

## 4. "VIRGIN AND CHILD"

ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO AND WORKSHOP

30 JANUARY – 18 MAY 2014

**ANDREA DEL VERROCCHIO** is one of those Renaissance figures who summon the dearest elegiac adjectives to artistic literature. It will be nothing but a repeated assertion to claim that **inventiveness** – an ingenious ability to “draw” shapes and innovative compositions (even if inspired by precise sources) – was the most defining and unifying trait of his kaleidoscopic creative work. This, together with the most inspiring models (still surviving today in rare and beautiful sheets of figure studies) fuelled the entire multifaceted production of the vast workshop he ran, both in the different sculpting techniques and materials and in the domain of painting – for which he, incidentally, preferred the Florentine tradition of tempering the then modern and more Nordic use of oil.

Even in compositions of a devotional and routine nature, such as the *Virgin and Child*, Verrocchio appears to have studied deeply the meaning of the subject and reflected upon the best way to give it form, as can be seen in the composition of the Frankfurt painting, the first “guest work” in MNAA in 2014. In effect, the image falls outside the traditional canon of Mary maternally cradling or enveloping Jesus. Here, the Child is “presented” standing on a cushion, hinting at an interlocutory gesture of blessing over a windowsill which emphasises the three-dimensional effect (and the realism) of the representation towards the observer. The frankness of the figure, together with the gentleness and pictorial delicacy concentrated in it, confers monumentality and sacredness without removing sentimental empathy and vivid presence. This communicative and interpellant capacity is further enhanced by other significant subtleties, such as the detail of the diaphanous veil which “covers” the genital nudity of the Child, the veil of the co-redemptrix Mary according to the popularised *Meditationes Vitae Christi* by the Pseudo-Bonaventura (writings from the XIV century which promote the theory that Christ was crucified naked and that Mary had to cover his nudity with her own veil). In this way, Verrocchio’s composition constitutes a double prefiguration: the veil alluding to the death of Christ on the cross and His gesture of blessing

**Workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio**

(Florence, ca. 1435 - Venice, 1488)

***Virgin and Child***

1470-1480

Tempera (?) on panel, 84,7 x 64,6 cm

Acquisition, 1817

Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, inv. n° 702

referring to the resurrection. Although the figure of Christ is derived from a sculpture by Desiderio Settignano – which adds the finishing touch to a tabernacle in the Basilica of St. Lorenzo, Florence (c. 1460) – the inventive merits of the composition have been instrumental in making it one of the biggest commercial successes of Verrocchio’s workshop. In addition to the variations in painting (with differences in dimensions, the depiction of characters and manner of execution), identical representations exist in terracotta, stucco and marble, two of which are particularly close to the Frankfurt panel (figs. 1 and 2.). The repetition of certain figurative elements (hands, shape and fall of drapery) in the different works of art leads to the presumption that studio models were subject to reproduction through various techniques.

**Workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio*****Virgin and Child***

ca. 1475-80, marble (fig. 1)

**Workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio*****Virgin and Child***

ca. 1475, painted terracotta (fig. 2)