Santi di Tito
(Florence 1536 – 1603)

Portrait of a Lady with Her Daughter

1580–5

Oil on panel, 100 x 80 cm.

Advances in scholarship regarding Santi di Tito, who is now known to have been born in Florence[1], increasingly confirm his stature not only as one of the leading figures on the art scene during the Counter-Reformation, but also as the greatest Florentine portrait artist of the second half of the 16th century.

The hand of Santi, to whom this portrait is attributed and who was one of the most innovative artists in the group formed by Vasari and Borghini to work in Francesco I's

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[1] Though long thought to have been born in Sansepolcro, archive research has revealed that Santi, the son of Tito di Santi di Bartolomeo from Borgo a Sansepolcro (enrolled in the Arte dei Linaioli guild in1535), was in fact born in the Parish of San Michele Visdomini in Florence on 5 December 1536; see A. Belluzzi, G. Belli, *La villa dei Collazzi*, Florence 2016, p. 46.

Studiolo, is instantly clear in the firm, oval design of the sitters' faces and the porcelain-like treatment of the flesh, with a faint pink blush on the cheeks of both mother and daughter. These sensitive touches are the product of a specific method involving the use of dense, compact pigments that make it extremely easy to identify Santi's hand. This, because while he was always careful to capture his sitter's physical resemblance, he invariably displayed a clear, easily identifiable approach to draughtsmanship over the years – a stylistic ploy that also uses the sitters' solid volumes to convey their communicative expressions.

The painter's uncommon skill in capturing naturalistic precision in his portraiture shines through in such works as the *Portrait of a Woman with Her Daughter* (fig. 1) formerly in the Koelliker collection[2] or the *Portrait of Lucretia (Emilia) and Sinibaldo di Niccolò Gaddi*[3] (fig. 2), all of them datable to the 1570s on account of their still firm and solid stereometric definition of form.

Fig. 1: Santi di Tito, *Portrait of a Lady with Her Daughter*, Private collection, formerly Koelliker Collection

Fig. 2: Santi di Tito, *Portrait of Lucretia (Emilia) Gaddi*, Private collection

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[2] N. Bastogi, *Due ritratti femminili di Santi di* Tito, "Paragone", 84/85, 2009, pp. 58-66.

[3] A. Fenech Kroke, In *Florence. Portraits à la cour des medicis*, exhibition catalogue, ed. C. Falciani, (Paris, Musée Jacquemart – André, 2015–16) Paris - Brussels 2015, pp. 178-183.

As the years went by, however, this feature, dating back to his training under Bronzino, began to give way increasingly to a softer, more sensitive style that achieved ever greater naturalism. An emblematic work in that sense is the *Portrait of Guido Guardi with His Sons*[4], in which Santi portrayed Guardi immediately after his return from Rome, where he lived from 1564 to 1568. At that time, Guardi had also commissioned Santi to paint a *Nativity* for the family chapel in the church of San Giuseppe. The archaic pose of Guardi, seated in an armchair, appears to hark back to early 16th-century portraiture, from which Santi also drew his inspiration for his solid depiction of the sitter's tunic with its sharp, sculptural folds. Probably some time towards the turn of the 1570s, however, Santi was commissioned to add the portraits of Guardi's sons to the picture, at a time when it was likely to have already been framed. The two young men's heads reveal a more naturalistic approach, and their clothing is also in a later style than their father's, particularly the large white ruff designed to set off the face of the son on Guardi's left.

In our portrait too, the oval of the sitters' faces remains firm and immediate, as in the former Koelliker painting, while their clothing is brought to life by highlighting and by such decorative details as the gilt buttons or the slashed sleeves that impart variety and sumptuousness to their attire. In this, Santi is following in the footsteps of Bronzino and his *Portrait of Eleonora of Toledo with Her Son Giovanni*, where his virtuosity reached a new pinnacle in the depiction of the sitter's gown, thus setting a trend for the entire generation of Florentine artists that followed. The daughter, too, with her gesture of modesty emulating that of her mother, wears a gown made of fabrics that gleam in different ways from one another, the artist displaying immense skill in the rendering of the satin sleeve with its small decorations in relief, akin to those in the gowns seen in the Koelliker portrait published by Nadia Bastogi[5].

The setting, in a room built in the austere Florentine style with a simple doorway in *pietra serena* stone, echoes the many portraits that Santi di Tito painted for the city's aristocracy. One has but to think of the *Portrait of a Member of the Passerini Family with His*

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[4] See A. Geremicca in *Il Cinquecento a Firenze*, *"maniera moderna" e controriforma*, exhibition catalogue (Florence, Palazzo Strozzi 2017-18) ed. C. Falciani and A. Natali, Florence 2017, pp. 156-157.
[5] See note 2.

Son (fig. 3) auctioned at the Dorotheum on 5 October 2013[6], where the palazzo setting is reminiscent in tone of the setting in the painting under discussion here.

A final stylistic feature that is tantamount to the artist's signature is the rendering of the hands with their oval nails and their cylindrical fingers, a feature that recurs in every one of Santi di Tito's portraits.

Fig. 3: Santi di Tito, *Portrait of a Member of the Passerini Family with His Son,* Private collection.

Santi di Tito was a past master at setting his family portraits in Florentine palazzi. In addition to the *Portrait of Lucretia (Emilia) Gaddi* (fig. 2) mentioned above, we should also examine a monumental portrait of a family in the courtyard of its palazzo (fig. 4) attributed to Tiberio Titi, but unquestionably by Santi, painted in the 1590s. Despite the difficulty in dating a painting such as ours solely on the basis of stylistic elements in view of the painter's formal approach to portraiture, it is tempting to suggest a date falling between the late 1570s and early '80 on the basis of its firmness of execution, a feature still present in the Passerini portrait yet replaced, by the time we reach the Dublin portrait, by looser and more summary brushwork.

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[6] Lot no. 553. The painting was subsequently sold by Pandolfini at their auction entitled *Dal Rinascimento al primo '900. Percorso attraverso cinque secoli di pittura,* Florence, 2 February, lot no. 9.

Fig. 4: Santi di Tito, *Family Portrait*, Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland.

Born in Florence in 1536, Santi di Tito trained first under Bastiano da Montecarlo and then under Bronzino. While clinging to Bronzino's preference for luminous, sculpted volumes, however, he tempered those volumes with a clarity of composition and a naturalism demanded by the dictates of the Counter-Reformation that prompted him to show an interest in the style of Scipione Pulzone and the Zuccari brothers, whose work he had seen both in Florence and in Rome. In connection with Santi's training, Raffaello Borghini tells us that he pursued his studies under Baccio Bandinelli, from whom "he had much advice regarding drawing". Baldinucci also mentions Santi di Tito's skill as a draughtsman, but he adds that other artists were jealous of his self-assured nonchalance, which shines through in the "ease" with which he painted the decorative apparatus in our painting, with rapid brushwork and a subtle, harmonious palette.

After training in Florence, Santi di Tito moved to Rome, dwelling in the city from 1560 to 1564 and working cheek by jowl with the Zuccari brothers, frescoing the chapel in Palazzo Salviati and the Casino of Pius IV and the Salone del Belvedere in the Vatican. It was probably in Rome that Santi added a layer of complexity to the naturalism and calm simplicity that were such essential features of his painting and his major contribution to art in Florence, whither he returned in1564 to take part in producing the apparatus for Michelangelo's funeral. The place where the powerfully innovative nature of Santi's painting is most striking by comparison with the expressive style of Vasari's school, however, is the *Studiolo* of Francesco I de' Medici in

Palazzo Vecchio, for which he painted three pictures *c.* 1572. That innovative charge probably owes a crucial debt to a trip to Venice at the start of the 1570s, where he was able to admire the naturalistic work of Titian and Tintoretto, which prompted him to renew Florentine Mannerism while, however, standing firmly by the primacy that it afforded to drawing. For the *Studiolo* he painted *The Creation of Amber*, *Hercules and Iole* and *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, all three of which display an interest in rendering sentiment that is totally absent from the tenets of Mannerism, and a naturalism in the figures' faces, gestures and tone that already points to the synthesis of abstraction and naturalism we find in our painting (although it should be dated more towards the end of the decade). Also in connection with our painting, it is worth taking a fresh look at the remarks of Raffaello Borghini in *Il Riposo* and of Filippo Baldinucci in his *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, both of whom agree that Santi di Tito was an extremely skilled portrait artist.

Writing in 1584, Borghini tells us that "many painters and sculptors have been portrayed from life" by the hand of Santi di Tito in Florence, and that "he has made many portraits, for example of Pope Pius IV, Don Ernando Cardinal de' Medici, Don Pietro, Lady Isabella de' Medici, Paolo Orsino, Pier Vettori, a celebrated man of letters, and many others whom it would take me too long to list here"[7]. So, judging from the level of his commissions, Santi di Tito already appeared to Borghini (who was writing before Santi's death) to be one of the most important Florentine portrait artists of his day, a role that he earned thanks to his talent as a painter, his interest in naturalism and skill and experience of draughtsmanship in the Florentine tradition, which made him, together with Allori, the natural heir of the manner first formulated by Bronzino. Baldinucci, however, is the author who devotes the largest number of pages to Santi's portraits, which were still to be seen in late 17th-century Florence, although most of them have unfortunately since been lost.

It is worth quoting a number of passages from Baldinucci: Santi di Tito "was driven by genius, no less than by his desire for wealth, to make portraits such as those which, displaying uncommon self-confidence in his drawing, he produced with great ease and perfect resemblance from life, and what is more, also from death". One of the best preserved portraits in a Florentine home is the one "he made of Caterina di Camillo

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[7] R. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, Florence 1584, p. 621.

dei Pazzi, a Florentine noblewoman, who later donned the religious habit of the Carmelite order, changing her former name into that of Maria Maddalena and achieving such heights of sanctity that she is deservedly included today in the catalogue of saints". Baldinucci also discusses a "very fine portrait of an old lady in widow's weeds, [which] is owned by Marquis Francesco Riccardi", and he goes on to mention "Ippolito de' Ricci, an advocate in the College of Nobles, a gentleman who, for his amusement, has dabbled considerably in painting and who has in his house in Santa Croce certain portraits of his ancestors and others related to them, including that of Niccolò Machiavelli, a former Secretary of the Florentine Republic, who lacks only a voice to make him come alive; and another portrait of him, with others also from that household, all by the hand of Santi, held by the heirs of Pierfrancesco of the same noble De' Ricci family. Senator Ruberto Pandolfini, also an advocate in the College of Nobles, a gentleman of the greatest integrity, prudence and learning, has, in his palazzo in Via S. Gallo designed by the great Raphael of Urbino, three portraits by the hand of the same Santi of members of the Tornabuoni household, being his ancestors on his mother's side".

And finally, to wind up this brief excursion into the sources for Santi di Tito's portraits, in addition to the effigies of knights and aristocrats, Baldinucci also mentions that Santi "was accustomed to making portraits of most serene princes, and having one day to make that of Madama Christina of Lorraine, then the wife of Grand Duke Ferdinando I, who loathed the tedium of sitting still in a natural pose, he found a way to deal with the whole matter in half an hour, in which time (so earnest was his brush) he made a portrait so fine that it earned the praise of the Grand Duke and of the entire court"[8]. According to Baldinucci, Santi di Tito's portraits were still held in such great esteem for their resemblance and their vibrancy at the turn of the 17th century, despite their distance from the style of Florentine Baroque painting, that the memory of the praise the artist earned from the Medici court for his talent and speed was still fresh in people's minds.

Carlo Falciani

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[8] All these quotes are from F. Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, (1681-1728), ed. F. Ranalli, Florence 1845–7, 2, pp. 540-544.