Bulletin of
The Detroit Institute of Arts

Of the City of Detroit

Vol. VI MAY, 1925 No. 8

MADONNA AND CHILD
WOOD CARVING, BY SILVESTRO DELL' AQUILA
About 1440-1510

TWO ITALIAN RENAISSANCE STATUES

The delightful little mountain city of Aquila, which lies in the Abruzzi not far from the Gran Sasso d'Italia, is better known to art lovers through its mediaeval architecture, dating from the period of the last of the Hohenstaufens and Anjous, than for its Renaissance sculpture, which belonged to the period when the City's importance had already dwindled. Moreover, its two best sculptors of this period, Andrea and Silvestro dell' Aquila, with whose work it is only here that we can become thoroughly acquainted, do not measure up to the great Florentines. They have, nevertheless, left a very individual imprint on this quiet mountain city, and their work, combining as it does a certain provincial backwardness with naivete and intimacy of conception, will repay study.

The Art Instiute has acquired through a gift from Mr. F. Kleinberger, a large statue carved in wood, representing the Madonna, by the younger of these two masters, Silvestro del Aquila, called "L' Ariscola" (about 1440–1510), which shows his art at its best. Silvestro may be called a follower of Antonio Rossellino, whose work he had especially studied in Naples. While he executed a number of marble sculptures in his own city, among them the S. Bernardino mausoleum and the tomb of Maria Camponeschi, he was at his happiest in the simpler portrayals of the Virgin and Child, which were mostly carried out in wood, a medium which seems to have been particularly well adapted to his art.

These Madonnas, of which ours is hitherto an unpublished work, are usually seated on a throne worshipping the Child, and breathe a mediaeval piety and simple dignity which was not often to be found in the art of the larger and more worldly cities of Italy of that day. To this must be added the great decorative charm which the rich coloring and lavish gilding lent to these statues. The statue which has been presented to the Art Institute has, unfortunately, suffered somewhat through subsequent painting, particularly of the Child, but still shows the characteristic color scheme of the artist, a prevailing gold which covers the whole costume of the figure with a few splashes of light blue seen on the head cover, the shoes and the Savonarola chair on which the Virgin sits. The figure was probably executed about 1480, when Silvestro's conception was simpler and his arrangement of drapery less complicated than in some of his later works like the Madonna in Chieti.

While this statue represents a typical Quattrocento master, another statue of the Madonna, presented to the Museum by Mr. René Geimpel, is an example of the greatest sculptor of the Cinquecento at Venice, Jacopo Sansovino, the friend of Titian and follower of Michelangelo. Although this charming figure is executed in a different material, in terra cotta, and is of very different type, (it is only about one quarter life size while the wooden statue is life size), it is interesting for comparison with the statue of Silvestro dell' Aquila, if we look at it only from the plastic point of view which changed so greatly in the transition from the XVth to the XVIth Century. The earlier statue shows the relief-like composition of the Quattrocento, the Madonna sitting straight in frontal view, the knees being placed close together in one plane, the child forming loosely a connection between the two planes expressed by the upper and the lower part of the body of the Virgin. Like a relief the statue is seen at its best from one side only, from the front. The group by Sansovino is composed in a much more complicated matter, in such a way that we feel the roundness of the figure. The eyes, from whatever side they are approached, lead through curves from the front to the back, making it obvious that the figure can be seen from all sides. This is brought about by the turning of the Madonna; by the placing of one of her feet in advance of the other; by the stretching out of her right hand,

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN
Painted Terra-cotta
BY JACOPO SANSOVINO (1486-1570)

and the diagonal lines of her drapery as well as the diagonal position of the Child.

The little St. John has been added to the group to increase the richness of the movement of the composition. We find that Sansovino is especially fond of adding one figure more to the group of the Madonna and Child, or even a number of children, so as to accentuate the rich plasticity of the group. Somewhat similar compositions he has executed in marble as well as in bronze and in terra cotta (In Venice, in the Berlin Museum and in the Metropolitan Museum). Ours is especially attractive on account of its excellent condition, which shows how much more charming the terra cotta sculptures of the High Renaissance were when seen with the original coloring of the flesh and the costumes.

W. R. V.

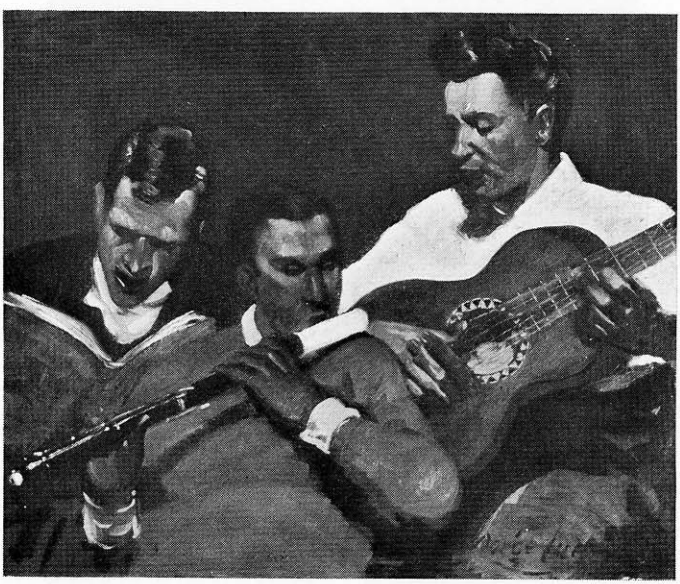
PUBLISHED MONTHLY, OCTOBER TO MAY, INCLUSIVE, AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS OF THE CITY OF DETROIT. ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER AT THE POST OFFICE AT DETROIT, MICHIGAN, UNDER THE ACT OF OCTOBER 3, 1917.

TWO PAINTINGS BY AMERICAN ARTISTS

(1) GEORGE LUKS

A painting by George Luks, entitled "Three Top Sergeants," has joined the permanent family circle of American Art in the collection of the Institute. The assertive way this picture holds its own in the American Exhibition gives great promise of its staying qualities as one of the able works of our time. It is not offensively assertive but by comparison maintains its position by sheer merit of craftmanship and exuberance of life. Of all the works of Luks that have passed in review before me—"The Spielers", "The Sand Artist", "Woman with Macaws", or "Boy with Guitar"—this evidences that same appealing humanity of the common people portrayed with a fervid but joyous realism and unlike many of the painter's delightfully spontaneous pictures of street gamins it possesses some semblance of thoughtful arrangement.

Three amateur musicans, one in shirt sleeves strumming a guitar accompaniment, another in sweater with protruding white collar and cuffs playing a flute, a third in dark coat singing from a book, are energetically engaged in a musical pastime. For a genre subject the scale of the half-length figures is large and the players so placed as to make a dynamic composition which contributes quite as much to the suggestion of liveliness as does the arrested action of the musicians themselves. The joyful animation of the scene and its veracity are set down with a direct attack and a masterly firmness of brush that delight the eye. The areas of color are broad and happily related one to another except that in his fear of the delicacy of blended edges the artist apparently errs on the side of a masculine ungainliness. I am inclined to think, however, both from my observation of the aging of his other fine works and from



THREE TOP SERGEANTS, BY GEORGE LUKS
Acquired by Purchase

his own remarks about this picture, that he is counting on time to put the softening touch to his sharp edges and his fresh color, as it has already done to a number of his earlier works.

After long familiarity with his convincing portrayals of east side types I met George Luks and was much impressed with certain superficial resemblances between the manner and character of the painter and his pictures. One feels that his penetrating eyes have looked with sympathy and understanding upon many and varied human experiences. He does not sentimentalize about the foibles and follies of man but accepts them, and holds them up for our inspection with the keen zest of a scientist. He sees the cheerful rather than the melancholy incidents of daily life. To his ability as an accurate reporter he adds the relish of a keen appreciation, and the terseness of a facile brush. His sheer joy in the painter's stroke is probably inherent. His father, a physician, was a clever draughtsman and his mother too was a talented painter. And knowing Luks one cannot imagine him painting in a different manner.

(2) ALBERT PINKHAM RYDER

In the gallery of new accessions hangs the small oil painting "Summer Night Moonlight" (14 x 20 inches) by Albert Pinkham Ryder, recently purchased. It is one of the blue green marine subjects probably painted prior to 1890 which show this artist's felicity in expressing the poetry of night. There is on this moonlit seashore caressed by a gently splashing sea, a sense of quiet solitude broken only by the lonely thatch-roofed cottage of a fisherman at the foot of a shadowed hill and a sailboat left on the sands by the ebbing tide together with two net reels that suggest the proximity of man.

SUMMER NIGHT MOONLIGHT, BY ALBERT P. RYDER
Acquired by Purchase

It is a satisfaction to record the representation in our permanent collection of so important a figure in American painting. Ryder in his own time was regarded as an eccentric, and while he found some measure of recognition among his fellow artists from 1873, when his first work was admitted to the National Academy, to 1898, within which period practically all of his important works fall, he found but little encouragement and

PIETA, BY CARLO CRIVELLI. VENETIAN XV CENTURY
Purchased and Presented by the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society

appreciation in the outside world except for the small circle of loyal friends who believed in him. He was, however, elected as an Associate of the National Academy in 1902 and was made an Academician in 1903. Perhaps his seclusion was accountable in a large measure for his belated recognition. Without wife or family he lived the life of a recluse in his unkempt New York studio with no thought of personal gain beyond the most meagre necessities. He himself was quite oblivious of the clutter and disarray that checked the advances of his infrequent visitors. To him the studio was a world apart where he dreamed dreams and had beautiful visions, where verses and pictures were haltingly brought forth.

A true born artist, Ryder was practically self-taught. In his teens he took up painting, first studying the masters and then going to nature for his instruction. His faltering technique and unmethodical ways are due to his lack of training and to his inability to assimilate the facility of other painters. His own themes were so ofter beyond the ken of reality, so much in the realm of fancy, that they were but slowly and laboriously realized. Yet the magic of poetry and emotional appeal (the precious cargo of Ryder's fanciful conceptions) arrive in spite of these vehicular limitations.

Ryder was well read, intelligent and quite capable of social intercourse, but he felt that meeting others took from him his precious creative hours. Had he chosen to repeat with variations some of his earlier salable pictures he could have had a measure of worldly success, but he preferred to invade the realm of new experiences.

Since his death in 1917, as a summary of his achievement is brought before us, we see in the work of Ryder something of the inner consciousness and fine individuality that characterized the works of George Fuller, R. A. Blakelock and Winslow Homer that have given American painting a standing with the nations of Europe.

C. H. B.

A PIETA BY CARLO CRIVELLI

Carlo Crivelli (about 1430–1493) is one of the most fascinating painters of the North Italian early Renaissance and holds a position of his own among the great Venetian Masters of the XV Century. Wherever we meet his works in the galleries (and no one who has visited the National Gallery at London will forget the extraordinary display of his six masterpieces) we are fascinated by his strikingly original manner and by his passionate and strong individuality. Seen with other paintings of the Italian School, his works usually stand out by the gorgeousness of their colors, by the enamel-like quality of their technique and by their fantastic decorative effect, produced through a lavish use of embossed gold ornaments; and if by nothing else, the curious museum visitors are nearly always attracted by the remarkable plasticity of his figures, of the architectural forms and the rich decorative details such as the marvelously executed pattern of the costumes or the garlands and still life of fruits or flowers. When one is thus attracted by the relief-like quality of his painting and studies them at close range, he is surprised to find that the artist in his endeavor for a completely realistic rendering of his subject did not hesitate to raise certain parts of his ornaments by stucco application so as to enhance their plastic effect. The intensity of his temperament, which in this manner tries to overstep the limits set to the painter by the flat surface, is just as visible in the expression which he gives to his figures. It varies from a passionate vehemence shown in the scenes from the life of Christ to an exquisite and heavenly beauty in his Madonnas which, however, is often combined with a rather affected behavior in the figures of the accompanying saints.

His wish to show grace and daintiness sometimes carries him too far and tempts him to a rather eccentric manner, especially in the drawing of the long, spider-like fingers of his female figures.

From his works we may conclude that the artist must have had a very peculiar and self-centered personality. Indeed, we find that he kept himself apart from the artistic development of his home city, Venice, and followed undisturbed his own almost archaic styles in smaller provincial towns in the Marches Ancona, where he worked most of his life. In his youth he had an unpleasant experience in Venice. Having committed adultery with the wife of a sailor in the absence of her husband, he was imprisoned there for a period. Although he seems to have lived in seclusion more or less afterward, he never lacked orders, and proved to be a fertile artist in spite of the careful and durable technique in which his works were executed. He reached considerable fame at the end of his life, when he was knighted by King Ferdinand II of Aragon. How proud he felt to be honored in such a way we may assume from the large labels with which he signed his last pictures, adding to his name MILES or even EQUES LAUREATUS.

In England, where great Italian art was understood and collected earlier than on the continent, the art of Crivelli has been highly appreciated for at least a century. In Berenson's list, we find half of the works mentioned by the artist as being in English collections. Next to the National Gallery there was specially the collection of Dudley House, rich in important examples of the master, and when this collection was sold at auction in 1892, one of its masterpieces went to the Berlin Museum, two others came into private collections in England from which one afterwards passed into the Metropolitan Museum, and the other, belonging to Mr. Thomas Brocklebank of Waterbury Place, Kent, has now been acquired by the Detroit Institute of Arts as a gift from the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society.*

Next to England the American collectors have shown a very keen interest in the art of Crivelli and as early as 1902 one of his grandest pietas went into a public gallery, the Pieta of 1485 from the Pianciatichi collection, Florence, now in the Boston Museum. Mrs. Jack Gardner soon followed with the acquisition of the splendid "St. George and the Dragon", and Mr. John G. Johnson of Philadelphia came next with another Pieta of his earlier period (about 1473). A third remarkable Pieta, the one from the Dudley sale, afterward belonging to Mr. R. Crawshay of London, was then purchased by the Metropolitan Museum, and in 1912 the supremely beautiful Madonna passed into the collection of Mr. Philip Lehman of New York. These, together with an earlier Madonna belonging to Mr. Henry Walters of Baltimore and two unimportant panels with saints in the Metropolitan Museum form the examples so far owned by public and private galleries in America, all of which are described in B. Berenson's "Venetian painting of the XVth Century in America."

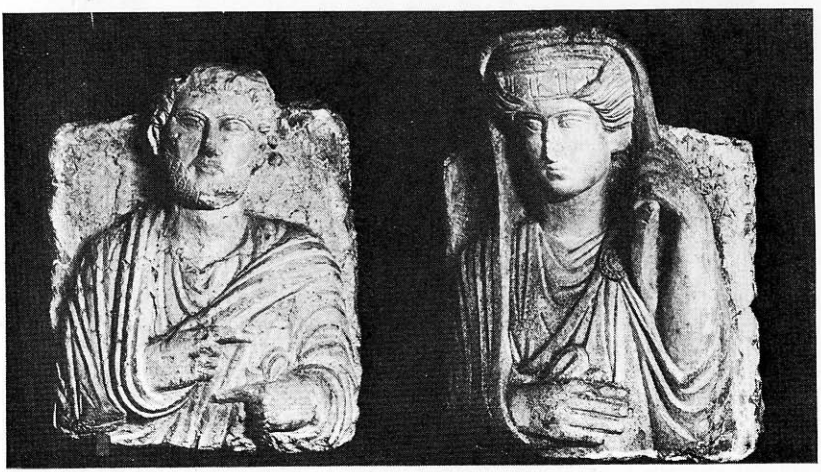
Our picture is the eighth work of this great master to have reached this shore, the third to be sent to a public gallery of this country. It is in the form of a lunette, which undoubtedly was placed originally above a series of three or five panels containing the representation of the Madonna and Saints, forming the main part of one of those large altar-pieces of which we find a complete one, for instance, still in the Ascoli Cathedral. It is not impossible that it belonged originally to the dispersed altar of which Mrs. Gardner's picture formed one wing, formerly in S. Fermo at Ascoli, as we find that the entombment mentioned in 1830 as belonging to this altar is missing. The style points to the same early period as

*The painting is reproduced in A. Ventura: Storia dell' Arte Italiana, Vol. VII; and in Venetian Paintings exhibited at the Burlington Club, London, 1912.

Mrs. Gardner's picture, when the artist was still under the influence of the Murano School and Mantegna. The composition differs from the other rendering of the subject inasmuch as it is more drawn out to both sides by adding to the three nearest to Christ, the Virgin, St. John and Magdalene, two male figures, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The different shades of sorrow expressed in the five surrounding Christ show an extraordinary, psychological understanding. While the Virgin seems to cry aloud her grief, St. John's face has become a grimace in trying not to show too much feeling. Magdalene is all devotion in the beautiful gesture with which she kisses the hand of Christ, while the two men to the left show awe and respect as they sorrowfully look toward the Lord. The sharp and clean-cut outlines show an artist absolutely sure of his means and effects, and the color composition combining different reds from pale crimson to a vivid cinnobar, green and pale violet all held together by a background of gold, is characteristic of the brilliant decorative sense of the master.

The Art Institute is very fortunate to be able to add to its collection a work of such quality and strength, thanks to the generosity of the Detroit Museum of Art Founders Society and the excellent judgment of its committee.

W. R. V.



TWO PALMYRA BAS RELIEFS. III CENTURY A. D.
Presented by Ralph H. Booth, Esq.

GIFTS FROM RALPH H. BOOTH

Further significant contributions to the treasures of the permanent collection have been made recently by Mr. Ralph H. Booth, consisting of four sculptures and two paintings of ancient, mediaeval and post-Renaissance date.

Two carved stone portraits in high relief represent important personages of the most glorious days of Palmyra. One is a lady of apparently high, if not regal, station in life. She has a tiara on her head from which a veil hangs down over her shoulders. A classic drape is about her, fastened at the neck just below the left shoulder with a jeweled medallion-shaped fibula. It is very characteristic of the day, as is the second relief, a portrait of a bearded man in similar classic attire.

Both are in the rather hard stone of the region, of warm grey color. The forms superficially are classic; the details suggest the more summary, schematized Byzantine carving; the almond eyes and love of rich personal effects are in the spirit of the East.

Palmyra was originally established by Solomon as Tadmor in the Wilderness, recorded in I Kings IX: 18. It was half way between the Euphrates and Syria. The riches of the East, the wealth of India and Mesopotamia were exchanged here. After a prestige of short duration it declined and little is heard from it for one thousand years. Then in 130 A. D., Hadrian made it a Roman colony. It prospered more and more for one hundred and fifty years until Zenobia, wife of Odenathus, became joint ruler with this king. She also succeeded him as regent for her son and as Queen, adding to her domain Egypt, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. The Temple of the Sun and the great colonnades now in sad ruin were once the most famous architectural and sculptural monuments. Aurelian was responsible for the final downfall of Palmyra, which took place about 272. Zenobia herself was captured and brought to Rome.

This Queen, who once ruled the East and lived with the pomp of Persian potentates, "banqueted with the Roman Emperors", as Trebellius Pollio tells us, and knew Egyptian, Latin and Greek. We also read that she was so versed in the history of Alexandria and the East that she made an abridgement of Oriental history. We mention this to indicate that her subjects, no doubt, were influenced in various ways in their life and art. These two portraits have the double character of Western naturalism and classicism and of Oriental spendor, conventionalism and symmetry.

BAPTISMAL FONT. WESTPHALIA, XV CENTURY
Presented by Ralph H. Booth, Esq.

The Baptismal Font which Mr. Booth has also given is intriguing with its unusual reliefs. On its octagonal faces it alternates tracery of arches with storied panels representing "The Fall of Adam and Eve", "The Circumcision", "The Baptism" and "Ecce Homo". In the first panel, Adam and Eve are shown on either side of the tree of knowledge, about which is coiled the serpent terminating in the head of a satyr that looks down on his victims from the foliage.

WOOD CARVING, BY GREGOR ERHARDT
Presented by Ralph H. Booth, Esq.

In the next, three figures take part in the circumcision of the Christ Child; in a third, John the Baptist pours water from a bowl to baptize Christ, standing in the stream which reaches to his waist; in the fourth, Christ with crown and scourge—symbols of his suffering—points to the wound in his side. The single figure composing this one panel is but half length and proportionally larger.

The font, 51 cm. high by 81 cm. in diameter, comes from Spenge and represents the late Gothic art of the Westphalian province. At this time, as elsewhere, a single international style was employed with something borrowed from the French. The work is a rather colloquial expression, unconsciously affected by various styles. It is architectural in its tracery and generally well proportioned small figures. The heavy folds of the drapes, the simplified forms and flattened relief are in the spirit of the German fifteenth century which was especially distinguished in civic sculpture at Nuremberg, in wooden retables and charming Madonnas, and especially in tomb forms with their decorative sculpture.

While the French found in soft stone a happy medium for their ordinarily delicate touch and attractive forms, the Germans with their love of dynamic, dramatic and expressive line used the fibrous wood wonderfully in carving the figure. Included in Mr. Booth's latest gift is the graceful and stately Madonna of the Immaculate Conception from the developed Gothic XVth Century, by Gregor Erhardt of Augsburg, a leading center of Great German Art. It antedates the "Immaculate Conception" which later became so popular in Spain, recalling the passage in Revelations. In this sculpture the Christ Child is also represented, but the Virgin has the crown suggestive of the twelve-starred attribute and rests a foot upon the crescent moon as in paintings by Murillo and his contemporaries. The significant flowing lines and crisp carving give this both distinction and beauty.

Two pictures of much later date are also among these recent donations. "The

PORTRAIT OF A LADY, BY JAN DE BRAY
Presented by Ralph H. Booth, Esq.

PORTRAIT DE FEMME, BY EDGAR DEGAS
Presented by Ralph H. Booth, Esq.

Portrait of a Lady" by Jan de Bray of Haarlem, Holland, is a fine piece of painting. The life of this painter terminated in 1697, extending somewhat beyond the greatest Dutch art. De Bray executed work for the Town Hall and for the Women's Home in his native city. His drawings were greatly sought, while his portrait and historic pictures have gained for him an enviable reputation. This portrait and the Nicolaes Elias, "Portrait of a Lady," also given by Mr. Booth, are exceptional in their wonderful technique, in rich tonal quality, and in their refined, pictorial sense. The representation of the animate and of the quite different but equally interesting lace and fabrics is masterly.

The "Portrait de Femme" by Edgar Degas is a most representative example by this very great French master of the last half of the Nineteenth Century. Engraver, lithographer, pastellist, painter and sculptor, he is a unique figure in the development of modern art, impressionistic in spirit, the synthesis of his people's art in his day. A master draftsman, an emotional and aesthetic colorist, he expressed dynamic form and life, interpreting their significance, The four classes of pictures for which he is especially noted are scenes of the race-course and steeple-chase, the ballet, various types of middle class women and, inspired by Zola, those of more humble life, washerwomen for example. He knew that art was a matter of treatment rather than subject. Powerfully original and most aesthetic, he may well be mentioned in the same breath with Rembrandt and Goya for his virile intense expression, good design and harmonious, low intensity color combinations. The rose-violet flowers against the soft turquoise-green with the flesh tones and velvety, black dress make this an effective yet sensitive picture.

Some of these objects have been in the Museum collection for some time. Having selected them personally for purchase by the Institute, Mr. Booth expressed a desire to reimburse the Institute and the Founders Society by whom they were originally purchased for the cost of these objects, in order that he might have the satisfaction of presenting them in his own name.

R. P.

School classes may arrange to visit the exhibitions by calling the Art Institute, Main 7820

Free sketch classes are held every Friday evening from 7:30 to 9:30, under the auspices of the Recreation Committee.