

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 and Child

oil on panel, 21 x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

Provenance

Jules S. Bache, New York⁽¹⁾; Bache sale, Kende Galleries, New York, Apr. 23, 1945, no. 20⁽²⁾. Acquired by Dr Clowes in 19

Literature

E. Tietze-Conrat, "An Unpublished Madonna by Giovanni Bellini and the Problem of Replicas in his Shop", Gazette des Beaux Arts, 6^e série, 33, 1948, pp. 379-382 and fig. 1; W. Suida, Catalogue of the Samuel H. Kress Collection....., ~~William Rockwell~~ Nelson Gallery ~~of Art~~ and ~~Mary Baker~~ ^{Allen} ~~Walbridge~~ ^{Rockwell} Museum of Fine Arts, Kansas City, 1952, under cat. no. 18; F. Heinemann, Giovanni Bellini e i Belliniani, 2 vols, Venice, 1962, I, pp. 13f., no. 45(c) and fig. 215.

INSCR.

Versions

1. Kress Foundation, New York, on loan to Kansas City Art Museum (formerly in colln. of Nicholas F. Brady, Manhasset, Long Island). 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins, transferred to canvas. (Heinemann no. 45 and fig. 72.) Inscr. JOANNES BELLINUS on the parapet. Without curtain, so that there is open landscape to the rear on both sides of the figure group; castle to the left.
2. National Gallery, Washington, no. 373 (formerly in the Wesendonck colln., Bonn; on loan for many years to the Landesmuseum, Bonn). 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins. (Heinemann no. 45(a) and fig. 213.) Inscr. JOANNES BELLINUS on the parapet. Without curtain; castle buildings to the left, tree to the right.
3. Formerly in the colln. of William Salomon, New York. 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ ins. (Heinemann no. 49 and fig. 51). Curtain at the right; castle to the left.
4. Ghedini colln, Bologna. No reprodn. available.⁽³⁾

Exhibited

Ind., 1959, no. 5

Sold in 1945 with certificates from R. Longhi and G. Gronau, and a supporting letter from D. von Hadeln (all of 1928)⁽⁶⁾. Further certified to be a Bellini at that time by H. Tietze, W. R. Valentiner, W. Suida and L. Venturi⁽⁵⁾. Longhi suggested a date of around 1480, and Valentiner one of around 1485-87. Tietze-Conrat (1948) judged the Clowes painting to be the earliest of the existing versions and an integral production of Giovanni Bellini's. She suggested a date of around 1487 for the invention of the composition by Bellini, by analogy with the Madonna degli Alberetti, dated that year.

Suida later (1952) called the Kansas City version the best example of the composition, and classified the Clowes version as a somewhat earlier variant. ⁽¹⁹⁶²⁾ Heinemann catalogued the painting as a copy of the ^{Vincento} Kansas City version, in the style of Catena. F. Gibbons (1966)⁽⁶⁾ singled out the Kansas City version as the strongest one, and dated it around 1490. The Clowes version is in fact closest to the "Washington one," ^{but as Gibbons said} the face of the Virgin is more drily painted and the mouth is smaller. These features point to its being the work of a Bellini follower, to whom the design was handed over; and ^{here} Heinemann's suggestion of Catena (active ca. 1480 - 1531) deserves consideration ~~in this connection~~.

Notes.

1. In the 1945 sale cat. the painting is said to have belonged previously to Count Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, Rome. According to Heinemann, however (1962, no. 45(B)), the Contini-Bonacossi version is a different one, signed and dated 1480. He gives its earlier provenance as Lochis Colln., Bergamo; Meazza colln., Milan (sold 1884); and states that it is now in the colln. of F. A. Ghedini, Bologna. ~~For further~~ For further references to the Contini-Bonacossi version, see G. Gronau, Giovanni Bellini, Klassiker der Kunst, Stuttgart, 1930, p. 212, under nos. 127-28, where this version ("formerly in Milan") is said to be by Bellini and a forerunner of the Bonn version; and R. van Marle, The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting, 19 vols, The

Notes, cont.

Hague, 1923-38, XVII, 1935, p.294, where it is given to the Bellini shop.

22. Heinemann's supposition that the work subsequently passed into the Gimbel colln., New York appears to ^{be based} rest on a misunderstanding of Tietze-Conrat's already mistaken statement (1948, p.379) that the Bache sale took place "at Gimbel's".

3. See n.1. Heinemann lists three other versions which are less relevant, in that they reflect only the Bellini composition, and that much less directly.

4. Longhi, document of May 1928 ; Gronau, doc. of Sept.3, 1928 ; von Hadeln. doc. of Nov. 3, 1928, stating that in his view this was to be taken as the lost original referred to in his article "Kopien eines verschölenen Originals Giovanni Pellinis", Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst, N.F. 31, 1909-10, pp.139ff.

5. Tietze and Valentiner, docs. of Jun.18, 1945 ; Suida, letter of Oct.22, 1945, concurring with Longhi's opinion ; Venturi, doc. of Dec.5, 1945, concurring also (Clowes archives).

6. Letter to the compiler, Oct. 27, 1966 ; and cf. the opinion expressed in his entry for the Kansas City version in the exhb. cat. The Italian Heritage, Wildenstein, New York, May-Aug. 1967, no.9.