

Press Contacts

Patrick Milliman
212.590.0310, pmilliman@themorgan.org

Alanna Schindewolf
212.590.0311, aschindewolf@themorgan.org

**ROSSO FIORENTINO'S CAPTIVATING *HOLY FAMILY* IS THE
CENTERPIECE OF NEW EXHIBITION AT THE MORGAN ON
FLORENTINE MANNERISM**

*Fantasy and Invention:
Rosso Fiorentino and Sixteenth-Century Florentine Drawing*

November 16, 2012–February 3, 2013



Rosso Fiorentino (1494–1540)
Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist, ca. 1520
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore
Photo © The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

New York, NY, October 19, 2012—The emergence of Mannerism in Florentine Renaissance art as exemplified by the brilliant painter Rosso Fiorentino is the subject of a new exhibition at The Morgan Library & Museum, opening on November 16, 2012. The show includes the artist's extraordinary painting, *Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist*, as well a selection of drawings, printed books, letters, and manuscripts by other Florentine masters. The *Holy Family*, on loan from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, is one of only three paintings by Rosso in the United States. *Fantasy and Invention: Rosso Fiorentino and Sixteenth-Century Florentine Drawing* will remain on view at the Morgan through February 3, 2013.

Born Giovanni Battista di Jacopo di Guaspare in Florence, Rosso Fiorentino (1494–1540)—so known because of his distinctive red hair—was one of the

foremost exponents of the late Renaissance style known as Mannerism, or the *maniera*.

Characterized by extreme artifice, effortless grace, and refinement, and given to displays of

inventive fantasy, spatial ambiguity, and strange beauty, this style developed about 1520 simultaneously in Rome (in the circle of Raphael) and in Florence (in the work of artists associated with Andrea del Sarto).

Using the *Holy Family* as a starting point, *Fantasy and Invention* traces the Florentine iteration of Mannerism through some twenty drawings from the Morgan's collection; five autograph documents and letters from leading artists of the day, including Michelangelo; two printed books; and a rare drawing by Rosso, on loan from The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Together, these works speak to the fundamental role of *disegno*—the Italian word for drawing that carries broader, theoretical connotations of artistic skill and invention—in the formulation of Mannerism.

The exhibition begins with the style's antecedents in the High Renaissance as seen in major examples by Fra Bartolommeo and Andrea del Sarto. It then moves on to Mannerism's early stirrings in the art of Rosso and Jacopo Pontormo and its elaboration by their younger contemporaries Francesco Salviati and Giorgio Vasari. Finally, Mannerism's more formal, frozen codification later in the century is explored through the work of Agnolo Bronzino, Giovanni Battista Naldini, Alessandro Allori and others, many of whom were employed by the Medici rulers of Florence.

"*Fantasy and Invention* offers museum-goers a sharply focused look at the development of Florentine Mannerism," said William M. Griswold, director of The Morgan Library & Museum. "With Rosso's brilliant *Holy Family* as its centerpiece, supplemented by a carefully chosen selection of drawings and related material, the exhibition explores how the artist and his contemporaries approached the discipline of drawing, creating some of the most extraordinary and beautiful works of the Italian Renaissance."



Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574)
Rosso Fiorentino, from
Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori (Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects)
Florence, 1568
The Morgan Library & Museum, Purchased as the gift of Millard Meiss, 1974

ROSSO FIORENTINO

In his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1568), Giorgio Vasari described Rosso as always showing “the invention of a poet in the grouping of his figures, besides being bold and well-grounded in draftsmanship, graceful in manner, sublime in the highest flights of imagination, and a master of beautiful composition.” The artist’s drawings, Vasari went on, “were held to be marvelous, for Rosso drew divinely well.”

A gifted painter, draftsman, print designer, and master of stucco, Rosso was also a notoriously quirky and difficult individual—he kept a pet monkey; had trouble with patrons; acknowledged his own arrogance; ran afoul of and was blacklisted by the powerful cabal of artists in Rome who had worked with the recently deceased and revered Raphael; and may have committed suicide by poison. Something of that personality seems to have left an imprint in the disturbing undercurrents of his style, resulting in highly original, emotionally expressive, and at times bizarre works of art—including one altarpiece that the patron judged so unsettling upon first seeing it that he fled the room in horror.

EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS

Rosso Fiorentino (1494–1540)
The Holy Family, ca. 1520

Affluent bankers, merchants, and patricians in Renaissance Florence frequently commissioned paintings of the Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist (the city’s patron saint) to hang in their palaces. For his early, unfinished *Holy Family*, painted for an unknown patron, Rosso cast the subject in his distinctive Mannerist style. The figures of Mary, Joseph, Jesus, and John the Baptist are confined within a tight, claustrophobic space, yet they lack any psychological interaction, each gazing in a different direction. The young John the Baptist wears a grapevine crown, an attribute of the ancient god Bacchus and a uniquely Florentine iconographic convention that fused pagan and Christian imagery. The strangely submissive figure of Saint Joseph at left of the ensemble adds to the mystery and emotional complexity of the painting—both defining features of Rosso’s work.



Rosso Fiorentino (1494–1540) *Bust of a Woman with an Elaborate Coiffure*, 1530s
Black chalk, pen and brown ink; brown wash in background added by a later hand
Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.

Michelangelo, Raphael, and ancient sculpture were the canonic models from which sixteenth-century artists drew inspiration. Rosso's depiction of a woman with curling braids and a fanciful headdress harks back to similar female heads in Michelangelo's frescoes and sculptures. Elaborate, finished drawings such as this were not

preparatory studies for paintings, but rather stand-alone creations intended to display an artist's creative prowess and powers of invention.



Fra Bartolommeo (1472–1517)
View of the Ospizio della Madonna del Lecceto from the West, ca. 1504–1508
Pen and brown ink
The Morgan Library & Museum
Purchased as the Gift of the Fellows

Fra Bartolommeo was one of the first Italian artists to create pure landscape drawings directly observed from nature. Not all the sites he depicted can be identified, but this example shows a convent in the Florentine countryside belonging to the Dominicans, the monastic order to which the artist professed his vows in 1500. The edifice seen here was completed around 1504, but whether the artist was drawing for pleasure or to create a visual record of Dominican

real estate holdings cannot be determined.



Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)
Studies of David and Goliath, 1550s
Black chalk
The Morgan Library & Museum

In the mid-sixteenth century in literary and cultural circles in Florence, a debate known as the *paragone* (“comparison”) was waged over the relative merits of painting versus sculpture, the

practitioners of each discipline arguing for the superiority of their chosen pursuit. Michelangelo advocated for sculpture, but his follower Daniele da Volterra used these small yet powerful drawings of David beheading Goliath for a painting of the same subject, thereby championing the opposing side of this theoretical disputation. The poet and historian Benedetto Varchi published the written responses of some artists—among them Michelangelo and Bronzino—to the *paragone* question in a volume also on view in the exhibition.



Andrea del Sarto (1486–1530)
Young Man with a Basket and a Sack on his Head, 1524
Black chalk
The Morgan Library & Museum

The preeminent painter in Florence in the 1510s and 1520s, Andrea del Sarto oversaw a productive and industrious workshop whose ranks included Rosso, Pontormo, Vasari, and Salviati. This is a study for a figure gracefully mounting the stairs in a fresco of the *Visitation* in the *Chiostro dello Scalzo*—one of the most important undertakings of Sarto’s career, and one of the major artistic campaigns of the Florentine High Renaissance.



Jacopo Pontormo (1494–1556)
Male Nudes, ca. 1520
Red Chalk
The Morgan Library & Museum

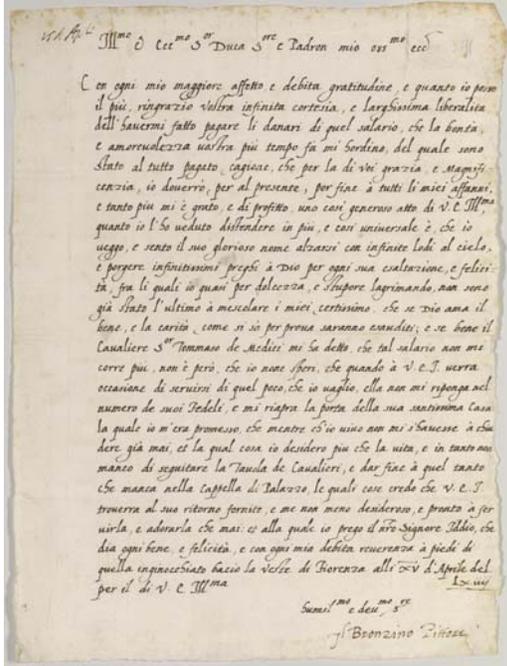
Like Rosso, Pontormo worked in the studio of Andrea del Sarto in the 1510s, and by the end of the decade he had become one of the leading proponents of Florentine Mannerism. The artist frequently favored red chalk when creating the vacant-eyed, elongated, and muscular but weightless figures that characterize his style. This striking, vaguely mysterious study of three nudes may have been executed in connection with a fresco that Pontormo painted in the Medici Villa of Poggio a Caiano outside Florence around 1521.



Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1573)
Rearing Horse, ca 1546–48
Black chalk
The Morgan Library & Museum

The horse in this drawing—previously attributed to the sixteenth-century Florentine painter Alessandro Allori but recently recognized as the work of his teacher and adoptive father, Agnolo Bronzino—derives from one of the most influential sculptures of classical antiquity, the monumental *Dioscuri*, or *Horse Tamers*, on the Quirinal Hill, Rome. Bronzino must have made this study, which constitutes a highly important addition to the artist's small oeuvre, during a trip to Rome in the later 1540s. He subsequently used it as a model for the horse that appears in a tapestry he designed for Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke

of Florence.



Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572)

Autograph Letter to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici,
April 15, 1564

The Morgan Library & Museum

Fantasy and Invention includes several letters and autograph documents written by some of the leading artists of the period on matters of artistic creation and production. Agnolo Bronzino sent this letter in his elegant script to his patron, Duke Cosimo I de' Medici, thanking him for his salary. At the time, Bronzino was at work in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the church of S. Stefano in Pisa—both Medici commissions.



Francesco Salviati (1510–1563)

Study of a Bearded Man, 1540s

Black chalk

The Morgan Library & Museum

A prolific and inventive draftsman, the ill-tempered Francesco Salviati divided his career between Florence and Rome where he worked for some of the most powerful patrons in both cities, among them the Medici and the Farnese. This striking work has long been thought to be an artistic invention—an example of a “type” that appears in the artist’s frescoes and other narrative compositions for which he would have used such a study as a model. However, the rather specific and descriptive physiognomy suggests

that it may be a portrait, or at least based on the features of an actual sitter.



Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574)
*Design for a Ceiling in the Palazzo Vecchio,
Florence, ca. 1558–62*
Pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black
chalk
The Morgan Library & Museum

Best known as the author of the *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (a copy of which is on view in the exhibition) Giorgio Vasari was also a painter and architect retained as court artist by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici. He oversaw a large workshop and was engaged in the extensive decoration and refurbishment of the vast Palazzo Vecchio, the

medieval town hall of Florence that was converted into a palace by Duke Cosimo. This carefully rendered and elaborate design—one of Vasari's most celebrated drawings—is a study for a ceiling illustrating scenes from the life of Lorenzo de' Medici, the de facto head of the Florentine government in the late fifteenth century. Lorenzo appears in the design's center compartment, receiving gifts from the ambassadors of Naples, Milan, and Constantinople.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

Gallery Talk

Fantasy and Invention: Rosso Fiorentino and Sixteenth-Century Florentine Drawing

Friday, December 7, 7 pm

Linda Wolk-Simon, Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Head of the Department of Drawings and Prints, will lead this informal exhibition tour.

Free

SPONSORSHIP

Fantasy and Invention is organized by Linda Wolk-Simon, Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Head of the Department of Drawings and Prints.

This exhibition is generously sponsored by Barbara Hanson Pierce, Michael Francis Hanson, and Robert Hixon Hanson in memory of their mother, Margaret Hixon Hanson.



The activities of The Morgan Library & Museum are made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.



2013 ANNO DELLA CULTURA ITALIANA
YEAR OF ITALIAN CULTURE

The Morgan is pleased to participate in the 2013 Year of Italian Culture which celebrates Italian cultural and scientific legacies in the United States.

The Morgan Library & Museum

The Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today, more than a century after its founding in 1906, the Morgan serves as a museum, independent research library, musical venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. In October 2010, the Morgan completed the first-ever restoration of its original McKim building, Pierpont Morgan's private library, and the core of the institution. In tandem with the 2006 expansion project by architect Renzo Piano, the Morgan now provides visitors unprecedented access to its world-renowned collections of drawings, literary and historical manuscripts, musical scores, medieval and Renaissance manuscripts, printed books, and ancient Near Eastern seals and tablets.

General Information

The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue, at 36th Street, New York, NY 10016-3405
212.685.0008
www.themorgan.org

Just a short walk from Grand Central and Penn Station

Hours

Tuesday–Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.; extended Friday hours, 10:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; closed Mondays, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. The Morgan closes at 4 p.m. on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. The Morgan will be open on the following holiday Mondays in 2012: Labor Day, September 3; Columbus Day, October 8; Christmas Eve, December 24; New Year's Eve, December 31.

Admission

\$15 for adults; \$10 for students, seniors (65 and over), and children (under 16); free to Members and children 12 and under accompanied by an adult. Admission is free on Fridays from 7 to 9 p.m. Admission is not required to visit the Morgan Shop.