

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



ANGELICA KAUFFMAN

(Chur 1741-1807 Rome)

***THE HOLY FAMILY
WITH INFANT SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST***

oil on canvas
33 x 40.5 cm;
13 x 16 in.

Provenance

Sale, Milan, Lucas Casa d'Aste, 19 September 2023, lot 60;
Private collection, Siena.

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Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807), a luminary of eighteenth-century European art, is renowned for her exceptional contributions to the cultural landscape of her era. A talented musician and one of the few women artists to achieve professional acclaim, Kauffmann's artistic scope was broad, encompassing historical, mythological, portrait and religious paintings. Her depiction of *The Holy Family with the Infant Saint John the Baptist* stands out as a rare and exquisite example of her forays into religious themes, showcasing her exceptional skill and sensitivity as an artist. It was only later in her career that Kauffmann turned her talents to Christian subjects attempting, as she had in her history paintings, to find new and untried means of representing them. In this scene, the Madonna is depicted cradling the Christ child on her lap, while the infant Saint John the Baptist, clutching a lamb, stands at her feet, with Joseph nearby engaged in carpentry, all within a rustic outdoor setting. The intimate scale of this tender portrayal of the Holy Family draws the viewer in for close inspection and deep contemplation.

Angelika Kauffmann was born in 1741 in Switzerland, to Cleophea Lutz and the artist Johann Joseph Kauffmann. From a young age, her parents nurtured her talents in both music and painting, providing her with an exceptional education uncommon for girls of her era. She quickly emerged as a prodigy, engaging in her father's work as an assistant by her early teens and soon producing her own works and portraits. She accompanied her father on his travels across Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, where she was not only exposed to the grandeur of Renaissance art but also to the emerging trends of Neoclassicism, enriching her artistic foundation and perspectives.

Following a several-year stint in Italy, during which time she honed her skills as a painter and began developing relationships with many important clients, she relocated to London in 1766, where her career flourished. She quickly formed a bond with Sir Joshua Reynolds, a leading figure in English art, with whom she reportedly shared a close relationship that nearly led to marriage. Her multilingual proficiency in English, French, Italian, and German, combined with her charisma, intellect, and artistic prowess, garnered widespread admiration. She became a favoured artist among the elite, attracting patronage from Royal family members and other prominent connoisseurs. The recognition of her talents was such that in 1768 she became one of only two female founding members of the Royal Academy. Her status as a highly celebrated painter in England was further solidified when, in 1779, she was chosen among the artists to contribute to the ambitious didactic programme that formed part of the decoration of the Council Chamber of the Royal Academy. Perhaps the most telling testament to her prominence in that era comes from Kauffmann herself, through her renowned *Self Portrait with a bust of Minerva, the Goddess of Art* (**Fig. 1**), executed in 1780.

In 1781, following her marriage to Italian decorative artist Antonio Zucchi (1726-1795), Kauffmann returned to Rome. Her studio there evolved into a cultural hub for the elite on the grand tour, drawing in artists, writers, aristocrats, and art dealers. Among her distinguished clientele were several European monarchs, including Catherine the Great of Russia, and she also maintained close friendships with global figures like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Antonio Canova, and Sir William Hamilton. These connections not only cemented her status as a cultural icon of her time but also enriched her artistic output. It is within this context that the present work, signed and dated 1784, was created.

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Fig. 1 Angelica Kauffman, *Self Portrait with a bust of Minerva, the Goddess of Art*, 1780
Chur, Bündler Kunstmuseum.