

# Andrea del Sarto

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# Andrea del Sarto

(1486-1530)



## Contents

### *The Highlights*

Noli me tangere (1510)  
Frescoes of 'Life and Miracles of Filippo Benizzi' (1509-1514)  
Portrait of the Artist's Wife (1514)  
Madonna and Child with Saint John (c. 1515)  
Madonna of the Harpies (1517)  
The Disputation on the Trinity (1517)  
Portrait of a Young Man (1518)  
Julius Caesar Receives Tribute (c. 1520)  
Scenes from 'The Life of Saint John the Baptist' (1515-26)  
Panciaticchi Assumption (1523)  
Pietà with Saints (1524)  
Saint John the Baptist as a Boy (c. 1525)  
The Last Supper (1527)  
Self Portrait (1528)  
Holy Family (Medici) (1529)  
Portrait of a Man (c. 1529)  
The Sacrifice of Isaac (c. 1529)

### *The Paintings*

The Complete Paintings  
Alphabetical List of Paintings

### *The Drawings*

Selected Drawings

### *The Biographies*

Life of Andrea del Sarto (1568) by Giorgio Vasari  
Andrea d'Agnolo (1881) by Leader Scott  
Andrea del Sarto (1913) by Gaston Sortais

*The Delphi Classics Catalogue*

# A N D R E A D E L S A R T O

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*Masters of Art Series*

**Andrea del Sarto**



*By Delphi Classics, 2025*

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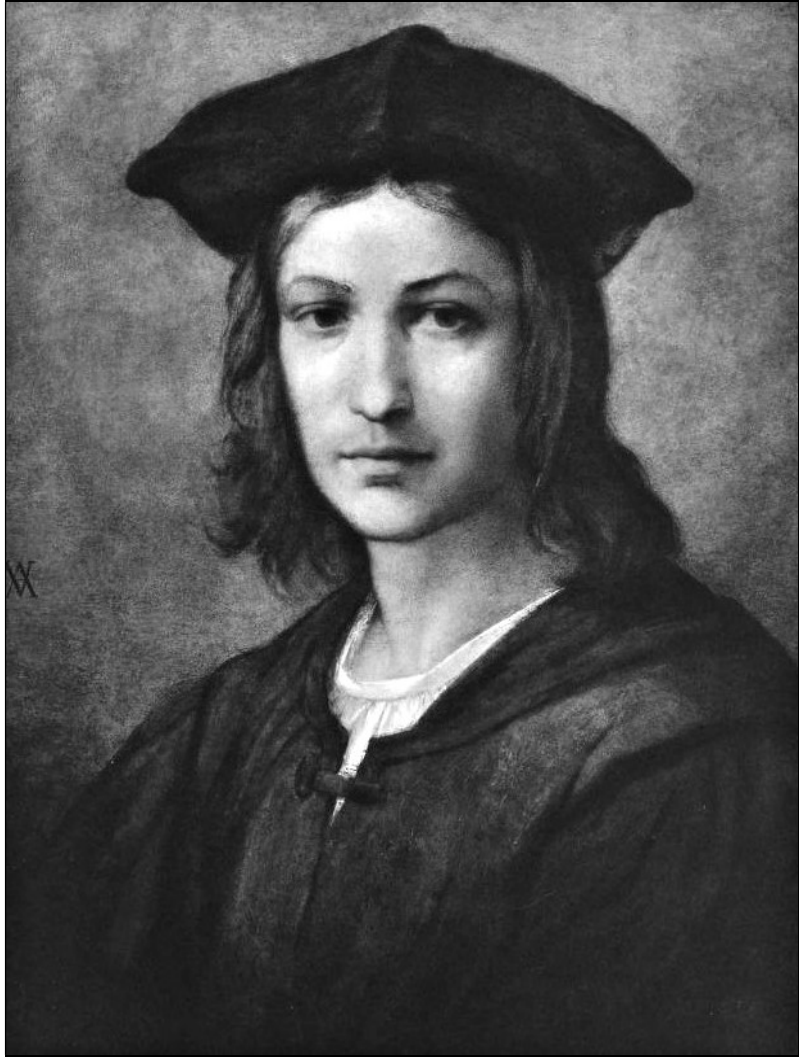
## The Highlights



*View of Florence by Hartmann Schedel, published in 1493, a few years after Andrea's birth in the city*



*Florence, today*



*Seventeenth century depiction of Andrea*

## The Highlights



In this section, a sample of Andrea del Sarto's most celebrated works is provided, with concise introductions, special 'detail' reproductions and additional biographical images.

## Noli me tangere (1510)



One of the foremost painters of the Italian High Renaissance, Andrea del Sarto produced works of exquisite craftsmanship, which were instrumental in the development of Florentine Mannerism. He was born in Florence on 16 July 1486 and his father was a tailor (hence his nickname “del Sarto” — tailor). Few details regarding his early life have survived. He was notably short in stature and known to his friends as Andreino. With two brief exceptions, his working life was spent in his native town, where he was initially apprenticed to a goldsmith and then a woodcarver and painter named Gian Barile, with whom he remained until 1498. According to his late biographer and former student Giorgio Vasari, Andrea was then apprenticed to Piero di Cosimo (1462-1522), a master essentially known for his early Renaissance style.

Eventually, Andrea and an older friend, Franciabigio, established a joint studio in a lodging in the Piazza del Grano. The first product of their partnership was likely a *Baptism of Christ* for the Florentine Compagnia dello Scalzo, which would serve as the beginning of a monochrome fresco series. By the time the partnership was dissolved, Andrea’s style had evolved a special interest in effects of colour and atmosphere. These early paintings capture a sophisticated informality and natural expression of emotion — a technique that would later inspire the Mannerist masters.

From the start of his career, Andrea was heavily influenced by Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci and Fra’ Bartolommeo. His style, rooted in the traditional fifteenth century approach of his master Piero di Cosimo, sought to combine Leonardo’s *sfumato* technique (e.g. allowing tones and colours to shade gradually into one another, producing softened outlines or hazy forms; the *Mona Lisa* smile being a famous example) with Raphael’s compositional harmony and vivid palette. Andrea was never a precocious artist and he would not start to produce independent work until c. 1506, at the age of twenty, certainly late by Renaissance standards. Almost immediately he began a long association with the church and convent of SS. Annunziata, for which he executed numerous frescoes over the years and where eventually he would be buried.

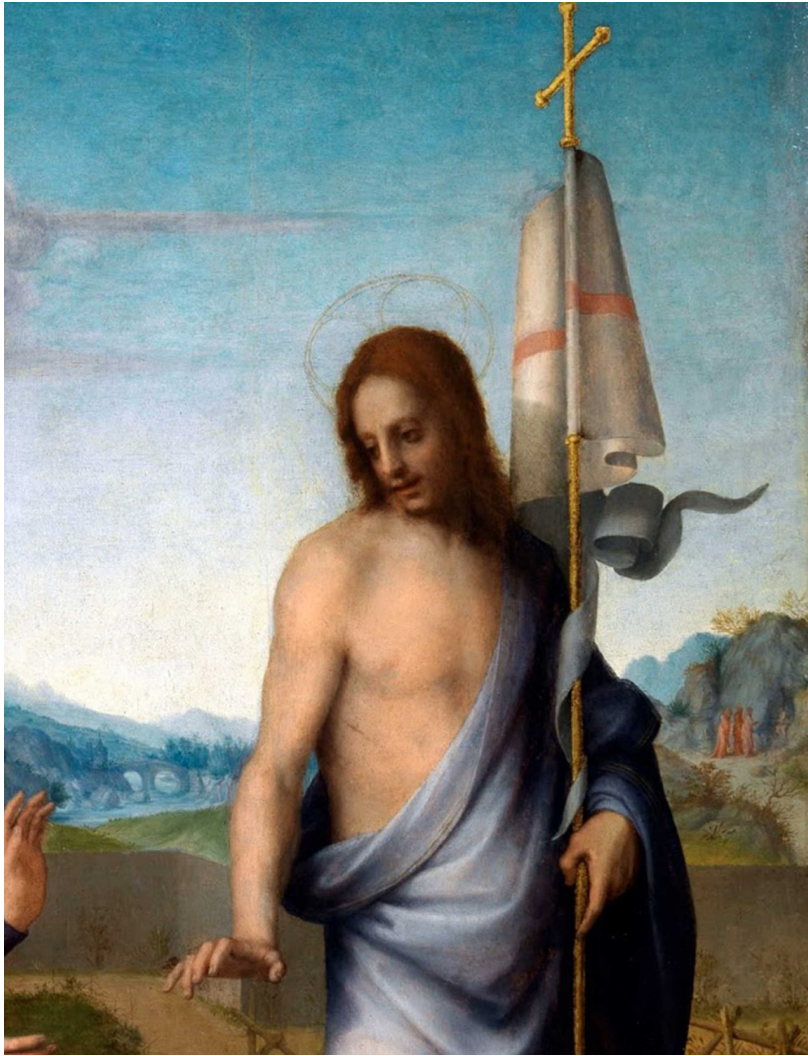
*Noli me tangere*, his first masterwork, was executed in c. 1510 and is based on a popular New Testament subject, when Jesus, after the Resurrection, tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him as he has not yet ascended to the Father (*John 20:17*). This story has enjoyed a continuous tradition in Christian art since Late Antiquity, portraying Mary’s initial mistaking of Christ for a gardener and her subsequent realisation and awe at his appearance. Held today in Florence’s Uffizi Gallery, this was the first painting Andrea produced for the Augustinian San Gallo church in Florence, as recorded in Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*. He later produced the *San Gallo Annunciation* and *The Disputation on the Trinity* for the same church.

The canvas reveals the influence of the school of San Marco, including the technique of Fra Bartolomeo and Mariotto Albertinelli. Andrea sets the scene in a walled garden with a monastic quality, replicated with great care. Note the regular hedges bordered by a trellis and espaliers of the surrounding fruit shrubs. A large palm on the left alludes to Christ’s martyrdom. Several small figures in the background hint at other episodes of the days following the Resurrection, such as the three Marys at the sepulchre and the Samaritan woman at the well.

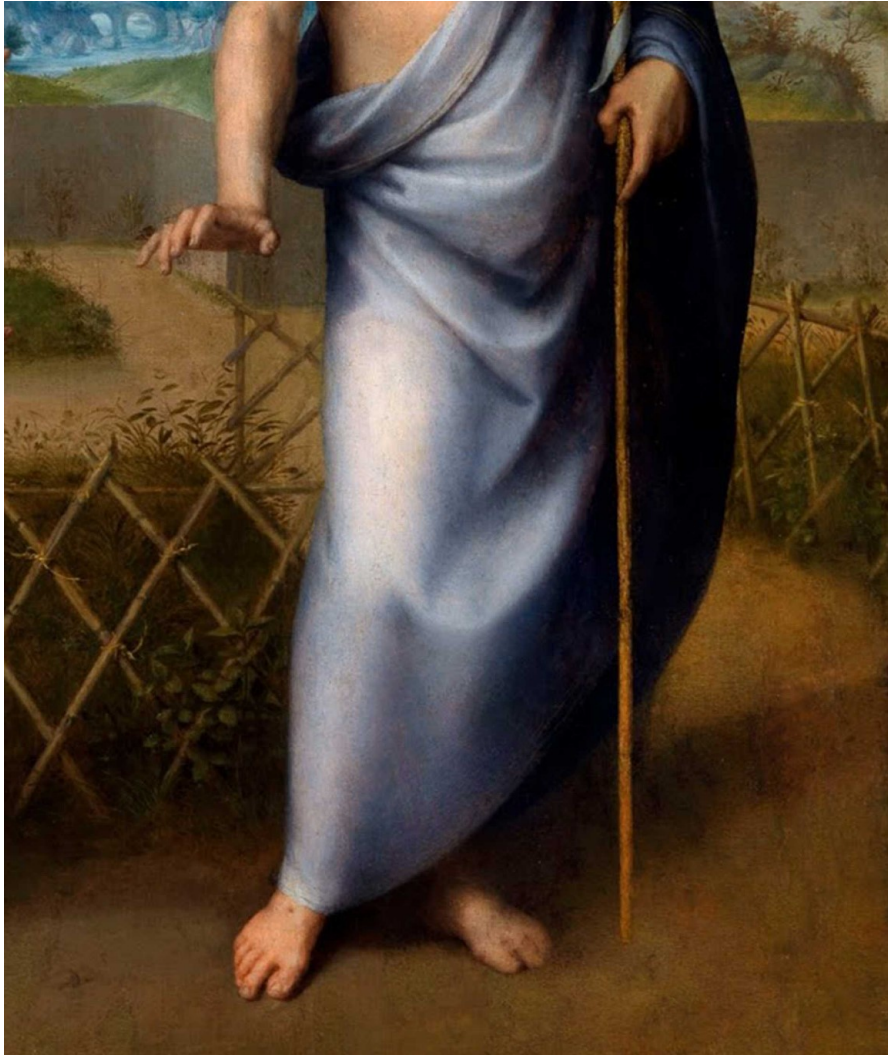
The principal figure of Mary Magdalene appears on the left in an engaging pose, half-kneeling, half-leaping forward to greet the newly arisen Christ, who bears a Crusader's banner. The iconography and traditional setting, with the horizon line near the centre and the soft and nuanced drawing, is largely derived from Piero di Cosimo. Both figures are represented in a monumental aspect, with fully rounded forms and vibrant tones, contrasting notably with the usual fifteenth-century Florentine mode. The uncertainty in connecting the near and the far aspect in the background reveals that this is, after all, an early work of a new master, still somewhat finding his way.

*Noli me tangere* was commissioned by Leonardo Morelli, as shown by a papal brief of 9 April 1532. During the siege of Florence the monastery's artworks were moved within the city walls to San Jacopo tra i Fossi. In 1531 the original church outside the walls was razed by Charles V's troops, but all its chapels were reconstructed at San Jacopo, with *Noli me tangere* being moved to the Morelli chapel. About a third of the painting was underwater during a flood in 1557. The original predella is lost, probably after being damaged by the water, and so was replaced by a new predella in the late sixteenth century. The replacement was later removed and is now exhibited in the Casa Vasari museum of Arezzo. In 1849, the church was suppressed and turned into a barracks, when the Morelli family took back the painting, on the condition that it would remain on public display. However, they did not meet this condition and in 1875 the Italian state took legal action to confiscate and display *Noli me tangere* at the Uffizi.

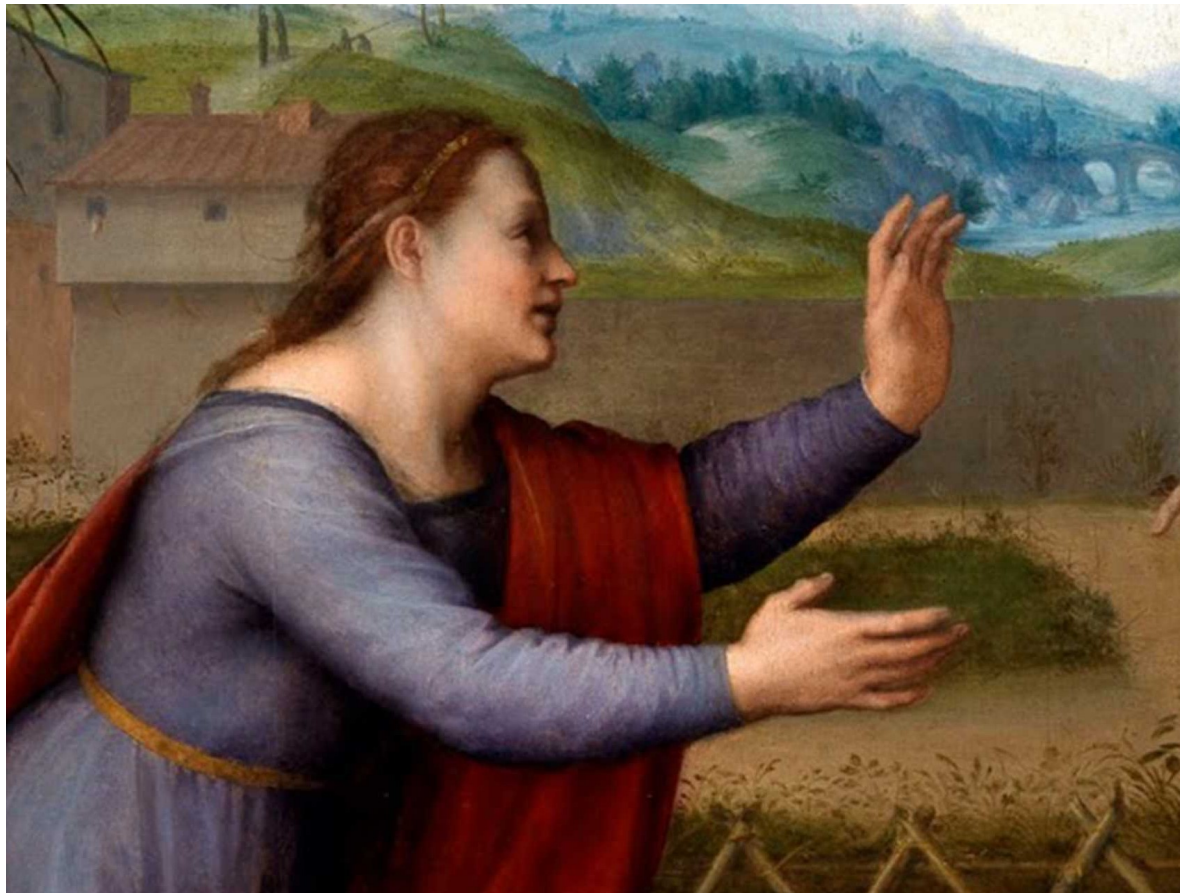




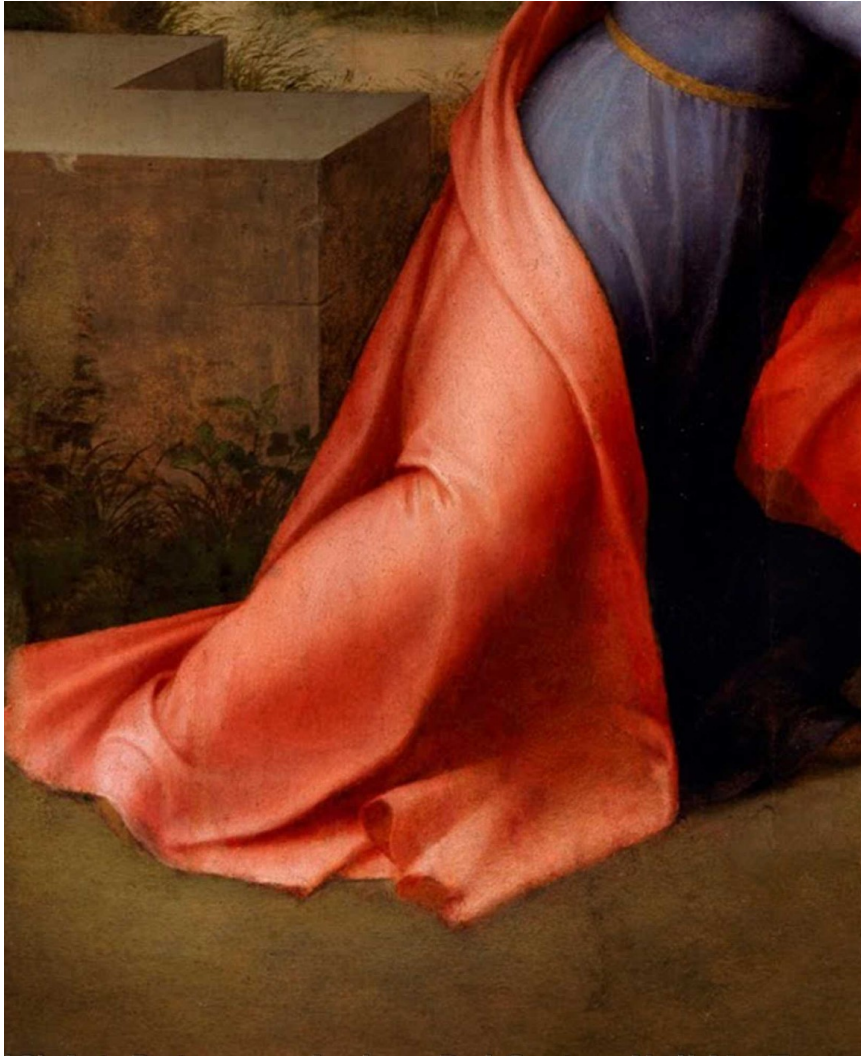
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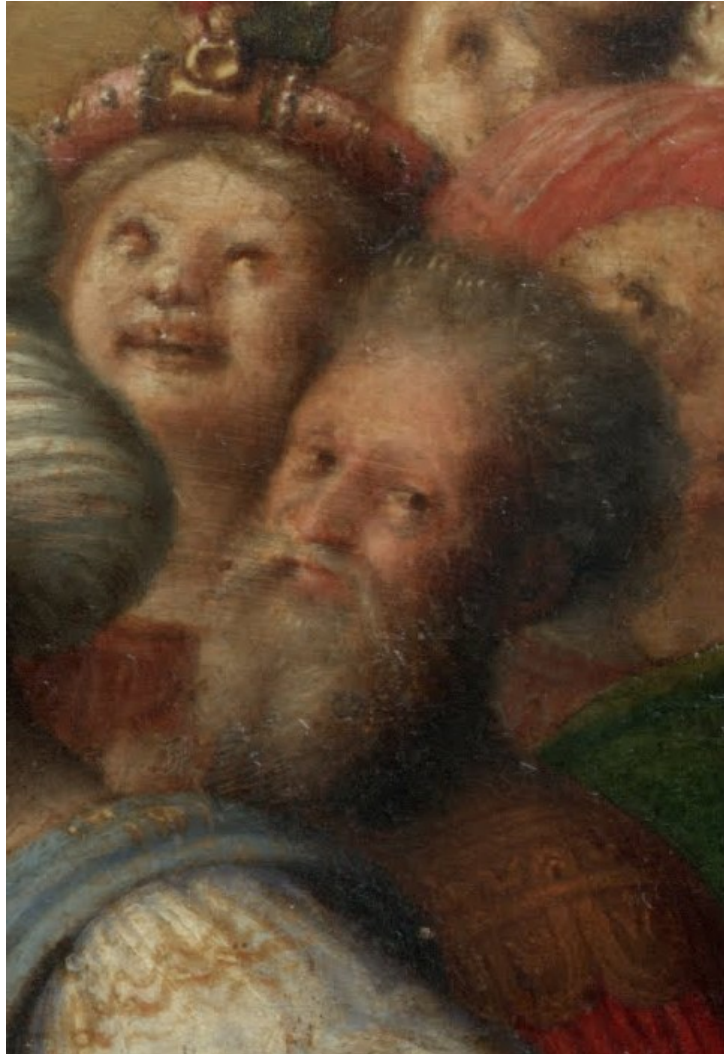
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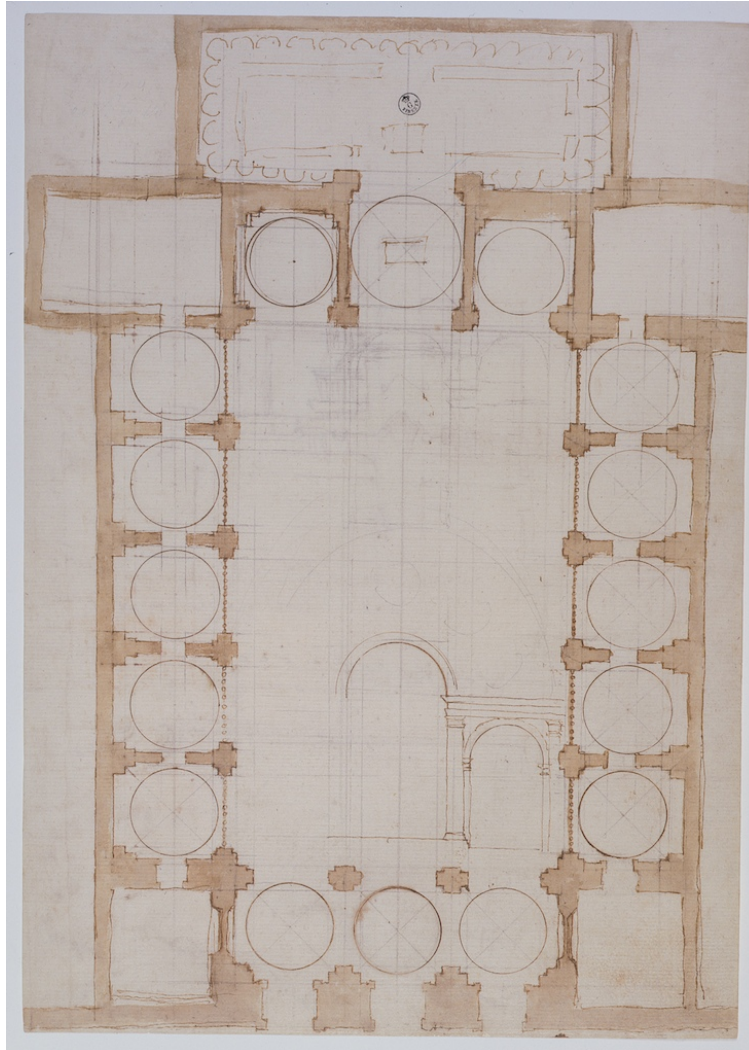
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*Presumed self portrait of Andrea's first master Piero di Lorenzo, at the right side of his painting  
'Perseus Freeing Andromeda'*



*Piero di Lorenzo's 'Visitation, with Saints Nicolas and Anthony Abbot', National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., c. 1490*



*A fifteenth century plan of the Church of San Gallo in Florence, which was built outside of the city walls and was later destroyed during the Siege of Florence, 1530*

## Frescoes of ‘Life and Miracles of Filippo Benizzi’ (1509-1514)



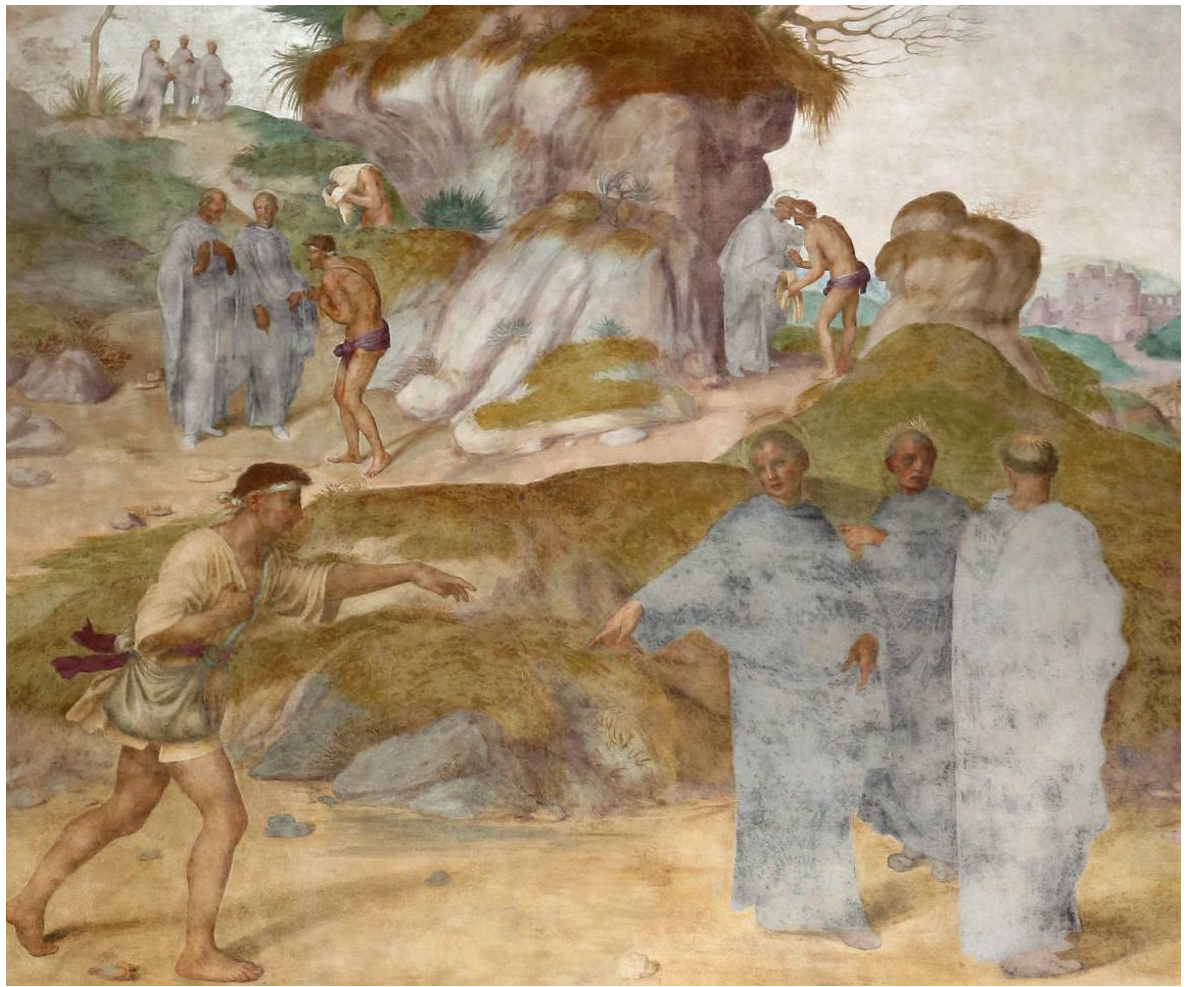
In 1509 Andrea, along with Franciabigio and Andrea Feltrini, was commissioned by the Servite Order to provide a cycle of frescoes for the Santissima Annunziata, Florence — the mother church of the Order (Servite friars lead a community life in the tradition of the mendicant orders). He completed seven frescoes in the forecourt (the *chiostro dei voti*) in front of the Servite church, five of which illustrated scenes from the *Life and Miracles of Filippo Benizi de Damiani*, a Servite saint that died in 1285 and was canonised in 1671. Filippo Benizi (1233-1285) was a general superior of the Servites, who is credited with reviving the order. Andrea executed these frescoes quickly, depicting: the saint healing a leper through the gift of his undertunic; the punishing of several blasphemers; and the restoring of a girl possessed by a devil. The two final frescoes of the series portray the healing of a child at the deathbed of Filippo Benizzi and the curing of sick adults and children through his relic garment held at the Florentine church. All five frescoes were completed before the close of 1510.

The original contract also required Andrea to paint five scenes of the life and miracles of Saint Sebastian, though he told the Servites he no longer wished to continue with the second cycle, most likely due to the low remuneration they were offering. The Servites convinced him to produce two more frescoes in the forecourt, yet concerning a different subject matter: a *Procession of the Magi* (containing a self portrait) finished in 1511 and a *Nativity of the Virgin* (1514), which combines the influence of Leonardo, Ghirlandaio and Fra Bartolomeo. All of these commissions were duly praised, earning for Andrea the sobriquet *Andrea senza errori* (Andrea without fault).

The scenes from the life of Saint Filippo Benizzi were Andrea’s first fresco commissions and reveal how he experimented with a variety of techniques. Two of the scenes were loosely arranged and recall the pictorial ideals of the preceding century, but in the *Liberation of the Young Woman Possessed by the Devil*, the *Miraculous Cure by the Relics* and the *Death of Saint Filippo Benizzi*, Andrea introduced rigidly organised and symmetrical compositions, showing his debt to Leonardo, while his handling of colour, light and shade reveals his admiration for Raphael. Still, the finest work he produced for this commission was arguably the last that he painted, the *Birth of the Virgin* (1514). In this remarkable fresco, which some art historians regard as the beginning of his artistic maturity, he avoids the severity of the earlier scenes, rendering a more flexible and subtly harmonious composition, epitomising the pictorial ideals of the High Renaissance.



*The Healing of the Leper*



*Detail*



*Liberation of the Young Woman Possessed by the Devil*



*Detail*



*Miraculous Cure by Relics of Filippo Benizzi*



*Detail*



*Saint Filippo Benizzi Punishing the Blasphemers*



*Detail*



*Death of Saint Filippo Benizzi and Resurrection of a Child*



*Detail*



*The Birth of the Virgin*



*Detail*



*The Basilica della Santissima Annunziata di Firenze*



*View of the Atrium, Santissima Annunziata*



*Statue of Saint Filippo Benizzi by Rinaldino di Francia, Santa Maria dei Servi, Padua*

## Portrait of the Artist's Wife (1514)



In c. 1517 Andrea married Lucrezia del Fede, a widow that he had, according to her testimony, “used as a model for several years”. She brought him property and a welcome dowry. Housed today in Madrid’s Museo del Prado, the following portrait of Lucrezia, executed several years before their marriage, is a noticeably personal and delicate portrayal of the artist’s future spouse. During this period of his career, Andrea’s use of a warm palette, long before the days of Mannerism, gave his paintings a sentimental grace. He liked to depict a single type of woman, namely the Lucrezia del Fede of this portrait, to whom almost all his female heads, from the Virgin to the Magdalen, would resemble. As Vasari put it, Andrea was so often inspired by Lucrezia’s features when depicting an ideal of beauty that “all the women he painted ended by looking like her.”

The half-length portrait is derived from several portraits of women painted by Raphael during his period in Florence between 1504 and 1508. Yet, Andrea’s portrait demonstrates a more intimate and homely impression than seen in the dignified portraits of his Florentine rival. An early copy of Andrea’s portrait, with nearly matching dimensions, is kept at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo. In the canvas, he employs an almost black background, forcing the viewer to focus on her graceful demeanour. He even omits a depiction of her hands, ensuring there are no distractions from the portrait’s principal focus. Lucrezia appears to regard our scrutiny patiently, her head slightly turned, her lips betraying a smile that might break out at any moment.

Andrea’s wife turned out to be a modern woman, who was at times difficult to please, dominating her husband for the collaboration she provided him as a model. Indeed, the repetition of the same feminine type in his works could be described as monotonous, though on the other hand the ideal of feminine beauty that she inspired is impressive. In this portrait, the close attention to her garment’s folds is rendered with great skill. The naturalistic quality and the softness of the modelling reinforce the impression of the wife’s sensitive and loving expression. By all accounts, she was a patient sitter for her husband, appearing never to tire of the countless artworks she would appear in.





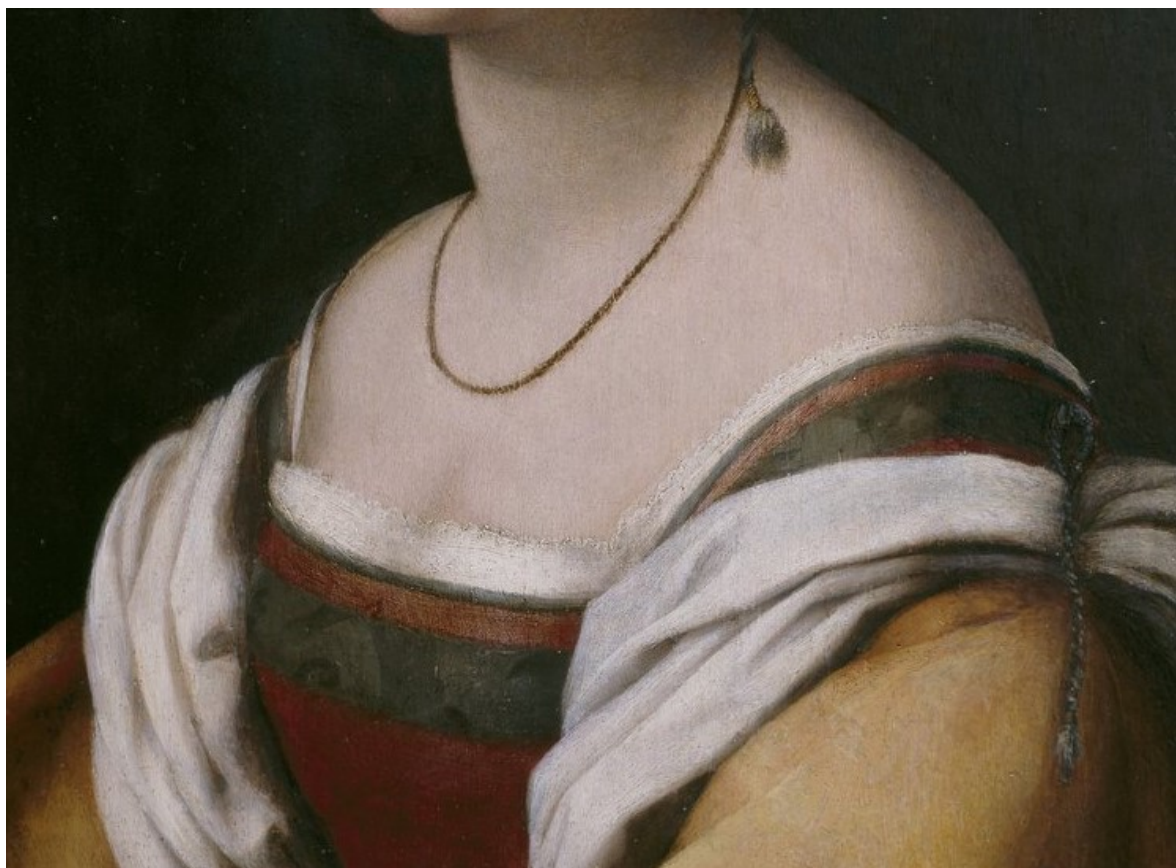
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*One of Andrea's many drawings of Lucrezia, black chalk on grey paper, Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris*



*Raphael's 'Portrait of Maddalena Doni', Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1506*

## Madonna and Child with Saint John (c. 1515)

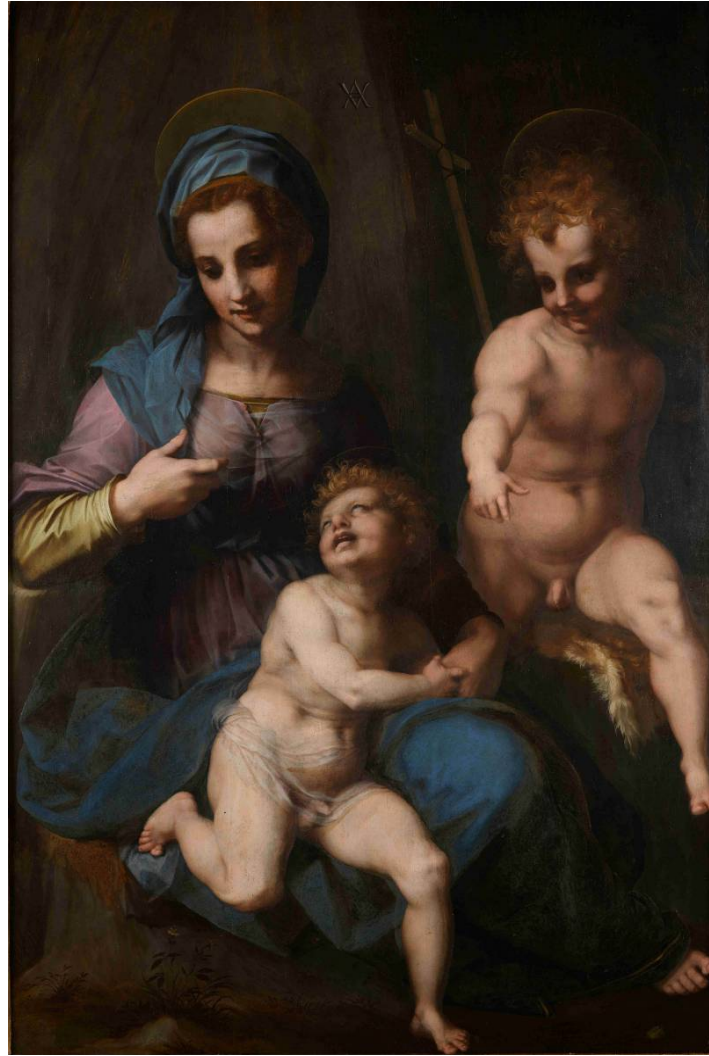


Considered by Vasari to be “the best that Andrea had then produced”, this sacred panel was commissioned by the cultured Florentine collector Giovanni Gaddi. It depicts the Virgin and Child with a young John the Baptist, signalling the artist’s enduring interest Mannerist traits. This new and innovative style of European art emerged in the later years of the High Renaissance, lasting until the end of the sixteenth century, when it was largely replaced by the Baroque style. Mannerism encompasses a variety of approaches influenced by artists such as Leonardo, Raphael and the early Michelangelo. Where High Renaissance art emphasised proportion, balance and ideal beauty, works in the Mannerist style sought to exaggerate and even distort such qualities, often resulting in compositions that are asymmetrical or unnaturally elegant. Notable for its artificial (as opposed to naturalistic) qualities, the style prefers compositional tension and instability rather than the balance and clarity of earlier Renaissance painting. In the following panel, we can detect how the traditional pyramidal structure of the Madonna, Child and Infant John has been shifted, where elongated forms and a greater distance between the figures creates an uneven triangular structure. The perfect balance and strict adherence to shape is no longer important.

At an unspecified date the panel entered the Borghese collection, where it is first mentioned in an inventory in 1790. At the time it was considered to be a workshop painting or a copy of a lost original. The first to attribute it to Andrea without any reservations was the art historian Roberto Longhi in 1928, after he noticed a relation with the anti-classical movements of Rosso and Pontormo, and so judged the panel to be a “stupendous and profound creation”.

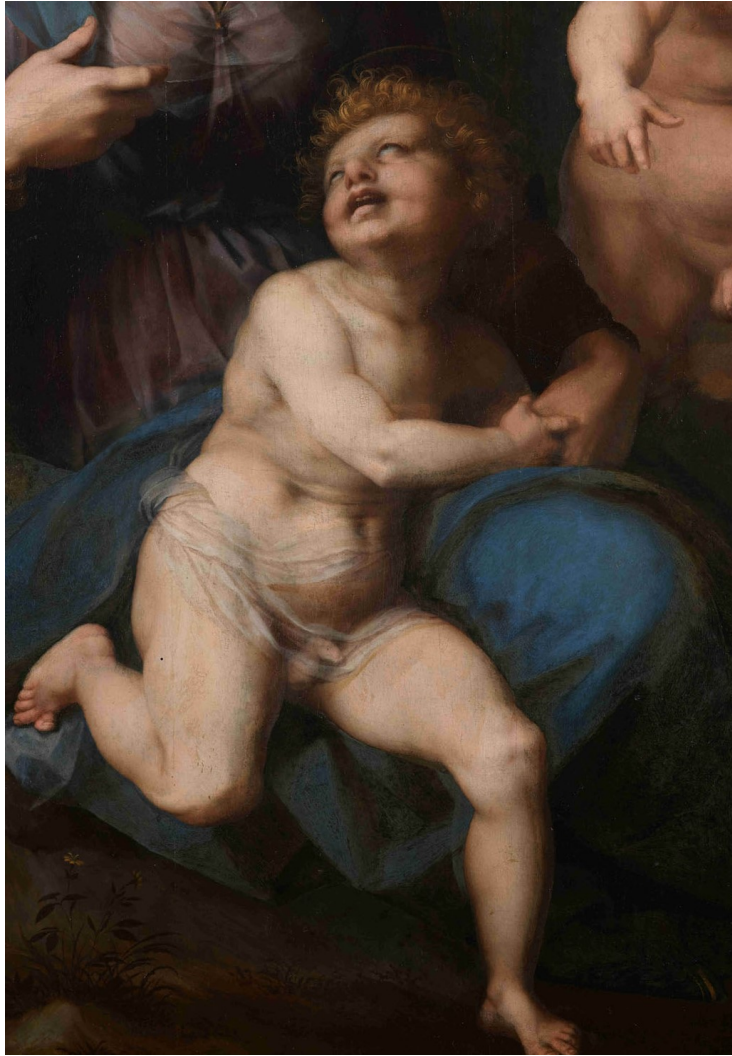
The panel portrays Mary with Jesus and John the Baptist, the latter identified by the wooden cross behind him. The group are set against a dark wall, marked in the centre with the interlaced “AA” monogram, used by the artist in many of his paintings, which emerges subtly in the careful rendition of light. The adept use of *chiaroscuro* on John and the Virgin’s face reveals the handling of an accomplished master. Also, the delicate veil-like garments and the plasticity of the figures, influenced by Michelangelo’s *The Battle of Cascina*, hint at Andrea’s mature development. However, the figures’ dynamic sense of movement is the panel’s most striking feature. This is no peaceful and sedate depiction of a traditional theme, but a new and pulsing interpretation, where the outstretched and elongated forms of the three figures direct our gaze around the pyramidal structure.

The composition was clearly a great success and resulted in at two further versions of the same theme, one panel in Ancona (Pinacoteca Civica) and another in Rome (Cassa Depositi e Prestiti), as well as its several replicas in private collections.





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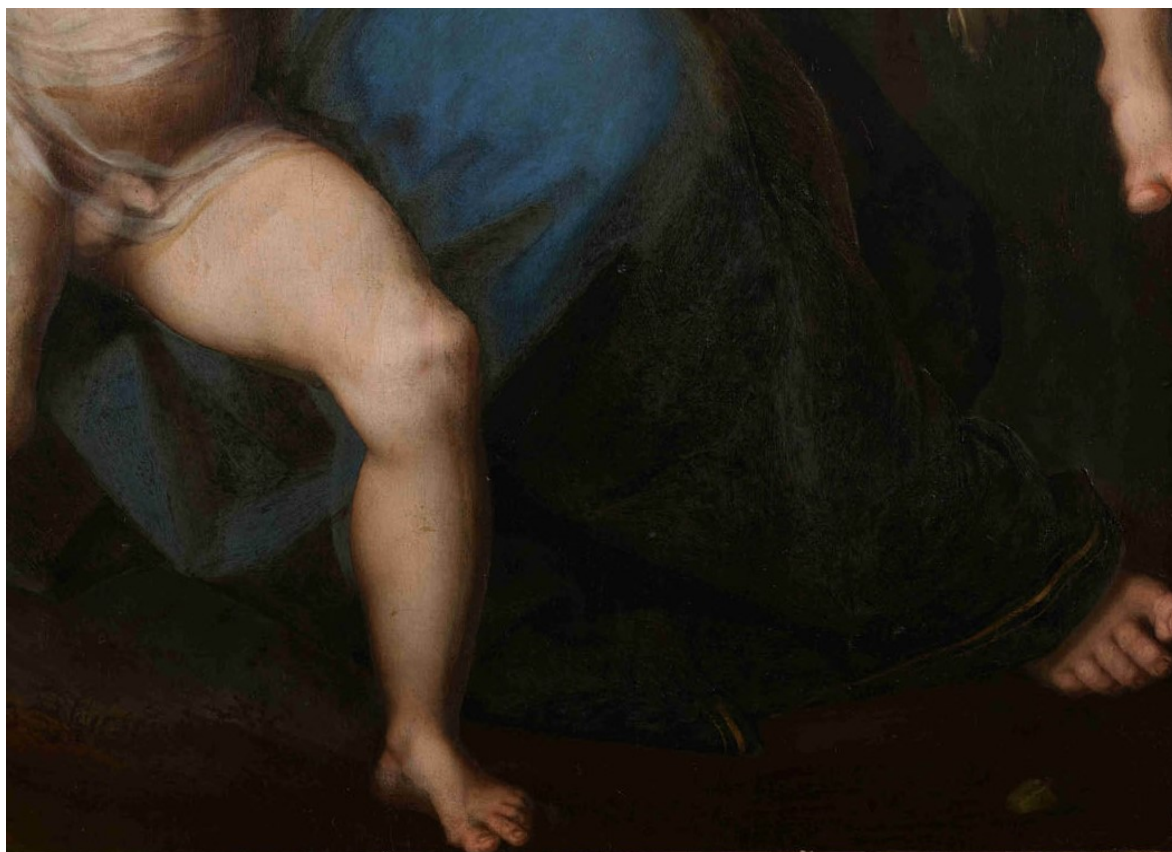
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*Michelangelo was commissioned to produce 'The Battle of Cascina' fresco for the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. He created only this preparatory drawing before being called to Rome by Pope Julius II, where he worked on the Pope's tomb.*



*Comparison of the dynamic figure in Michelangelo's drawing, which inspired Andrea's depiction of the Christ Child*



*Galleria Borghese, Rome, housed in the former Villa Borghese Pinciana*

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