



Jacopo Tintoretto and Workshop
Jacopo Tintoretto
Venetian, 1518 or 1519 - 1594
Italian 16th Century

The Madonna of the Stars

c. 1575/1585

oil on canvas

overall: 92.7 x 72.7 cm (36 1/2 x 28 5/8 in.)

framed: 118.4 x 99 x 8.8 cm (46 5/8 x 39 x 3 7/16 in.)

Ralph and Mary Booth Collection 1947.6.6

ENTRY

The Gallery's *Madonna of the Stars* is one of a small group of loosely related paintings of the Madonna and Child, of varying degrees of quality, that have been linked to Jacopo Tintoretto. Although the entire group was attributed to Tintoretto himself by Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi (who acknowledged the possibility of studio participation only in the Gallery painting), it is evident that several different hands were involved in the production of these pictures. Some were undoubtedly painted in Tintoretto's studio, while others may be by followers outside the shop. [1]

Of the group, the Gallery's picture is the only one with a plausible claim to be at least in part by Jacopo Tintoretto, although opinions on this point have varied over the years. [2] The facial type of the Virgin, with its prominent nose, is one that appears regularly in Tintoretto's paintings, although not usually in depictions of the Virgin; for example, it appears in the angel of the Annunciation in the organ shutters in the church of San Rocco, not firmly dated but probably from the late 1570s [fig. 1], and in a female onlooker to the right in the *Adoration of the Magi* at the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, datable to 1581–1582 [fig. 2]. [3] The faces of the Virgin in the *Annunciation* and the *Adoration of the Magi* are modeled similarly to their counterpart in the Gallery picture; their features, however, are more delicate. As noted by Adolfo Venturi, the Virgin in the *Madonna of the Stars* also resembles the women in the background in *Saint Agnes Cures Licinius* (datable before 1582, probably mid- to late 1570s). [4] All of these date from the period in which Tintoretto employed many workshop assistants, including his son Domenico and

his daughter Marietta; although the paintings cited as comparisons were undoubtedly designed by Jacopo and produced under his supervision and with his participation, other hands were almost certainly involved in all three.

Although the overall composition is conventional and the bodies of the Virgin and Christ Child are awkward and anatomically distorted, the face of the Virgin is confidently rendered and convincingly three-dimensional. In contrast, the hands, an important compositional element, are crude and inexpressive. While it is highly unlikely that Jacopo himself was responsible for the painting as a whole, it is possible that he participated in its execution to some extent, either leaving the peripheral areas to an assistant, or perhaps correcting and completing the assistant's work after the latter had worked up the figures. Alternatively, the entire painting may have been executed by a member of the studio skilled at mimicking Tintoretto's types and technique. [5] The Virgin could have been copied from an angel or similar figure by Jacopo in another painting. Domenico Tintoretto remains a possible author, although the picture shows no definitive characteristics linking it to his established works.

The cherubim and stars in the background were uncovered when the painting was acquired by the National Gallery of Art. The present title was adopted in 1948. [6] Similar cherubim appear at the top of Tintoretto's *Baptism of Christ* in the church of San Silvestro, Venice (datable before 1582, probably circa 1580). [7] Since the canvas may have been cut down, it is not possible to determine whether the original composition was significantly different. The existence of several other very similar paintings suggests that it might have been only slightly larger, standing in the long Venetian tradition of half-length Madonnas. [8] However, the presence of the heavenly light and cherubim raises the possibility that the Virgin was originally seated on a crescent moon, as seen in several other versions by Tintoretto and his followers. The motif is associated with the Woman of the Apocalypse (Revelations 12:1), "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head twelve stars." [9]

The links to paintings by Jacopo Tintoretto from the mid-1570s and early 1580s suggest a date of circa 1575/1585.

Robert Echols

March 21, 2019

COMPARATIVE FIGURES



fig. 1 Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Annunciation*, late 1570s, oil on canvas, Scuola Grande Arciconfraternita di San Rocco, Venice



fig. 2 Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1581–1582, oil on canvas, Scuola Grande Arciconfraternita di San Rocco, Venice. © Cameraphoto Arte snc

NOTES

- [1] Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: nos. 93, 94, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, and 311; 2: figs. 119, 120, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, and 406; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), nos. S31, S32, S33, S34, and S35 ("Tintoretto Studio") and C40, C41, and C93 ("Circle of Tintoretto").
- [2] The attribution to Jacopo Tintoretto of *Madonna of the Stars* has been accepted by Georg Gronau (1921, dating it to c. 1565), Detlev von Hadeln

(1922 and 1924, dating it c. 1560/1565), Wilhelm R. Valentiner (who saw in it a tender reflection of Tintoretto's own domestic bliss), Erich von der Bercken and August L. Meyer (1923), Bernard Berenson (1932 and 1957), and Lionello Venturi; the latter two considered it a late work. Adolfo Venturi, seeing feminine grace rather than Tintoretto's characteristic energy in the pictorial technique, ascribed it to Jacopo's daughter Marietta, along with several related versions of the theme, while Rodolfo Pallucchini originally assigned it to Jacopo's son Domenico. Luigi Coletti (1940) and von der Bercken (1942) attributed it to Jacopo with assistance. All these scholars based their judgments on the picture's pre-restoration state, before the removal of overpainting that had softened the texture and hidden the cherubim and stars. More recently, Pierluigi De Vecchi (1970) and Pallucchini and Paola Rossi (1982) judged it to be a work by Jacopo with collaboration, dating from the early 1570s; Fern Rusk Shapley (1979) and Federico Zeri attributed it to Domenico; and Echols and Ilchman (2009) listed it as a studio production, possibly by Domenico, of the 1580s. Georg Gronau, *The Bachstitz Gallery Collection*, vol. 3, *Objects of Art and Paintings* (Berlin, 1921), pl. 92; Detlev von Hadeln, *Zeichnungen des Giacomo Tintoretto* (Berlin, 1922), 95; and Detlev von Hadeln, "Two Works in the Detroit Museum," *Art in America* 12 (1924): 32–37, repro.; Wilhelm R. Valentiner, "The Ralph H. Booth Loan Collection," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 4 (1923): 54; Erich von der Bercken and August L. Mayer, *Jacopo Tintoretto* (Munich, 1923), 1:226; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance* (Oxford, 1932), 558; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Venetian School* (London, 1957), 1:183; Lionello Venturi, *Pitture italiane in America* (Milan, 1931), no. 406; Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 9, pt. 4, *La pittura del Cinquecento* (Milan, 1929), 684; Luigi Coletti, *Il Tintoretto* (Bergamo, 1940), 31; Erich von der Bercken, *Die Gemälde des Jacopo Tintoretto* (Munich, 1942), 108; Pierluigi De Vecchi, *L'opera completa del Tintoretto* (Milan, 1970), 113; Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1:195; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:461–462; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology," in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), 142, no. S31. Zeri's attribution to Domenico, rendered orally to NGA curator David Alan Brown, is recorded in NGA curatorial files (memorandum of October 17, 1975). Pallucchini's attribution to Domenico was made in a manuscript opinion of October 15, 1940, a copy of which is in NGA curatorial files.

- [3] Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: nos. 434 and 436; 2: figs. 552 and 554; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of

Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,” in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), nos. 212 and 263.

- [4] Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. 9, pt. 4, *La pittura del Cinquecento* (Milan, 1929), 684. On *Saint Agnes Cures Licinius*, see Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: no. 371; 2: fig. 479; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,” in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), no. 198.
- [5] X-radiographs of the painting show that the figures were initially rendered in a broad, sketchy technique, generally similar to that which appears in the *Virgin and Child in the Gallery's Doge Alvise Mocenigo and Family before the Madonna and Child*, 1961.9.44, of c. 1575.
- [6] Title change memorandum dated February 2, 1948, in NGA curatorial files. The original title was *Madonna and Child*.
- [7] See Frederick Ilchman et al., *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice* (Boston, 2009), 246–251, cat. no. 53, repro. (The cherubim were revealed in a restoration in 2003–2004 and do not appear in earlier reproductions.) Cherubim also appear in a *Madonna and Child* attributed to Tintoretto in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples; however, the cherubim and principal figures appear to be by a different hand from the Gallery painting. See Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. 311; 2: fig. 404; cataloged by Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,” in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), no. C93 as “Circle of Tintoretto.” The *Madonna of the Misericordia* (Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice; attributed there to Studio of Tintoretto), with a similar glory and cherubim, cited by Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, DC, 1979), 1:462, as a comparison, also appears to be by another hand; see Sandra Moschini Marconi, *Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia*, vol. 2, *Opere d'arte del secolo XVI* (Venice, 1962), 250, fig. 433.
- [8] As argued by Detlev von Hadeln, *Zeichnungen des Giacomo Tintoretto* (Berlin, 1922), 95. In contrast, Erich von der Bercken and August L. Mayer, *Jacopo Tintoretto* (Munich, 1923), 226, thought that the canvas had been cut down from a full-length figure. Melania G. Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto e i suoi figli: Storia di una famiglia veneziana* (Milan, 2009), 261, speculated

without any real foundation that the painting might have been cut down from an altarpiece for the church of La Maddalena in Venice, mentioned by Marco Boschini as a product of the “casa del Tintoretto.”

- [9] For example, the *Virgin and Child with Saint Mark and Saint Luke* (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) and *Madonna and Child* (Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence); see Rodolfo Pallucchini and Paola Rossi, *Tintoretto: Le opere sacre e profane* (Venice, 1982), 1: cat. nos. 310, 312; 2: figs. 406, 407; Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, “Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology,” in *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26–27, 2007* (Madrid, 2009), no. 156, S33.
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TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting was executed on a piece of medium-weight, plain-weave canvas that has been expanded at the very top with a narrow strip (now 3.75 centimeters) of slightly finer weight canvas. The painting has been lined to two pieces of additional fabric and the tacking margins have been removed. No cusping is evident, suggesting that the picture may have been cut down.

Microscopic examination suggests the presence of an overall thin, reddish-brown ground. The paint is thinly applied, in both a very dry and a fluid, liquid technique. Many glazes are broken through or missing, notably on the Madonna’s mantle and hands and on the Christ Child. Some fading is apparent on the Madonna’s red dress and on her mantle, which now appears brown, but originally would have been blue or purple. [1] The paint has been flattened and the canvas weave emphasized, probably due to the use of excessive pressure during the lining process. The entire surface is abraded and there are many minute areas of retouching, now moderately discolored, all over the painting. The Madonna’s eyes, eyebrows, and hair were heavily retouched and there is also retouching in the lower part of her nose and mouth. The varnish is matte and slightly discolored. Residues of natural varnish are evident in the interstitial areas of the canvas. The painting was relined, cleaned, and inpainted in 1947–1948 by Stephen Pichetto. At that time, the stars and the cherubim in the background were revealed.

Joanna Dunn and Robert Echols based on the examination report by Julie Caverne

March 21, 2019

TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] The paint in the area of the mantle was analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (XRF) and found to contain the elements for smalt, a blue pigment that often fades (see report in NGA conservation files).

PROVENANCE

(Kurt Walter Bachstitz Gallery, The Hague), by 1921.[1] Ralph Harman [1873-1931] and Mary Batterman [d.1951] Booth, Grosse Pointe, Michigan, by 1923;[2] gift 1947 to NGA.

[1] Published by Georg Gronau, *The Bachstitz Gallery Collection, vol. 3: Objects of Art and Paintings*, Berlin, 1921: pl. 92; and Detlev von Hadeln, *Zeichnungen des Giacomo Tintoretto*, Berlin, 1922: 95, repro.

[2] C.B. Ely, "Two Works by Tintoretto in the Detroit Museum," *Art in America* 12 (1923): 32-37.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1923 Ralph H. Booth Loan Collection, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1923, no catalogue.

1926 Loan Exhibition from Detroit Private Collections. Third Loan Exhibition of Old Masters, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1926, no. 12, as *Madonna and Child*.

1927 Fifth Loan Exhibition of Old and Modern Masters, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1927, no. 20, as *Madonna and Child*.

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- 1984: 230, no. 293, color repro.
- 1985 *European Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1985: 392, repro.
- 1998 Silverstein, Alexander M. "Marietta Robusti: La Tintoretta, Daughter of Tintoretto." Unpublished manuscript, dated November 1997. [New York, 1998]: vii, 71-72, 86.
- 2009 Echols, Robert, and Frederick Ilchman. "Toward a New Tintoretto Catalogue, with a Checklist of Revised Attributions and a New Chronology." In *Jacopo Tintoretto: Actas del congreso internacional/Proceedings of the International Symposium, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, February 26-27, 2007*. Madrid, 2009: 142, no. S31, as Studio of Tintoretto, possibly Domenico Tintoretto.
- 2009 Mazzucco, Melania G. *Jacomo Tintoretto e i suoi figli: storia di una famiglia veneziana*. Milan, 2009: 261.
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To cite: Robert Echols, "Jacopo Tintoretto, Italian 16th Century/*The Madonna of the Stars*/c. 1575/1585," *Italian Paintings of the Sixteenth Century*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/33757> (accessed October 15, 2024).