

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Andrea Guardi,
called Donatello da Pisa
(Florence c. 1405 – 1476 Pisa)

Madonna and Child
(Our Lady of the Little Arch
or Our Lady of Acceptance)

bas-relief, marble,
polychrome wooden frame
51 x 34.5 x 5 cm.; (marble)
20 1/8 x 13 5/8 x 2 in. (marble)
96 x 57.5 x 12 cm.; (frame)
37 3/4 x 22 5/8 x 4 3/4 in. (frame)

Provenance

Stefano Bardini (1836 – 1922), Florence;
Maurice Kann (1839 – 1906), Paris;
His sale, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 5-8 December 1910, lot 437 (as School of Donatello);
Private collection, USA, until 2014;
Private collection, Belgium.

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This extremely fine and unpublished relief originally interprets a 1425/30 Donatellian composition best known as either *Our Lady of the Little Arch*, due to the peculiar architectural and prospective disposition of the Virgin, or *Our Lady of Acceptance*, for the gracious movement of the Virgin towards the faithful viewers. This model can be seen in the refined small plate of the National Gallery of Art in Washington¹ and its numerous replicas in bronze (Bode-Museum, Berlin; Louvre Museum, Paris; Wallace Collection, London), terracotta (Bode-Museum, Berlin) and painted plaster (Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Musuems der Bildenden Künste, Budapest).²

The composition was also copied by an artist in the Circle of Pisanello (Musée Condé, Chantilly) and was replicated in marble by sculptors in the Circle of Donatello, who introduced various thematic variants. We shall mention the versions of: Santa Maria Delle Nevi, Sinalunga; Santa Maria Assunta in Orbignano, Lamporecchio-Pistoia; the Museum of the Christians, Vatican State; Cemetery, Pisa³ – both at the Vatican and in Pisa the Child is found in the same counter-position. It is also worth recalling the monumental tabernacle of Rocca Brancaleone, Ravenna, possibly realised around 1460 by Venetian artist Marino di Marco Cedrini, as suggested by the inscription.

The Pisa marble has long be attributed to Andrea Guardi⁴ (Andrea di Francesco di Guardi from Florence), a prolific sculptor trained in the workshop of Donatello, who participated (around 1428) in the works on the Brancacci sepulchre in the Neapolitan church of Sant'Angelo a Nilo, Pisa – it is probably at that time that he worked on the *Madonna and Child*, given the similarity in the Virgin's movement of 'acceptance'.

Guardi was also successfully active on the Tyrrhenian coast, in Naples, Noto, Pisa, Carrara, Genoa, and Piombino, and we can regard him as a leading protagonist of the diffusion of Donatellian culture in West Tuscany, the South and Liguria.⁵ Later on, in *circa* 1460, adopted elements from the composition of *Our Lady of Acceptance* can also be found in the lunette of the San Ranieri door in the Cathedral of Pisa,⁶ which bears resemblance with both the Madonna di Orbignano⁷ and the present relief.

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Elements such as the robust physiognomy of the Virgin, the rotund face of the Child, the clumsy positions of the characters, the thin niche within which they are positioned, the gothic leaves and gold pinnacles, the fluted halos and other details are recurrent in his devotional reliefs, for instance, in the *Madonna in Adoration* in the Berlin Bode-Museum and the sculpted *Madonna of the Sepulchre* of Niccolò Speciale in Noto Civic Museum.⁸

The provenance of the present marble is further evidence of its importance. The work was sold as part of the Maurice Kann Sale (Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 5th-8 December 1910, lot 437, as '*École de Donatello*'). It was also formerly owned by the Florentine antiquarian Stefano Bardini (fig. 1), at which time it was already inserted in its present painted wood tabernacle.

Giancarlo Gentilini, 27 February 2023, Florence

We are grateful to Giancarlo Gentilini for confirming the attribution to Andrea Guardì. The present text anticipates a larger factsheet which is in progress.

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Figure 1. Photograph conserved at the Archive Fotografico Eredità Bardini, Uffizi Galleries, Florence

Footnotes

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¹ Scholars now widely confirm its attribution to Donatello. See also A. Galli, in *Donatello: the Renaissance*, exh. cat., (ed.) F. Caglioti, Venice 2022, pp. 268-269, no. 8.13.

² A. Jolly, *Madonnas by Donatello and his circle*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, pp. 147-153, no. 44.

³ Now in the National Museum of San Matteo, Pisa.

⁴ G. Donati, *Andrea Guardi. Uno scultore di costa nell'Italia del Quattrocento*, Pisa 2015, p. 217, no. 42.

⁵ Donati 2015.

⁶ Donati 2015, p. 199, no. 32.

⁷ Galli 2022, p. 268.

⁸ This was commissioned to Guardi in July 1444 for the Church of Saint Francis. See Donati 2015, p. 161, no. 5, pp. 187-191, no. 25.