

Ridolfo di Domenico Ghirlandaio (Florence 1483 - Florence 1561)

The Virgin and Child

Pen and brown ink, the outlines pricked for transfer.
Laid down on an 18th century English mount.
112 x 57 mm. (4 3/8 x 2 1/4 in.)

Despite the artist's lengthy and active career, drawings by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio are rare, and only a handful of drawings have been firmly attributed to him. While determining a firm chronology for Ghirlandaio's style as a draughtsman is problematic, the present sheet would appear to be an early work by the artist, datable to the first decade of the 16th century. With fine penwork applied with regular hatching and crosshatching, this small drawing is typical of the artist's draughtsmanship, which ultimately derives from the example of the drawings of his father Domenico Ghirlandaio.

The present sheet also displays the particular influence on the younger Ghirlandaio of the pen drawings of Fra Bartolommeo, to whom it was once attributed. Indeed, the drawing is derived from a pen and ink study of the Virgin and Child by Fra Bartolommeo in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, which in turn was used for the figure of the Virgin in two early paintings by the Frate; an Annunciation of 1497 in the Cathedral at Volterra, and a Holy Family, painted at around the same time, in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

A stylistically comparable pen drawing by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio of A Bishop and a Priest, with the same Richardson and later provenance as the present sheet, is in the collection of Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. It has been suggested that both drawings may have been trimmed from the same sheet. Among other comparable pen drawings by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio is a study of The Virgin and Child with Saints Onofrius and Augustine in the Szépmüvészeti Múzeum in Budapest and a Saint Sebastian formerly in the Habich collection in Kassel.

Provenance:

Jonathan Richardson Senior, London (Lugt 2183, and on his mount); Probably his sale, London, Christopher Cock, 22 January to 8 February 1747
Included in an album of drawings compiled in England in the mid-18th century
Ray Livingston Murphy, New York
His estate sale, London, Christie's, 12 December 1985, lot 152 (as Fra Bartolommeo)
Private collection, until 2008.

Literature:

William M. Griswold, 'Early Drawings by Ridolfo Ghirlandaio', Master Drawings, Autumn 1989, No.3, pp.218-219 and pl.25b; Roberta J. M. Olson, ed., The Art of Drawing: Selections from the Wheaton College Collection, exhibition catalogue, Norton, MA, 1997, p.44, under no.52; London, Sotheby's, Old Master & British Drawings, 4 July 2012, p.9, under lot 2.

Artist description:

Born in Florence in 1483, Ridolfo Ghirlandaio was the son of the eminent painter Domenico Ghirlandaio. Following his father's death in 1494, when he was just eleven years old, Ridolfo is thought to have continued his training with his uncle Davide, who had taken over the Ghirlandaio workshop. Vasari noted that Ridolfo also studied with Fra Bartolommeo, and indeed the influence of the latter is evident in much of his early work, as is that of Piero di Cosimo and Raphael, with whom Ridolfo was friendly during the latter's stay in Florence. (Vasari writes that Ridolfo completed the blue robe of the Virgin in Raphael's painting La Belle Jardinière, today in the Louvre.) Ridolfo soon gained a measure of independence within the Ghirlandaio bottega, and several paintings of the early 1500's commissioned from Davide would appear to be by his nephew. His earliest documented painting, however, is a Virgin of the Sacred Girdle in the Duomo in Prato, commissioned from both Davide and Ridolfo in 1507 but largely the work of the younger artist and completed in 1509.

As an independent artist, Ridolfo Ghirlandaio enjoyed a long and highly successful career, with a number of significant public commissions in Florence, including the fresco decoration of the Cappella della Signoria in the Palazzo Vecchio, begun in 1514, and two paintings of scenes from the life of Saint Zenobius for the Compagnia di San Zanobi, painted between 1516 and 1517. Ridolfo had a large and busy studio in Florence (where among his pupils was the young Perino del Vaga) and counted among his patrons members of the Medici, Antinori and Ricasoli families, among others. He produced altarpieces and frescoes for such Florentine churches as Santa Maria Novella, Santo Spirito and Santa Maria degli Angeli, as well as altarpieces for several towns outside Florence, and also enjoyed a particular reputation as a portrait painter.