

BERNARDINO LUINI

c. 1475 - Luini - 1532

Virgin and Child with the Infant St. John

Canvas, 34 x 23½ ins (86 x 60 cms)

Collection: Baroness Edouard de Rothschild, Paris
and by descent to the family

Literature: F. Malaguzzi-Valeri, Nuovi Dipinti de Bernardino Luini,
Rassegna d'Arte, no. 13, 1913, p. 27 ff.

W. Suida, Leonardo und Sein Kreis, Munich, 1929, p. 236

B. Berenson, Italian Painters of the Renaissance,
Central and North Italian Schools, London, 1968, vol. I,
page 234; vol. III, fig. 1490

Angela Ottino della Chiesa, Bernardino Luini, Novara,
1956, no. 210, p. 130, fig. 104

The early history of the picture before its appearance in the Rothschild collection in 1880 is unknown, but the attribution to Luini is fully maintained throughout the literature including Malaguzzi-Valeri, Suida, Berenson, and the only monograph on the artist published by Chiesa in 1956. The composition is clearly derived from a Leonardesque prototype and the model for the Virgin is the same as that used by Leonardo for the Virgin of the Rocks (versions in the Louvre and the National Gallery, London). The landscape background shows the influence not only of Leonardo but also of Venetian painting from the circle of Giorgione and also of Flemish art of the late 15th century, which had a wide circulation in Milan. The landscape background is largely idealised but may also reflect the geography of the lakes of Northern Italy, where Luini was born. The castle overlooking the hill is reminiscent of many of the fortresses around Lake Como.

The picture almost certainly dates from the artist's middle period around 1523-5, probably contemporary with the Torriani Polyptych, formerly in the parish church at Mendrisio, which is documented after 1523, and the Virgin and Child with Musical Putti in the church of S. Magnio Legnano, documented in 1523.

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