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COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO. TRIPTYCH.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



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A SIENESE LITTLE MASTER IN NEW YORK AND ELSEWHERE

OFTEN enough one comes across a picture which can be attached to no known painter or group, or even to any other one work which, although remaining unclassified, may have been already a subject of study. Nevertheless this picture may display some quality, some characteristic, some mannerism, or even some absurdity that attracts attention, and puts us on the lookout for its occurrence elsewhere. When we succeed in finding it in another panel we are stimulated to search for a third and a fourth. Needless to add that this something for which we are on the watch, this something so peculiar and characteristic, may be taken in paintings of the same period or school to stand for identity of hand. But as even the humblest artist seldom turns out designs as like as pennies coming from the same mint, any three or four works manifestly by the same painter are pretty sure to betray a certain variety. Thus it happens that these variations retained in our memory suddenly converge upon a picture whose identity has hitherto been a problem and link it to the three or four already set apart, so as to constitute a fairly well-articulated group. At times, but more rarely, the connoisseur is rewarded by discovering a work of known authorship wherewith to head his group; and if the whole has a certain æsthetic value as well he will not be denied the right to indulge for an illusive moment in the raptures of creative research.

Although the method and process are the same, the extreme humility of the few paintings that form the subject of this article afford as reward only the mild pleasure that accrues from the easy exercise of one's faculties. The trained student finds nothing easier than the task just described, and his career will afford him abundant opportunity for performing it.

On my last visit to New York I noticed in the Metropolitan

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Museum a small triptych trimmed with fat little finials like broken and smoothed-over coral branches. (Frontispiece.) On its three panels are the Blessed Virgin, angels and saints, among whom we easily distinguish Anthony Abbot, the Baptist, Lucy, Catherine, the Magdalen, Peter and Paul. Above them all in the gables are the Crucifixion and the Annunciation. The saucy female faces with their pointed little noses, sensitive mouths and mad eyes amused me. Although there is small chance that the tenth-rate artist who designed them had any other intention than to make them look like the faces of Andrea Vanni and Bartolo di Fredi and Fei, who evidently inspired him, and although he was too feeble a draftsman to attain even such a modest ambition, so that the resulting features are only accidental, their quaint piquancy is there to be enjoyed. The craftsmanship is good enough to make up to a certain extent for other deficiencies and the whole air of the thing roused in me the curiosity of the absorbed fancier of the painting of Siena whom nothing that that school produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries can fail to interest. At the time I could not have named its author, but I vaguely recalled other things by the same hand.

Sure enough. Returning to my study and rummaging among my photographs I soon found several.

As close as any to the one in the Metropolitan Museum is another small triptych belonging to Mr. Charles Loeser of Florence (Fig. 2). The same kind of frame with its fat sleek finials, and as representation the Madonna with angels and saints, Andrew and the Baptist, a lady I cannot identify and Catherine, Anthony Abbot and James, and in the gables the Annunciation and the Eternal. The types are nearly the same, with the same absurd little noses and uncertain, quivering mouths, but the whole is less mannered and of better quality. The general impression one receives of its author is that he must have been all but a double of Fei. There is the closest likeness in arrangement, in flow of lines, and even in expression. The Virgin and Child might have been copied from such a well-known design by the last-named artist as his Madonna in S. Domenico at Siena (Fig. 3).

In the Liechtenstein Collection (Fig. 4) at Vienna there is the central panel of yet another triptych representing the Madonna with Peter and Paul, Catherine, and another sainted lady and two angels, and in a medallion above the Eternal blessing. The tiny peaked



Fig. 2. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: TRIPTYCH.
Collection of Mr. Charles Loeser, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 3. FEI: MADONNA.
S. Domenico, Siena.



Fig. 4. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: MADONNA
ENTHRONED.
Liechtenstein Gallery, Vienna.



Fig. 5. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: ASSUMPTION
OF THE VIRGIN.
S. Maria, Bettona.



nose of the Child, the look in the eyes, the flow of the draperies persuade us that it was done by the same little master. Only here he is closer to Vanni, inspired by some such composition by that grave artist as his impressive Madonna and Saints with Mother Eve and the Serpent, now in the public gallery of Altenburg.

No sooner did I come to the conclusion that the trifling paintings just described were from the same hand than they solved a problem which, with hundreds of like preoccupations, had been troubling me for some time.

In the little Umbrian hill town of Bettona frequented by students for its Fiorenzo and Perugino, there is in the church of S. Maria a very attractive Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (Fig. 5). Our Lady, as frontal and collected as a Buddha, sits enshrined in the midst of seraphim in a *mandorla* which is carried aloft and accompanied by angels wearing garlands. Below, most of the apostles look into her empty tomb, two unexpectedly bless and pray over a saint of much smaller proportions standing between them, while Thomas leaps up in the traditional Sienese way to catch the Madonna's girdle. In the medallions of the modernish frame appear heads of prophets, and in the upper corners of the picture are Moses and Elias with scrolls on which we read the words ECCE VIRGO ASUNTA. In the corresponding corners below are two kneeling donors.

It is a design whose whimsical and exotic types and delicate airiness of movement helped in a measure to prepare a student like myself to prize similar compositions that were being painted at the same time or somewhat earlier in a far distant island known then to the few who had ever heard of it as Cipango. That alone would have kept it fresh in my memory and given me the craving to identify its author.

Until recently authorities were inclined to ascribe it to Bartolo di Fredi, which was not a bad guess. Fei seemed a still better one, and I included this Assumption in the list of his works, placing it, however, in the early and therefore less ascertained phase of his art. But now one need guess no more. The evidence that it is by the author of our three other paintings is clear and decisive. The little pointed noses, the quivering mouths, the look—in brief, the entire cast of countenance—are the same in them all as well as much else besides. It is not necessary to labor a demonstration which

requires the trained and sincere use of the eyes, rather than verbal persuasion.

These four works conjointly, and each several figure they contain, prodded at my memory until it yielded up yet another creation of the same hand; and at last, to my great glee, a signed one, revealing the name of the painter, a certain Cola Petruccioli of Orvieto. We shall see to him in a moment, but first we shall attend to the diptych in the Spello Library (Figs. 6 and 7) that bears this signature, and the date 1385, and satisfy ourselves that it is really the handiwork of the same craftsman that did the other four.

The two panels, ruined and half-effaced but not repainted, were first published some ten years ago by Giustino Cristofani in *Augusta Perusia* (1907, p. 54), and the somewhat mutilated inscription correctly interpreted. The two panels represent the Crucifixion and the Coronation of the Virgin, with the Annunciation in the gables above. The author has so little skill in carrying out his intentions that neither the Mother of Our Lord, nor the Baptist nor Magdalen, has the look of grief and contrition that he must have meant to give them in the presence of Christ crucified. The other scene betrays less incapacity because less is required of the artist. The Angels blow and strum away on their trumpets and viols, the robes and embroideries are gorgeous, and the two principal figures are quaintly impersonal. The quality is inferior, if anything, to the other achievements described, the drawing even more wobbly, the modeling mussy. We may conclude, therefore, that it was done later than those we studied first. Nor is it so unadulteratedly Sieneſe. Had we no information about these panels I should yet be tempted to think that, owing to a faint infiltration of Alegretto Nuzzi's influence, their author, a Sieneſe, had painted them in Umbria.

But I have not yet attempted to prove that he also was the author of the four little works that we found to be by the same hand. It ſuffices to point again to the peaked faces, the noses looking somehow unfinished, the uncertain ill-placed mouths, and in the entire figures the arabesques formed by the draperies. Compare, for instance, the Magdalen with the Madonna in the Metropolitan Museum triptych.

Cola Petruccioli was not absolutely unknown, for Fumi in his magnificent volume on the cathedral of Orvieto published more than



Fig. 6. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: THE
CRUCIFIXION.
Library, Spello.



Fig. 7. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: CORONATION
OF THE VIRGIN, 1385.
Library, Spello.



Fig. 8. COLA DI PETRUCCIOLI DA ORVIETO: FRESCO.
S. Giovenale, Orvieto.



one document concerning him, and a fresco of the Crucifixion, signed and dated 1380, is still to be seen in the not easily accessible oratory under the choir of that gorgeous edifice. Unfortunately I can offer no reproduction of this design, although it would clench my argument, and strengthen the effort I shall now make at a chronology of this little master's work.

But first just a line about another fresco at Orvieto in the church of S. Giovenale (Fig. 8), which, to my knowledge, has never before been attributed to Petruccioli. It represents the Nativity, the Annunciation and (unreproduced) the Birth of the Baptist. There is a gracious sweetness about the Blessed Virgin which is more than pleasing. When I knew less intimately than I do now the painters of Siena, I was inclined to ascribe this fresco to Bartolo di Fredi, but a moment's comparison with the Spello diptych leaves no doubt that it must have been painted by Cola at nearly the same time. It suffices to compare the angels in the Nativity and in the Coronation.

The earliest probably of the works we have ascribed to Petruccioli is the Assumption at Bettona. It is the least helpless in its mannerisms and most like a normal achievement by a Siennese who follows close in the wake of Barna, the Vannis, and Bartolo di Fredi. Next should be placed Mr. Loeser's triptych, in which Cola approaches as never again to Fei. I have not had the leisure to try to establish the chronology of the last-named painter, or it would be easy to know the exact date of Mr. Loeser's panel. As we observed when making its acquaintance, the Madonna might have been taken over from Fei's at S. Domenico. On the other hand, both may be imitations of a lost original by Andrea Vanni, and in the Liechtenstein Madonna Petruccioli recalls that master directly. Last, but still several years before the dated diptych at Spello, should be placed the little tabernacle in the Metropolitan Museum.

Although our modest Orvietan recalls Fei to such a degree that at times it is not easy to keep them apart, it would be rash to conclude that the one was the pupil of the other. A curious coincidence brings it about that the first notice we discover of either goes back to the same year, 1372. Most likely both were pupils of Vanni and Bartolo, and the imprint of the latter remained so indelible that, as we have seen, Petruccioli in his frescoed Nativity, of about 1385, designs a Child that might be his. It is probable, however, that Cola did not remain untouched by his fellow-pupil.

His place is with those minor painters who as craftsmen were, like Fei himself, in the intermittent employ of the great cathedral fabrics to do a bit of new decoration here and a bit of refurbishing there, filling in the intervals with turning out pictures to order, or, as is the case with the little triptychs, for the market. Siena seems to have been particularly rich in such little men, whom indeed Petruccioli recalls, as, for example Francesco Vannuccio, and, a generation later, Tino di Bartolommeo or Nanni di Jacopo. At that time they had to seek a livelihood far away from home, and they can be tracked not only to Pisa but to the most secluded recesses of Umbria and perhaps even to Sicily.

THE DAVIS MADONNA AT THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM · BY PHILA CALDER NYE

THE Madonna loaned to the Metropolitan Museum by the estate of Theodore M. Davis is a small statue, not more than three-quarters life-size. It is of highly polished marble, and still shows traces of color; some gold on the back of the head of the Child; some blue in the deeper folds of the mantle of the Madonna, and here and there on other parts of the robes dark spots which may once have been color. The statue is now of a creamy tint, tending towards brown. The crown is missing, and there are some minor breaks, but on the whole it is remarkably well preserved. In pose, this Madonna follows the traditions of the Pisan school; she stands with head slightly bent and chest indrawn, as if, in that position, she found it easier to balance the Child upon her left arm. In her right hand is an apple, held up to attract the attention of the Child. The head is covered with a short veil, two points of which fall over her breast. To her shoulders a long mantle is attached, which she seems to have gathered up at each side, holding it in place by means of the pressure of her elbows. This awkward method of gaining the appearance of an apron is not often seen. Usually the effect is produced by draping the mantle over the arms, or by gathering up one side in the free hand. Her long and very full skirt falls in heavy folds to the ground, breaking over the feet and allowing the pointed shoes to be plainly