

AGOSTINO CARRACCI

1557-1602

- *The Madonna and Child with the young St. John*

Canvas, 37½ by 30½ inches, 94 by 78.7cm.

- PROVENANCE: Earls of Radnor, Radnor Castle by c. 1760 when recorded in an inventory there, without however any record of when or how acquired, and by descent until 1977.
- EXHIBITED: London, Royal Academy, Winter Exhibition, Burlington House (Old Masters), 1873, No. 150, (as by Lodovico) Burlington Fine Art Club, London, 1925, No. 38, (as by Lodovico).
- LITERATURE: G. F. Waagen, *Galleries and Cabinets of Art in Great Britain*, London 1857, Vol. IV. (supplement) p. 360, No. 141 'in Lord Folkestone's collection at Longford'.
 Claude Phillips, *The Collection of Pictures at Longford Castle*, II The Italian Pictures, in "The Art Journal", 1897, p. 140-145.
 Helen Matilda, Countess of Radnor, *Catalogue of the Pictures in the Collection of the Earl of Radnor*, 1909, Part 1, pp. 48-9 (as by Lodovico).
 H. Bodmer, *Lodovico Carracci*, 1939, p. 142 (among works considered by Bodmer to be not by Lodovico)
- ENGRAVED: "The Art Journal", 1897, p. 145.

Until more is known of the pictorial style of Agostino Carracci, the attribution to him of this painting must remain tentative. But there are many indications that point in the direction of such a conclusion.

There is no mystery about the sources of the artistic inspiration behind this painting; there is more than an echo of Raphael's *Madonna della Sedia*, another of Venetian colouring, and more than a hint of Correggio in the intimacy of the composition. Forty years ago, this itself would have seemed a confirmation of an attribution to Agostino, but one that carried the disparaging overtones of eclecticism. Charles Dempsey has recently queried (*Annibale Carracci and the beginnings of Baroque Style*, 1977, p. 61) whether the sentiment expressed in the well-known sonnet praising Niccolò dell'Abate, and attributed by Malvasia to Agostino's authorship, should really be dismissed as irrelevant to Carraccese thinking, as they have since Denis Mahon's *Studies in Seicento Art and Theory* of 1947:

Chi farsi un buon pittor cerca, e desia
 Il disegno di Roma habbia alla mano
 La mossa, coll'ombrar Veneziano,
 E il degno colorir di Lombardia

continued overleaf

Di Michelangiolo la terribil via,
 Il vero natural di Tiziano,
 Del Correggio lo stil puro e sovrano
 E di un Rafel la giusta simetria.
 Del Tibaldi il decoro e il fondamento,
 Del dotto Primaticcio l'inventare,
 E un po'di grazia del Parmigianino.
 Ma senza tanti studi e tanto stento,
 Si ponga solo l'opre ad imitare
 Che qui lascioci il nostro Nicolino.

(Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*.
 ed. 1841, Vol. 1, p. 129)

As it now seems, one of the great strengths of the Carraccesque school was that it was founded on accurate observation, not only of Nature, but also of the work of rivals and predecessors. One of the signal reflections of this is that both Annibale and Agostino's style changed with each experience of a new artistic school. The process is enshrined in the academic tradition, which insisted on the study, not only of Nature, but also of the work of rivals and predecessors. Agostino Carracci has as good a claim as any to be regarded as the father of the academic tradition.

In his character there was joined the observation of life around him with the close study of others' work, in the process of engraving; and his intellect sought exchanges with men of culture engendered around the Carracci owe much to this intellectual exchange, and undoubtedly some of Agostino's ideas in this direction were as persuasive for patrons of the arts as the painters who came into contact with them.

This *Madonna and Child with St. John* expresses forcefully the artistic synthesis sought by Agostino, with the most powerful ingredient being the idea from the picture by Raphael, whose impact on both Agostino and Annibale was one of the principal features of their Roman style. During Annibale's long indisposition that preceded his death in 1609, he urged his pupils repeatedly to study the lessons of Raphael in the Loggia. Annibale's own compositions, like the lost Montalto Madonna (known from the engraving by Bloemaert: D. Posner, *Annibale Carracci*, 1971, II, No. 100) and the Madonna del Rondinello in Dresden, reveal a reinterpretation of the classic compositions of Raphael's Madonnas. The composition also has affinities with Annibale's print after Agostino's *Madonna and Child* (B. 31, as by Agostino; Diane De Grazia Bohlin, *Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci*, Washington, 1979, Annibale, 16).

Agostino is the one member of the Carracci family who has had no partisan in the modern literature, and one consequence of this is that he is left with but few inalienable pictorial works to his credit, but ones whose stature presupposes a much wider experience. There is little between the *Last Communion of St. Jerome* (Bologna, Pinacoteca) for artists through the eighteenth century one of the greatest paintings ever produced, to the large frescoes in the Galleria Farnese of *Aurora and Cephalus* and *Thetis Carried to the Bridal Chamber of Peleus*, which date from immediately before the artist's return to Emilia in 1600. The cartoons for these frescoes, now in the National Gallery in London reveal a hand where the precision of the engraver, usually looked for as a hallmark of Agostino's style, gives way to the kind of confident and yet painterly handling also evident in this work.

NICCOLÒ MUSSO
Casale Monferrato, c. 1595–Casale Monferrato? after 1631

An obscure figure, Niccolò Musso travelled to Rome from his native Piedmont when quite young. Lanzi reports a tradition that he was a student of Caravaggio, but Musso certainly arrived in Rome after the Lombard had left the city and perhaps even after his death. However, Musso was certainly a scholar of Caravaggio's Roman paintings and seemed to move in advanced artistic circles. Two of his works were evidently owned by the Giustiniani (see below). By 1618, Musso was back in Casale where he signed and dated the *Madonna of the Rosary* (San Domenico, Casale), which is certainly dependent on Caravaggio's painting of the same subject, now in Vienna. The only other known works of importance are both in S. Illario, Casale: a *Crucifixion with St. Francis*, and *The Madonna del Carmine Giving the Habit to St. Simon Stock*. Musso is last mentioned in a document of 1631.

Musso must be regarded as an early, if minor, Caravaggesque and an interesting example of the style's diffusion. Despite his present-day elusiveness, he achieved substantial local fame. He was the subject of a series of (fairly useless) biographies, and his works were recognised and appreciated by Piedmontese connoisseurs at the beginning of this century.

All this gives witness to how memorable, novel, and powerful was the rather tame version of the Caravaggism Musso brought home. He should also be considered in relation to his fellow Piedmontese, Tanzio da Varallo, who was certainly in Rome contemporaneously with Musso.

13 *Christ Carrying the Cross with St. Veronica*

Canvas 265×175 cm.

PROVENANCE: Benedetto and Vincenzo Giustiniani Rome, remaining in the Palazzo Giustiniani until at least 1791; thence passed by descent to the Odiscalchi, Bassano di Sutri.
Private Collection, Switzerland.
Art Market, New York.

LITERATURE: L. Salerno, 'The Picture Gallery of Vincenzo Giustiniani', *The Burlington Magazine*, 1960, no. 102, pp. 102.
A. Moir, *The Italian Followers of Caravaggio*, Cambridge, 1967, I, p. 267, II, p. 65, 89.
G. Romano, 'Niccolò Musso a Roma e a Casale', *Paragone*, 1971, no. 225, pp. 47–48, 56 (for full bibliography).
B. Nicolson, *The International Caravaggesque Movement*, Oxford, 1979, p. 76.
M. Marini, 'Gli esordi del Caravaggio e il concetto di "natura" nei primi decenni del '600 a Roma. Equivoce: del caravaggismo', in *Artibus et Historiae*, no. 4, 1981, pl. 31.

After the death of the Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani in 1637, an inventory was taken on the 6th of February 1638 of the contents of the palazzo he had shared with his brother at San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. Numbers 163 and 164 are described as:

Due quadri grandi simili. Uno della Natività di Cristo, Nostro Signore e l'Angelo che annuntia alli Pastori di lontano, altro de Cristo che porta la Croce al Calvario, dipinti in tela, alla palmi II lar. 8 in circa senza cornice de mano di Francesco Casale.

Luigi Salerno, in his publication of the inventory, first suggested that the latter painting could be identified with the one here exhibited.

As the *Christ Carrying the Cross* matches iconographically, is exactly the requisite size, and was once in the former Palazzo Giustiniani at Bassano di Sutri, Salerno's suggestion seems correct. In addition, Salerno proposed that the other 'Francesco Casale' mentioned in the inventory, was a *Nativity*, also formerly in the Giustiniani collection, and at one time on the Roman art market. Moir cast doubt upon this hypothesis pointing out that *The Nativity* is somewhat

shorter in size than the *Christ Carrying the Cross*. But, considering their provenance and their stylistic homogeneity, these are almost certainly the canvases referred to in the inventory, and the *Nativity* has perhaps been reduced in height.

Unfortunately, there is no trace of an artist named Francesco Casale. Salerno further proposed that the painter intended was Niccolò Musso and that at the time of the inventory nothing was remembered about who was responsible for the canvases except his place of origin, to which was coupled a common forename. The *Christ Carrying the Cross* certainly shares a number of stylistic affinities, such as physiognomic types and a flashing chiaroscuro, with Musso's documented *Madonna of the Rosary* (San Domenico, Casale Monferato). Thus on balance, it seems reasonable to accept Salerno's ingenious proposal and identify this painting as the one referred to in the Giustiniani inventory and that it is by Niccolò Musso. Romano (*op. cit.*) tends to accept this double identification, and Nicolson (*op. cit.*) does also.

Giustiniani probably acquired this canvas while Musso was in Rome (though the wide-ranging nature of Vincenzo's collecting makes it possible that he somehow obtained it from the artist in Casale Monferato).

Musso seems to have returned to Piedmont in 1617, and so it is probably that *Christ Carrying the Cross* must date from *circa* 1610 to 1616. This makes it a very early Caravaggesque painting, and places Musso among the second wave of mainly northern painters in Rome (after Baglione, Gentileschi, and Manfredi, who certainly knew Caravaggio) and who were consequently to absorb and disseminate the Lombard's radical art.

Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani was among the leading and most intelligent connoisseurs of contemporary art in early seventeenth century Rome. He was well known as a collector of Caravaggio and his followers and later patronised Poussin, Claude, and Testa (for a discussion of Giustiniani as a patron, see F. Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, London, 1980, especially pp. 29–30.). In a famous letter, Vincenzo contrasted painters 'di maniere' with those depending on nature, but concluded that:

'... più perfetto di tutti . . . perche e più difficile cioè dipingere di maniere e con l'esempio davanti dal naturale che così dipinsero gli eccellenti pittori della prima classe.'

This painting by Musso, with its still Mannerist composition but observed naturalism, exemplifies the kind of art Vincenzo strove to encourage.