



The Yarnwinder Madonna of Leonardo da Vinci: The Three Versions for his First French Commission (Italian and English Edition)

Carlo Pedretti, Margherita Melani

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In April of 1501 Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), now in his early fifties, was in Florence, working on a “small painting”, a Madonna and Child intent on yarn-winding, destined for Florimond Robertet, favourite of Louis XII, the king of France. This Information is gleaned from a letter by Fra Pietro da Novellara to Isabella d’Este, dated 14 April 1501. When the letter was published in 1869, it did little other than to add yet another entry to the list of Leonardo’s lost works: the Madonna of the Yarnwinder. It was only in the 20th century that the subject described in the letter was recognized for what it was in numerous copies, variations and school replicas. In this richly illustrated volume of prestigious editorial format, Carlo Pedretti and Margherita Melani reconstruct the genesis of the theme of the Madonna of the Yarnwinder and the artistic fortune of the subject, conceived and painted by Leonardo and subsequently reposed by both his pupils and his followers. Three versions are attributed to Leonardo and his inner circle: the Reford Madonna, the Buccleuch Madonna and the Crespi Madonna. To all intents and purposes, these can be considered as three versions of his first French commission. The three variations on the theme of the Madonna of the Yarnwinder are closely investigated by the authors through Leonardo’s drawings, literary and historical sources. Their study also clarifies the role and importance of the customer, Florimond Robertet, and the origin of the subject which has merited a fair number of copies. The volume concludes with details of the copies and variants, testimony not only to the success of the Madonna of the Yarnwinder but also the indisputable historical and artistic value of this painting by Leonardo. Bilingual edition: Italian and English text.

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