



ANDREA MANTEGNA.

JUDITH.

Uffizi, Florence.

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HUGO HELBING'S
MONATSBERICHTE

JAHRGANG I
HEFT 6

(Fortlaufende Tafelnummer 37)

The Drawings of Andrea Mantegna.

By Bernhard Berenson.

The painted masterpieces of Andrea Mantegna discover a feeling for line which leads one to suspect that, casting aside the coarseness of the brush, Andrea would attain his subtlest effects in drawings with pen, pencil, or silver-point. I will not say that this expectation is wholly disappointed, for it is not; its fulfillment, however, is not found where we should have looked for it. The inevitable speed and the unfailing precision of line which we encounter in almost any of Mantegna's well-preserved paintings are not the qualities which we find in his drawings. In these Mantegna is, in fact, more pictorial than in his pictures, and he is more pictorial in swift, unstudied sketches than in carefully wrought-out cartoons. His first thoughts are those of an artist who perceives form in masses and not in outlines — therein betraying his affinity with the Venetians and with all born painters.

Mantegna is thus very different from the Florentines, particularly from the two great painters with whom in the past he has been frequently confounded, Antonio Pollaiuolo and Sandro Botticelli. These were in the first place linealists, and their freshest thoughts flashed before them as effects in pure line, wherein mass was not clearly indicated but left to be inferred, while their colour, although it often ended by being exquisite, came by way of ornament to a design already complete. Effects of mass and colour were obtained by Botticelli precisely as effects of line were obtained by Mantegna — they came not as the unsought expression of a native energy, but as the spoils of hard-fought battles. The less arduous, then, the attempt, and the more freely Mantegna manifested his native power, the less do we find him winning those triumphs of line which he earned in his more carefully executed compositions. Proceeding from his most unlaboured drawings to his most elaborately coloured canvases, we can establish a ratio of effort to effect which would sound like this: The slighter the effort, the greater the effect of mass; the stronger the effort, the greater the effect of line.

It is possible that in his earlier years Mantegna was so dominated by his ideal of swift yet strenuous line, that his spontaneous bent for mass completely disappeared before it, not venturing to show itself in even the most unpretending sketch. This is possible, I say, and a certain support for such a belief will appear later. But by an accident as singular as it is unfortunate, the drawings by Mantegna that have been wafted down to us through destroying centuries all date from his later and even his latest years.

I.

These waifs are not many, if we single out the genuine from the spurious; but a criticism at once competent and cautious will scarcely refuse the title of authenticity to the following drawings:

CHATSWORTH. Collection of the Duke of Devonshire. Sketch for the engraving representing a *Combat of Marine Deities*. (Sepia ink on white paper. H. 24½ cm. W. 35½ cm. Photo. Braun, no. 192.)

FLORENCE. Uffizi. No. 404, Cornice 295. *Judith*. (Sepia ink on washed paper, originally white. H. 36 cm. W. 24 cm. Photo. Braun, no. 191.) Signed along the right margin in those beautiful square letters the introduction of which we owe largely to Mantegna, one letter over another, with an occasional ivy leaf daintily interposed: ANDREAS MANTINIA MCCCCLXXXVI FEBI.)

LONDON. British Museum. *Madonna enthroned with an Angel at her feet*. (Sepia ink on brown paper. H. 19½ cm. W. 14 cm. Photo. Braun, no. 57.)

Dring Man reclining on a stone slab. (Sepia ink on brownish paper. H. 19 cm. W. 13½ cm. Photo. Braun, no. 56.) Apparently for the famous Pietà in the Brera.

Mars, Venus and Diana. (Outline in brown ink, shading in sepia wash and white, but touched up — by a later hand, no doubt — with ultramarine and lake; on brown paper. H. 35½ cm. W. 31½ cm. Photo. Braun, no. 58.)

Allegory of Folly, or perhaps, *Calumny of Apelles*. (Background dark reddish brown, figures light brown wash heightened with white. Woman, sphinx to left, and fire heightened with red; ribbon entirely red. Below, to left the monogram AA. H. 28½ cm. W. 44 cm. Photo. Braun, no. 59.)

DUBLIN, NATIONAL GALLERY. *Judith*. (Grisaille, on canvas. H. 35½ cm. W. 26 cm.)

MUNICH PRINT ROOM. *A Muse*. Sketch for one of the figures in the *Parnassus* of the Louvre. (Sepia, heightened with white, on brown paper. 526 × 260 mm.)

Mucius Scaevola. (Grisaille.)

Christ between Andrew and Longinus. Study for engraving of same subject. (Pen and ink on white paper.)

PARIS, LOUVRE. *The Judgment of Solomon*. (Grisaille, on linen; background slightly coloured. 466 × 370 mm.)

It need scarcely be said that the eleven drawings here enumerated are not the only ones ascribed to Mantegna. Many of the ample remainder we shall meet while studying other masters; some are copies of favourite originals like the *Judith* of the Uffizi. One copy so certainly is of an original now lost that it merits special mention. It is a sepia drawing exhibited at the museum of the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, and represents the *Descent of Christ to the Shades*. In all but quality this puerile production corresponds with Mantegna's engraving of the same subject. In Ridolfi's day the original of this drawing, or perchance this example itself, was in the possession of the Venetian Inquisitor, Anselmo Bresciano.¹⁾

The list of Mantegna's drawings would be lengthened if we chose to include among them the master's other uncoloured works, such as the *Triumph of Scipio*. This and the *Samson* have as much a place among drawings as the *Judgment of Solomon* or the *Mucius Scaevola*. But in the National Gallery both are placed along with the paintings, and, as they have nothing new to teach us, either by way of technique or touch, there we shall let them remain.

II.

Pen and ink; pen, ink and sepia-wash, sepia, white lead and touches of colour; finally, grisaille with slight application of colour, — these are all the varieties of technique that we find in Mantegna's drawings.

If we now look carefully at each of the more important of these productions, we shall find, as I have already said, that, on the whole, the simpler and less studied the sketch — in other words, the more spontaneous it is — the more effective will be its manifestation of mass, and the less noteworthy its quality of line. Let us begin with the simplest drawings to end with the more elaborate.

As simple as any is the *Madonna* of the British Museum. It happens to be the earliest also, dating from Mantegna's middle period, and not, like all the other drawings, from his later years.²⁾ For the technique it is in, it is somewhat stiff and laboured, leading one to suspect that at the time of its execution Mantegna dared not yet allow himself liberties. But we need only hold this little sketch at a certain distance from the eye to perceive its essential features. General effect of mass, scarcely surpassable plastic values, muscular realization of movement, proper emphasis on points of force — such are the marked traits of this drawing. The technique is one aiming at light and shade alone, and the line is completely subdued to this end. Look at any line. It scarcely exists by itself. It is a series of meeting-points between a mass of light and a mass of shade. It wavers, it vanishes, it gains body and grows puissant, the humble and always helpful ministrant to the plastic effect. Look at the thick line — if indeed we may not more correctly call it dense

shadow — outlining the right hand: we feel even more fully what we can not see, the inside of wrist, palm and fingers, than what we actually behold, the outside. How pictorial is the depth of dense shade severing the Madonna's cheek from the Child's head and shoulders, or his leg from her mantle! Here also we are compelled to an even keener realization of the unseen than of the visible. Note how the masses of shadow along the legs and the torso, and the flashes of light on the knees and the shoulder, give us the exact visual equivalents of the various actual projections. Observe the curls escaping from under the Madonna's kerchief, and see how the simple touches of light and shade convey the effect not only of their mass but also of their movement. Holding it always at the same distance, look again and note how the shadow separating the Child's left foot from his leg makes you realize not only the ripple of his chubby flesh but the pressure borne by the ankle-joint supporting his whole body. Look once again and see the dashing lines in the Madonna's mantle, and note how each, serving its double purpose, indicates the firm frame of flesh and bone beneath, and the pull of the tight-drawn drapery. Thus might one wander over every detail of this small sketch and account for its function in producing the full pictorial effect. Never a link of line for mere love of line, as among the Florentines, or for an ideal of line, as in Mantegna's own more elaborated achievements.

The reader would weary if I were to make an equally minute analysis of each and all of Mantegna's authentic drawings. Nor is it necessary. The qualities with which we have made acquaintance in the *Madonna* we shall find unfailingly in other sketches of equally simple means. We should note however that as time went on Mantegna learned to allow himself a looser rein than we found him holding here.

How loose a rein he could permit himself, and how justified by an all-saving sense for mass and plastic effect, we shall see if we stop a moment over his cartoon for the engraving of the *Marine Combat*. In this, his least elaborated drawing, which he seems to have executed with the greatest ease and the least thought of outline, Mantegna is in an unusual degree pictorial, plastic and life-communicating. We have here also the fullest roundness of relief, and, in addition, a rare effect of circumfused air and water unifying the composition atmospherically. At the same time, the fire and spirit of the sea-horses and the energy of the onset sweep us out into the tide of their fierce life.

Much of this evaporated with attention to line for its own sake, as we shall readily perceive in comparing this cartoon with the finished engraving. The engraving is not so plastic, the atmospheric effect has disappeared, and, with it, the pictorial charm. What the line has gained in continuity it certainly has lost in life and force. Whither has the spirit fled from the horses? You could hear them neigh and champ. It was a pleasure to pat their beautiful heads. The toss of their manes made the air electric. How tame all this has grown in the engraving!

Yet one other sketch in the simple technique of sepia demands attention. It is a drawing lacking none of the qualities which make the cartoon for the *Combat* delightful, and at the same time possessing attractiveness

¹⁾ Ridolfi. *Meraviglie* I, 72.

²⁾ The Child is of the type that we find in such a characteristic work of Mantegna's middle period as Mr. Mond's *Holy Family*. The Madonna's right hand is long and slim — the hand Mantegna has in common with the young Giambellino — like the hand of the young woman in the *Circumcision* of the Uffizi *Triptych*. The Madonna's left hand, with its thick fingers, is like the hand of the old Magian in the same *Triptych*, and like the hand of the Madonna in a work even earlier, the *San Zeno Altar-piece* of 1458.



ANDREA MANTEGNA.

MADONNA.

British Museum, London.

By kind permission of Messrs. Braun, Clément & Co., Dornach.

and power as a masterly rendering of a great theme — I refer to the *Judith* in the Uffizi.

Twice and perhaps thrice has Mantegna treated this subject, twice without colour, and once as a painting. Whatever point of view we choose to start from, whether we regard the specifically artistic effect, or the presentation of spiritual significance, we shall agree, I believe, in preferring the *Judith* of the Uffizi to the one in grisaille formerly belonging to Col. Malcolm and now at Dublin, or to the doubtful one in Lord Pembroke's collection, painted in tempera and finished with the mincing primness and the niggling precision of a miniature.

We all know the story of Judith. She soothes her people's enemy into a besotted sleep, and thus asleep she cuts off his head. She has played her part well, caressing and cajoling, with mortal hatred and deadly determination at her heart; and now at last, after such tension, her fever-strung nerves may relax, and her pent-up feelings have vent.

In every version of the story this is the moment which Mantegna has chosen to depict. The earliest certainly, if really by Andrea, is Lord Pembroke's tempera painting, treated, as I have already said, laboriously and minutely. All that we see is modelled with cautious care; the relief is full and round; but the figures do not escape Squarcione's taunt — they suggest marble rather than flesh and blood. A perfectly plastic figure should be so modelled that we realize the unseen parts of it as vividly as the visible. Such modelling we found in the *Madonna* of the British Museum and in the Duke of Devonshire's *Marine Combat*. In Lord Pembroke's *Judith* the contours are coast-lines en- islanding the figures. In his preoccupation over the lineal effect, Mantegna, if indeed it was he, seems to have forgotten what he had started to do, and has given but a sorry interpretation of his theme. Judith holds the gory head in her hand, but she feels neither hatred nor exultation. She shows the face of Faustina morose with the lassitude of a disappointing orgie.

Such is Lord Pembroke's painting. And now look at the Uffizi drawing. No Roman empress of the decline is this Judith. She presents a slim figure, majestically tall, a profile of Athene such as Hellenic genius at its height conceived. From head to foot her tremulous frame is aquiver with loathing, and for disgust her fingers will scarcely touch the hated head.

The specifically artistic qualities of this work are worthy of the interpretation. The means used are as simple as in the *Marine Combat*. With sepia on white paper Mantegna attains effects of unsurpassable plasticity, of resplendent colour. Note, for instance, how white and round the right arm emerges from the impenetrable blackness. But let us hear what Messer Giorgio Vasari has to say touching this masterpiece:

»There is in our portfolio, on a half sheet royal, »a drawing by Andrea of a Judith putting in the bag »of a negress slave the head of Holofernes. It is in »black and white, but of a technique no longer practised: for in place of white lead, he has used the »white ground so skilfully that you see the separate »hairs spun out, and such other refinements, as if they »had been done most daintily with a brush. Where-

fore this sheet may be regarded as a painting rather than as a »drawing«.

III.

With the sepia version of the Uffizi, the Dublin *Judith* may not be compared either for interpretation or execution. It is the ablest of Mantegna's works in grisaille, his most elaborate technique, but we quickly note the hampering of energy both mental and manual. No fierce rebound from stifling oppression is depicted here, but the self-pity and lassitude of one tasting the futility of revenge and foreseeing further wrongs.

The modelling is more obvious than in the sepia sketch, but scarcely so plastic; with one exception, the touch is never so vivifying. The exception is the hair of Holofernes, the locks of which are like swaying river grasses swept by the wind. But Judith's own hair, somewhat limp, and mechanically curled, lacks the life-communicating quality of the Uffizi drawing. Taken by itself, however, the Dublin Judith is one of the masterpieces of Italian art, as composition, as arrangement, as modelling, as movement, to be surpassed only by Mantegna himself. It suffers somewhat beside the more spontaneously felt and simply executed sketch, but gains vastly when confronted with any other of Mantegna's drawings equally elaborate.

But first I would draw attention to a quality which the Dublin grisaille possesses in an eminent degree, the quality of line. Look at the swift, unswerving lines of Judith's draperies. Some of them have the flow of silent streams. You will not find such lineal perfection in the sepia drawings. There, as I have said, the effort was less, and the effect of mass and colour greater: here, there is more labour, and a closer approach to Mantegna's conscious ideal, surety of line.

Passing over the powerfully conceived and ably executed, but now somewhat washed-out *Mucius Scaevola*²⁾ of Munich, let us look at the elaborate grisaille of the Louvre, representing the *Judgment of Solomon*. Were it not for the subject, we behold what we easily might mistake for the copy of a bas-relief from the age of the Antonines. The conception is tame, almost cheap, the execution careful and cold. There is no effect of mass, no grouping and fusing atmosphere. The figures stand like stiff statuary, unkindled and unkindling. The executioners are ignoble gladiators, and the real mother is their mate. Neither values of plasticity nor of force are accentuated. How merely mask-like are most of the faces! How little life there is in any joint! On the other hand, the contours are clean and precise, and the line by itself has great beauty. Note the hair of the executioners, and the lineal effect of the young guard's entire figure.

¹⁾ Vasari, Vasari III. 402. Doubts have been cast upon the identity of the Uffizi drawing with the one described by Vasari. He expressly states — and it is his point — that the drawing shows the white of the sheet where most artists would have used white lead. The Uffizi drawing, however, is touched up with white lead. But a careful scrutiny will soon convince one that these touches are each and all comparatively recent. They never add to the effect, but generally detract from it, often carelessly going over the blacks, and always looking fresher than the rest of the surface. Granting, as every competent critic will, that the white is a later addition, Vasari's description perfectly fits the Uffizi Judith — may more than fit, is a most illuminating criticism.

²⁾ This can scarcely be other than the work seen in 1512 by the Archimede Morelliano in the house of Francesco Zio, and thus entered: «El quadretto de Muzio Scevola che brusa la mano propria, fatto da bronzo, in de mano de Andrea Mantegna.» Edition Frizzoni, p. 179.

IV.

Between the boldly spontaneous sepia sketches and the over-elaborated grisailles, not quite rising to the vivacity of the first, nor sinking to the tameness of the others, the three drawings of mixed technique find their fit place. One of them, the *Mars, Venus and Diana*, almost wholly in sepia, is less elaborate than the other two, and has many of the qualities of the least labored works. The *Muse* and the *Allegory* are highly and cautiously finished, but artistically no less valuable.

All three may be connected with the paintings Mantegna furnished soon after 1490 for the study of his fascinating patroness, Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua. The *Venus, Mars and Diana* may have been a first thought for the group of Mars and Venus upon the hillock in the *Parnassus*. The *Muse* was certainly for the same picture, and Mantegna transferred her figure to the canvas with scarcely a change.¹⁾ The *Allegory* is a sketch for a picture that seems never to have been painted, having probably given place to the kindred subject of the *Expulsion of the Vices*.

The first of these, the *Mars, Venus and Diana*, is almost entirely in sepia, and although much more studiously finished than Mantegna's other drawings in this technique, partakes of their freedom, plasticity and suggestiveness. The modelling of the Diana is peculiarly appealing.²⁾

The successful search for subtle line has, it is true, resulted in exquisite contours, but there is a loss of force values. The hands are hardly prehensile; the joints communicate but feeble pressures to one another; the limbs do not weigh their full weight.

¹⁾ The face in the painting is significantly different and has the individualized traits of a portrait, and not Mantegna's usual type, which appears in the drawing. Having sketched, for the action, this foremost of the muses, Mantegna, in transferring it to canvas, added a portrait face. It will be noted that this is the only face in comparative repose, and looking out of the picture. I venture to believe that the portrait is of no other than Isabella herself.

²⁾ She has been transferred with but little change of action to the *Parnassus*, where, however, she figures as Venus. Drapery and head apart, the Venus here is in figure and movement almost identical with the Uffizi *Judith*, which, as we remember, is dated 1491.

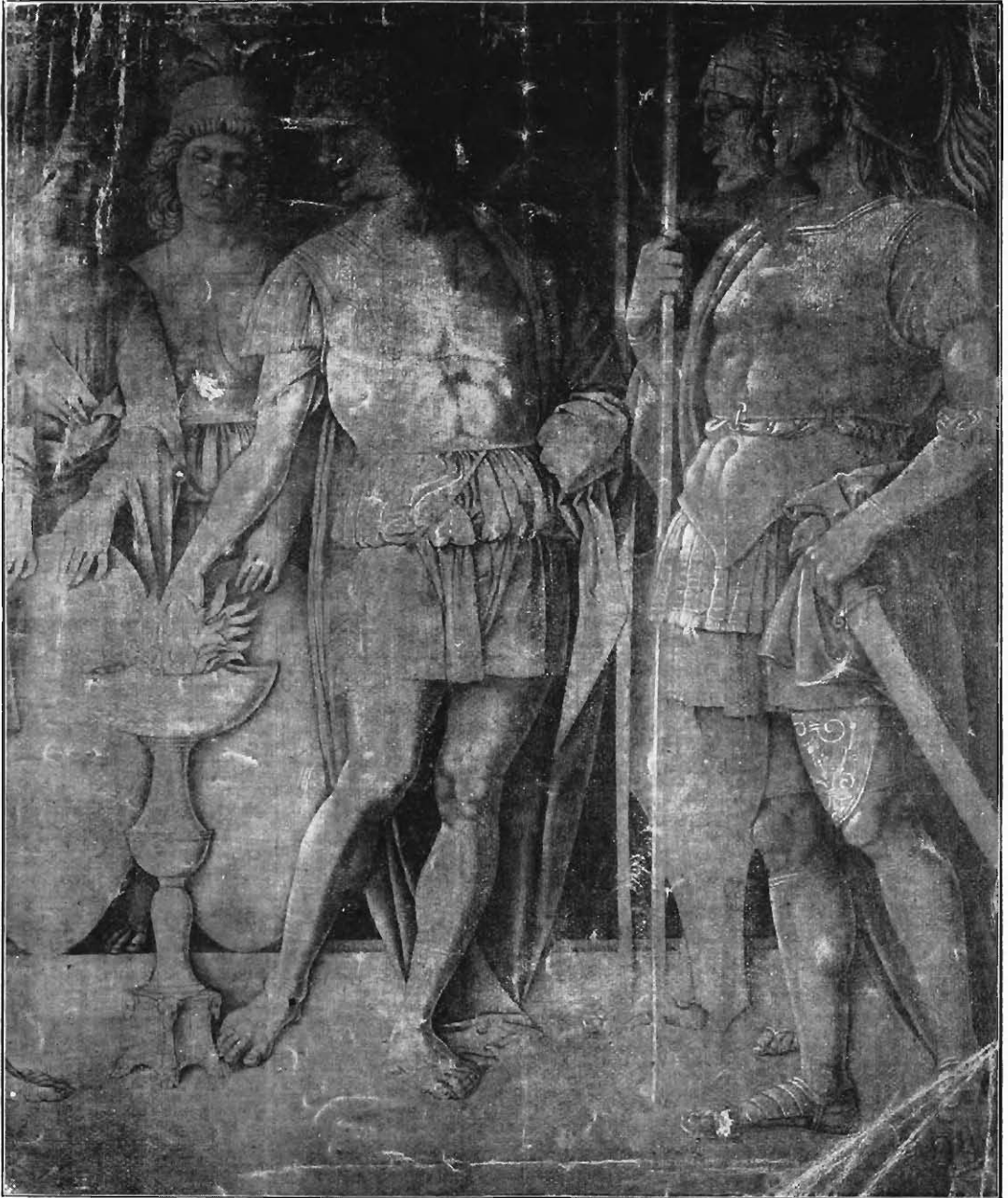
The *Muse* is masterly in modelling and in movement of line. Perhaps we should consider this drawing chiefly as a study of drapery. As such it lacks little of perfection. How the folds flutter as she dances; and yet they mould the form under them, the breasts, the waist, the hips, each with its utmost plasticity! Apply the test from which masterpieces alone emerge: imagine this sheet torn to tatters; like fragments of great Greek art, every shred would betray its value and function, conjuring up the whole.

The *Allegory* is as elaborate in execution as it is enigmatical in intention. Is the king in his bloated nakedness esconced on a globe kept firm by sphinxes, Emperor of the Fools, or is he Midas? Is the hag beside him Envy, and the bandaged maid Justice? And what may be the meaning of the other group: the nude girl about to leap over the precipitous wall; the dancing faun; the piping satyr, and the uncanny figure led by a crawling dog, his own head wrapped in a handkerchief tied around his neck as we tie a rag over a stopper? He of course is Blindness; but what does it all signify?¹⁾

Fortunately our purpose is not the guessing of charades but the appreciation of the work of art, and as a work of art the *Allegory* is not obscure. To judge it at its full value we should regard it not as the hot transcript of a dazzling idea, but as a work finished even to the finger-nail; whereupon it takes rank among Mantegna's masterpieces. The firmness of the modelling, the loading of the limbs, the pressure upon the joints, are one and all directly force-communicating. Much is here sacrificed to contour; but the beauty of the outlines almost weans one from that fusion of form and atmosphere, those effects of mass and colour, in a word, from that higher plasticity which we found in the *Judith* and in the other unelaborated drawings by Mantegna.

¹⁾ An engraving exists in which this drawing is faithfully reproduced, and continued below, where a dungeon appears.





ANDREA MANTEGNA.

MUCIUS SCAEVOLA.

Print Room. Munich.

HUGO HELBING'S
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JAHRGANG I
HEFT 6

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