

COLNAGHI

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Tommaso Manzuoli, called
Maso da San Friano
(Florence, 1536 – 1571)

Portrait of Sinibaldo Gaddi
post 1564
oil on panel
116 x 92 cm.;
45 5/8 x 36 1/4 in.
inscribed (on the vase):
SINIBALDUS.NIC.SINI.DE GADDIS.
I ETA. S.A.M. VI

Provenance

Probably commissioned by Niccolo Gaddi (1537 – 1591), Florence;
Luigi Koelliker Collection, Milan, until approximately 15 years ago when acquired by a:
Private collection, Florence, from whom acquired by the present owner.

Literature

L. Conigliello, 'Jacopo Ligozzi tra turchi, fantolini e disegni di architetture', *Paragone*, s. III, nos. 84-85, 2009, pp. 52-53, note 25 (as Jacopo Ligozzi);
A. Nesi, 'Problemi di ritrattistica cinquecentesca: Maso da San Friano ed altri pittori a lui contemporanei', *Arte Cristiana*, XCVIII, 2010, pp. 189-190, reproduced in black and white on p. 192, fig. 17;
A. Fenech Kroke, in *Florence. Portraits à la cour des Médicis*, exh. cat., (ed.) C. Falciani, Brussels 2015, pp. 173, 183, under cat. no. 37;

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C. Acidini Luchinat, 'Ritratto di Sinibaldo Gaddi', in *Il Cinquecento a Firenze: "maniera moderna" e controriforma*, exh. cat., (eds.) C. Falciani & A. Natali, Florence 2017, p. 150, cat. no. IV.2, reproduced in colour on p. 151.

Exhibited

Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, *Il Cinquecento a Firenze: "maniera moderna" e controriforma*, 21 September 2017 – 21 January 2018.

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The following note is based on an extract from the *Il Cinquecento a Firenze* exhibition catalogue (Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, 21 September 2017 – 21 January 2018, curated by Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali), written by Cristina Acidini Luchinat.

Among the ‘child’ portraits of Florentine art – which should be considered an authentic ‘genre’ in its own right within the encompassing ‘genre’ of portraiture – there is no doubt that the case of the portraits of the Gaddi children is an unusual one. Present in paintings dating from the last years of the 16th century, they are poignant tokens of hope, of mourning and of remembrance. Lucrezia, Sinibaldo and Emilia, all of whom died at a tender age, were the offspring of cavaliere Niccolò Gaddi’s two marriages. Niccolò Gaddi was a gentleman descended from the line of Giottesque painters who held positions at the Medici court – senator, lieutenant of the Accademia del Disegno – and was especially close to Francesco I. Niccolò was Francesco’s companion and often acted as a guide as he pursued his passions and curiosities: in the collection of antiquities, works of art and natural rarities, in his precocious museography and the practice of proto-scientific experiments in the Casino Mediceo of San Marco. Works of art from his rich collections, dispersed in the 18th century, are still appearing on the art market.¹

Three of the portraits of his descendants – all in private collections – were reunited for the exhibition *Florence. Portraits à la cour des Médicis* in Paris in 2015 – 2016; in that catalogue, Antonella Fenech Kroke attributed the paintings to Santi di Tito and dated them around 1564 – 1565.² Lucrezia (who died in 1569, but was painted in 1577 according to Cristina De Benedictis)³ is depicted in the garden known as the *Paradiso dei Gaddi* with the palazzo in the background, with a yellow Macaw parrot and a gerbil (otherwise known as a desert rat), symbols of her father's access to exotic fauna or at least images of these species. Emilia, depicted in half-length, refills a vase full of flowers with water, perhaps an allusion to her father's knowledge of botany. In the pendant to the painting of Emilia, Sinibaldo brandishes a luxurious teething-ring, while his masculine gender is covertly displayed through a curtain-like opening in his swaddling bands.

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The question of the Gaddi children named Sinibaldo, the ancestral name, is more complex than might at first appear. The documents suggest that two were born: one of a pair of twins (the other named Vincenzo), son of Niccolò and Emilia Ridolfi and baptised on the 7th October 1563; and another who was the son of Vincenzo, who was only twenty at the time, and baptised on the 26th May 1582.⁴ However, the question remains open, as no other trace of Vincenzo – who predeceased his father – survives. Mirabello Cavalori's portrait of Niccolò Gaddi's illegitimate daughter Settimia – who was later renamed Lucrezia in honour of the latter's mother, perhaps after the demise of his legitimate daughter Lucrezia (Corsi Collection, Museo Bardini, Florence) – contributes to the complexity of what we know of Gaddi's progeniture.

The present painting, once in the Koelliker Collection, Milan, is a portrait of the first Sinibaldo, born in 1563. The inscription on the vase of flowers tells us that he was six months old at the time; he was to die not long after reaching this age, on 31st March 1564. The composition is of the greatest originality. In the same manner as the more restless of the 'innocents' in Della Robbia's medallions in the portico of the renowned Florentine *ospedale*, Sinibaldo has freed himself of his swaddling bands, which he has perhaps only just succeeded in unwinding, thus displaying his robust and firm body, now barely girded at the waist and the groin by the remains of the swaddling. The chubby face set in his round head presents, even in its childish features, resolved and recognisable physiological elements: full red lips, a dimpled chin, and sharp black eyes, which together with the red hair make manifest the resemblance to his father. A young Moorish page tries with difficulty to hold steady the wriggling and unstable infant Sinibaldo, who sets his eyes on what is occurring outside of the boundaries of the painting, and is sitting on the edge of a cabinet set on a platform, on top of a trimmed cloth and a cushion covered in *cangiante* silk. The tonal and chromatic contrasts between the two figures are of great refinement: the white and pink flesh of the naked infant is heightened by the contrast with the darker paint used to paint the Moor, on whose black velvet garment the snow-white cambric collar edged with lace stands out. Two small bracelets of auspicious coral are wrapped around the child's chubby wrists and introduce vivid touches of red to the composition. In addition, the black silhouette of the page, arching in its caring and vigilant gesture, stands out against the light-coloured

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architecture, which is almost certainly a view of Palazzo Gaddi between via del Giglio and via del Melarancio. The stone shield over the door frame (with the 'staff' (*bastone*), bent at an angle at its foot, as was customary in Florence), a portion of white-washed wall lit by the light of the sun, and then a chimney-piece in *pietra serena* on brackets (*mensole inginocchiate*), with a putto holding the Gaddi arms, outlined by the slight cast shadow.

The view – seen in strong perspective which endows the architectural elements with sharp, clean-cut profiles – suggests a meditation on Bronzino's *Portrait of Bartolomeo Panciatichi* (fig. 1).⁵ In the foreground of this shaded environment, one observes a middle-sized, thick-coated white and tan dog, with long ears and a tufted tail which seems to belong to the Epagneul or Spaniel family, originating in Britany and valued since the 16th century for hunting. Crouching between the floor and the platform, the dog has his eyes fixed on the circular biscuits (*ciambelline*) so negligently hanging from Sinibaldo's hand. A bunch of spring flowers – roses, peonies, a narcissus and a sprig of white philadelphus – in a finely wrought metal vase with pod-shaped decoration (*bacellato*) completes the setting.⁶ Towards the bottom right, we see a winged insect.

This *sui generis* masterpiece captures and fixes – outside of time – an instant of fragile happiness. Only superficially a spontaneous composition, appearing to record a *tranche de vie*, it is in fact constructed to communicate very specific messages: the wealth of the family who owns an exotic page, the nobility of the father's interests, the social standing conferred by such a well-endowed home, and the proximity of a well-tended garden cultivated with both botanical knowledge and passion. From the painting, which is believed to be posthumous, emerges the desire to pass down to the descendants the image of a flourishing child full of vitality, cared for in the elegant and comfortable domestic environment, whose promising existence could only be interrupted by a fatal illness.

During the search for the author of the work, Jacopo Ligozzi's name has been proposed⁷ owing in part to the presence of the naturalistic components in the portraits, such as the animals in that of Lucrezia⁸ and the flowers present in Emilia's portrait. A well-aimed suggestion by Philippe Costamagna was then followed by further in-depth investigation by

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Alessandro Nesi in the direction of Maso da San Friano, a convincing attribution, when one makes a comparison to other works by this artist. These display affinities in terms of the composition, as well as in the handling of the paint, which is 'suspended between a decisive plasticity, in the manner of Foschi, and the soft sfumato associated with Andrea del Sarto'.⁹

In Zeri's photographic archive, there is a colour photograph of a painting (attributed to an unknown Florentine artist of the 16th century, whereabouts unknown) which is a partial copy of the painting presented here, as it is only the child who is depicted, with the *taralli* biscuits held in his left hand, and his right hand – rather than holding the hand of the page – clutches a rose, which alludes to the brevity of his tender years of existence (fig. 2). The inscription, in capital letters at the top of the painting, reads *Sinibaldo S [econ]do [son] di Nic.o di Sinibaldo Gaddi*, suggesting that this version was destined for the dynastic gallery of the Gaddi family, which was dispersed in the same way as the rest of the collection.

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NICCOLO GADDI (1537 – 1591)

Niccolo Gaddi (1537 – 1591) was the son of Sinibaldo di Taddeo Gaddi and Lucrezia Strozzi, the daughter of Matteo Strozzi. The family were direct decedents of Taddeo Gaddi, one of the leading pupils of Giotto and founder, after his master's death in 1337, of a prestigious workshop in Florence during the 14th century. The other significant painters within the Gaddi dynasty were Gaddo Gaddi, Taddeo's father, and Agnolo Gaddi, his son, the last exponent of Giotto's style and master of Lorenzo Monaco.

The Gaddi family occupied a major role in Florentine political life for many years – as members of the Signoria, senators and cardinals. The foundation of this political influence was their role as bankers, in part thanks to the marriage of Niccolo's grandfather, Taddeo di Angelo, to Antonia Altoviti, daughter of the renowned Bindo Altoviti, the financier to the papal states and second only in international banking influence to the Medici.

Through this marriage the Gaddi family established their position in Rome, which was consolidated further by Luigi Gaddi, Niccolo's uncle, who obtained extensive privileges, greatly expanding the family's activity within the papal states due to his close ties to the Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII.

Around 1550 Niccolò Gaddi was studying Latin and Hebrew under Francesco Vagnucci. This humanist education was most likely intended to prepare him for a career in the church, even taking minor orders at the age of fourteen, however in 1559 Niccolò had an illegitimate daughter named Lucrezia and rescinded any such vocational plans, marrying Emilia, the daughter of Lorenzo Ridolfi. Around 1552 he became a knight of the Order of St James of the Sword, then presided over by Charles V as King of Spain.

Gaddi exhibited his collections of art and other objects in his palazzo on the Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini in Florence, to which he added a botanical garden, even hiring the Flemish botanist Joseph Goedenhuyze and introducing him to the Grand Dukes of Tuscany.

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After his first wife's death in 1563 Gaddi married again, this time to Maria, a daughter of Alfonso Strozzi. In 1569 Niccolò became Florentine ambassador in Mantua and Ferrara for the Grand Duke Cosimo, who then appointed him Senator in 1578. In 1575 he was an '*operaio*' at Santa Maria del Fiore, in 1579 one of the nine '*conservatori del Dominio*', in 1581 the supreme magistrate, and in 1582 one of the eight '*guardia e balia*'.

Despite his long and prestigious career within the court, Niccolò is more renowned as an art collector and advisor to the Medici art collections. At the time of his death, he owned around 200 paintings, the whole series of the Libro de' Disegni by Giorgio Vasari and, quite unusually for that time, a group of preparatory drawings and cartoons made for frescoes. He also collected ancient Roman statues and vases and by his death owned: nine sundials, 2700 medals in different metals, 1270 general books and manuscripts, 130 music books and manuscripts, around 40 musical instruments, and a small collection of exotic curiosities, including minerals, coral and shells.

Between 1586 and 1590 he was put in charge of the Uffizi's painting collections. He commissioned works from Maso da San Friano, Giovan Battista Paggi, Naldini, Santi di Tito and Girolamo Macchietti, his most favoured artists, many of whose paintings were added to Gaddi's own collection.

Much like his famous great-grandfather Bindo Altoviti, Niccolo was one of the most passionate and ambitious patrons of his age, possessing an esteemed connoisseurship that has stood the test of time. It was Niccolo who commissioned Giovanni Antonio Dosio to construct the family chapel in Santa Maria Novella. Accomplished in less than 7 years, it was the first example of Florentine architecture fully decorated in *commesso* of *pietre dure* and stones, a luxurious kind of decoration that until this commission had only been seen exclusively in Rome. This is not to mention the outstanding altarpiece by Bronzino, as well as frescos of the vault by Alessandro Allori.

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Niccolò wrote his will on the 11th June 1591 and died only three days later; he was buried with his family in their tomb in Santa Maria Novella. With him, the male Gaddi line died out, and Niccolò's estate went to the descendants of his sister Maddalena, the wife of Jacopo Pitti. However, only a few years after his death the collection began to be dispersed, despite the best efforts of Vincenzo Gonzaga's wife, Eleonora de' Medici, who endeavoured to buy the whole collection on 28th June 1591 (only a fortnight after Niccolò's death), but was unsuccessful.

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Figure 1. Agnolo di Cosimo, known as Bronzino, *Portrait of Bartolomeo Panciatichi*, 1540.
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

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Figure 2. Unknown Florentine artist of the 16th century, *Portrait of Sinibaldo Gaddi*.
Whereabouts unknown

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Footnotes

¹ C. Acidini Luchinat, 'Niccolò Gaddi collezionista e dilettante del Cinquecento', *Paragone*, nos. 359/361, 1980, pp. 141-175; C. Acidini Luchinat, 'A Firenze per i Medici sulla cappella Gaddi nella chiesa di Santa Maria Novella', in *Giovan Antonio Dosio da San Gimignano architetto e scultor fiorentino tra Roma, Firenze e Napoli*, (ed.) E. Barletti, Florence 2011, pp. 327-343.

² A. Fenech Kroke, in *Florence. Portraits à la cour des Médicis*, exh. cat., (ed.) C. Falciani, Brussels 2015, pp. 178-183, nos. 35-37.

³ C. De Benedictis, 'Devozione-collezione: sulla committenza fiorentina nell'età della Controriforma', in *Altari e committenza: episodi a Firenze nell'età della controriforma*, Florence 1996, pp. 11-12, fig. 1.

⁴ L. Conigliello, 'Jacopo Ligozzi tra turchi, fantolini e disegni di architetture', *Paragone*, s. III, nos. 84/85, 2009, pp. 52-53, note 25; A. Nesi, 'Problemi di ritrattistica cinquecentesca: Maso da San Friano ed altri pittori a lui contemporanei', *Arte Cristiana*, XCVIII, 2010, pp. 189.

⁵ 1540, Uffizi, inv. 1890 n. 741.

⁶ Nesi 2010, p. 190.

⁷ Conigliello 2009, pp. 52-53, note 25, with a date of the late 1580s.

⁸ Also present in Ligozzi's painted panels GDSU, inv. nos. 1959 Orn. 1997 Orn, as observed by De Benedictis.

⁹ '*...sospesa fra plasticismi decisi, alla Foschi, e morbido sfumato sartesco.*' Nesi 2010, p. 190.