# Four *Adorations* between Florence, Siena and the Marche

Displayed here, with Ghirlandaio's, are four other splendid *Adorations*, painted in tempera on wood in the mid 15th century and all from the Vatican Museums.

The first was part of a predella of a dismembered polyptych with *Stories of Christ*, divided into four compartments, and is the work of the Florentine **Zanobi Strozzi** (1412-1468). Trained under Beato Angelico, Strozzi was also a talented illuminator, whose chorales executed for the church of San Marco (1446-1453) and antiphonaries for Florence cathedral (1463) are preserved. His dual profession, but particularly that of miniaturist, emerges clearly from the panel on display here, marked by an almost Flemish attention to the single detail, from the landscape that envelops the scene to the angelic choir above, up to the piece of pure virtuosity constituted by the ruined building in perspective on the right.



Two absolute masterpieces, both of Sienese production and both originally elements of a predella of two decomposed polyptychs, are the *Adorations of the Child* painted by **Giovanni di Paolo** (c. 1400-1482) and **Sano di Pietro** (1406-1481). In these the two episodes of the annunciation to the shepherds and the adoration/nativity of the infant Jesus are combined in a single scene. In the first case, we are in front of an early and extraordinary nocturne, ahead of the later *Dream of Constantine* frescoed by Piero della Francesca for the cycle with the *Legend of the True Cross* in the choir of the Basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo (1452-1466). Its author, the painter and miniaturist Giovanni di Paolo, was an artist endowed with an uncommon imagination, as revealed by the painting exhibited here in which, as Guido Cornini has written, 'the radiant quality of the colours as of enamel is decanted into timbric orchestrations of almost material compactness'. More traditional appears to be the panel by Sano di Pietro, whose realism and the casual everyday life of certain details, such as the shepherds in the top left corner warming themselves by the fire, are striking.

Depicting an *Adoration of the Magi*, the fourth panel on display is the work of the painter **Ludovico Urbani** (documents from 1460 to 1498), a native of San Severino Marche in the province of Macerata. An artist characterised by a strong expressionistic charge, which he derived from direct contact with the works of the Foligno school represented by Bartolomeo di Tommaso and Niccolò di Liberatore known as *l'Alunno*, Urbani painted this predella in 1477 for a triptych,

now dismantled, of which the *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Angels* (Avignon, Musée du Petit Palais) and the two side compartments with *St. Francis and St. Louis of Toulouse* (Recanati, Museo Diocesano) are also preserved. Restored to its original chromatic brilliance through a restoration completed in 2022 by Rossana Giardina of the Vatican Museums' Painting and Wood Materials Restoration Laboratory and financed by the New York Chapter of the *Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums*, the painting showcases exceptional technical use of different materials, including the golden relief pastille also used by Carlo Crivelli.

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