) who specialized in painting the Madonna in a variety of settings that includes trees and landscapes, as in *Madonna of the Meadow* (1505), but always holding the Holy Child upright. The Madonna always appears grave and pensive, usually with a white coif covering her hair beneath a blue hooded mantle. She holds the robust infant in her arms or on her knees. Mary adopts the classic devotional pose as she gazes on the Word made Flesh and meditates on the mystery enshrined in the vision before her. She is the corporeal ciborium, the earthly bearer of the Godhead. Occasionally there are other figures kneeling accompanied by their saintly patrons, but the Virgin remains impassive and unheeding. Bellini excelled in creating the mood in the painting and he was more interested in the atmosphere rather than the action.

Bellini may have originated the art form known as *Sacra Conversazione* or he may have adapted it from Antonello da Messina. Examples are found in the grand altarpieces of *S. Giobbe* (1483-1485) and *S. Zaccaria* (1505) as well as the triptych of the *Frari Madonna* (1488), all of which show the golden mosaics of St. Mark's Cathedral. Bellini also created the haunting images of *Pieta* where the figure of the dead Christ is upheld by the angels, a theme which reappears in many of his works, as in *Pieta with the Virgin and S. John* (1460), and in the *Pieta* which is one of the crown jewels of the Vatican. His *Agony in the Garden* (1459), *Transfiguration* (1485), *S. Francis in Ecstasy* (1490), and *Resurrection* (1475-1479) are remarkable for their glowing colors and haunting stillness and illustrate his skill in conveying intricate symbolism.

Bellini established and inspired the Venetian school of painters. His importance in Venetian art is such that Kenneth Clark said that "No other school of painting is to the same extent the creation of one man." From 1490 all the prominent Venetian painters, including Giorgione and Titian, were trained in his workshop.

SEE ALSO: Art (Painting)

References and Suggested Readings

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