



# The Angel Tree: A Christmas Celebration

*Linn Howard, Mary Jane Pool*

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The annual installation of the Christmas tree at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, is an event cherished by visitors and scholars alike. The Baroque base of the majestic tree supports a landscape in which vivid eighteenth-century Neapolitan creche figures reenact the events of Christ's Nativity. Magi, dressed in sumptuous robes, are surrounded by their retainers and animals. Exotic travelers, townspeople, and shepherds throng to Bethlehem to view the Christ Child lying in the manger. Above the infant and the graceful figures of Mary and Joseph, a glory of angels hovers in adoration. The tradition of re-creating the events at the manger became a national passion in eighteenth-century Naples. Leading artists were commissioned to create extravagant panoramas containing hundreds of figures, many shown dressed in current fashion and attending to their trades. They offer a wealth of information about the costumes and customs of the day. Loretta Hines Howard gave her collection of creche figures, including the magnificent group called the Adoration of Angels, to the Metropolitan Museum in 1965. For many years she installed it personally, and now her work is being carried on by her daughter, Linn Howard. Together with Mary Jane Pool, noted author and long-time editor-in-chief of House and Garden magazine, Linn Howard tells about the Neapolitan tradition of creche making, and about the Metropolitan's collection in particular. The authors also provide a fascinating glimpse into the care and conservation of the figures; thumbnail biographies of the artists to whom particular figures can be attributed; a glossary; and the story of how Loretta Hines Howard began her collecting. A special feature of the book is "The Christmas Story," in which the Gospels are illustrated with pictures of the creche. The magnificent photography that makes this book a work of art was created especially for it by Elliott Erwitt, whose work can be found in major galleries and museums arou

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