



Lotto's Renaissance rendering of the sacred and the secular

Rome: Among High Renaissance Italian painters, Lorenzo Lotto (c. 1480-1556/7) stands out as both provincial and cosmopolitan. He spent much of his career in several small cities of the Marches region in central Italy, where he died a humble lay member of a religious order. Yet to a much further degree than more celebrated countrymen, including his collaborator Raphael and his fellow Venetian Titian, Lotto absorbed the influence of such great German contemporaries as Dürer and Grünewald.

In this show at the Scuderie del Quirinale, with over 50 works that span the length of Lotto's career and the range of his sacred and secular subject matter, reflections of the north are evident throughout; for instance in the Gothic architecture of the Virgin's stiffly folded cloak as she appears to two saints in an altarpiece from the Asolo cathedral, and in the cold light that

shines on the scene.

A relative unknown for centuries until American art historian Bernard Berenson championed him in 1895, Lotto was a fitting rediscovery for the age of Freud, since his work is marked by psychological tension of a piece with his anguished piety. The infant Jesus in his mother's arms reaches out with a baby's impulsiveness for his own pierced heart, proffered to him by a martyred saint; elsewhere he caresses a lamb with poignant innocence, suggesting the paradox of Christ's human nature, still unaware of the sacrificial symbolism in which his divine nature is engaged.

Among the 17 portraits in the show, a Dominican friar appears with his financial accounts, keys and coins, and no symbol of the divine in sight. The 1526 painting seems to modern eyes like a recruiting poster for the young Lutheran Reformation, a movement now believed to

have held Lotto's guarded sympathy.

By contrast, the friar in a 1547 portrait reads what is evidently a devotional book, as the crucifixion scene unfolds in the background. Yet what dominates this picture is the clenched fist with which the subject beats his breast, itself a miniature portrait of penitence in muscular stress.

Lotto's rendering of the Venetian merchant and collector Andrea Odorini, on loan from the Royal Collection in London, personifies Renaissance ambivalence toward pagan antiquity and Christianity. Surrounded by fragments of classical sculpture, the subject presses a gold crucifix to his heart and holds out a statuette of the fertility goddess, Diana of Ephesus. Is he offering the viewer a choice, or showing off the two sources of his own power?

—Francis X. Rocca

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'Adorazione dei pastori' (circa 1534) by Lorenzo Lotto