

# THE OLIVE FACT FEED

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## FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT: THE OLIVE ILLUSTRATED IN 6 ARTWORKS – PART 1

The history of the olive tree is millenary. As a symbol of spirituality and sacredness, peace and purification, its ritual is alive even today. The olive tree has been a source of inspiration in the art and, since the earliest times, one of the main objects in representation and iconography. Let's discover together six artworks that have enhanced the olive plant in all its forms and meanings.

Here are the first three!

### 1) **Anfora from Vulci, 500 BC British Museum, London**

The Greek amphora was founded in the archaeological site of Vulci and shows an olive harvest scene where two men from below and another one above the tree, hit the branches with a stick, while a fourth kneeling man picks up the fruit from the



ground and puts them in a basket. In ancient times olive oil was one of the main components of nutrition and it had many uses, including medicine and lighting. There were different oil's qualities: virgin olive oil (oleum flos), second quality oil (oleum sequens) and commonly used oil (oleum cibarium).

### 2) **Simone Martini (1284 - 1344) and Lippo Memmi (XIII sec - 1356)**

#### **Annunciation between the Saints Ansano and Margherita, 1333, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence**

In the Old Testament, the olive tree is associated with peace and prosperity. In the historical-artistic context and in the iconography of the Virgin and the Passion of Christ particularly, the image of the olive tree is often the element in which the artist leads the observer thru the main scene of the painting. The Annunciation of Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi is a remarkable example: the whole work is enclosed in a Gothic style architecture and represent the moment in which Archangel Gabriel offers to Virgin an olive twig and she shyly retreat, as she was surprised by his visit.

### 3) **Sandro Botticelli (1445 - 1510)**

#### **L'orazione nell'orto, 1490-93, Museo de los Reyes Catolicos, Granada**

In the last part of his life, Sandro Botticelli dedicated himself to sacred representations, overlooking the allegorical ones. This painting is a good example because represents the la Last Supper when Jesus brings his disciples to pray in the garden of the "Getsemani". According to the Gospels, the Getsemani ("olive oil mill" in the Aramaic language) is a small olive grove just outside the old city of Jerusalem on the Mountain of Olives, where Jesus Christ, retired after the Last Supper before being betrayed by Judas and arrested.

## OLIVE HARVESTING

The olive has been present in the life and culture of man for thousands of years, and traditional methods of harvesting olives have been passed down from generation to generation.

Today we can still distinguish between different traditional methods:

- 1) **Hand-picking from the ground:** being the simplest and most intuitive, it is the first to have been used, with the olives harvested by hand once they have dropped to the ground after complete maturation. This practice allows the olive to be harvested at full maturity, but sometimes the fruits appear partially damaged and this can affect the quality of the oil to some extent.
- 2) **Beating or raking:** this is still widespread today, although quite demanding on the tree. The olives are detached from the branches by means of poles (beating) or wooden rakes (raking), causing them to fall into nets placed at the base of the tree.
- 3) **Hand-picking:** this is the technique most used by "artisanal" companies and consists of pulling the olives from the branches by hand. This implies a very high labour cost because there must physically be someone who climbs the tree and detaches the olives. This technique permits choosing the best fruits and keeping the olives intact.

Alongside traditional harvesting techniques, mechanised harvesting methods have become established over time. Here, machines that cause the tree to vibrate and the olives to fall off, or vibrating rakes (harvesters) that shake individual branches, are used. This type of harvesting is more economical but, compared with hand-picking, the quality of the harvested olives is proportionately inferior, because the machine cannot select the product to be harvested.

