



# Brooklyn Museum

## Teaching Resource: Collection Highlight

Joseph Stella

*The Virgin, 1926*





Joseph Stella  
(American, born Italy,  
1877–1946)  
*The Virgin*, 1926

Oil on canvas, 39<sup>11/16</sup> x 38<sup>3/4</sup> in. (100.8 x 98.4 cm).  
Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Adolph Lewisohn, 28.207

### Description of the Artwork

The central figure is a woman wearing a long, blue, hooded veil that cascades over her shoulders to the base of the composition. A white halo frames her head from behind. Her face is turned slightly to the side. She has smooth, luminous skin, and her eyes are cast gently downward. Her head and long, slender neck are enveloped by a pale purple robe punctuated by a brilliant red flower at the base of her throat. Her open palms rest gently on her chest. A dense array of flowers decorates the veil and robe, while leafy green stems and delicate buds meander along the contours of her hands and fingers. A canopy of vibrantly colored birds, fruits, and flowers curves above and around the figure. In the background sailboats glide across the water near the shores of a distant city.

### Background Information

The artist Joseph Stella immigrated to the United States from Italy when he was eighteen years old. While this painting uses the vibrant palette and high contrast characteristic of his New York scenes, the balanced composition and religious subject (the Virgin Mary) recall early Italian Renaissance paintings.

## Questions for Viewing

What area of the painting is your eye drawn to first? Why?

Use your body to recreate the figure's pose and facial expression. What do you notice? What might these details tell us about this person?

An attribute is an object associated with a figure that is meant to help identify or represent that person. What attributes can you find in this portrait? What more do they tell us about this woman?

Describe the setting. What kind of place might this be?

This painting is titled *The Virgin*. It depicts the Virgin Mary, who is identified in Christianity and in Islam as the mother of Jesus through divine intervention. What similarities can you find between this painting and other images of the Virgin Mary? What differences do you notice?

## Activity

Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. Label one column "I See" and the other, "I Think." Look closely at the painting. Record observations that are factual in the column labeled "I See." Record observations based on opinion and inference in the column "I Think." Share your inferences with a partner, using visual evidence to support your ideas.

## Resources

[www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/onview/](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/onview/)

The Brooklyn Museum's online collection database, featuring a search function that indicates artworks currently on view and their locations.

[www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/educators/teacher\\_resources.php](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/education/educators/teacher_resources.php)

This webpage offers links to free web interactives and Teaching Resources (PDFs) supporting K–12 instruction.

This text was written by Claire Moore, with assistance from School Programs Manager Alexa Fairchild and Curator of European Art Rich Aste.

