

PAOLO DI BERNARDINO D'ANTONIO called FRA PAOLINO DA PISTOIA
(Pistoia 1488 - 1547)

On recto: *Virgin and Child with the infant St John the Baptist*

On verso: *Virgin and Child*

Black chalk heightened with white
9,3 x 11,2 cm
circa 1515

Provenance:

Sale of Sotheby's New York: Tuesday, January 9, 1996 [Lot 00026];
Private collection.

Related work:

For the recto: Fra Bartolommeo, *Virgin and Child with Musician Angels*, Tempera, 130 x 130 cm, Hermitage museum, St Petersburg.

For the verso: Fra Bartolommeo, *Virgin and Child with St John the Baptist and St Elisabeth*, formerly in the Cook collection, Richmond.



We are grateful to Dr. Chris Fischer for suggesting the attribution to Fra Paolino on basis of photographs. This drawing recto and verso is related to Fra Bartolommeo's late works.

Dr. Chris Fischer noticed that From 1515 and onwards a steadily increasing part of work was left to members of Fra Bartolommeo's workshop assistants, possibly because Fra Bartolommeo suffered from malaria that he seems to have caught during his visit to Rome in 1513 or 14. The execution of many paintings and drawings were apparently given over to members of the San Marco workshop. Paintings like the *Madonna della Misericordia* of 1515 in the Museo di Villa Guinigi in Lucca or the *Madonna with music making angels* of 1515 in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg seem to have been executed under the daily leadership of Fra Paolino. Fra Bartolommeo at this point only worked as entrepreneur delivering loose sketches to his workshop assistants who based the rest of the preparatory work and the execution of the final work on them. The workshop was organized along the lines of Raphael's atelier concerned with the decoration of the *Loggia* in the Vatican, but as opposed to Raphael, who could freely chose gifted collaborators that he could control, Fra Bartolommeo, as a friar, had to collaborate with the painters that the prior of his convent decided to place in his workshop, which were usually members of the order.

This illuminating drawing bears witness to the great debt the pupils of Fra Bartolommeo, and in this case specifically Fra Paolino, owed to their master.

Fra Bartolommeo has a distinct and distinguished position among the classical painters of the Renaissance. The esteem in which the artist was held early on is demonstrated by a decree on the export of art, published in 1602 by the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand I, in which Fra Bartolommeo's name appears as one of the nineteen artists whose works were not allowed to leave Tuscany without special permission. Throughout his career, his works retained a very personal monumentality and solemnity, yet his style nonetheless evolved, reflecting the works and artists with whom he came into contact, as well as other artistic developments taking place around him. The drawings he produced reflect the dominant interests and influences of each period of his career. This particular sheet is particularly revealing of Fra Bartolommeo's influence on the style, technique, and subjects of Fra Paolino, working with the Master.

On the recto, the *Virgin and Child with the infant St John the Baptist* relates to the *Virgin and Child with St John the Baptist and St Elisabeth* by Fra Bartolommeo, formerly in the Cook collection, Richmond (London, Christie's, Old Masters & 19th Century Art Evening Sale « *Property sold at the direction of Brenda, Lady Cook, formerly from the Cook Collection, Doughty House, Richmond* », 7 July 2009, lot 15, sold for £ 2,169,250.), oil on panel, 148,6 x 121,7 cm, signed and dated « *F.Barto. or is pred. floren 1516* » (centre right).



Fra Bartolommeo was an outstanding draftsman, and drawing was central to his creative process. Two sheets in an album in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum at Rotterdam are directly related to this picture: both are of garzoni in the poses of the Virgin and Saint Elisabeth, and, in what is presumably the second, a draped stooping figure corresponding closely with the latter is also shown (Rotterdam, vol N, 53 verso and 51 verso, Fischer, loc. cit.). The pose of the Madonna was perhaps first explored in the sheet at Rotterdam (Vol N, 128, Fischer, pp. 309-11, no. 83), in which the positions of the legs and torso and right arm are already established, but the head is turned to the right, and the Child faces the Madonna. The Cook picture - which Fischer characterised as « *enchanting* » (op. cit., p. 310) and Padovani as « *stupenda* » (op. cit., p. 14), is one of two signed variants of the design. The other, in the Galleria Corsini, Rome, measures 137 by 127 cm., and shows the Madonna and Holy Children in reverse, with Saint Joseph rather than Saint Elisabeth.

The evidence of our drawing, which suggests how deliberately Fra Paolino expressed the human and spatial relationship between the Virgin and Holy children, shows the Virgin turned in the same direction, holding the Child leaning towards Saint John the Baptist. She wears a veil and her halo is suggested above her head by a line.

The pose of the Virgin and Holy Children served as model to Fra Paolino for the *Holy Family*, Galleria Doria and for the *Holy Family with St Elizabeth and the Infant Baptist*, oil on panel, 120 x 105,7 cm, Number K 1105, Kress Collection, New York.



Graphically our drawing is close to two drawing in the Louvre: Fra Paolino, *The Virgin, Saint John the Evangelist, and Mary Magdalene at the foot of the cross*, black chalk heightened with white on light grey prepared paper, 13,7 x 22,6 cm, collections: Jabach, Everhard (L. 2959), Cabinet du Roi, INV 222; and Fra Paolino, *Virgin and Child with the infant St John the Baptist* (recto) and *The disbelief of St Thomas*, black chalk heightened with white on light grey prepared paper, 13,9 x 9,9 cm, on recto inscription in pen and brown ink lower left: : « 7 » and « 98 », collections : Jabach, Everhard - Cabinet du Roi, INV 238.



According to Dr. Chris Fischer, the verso of our drawing was based on the sketch: Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen M176 verso which is no-doubt by Fra Bartolommeo himself. By comparison our drawing is more woolly, the contours and modelling softer and the eyes made with dark dots – a feature shared with the painting. These traits suggest that the draughtsman was Fra Paolino, who also made another drawing based on this figure: Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett KdZ 5080 verso (black chalk, see below), which in addition to the woolly character is marked by the curly outlines that are one of the hallmarks of Fra Paolino's style.



This remarkable double-sided sheet is the physical evidence of the intensive influence of the pose of the Madonna and Child and their expressions that went into the creation of Fra Bartolommeo's masterpiece located in the Hermitage, *Virgin and Child with Musician Angels*, dated 1515, Entered the Hermitage in 1772; acquired from the collection of L.A. Crozat, Baron de Thiers, in Paris, inventory number ГЭ-82.



Around 1511, Fra Bartolommeo almost always used only black chalk when making his drawings. This study of Virgin and child is entirely characteristic of Fra Bartolommeo's study sheets of this type. It relates to the central figures of the composition of *Virgin and Child with Musician Angels* in the Hermitage ; the legs and the elbow of the Musician Angel on the left are only sketched.

The pose of the Virgin embracing the Child is identical down to the location of her hands, like the blue coat of the Virgin on which she is kneeling, her right knee carrying the Child. The blue coat delimits the sacred space. It likely served as a model for the version of the *Virgin and Child* that Fra Paolino later painted and now located in the Galleria Estense, Modena.



The reform of the Dominican Order and the reform of the Church were the objectives that Savonarola had set for himself since his election as Prior of the convent of Saint-Marc in July 1491. What was the main idea of his reform? Poverty and simplicity. Convents were not supposed to have property, if they did, they had to sell it and give the profits to the poor. The order was to be strictly mendicant and brothers were not even supposed to own their own personal items.

Florence was then the cultural capital of Italy; Savonarola himself, who came to Florence for the first time in 1482, called it the « heart of Italy », which is why he knew well that culture and art, in all its multiform expressions, had great importance for the life of the city and its people. If it was necessary to reform the Church, society and the people, art could not be neglected. In 1495 he wrote *De simplicitate christianae vitae* which contains and clearly sets out the main ideas adapted to the life of every man, of the State, of the Church and therefore also of art.

Painters had to seek « *simplicity* » in their pictorial compositions since the moral model of life that the brother advocated had to also infiltrate the practice of art. Painting must therefore be « *pious* », it must make one meditate and for this it does not need inventions but simply to present the sacred characters represented with colors in accordance with the seriousness of the painting. All this amounted to going back a few steps, turning towards the first years of the 15th century, moving away from these innovative humanist ferments which still surprise us today with their unequalled beauty.

Mentioned by Vasari in his *Vite* as an heir of Fra Bartolommeo, Fra Paolino was the son of the painter Bernardino del Signoraccio. At the age of 15, in 1503, Paolo entered the Dominican order and became Fra Paolo, more commonly Fra Paolino and soon settled in Florence, perhaps at the convent of S. Domenico di Fiesole where was also present his maternal uncle. Agostino, also a painter.

In 1509, as evidenced by a notarial deed, we find Fra' Paolino at the convent of S. Marco in Florence. Fra' Bartolomeo, the greatest artistic representative of the Savonarola movement, works here. There is also Mariotto Albertinelli who signed an Annunciation in 1511 with Fra' Bartolomeo, today in the Geneva Museum.

Fra Paolino certainly entered the workshop of S. Marco, although it is not clear in what role.

His first documented work was the creation of two terracotta statues for the Hospice of S. Maria Maddalena in Florence where he certainly came into contact with Andrea Della Robbia, a fervent and famous Savarolian who, with Fra Bartolommeo, worked in the same Hospice in this year 1513.

Two years later, in 1515, Fra Paolino was commissioned to restore the paintings of *Beato Angelico* in the chapter house of the convent of S. Marco. Angelico's « *simplicity* » and devotion would certainly influence the painter's future style.

In 1517, upon the death of Fra Bartolommeo, all the graphic material from the workshop of S. Marco was lent to Fra Paolino, because the young Abertinelli, friend, collaborator and certainly the closest painter, had already died there two years ago. He inherits from the master all the material including cartoons and drawings, which he will use throughout his life, reinterpreting them with personal taste.

Fra Paolino naturally turns to his master Fra Bartolomeo, but his gaze went even further, often referring to Angelico's style in the paintings he had worked on as a restorer.

Between 1517 and 1526, the year of our painter's return to his hometown, Fra Paolino produced numerous paintings, especially for provincial churches, such as the *Annunciation* for the Oratory of the SS. Annunziata of San Casciano; almost always the paintings were intended for Dominican places or those linked to the Dominicans of St. Mark. They are always works of neo-15th century taste, rigorously "simple", even simpler than those of his teacher Fra Bartolomeo whose solemn language is rendered modestly by the pupil.

Decorative elements almost disappear, the coatings of the buildings have smooth backgrounds, the capitals of the columns project just enough to emphasize their function. This way of applying color in architecture has been defined as "weeping classicism", a clear reference to the group of followers of Savonarola responsible for the famous "burnings of the vanities"; a spirituality that suited the Dominican Fra Paolino.

It was a period of intense work for our artist, with many commissions completed: probably several assistants worked with him.

Since 1525, we have no more documents attesting to Fra Paolino's presence in Florence; since 1530, the presence of his workshop in the convent of S. Domenico in Pistoia is documented. The reasons for the transfer are currently unknown, except for a request from the authorities of Pistoia who asked for Fra Paolino's presence with Father Bernardino.

In Pistoia, Fra Paolino's pictorial style underwent a change.

In 1530, the Medici returned to Florence, definitively ending the republican period. Clement VII, son of Lorenzo de' Medici, ascended to the papal throne and dissolved the Congregation of San Marco: repression began, and Savonarola's experience also ended among his last disciples.

Shortly after the grand « *Assumption* » of 1532 for the convent of S. Maria del Sasso near Bibbiena, Fra Paolino's style became simplified again and turned towards past experiences. In the latter part of his life, he met Caterina de' Ricci, a Dominican mystic, later canonized, who, devoted to Savonarola, had visions of the Ferrarese friar on the very day of Savonarola's death. In her cell at the convent of Prato, she kept the portrait of Savonarola painted by Fra Bartolomeo and offered by Francesco Salviati. This painting is now located in S. Marco in Florence. The mystical love of the Saint for Savonarola now bound Caterina to Fra Paolino, to whom she wrote letters almost every month. Meanwhile, Cosimo I, now in power, expelled the Dominicans from San Marco, and in Florence, a new religious climate reigned, far from the austere ideas of Savonarola.

In 1547, Fra Paolino died, and with him ended the experience of the Dominican « *bottega conventuale* » begun at the convent of S. Marco by Fra Bartolommeo.

This is a very interesting addition to the corpus of drawings given to Fra Paolino, which is mainly limited to studies of the Madonna and Child executed, like the present drawing, in black chalk heightened with white chalk.