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THE JAMES E. SCRIPPS COLLECTION of paintings by early Italian, Flemish, Dutch, French and English artists, is coming to be studied by critics in this country and Europe. Mr. Scripps anticipated such a result when he gave the collection to the Museum in 1889. He then wrote: "The labor and expenditure has been undertaken with the full knowledge that my work will probably not be immediately appreciated, but in the fullest confidence that the future will recognize its wisdom and foresight."

In the August number of "Art in America," Professor Chandler R. Post, assistant professor of Greek and the Fine Arts at Harvard University, discusses "A Triptych by Allegretto Nuzi in Detroit." The article is reproduced herewith through the courtesy of the editor of that magazine:

A TRIPTYCH BY ALLEGRETTO NUZI AT DETROIT

BY CHANDLER R. POST

Among the interesting and almost unknown group of paintings presented to the Detroit Museum of Art by the late James E. Scripps is a charming little triptych of the fourteenth century (No. 3), formerly in the collection of the Marchese del Turco at Florence, and ascribed by Berenson¹ and by Mary Logan² to Allegretto Nuzi. The justness of the ascription and the great significance of the work for a comprehension of Nuzi's personality must be evident even to the casual student.

In the central panel the Virgin and Child are enthroned beneath a golden *baldachino* of the type that Arnolfo da Cambio had popularized at Rome and Giotto had introduced into painting. Our Lady is clad in the traditional red undergarment and blue mantle, the latter diapered with an elaborate pattern of brocade, and lined with fur. At the sides of the dais, in symmetrical balance, stand two of the master's

loveliest angels in blue tunics. From the throne the rich tapestry is stretched in front of the angels to the edges of the panel, and relieved against this, in the foreground, are two saints. John the Baptist in the place of honor at the right of the Virgin wears a pink robe over his camelskin, and is more stalwart, less gaunt and forbidding than usual. The feminine saint at the left, in the absence of any more definite attributes than the book of pious wisdom, the conventionalized martyr's palm, and the princess's crown, we may conjecture to be Catherine of Alexandria, who was so prominent in the category of virgin-saints that it was sometimes not thought necessary to distinguish her by her ordinary symbol, the wheel. The book, indeed, is carried by some of the other saintly virgins, but it is peculiarly the property of St. Catherine, as the patroness of learning. The similar figure in the Berlin diptych by Allegretto Nuzi is identified in the catalogue as St. Catherine, although she has no more attributes than in the Detroit example.

¹ *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, lists at end.

² *L'exposition d'ancien art ombrien a Perouse*, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, xxxviii 222.

The wings of the triptych represent the beginning and the end of Christ's life. In the left is the Nativity, forced by the narrowness of the panel into an upright composition, in which the proclamation to the shepherds has to be set directly above the manger and is made as important as the Birth itself. A particular interest is added by the exquisite flight of angels, making music and lifting their hands in ecstatic adoration over the holy cave. The right wing, the least successful part of the altarpiece, contains a somewhat rigid Crucifixion. In the St. John, Nuzi vainly strains at expressiveness; the Magdalene grasps the foot of the cross in a stiff and unconvincing embrace; one's eye is arrested rather by the really tragic figure of the swooning Mother and by the noble tenderness of the holy women who support her. The pinnacles of the wings are reserved, as not uncommonly, for the Annunciation. In all these panels the place of the sky is taken by gold backgrounds with a border of pure design.

The significance of the triptych lies in the fact that, although manifestly a very early work, it already presents in embryo those qualities which, from the evolutionary standpoint, define Allegretto Nuzi in his maturity as an important figure in the development of Italian art, and which, from the absolute standpoint, give him a distinct and honorable seat among the world's secondary masters. This one painting enables the American student to obtain an adequate conception of his whole career. Very few of his works are in America, the only ones known to the writer being a single image of

St. John Evangelist, a diptych of the Madonna and the Pietà, and two productions of his school in the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia, a large bishop-saint, owned by Mr. Horace Morison of Boston, and a doubtfully attributed St. Anne, belonging to Professor Mather of Princeton³; but none of these examples has the comprehensive importance of the Detroit triptych.

Upon it are impressed unmistakably the traces of his discipleship. The first great figure of the bright and gentle school of Fabriano in the Marches, he is unknown to history until 1346, when he matriculates at Florence in the guild of apothecaries and physicians, where the painters were generally enrolled.⁴ How much training he had already obtained before he came to the artistic center of Italy is a question; the outstanding fact is that now he became a pupil of Bernardo Daddi. No work demonstrates the relationship more conclusively than the Detroit triptych. The composition of the central panel, with the Virgin enthroned between angels and with saints in the foreground, is often employed by Daddi, notably in the altarpieces at Ruballa and in the Sterbini Collection, Rome. The canopy in Daddi's late work, No. 127 of the Academy, Florence, is similar to that used by Nuzi. The type of the Virgin and Child is much the same, especially when in Daddi's more advanced period the somewhat elongated forms give way to ampler bodies and rounder heads. Allegretto inherits and develops further the Florentine master's predilection for magnificent fabrics. But a curious and striking confirmation of the connection exists in a triptych belonging to Dr. Giulio Ruoizzi of

³ The attribution is made, so far as I know, by only one critic. Professor Mather himself questions it; and from the photograph which he has kindly sent me, I should be disposed to agree with him in assigning the lovely panel to some later painter of Fabriano, who had seen the work of Gentile.

⁴ Suida's differentiation of the Allegretto Nucci registered at Florence from Allegretto Nuzi of Fabriano (*Florentinische Maier um die Mitte des xiv Jahrhunderts*, pp. 43 ff.) is generally discredited.

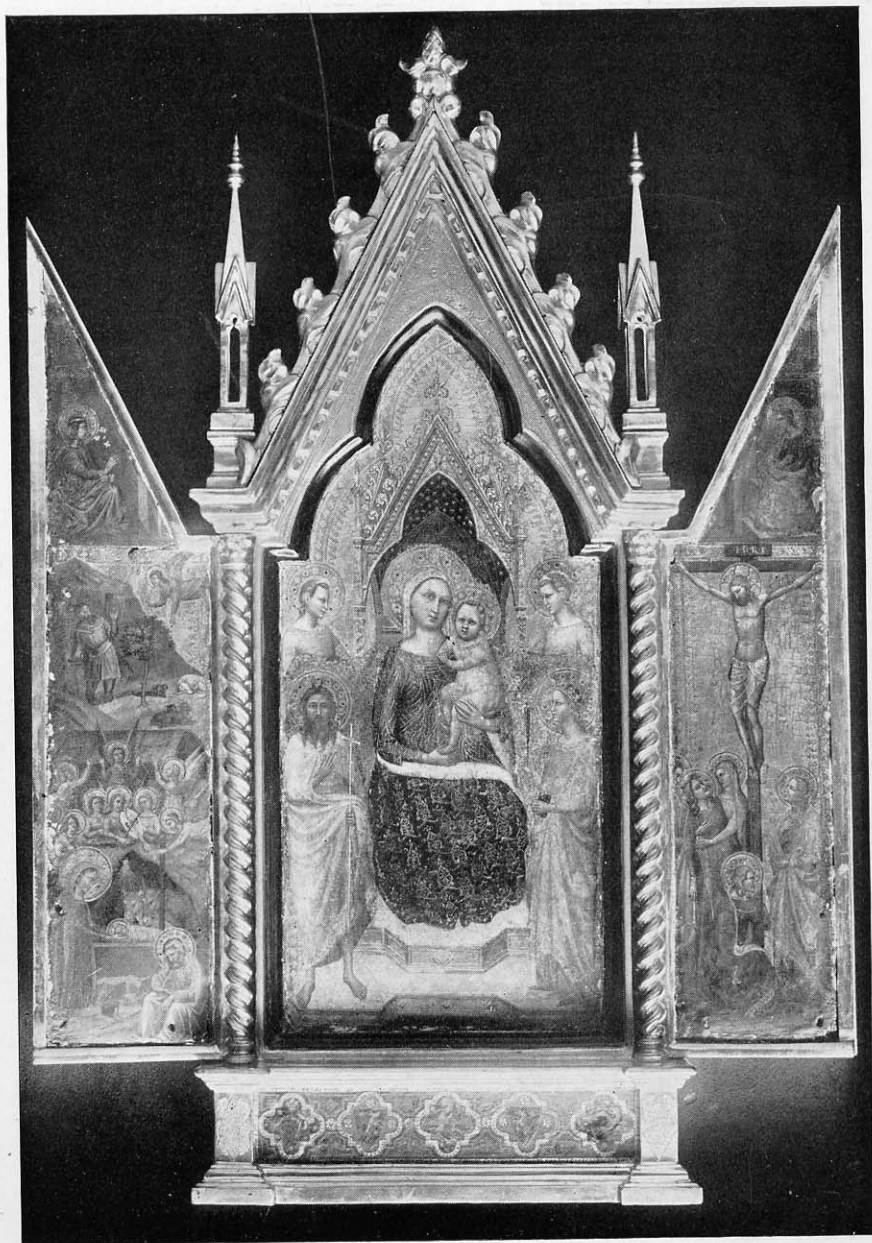


FIG. 1. ALLEGRETTO NUZI: TRIPTYCH.
The Detroit Museum of Art. Gift of the late James E. Scripps.

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Spello (Fig. 3), exhibited for the first time in the *Mostra* of Umbrian art at Perugia, 1907 (*Gabinetto della Torre*, No. 6). Assigned by Mason Perkins,⁵ Mary Logan,⁶ and Umberto Gnoli⁷ to Daddi, it suggests Nuzi so vividly that it was actually but wrongly given to him by Walter Rothes.⁸ The subjects and, except for a few variations in de-

tail, the compositions are identical with those of the Detroit shrine, even to the Annunciation of the pinnacles and the border of the gold backgrounds. Two masculine saints take the place of the angels beside the throne, and as a pendant to the richly robed St. Catherine, for St. John Baptist is substituted St. Agnes.

Venturi⁹ discerns in Nuzi the slight influence also of another great Florentine master, Andrea Orcagna. It is perhaps under this stimulus that he impresses upon his altarpieces a more pronounced religious dignity and severity than was usually attained by Daddi or by the benign Umbrians. In the Detroit example, the woman who just beneath the cross supports the fainting Virgin is infused with a solemn religious intensity that even suggests Giotto. A little triptych in the Historical Society, New York, ascribed by Sirén to the school of Orcagna,¹⁰ resembles our picture both in subject and composition, but the proper explanation is probably that the parallelisms in both cases are derived from the Daddi *bottega*.

Because of all these Florentine characteristics, Berenson in his lists for the "Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance" attaches the *E* that means early to this alone among the works of Allegretto Nuzi.¹¹ If we may assert that among his certainly authentic pictures it is the only one that is certainly early, it acquires a new and peculiar significance.¹² The panels were obviously executed immediately in connection with his sojourn at Florence; but do they retain any evi-

⁵ *La pittura all'esposizione d'arte antica, Rassegna d'arte*, VII, 89. He calls it an early work of Daddi.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁷ *L'arte umbra alla mostra di Perugia, Bergamo*, 1908, p. 28.

⁸ *Alt-umbrische Malerschulen*, p. 21.

⁹ *Storia dell'arte italiana*, V, 842, 848.

¹⁰ *Art in America*, II, 275.

¹¹ Cf. also Berenson's catalogue of the Johnson Collection, p. 68.

¹² Berenson mentions a triptych with exactly the same subjects in the Collection Maciet of the Museum of Dijon; but since I have been unable to get a photograph of this, I can make no statement about its chronological or general relation to the Detroit painting.



FIG. 2. ALLEGRETTO NUZI: BISHOP-SAINT.
Collection of Mr. Horace Morison, Boston.

dence of a previous and more youthful training? It is a curious phenomenon of Trecento art that Sieneſe models enjoyed a wider vogue than Giotteſque, not only in Italy but, through the papal court at Avignon, in a large part of Spain and northern Europe. But it would have been a ſtill more curious phenomenon if, when Umbria and the Marches were flooded with the Sieneſe current, Allegretto Nuzi at Fabriano had eſcaped intact. And yet ſo diſtinguiſhed a writer as Mary Logan believes that this is exactly what happened.¹³ She ſtands, however, almoſt alone. Among the many other prominent experts who have devoted attention to the ſubject, Colasanti concerns us moſt, when he ſays that Nuzi was ſubjected to Sieneſe influences before he ſtudied at Florence.¹⁴ Daddi himſelf was no ſtranger to the painting of the rival Tuſcan city, but certain characteristics, ſuch as the types of the angels, the cult of ſplendor in coſtumes and accessories, and the ſpatial composition of the central panel, may be derived directly from the Lorenzetti as well as from him. The Detroit triptych, however, reveals a more intimate knowledge of Sieneſe art than Nuzi could have abſorbed from his maſter. The flight of angels in the Nativity is ſuggestive. Giotto in his Paduan composition had introduced a few angels over the ſtable in ſuch an agitated flutter as to ſeem in very truth "birds of God," but the compact, ſymmetrical, and quieter grouping of a larger number and their location directly upon the cave are motives that begin in Sieneſe painting with the part of Duccio's *pala* now in Berlin. Although the rounder and fuller faces for the Virgin and Child conſtitute one of Nuzi's mannerisms, the forms in general often poſſeſs a Sieneſe lightneſs and grace, and the execution uſually

is marked by an extreme and delightful Sieneſe delicacy. In the Detroit painting, eſpecially important from theſe aſpects are the angels about the throne, and in the Nativity, the St. John, and above all the ethereal St. Catherine.

According to the tedious velleity of modern criticism, I have lingered long over the queſtion of ſtyliſtic provenance, but the Detroit triptych may be taken alſo as a text for a ſermon on thoſe qualities which, apart from his origins, make Allegretto Nuzi a ſignificant perſonality in the history of Italian and, indeed, of European art. Concrete magnificence is a legitimate, though minor, conſtituent of good art. The appeal to the more childlike and leſs tutored inſtincts has its proper place in eſthetics as well as the appeal to the more developed and more ſophiſticated parts of our psychology through design, realization of form, and harmonious color. But if the lower appeal is all, if it is not ſublimated by being united to the higher, the reſulting product remains merely vulgar. No one of his predeceſſors or contemporaries loved ſumptuous fabrics ſo much as Allegretto Nuzi; in themſelves they would be nothing, but combined with thoſe more ſterling traits that I have tried to indicate in diſcuſſing his training, they diſtinctly enhance the value of his paintings. The brocade on the Virgin's fur-lined mantle in the Detroit example, virtually identical in pattern with the ſimilar garment of the Berlin diptych, is much more pretentious than that in the parallel work by Daddi at Spello; and in Nuzi's later period the ſtuffs are to be enriched with ſtill more elaborate figures of ſunflowers, parrots, and tortoiſes. The ſimple, homely, *bourgeois* forms of Giotto and of Giotto's more faithful followers would ill befit ſuch

¹³ *Op. cit.*, p. 223.

¹⁴ *Note Sull' antica pittura fabrianese, L'arte*, IX, 272.

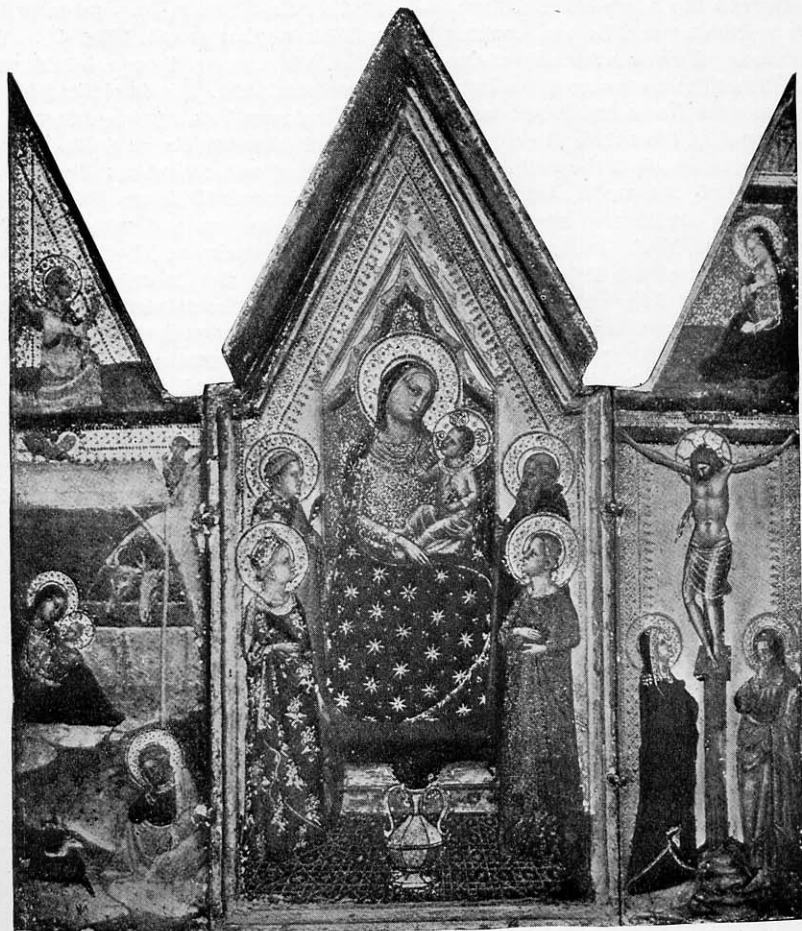


FIG. 3. BERNARDO DADDI: MADONNA ENTHRONED.
Collection of Dr. Giulio Ruozzi, Spello, Italy.

magnificence of dress; Allegretto turns rather to the more formal and aristocratic forms of Siena. But the languid mysticism of the Sienese saints ill accords with the heavy-laden stiffness of the vestments; and he has recourse to the stern religious solemnity of Orcagna. The older he grows, the more opulent become the sacred robes; and the more opulent the robes, the more hieratic the bodies that they clothe. The devotion of Orcagna's characters remains the devotion of real men and women, but Nuzi finally, as in the Three Saints of the Fabriano Gallery, crystallizes it into an almost Byzantine formalism. His conception of the office of a picture approaches the Byzantine; it is to be decoration rather than representation. The difference is that he conventionalizes, not Greek, but Giottesque and Sienese prototypes. He sets before himself the definite ideal of religious stateliness, and his evolution is a consistent progress towards its realization. In the end, all things are brought into harmony with his theory,—the personages have the aloofness of an officiating priest, the vestments are appropriate to the ceremonial pomp of the greatest feasts, and the whole picture is suggestive of a grandiose ecclesiasticism. The Detroit triptych retains the freshness of an early work, but it is already prophetic of Nuzi's maturity.

Nuzi's definitive style is well illustrated in the superb Bishop-Saint

which was lately shown at the Loan Exhibition of Italian painting in the Fogg Museum, Harvard. Through the kindness of Mr. Morison and of Mr. Forbes, the director, I am permitted to publish a photograph (Fig. 2). The saint sits upon a throne inlaid with *opus tessellatum*. He is clothed in the full episcopal insignia,—an alb, a greenish-blue tunic or dalmatic, and a brilliant red chasuble with resplendent orphreys. With one of his gloved hands he blesses, and with the other he holds a book; at his feet kneels a Dominican sister in miniature. The figure recalls the sainted bishop in the polyptych of the cathedral at Fabriano and the St. Augustine of the Galleria Civica; the formal design of curls in the beard is indicative of the Sienese attitude towards art. The panel is mentioned by Langdon Douglas in his edition of Crowe and Cavalcaselle, III, 181.

Nuzi's artistic ideal was in some respects analogous to that of Venice, and his connection with the more northern school was very intimate. He himself may have sojourned at Venice,¹⁵ and in any case, through his greater pupil, Gentile da Fabriano, he helped to stimulate the innate Venetian proclivity for religious splendor. A direct relation may be traced between the primitive magnificence of this sequestered Umbrian master and the glorious pageants of Paolo Veronese.

¹⁵ A. Ricci, *Memorie Storiche*, I. 88.

