The Brera Madonna (also known as Pala di Brera, Montefeltro Altarpiece or Brera Altarpiece) is a painting by the Italian Renaissance master Piero della Francesca, executed in 1472-1474. It is housed in the Pinacoteca di Brera of Milan (Lombardy), northern Italy.

It is a work, of a type known as sacra conversazione, was commissioned by Federico III da Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino, to celebrate the birth of Federico's son, Guidobaldo. According to other sources, it would celebrate his conquest of several castles in the Maremma.

**Dating**

The painting was executed between 1472 to 1474. The former date is based on a document of the Monastery of San Bernardino, where the painting was originally located, which stated that it had been executed by Fra Bartolomeo Carnevale of Urbino by that date; the latter is confirmed by the absence from Federico's figure of the insigna of the Garter, which he received in that year. The attribution to Fra Carnevale (Bartolomeo di Giovanni Corradini) is today rejected by all art historians.

Some sources state that the work was commissioned for to celebrate the birth of Federico's son, Guidobaldo, who was born in 1472. According to this hypothesis, the Child could represent Guidobaldo, while Virgin may have the appearance of Battista Sforza, Federico's wife, who died in the same year and was buried at San Bernardino.
Description
The work represents a 'sacra conversazione', with the Virgin enthroned and the sleeping Child in the middle, surrounded by a host of angels and saints. On the right low corner, kneeling and wearing his armor, the Duke, patron of arts and condottiero Federico da Montefeltro. The background consists of the apse of a church in Renaissance classical style.

The Child wears a necklace of deep red coral beads, a color which alludes to blood, a symbol of life and death, but also to the redemption brought by Christ. Coral was also used for teething, and often worn by babies. The saints at the left of the Madonna are generally identified as John the Baptist, Bernardino of Siena (dedicatee of the paintings's original location) and Jerome; on the right would be Francis, Peter Martyr and Andrew. In the last figure, the Italian historian Ricci has identified a portrait of Luca Pacioli, a mathematician born in Sansepolcro like Piero della Francesca. The presence of John the Baptist would be explained as he was the patron saint of Federico's wife, while St. Jerome was the protector of Humanists. Francis, finally, would be present as the painting was originally thought for the Franciscan church of San Donato degli osservanti, where Federico was later buried.

The characters' clothes, the angels' jewels, Federico's armor and the oriental carpet beneath the feet of the Virgin are depicted in great detail, reflecting the influence of Early Netherlandish painting.

The apse ends with a shell semi-dome from which an ostrich egg is hanging. The shell was a symbol of the new Venus, Mary (in fact it is perpendicular to her head) and of eternal beauty; in fact, differently from the Greek goddess, Mary's beauty will remain eternal in the Kingdom of God. According to another hypothesis, the egg would be a pearl, and the shell would refer to the miracle of the Immaculate conception (the shell generates the pearl without any male intervention). The egg is generally considered a symbol of the Creation and, in particular, to Guidobaldo's birth; the ostrich was also one of the heraldic symbols of the Montefeltro family.

According to Italian art historian Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, the work has been cut down on both sides, as shown by the portions of entablatures barely visible in the upper corners.

References

External links
• Page at artonline.it [1](Italian)

References
Article Sources and Contributors


Image Sources, Licenses and Contributors


License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/