

Christ Carrying the Cross

Study Summary

This study examines a Christ Carrying the Cross from the Italian Renaissance, painted in oil on a poplar panel. The Painting measures 60 x 46 cm excluding its frame. Material and technical analyses indicate a work consistent with Italian practices of the late 15th and 16th centuries: a traditional ground, pouncing, pentimenti, layered paint, old overpainting and later interventions.

Carbon-14 dating places the panel between 1470 and 1650. Scientific imaging has also revealed several significant features: a youthful, androgynous figure to the right of Christ, once covered by a black layer; traces of preparatory transfer; visible changes in the painted composition; and a halo whose examination suggests it was added later.

The back of the panel retains a red wax seal of Roman type and several old inscriptions, including the forms 'Salaj/...', 'Leonardo' and 'Salajno'. These elements do not prove an attribution, but they belong to the panel's material history and merit close attention.

The study's central comparison is between the Christ in the Painting and three versions attributed to Giampietrino, held in London, Budapest and Turin. Leading scholars, including Wilhelm Suida, Carlo Pedretti and Pietro C. Marani, have recognized the Venice Drawing, attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, as the graphic source for these versions.

The similarities are strong: the orientation of the head, the overall structure of the face, Christ's position, the construction of the model and the logic of the transfer. They suggest a shared cartoon or model, derived from the Venice Drawing or from a closely related design.

The Painting, however, is not simply a copy by Giampietrino. Several technical, radiographic, morphological and stylistic differences set it apart: the use of pouncing, pentimenti, handling of the paint, the structure of the cross, Christ's forearm, the parting of the hair, the figure on the right and the differing behavior of the underlying layers.

The Painting may therefore preserve an earlier form of the composition than the one found in Giampietrino's versions.

These findings do not permit an attribution to Leonardo da Vinci. They do, however, show why the hypothesis can be examined through a coherent body of technical, iconographic and comparative evidence.

The website christcarryingthecross.com presents this research with the Painting at its center. The 'Leonardo Connection' section, now in the main menu, brings together comparisons with his drawings, anatomical studies and circle. The Venice Drawing is the principal source; Giampietrino provides the comparative link. The study of Thaddaeus in The Last Supper is grouped with the Venice Drawing, extending the inquiry into how models circulated.

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