

An Artist of Modern Sensibility

— The recent restoration of the “Holy Family with Saints Anne and Jerome” by Lorenzo Lotto has confirmed the correct chronological relationship between the painting and its replica in the Courtauld Gallery of London

In 1798, Tommaso Puccini chose the *Holy Family with Saints Anne and Jerome* by Lorenzo Lotto, a possession of the Grand Prince Ferdinando in the XVII century, for the completion of his arrangement of the halls of the Royal Gallery of the Uffizi. It was there, nearly a century later, that Bernard Berenson saw the work, signed and dated 1534, and immediately adopted it in the first edition of his monographic study on the artist as an incontrovertible point of comparison in the reconstruction of the artist's third sojourn in the Marches region. The painting – in which the scholar vigorously noted the “exaggerated expressivity” of the physiognomic representations and a “grand agitation in movement” – also represented for Berenson a perfect example of that emerging tendency on the part of Lotto, an artist of modern sensibility, to represent the emotive complexity of his personages. But only in his third edition, does Berenson finally make mention of a canvas painting of similar subject in the Seilern Col-



Lorenzo Lotto, *Holy Family with Saints Anne and Jerome*, after restoration sponsored by the Friends of the Uffizi Galleries.

lection of London that he considers “an autograph replica” of the painting in the Uffizi.

The latter, now in the Courtauld Gallery of London, presents a notable variation in composition:

in place of Saint Jerome a window opens onto a vast and hilly landscape. The surface of the canvas is notably damaged and presents losses due to past interventions and in particular, the date written on the white cushion is missing its last numeral (153..). Once held to be the prototype of the Florentine painting, the *Holy Family* in London has subsequently been dated to a few years later for its minor quality and for stylistic characteristics. This correct chronological sequence can now be confirmed by the preliminary testing on the Florentine painting that took place during the restoration sponsored by the Friends of the Uffizi Galleries (donor Trish Savides). Infrared reflectography has brought to light the

the leaves of the trees, in the white clouds painted in the sky and in the subtle distinction of greys in the window frame.

The restoration carried out by Elisa Todisco now reveals a marvelous range of icy, glazed tonalities “of exceptional purity”, a weave of luminous passages previously obscured by yellowed varnishes and tainted repainting. The surface shows signs of consumption in the red mantle of Saint Anne and in the blue gown of the Virgin, but on the whole, the work is in a good state of conservation as the extraordinary pictorial passages of the intensely animated visages of Saint Anne and of Saint Joseph demonstrate.

Spouse of the Virgin, *nutritor Domini* (the cask at his

presence of a window opening onto a distant landscape – similar to the one seen in the replica in London – painted prior to the figure of Jerome. The landscape is furthermore highly finished in detail as seen in

side unequivocally alludes to this title) and first witness to the Incarnation of Christ, Joseph exchanges a glance of intense adoration with the Christ Child. ■

Fausta Navarro