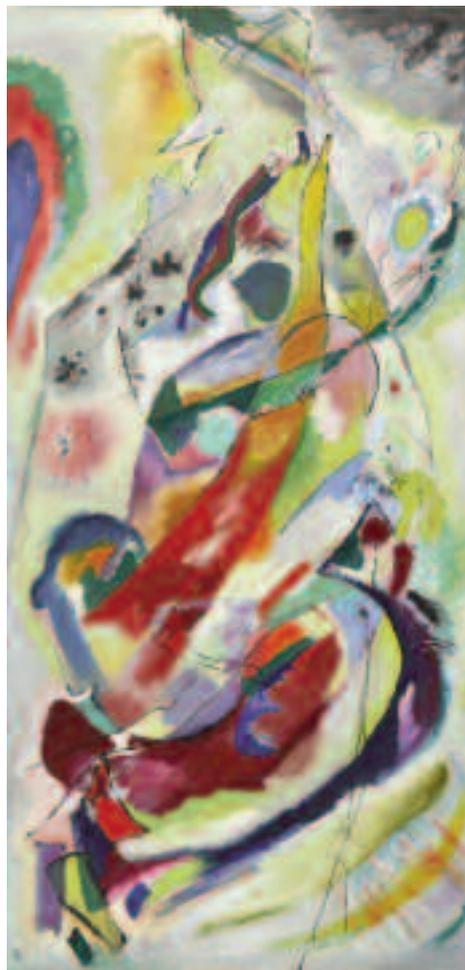


67. Design for wall painting B for the *Juryfreie Kunstschau*, by Vasily Kandinsky. 1922. Gouache and white chalk on black paper, 34.7 by 60 cm. (Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; exh. Neue Galerie, New York).

are on view in the room devoted to 'Music and Theater', which brings together theoretical texts, archival photographs, line drawings, mural studies and stage designs in such a way that the artist's experiments are not reduced to a narrative of progression, but allowed to show conflicting ideas and layers of influence. In his composition, Mussorgsky attempted to emotively translate into music, drawings and watercolours by his friend Viktor Hartman. In the ballet project in 1928, Kandinsky and his colleagues reversed Mussorgsky's original, adding another stage of metamorphosis, transforming the ten 'pictures' into sixteen scenes, each with different designs by Kandinsky. While some of his sets, such as *Picture II, gnome*, are purely geometric, others such as *Figures for picture XVI, The great gate of Kiev*, clearly evoke the ancient city of Kiev with towers topped with onion domes rising on the right-hand side of the composition.

A subplot to the exhibition is American collections and patronage of Kandinsky's work during his lifetime. Arthur Jerome Eddy, Katherine S. Dreier and Hilla Rebay, all of whom are discussed in the catalogue, are well-known collectors and promoters of the artist's work in the United States. However, here it is the commission of four wall panels for the oval foyer of Edwin Campbell's New York apartment that is the most interesting as these are the only surviving 'mural' works by the artist and all four are on view. Although Kandinsky welcomed American patronage, he seems to have found aspects of this commission frustrating. In particular, in a letter to the artist regarding the pictures, Eddy (who had introduced Campbell to the artist's work) suggested that Kandinsky base the panels on a painting in his own collection, as Eddy felt the bright colour scheme would be well suited to Campbell's apartment. Kandinsky felt such a suggestion debased the purpose of his work and implied that they were merely decorative, although in the end he seems to

have generally followed Eddy's suggestion. The panels are loosely based on the four seasons, but panel number two has a distinctly more sombre palette, in counterpoint to the luminous colours that are especially evident



68. Panel for Edwin R. Campbell no.1, by Vasily Kandinsky. 1914. Canvas, 162.5 by 80 cm. (Museum of Modern Art, New York; exh. Neue Galerie, New York).

in panels one (Fig.68) and three.

The subject covered by this exhibition is broad, bracketed by periods that are very different aesthetically: Kandinsky's association with the Blaue Reiter group and his time teaching at the Bauhaus. His experiments with theatre and music, outside his theoretical writing, are little studied (although often invoked), and less often explored in an exhibition, arguably due to the simple fact that few examples of these works have survived – three out of the four mural projects are lost or destroyed – and the artist's most complete experimental work for the theatre, *Der gelbe Klang (The yellow sound)* (1909), a 'colour-tone drama' with text, stage directions and designs by Kandinsky and music by Thomas V. Hartmann, although published in the *Blaue Reiter Almanac* in May 1912, was never performed during the artist's lifetime. The exhibition has secured some incredible loans, but the true highlight is its excellent catalogue, containing a wealth of scholarly articles that pull the show's nebulous theme together into a neat critical investigation.

¹ Catalogue: *Vasily Kandinsky: From Blaue Reiter to the Bauhaus, 1910–1925*. Edited by Jill Lloyd, with contributions by Jill Lloyd, Rose-Carol Washton-Long, Peter Vergo, Shulamith Behr, Vivian Endicott Barnett and Christian Derouet. 208 pp. incl. 192 col. + b. & w. ills. (Hatje Cantz, Berlin and Ostfildern, 2013), \$49.95. ISBN 978-3-7757-3734-0.

Francesco Vanni

New Haven

by ROBERT B. SIMON

FRANCESCO VANNI IS the improbable subject of a rewarding exhibition at the **Yale University Art Gallery** (to 5th January).¹ Improbable, as New Haven, the exhibition's sole venue, is far from Siena, the artist's birthplace and the locus of his artistic activity, and has no special cultural bond with it (*pace* nearby Waterbury's Union Station, modelled after the Torre di Mangia). And improbable as well since no anniversary of the artist, who lived from 1563/64 to 1610, is to be celebrated this year; nor is there any relevant academic initiative at Yale University, which sadly features but one course in Italian painting out of seventy-nine offered in the Department of the History of Art during the current academic year. But what was sparked by an inspired painting acquisition by the Gallery in 2003 has been developed into a moderately sized but rigorously conceived exhibition that presents an incisive portrait of the artist as painter, draughtsman and iconographic innovator.

Most of Vanni's paintings are large altarpieces, commissioned for churches in Siena, in other Tuscan towns, and in Rome. These have, almost without exception, remained *in situ* – a welcome circumstance for the scholar

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or traveller, but a considerable impediment to any monographic exhibition on the artist, especially one on another continent. The curators of *Francesco Vanni: Art in Late Renaissance Siena*, John Marciari and Suzanne Boorsch, have focused on several of the altarpieces as the critical commissions that they are, but examine them through Vanni's preparatory drawings and oil-sketches. The choice of studies for *St Ansanus baptising the people of Siena* (S. Maria Assunta, Siena), a massive work measuring more than 14 by 9 feet, is exemplary, with loans from Princeton, Siena, Worcester and Vassar (cat. nos.17–23). They include agitated figural explorations, variations of compositional designs, studies of posed models, and alternate drapery treatments. Process and development are examined, but considered within the artist's imperative to create legible devotional images of themes never previously treated. Preparatory works for another new altarpiece subject, *St Hyacinth saving a drowning boy* (S. Spirito, Siena), include a brilliant *brunaille* compositional oil-sketch from the Louvre (no.35) and a group of figure studies in red chalk of uncommon fluidity and grace. That of a standing woman (no.38; Fig.70) might have stepped from a nineteenth-century genre painting.

Vanni is inevitably thought of as a follower or imitator of Barocci; with his half-brother Ventura Salimbeni, he is one of the two *barocceschi senesi* of the title of the 1976 drawings exhibition at the Uffizi, Florence.² Yet, despite Vanni's at times astonishing dependence on Barocci, there is no record of any personal contact between the two painters. Vanni appears to have come to his embrace of Barocci's figural types, palette and style



70. *Study of a standing woman*, by Francesco Vanni. c.1596–98. Red chalk and red wash, 24.8 by 16.7 cm. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; exh. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven).



69. *Rest on the flight into Egypt*, known as the *Madonna della Pappa*, by Francesco Vanni. c.1599. Canvas, 119.3 by 88.2 cm. (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven).

following his tenure in Bologna in 1586–87 and through his association with the Carracci. As Marciari suggests, Vanni's bond with Barocci's art may also have been engendered through the shared devotional and patronage channels of the Confraternity of the Sacro Chiodo in Siena, to which Vanni belonged, and the kindred Oratorians, enthusiastic patrons of Barocci. A precious document of Vanni's discovery of Barocci is his drawn copy (no.3) of the *Madonna del Popolo*, then in Arezzo – a work Vanni would shamelessly mine for his S. Ansano altarpiece, candidly described by Marciari as the *Madonna del Popolo* 'with all the pieces scrambled and put together again'.

If Vanni's *barocismo* can seem slavish in that work, in others it is brilliantly rethought and expressed with distinct personality – none more so than in Yale's *Rest on the flight into Egypt*, known as the *Madonna della Pappa* (no.42; Fig.69). Here the Virgin holds the standing Christ Child on her knee as Joseph leans forward holding a sprig of cherries, more to entertain than to nourish the baby. The Child is bound in swaddling clothes, but with his arms free, one hand tenderly touching his mother's fingers, the other held before his mouth in a familiar gesture of infancy. While the Holy family is clothed in relatively naturalistic pastel-hued drapery, the angel appearing before them is spectacularly arrayed with a counter-intuitive display of extravagant '*vago colore*': we accept without question a light-to-dark transition on the angel's shoulder that proceeds from brilliant yellow highlights to pink middle-tones to blue shadow. The divinity of this decidedly female figure is underscored by the golden spoon and elegant porcelain plate she holds, its splendour contrasted with the utterly humble contents offered, *pappa* (moistened leftover bread), the

Ur-dish of *cucina povera*. Vanni's unambiguous portrayal of the Holy family as modest familial protagonists reflects both his own devotional convictions and the tenets of Counter-Reformation expression.

A considerable part of the exhibition is devoted to the dissemination of Vanni's imagery through prints. While he was a modest printmaker himself – his three known etchings are included here – it was through the work of others, some Italian (notably Agostino Carracci), mostly Northerners (Philippe Thomassin, Pieter de Jode and Cornelis Galle I), that Vanni's designs proliferated across Europe. De Jode's engravings of Vanni's *Map of Siena* (no.29) and *Scenes from the life of St Catherine of Siena* (no.32), both accompanied by preparatory drawings by Vanni, are worthy additions to the exhibition. Some of the depicted episodes are inventive, if graphic, illustrations of the extreme mystical and visionary deeds of the saint: Catherine drinks blood from Christ's side; Catherine sucks the wound of a cancerous woman; Catherine receives a new heart from Christ.

Among the paintings lent to the exhibition are an engaging, if somewhat impish, *Self-portrait* (no.69); a *cataletto* (funeral bier) panel of the *Virgin adoring the sleeping Child* (no.12; Fig.72), a poignant meditation on death; and the sole altarpiece by Vanni outside Europe, his *Virgin offering the Christ Child to St Francis* (no.55), commissioned in 1599 for a church in Lyon and now at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, specially cleaned for this exhibition.

The handsome catalogue not only illuminates the works exhibited, but serves as an accessible monograph on the artist, illustrating



71. *Study for the Virgin and Child with Sts Cecilia and Agnes*, by Francesco Vanni. c.1605. Canvas, 21.8 by 14.5 cm. (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven).



72. *The Virgin adoring the sleeping Child*, by Francesco Vanni. 1591. Panel, 59 by 42 cm. (Santuario di S. Caterina in Fontebranda, Siena; exh. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven).

most, if not all, of Vanni's altarpieces in colour. The relationship of preparatory works to completed projects is best studied here, as the comparative photographs displayed in the exhibition are too small and too dark (and exhibited too dimly and too low on the wall) to be of much use.

Vanni's progression towards a tenebrist Baroque naturalism in his later work, seen at its nascent stage in the Providence altarpiece, is treated at the conclusion of the exhibition through drawings and oil-sketches. A monochrome *bozzetto* for an altarpiece of c.1605 (no.74; Fig.71), recently acquired by the host institution, demonstrates the artist's vitality at the end of his short career.

In its scale, focus and scholarly foundation this is an immensely satisfying exhibition. There are no claims for Vanni as a rediscovered forgotten master. He has always had his quiet admirers through isolated viewings in churches, museums and print rooms. But by integrating a choice selection of his works within a thoroughly researched review of his career, associations, patronage and contemporary cultural and religious contexts, the viewer (and reader of the catalogue) can better understand the seriousness, scope and direction of Vanni's art, while enjoying some of its most attractive expressions.

¹ Catalogue: *Francesco Vanni: Art in Late Renaissance Siena*. By John Marciari and Suzanne Boorsch, with contributions by Jamie Gabbarelli and Alexa A. Greist. 256 pp. incl. 194 col. + 13 b. & w. ills. (Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, in association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013), \$65. ISBN 978-0-30013-5480.

² P.A. Riedl: exh. cat. *Disegni dei baroccheschi senesi*, Florence (Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi)

1976.

Sam Francis

Pasadena and Sacramento

by JAMES LAWRENCE

IT HAS NEVER been easy to place Sam Francis in the development of American painting, not least because the appropriate criteria for judging his legacy remain unclear. He is more highly regarded in Europe and Japan than in the United States, where his delicate but irrepressible colours seem light when compared with the gravitas of his more renowned contemporaries. His rise as part of the 'second wave' of Abstract Expressionism also coincided with a shift in critical taste towards deadpan inscrutability and engaging objects. One result of this uncertainty is sincere but perhaps qualified respect, expressed as admiration for his mastery of colour or acknowledgment of his standing as a West Coast artist rather than as a full member of the celebrated heroic line. There remains a sense that his career deserves more careful scrutiny than has yet emerged.

The exhibition *Sam Francis: Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections*, at the **Pasadena Museum of California Art** (to 5th January),¹ is a panegyric encapsulation of Francis's work rather than a scholarly proposition. It offers more affectionate warmth than critical distance. The hang is assured and visually excellent, although in places it lacks clarity. There are slightly too many works – more than one hundred – arranged to promote immediacy over structure. The only serious lapse is the familiar problem of title panels with too much pre-digested interpretation. They add clutter in an attempt to tell us what the hang ought to show us. These are minor distractions, however, in an intelligently assembled exhibition. It captures the vivacity that Francis instilled in his paintings even when he was beset by

misfortune.

Francis began to paint as a direct result of one such misfortune. In 1943 he crashed during Army Air Corps flight training. That accident and a subsequent bout of spinal tuberculosis led to four years of hospitalisation. He spent much of that time in a body cast with only his arms free. Painting initially served a therapeutic purpose, as much physical as psychological. His early efforts, a nice selection of which is in the show, indicate technical acuity and chromatic sophistication. *The secret room* and *After de Chirico* (cat. nos.6 and 7; both 1946), for example, are crisp and thorough emulations of European precursors. These initial forays into advanced styles are sincere but desiccated, the work of a painter for whom homage is merely a way station. He soon loosened up as he gained confidence through modest public exhibitions and the support of local figures such as David Park. These early paintings have an ecological quality of living elements in flux, a trait that never entirely disappeared in subsequent works. As one might expect of an aviator whose studies initially favoured biological sciences, Francis excelled at suggesting the intrinsic beauty of organic forms on a scale ranging from microscopic to atmospheric.

In the autumn of 1950 Francis moved to Paris and studied at l'Académie de Fernand Léger under the GI Bill, and soon became part of the circle associated with Tachisme. Accounts of his career often suggest that choosing Paris over New York limited his opportunities to assert himself in the vanguard of American painters, although his works were frequently chosen for international showcases of American painting. This touches upon one of the least adequately investigated aspects of post-War art: the cross-fertilisation of taste and its implications for painting since the 1960s. The remarkable atmospheric effects of his monochromes from the early 1950s, including the splendid



73. Installation view at the Pasadena Museum of California Art of *Sam Francis: Five Decades of Abstract Expressionism from California Collections* showing, in the foreground, *Grey* (1951; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles) and *3 blue* (1952; Berkeley Art Museum).