



Anonymous, *Virgin and Child*, 16th c.,  
boxwood, 8.4 x 3.3 x 2.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

This sixteenth-century sculpture draws on a well-recognized Christian emblem of maternal love in its portrayal of the Virgin and Child. The Virgin Mary is holding the Christ Child in her left arm, while her right arm is delicately outstretched in a gesture that may be interpreted as protective or inviting. The Christ Child is looking warmly at his mother as he holds a bushel of

pomegranates, a classic Christian symbol representing eternal life and Christ's resurrection. Despite its static medium, the incised details of the drapery, hair and facial features are dynamic. The tradition of boxwood sculpture emerged in northern Europe at the end of the fifteenth century. Similar in consistency to pear and cherry wood, boxwood is dense yet pliable, and even simulates bronze when varnished. Boxwood sculptures are generally small in size due to the limiting nature of the wood. Their quality is on par with bronze Renaissance sculptures, attesting to the skilled craftsmanship of each artist, most of whom remain anonymous in the Montreal Museum of Art's boxwood sculpture collection.

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