

Painting Pairs 2022-23

A Question of Attribution: An Art Historical and Technical Study of The Courtauld Gallery's *Salvator Mundi*

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During the sixteenth century, there was a proliferation of Italian panel paintings depicting Christ as the *Salvator Mundi* ('Saviour of the World'). This iconographical type portrays a front-facing Jesus with his right hand raised in blessing and his left hand holding an orb. These artworks are largely attributed to followers of Leonardo da Vinci, collectively described as the 'Leonardeschi'; they are thought to be based upon an original by the master. This report summarises an investigation of one of these paintings: The Courtauld Gallery's *Salvator Mundi* currently attributed to the circle of Marco d'Oggiono. Through a combination of art historical and technical research, this study has sought to confirm (or challenge) the previously ascribed date of creation (c. 1510-25) and to situate the painting, all things being equal, among other contemporary versions of the composition, with the hope of confirming (or challenging) its current attribution.

The study first considers the painting's provenance, tracing it back through the Gambier Parry family collection to its purchase in Italy in the mid-nineteenth century. While the panel's early history in Italy remains unknown, there is evidence of a connection with Milan, the home of d'Oggiono and other Leonardo followers. The painting is then considered in the context of early sixteenth century artistic practice. A technical investigation of the artist's materials and technique—using infrared reflectography, macro-XRF scanning, and other examination methods—is compared with published analysis of other artworks by the Leonardeschi. Finally, stylistic comparisons are made between The Courtauld painting and other versions of the *Salvator Mundi*, with particular reference to that attributed to Leonardo. The embroidered band across Christ's chest is considered and investigated as an interesting point of deviation across different copies.

In both style and technique, the painting is characteristic of the period and conforms to the manner of the Leonardeschi. While no evidence has been found to specifically contradict the attribution to the circle of Marco d'Oggiono, the study has failed to uncover any positive basis for the current attribution. It is suggested that the painting might be by d'Oggiono or his circle but, on the basis of available evidence, it might just as likely have been produced by another of the Leonardeschi. It is argued that assigning the artwork to a 'follower of Leonardo' or to 'a Leonardesque artist' might be a more appropriate attribution.