

Labels for a small exhibition

THE ARTIST

Bernardino Betti (1454-1513) was known by the nickname “Il Pintoricchio,” (The Little Painter). He began his career in the workshop of Pietro Vannucci, “Il Perugino” at Perugia. His earliest surviving works show his background as a miniaturist. In the early 1480s, although he assisted Perugino with the Old Testament cycle in the Sistine Chapel, the most monumental fresco project of the time. Pintoricchio’s surviving work consists of miniatures, ambitious fresco cycles entailing the decoration of an entire chapel, apartment, or library, as well as panel paintings of all sizes, whether for the main altar in a church, like the altarpiece for S. Maria dei Fossi, now in the National Gallery in Perugia, or for private use, like the intimate Madonna and Child to which this exhibition is devoted.

Some of his works were executed for small, remote towns, which nonetheless enjoyed considerable prosperity at the time. Yet Pintoricchio also enjoyed consistent favor with the wealthiest and most powerful patrons of his time, above all, Popes Sixtus IV, Innocent the VIII, Alexander VI Borgia, Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini Todeschini, Archbishop of Siena, who would reign as Pope Pius III in 1503, and Julius II.

In Italy Perugino and Pintoricchio were the foremost representatives of the Umbrian school of painting, a term which designates the regional style cultivated in Perugia and the territory around it. This style appealed to powerful ecclesiastical patrons in Rome because of its opulent ornament and conservative fidelity to medieval tradition. At the same time the leading Umbrian masters reinterpreted tradition in a fundamentally innovative way. Perugino was one of the leaders in the use of sophisticated techniques in glazes and oils, which Italian painters had only learned from Netherlandish painting during his own lifetime; and Pintoricchio was second to none in his study of ancient Roman ornament, which had only recently been rediscovered in the Emperor Nero’s palace in Rome. These artists were therefore among the most advanced painters of their time. When their pupil Raphael eclipsed them with his revolutionary style, which he had developed by working among more radical artists in Florence, Perugino turned to a local career in Umbria, while the career of the fifty-nine year old Pintoricchio was brought to an end by his final illness and death in 1513.

BERNARDINO BETTI, CALLED IL PINTORICCHIO Perugia 1454-Perugia 1513 MADONNA

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AND CHILD Oil and tempera on panel Elizabeth Severance Prentiss Collection
44.89 Ex collections: (F. Kleinberger Galleries, Paris, New York, 1913-1915); Mrs. Dudley P. Allen

This Madonna and Child is a product of one of the high points of Pintoricchio's career, his years in Siena, where he settled in 1503. From then until 1508 he painted the ceiling and walls of a library attached to the Cathedral of the city. Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini Todeschini, Archbishop of Siena, who would reign as Pope Pius III in 1503, commissioned this monumental decoration, depicting the life of his ancestor Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who reigned as Pius II from 1458 to 1464

Pintoricchio's large workshop became a place of artistic ferment, where some of the major figures of the next generation were trained, above all Raphael, who had been a pupil of both Perugino and Pintoricchio. For the Piccolomini Library Pintoricchio used Raphael's extraordinary gifts as an inventor of complex narrative compositions and as a draughtsman of the human figure to the fullest. He asked Raphael to provide drawings for the frescoes, some of which survive today. Pintoricchio and his workshop, including Raphael (it is thought) executed the frescoes in their traditional manner, but Raphael's input led to a significant stylistic advance, which foreshadowed his own achievement in years to come. This mutual influence between the forty-nine year old Pintoricchio and the twenty year old Raphael appears in the Madonna shown here as well. The figures have a solid and natural quality which Pintoricchio had never before achieved. It is therefore likely that Raphael had furnished drawings for this work as he had done for the Piccolomini Library. This circumstance accounts for the exceptionally high quality of the painting and makes it one of the most important early Umbrian paintings in North America.

A SIENESE FOLLOWER OF BERNARDINO BETTI, CALLED IL PINTORICCHIO THE MYSTIC MARRIAGE OF ST. CATHERINE Oil and tempera on panel Ex collections: Mrs. Dudley P. Allen (later Elizabeth Severance Prentiss) Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Mrs. F. F. Prentiss Bequest 44.51

This round panel, which depicts the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine with scenes of her martyrdom in the background, was painted by a Sieneese follower of Pintoricchio. Similarities like the facial type of the Virgin Mary and the modelling of the Christ Child's legs suggest it was created in the same ambiance as the Madonna in the Museum collection.

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Several of the structures in the background are based on well-known ancient Roman buildings and show the artist's intellectual interest in antique architecture.

Both this painting and the CMA Madonna were once in the collection of Mrs. Elizabeth Severance Prentiss. The tondo was then considered to be the work of Pintoricchio himself, who was highly esteemed by the collectors of the early twentieth century. His magnificent decorations in the apartments of Pope Alexander VI Borgia had been only restored and opened to the public in the 1890's, and the courtliness and delicacy of his style complemented the opulent manner of living supported by the great industrial fortunes of the time.

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PIETRO VANNUCCI, CALLED IL PERUGINO Città della Pieve ca. 1445 - Fontignano, near Perugia 1523 ST. SEBASTIAN Metalpoint, brush and brown wash on prepared paper Dudley P. Allen Fund 58.411 Ex collections: Count Moriz von Fries, Vienna (Lugt 2903); The Prince of Liechtenstein

This metalpoint drawing by Perugino shows the figure of St. Sebastian as it appears not only in his *Madonna and Child Enthroned between Saint John the Baptist and Saint Sebastian*, dated 1493, now in the Uffizi, but in several other paintings as well. The Saint's foreshortened head is similar in treatment to that of the Christ Child in the *CMA Madonna*. This is typical of the working methods of the Umbrian School. Rather than reinvent an entire figure in each commissioned work, Perugino and his assistants, following the tradition of the medieval workshop, consulted a drawing in which the image was already formulated and repeated it literally in the finished work. This method has been criticized as archaic and repetitious, but under the circumstances it helped the artist maintain uniformity within a large group of assistants of differing personalities and abilities. This was also desirable to patrons, who wanted a recognizable work of the master.

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LORENZO DI CREDI Florence ca. 1458 - Florence 1537 MADONNA AND CHILD Metalpoint
on prepared paper John L. Severance Fund 63.472 Ex collections: E. Desperet,
Paris (Lugt 721); Emile Galichon, Paris (Lugt 1058-1059); Louis Galichon, Paris (Lugt 1060
-1061); J. P. Heseltine, London (Lugt 1507-1508); Henry Oppenheimer (Lugt 1351); Sir Thomas
D. Barlow, London; Dr. Francis Springell, Prague and Portinscale, Cumberland (Lugt
Supplement 1049 a)

This study for a Madonna by Lorenzo di Credi, a painter who was considerably influenced by Leonardo da Vinci, shows how different the working methods of Florentine artists were from those of the Umbrians. The artist has combined a previously worked out Infant with a figure of the Madonna and repeatedly passed over the contours with his stylus in order to adjust them to each other. In this manner he achieved a unique and harmonious unity in his overall design. This is the antithesis of the procedure exemplified by Perugino's Saint Sebastian.

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RAFFAELLO SANZIO Urbino 1483 - Rome 1520 SKETCHBOOK PAGE WITH STUDIES FOR A MADONNA AND CHILD Metalpoint on prepared paper Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund 78.37 Ex collections: Cavaliere Benvenuti, Florence; The Grand Duke of Tuscany; Emperor Charles of Austria; S. von Licht (Lugt Supplement 789b); Edwin Czeczowiczka, Vienna; R. von Hirsch, Basel and Frankfurt

In 1504 Raphael left the milieu of Perugino and Pintoricchio for Florence, where he readily absorbed not only the working methods, but the rounded, tangible vision of form cultivated by the local artists. He studied above all the works of Leonardo da Vinci. This drawing was executed not long after he left Florence for Rome in 1508 and shows his revolutionary advance from his Umbrian beginnings. In one part of the sketchbook page he drew a workshop assistant from life. In later drawings he would transform the image into the figure of the Madonna. In the head of the Christ Child and the repeated sketches of the entire figure he is seeking a specific, unique invention which will produce an organic total image which is harmonious and balanced in every aspect. In this drawing he fully realized the classic style of the High Renaissance which still lay beyond his grasp when he collaborated with Pintoricchio on the CMA Madonna and Child.

CIRCLE OF PIETRO VANNUCCI, CALLED IL PERUGINO Città della Pieve ca. 1445 -

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Fontignano, near Perugia 1523 LEAF FROM A GRADUAL: INITIAL B WITH THE TRINITY
Ink, tempera, and gold on parchment, 1475-1500 Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund
52.461

This illuminated page conforms in every respect to the figural and ornamental style of Perugino. Although it is of superior quality, it is not quite on a level with the master's own work. It also shows certain mannerisms, like the squat human proportions, which distinguish it from Perugino's hand. This is the style from which Pintoricchio emerged as a distinct artistic personality. The art of manuscript illumination is explored further in the exhibition Scriptorium: The Illuminated Book in Medieval Art, on view in the Lower Level/Education gallery.