

Catalogue of the Collection

PAININGS AND SCULPTURE

Huntington, New York

1979





Lucas Cranach the Elder / *Virgin, Child, St. John the Baptist and Angels* / 1959.127

LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER

Kronach, Germany 1472–1553 Weimar

Virgin, Child, St. John the Baptist, and Angels

Oil on canvas, transferred from panel 1534
48½ x 33½ in. (123.19 x 85.09 cm.)

Inscribed upper left with winged serpent and dated: 1534

□ REFERENCES: *HFAB*, p. 26, no.171 / M.J. Friedländer and J. Rosenberg, *Die Gemälde von Lucas Cranach* Berlin (1932), p.65, no.189f, catalogue painting and cite its provenance as

"1920 Ehrich Galleries, New York" and the Münchhausen auction; its location in the Heckscher Museum was not known at that time / *HM 16–18 Cat*, 1944, p.4, no.4 / J. Rosenberg, letter in Museum Archives, Nov. 1975, states that painting's location in the Heckscher Museum will be recorded in the forthcoming second edition of his monograph.

□ EXHIBITION: H.M. *Changing Vision*.

□ PROVENANCE: Possibly Freiherrn von Münchhausen zu Hannover, until 1887 / group

sale, J.M. Heberle, H. Lempertz Söhne, Cologne, Oct. 28–9, 1887, no.33, illus. / Ehrich Galleries, N.Y., 1920 / August Heckscher, N.Y., 1920.

Gift of August Heckscher

Accession number: 1959.126

Lucas Cranach was born with the name Müller or Sunder, his pseudonym resulting from a slightly altered spelling of his native town. Of his training and early life little is known. He came to Vienna c.1500, where he was exposed to the influence of Dürer's woodcuts and the individualistic, creative spirit of the Bavarian painters of this period, whose works exhibited an expressionism which was the anti-thesis of the Renaissance style. Cranach's painting became more conventional, when in 1505 he was called to Wittenberg and appointed court painter to the House of Saxony under three successive electors, later becoming a burgomaster of the town from 1537 to 1544. He was the intimate friend and follower of Martin Luther, whose portrait he painted several times.

The emblem of the winged serpent at upper left in the Museum's painting was given Cranach by Frederick the Wise in 1508. Here Cranach has combined expressions of deeply mystical and tenderly personal emotions. Color harmonies are rich and vibrant in a juxtaposition of deep reds, blue and green, contrasted with delicately painted flesh tones. Cranach painted numerous versions of the madonna and child before a curtain supported by hovering angels. The version most closely related both chronologically and stylistically to the Museum's painting, except for its landscape background, is in the State Museum, Gotha, German Democratic Republic.¹ In this version, also dated 1534, the Virgin's facial features and the tilt of her veiled head, as well as the knife-edged treatment of the folds of the curtain behind her, are nearly identical to those in the Heckscher Museum's painting.²

It cannot be proven that the Museum's painting was once located in the Münchhausen Collection since the group auction which included Münchhausen does not cite owners' names. All of the auctioneer Lempertz's pre-war records were completely destroyed.

1. See Friedländer and Rosenberg, p.65, no.189g.

2. Other closely related versions are: in the Stuttgart Staatsgalerie, (F & R, p.65, no.188); and in the Detroit Institute of Arts, (F & R, p.65, no.189).