

Wednesday, 17 August 2011

CORREGGIO ACQUISITION BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The artist: Correggio (Antonio Allegri)

Antonio Allegri, known as Correggio (1489 – 1535) was born in Correggio, Italy, a small town near Reggio Emilia.

There is no record of Correggio's artistic training but his early style indicates that he must certainly have been aware of the work of Lorenzo Costa (1460-1535). However, his first real inspiration was Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), in whose studio he may well have assisted.

Correggio is one of the key artists whose work defines High Renaissance painting – the others being Leonardo, Raphael, Titian and the young Michelangelo. Scholars have always considered Correggio as one of the greatest artists of the High Renaissance. However, his fame has never been as widespread as that of his contemporaries as he did not work in Rome and left no works on what, in the sixteenth century, was the greatest artistic stage in the world. His influence on later Italian artists was profound and a journey to his home town of Parma, where most of his works were to be seen, was virtually mandatory for artists. Due to his high status in art history and the broad appeal of his sumptuous images, this was arguably the only remaining painting in private hands and accessible to museums.

His best-known works are the illusionistic frescoes in the domes of S Giovanni Evangelista and the cathedral in Parma, where he worked from 1520 to 1530. The combination of technical virtuosity and dramatic excitement in these works ensured their importance for later generations of artists.

The work: *Madonna and Child with the infant Saint John the Baptist*

Painted circa 1514-15, this is an important newly discovered work by Correggio, part of a group of small scale religious paintings in which Correggio interpreted Christian themes in a manner unique to his age. He brought a palpable humanity to his subjects, portraying his figures with naturalism and warmth. The relationships of the characters are emotionally defined through tender gestures, touch, facial expression and gaze. It exemplifies the stylistic link between work from his critical formative years and that of his more mature period.

The earliest documented work by Correggio is the Virgin of St Francis (1514–15; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister), around the same date as the NGV painting. But a considerable body of work clearly precedes it. Most are small-scale devotional paintings of the Virgin and Child or biblical episodes, and they suggest that his career was slow to develop.

This is the first widely accepted autograph painting by Correggio to come on to the market in the last half century.

The hand carved and gilded wood frame is not original to the work and is thought to have been cut down to fit this painting, possibly in the nineteenth century.

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NGV NEWS



Conservation and restoration:

The work is in very good condition for its age. Painted on a poplar wood panel, the surface layers have been spared the wear and tear that is commonly found on canvas paintings from the sixteenth century.

The painting will undergo conservation treatment in the next year.

The old varnish layer will be removed as it casts a brownish veil over Correggio's richly toned colours; old repairs and retouchings left by previous restorers will also be removed.

The painting will be revarnished, and small losses and damages will be inpainted. A tiny split in the wood panel will also be repaired.

Other beautifully intact details are the delicately applied strokes of gold paint (called shell gold) which form the Child's halo and parts of the Virgin's robe.

Masterpieces for Melbourne:

On 21st May 2008 the NGV launched its major new fundraising campaign, Masterpieces for Melbourne. The campaign, which seeks to raise \$150 million for the NGV's 150th birthday in 2011.

Specifically, Masterpieces for Melbourne aims to raise cash for the immediate purchase of important works of art, endowed funds available in perpetuity and notified bequests, whose promise will provide confidence that the NGV will be able to make significant additions to both the endowment and the Collections.

Renowned as having an exceptional collection, the NGV has for nearly 150 years been Melbourne's cultural flagship. Nearly all of the NGV Collection represents private philanthropy, with Government paying the operating costs.

The success of the Masterpieces for Melbourne campaign will allow the NGV once more to begin to acquire highly important works of art of a quality and significance that have been difficult to achieve for nearly half a century. The value of the artworks gifted to the NGV to celebrate the 150th anniversary since February this year has now reached \$30 million.

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