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Problem Pictures: Paintings Without Authors

VASSAR COLLEGE ART GALLERY
POUGHKEEPSIE, NEW YORK
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PROBLEM PICTURES: PAINTINGS WITHOUT AUTHORS

It seems particularly appropriate for a college art gallery to assemble an exhibition which is purely didactic in character. One of the main purposes of art historical training is to teach students to look at actual works of art and to thoroughly study them. It is hoped that this gathering together of paintings which cannot be definitely attributed to specific artists will not only demonstrate the high level of quality to be found in anonymous works of art of all periods, but may also lead to the illumination and perhaps solving of some of the problems here presented. Even if after this exhibition closes, none of these pictures can be more definitely attributed than now, the questions raised may provide a clearer understanding of some of the questions of art history.

There are various sorts of attribution problems in this exhibition. In the case of most Medieval and Early Renaissance works of art, the names of the actual artists will never be known so that one of the major tasks is to connect works with a specific center or school. While this is usually possible, such is not the case of the Early Italian Panel (1). Sometimes it has not even been possible to decide on the actual country where a painting was produced, so complex are the interrelations at various periods (2, 4, 9 and 10). The greatest number of problems shown here relate to a major artist and his following: the Caravaggesque pictures (6 and 7) which could also include the Vassar "Card Players" hanging in the next gallery, and the Jacques-Louis David School paintings (22 and 23). Often, pictures illustrating similar themes and which are sometimes related in style tend to be attributed to the best known practitioner of that genre; seventeenth century "realistic" portraits are all given to the Le Nains (11 and 12); their counterparts in eighteenth century England to Copley and Wright of Derby (17 and 18); Rococo pictures are often thought to be by the leading French artists (14 and 15); and all topographical works by Pannini (16). Occasionally there are pictures which seem to be painted in more than one style (3), or works which contain elements from the works of several artists (5). Perhaps the most unusual problem in our exhibition is (19), a picture once attributed to a major artist but may actually be by another equally as important. The painting which originally inspired this exhibition (24) best summarizes the idea of all this: a work of the highest quality, but who painted it?

CATALOGUE

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While this exhibition has been formulating in the mind of its organizer for several years, its realization would not have taken place without the encouragement of Federico Zeri and Charles Childs. The advice and suggestions of the following scholars have been invaluable although it has not been possible to include all their suggestions: W. G. Constable; Colin Eisler; S. Lane Faison, Jr.; Creighton Gilbert; Benedict Nicolson; Ellis K. Waterhouse; and Richard Wunder.

The generous lenders not only parted with works in their care, but also made many valuable suggestions and provided much of the necessary information.

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, N. Y.
The Andrew Dickson White Art Museum, Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Md.
The Childs Gallery, Boston, Mass.
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.
Durlacher Brothers, New York, N. Y.
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Dwight, Clinton, N. Y.
The Jewett Arts Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass.
F. Kleinberger and Co., New York, N. Y.
The Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, Rochester, N. Y.
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minn.
The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.
The Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.
Mr. Victor Spark, New York, N. Y.
The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va.
The Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.
The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, Md.
The Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Mass.

The tedious work of correspondence, insurance, and handling of the exhibition was in the capable hands of Mary Delahoyd, Innis Shoemaker, and Richard Tasciotti.

THOMAS J. McCORMICK
Director

1. FLORENTINE SCHOOL (?) 1460-1470 (?)

"The Judgment of Solomon"

Tempera on panel, 29 x 29"

Lent by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Va.

This Nativity or Marriage salver has a figure representing Hope on the reverse by the same artist, as well as what may be the coats of arms of the Davanzati (or Bartolini ?) and Ginori (?) families of Florence. There have been a number of suggestions made as to the authorship of the painting. Once called Paduan or Paduan-Ferrarese, it was published in 1958 by the Museum as the product of a minor Ferrarese workshop. However, most authorities have suggested an artist of the Florentine school. Among other names, the Master of the Jarves Cassone, active in Florence about 1450 has been advanced as the author. A salver representing "Solomon Visiting the Queen of Sheba" in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which may be a companion to the Richmond one is attributed to the School of Ferrara. The latest feeling is that the Richmond painting is probably Florentine, 1460-1470.

2. LUDGER TOM RING, THE ELDER (German) 1496-1547, attributed to:

"Still Life of an Open Book"

Oil on panel transferred to masonite, 23½ x 23¼"

The Vassar College Art Gallery

Originally thought to be Flemish ca. 1500, the painting is now attributed to the German artist, Ludger tom Ring. Professor Leon Delaissé first suggested that the manuscript represented might be German, but Professor Colin Eisler feels that it is fairly close to one sometimes attributed to the Flemish artist Gerard David, now in the Escorial, which is dated 1486. Our painting's use may have been as a sign for an illuminated manuscript shop or possibly a panel from a cabinet where illuminated books were stored. The tradition of trompe d'oeil paintings of manuscripts goes back to at least 1411, when the Limbourg Brothers presented to their patron on New Year's Day a painted imitation of a manuscript.

3. FLEMISH, XVI Century

"The Triumph of Faith, or Allegory of Patience as a Christian Virtue"

Oil on panel, 22½ x 20¾"

Lent by Jewett Arts Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass.

Professor Erwin Panofsky has proposed that the damaged inscription in a Flemish dialect be interpreted as "Patience is always a virtue or superior" and that the central figure is the personification of the Christian virtue of Patience. The scenes in the background illustrate this: patient Job and patient Anthony resisting temptation, patient Lawrence being grilled and Stephen stoned. The Devil and his grandmother are trying to pull Patience off her pedestal.

Once sold as Bosch, this painting has been attributed by various scholars to Frans Floris, Cornelis Massys, and Cornelis Teunissen. The current owners

wonder if it was painted entirely by one hand: the landscape is in the general tradition of Patiner, the Devil and grandmother in the genre manner of the Bosch-Brueghel tradition, the angel is finely painted in the central tradition going all the way back to Bouts, while Faith is done somewhat coarsely in the imported Romanizing style of Jan van Scoral. There may be some meaning in the discrepancy, for the style of the angel is from the remote past, while the Devil and Grandmother are contemporary, and the Patience-Faith is *avant-garde*; this would suggest that the painting is by one artist, as yet unknown. The most recent suggestion is a follower of Jan Willensz de Cock.

4. FLEMISH (?), XVI Century

"David and Judith"

Oil on panel, 17½ x 12¾"

Lent by Victor Spark, New York, N. Y.

David and Judith with the heads of their victims were often paired together as symbols of Virtue. Originally considered Italian, this painting is probably by a Flemish artist under Italian influence. The sharpness of detail and landscape, although modified by Italian chiaroscuro, would seem to suggest a Northern artist.

5. FLORENTINE, XVI Century

"Madonna and Child with St. Joseph"

Oil on panel, 47¼ x 33¾"

Lent anonymously

Authorities have been unable to give this picture to any specific artist. However, Mazo da San Fraiano has been suggested. The St. Joseph may be based upon the apostle in the upper left corner of Andrea del Sarto's "Pieta" in the Palazzo Pitti, datable 1523-1524, and the Virgin also recalls the late works of del Sarto. The Child is obviously Michelangelesque. Dates suggested are in the early or mid XVI century.

6. SCHOOL OF CARAVAGGIO (Italian) XVII Century

"The Vision of St. Jerome"

Oil on canvas, 28 13/16 x 38 3/8"

Lent by the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, Mass.

Obviously inspired by the dramatically lighted paintings of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610), this picture may be by an Italian artist, or as has been suggested by some scholars, by a Northern painter who had visited Italy. However, most Northern examples include a lighted candle as the major source of illumination. The reddish color and dark tones suggest a Neapolitan artist.

7. NEAPOLITAN, XVII Century, ca. 1625

"St. George Liberating the Princess"

Oil on canvas, 51½ x 38¾"

Lent by Durlacher Brothers, New York, N. Y.

The heads seem Venetian but the Princess' garment resembles the work of Caravaggio and his followers, particularly Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi. The

latter settled in Naples during the 1630's. Various suggestions have been made as to the authorship, the latest being that it was executed in Naples about 1625.

8. ITALIAN, XVII Century

"Madonna and Child" or "The Education of the Virgin"

Oil on canvas, 36 x 28"

Lent by the Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art,
Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.

This recently acquired painting has not yet been studied, but the likely suggestion has been made that it is Bolognese. In certain respects it resembles the work of the Genoese artist Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644).

9. ITALIAN (?) XVII Century

"Pots and Pans"

Oil on canvas, 24¾ x 36½"

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edward H. Dwight, Clinton, N. Y.

Until recently this painting was thought to be by an unknown XVII century French artist. Most recently it has been attributed to an artist working in Italy during that time who signed his works G. D. V. However, its sense of clarity and stillness seems to be closer to French painting of the period. The sombre color and lack of deep space have given rise to the suggestion that the picture is Spanish.

10. DUTCH (?), XVII Century

"Crucifixion"

Oil on canvas, 60¾ x 41½"

Lent by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Mass.

This painting was formerly thought to be by the Fleming Abraham Janssens (1575-1632), but it is not by him. Perhaps it is Dutch. So far the painting has defied various experts in the field.

11. FERDINAND ELLE, THE ELDER (FRENCH), ca. 1585-1649,
attributed to:

"Portrait of a Nobleman" ca. 1625

Oil on canvas, 26½ x 21¾"

Lent by F. Kleinberger and Co., New York, N. Y.

Formerly attributed to one of the Le Nain brothers, the painting is now given to Ferdinand Elle. Like the Le Nains, Elle depicted his sitters in a direct and detailed manner, and this painting may be by him or some other as yet unidentified artist.

12. FRENCH, XVII Century

"Portrait of a Religieuse" (dated "an 1671 aetat suae an 30")

Oil on canvas, 44 x 35"

Lent by the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester,
Rochester, N. Y.

The painting's monumental composition recalls the tradition of Italian XVI century portraits, which was still to be felt in Northern Italy in the XVII cen-