

Wednesday, 17 August 2011

## NGV acquires newly discovered Renaissance masterpiece



### CORREGGIO

Italian 1489–1534

Madonna and Child with infant St John the Baptist 1514–15

oil on wood panel

45.0 x 35.5 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Andrew Sisson, 2011

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) today announced that in its 150th year it had acquired a highly important masterpiece by Correggio, one of the most influential figures of the Italian High Renaissance. Director Gerard Vaughan unveiled the painting, which has just arrived from London.

The newly discovered work, titled *Madonna and Child with the infant Saint John the Baptist* was painted by Antonio Allegri, called Correggio, circa 1514-1515.

This rare Correggio is a magnificent example of early 16th century Northern Italian painting. It is an incomparable masterpiece with no other similar work either in the NGV Collection, or any other public collection in Australia.

The painting was purchased at Sotheby's London sale on 6 July 2011 for \$5.2 million and is the single highest priced acquisition in the NGV's history. Funds for the purchase were generously donated by NGV Trustee Andrew Sisson.

NGV Director Gerard Vaughan said he was thrilled that the Gallery was able to acquire the highly sought after painting.

“Correggio is one of the key artists whose work defines High Renaissance painting – the others being Leonardo, Raphael and the young Michelangelo.

“The exceptional generosity of Andrew Sisson has allowed the Gallery to acquire this masterpiece which is considered by many as the highlight of this year's London old master auctions. It is the only authenticated Correggio sold on the auction market in half a century and possibly the last Correggio which could ever be purchased by a public gallery.

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# NGV NEWS

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“For many years we have identified High Renaissance art of the 16th century as a significant gap in our collection. The NGV is now the only gallery in Australia that presents a full history of Renaissance art from the 14th to 17th centuries.

“We are privileged and proud to have acquired this work for the enjoyment of all who visit the NGV. It is a significant addition to our Masterpieces for Melbourne campaign, established to acquire artworks, cash and bequests for our 150th anniversary.”

Director of the National Gallery London Dr Nicholas Penny, himself a noted expert on Renaissance Italian paintings, recently visited Melbourne and was hugely impressed by the NGV’s collection of Renaissance works. Penny congratulated the NGV on its valuable acquisition:

“The enchanting painting of the *Virgin and Child* by Correggio, which the National Gallery of Victoria has recently acquired at auction in London is a new discovery, instantly accepted as authentic by all authorities on the artist. It is clearly in remarkable condition, even though many of its beauties are still concealed by darkened varnish.

“The Gallery is to be congratulated on acting so decisively and judiciously. It is hard to believe that there will be another chance to acquire a painting by this artist, one of the greatest of the Renaissance, and this relatively early work enables one to see the sources of his new and seductive style of painting in Andrea Mantegna and Leonardo da Vinci—the influence of the latter is evident not only in the smile and soft shadows but in the exquisitely painted foliage behind the Virgin’s head.”

The work will be on display at NGV International, St. Kilda Road before expert conservator Carl Villis begins the restoration process next year to remove the old varnish layer, remove old repairs and revarnish the work.

Correggio brings a very human touch to *Madonna and Child with the infant Saint John the Baptist*, portraying his figures with a naturalism and tenderness which was radical at the time it was painted.

Painted on a poplar wood panel, the surface layers of the work have been spared the wear and tear that is commonly found on canvas paintings from the sixteenth century. The viewer is able to enjoy the subtlety of Correggio’s blending of light and shade in the figures, what the Italians called ‘sfumato’.

Technical examinations show that the work is exceptionally well preserved, revealing the glowing flesh tones as well as the strong colouring in the reds, green and blue of the Madonna’s cloak.

Leading European experts have examined the work and confirmed that it is a newly discovered masterpiece from the first phase of Correggio’s career.

The painting will be on display at NGV International, St Kilda Road. Admission to the NGV Collection is free. NGV International is open 10am–5pm, closed Tuesdays.

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