



73. *Nativity*, by Domenico Capriolo. 1524. Canvas, 73.5 by 114 cm. (Musei Civici, Treviso; exh. Palazzo Sarcinelli, Conegliano).

enthroned with *Sts John the Baptist and Francis* commissioned by Antonio Hoyos of Salamanca, Bishop of Gurk, for the Reformed Franciscans (pp.194–96; Fig.72). In the same context the proposal that the *Dead Christ* (Staatliche Museen, Berlin) once formed the gable of Pordenone's altarpiece with *Sts Roch, Jerome and Sebastian* (c.1512; S. Maria della Salute, Venice; not exhibited; pp.132–33) gains credibility; it was commissioned by the da Collalto family and, as well as its matching iconography, the lunette's Eucharistic subject, which was increasingly popular, and being promoted by the Church, would have suited the religious climate in Conegliano. An equally eloquent work was Giampietro Silvio's *Christ in glory* for the parish church of S. Vendemiano (1549; exhibited; pp.200–02).

The exhibition also provided the occasion to re-examine Pordenone's work in the old chapel of the Castello di San Salvatore, near Susegana. Commissioned by the da Collalto family, the work was finished in the second decade of the sixteenth century. The frescos were destroyed in the First World War, but it may be worth proposing that as well as the altarpiece now in S. Maria della Salute, Venice, Pordenone's *Transfiguration* also came from the castello (1515–16; Brera, Milan; exhibited; pp.134–36).

There is no doubt that the climate of religious anxiety affected many people – Del Col's essay on the Inquisition makes this apparent – and research into works of art made for private devotion might reveal more on this. For instance, Domenico Capriolo's *Nativity* of 1524 (pp.146–48; Fig.73) contains many iconographical elements (the harrow on which the Christ Child's cot rests, the well, the lit fire in the chimney being the most obvious), that may have been included for the specific devotional needs of the patron. Naturally, nothing suggests that these were heretical. There is no mention of Lorenzo Lotto in the exhibition, the name that immediately comes to mind in the context of religious disquiet. The decision to omit him was courageous, because it allowed one to concentrate on Conegliano and its environs. However, he is alluded to in the catalogue. He had direct

contact, of a professional nature, with Francesco Beccaruzzi, whose *Assumption of the Virgin* in the cathedral of Valdobbadiene (*in situ*; pp.198–200) Lotto judged favourably in 1544; but he also had indirect contact with Elisabetta Perucolo, sister of the wretched Riccardo mentioned above, who was associated with one of Lotto's patrons, Liberale Pinadello. Such details lead to a more profound understanding of the situation in Conegliano during the sixteenth century, and provides a counterbalance to the rigidly conformist orthodoxy of works destined for public places.

<sup>1</sup> Catalogue: *Un Cinquecento inquieto. Da Cima da Conegliano al rogo di Riccardo Perucolo*. Edited by Giandomenico Romanelli and Giorgio Fossaluzza, with essays by Giandomenico Romanelli, Lionello Puppi, Andrea del Col, Pier Angelo Passalunghi, Tiziana Plebani and Giorgio Fossaluzza. 240 pp. incl. 110 col. + 4 b. & w. ills. (Marsilio Editori, Venice, 2014), €34. ISBN 978-88-317-1786-1.

<sup>2</sup> M. Firpo: *Lorenzo Lotto: Artisti, gioiellieri, eretici*, Rome 2001, pp.312–14.

## Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino

Florence

by ROBERT B. SIMON

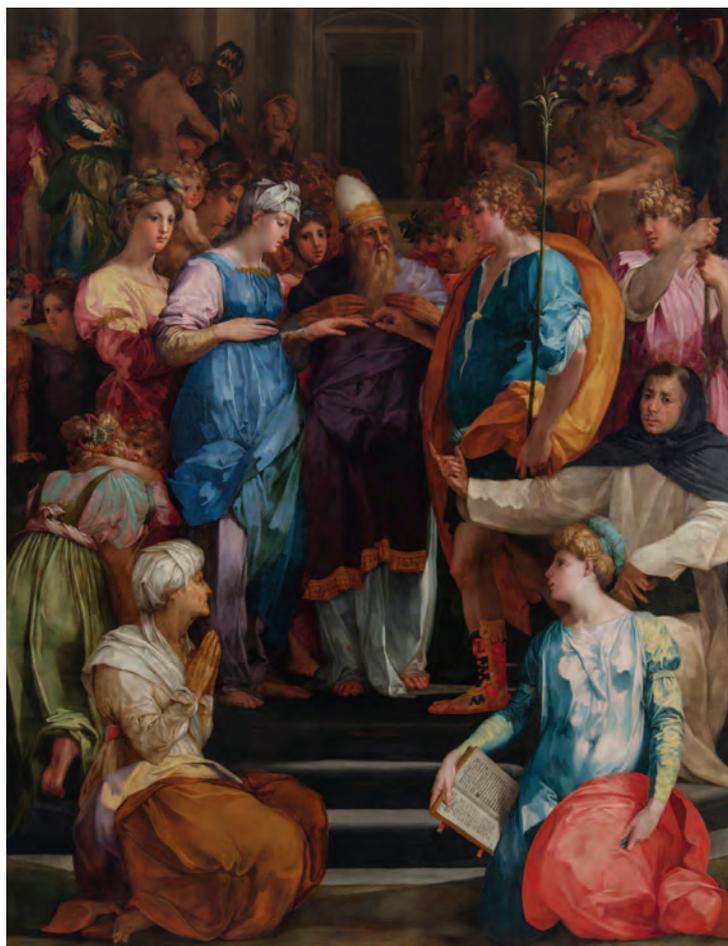
PONTORMO AND ROSSO FIORENTINO are the subjects of a magnificent exhibition at the **Palazzo Strozzi, Florence** (to 20th July). While the treatment of the two artists together may seem somewhat contrived – and it is unclear whether the marriage was one of desire, convenience or necessity – the dual presentation functions to a large degree as parallel monographic exhibitions of these two brilliant painters of the Florentine cinquecento. The title *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino: Diverging Paths of Mannerism* is curious, since the exhibition's curators, Antonio Natali and Carlo Falciani, take great pains to disavow the use of the term *Mannerism* as anything other than a chronological convenience. They sensibly prefer the Italian subtitle (*Divergenti vie della*

'maniera'), where *maniera* signifies simply 'style'. In that regard there can be little argument with the essential construct of the exhibition, which views the two artists as fraternal twins – they were in fact born but eleven weeks apart in 1494 – formed under the artistic parentage of Andrea del Sarto. Less assured is whether they can be said to diverge, as opposed to being two very different artists from the beginning, each of whom followed his own personal path with little regard for the other.

The exhibition opens with the dramatic presentation of three of the frescos from the Chiostro dei Voti of SS. Annunziata in Florence (cat. nos.I.1.1–3). Andrea del Sarto's *Journey of the Magi* of 1511 is flanked by Rosso's *Assumption of the Virgin* and Pontormo's *Visitation*, these last two painted following a probable trip to Rome in the company of their master. The frescos have been newly conserved, are hung at a congenial height, and sympathetically lit – a triumph of presentation repeated with many of the paintings in the exhibition that will leave visitors understandably believing that they will never again see them under such ideal conditions. Twenty-one works were specially conserved for the exhibition through the co-ordinated efforts of owning institutions, foundations and donors.

The exhibition is handsomely installed across ten rooms on the *piano nobile* of the palace, with works grouped by type within a broadly chronological scheme. Paintings by one artist are generally shown together, often contrasted with the other's across a room, although some stimulating direct juxtapositions are made. One impressive wall features Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna of the harpies*, though looking slightly naked without its Baroque frame, flanked by Rosso's Spedalino altarpiece from the Uffizi and Pontormo's Pucci altarpiece from S. Michele Visdomini (nos.II.1–3). The three like-sized works were all painted within a two-year period (1517–18) and reveal among them not only a dramatic range of expression, but a sense of the creative imperative of the moment, manifested in these dynamically disparate explorations of the *sacra conversazione* theme. Fra Bartolomeo's earlier, more traditional Cambi altarpiece of c.1509 (no.I.1.4) can be seen with them through the adjacent doorway, a clever installation strategy.

While the divergence of Pontormo's and Rosso's styles is the organising theme of the exhibition, the characterisation (in wall texts and catalogue) of wholly diverse, if not opposing ideological and artistic concerns, philosophical and religious beliefs and patterns of patronage between the two painters seems often hyperbolic. The exhibition concept also inevitably leads the visitor to compare the two artists in terms of quality and personal preference – which really should not be the point of such an undertaking. But these are issues easily disregarded in the face of the works themselves – an intelligently chosen selection, comprehensive in its representation of both painters' careers. Inevitably, there are paintings that one hoped to see which could or would not be lent,



74. *Marriage of the Virgin* (the Ginori altarpiece), by Rosso Fiorentino. 1523. Panel, 325 by 247 cm. (S. Lorenzo, Florence; exh. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence).



75. *Visitation*, by Jacopo Pontormo. c.1528–29. Panel, 202 by 156 cm. (S. Michele Arcangelo, Carmignano; exh. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence).

but the loans to the exhibition are significant, whether relatively local or exotic in origin.

Of the Rosso loans most extraordinary are three altarpieces: the S. Lorenzo *Marriage of the Virgin*, cleaned for the exhibition (no.VI.2.1; Fig.74), the *Deposition* from Sansepolcro (no.VIII.1) and the Louvre's *Pietà* (no.IX.1). While in date spanning the artist's mature career, each is consistently powerful, brutal, even disturbing in its intensity, yet graced with passages of phenomenal finesse and elegance. (They also justify Vasari's quip that Rosso was so full of invention that he never left any part of the background blank.) Rosso's *Death of Cleopatra* from Braunschweig (no.VII.3), a poetic and sensual anomaly for the artist, also recently conserved, and the *Bacchus, Venus and Cupid* from the palace of Luxembourg (no.IX.2) are welcome visitors from afar.

The Pontormo loans include the *Madonna and Child*, once the altar frontal in the Capponi Chapel in S. Felicita, Florence (no.VII.1), the haunting unfinished *St Jerome* from Hanover (no.VIII.6), the dynamic standing saints from the artist's birthplace, Pontorme (no.III.3.a–b), and the Corsini *Madonna and Child with St John the Baptist* (no.VI.1.1). Unquestionably, the highlight, both for specialists and casual viewers, is the *Visitation* from Carmignano (no.VIII.3; Fig.75). That so celebrated a painting seems a revelation is due not only to the practical

impediments of seeing it in its usual home, but to the success of the restoration that preceded the exhibition. While some background details are newly uncovered (a figure in a window, a donkey's head peeking around a corner), these seem minor curiosities compared to the dramatic changes observable in the volumes of the figures, the spatial relationships among them, the broadening and diversity of the palette and the intensity of the expressions of the protagonists. This was always a great painting, but it seems greater now.

Portraits by both artists are rewardingly explored. Those by Rosso – from London, Washington, Naples and Liverpool – form a compelling and integral group demonstrating the artist's evocation of personality through pose, posture and the exploration of momentary engagement with the viewer. The turbulent 'inner weather' of Pontormo's subjects is seen in a choice selection that includes the remarkable *Portrait of a gentleman with a book* (no.IV.1.6; Fig.76).

Two galleries provide balanced overviews of the artists' activities as draughtsmen (no small feat considering the paucity of surviving drawings by Rosso). The dozen sheets by each are superbly chosen to reflect disparate media, purpose and relationship both to works represented in the exhibition and others absent or lost. The exhibition is enriched by prints after Rosso's designs and

tapestries based on cartoons by both, as well as by Guillaume de Marcillat's brilliant stained-glass window (no.VII.2) for the Capponi Chapel (there replaced by a copy).

The catalogue, published both in English and Italian editions, contains worthy essays and detailed catalogue entries by the exhibition's curators and other contributing scholars.<sup>1</sup> Sadly, the authors who have written in Italian are often ill-served by English translations that range from the pedantically literal, to the misguided, to the incomprehensible, to the comical. Many passages demand that one revert to the Italian edition, even if one's Italian is limited. The illustrations, reflecting the current state of condition, are uniformly excellent and include related works not included in the exhibition.

Like the 2010 Bronzino exhibition held at the same venue and organised by the same team,<sup>2</sup> *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino* is best savoured for its remarkable opportunities to study well-known works under ideal circumstances and to become acquainted with unfamiliar ones, including recent attributions. Although connections and observations are to be made throughout the exhibition, these two great artists remain distinct and distant. But they are kindred in their emotional appeal to the viewer, whether it is expressed through Rosso's insistent staccato or Pontormo's ethereal harmonies.



76. *Portrait of a gentleman with a book*, by Jacopo Pontormo. 1541–42. Panel, 88.2 by 71.5 cm. (Private collection; exh. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence).

Some comments on individual works follow:

- no.I.1.1. *Journey of the Magi* (SS. Annunziata, Florence), by Andrea del Sarto. The attribution to the young Rosso of the purple-robed standing figure at the left is convincing, but surely the two figures at the lower right of the scene are by the same hand. These compare well to the Apostles in Rosso's adjacent *Assumption of the Virgin* (no.I.1.2).
- no.IV.1.1. *Portrait of a woman with a basket of spindles* (Uffizi, Florence). The attribution of this much-discussed work remains unresolved, but with its skewed eyes and imperfectly drawn elements, its presentation here as Andrea del Sarto seems the least tenable.
- nos.IV.2.2. *Portrait of a man* (Uffizi, Florence), and IV.2.3 *Portrait of a man holding a letter* (private collection). These remain speculative attributions, but are catalogued as early works by Rosso without qualification. The argument for the attribution of each depends on the other, and the stated analogies to the Apostle heads in the *Annunziata Assumption*, are not convincing. These seem spiritually foreign to Rosso.
- no.VI.2.2. *Moses defending the daughters of Jethro* (Uffizi, Florence). Seen in the context of the exhibition, the consideration of this most celebrated work as a workshop copy after a lost original by Rosso seems entirely justified.
- no.IX.2. *Bachus, Venus and Cupid*. (Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg). While there are good reasons for accepting this work as Rosso's lost painting from the east wall of the gallery at Fontainebleau, its infelicities and awkwardnesses cannot be explained by its compromised condition alone. While the canvas support might imply a copy (Vasari called the original a *tavola*), there remain passages of considerable quality which suggest the painting is part autograph.

<sup>1</sup> Catalogue: *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino: Diverging Paths of Mannerism*. Edited by Carlo Falciani and Antonio Natali, with essays by Claudia Conforti, Philippe Costamagna, Elizabeth Cropper, Carlo Falciani, Massimo Firpo, Tommaso Mozziati, Antonio Natali, Alessandro Nova and Massimiliano Rossi. 320 pp. incl. 203 col. + 23 b. & w. ill. (Mandragora, Florence, 2014), €39.90. ISBN 978-88-7461-216-8 (English edition). *Pontormo e Rosso Fiorentino: Divergenti vie della 'maniera'*. ISBN 978-88-7461-215-4 (Italian edition).

<sup>2</sup> Reviewed by the present author in this Magazine, 153 (2011), pp.59–61.

## Gauguin

New York

by RICHARD BRETTELL

THE EXHIBITION *Gauguin: Metamorphoses* at the **Museum of Modern Art, New York** (closed 8th June), was among the most important ever mounted to focus on that artist's contribution to printmaking. Although it included paintings, drawings, ceramics and wooden sculpture, it was dominated by his lithographs, woodcuts and variously defined 'mono-prints'. It assembled impressive groups of his three print cycles – the 'Volpini Suite' of 1889, the 'Noa Noa' woodcuts of 1893–94 and the 'Vollard Suite' of 1898–99. Not only were the various prints from these three cycles presented in varying states and types of impressions, but the exhibition also included many of the artist's independent prints. To these were added well-selected groups of his monoprints with matrixes in watercolour, pastel or gouache, as well as a large selection of Gauguin's last group of prints, usually called 'printed drawings', but here termed, with all the linguistic finesse of a conservation scientist, 'oil transfer drawings'. Even with no works in oil, wood or ceramic, this would have been an impressive exhibition. It places him in the company



77. *Te faruru (Here we make love)*, from the suite *Noa Noa (Fragrant scent)*, by Paul Gauguin. State IV/VI, 1893–94. Woodcut with hand additions, 35.9 by 20.5 cm. (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown MA; exh. Museum of Modern Art, New York).

of Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya, Blake, Degas, Whistler, Munch and Picasso – all artists whose contributions to various print mediums rival or even surpass their paintings in art-historical importance.

Many of the works in the exhibition were also shown in a similar manner in the 1988–89 monographic exhibition *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, in which, for the first time, sequences of Gauguin's dizzyingly original impressions were shown together.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in the MoMA exhibition, the sheer visual dominance of the prints over paintings created ideal conditions for assessing the artist's contribution to the graphic arts.

The exhibition began in 1889 with a wall of the 'Volpini Suite' on brilliant yellow paper. These prints were first available to viewers of the Synthetist group exhibition held in the Café Volpini just outside the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, but were apparently kept in a portfolio rather than framed and installed on the wall. They were Gauguin's first lithographs and are evidence of such a commanding proficiency of the medium that some writers have suggested that he received considerable assistance from others in their creation and printing. Emile Bernard's name is often mentioned in this connection, because he had already tried his hand at lithography, but, in the end, Gauguin's prints show an even greater technical proficiency than Bernard's, also shown in the 1889 exhibition.

The 'Volpini Suite' at MoMA belongs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and, although the yellow paper on which the zinc plates were printed (not by Gauguin, but by a professional printer) is almost pristine in its brilliance, the entire set was printed on sheets of paper that were cut down from the full size, lessening the sheer visual impact of the yellow that one sees in the sets on full sheets such as those in the Art Institute of Chicago or the Clark Art Institute, Williamstown MA. Sadly, these were, for diverse reasons, unavailable for the MoMA exhibition, meaning that the sheer visual *éclat* of the opening wall was less than it could have been.

The 'Volpini Suite' did not, however, appear alone, and a case positioned nearby contained three of the artist's most brilliant ceramic vessels from 1886–88. Two of these have a nude female figure that derives from a painting of 1887 now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires, which, in turn, reappears in two of the 1889 lithographs from the series. This alerts us to the exhibition's title, *Gauguin: Metamorphoses*, in which motifs and aspects of compositions migrate from one medium to another, forming systems of image transformation that are essentially unprecedented in the history of art. The third ceramic, a brilliantly glazed and gilded cylinder vase from the Royal Museums in Brussels, features two coiffed Breton figures similar to, but not the same as figures in two of the prints in the 'Volpini Suite'.

The exhibition's catalogue also includes two other ceramics and a painting, *Breton girls dancing* (1888; National Gallery of Art,