

DISCOVERING PIER FRANCESCO FOSCHI From cartoon to canvas: the pouncing technique

In Pier Francesco Foschi's day, artists would study the composition of their intended picture with all its details by making preparatory drawings well before they started actually painting on their canvas. Once they had perfected their subject by drawing it in detail but in a smaller size than the



final picture would be, they often went on to the next phase which involved using a technique called chequering or squaring to transfer the composition onto an "actual size" cartoon.



The most commonly used technique to then reproduce the subject on the canvas was known as "pouncing". This involved pricking the silhouettes all over the drawing with a pin, then laying the cartoon on top of the canvas and dabbing it with a pouch filled with powdered charcoal and red earth.

They would then use the outline traced on the canvas as a guide over which to paint. This technique, described at length by Cennino Cennini (Colle di Val d'Elsa, 1370 - Florence, 1427) in his *Libro dell'Arte* ("The Book of Art"), allowed artists not only to keep their mistakes to a minimum but also to reproduce subjects or whole compositions in multiple versions.



Young apprentices in artists' workshops practiced by copying their masters' masterpieces. Copying was a virtuous exercise which Foschi actually developed into a real skill.

“Replicas of Andrea del Sarto’s prototypes formed an important part of Foschi’s output, which must have been very much to the liking of his Florentine patrons who wished to own a memory of Del Sarto’s much-admired works. An emblematic example of Foschi’s extensive knowledge of his master’s work is the *Madonna and Child*, the composition for which must have come from a lost drawing prepared by Del Sarto in the mid-1520s for the central embroidery of an altar frontal commissioned by Cardinal Silvio Passerini for Cortona Cathedral”.



Passerini Altar Frontal embroidery (to a design by Raffaellino del Garbo and Andrea del Sarto)
Andrea di Cosimo Feltrini (Florence, 1477-1548)
1521-1526, crinkled gold brocade and crimson velvet, embroidered 91 x 285 cm
Cortona (Arezzo), Museo Diocesano, Diocese, of Arezzo-Cortona-San Sepolcro



Madonna and Child
detail, *Passerini Altar Frontal*
embroidery

Pier Francesco Foschi (Florence, 1502-1567)
Madonna and Child
1530-1535, oil on wood, 87 x 72 cm. private collection

The sheet with the *Head and bust of the Virgin Mary* was “part of a cartoon that Foschi made on the basis of a tracing or of autograph drawings by Del Sarto for the Bracci Holy Family, a very famous picture from the moment it was painted in 1526-7 and now in the Galleria Palatina in the Pitti Palace. Foschi used cartoons from that original for many of his paintings, including a *Madonna and Child with the Young St. John the Baptist* in Palazzo Spinola, which almost perfectly matches Del Sarto’s original, apart from the addition of a new background and St. Joseph not being shown”.



Pier Francesco Foschi (Florence, 1502-1567)
Head and bust of the Virgin Mary
 c. 1525-30, charcoal (or black chalk) on three sheets
 of paper glued together, 321 x 239 mm
 Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet



Pier Francesco Foschi (Florence, 1502-1567)
Madonna and Child with the Young St. John the Baptist
 c. 1528-30, oil on wood, 113 x 83.5 cm
 Genoa, Musei Nazionale di Genova Galleria Nazionale della Liguria e
 Palazzo Spinola

“Between 1528 and 1529, Del Sarto painted three versions of *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. The copy on canvas that Foschi made a few years later is an exact reproduction of the unfinished version now in Cleveland, which was the first in the series. Looking at the two pictures side by side allows us to fully grasp the pupil’s personal take on his master’s style”.



Andrea del Sarto (Florence, 1486 - 1530)
The Sacrifice of Isaac
c. 1528, oil on wood, 178 x 138 cm
Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art



Pier Francesco Foschi (Florence, 1502-67)
The Sacrifice of Isaac
c. 1530-1535, oil on canvas, 204 x 146,6 cm
Florence, Villa del Poggio Imperiale, Educandato Statale SS.
Annunziata

Educational project devised by Graziella Cirri, Maria La Venuta and Elena Perla Simonetti
Translated into English by Stephen Tobin

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