

Glynn Vivian Art Gallery

ACW Beacon Award Research Project, 2008-2010

Picture Report by Kirstine Dunthorne

Acc. Number: GV 26

Artist: Ippolito Scarsella, Lo Scarsellino (Ferrara c1550 -1620), copy after (previously attributed to Ludovico Carracci)

Biography: A Ferrarese painter who originally trained with his father, Sigismondo Scarsella (1530 – 1614) in Ferrara, Scarsellino is said to have spent four years in the studio of Veronese in Venice from c.1570. Later, in the 1590s, he worked closely with the Carracci, including decorative painting at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara. His work is influenced both by the Venetian school and by Mannerist painters such as Parmigianino and Dosso Dossi, his famous predecessor in Ferrara, as well as by the Carracci. In addition to frescoes, altarpieces and mythological scenes, he painted many small-scale devotional images of the Virgin and Child and Holy Family on copper and panel similar to GV27. He had a considerable workshop about which little is known.

Chronology:

Title: *The Holy Family (The Holy Family with the young St. John the Baptist)*

Date: Late 16th Century (c.1590) or 18th Century

Medium: Oil on wood panel

Dimensions: 399 x 206mm

Inscription:

Credit: Richard Glynn Vivian Bequest

Context of Picture:

This small devotional image is made up of two panels. The arched upper panel is filled with tree branches. The lower panel shows the Virgin Mary, firmly holding her infant son as he twists round to embrace his cousin, St John the Baptist. Mary turns her head to look at the friendly lamb in the left foreground, the emblem of St. John. As far as it is possible to make out the far left of the painting, the elderly St. Joseph's right hand rests heavily on a stone or sarcophagus?, while his left holds a long staff. It may be that this close-knit family group represents the whole cycle of salvation: Christ's incarnation as a baby, his sacrifice symbolised by the (sacrificial) lamb and his Resurrection from the tomb indicated by St. Joseph's pose.

RGV bought GV 26 from the Duke of Marlborough's sale at Christies in August, 1886 as by Ludovico Carracci. GV 26 and GV 27 (now also attributed to Scarsellino) were both catalogued in Swansea in 1911 as 'attributed to Ludovico Carracci'. George Scharf, who had seen the paintings in the collection of the Duke of Marlborough at Blenheim in 1862 attributed GV26 to 'L. Carracci' and described it as follows: 'In the Duchess's Sitting Room: 'The Holy Family, a small arched picture, painted on panel. The Virgin, seated under a tree... [Joseph] holds a staff, and, clad in green and orange, gazes earnestly at them, a lamb, at his feet looks up towards the Virgin. The colours of her dress are somewhat unusual, consisting of a black mantle over a red garment. The nimbus to the heads is composed of rings not seen in perspective. The sky is broken with blue streaks, in the Venetian manner.' GV 26 and GV 27 are probably by different hands. Various experts [Dr. Gian Paolo Cammarota, Curator of the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna and Dr. Catherine Whistler, Senior Assistant Keeper at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, both in correspondence 2009; Mr Andrew MacKenzie, Director of Old Master Paintings at Bonhams, February 2010] have agreed that the present painting, *The Holy Family*, GV26 is not by Ludovico Carracci and is of poorer quality than GV27; it is probably a copy or variant of a painting from the collection of Sir Denis Mahon which is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. This painting, *The Holy Family with the Young St. John the Baptist*, c.1590, oil on panel, 280 x 208cms, was formerly attributed to Bartolomeo Schedoni (Modena 1578 -1615) but is now considered to be by Ippolito Scarsella, Lo Scarsellino (Ferrara c.1550 – 1620). Catherine Whistler of the Ashmolean Museum has suggested that GV26 may be an English copy made at Wilton House, where the Ashmolean's painting was in the collection of the Earls of Pembroke from the early part of the eighteenth century. The upper arched panel of GV 26, full of branches, was probably added when the copy was made. There are two other versions of the Oxford composition by Scarsellino in Italy. One is in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, oil on panel, 27 x20cms. The other is in the Molinari Pradelli collection, Bologna, oil on copper, 264 x226cms.

In an 'Extract from the Third Codicil to the Will of Richard Glynn Vivian, Esquire deceased', dated 5th April 1902 (8?), in which RGV describes his bequest to the Mayor and Corporation of Swansea, two other pictures attributed to 'Caracci' are mentioned in the context of GV26 and GV27:

The following articles now at Sketty Hall, that is to say: -.....celebrated picture by Caracci "*The Holy Family*" from the Blenheim Collection. Two small pictures by Caracci. Picture of the "*Dead Christ*" by Caracci. These last three pictures are now in the drawing room".

The 'two small pictures by Caracci' are possibly GV26 and GV27. The '*Holy Family*' is probably the same as Lot 640 in the Blenheim Sale of August 1886, where it is described as 'Agostino Caracci, *Madonna and Child with St. Joseph*. A composition of three figures, life size. Half length... (price) £210.0'. Neither the '*Holy Family*', nor the '*Dead Christ*' is mentioned in the 1911 *Catalogue of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea*. This suggests that RGV's Trustees exercised their right to 'except from the above bequest a few specimens of each description which shall be selected ...and retained by them and left in the rooms where they now respectively are...' Richard Glynn Vivian's '*Holy Family*' was

sold in Swansea by John M. Leeder & Son in a sale of *Part of the Collection of Works of Art made by the Late Glynn Vivian, Esq.* on 9 January, 1914 (Lot 71). Now attributed to Annibale Carracci, it was given to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne as part of the Felton Bequest in 1971.

Web summary:

This small devotional image is made of two separate panels. The arched upper panel is filled with tree branches; below, the Virgin Mary holds her infant son close as he twists round to embrace his cousin, St John the Baptist. She turns her head to look at the friendly lamb in the left foreground, emblem of St. John the Baptist and of Christ's sacrifice for our salvation. The lower panel is identical to a small *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist* by Lo Scarsellino (Ferrara c.1550 -1620), now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and is probably an eighteenth century English copy.

Provenance:

Purchased by RGV from the 'Collection of Pictures and Porcelain from Blenheim Palace sold by order of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough by Christies. Saturday August 7, Monday August 9, 1886'. Lot 638.

'An Extract from the Third Codicil to the Will of Richard Glynn Vivian, Esquire deceased', dated 5th April 1902/8?, which describes his bequest to the Mayor and Corporation of Swansea, notes 'The following articles now at Sketty Hall that is to say: - Two small pictures also by Caracci. Picture of the Dead Christ by Annibale Caracci. These last three pictures are now in the drawing room.'

The 'two small pictures by Caracci' are possibly GV26 and GV27. The '*Holy Family*' is probably the same as Lot 640 in the Blenheim Sale of August 1886, where it is described as 'Agostino Carracci, *Madonna and Child with St. Joseph*. A composition of three figures, life size. Half length... (price) £21.0.0'.

Bibliography:

References:

Scharf, George FSA *Catalogue Raisonne, or a List of the Pictures in Blenheim Palace with occasional remarks and illustrative notes*, London, 1862, p.?

Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures and Porcelain from Blenheim Palace sold by order of His Grace the Duke of Marlborough by Christies Saturday August 7, Monday August 9 1886, p.101, Lot 638. Price 10.10.0 i.e.10 guineas

County Borough of Swansea *Catalogue of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea* (Swansea, 1913), p.3 No.26

Christopher Wright? *Old Master Paintings in Britain* (Sotheby's Parke Bernet, 1976)

The National Inventory of Continental European Paintings online:

[www.http://:nicepaintings.org](http://www.nicepaintings.org). Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea

Further Reading:

Novelli, Maria Angela *Scarsellino* (Skira: Milan, 2008)

The Glynn Vivian version of *The Holy Family* is not mentioned in this catalogue. The other versions appear as follows: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (dated c. 1580, p.145, Cat.117), Uffizi Gallery, Florence (dated c.1610, p.100, cat.77) and Molinari Pradelli collection, Bologna (dated c.1590-1600, p.199, Cat.175). The Oxford version is clearly the closest to GV26.

Notes:

I am immensely grateful to Dr. Catherine Whistler of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for her helpful suggestions and for allowing me to see her unpublished catalogue entries on two paintings by Scarsellino in the museum.

In an 'Extract from the Third Codicil to the Will of Richard Glynn Vivian, Esquire deceased', dated 5th April 1902 (8?), in which RGV describes his bequest to the Mayor and Corporation of Swansea, two other pictures attributed to 'Caracci' are mentioned:

The following articles now at Sketty Hall, that is to say: -.....celebrated picture by Caracci "*The Holy Family*" from the Blenheim Collection. Two small pictures by Caracci. Picture of the "*Dead Christ*" by Caracci. These last three pictures are now in the drawing room".

The *Holy Family* is probably the same as Lot 640 in the Blenheim Sale of August 1886, where it is described as 'Agostino Carracci, *Madonna and Child with St. Joseph*. A composition of three figures, life size. Half length... (price) £21.0.0'. Neither the *Holy Family* nor the *Dead Christ* is mentioned in the 1911 *Catalogue of the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea*. This suggests that RGV's Trustees exercised their right to 'except from the above bequest a few specimens of each description which shall be selected ...and retained by them and left in the rooms where they now respectively are...' It is probable that Richard Glynn Vivian's *Holy Family* was sold in Swansea by John M. Leeder & Son in a sale of *Part of the Collection of Works of Art made by the Late Glynn Vivian, Esq.* on Friday, 9 January, 1914 (Lot 71 'Oil painting in carved gilt frame 'The Holy Family' by Agostino Caracci'). Now attributed to Annibale Carracci, it was given to the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne in 1971 as part of the Felton Bequest.

Lot 99 in a Sotheby's sale on 27 March 1974?, 'The property of Richard Vyvyan, Esq.' is a *Holy Family* 'on metal' attributed to L. Carracci. (Witt Library Photographic Collection). This is a landscape composition showing the Holy Family seated beneath a tree on the right. 'The Virgin, in pink with a blue cloak, with the infant Christ on her knee, St. Joseph in a yellow tunic beside them, putti with a censer and a lamp above to the left, river landscape in left background.' The infant is asleep while the Virgin reads a book/bible. Perhaps fortuitously, the John M. Leeder & Son sale in Swansea on Friday, 9 January, 1914 contains as Lot 96 two unattributed paintings: 'Unframed Oil Painting on Copper

'Madonna and Child' and ditto 'Holy Family'. The Sotheby sale picture may have nothing at all to do with the estate of Richard Glynn Vivian but could be investigated.