

President's Newsletter, February 2009

Dear Members:

At the beginning of the millennium, SGI turned its sights towards strategic development. In 2001, then President Sherman Elias signed a twelve-point strategic plan which heralded a new era aimed at initiating a renaissance for our Society.



Madonna del Parto, Piero della Francesca , 1460
Monterchi, (Tuscany, Italy)

Historically, the Renaissance which spread throughout Europe led to great artistic innovations and in particular the perspective and the study of human anatomy. Artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rafael, Hans Holbein, and Albrecht Durer were able to represent what they saw, "as the eye sees it."

This revolution, in turn, led to the depiction by artists of pregnant women. In 1460, Piero della Francesca, a famous artist of Tuscany, painted the "Madonna del Parto" (above). Popularized recently in numerous works such as the thriller "Visus" (2007) by Richard Hayer, the poem "San Sepolcro" (2006) by Jorie Graham, and the movie "Nostalghia" (1983) by Andrei Tarkovsky, this fresco offers two details worthy of comment. First is the artist's use of a new blue color obtained from lapis lazuli, which had been imported from Afghanistan by the Republic of Venice. Second, the subject has a goiter. Presumably this is because della Francesca used a Tuscan model that happened to have a goiter, a typical condition in the foothills of the Apennine Mountains of Central Italy. In fact, goiter is often seen in Renaissance and Bourgogne paintings from Italy, Switzerland, and Northern Europe. Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Weyden also represented pregnant or post-partum women with goiter.

These images remind us of how art can reflect the medical conditions of a given time period. As is known, the thyroid gland increases in size during normal pregnancy. In regions where there is a dietary iron deficiency, it may enlarge by up to 50%, and may not fully regress after delivery. The physiologic changes of pregnancy may mimic thyroid disease or cause a true remission or exacerbation of underlying disease. The hypothyroidism may increase the risk of early miscarriage and of pregnancy-related morbidity (preterm birth, preeclampsia). In addition, thyroid hormones are key players in fetal brain development, raising the open gestation of iodine prophylaxis or thyroxin therapy in pregnant women at risk of endemic goiter.

Following the analysis made by John Challis and the Developmental Committee, the 12 points of the 2001 SGI Strategic Plan appear to have been all reached in these last 9 year. In particular: the re-design of the website, the rebuilding the relationship with SMFM and/or SSR, the progress in the process of internationalization, the development of an education committee to promote workshops, the creation of a finance committee and a publication committee, review of the membership process, the changing of the editorial partnership, and the holding of an Annual Meeting outside North America (which will be realized next March in Glasgow). The incoming President, Leslie Myatt, confirmed the high interest to work on a new edition of the Strategic Plan, with the support of the Executive Committee and the new Council.

Sincerely Yours,

Felice Petraglia
SGI President, 2008-2009