

Bulletin

OF THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
OF THE CITY OF DETROIT

VOLUME XXI

DECEMBER, 1941

NUMBER 3



MADONNA AND CHILD
BY CRISTOFORO SOLARI, ITALIAN, ACTIVE, 1489-1527
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn, 1941

THE WAR AND THE MUSEUM

THE TASK BEFORE OUR COUNTRY must be shared by every individual and every institution in its own measure; and in order to be prepared for any possible eventuality, the Art Institute is making plans for the safety of its collections, which we hope may never have to be put into effect. But our first contribution to our war effort, we believe, will be to keep the museum open, its collections in place, and all its resources for pleasure, instruction and refreshment of the spirit available to the people of Detroit. The need for recreation in the true sense — a re-creation of one's spirit by contact with the timeless and inexhaustible wealth of human culture — is the need which our institution was created to fill in peace time. It is a still greater need in war time. We believe that many people will find not only pleasure and refreshment but a source of strength in falling back upon the inheritance of great thoughts and profound perception of the values of life, the magnificent imagination and enduring achievement which is our heritage from the artists of our civilization.

Our second contribution must be to do what we can to help the promising and hopeful artistic life of our community. Few people realize as yet how interesting the work of the artists, architects and craftsmen of Detroit has been in recent years and what possibilities there are in the artists who are at work here today. We hope that among the tragedies of war there will not be included the snuffing out of this promise.

We wish to call attention again to the program of gallery talks, study courses, lectures and special exhibits which the Art Institute now offers, and to remind people that it is as essential to preserve their strength and elasticity of mind as to preserve their health in order to be useful in the task ahead. We are ready, as always, to take care of requests of individuals or groups who wish to use our resources, and now more than ever welcome suggestions from the people of Detroit as to how we may make their Institute useful to them.

A MADONNA BY CRISTOFORO SOLARI

THE NOW ALMOST FORGOTTEN Milanese sculptor, Cristoforo Solari, called *Il Gobbo* (the Hunchback), was considered one of the most excellent sculptors of his time and one whom the great art patrons of the Renaissance hoped to employ, as we learn from the correspondence of Isabella d'Este and her brother Alfonso, Duke of Ferrara.¹ Alfonso gave him the commission to execute a large group in marble representing Hercules and Cacus, while Isabella begged him, when he visited the Marchesa at Mantua, to design a magnificent fountain for the gardens of her favorite villa at Porto. He never completed this work, however, as the plague carried him off in the year 1527.

Published monthly, October to May inclusive, at the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit, 5200 Woodward Avenue, Detroit, Michigan. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Detroit, Michigan, under date of October 29, 1934. Subscription price \$1.00 per year.

His fame went back to the end of the fifteenth century, when he was employed by Lodovico Moro, the Duke of Milan, to sculpture a tomb for himself and Beatrice d'Este (d. 1497), which was later placed in the Certosa at Pavia. From 1501 on he was architect of the cathedral at Milan for which he executed several statues (*Adam and Eve*, *Christ at the Column*). He continued to hold this position after the French occupied Milan. The medieval tradition which demanded that the architect be a sculptor as well was still alive in him as in many other of the Renaissance architects.

The beautiful tomb of Lodovico Moro and Beatrice d'Este is the only work which still maintains Cristoforo's fame. It is the most popular piece in the rich array of sculptures in the Certosa at Pavia. Even the young Michelangelo had to compete with its fame, as we learn from an anecdote told by Vasari in connection with Michelangelo's *Pieta* at St. Peter's which was executed at almost the same time (1500). "It happened one day that Michelangelo, entering the place where the *Pieta* was erected, found a large assembly of strangers from Lombardy there, who were praising it highly; one of these asking who had done it, was told, 'our hunchback of Milan,' hearing which Michelangelo remained silent, although surprised that his work should be attributed to another. But one night he repaired to St. Peter's with a light and his chisel to engrave his name on the figure . . ."

While one concludes from this story that the best proof of an attribution is the artist's signature, we should not forget that the signature alone is worth little if the style also is not indicative of the artist's hand. Let us hope that we are more successful in our attribution of a new work to the "Hunchback of Milan" than the guides of St. Peter's were with Michelangelo's *Pieta*. Unfortunately, we cannot uphold our attribution by a signature. The inscription on the base of the Madonna² which Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn have presented to the museum, refers not to the artist but to the devotee who kneels in prayer before the Virgin. The words spoken by the Christ child say: "If you will say the Ave Maria, I will give you my blessing" (SE TU DI L AVE MARIA TE DARO LA BENEDICIO (NE) MIA).

Our attribution to Cristoforo Solari is based upon a similarity of facial type, of plastic conception, of linear expression and of the execution of details, to the tomb figures in the Certosa, the statues on the Milan Cathedral, a relief of the Madonna in the Berlin museum³ and some drawings in the Ambrosiana. In the illustration of one of the latter we find the same heavy curves in the drapery and outlines as in the profile view of our Madonna. Common to all these works is a transitional character combining exuberant late Gothic movement in the folds of drapery and hair, and slightly affected gestures, with a realism in face, costume and the representation of the nude characteristic of the early Renaissance.

This Madonna belongs to a period when religion represented the personal conception of the artist who could not imagine the Virgin other than as a pretty woman of his time dressed in an elegant costume and the Christ Child as a real baby of pure and healthy forms. Sculptors seldom went farther in realistic costume than is the case here; dress, coiffure and even shoes are those in fashion at Milan from about 1450 to 1500. The Virgin's head, with carefully plaited



DRAWING BY CRISTOFORO SOLARI;
AMBROSIANA, MILAN



MADONNA AND CHILD BY
CRISTOFORO SOLARI; SIDE VIEW

curls, is like an early drawing by Leonardo da Vinci. Indeed we know that the sculptor must have been in close touch with Leonardo who was likewise at the court of Lodovico Moro; while Cristoforo's brother, Andrea, was one of Leonardo's best pupils.

But Leonardo was not the only influence upon our artist. We know that Cristoforo was at one time in Rome, and even before that, he must have been acquainted with the new tendencies of the High Renaissance formulated by Michelangelo. We feel the latter's influence not only in the robustness of the child in our group, but in his pronounced sideward movement. This pose of the child's body shows Solari endeavoring to make an all around composition out of the otherwise relief-like construction of his group. He did not quite succeed as he was by nature a Quattrocentist who thought out his work in clearly marked horizontal and vertical planes from front to back. The upright position of the Madonna and the emphasis upon the front plane in her skirt and right hand has still something of the hieratic character of medieval sculpture which contrasts strongly with her sophisticated features and appearance.

This new group is exceptionally well preserved, probably because of its place in a niche above an altar. Traces of gilding are still visible on some parts of the dress. It is said to have come from the now dissolved monastery of the Calmaldolese monks at Monte-Conero, Ancona. It was for many years in the collection of Mortimer L. Schiff, New York, and after this collection was sold at Christies' (London, June 22, 1938) it was acquired by the donor in the London art market. It has been placed on exhibition in the gallery of North Italian art and occupies the center of the north wall, representing the art of sculpture against a setting of contemporary paintings of the Lombard school.

W. R. VALENTINER

¹Julia Cartwright, *Isabella d'Este*, New York, E. P. Dutton, Volume II, p. 139.

²Accession Number 41.15. Marble; Height: 32¼ inches. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Albert Kahn, 1941.

³Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, Catalogue Number 320.

JOHN C. HAMILTON BY HENRY INMAN

A SMALL PORTRAIT of John C. Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton, by Henry Inman¹ is an item of American art recently added to the permanent collection through the gift of Mr. D. M. Ferry, Jr.

Henry Inman, born in Utica, New York, October 28, 1801, showed an early inclination for drawing and in this was encouraged by his family. He was



PORTRAIT OF JOHN C. HAMILTON
BY HENRY INMAN, AMERICAN, 1801-1845
Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., 1941

provided with such instruction as was available at Utica, and later, when his father moved to New York in 1812, he continued his art studies in the metropolis. In 1814, on a visit with his father to an exhibition in the studios of John Wesley Jarvis, he casually met the artist who was to play so important a part in shaping his career. His reverent attitude toward Jarvis probably had much to do with the affinity which sprang up between the thirteen year old boy and the older man. At any rate, he was bound as an apprentice to Jarvis and with him travelled to Baltimore, Washington and New Orleans, painting backgrounds and draperies and in other ways assisting his master. After serving an

apprenticeship of seven years with Jarvis, Inman became one of the leading portrait painters of his period, dividing the abundant commissions with Neagle, Harding, Waldo, Elliott, Page and Healy. Most of these contemporaries of his are also represented by suitable examples in our collection.

In 1822, Inman set up a studio for himself in New York on Vesey Street, where he became a well-established member of his profession and where he enjoyed a good patronage for the next decade. He was one of a group of dissatisfied young artists who, in opposition to the American Academy of Arts, presided over by the autocratic John Trumbull, established the National Academy of Design in 1827. Samuel F. B. Morse was the first president of the new organization, and Inman was vice-president, an office he continued to hold until he took up his residence in Philadelphia in 1831.

During his few years' sojourn in the City of Brotherly Love, he not only painted many portraits of prominent individuals, but he shared in a publishing partnership with C. A. Childs under the firm name of Childs and Inman. They made, among other things, lithographic portraits from Inman originals. The *Dr. Philip S. Physick*, produced for the medical class of the University of Philadelphia, and the *Chief Justice John Marshall*, ordered by the Bar of Philadelphia, are examples.

The portrait of John Church Hamilton, just acquired by us, is a small but good example of the artist's early period. Born in 1792, this son of Alexander Hamilton practiced law in New York after his graduation from Columbia University, but devoted a large part of his life to collecting and editing the papers of his distinguished father. These were published in six volumes under the title *History of the Republic of the United States of America as Traced in the Writings of Alexander Hamilton, by his son, John Church Hamilton*. He also published the *Memoirs and Life of Alexander Hamilton*.

CLYDE H. BURROUGHS

¹Accession Number 41.5. Canvas mounted on wood panel; Height 8-5/16 inches; Width: 6-13/16 inches. Gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr., 1941. Inscription on back of panel which purports to be in the handwriting of Inman himself: "John C. Hamilton Son of Alexander Hamilton. Henry Inman pinxt."

A CANAL SCENE BY JACOB VAN RUISDAEL

AN EARLY LANDSCAPE by Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/29-1682) was added to the collections some years ago but has not yet found a place in the *Bulletin*. It is a *Canal Scene*,¹ painted in the artist's early period, about 1650, a little before the two other pictures in our collection, *The Cemetery* and *The Dunes*.

In composition it still follows the simple but effective scheme of two vistas opening to right and left of a central mass, which was used so often by the generation of Dutch landscapists preceding Ruisdael. The foreground is filled with the water of a canal, ruffled by the evening breeze and reflecting the light of a cold evening sky. The sweeping curve of the water forms the principal vista into the left distance. In the center the flowing water moves under the shadow of a farm house and hay stack surrounded by a dark clump of trees. To the right of this central mass of shadow the minor vista opens inward to the distant tower of the village church and the cool depths of the sky. A man poles

his boat away from the river bank; a second boat is tied up in the shadows of the farther bank while two figures stand on the towpath by the farmhouse door. But the figures are of minor importance and the scene is essentially a study of the evening light in one of those simple, lonely corners of the Dutch countryside in which Jacob van Ruisdael delighted.



CANAL SCENE BY JACOB VAN RUISDAEL,
DUTCH, 1628/29-1682
Gift of D. Katz, Dieren, Holland, 1937

It has often been observed that Ruisdael shows his distinctive traits from the very beginning of his work. This early picture reveals the love of solitude and revery which are characteristic of his sensibility. It is a picture of a momentary effect of light. The level beams of sunset shine across the water and catch the reeds by the water's edge. In a moment the dark shadows of the trees and buildings will spread further and the earth will be in darkness, leaving light only in the clouds overhead. Even in such an early work, Ruisdael was able to give so convincing an expression of the life of nature that the observer seems to experience for himself the coolness of the evening air and to feel the poetry of the smoke rising from the farmhouse chimney, saying, here is warmth, shelter, home. It was the mark of the Dutch imagination to feel such experiences without sentimentalism but with a sensitive perception that makes them timeless.

E. P. RICHARDSON

¹Accession Number 37.21. Panel; Height: 15 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches; Width: 20-3/16 inches. Not recorded by Hofstede de Groot or Rosenberg. Gift of D. Katz, Dieren, Holland, 1937.

MUSEUM NOTES

Mrs. Marjorie McKeown Player has been appointed to the Museum Staff and will be in charge of public relations. Mrs. Player received her degree at the University of Michigan and has since been associated with Detroit newspaper and publicity work.

JUNIOR EXPLORERS CLUB: 11 a.m. Saturday mornings.

A new club, called the Junior Explorers Club, will begin on January 17, at eleven o'clock, for children of Museum Founders Society Members. By means of motion pictures, slides and the museum collection, the first meetings will present the story of the Egyptians and will continue with subjects chosen by the club members. Membership will be limited to fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grade students who are children or relatives of members of the Museum Founders Society. Admission will be made by membership cards, which may be obtained by telephoning in advance to the Educational Department, Columbia 0360.

HOURS OF ADMISSION:

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday afternoons, 1 to 5; Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings, 7 to 10; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Russell A. Alger Branch Museum for Italian Renaissance Art and special exhibitions is open free daily, except Mondays, 1 to 5.