

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Seville 1618 - 1682)

Madonna and Child, c. 1658-1659

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, with touches of washed red chalk, on laid paper.
26.5 x 18.7 cm (10 3/8 x 7 3/8 in.)

Inscribed upper right, in pen and ink, with unidentified text or numerals, probably an old collector's inscription.

Watermark: a crowned shield (ducal coronet), containing three lobed flowers, and the letters DA below (17th century).

Provenance

Possibly William Mayor (d. 1874), London;
possibly his, sale, Paris, 6 March 1843, lot 57;
possibly Favet, Paris;
Private Collection, Madrid.

Literature

Catalogue Mayor, Paris, 1843, p. 8, no. 57 (as "Murillo. *Vierge assise tenant l'enfant Jésus*. A la plume et lavé. Al margen, 3");

A. Soullié, 1913, vol. I, unpaginated (recording the Mayor sale, 6 March 1843, lot 57, as "Murillo. *Viérgé assise tenant l'Enfant Jesus*. Dessin à la plume et lavé. Al margen, 3", noting Favet).

P. Hereza Lebrón, *Corpus Murillo. Pinturas y dibujos. Mariología*, Sevilla 2019, pp. 126–127, no. M-20.2, reproduced, p. 126.



This drawing of the *Madonna and Child*, datable to circa 1658–1659 and first published by Pablo Hereza in 2019, represents an important addition to the corpus of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. More significantly, it marks a decisive and highly resolved moment within the artist’s sustained engagement with the maternal theme. The present sheet must be understood in direct relationship to an earlier treatment of the subject, the *Madonna and Child* in the Colomer collection, with which it forms a closely related yet clearly progressive pair (fig.1). Together, these two drawings document a process of refinement through which Murillo moved from exploratory compositional probing towards a unified and assured pictorial solution.



Fig. 1. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Virgin and Child*, pen and golden-brown ink and brown wash, over red and black chalk. 17.6 x 13.3 cm. Colomer collection.

In the Colomer drawing, Murillo appears to test the emotional and spatial relationship between Mother and Child through a sequence of incremental adjustments. Technical analysis indicates that the sheet was constructed in successive phases: an initial conception focused on the sacred figures; a subsequent expansion of the Virgin’s mantle to stabilise the lower register; and a final architectural framing incorporating a bench, a column articulated with pilaster elements, and a hanging curtain. While each of these stages is persuasive in isolation, their cumulative effect introduces a degree of compositional tension, suggesting a moment in which the artist was still negotiating the balance between intimacy and structure.

Our drawing represents a more advanced stage in this sustained inquiry. Here, the subject is addressed with markedly greater clarity and assurance. The Virgin and Child are conceived from the outset as a coherent and interdependent unit, both psychologically and formally, embedded within a stable pictorial structure that leaves little sense of hesitation or revision. Rather than accreting compositional elements around an initial idea, Murillo arrives at a complete solution in a single creative act. The Virgin is shown in profile, gently inclined towards the Child, who reclines across her lap and returns her gaze. The reciprocal exchange of looks establishes an intimate emotional dialogue that forms the compositional core of the drawing, reinforced by physical contact and by the exceptional delicacy with which the hands are articulated.

This compositional type is not a sudden invention but remains closely aligned with solutions employed by Murillo as early as the 1640s. Comparable arrangements can be found in works such as *Saint Francis Solano* (1645), while the Child’s compact, robust anatomy recalls figures

in the *Adoration of the Magi*. These continuities underline Murillo's habit of revisiting and refining favoured motifs across decades and media. In our drawing, however, these established solutions are deployed with a new economy and restraint, allowing the emotional relationship between Mother and Child to emerge with particular clarity.

The architectural setting plays a crucial stabilising role in this achievement. A bench, together with a column articulated with pilaster elements and a loosely indicated hanging curtain, introduces a classical framework that finds parallels throughout Murillo's oeuvre. Architectural backdrops of this type appear in early works, such as the *Virgin and Child with Saint John* formerly in the Stirling Maxwell Collection (c. 1645–50, fig. 2), and recur in later paintings of the subject, including examples now in Dresden, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (fig. 3), and the Palazzo Corsini in Rome. In our drawing, this familiar architectural vocabulary is reduced to its essentials, functioning less as descriptive setting than as a quiet structural armature that anchors the figures and enhances the sense of compositional balance.



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.

The technical handling of the drawing reinforces this impression of unity and control. The pen line is confident and economical, articulating form with clarity and suppleness, particularly in the modelling of the faces and hands. The brown ink wash is applied with restraint, modulating volume and atmosphere without compensating for structural uncertainty. Red

chalk, while present in both our drawing and the Colomer sheet, assumes a more deliberate and constructive role here, subtly integrated into the modelling of flesh and enriching the tonal range. The consistent handling across the sheet contrasts with the shifts observable in the Colomer drawing and underscores the sense that our drawing was conceived and executed as a coherent whole.

At the same time, both drawings reflect Murillo's sustained engagement with Flemish graphic sources, particularly the engraved devotional works of Cornelis Schut I (see fig. 4). Schut's numerous interpretations of the Virgin and Child explore variations on maternal intimacy through pose, bodily contact, and reciprocal gazes, providing formal and iconographic points of reference that Murillo clearly absorbed. In the Colomer drawing, these influences manifest themselves in an exploratory manner, as Murillo probes different solutions for articulating the emotional and spatial relationship between Mother and Child. In our drawing, by contrast, those same influences are fully assimilated and distilled.



Fig. 4. Cornelis Schut I, *The Virgin and Child*, engraving, 11.8 × 10.8 cm.

The Flemish emphasis on affective immediacy remains present, but Murillo moves beyond quotation, translating external models into a personal idiom marked by tenderness, balance, and emotional restraint. Murillo's access to Schut's graphic production may have been facilitated not only through commercial channels but also through personal connections.

Cornelis Schut's nephew, Cornelio Schut III, relocated to Seville around 1641 and became active within the city's artistic milieu, offering a plausible context for Murillo's sustained familiarity with his uncle's engravings. Whatever the precise mechanism of transmission, the dialogue between Murillo's drawings and Flemish prints forms an integral part of his creative process during this period.

Stylistically and technically, our drawing aligns with Murillo's production of circa 1658–1659, a phase characterised by increasing compositional confidence and emotional refinement. Although no painted version corresponding exactly to this composition is known, this absence does not diminish the drawing's significance. Murillo frequently employed drawing as an autonomous arena for invention, refining pictorial ideas without necessarily translating them into paint. The relationship between the Colomer drawing and our sheet thus offers valuable insight into Murillo's working method: the former records a phase of exploration and adjustment, while our drawing crystallises those efforts into a resolved and convincing

solution. In doing so, it stands as one of the clearest expressions of Murillo's mature approach to the Virgin and Child, combining structural clarity with profound emotional subtlety. 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 Soullié 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.