



 CATALOGUE ENTRY

Adoration of the Christ Child

1490–1500

Workshop of Bastiano Mainardi

Italian, 1466–1513

egg tempera and oil on poplar panel

Diameter of tondo: approximately 33-1/16 in. (84 cm)

The Clowes Collection

2015.30

Marks, Inscriptions, and Distinguishing Features

None

Entry

¹ Aside from two major fresco commissions that mark the creative peak of his artistic career,¹ Bastiano Mainardi is mostly known for medium-sized, square altarpieces, usually representing *sacre conversazioni* (sacred conversations), and tabernacles and tondi of various sizes.² In devising the compositions for many of these works, he relied on cartoons developed in the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494).³ Mainardi apprenticed with this Florentine master in the late 1470s and continued to collaborate with his *bottega* even after his death in 1494, when it was operated by Domenico's brothers, Davide (1452–1525) and Benedetto (1458–1497).⁴ Giorgio Vasari made reference to Mainardi at the end of Ghirlandaio's *vita*, claiming that the two worked together ("a compagnia") on a number of commissions, including the Santa Fina fresco cycle at the Collegiata in San Gimignano (1475–77) and the *Last Supper* (1476) in Passignano.⁵ Both of these claims should be dismissed on chronological and stylistic grounds. Having received no previous artistic training, Mainardi—then barely 10 years old—could have served only as a *garzone* in Ghirlandaio's workshop.⁶ If anything, he may have assisted the Florentine master on later commissions, such as the *San Girolamo ai Frari Gesuati* panels in Pisa (1479) or the *Sala dei Gigli* fresco program at the Palazzo Vecchio (1483–84). The *Annunciation* dated to 1482 in the baptistry of the Collegiata of San Gimignano, which, solely on the basis of style had traditionally been considered Mainardi's earliest known work, has since been definitively expunged from his oeuvre.

² While under Ghirlandaio's tutelage, Mainardi learned how to draw and paint in the manner of his master. This mimetic operation was such that sometimes his contributions, albeit circumscribed to less important sections of a fresco cycle or altarpiece panel, were indistinguishable from those of Ghirlandaio and other senior members of his workshop. At the same time, this process of assimilation with the studio style allowed for the copious production of smaller "factory" works, in which the master would intervene only in crucial sections.⁷ Mainardi gained status in Ghirlandaio's studio during the last decade of the master's life, in the late 1480s and early 1490s. His profile image, prominently depicted next to Ghirlandaio in *The Awakening of the Roman Notary's Son* in the Sassetti Chapel at Santa Trinita in Florence (1483–85), has been interpreted by scholars as a statement of both his newly elevated rank within the studio and proof of his direct collaboration on this fresco cycle.⁸ This bond between master and disciple was cemented in 1494 with Mainardi's marriage to Alessandra Bigordi, Ghirlandaio's half-sister.⁹

³ A proper assessment of Mainardi's production has been marred by errors and misattributions since the early twentieth century. The Italian art historian Géza de Francovich included works in Mainardi's corpus that displayed even vaguely Ghirlandaiesque traits or those that could not be attributed to other members of Ghirlandaio's vast roster of disciples.¹⁰ Bernard Berenson compiled a list of more than 70 paintings that he attributed to Mainardi, the majority of which are questionable, both in terms of quality and style, especially when compared with Mainardi's documented and autograph works.¹¹ For decades, art historians attributed poor-quality pictures originating from Ghirlandaio's workshop or other affiliated studios to Mainardi. Everett Fahy successfully eliminated a number of problematic works and, at the same time, attributed additional paintings to Mainardi.¹² The record was set straight by Lisa Venturini, who, among other things, was able to discover the artist's correct birth date and definitively eliminated a number of misattributed pictures related to his early career, such as the previously mentioned *Annunciation*.¹³ Despite these impressive advancements, scholars neglected to address Mainardi's workshop production in the first decade of the Cinquecento, when the artist became increasingly removed from major artistic trends.¹⁴

⁴ Throughout his career, Mainardi made little effort to liberate his stylistic idiom from the fetters of Ghirlandaio's imprimatur, producing works that attempted to be consistent with the latter's workshop aesthetics. Unlike his master, however, he was never interested in examining stylistic developments in Flemish art. Furthermore, Mainardi's later production remained unaffected by the creative explosion that took place in Florence during the years between Leonardo's return to the city in 1503 and Michelangelo's departure for Rome in 1508. Indeed, there is little evidence in Mainardi's oeuvre of the former's *sfumato* or *figura serpentinata*, or the latter's exploration of human anatomy. On the contrary, toward the end of his career, Mainardi began to simplify Ghirlandaio's formal gravitas, much in the manner of Fra Bartolomeo della Porta (1472–1517) but with little creative input. His altarpieces from the years 1500 to 1510, such as the *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Sts. Justus of Volterra and Margaret of Antioch* of 1507 (fig. 1), though displaying an intimate monumentality, are devoid of elaborate decorative elements and generally marked by a subdued palette.



Figure 1: Bastiano Mainardi (Italian, 1466–1513), *Madonna and Child with St. Justus of Volterra and St. Margaret of Antioch*, 1507, oil on panel, 63-1/2 × 61 in. (panel). Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, Gift of Mrs. Booth Tarkington in memory of her husband, 51.58.

5 Mainardi's limited artistic ambition might be attributed partly to a deliberate market strategy. At the turn of the century, his workshop in San Gimignano supplied Ghirlandai-esque pictures to middle-class merchants, especially those in towns of the Valdelsa and Valdera regions. The most popular subjects were the Holy Family with Angels and, in particular, the Adoration of the Christ Child, such as that featured in the Clowes painting. These images—intended for domestic devotion—usually commemorated the birth of a child or were related to the cult of Mary. Their compositions were based on cartoons that originated in major Florentine workshops, such as Ghirlandaio's, and were copied by minor artists who reworked their content according to the specifications of their patrons. Such was the demand for these pictures that local Tuscan workshops would churn them out quickly, in some cases hastily, even before receiving specific commissions. (More than a dozen images of the Adoration of the Christ Child in various sizes and quality have been attributed, for the most part erroneously, to Mainardi.)¹⁵ Moreover, it is also not unusual that two artists would produce stylistically different versions of the same composition. To this point, [an almost identical version](#) of the Clowes [tondo](#), now at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, is attributed to the Master of the Naumburg Madonna by Everett Fahy.¹⁶ While the Richmond tondo, presents stylistic elements "cribbed from Filippino Lippi just as freely as [...] from Lorenzo di Credi,"¹⁷ the Clowes tondo is stylistically closer to the artistic sphere of Mainardi.¹⁸

6 The Clowes *Adoration of the Christ Child* presents several notable art historical challenges. It contains no distinctive attributes (e.g., a saint, cityscape, inscription, object, coat of arms, year) to indicate a precise date of execution, original location, or patron. This tondo, executed in the last decade of the Quattrocento or possibly even the first years of the Cinquecento, depicts the moment shortly after Christ's birth and before the arrival of the Magi. At the center, a larger-than-life Virgin in three-quarter view kneels in prayer. This posture is generally derivative of the Virgin in Ghirlandaio's *Adoration of the Shepherds* in the Sassetti Chapel at Santa Trinita, of 1485,¹⁹ which Mainardi often incorporated in other works, such as *St. Gimignano Blessing Mattia Lupi*, Domenico Mainardi, and Nello Nelli de' Cetti, of 1487 (San Gimignano, Sant'Agostino); *Pietà with Sts. John the Baptist and Paul*, of 1500 (Schwerin, Staatliches Museum), and the *Enthroned Madonna with Sts. Sebastian, Francis, and William and Archangel Raphael with Tobias*, 1500–1505 (Cappiano, San Lorenzo). A recent X-radiograph indicates that Mary's face was painted over, substituting the more modest original version. Mainardi's intervention may be detected in her delicate features, which recall the *Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist and the Three Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael*, of about 1490–1510, (fig. 2). The stiff and simplistic rendition of her robe, which do not conform to the contours of Mary's anatomy, can be attributed to workshop assistants.



Figure 2: Bastiano Mainardi, (Italian, 1466–1513), *Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist and the Three Archangels, Raphael, Gabriel and Michael*, about 1490–1510, tempera on panel, 36-7/32 (diam.) in. Musee d'Art Thomas Henry, Cherbourg, France/Bridgeman Images, M.I. 547.

7 The kneeling angel on Mary's right, possibly the archangel Uriel, who, according to legend, rescued John the Baptist from Herod's Massacre of the Innocents, also presents a number of problems. As with the Richmond tondo, the archangel's posture does not reflect the curved contour of the panel and instead projects outward, disrupting the harmony of the composition. Aside from the jagged and erratic folds of the garments, the figure's anatomic proportions are incorrect: the head and arms are much larger than the rest of the body, and the elongated fingers of the left hand are awkwardly rendered. Unlike that of Mary, the modeling on the angel's face presents an aggressive, almost exaggerated *chiaroscuro*. These elements suggest the hand of the workshop, and similar stylistic flaws are evident in the figure of Joseph, whose crossed arms symbolize humility.

8 Mainardi may have had a more prominent role in the depiction of the Christ child and St. John the Baptist, which stylistically recalls those figures in the Cherbourg tondo. Particular attention is paid to the modeling of their anatomy, constructed with a careful interplay of light and dark, and hair, designed more elaborately than that of the angel and Joseph. As with other tondi displaying this subject, an emotional connection is established between a contemplative Mary—whose somber expression indicates an awareness of her son's ultimate sacrifice—and her lively child, who extends his right arm toward his mother and, at the same time, turns his head to as if to engage the viewer.

9 The entire scene is claustrophobically set inside a makeshift shed, which according to tradition represents the ruins of King David's palace in Bethlehem. Several beams extend from this slightly off-axis stone structure, the molding of which includes a token reference to classical architecture. A barren, unimaginative landscape emerges from an opening in the back wall, while a few trees behind Joseph and the angel appear to have been arbitrarily inserted to fill compositional lacunae. These passages denote the less-skilled hand of Mainardi's workshop, which continues to be studied and assessed today by art historians of late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italian art

Author

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Provenance

Baron Karl Kuffner (1847–1924) de Dioszegh (or Diószeg), near Bratislava;

Baron Raoul Kuffner (1886–1961), Dioszegh, near Bratislava, later New York;²⁰

By inheritance to his widow, the painter Tamara de Lempicka (1898–1980).

Elizabeth M. Drey of (Paul Drey Gallery, New York);²¹

Edith Whitehill Clowes (1885–1967), Indianapolis, in 1964;

The Clowes Fund, Indianapolis, from 1964–2004, and on long-term loan to the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1971 (CI0076);

Given to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now the Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, in 2015.

Exhibitions

Allen R. Hite Art Institute, Louisville, KY, 1964, *Italian Paintings: 1300–1600*.

References

Italian Paintings: 1300–1600, exh. cat. (Louisville: Allen R. Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville Library, 1964), 17n1 (unpaginated, cover illustration and inside cover).

The Indianapolis Star Sunday Magazine, 19 December 1965 (cover illustration and inside cover information);

Ian Fraser, *A Catalogue of the Clowes Collection* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1973), 24–25.

Notes

1. These works are *The Ascension of the Virgin* in the Baroncelli Chapel in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence (1485–90), and *Sts. Gemignanus, Lucy, and Nicholas of Bari* (left wall) and the *Four Doctors of the Church* (ceiling) in the San Bartolo Chapel in the church of Sant'Agostino at San Gimignano (1500).
2. On Bastiano Mainardi, see Géza de Francovich, "Sebastiano Mainardi," *Cronache d'arte* 4 (1927): 169–93, 256–70; Lisa Venturini, "Bastiano Mainardi, pittore di San Gimignano e altri problemi di pittura fiorentina tra la fine del Quattrocento e l'inizio del Cinquecento," *laurea* thesis, Università degli studi di Firenze, 1989; Lisa Venturini, "Tre tabernacoli di Sebastiano Mainardi," *Kermes* 15 (1992): 41–48; Lisa Venturini, "Il Maestro del 1506: La tarda attività di Bastiano Mainardi," *Studi di storia dell'arte* 5–6 (1994–95): 123–83; Alessio Assonitis, *Bastiano Mainardi: Painter of Altarpieces in Renaissance Tuscany* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2011).
3. Lisa Venturini, "Modelli fortunati e produzione in serie," in *Maestri e botteghe: Pittura a Firenze alla fine del Quattrocento*, ed. Mina Gregori, Antonio Paolucci, and Cristina Acidini Luchinat (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1992), 147–57; Jean K. Cadogan, "Observations on Ghirlandaio's Method of Composition," *Master Drawings* 22, no. 2 (1984): 159–72, 223–35.
4. Frances Ames-Lewis, "Drapery 'Pattern' Drawings in Ghirlandaio's Workshop and Ghirlandaio's Early Apprenticeship," *The Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 49–62; Lisa Venturini, "Ghirlandaio," in *Maestri e botteghe: Pittura a Firenze alla fine del Quattrocento*, ed. Mina Gregori, Antonio Paolucci, and Cristina Acidini Luchinat (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1992), 109–13; Jean K. Cadogan, "Sulla bottega di Ghirlandaio," *Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1449–1494: Atti del convegno internazionale, Firenze, 16–18 ottobre 1994*, ed. Wolfram Prinz and Max Seidel (Florence: Centro Di, 1996), 89–96.
5. Giorgio Vasari, *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, vol. 3 (Florence: G. C. Sansoni Editore, 1880), 276–77.
6. Mainardi's complete oeuvre had to be thoroughly reconsidered after Lisa Venturini correctly identified his birthdate as 1466 rather than a decade earlier, as assumed by Geza de Francovich and Bernard Berenson.
7. Nicoletta Pons, "Dipinti a più mani," in *Maestri e botteghe: Pittura a Firenze alla fine del Quattrocento*, ed. Mina Gregori, Antonio Paolucci, and Cristina Acidini Luchinat (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 1992), 35–44.
8. The identification of Mainardi is made on the basis of another portrait that was included in *Joachim Expelled from the Temple* of 1490 (Florence, Tornabuoni Chapel in Santa Maria Novella), which Vasari identifies as Bastiano.
9. Venturini, 1994-95, p.137.
10. Geza de Francovich, "Sebastiano Mainardi," *Cronache d'arte* 4 (1927): 169–193, 256–70.
11. Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: The Florentine School* (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1963), 1:125–128.
12. Everett Fahy, *Some Followers of Domenico Ghirlandajo* (New York: Garland, 1976), 190, 215–219.
13. Lisa Venturini, "Bastiano Mainardi, pittore di San Gimignano e altri problemi di pittura fiorentina tra la fine del Quattrocento e l'inizio del Cinquecento," *laurea* thesis, Università degli studi di Firenze, 1989; Lisa Venturini, "Tre tabernacoli di Sebastiano Mainardi," *Kermes* 15 (1992): 41–48; Lisa Venturini, "Il Maestro del 1506: La tarda attività di Bastiano Mainardi," *Studi di Storia dell'Arte* 5–6 (1994–95): 123–183.
14. Problems related to Mainardi's workshop are discussed in Lisa Venturini, "Bastiano Mainardi, pittore di San Gimignano e altri problemi di pittura fiorentina tra la fine del Quattrocento e l'inizio del Cinquecento," *laurea* thesis, Università degli studi di Firenze, 1989.
15. The more notable pictures that have been attributed to Mainardi and his workshop are *Adoration of the Christ Child with Angels Holding a Banner*, Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana (this is a tableau with golden background); *Adoration of the Shepherds*, Leipzig, Museum der bildenden Künste; *Adoration of the Christ Child* (without angels and St. John the Baptist), Bergamo, Credito Bergamasco; *Adoration of the Christ Child* (without angels and St. John the Baptist), location unknown, formerly auctioned at Sotheby's, New York, 26 January 2006, 281; *Adoration of the Christ Child and St. John the Baptist* (without angels), Rome, private collection; *Adoration of the Christ Child with St. John the Baptist* (without angels), Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister; *Adoration of the Christ Child with St. John the Baptist* (without angels), location unknown, formerly in Florence, Costantini collection; *Adoration of the Christ Child with St. John the Baptist* (without angels and St. Joseph), Art Institute of Chicago; *Adoration of the Shepherds*, location unknown, formerly Turin, Piccola Casa della Divina

Providenza; *Adoration of the Christ Child* (without angels and St. John the Baptist), Prato, private collection; *Adoration of the Christ Child* (rectangular tableau, without angels and St. John the Baptist), Rohrau, Austria, Graf Harrach'sche Familiensammlung, Schloss Rohrau; and *Adoration of the Christ Child with St. John the Baptist* (without angels), Rome, private collection; *Adoration of the Christ Child* (without angels), Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Cat. no. 00457516).

16. Everett Fahy, "The 'Master of the Naumburg Madonna,'" *Fogg Art Museum Acquisitions* (1966–67), 11–18. In this article, Fahy attributes the Clowes tondo to the Master of the Naumburg Madonna. This attribution was confirmed by Nicoletta Pons in *Pittori attivi in Toscana dal Trecento al Settecento*, ed. Francesca Baldassarri (Florence: Polistampa, 2010), 110–13. The Master of the Naumburg Madonna takes the name from Nettie G. Naumburg, who donated a *Virgin and Child with a Bird* to the Fogg Art Museum in 1930. This unknown artist, according to Fahy, is the same of the Richmond tondo.
17. Everett Fahy, "The 'Master of the Naumburg Madonna,'" *Fogg Art Museum Acquisitions* (1966–67), 17.
18. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts attributes this tondo, without providing any documentary proof or stylistic argument, to the Master of the Samaritan Woman.
19. Nicoletta Pons, "La fortuna figurativa dell'Adorazione Sassetti di Domenico Ghirlandaio a Santa Trinita," in *Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1449–1494: Atti del convegno internazionale; Firenze, 16–18 ottobre 1994*, ed. Wolfram Prinz and Max Seidel (Florence: Centro Di, 1996), 165–74.
20. Baron Raoul Kuffner's parents were avid art collectors, who left their collection to their son. For more information on the Kuffner family, see the Prefatory Note in Parke-Bernet Galleries, *Dutch and Flemish Old Masters, Italian Renaissance Paintings...from the Collection of Baron and Baroness Raoul Kuffner de Dioszegh removed from the Picture Gallery at Castle de Dioszegh near Bratislava, sold by their order, 19 November 1948*. The Clowes painting was not, however, included in this sale.
21. Elizabeth Drey, who ran the Paul Drey Gallery after her husband's death, does not specifically mention Tamara de Lempicka's name, but lists Baron Raoul Kuffner as a previous owner; see Bill of Sale from Paul Drey Gallery, 1 July 1964, File CI0076, Clowes Registration Archive, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields.