

GIOVANNI BELLINI

Venetian school, ca. 1430 - 1516.

The leading Venetian artist of his generation, Giovanni Bellini was the son of the painter Jacopo Bellini and brother of Gentile, who was probably older than he. The date of his birth is purely conjectural, and there is an equal problem concerning the chronology of his early paintings --the first signed and dated works being of 1487-88. According to a reported document of 1459, he was at that time living apart from his father and brother, which would suggest that he was by then independent. The presumption is that he was trained by his father, and remained connected with his father's workshop until Jacopo's death in 1470-71. A more fundamental influence upon his art, however, was that exercised by Andrea Mantegna, who had married his sister in 1454. He lived and worked in Venice all his life. In 1479 he took over from Gentile the execution of a cycle of history paintings in the Doge's Palace (destroyed in 1577), and subsequently became the State's chief painter. His official work included altarpieces, devotional works and portraits of the Doges. He maintained a large workshop, consisting of pupils and assistants working with varying degrees of independence, and the inscription IOANNES BELLINUS (found in a number of variant forms) is simply the identifying stamp of this workshop, rather than an autograph signature. The workshop specialized particularly in the production of "Madonna paintings", evolving under Giovanni's guidance a large number of designs, which then served as the basis for innumerable repetitions, with and without variations. This makes the problem of attribution extremely difficult. After 1500 Giovanni's work ^{expanded} expanded in a direction comparable to that taken by Giorgione and the young Titian.

Madonna, Child and Infant St John

oil on panel, 30 x 23 ins.

Signed on the cartello on the parapet :

JOANNES BELLINUS.

Provenance

Schatzker colln., Vienna ; Berlin art market, 1932^①

Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19 .

Literature

W.Suida, "Una Madonna di Giovanni Bellini", Rivista di Venezia, 13, Aug.1935, pp.353f. ; B.Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance, Venetian Schools, 2 vols., Phaidon Press, 1957, I, p.37 ; F.Heinemann, Giovanni Bellini e i Belliniani, 2 vols., Venice, 1962, I, p.30, no.118(g) and fig.241 ; F.Gibbons, "Practices in Giovanni Bellini's Workshop", Pantheon, 33, 1965, p.153, n.5.

Versions

1. Steedel Institute, Frankfurt, no.853; (formerly in the Baronowsky colln., Vienna). 28½ x 35½ ins. (Heinemann no.118(s) and fig.239.) Inscr. JOANNES BELLINUS. With Sts John the Baptist -- shown as an adult -- and Elizabeth ; without heads of cherubim. Set outdoors.

2. Palazzo Ducale, Urbino, no.643. 27½ x 35½ ins. (Heinemann no.118(b) and fig.240.) With the same figures as (1).

3. John Herron Art Institute, Indianapolis, (formerly in Trotti colln., Paris). 30 x 23½ ins. (Heinemann no.118(n) and fig.296) Madonna and Child only ; curtain to rear.

Exhibited

Exhib.:
Museum of Fine Arts, Exhib. of Paintings, Sculpture and Graphic Arts, ^{Dallas Museum of Fine Arts} June-Nov.1936. Renaissance Gallery, no.9 ; Ind., 1959, no.4.

Versions (cont)

4. Last recorded in Schlossmuseum, Berlin. Dimensions unknown. (Heinemann no.118(1) and fig.301) Inscr. on parapet • Alunno Latantio P. (= by Lattanzio de Rimini). Madonna and Child only ; background of a single color (sky?)⁽⁵⁾

Attributed

First published by Suida (1935). He had earlier certified it to be by Bellini⁽¹⁴³²⁾, and this attribution was confirmed by G.Gluck, G.Gronsu, G.Fiocco and M.J.Friedländer (1932 also)⁽⁵⁾. Considered by Berenson (1957) to be by a close follower of Bellini. Heinemann (1962) classified it as a workshop version of a lost Bellini original of around 1490-95, attributing the central group to Girolamo di Santa Croce. According to F.Gibbons (1965) it is probably by Lattanzio de Rimini, working on a design of Bellini's.⁽⁶⁾

Comparison with the Madonna and Child in the Herron Institute, Indianapolis, with Lattanzio's name on it (see under versions) suggests that this latter attribution may well be right.⁽⁵⁾ Certainly the inscription in this case simply represents a public avowal of Bellini's primary responsibility for the work -- and one that was put on all major workshop products, irrespective of their true authorship.⁽⁶⁾

There are similar angels in the sky in the Madonna and Child with Cherubim in the Accademia, Venice (no.612/70) ; and, as as Heinemann noted, the Infant St John appears in the same place and pose in a Bellini composition known, e.g, from the version in the National Gallery, London (no.3540), ascribed to Catena.

(1432)

Notes.

1. These two pieces of information are taken from Heinemann (see lit.). At the time of purchase, the Clowes picture was

Penofsky noted the possibly emblematic significance of the colors here. According to Cesare Ripa's Iconologia of 1593, winter could be represented with a bluish garment, fire with a red one ; and pink (the color of the three cherubim round the angel's head) signified the "amor per dio".⁽⁷⁾

Notes, cont.

simply listed as coming from an "Austrian private colln."

21. Heinemann lists numerous other versions, both with saints and with the Madonna and Child only ; but they are either not reproduced, or not relevant to the Clowes painting.

3. Suida, cert. of May 1932, Baden bei Wien ; Glück, doc. of May 16, 1932 ; Gronau, doc. of Jun. 26, 1932 (citing the resemblances to pls. 156-158 in his book Giovanni Bellini, Klassiker der Kunst, Stuttgart, 1930 ; and also pl. 190 there, a copy by Pietro Duja) ; Fiocco, doc. of Sept. 7, 1932 ; Friedländer, doc. of Sept. 10, 1932.

4. Gibbons mistakenly cited the Clowes version^{type} as being at Indiana ^{University} ~~Univ.~~ For his opinion of the Frankfurt version (which he considers to be the best, though not necessarily by Bellini) and of the Urbino version, which he gives to Lattanzio, see pp. 147, 149 of that article. He proposed that use of the design in question was shared by Lattanzio and Rondinelli.

5. For Lattanzio, cf. F. Gibbons, The Late Giovanni Bellini and his Workshop, unpub. Harvard Ph.D. thesis, 1961, appdx. B7.

6. Cf. Gibbons, 1965, p. 152 on this subject.

7. Letter to Dr Clowes, Nov. 10, 1942.