

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Seville 1618 - 1682)

Madonna and Child, c. 1658-1659

Pen and golden-brown ink and brown wash, over red and black chalk.
17.6 x 13.3 cm (6 3/4 x 5 1/8 in.)

Bears old attribution at the base of the column 'Morillo'.

Provenance

Possibly William Mayor (d. 1874), London,
his, sale, Paris, 6 March 1843, lot 57;
sale, Paris, Christie's, 23 March 2006, lot 232;
sale, London, Sotheby's, 5 July 2017, lot 13;
Colección Colomer, Madrid.

Literature

M. Mena Marqués, *Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682): dibujos: catálogo razonado*, Santander 2013,
pp. 180-182, no. 23, reproduced, p. 181.
P. Hereza Lebrón, *Corpus Murillo. Pinturas y dibujos. Mariología*, Sevilla 2019, pp. 122-25, no. M-20.1,
reproduced, p. 122.



This intimate and highly sensitive drawing of the *Madonna and Child*, datable to circa 1658–1659, constitutes an important and particularly rare document within Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's graphic production of the central decades of his career. Executed in pen and golden brown ink with brown wash over red and black chalk, the sheet is notable for the way in which it records the gradual development of a compositional idea through distinct stages, rather than presenting a fully resolved invention from the outset. As such, it offers unusually direct insight into Murillo's working process at a moment of sustained formal and stylistic consolidation.

The drawing appears to have been executed in successive and cumulative phases.

The initial stage is devoted to the half-length group of the Virgin and Child, which forms the conceptual and emotional core of the composition. This first conception is realised primarily through transparent brown wash, supported by pen work, and establishes an intimate relationship between the figures. The Virgin is shown in profile, inclined towards the Child, a type that still relates to models employed by Murillo in the 1640s, including that used for *Saint Francis Solano* (1645), while the Child's compact and robust anatomy recalls that found in the *Adoration of the Magi*.

It also resonates with certain Flemish graphic sources, particularly the engraved devotional works of Cornelis Schut I (see fig. 1), whose numerous interpretations of the maternal theme appear to have provided Murillo with formal and iconographic points of reference. At this stage, spatial definition is deliberately limited, and the focus remains on the affective exchange between mother and child.

A second phase concentrates on the lower portion of the Virgin's mantle. Here Murillo reinforces the volumetric presence of the figure through a series of rapid and economical pen strokes that clarify the rhythm and weight of the drapery as it descends towards the ground. This intervention brings the figure into closer alignment with Murillo's established graphic practice of the mid-1650s, in which drapery is treated with a degree of abstraction while remaining structurally legible and expressive.

In a final phase, the composition is placed within an architectural framework. The addition of a bench, together with a column articulated with pilaster elements and a loosely indicated hanging curtain, introduces a classical setting that finds parallels across Murillo's oeuvre. Architectural backdrops of this type appear in early works, such as the *Virgin and Child with*



Fig. 1. Cornelis Schut I, *The Virgin and Child*, engraving, 11.8 x 10.8 cm.

Saint John formerly in the Stirling Maxwell Collection (c. 1645–50, fig. 2), and recur in later paintings of the subject, including those now in Dresden, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 3), and the Palazzo Corsini in Rome.



Fig. 2. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Madonna and Child with Infant Saint John*, 1645 - 1650, oil on canvas, 160.7 x 109.2 cm. Glasgow, Pollok House.



Fig. 3. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Virgin and Child*, 1670s, oil on canvas, 165.7 x 109.2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In the present drawing, however, these architectural elements remain schematically defined, suggesting that they functioned as exploratory additions rather than as components of a fully integrated spatial solution.

The present drawing thus documents a process of refinement in which Murillo progressively developed and adjusted his initial idea. The primary focus remains the half-length grouping of the Virgin inclined toward the Child, while the subsequent additions of drapery and architectural elements can be understood as part of the artist's ongoing effort to enrich and stabilize the spatial and formal relationships within the scene.

The interpretative value of our drawing is further illuminated by the existence of a related sheet, today in a Madrid private collection, which represents a more advanced and unified treatment of the same subject (fig. 4). In that later sheet, Murillo resolves within a single creative moment the compositional components that in our preliminary version appear to have been developed sequentially, achieving a more seamless integration of figures, drapery, and architectural setting. Seen in this light, our drawing assumes particular importance as a preparatory work that records an exploratory phase in the evolution of the composition.

This relationship is also reflected in the handling of materials. In our drawing, the use of red chalk is limited and discreet, anticipating its more fully integrated constructive role in the final version, where it contributes additional tonal and structural nuance alongside pen and wash.



Fig. 4. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Virgin and Child*, Pen and brown ink with brown wash, with strokes of washed red chalk, on paper, 26.5 x 18.7. Madrid, private collection.



The old inscription “Morillo,” visible at the base of the column, should be understood as a later collector’s attribution. Its spelling and graphic form correspond exactly to the notation found on the *Virgin and Child* drawing in the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 5), strongly suggesting that both sheets were inscribed by the same hand and, consequently, once formed part of the same, now unidentified, collection. This shared attribution is of particular significance given the absence of any secure early provenance for either drawing, and it provides circumstantial but compelling evidence for their historical association.

Fig. 5. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Madonna Nursing the Christ Child*, pen and brown ink and brush and brown wash over red and black chalk, with traces of white, 21.4 x 11.4. Cleveland Museum of Art.

Our sheet may correspond to a drawing recorded in a Paris sale catalogue of 1843 as *Vierge assise tenant l'Enfant Jésus*, described as executed in pen and wash and owned by an “artiste anglais, Mr Mayor de Londres,” as cited by Soulié in his manuscript of nineteenth-century Parisian sales of Spanish drawings preserved in the Museo del Prado. Given the absence of dimensions and the general nature of the description, this identification remains hypothetical.

The drawing was unpublished prior to its appearance on the French art market in 2006, where it was attributed to Murillo on the basis of the inscription. Manuela Mena Marqués subsequently proposed a dating of circa 1656–58,¹ noting the drawing’s undoubted quality as well as its technical, stylistic and compositional similarities with other works by the artist, most notably the Cleveland sheet.

¹ M. Mena Marqués, *Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682): dibujos: catálogo razonado*, Santander 2013, pp. 180-182, no. 23.