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"MADONNA AND SAVIOUR"

Story Of A Fine Painting



"And on observing the star their joy was boundless. Entering the house they saw the little child with His mother, Mary, and prostrating themselves they worshipped Him."

Matt. 2:10-11

Indeed, this fine painting depicts allegorically, what the three wise men would have seen upon "Following Yonder Star." The painting is entitled, "Madonna and Saviour" and is currently in the possession of Michael A. Charles. Mr. Charles is the owner of Michelangelo's Antique and Fine Art Gallery on the Public Square in Holley, N.Y.

The painting was at one time owned by Sam Grierson of Edinboro, Scotland. His family had acquired it in the early 17th Century, apparently while on one of their visits to the Continent. Around 1800, Mr. Grierson left Scotland and settled in Brooklyn, N.Y. bringing the painting with him at that time. Passed down through his descendants, it was eventually acquired by Dolly Grierson Signor, wife of Isaac Signor (1842-1935), one time Orleans County Judge. The Signors had three children: Charles who also later became a county judge and two daughters, Dorothy who married Francis H. Blake, Sr. and Beatrice, who married Lynn M. Burrows, all of Albion. Bea, as she was known, inherited the "Madonna and Saviour" and had it hanging in her home for many years. When she died, the painting was passed on to her nephew and his wife Mr. and Mrs. Francis H. Blake, Jr.

In 1990 Mr. Charles bought the painting from Mrs. Blake and had it completely cleaned and restored by the world famous conservator, Don Manfredi, formerly of East Bloomfield, N.Y. From tests of the canvas and stretcher, as well as detailed analysis of the pigments, Mr. Manfredi was able to authenticate the age of the painting as circa 1640. The Detroit Institute of Fine Arts had in 1938, authenticated the painting as that of the school of Vandyke. This was again confirmed by Christies (a famous auction house) of New York in 1991.

Five other especially good copies of this vintage painting also exist: One in the Walters Gallery in Baltimore, one in the Dulwich Gallery in London, one in Munich, one in Cambridge and this one, now in Holley, N.Y.

Mr. Charles states: "I enjoy the painting, and have contacted the other owners. We compare notes, and it is agreed that my painting has the best rendition of the Saviour's face, and the Madonna's hand and expression. Christies would

like to put the painting into one of their auctions, but I've resisted temptation."

Since our rendition here is in black and white, I will describe the colors. Mary is dressed in red denoting love while the swaddling cloth is white to suggest purity and light. The drapery in the foreground is blue to emit the idea of truth. Red and blue are traditionally Mary's colors as she is portrayed in religious art. We note also in the painting in the upper right corner, a base to a column. Obviously, Mary is looking heavenward in a spirit of adoration while the infant looks out of the painting, perhaps at the three wise men.

The painting is spoken of as being in the School of Vandyke. That means it was not done by the famous Flemish artist Sir Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641) but perhaps by a student or contemporary in his style. Van Dyck was sought after by the royalty, aristocracy, and upper middle class of Flanders, Italy, and especially England. Van Dyck also painted religious and mythological pictures, and was a fine engraver and etcher.

Van Dyck's style of portrait painting typically emphasized the elegance and wealth of his subjects. He often slightly exaggerated the height of the figure, and lengthened the outline of the hands to suggest greater refinement and stature. Many of Van Dyck's figures are dressed in luxurious clothing painted in rich color. The settings characteristically include elegant furniture, draped tapestries, imported rugs, and large architectural elements such as columns. He also used landscape as background for his portraits.

Van Dyck was born in Antwerp, in what is now Belgium. He showed great talent as a boy and had his own studio and pupils at the age of about 16. From about 1618 to 1620, he worked with the famous Antwerp painter Peter Paul Rubens. Van Dyck visited England briefly in 1620, and lived in Italy from 1621 to about 1627. Van Dyck's portraits of the nobles of Genoa and their children rank among his finest works. His Italian paintings reflect the influence of the warm colors and loose brushwork of the Venetian Renaissance painter Titian.

After leaving Italy, Van Dyck returned to Antwerp. He went to England in 1632, where King Charles I made him court painter. Van Dyck painted about 350 portraits while in England, including about 40 of the king.

Since this painting was owned for many years by an old Albion family, Mr. Charles would like at some point, to give the public a chance to see this fine painting. We are now tentatively looking to have the Madonna and Saviour on display during the Albion Strawberry Festival. Notification of dates, place and time will be forthcoming.