

37 The Madonna and Child with Saint Francis, Saint Anthony Abbot, and a Donor

Romanino's early oeuvre reveals that he studied the Milanese works of Bramante and Bramantino as well as the paintings of Giorgione (1477 or 1478–1510). During the second decade of the sixteenth century he was one of the most successful followers of Titian (c. 1488–1576) and produced his greatest work, the San Francesco altarpiece in Brescia. In 1519 he frescoed four stories of the Passion of Christ in the nave of the Cremona Cathedral, stimulated by the daring heterodox style of his former pupil, the Cremonese Altobello Melone (active 1497–1530). His anticlassical phase continued well into the 1530s, when he frescoed the palace of Cardinal Clesio in Trent as well as many churches in the Valcamonica. In the last period of his career Romanino returned to a more conventional style, influenced by the works of his partner and son-in-law Lattanzio Gambara (c. 1530–1574), who imported into Brescia the language of mannerism.

c. 1517, red chalk (wetted for counterproofing) on laid paper, laid down, 202 x 186 (7^{15/16} x 7^{5/16})

Inscribed at upper left in red chalk: *Hieronimo romani / da bressa*

Woodner Collections

This drawing became known to modern scholars in 1939 when it was exhibited in Brescia. It belonged then to Conte Rasini (Milan), who had bought it from an unidentified Parisian dealer on the advice of Antonio Morassi. The attribution has never been disputed, in part because of the inscription at the top left,¹ but the dating has varied widely. This is explained by several factors. The artist was active for approximately fifty-five years, yet he signed and dated only three paintings. A few more are either datable or well documented, but for the most part connoisseurship provides the sole insight into Romanino's different stylistic phases. Furthermore, his drawings were seldom made as preparatory studies for his paintings. The artist enjoyed improvising on the canvas or on wet plaster, with gouache and fresco being his favorite media and his drawings serving only as informal guidelines. Vasari tells us that Romanino was a great draftsman,² but it is very difficult to date his surviving graphic oeuvre, which has been critically discussed and partly reconstructed only in the last four decades.³

Antonio Morassi was the first to offer a thorough analysis of the Woodner sheet, noticing certain affinities with the work of Palma il Vecchio (1480–1528) and dating the drawing c. 1515. Maria Luisa Ferrari then connected it stylistically with the lost altarpiece of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned between Saint Louis of Toulouse and Saint Roch* (formerly Kaiser-Friedrich Museum, Berlin) and dated the sheet between 1516/1517 and 1519/1520.

The drawing was discussed often in 1965, when it was exhibited again in Brescia. F. Kossoff emphasized its Giorgionesque flavor, dating it c. 1515; she noted how Romanino reused the same composition for a later altarpiece (fig. 1) and observed that a later red chalk drawing of a kneeling worshiper (Uffizi, Florence) was based on the figure of the donor in the Woodner sketch.⁴ Ivan Fenyő connected the Woodner sheet stylistically with a red chalk drawing of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest), dating them both c. 1530 or later. H. A. Peters detected a similarity between the Woodner and Budapest drawings but dated them much earlier, c. 1512, seeing a connection between the saints on the Woodner sheet and those on two panels in the Cunietti collection (Milan) as well as the *Saint Peter* and *Saint Paul* panels in the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe (Kassel).⁵

Recent exhibition catalogues of the Woodner collection have continued to pro-

pose varying dates for this drawing: in 1986 it was dated between 1517 and 1519; in 1987, shortly before 1520 "when the artist was working on the frescoes in the Cathedral at Cremona, begun in 1519." Finally, Anna Forlani Tempesti noted affinities with the *Concert champêtre* in the Lehman Collection (Metropolitan Museum, New York) probably drawn in 1531/1532, and dated the Woodner drawing between 1520 and 1530.

Opinions thus range from c. 1512 to 1530 or later, which is typical for scholarship on Romanino's oeuvre. In 1986 I listed the Woodner drawing in the context of Romanino's Franciscan patrons. It is akin in its almost square format and in the theme of the Madonna seated in front of a tree in the middle of a landscape to the *Madonna and Child between Saint Bonaventure and Saint Sebastian* painted by Romanino for the church of San Bernardino in Salò (fig. 2).⁶ The church belonged to the Franciscan Observants, and the altarpiece has been plausibly dated c. 1517. In my opinion, the same date should be assigned to the drawing, which is profoundly influenced by Giorgionesque models revisited by the young Titian. The extremely elegant use of the smoldered red chalk, the few bravura touches used to render the crucifix held by Saint Francis or the hands of the donor, the face of the Virgin, and the right background are all elements derived from works produced by Titian during the second decade of the sixteenth century.



Hieronymo · romani

da bressa



FIGURE 1
Girolamo Romanino, *Madonna and Child with Saint Francis and Saint Anthony of Padua*, Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Milan

The sheet was once wetted for counterproofing, and it may have originally served as a model for an engraving. Romanino's activity in this area is usually ignored, but as early as 1948 A. M. Hind published three engravings designed and perhaps also executed by Romanino.⁷ If this were the purpose of the Woodner drawing, however, no trace of such an engraving survives.

• *Alessandro Nova* •

NOTES

1. Most critics consider the inscription to be autograph, although no clear evidence currently supports this. Morassi 1959, 190, claimed that the inscription was written in the same red chalk used to make the drawing, but it would have been highly unusual to "sign" a drawing in this way in the early sixteenth century. And although the handwriting may date from the sixteenth century, as is usually suggested, two other drawings by Romanino with similar inscriptions cast doubt on this assumption. A red chalk drawing of *Two Standing Soldiers* (Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, inv. 1973.38) is inscribed *Hieronimo Romanino da Bressa*; and a brush and wash drawing of a *Nude Male Figure with Upraised Right Arm* (Metropolitan Museum, New York, inv. 61.123.3) is inscribed *Gerolamo Romano Pratico / Pittore Bresciano*. The latter was certainly added in the eighteenth century, and both were probably written by collectors. It is possible that the inscription on the Woodner drawing was also added by a collector, perhaps in the sixteenth century. It is also possible that the artist or his engraver (if there was one) added the inscription after the red chalk was wetted for counterproofing.

The Woodner and Morgan Library drawings were said to be in the same English private collection either in the seventeenth century (exh. cat. Woodner, Munich and Vienna 1986, 36) or in the eighteenth century (Muraro in exh. cat. Venice 1957, 22). The confusion may have been created unintentionally by oral information given by Janos Scholz to the Pierpont Morgan Library, clarified somewhat in Scholz 1958, 416.

2. Vasari 1966 ed., 3:626.
3. For a discussion of Romanino's surviving preparatory drawings, see Nova 1995, 159–168.
4. Rearick in exh. cat. Florence 1976, 126, tentatively seconded the connection with the Uffizi drawing but dated both sheets c. 1518–1519.
5. According to the most recent studies, the two panels in Milan and the two in Kassel were part of the same polyptych; see Nova 1994, 213–215.
6. Ruggieri 1976, 25, also pointed out the affinities of the present drawing to the painting in Salò and dated the sheet slightly earlier than 1519.
7. Hind 1948, 5:229, and 7: pls. 898–899.

PROVENANCE

Unidentified seventeenth- or eighteenth-century English collection; (unidentified Parisian dealer, around the 1930s); Conte Rasini, Milan, 1939; (P. & D. Colnaghi, London); Woodner Collections (Dian and Andrea Woodner).

EXHIBITIONS

Brescia 1939, no. 9; Brescia 1965, no. 122; Woodner, Cambridge 1985, no. 81; Woodner, Munich and Vienna 1986, no. 17; Woodner, Madrid 1986–1987, no. 21; Woodner, London 1987, no. 16; Woodner, New York 1990, no. 20.

LITERATURE

Muraro in exh. cat. Venice 1957, under no. 14; Scholz 1958, 415–416; Morassi 1959, 190, fig. 38; Ferrari 1961, under no. 25; Kossoff 1965, 514–521; Fenyö 1965, 48; Peters 1965, 151–152; exh. cat. Florence 1976, 126; Ruggieri 1976, 25; Nova 1986, 114; Forlani Tempesti 1991, 91.



FIGURE 2
Girolamo Romanino, *Madonna and Child between Saint Bonaventura and Saint Sebastian*, San Bernardino, Salò