



LONGARI arte MILANO

Early Italian and European Works of Art



FEDERICA SIDDI

A RARE AND PRECIOUS 14TH CENTURY
LOMBARD MADONNA

MAESTRO DELLA MADONNA LIGNEA

DELLA PINACOTECA DI COMO

Madonna and Child, 1300-1310

Carved wood poplar

cm 120 × 60 × 45



A RARE AND PRECIOUS 14th CENTURY LOMBARD MADONNA

The *Madonna and Child* presented here is a graceful and harmonious wooden sculpture. On the basis of meaningful stylistic evidence, it can be connected to other wooden artworks produced in Lombardy at the beginning of the 14th century.

The Virgin Mary is seated on a throne, thus embracing the common iconographical type of Mary as *Sedes Sapientiae*. She is wearing a refined dress, that is close-fitting under her breasts, according to early 14th century fashion.

A long mantle, fixed on her head by a crown, covers her shoulders. The artist carved the wood in depth, by working with very incisive strokes. Such method creates a dense system of folds, that originates triangular shapes particularly evident on the knees and at both sides of the figure. Jesus Christ is seated on his Mother's left leg, which is slightly raised on a little base. The Child is blessing with his right hand, while handling a book with the left one. The sculpture was recently subject to a conservation treatment conducted by Luca Quartana and Antonella Ortelli in Milan.

The Longari *Madonna* shall be connected to the work of the clever Lombard carver known as Maestro della Madonna lignea della Pinacoteca di Como after a statue of the Virgin Mary housed at the Museo Civico of Como [fig. 1]. Both the general composition as well as specific stylistic patterns (such as the drapery and the physiognomy of the figures), relate our statue to the one in Como. In particular, they share a similar treatment of the facial features of the Virgin Mary, who in both works shows a perfectly oval face and delicate features, ample forehead with round superciliary arch, pointed nose, tiny mouth, and protruding chin. The head of hair, with twisted curls, is another detail that the statues have in common. Compared to the Como carving, however, the Longari *Madonna* shows a more pronounced sense of the volume and shape. In all likelihood, it is thus a slightly later work.

Daniele Pescarmona was the first to remark the importance of the wooden *Madonna* of the the Como Pinacoteca. In addition, he also identified a group of sculptures which belong to the same *atelier*. This is one of the most meaningful acquisitions in recent literature, as it opened the door to the rediscovery of wood sculpture production in Lombardy under the Visconti (1277-1447). Before that, such topic had indeed been only scarcely explored because of the lack of material dating back to this period.

The Maestro della Madonna lignea della Pinacoteca di Como's catalogue has been reconstructed by scholars and is now substantial. In addition to the *Madonna* of Como and the Longari one, it consists of a *Virgin Mary* on display at the Vatican Museums from 1978 [Fig. 2], a *Madonna* in the Church of S. Agata in Moltrasio (Como) from 2002 [Fig. 3], and the one that was exhibited in 1967 at the Galleria "Il Tarlo" in Cortina d'Ampezzo - which is however slightly different in terms of general composition (the Virgin Mary is standing, rather than seated), and might belong to another group. With the exception of the latter, all these sculptures belong to a typological tradition that went back to Northern European, Rheno-Mosan prototypes. This tradition had a great success and was mediated by ivories and goldsmithery, as well as by itinerant artists who worked all across Europe.

A possible stylistic and chronological term of comparison for these *Madonne* can be found in the marble statues that decorate the main portal in the façade of the Crema Cathedral. They feature the *Madonna and Child with Saints John the Baptist and Pantaleon* [Fig. 4]. As scholars have recently pointed out, these sculptures can be dated 1300-1310. Therefore, they slightly predate works created by one of the main protagonists of 14th century Lombard sculpture, the so-called Maestro della Loggia degli Osii, after the epochal marble statues he created in the 1320s for the Loggia degli Osii in Milan. Although not directly connected to the Longari *Madonna*, nor to the Vatican and Moltrasio ones, the formidable style of this artist inspired contemporary wooden production. It thus provides a contextual matrix that can be useful for the comprehension of our sculpture as well. This is demonstrated by some works that -although related to the Como statue- are distinguished by a more mature language. They thus reveal the development of the original prototype in later years. I am here thinking of the *Madonna* in the church of San Martino in Treviglio (Bergamo), the one in Santa Maria a Petroio in Vinci (Florence), where in all likelihood it arrived *ab antiquo*, and the *Madonna* in the Sacro Monte of Varese, the object of an intense and long-standing devotion.

In the bare scenario of Gothic wooden sculpture from Lombardy, the solemn and majestic language of the Longari *Madonna* thus constitutes an evidence of the first order. Indeed, it is a rare and precious testimony of the work produced by one of the leading workshop active in Lombardy under the Visconti.

Bibliography

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Fig. 1 Federica Siddi

Fig. 2 Musei Vaticani (© Governatorato dello S.C.V. - Direzione dei Musei)

Fig. 3 Diocesi di Como – Ufficio Beni Culturali

Fig. 4 Federica Siddi

Fig. pp. 1-2-5-8 Francesco Vitali

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Fig. 1 - Maestro della Madonna lignea della Pinacoteca di Como
Madonna and Child, 1300-1310
Como, Pinacoteca Civica.

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Fig. 2 - Maestro della Madonna lignea della Pinacoteca di Como
Madonna and Child, 1300-1310
Musei Vaticani (© Governatorato dello S.C.V. - Direzione dei Musei)



Fig. 3 - Maestro della Madonna lignea della Pinacoteca di Como
Madonna and Child, 1300-1310
Moltrasio (Como) Chiesa di Sant'Agata



Fig. 4 - Scultore lombardo
Madonna and Child between Saint John Baptist and Saint Pantaleone, 1300-1310
Crema, Cathedral



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