

INFORMATION STRICTLY UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL THURSDAY 17 DECEMBER AT 11AM

Press Call: Thursday 17 December at 11am at the National Gallery of Scotland, The Mound, Edinburgh



LEONARDO DA VINCI

1452 – 1519

The Madonna of the Yarnwinder

Oil on panel

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LEONARDO'S MADONNA OF THE YARNWINDER GOES ON DISPLAY AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND

The National Gallery of Scotland is delighted to announce that the painting, *The Madonna of the Yarnwinder* by Leonardo da Vinci will go on display in the Gallery from today. In 2003 it was stolen from Drumlanrig Castle, the Dumfriesshire home of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry. The painting was recovered in 2007. *The Madonna of the Yarnwinder* is the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in Scotland and is on loan to the Gallery from the Duke and the Trustees of the Buccleuch Heritage Trust.

In this pioneering and influential composition, an unusually large Christ Child is shown perched on a rocky outcrop beside his mother. He gazes intently at the cross-shaped form of a wooden yarnwinder, precociously aware of his future Crucifixion. The Virgin's tender, sorrowful expression and hesitant gesture reinforce the poignancy of the action.

This little panel is probably identical with one described in a letter dated 14 April 1501 from Fra Pietro da Novellara, head of the Carmelite order in Florence, to Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua and avid patron and collector of art. The letter clarifies that Leonardo was painting it for Florimond Robertet, a trusted minister and diplomat of the King of France, who had close ties to Italy. Leonardo had a notoriously poor record for bringing his works to completion, and it is unclear whether the painting was ever actually delivered to Robertet.

There has been much debate regarding the extent of Leonardo's direct involvement in the painting, but it seems likely that the overall design, and the execution of the figures and the foreground rocks, are entirely his. The background landscape, on the other hand, is not characteristic of Leonardo, and was probably added or completed by another artist, possibly quite a bit later. Technical examination has revealed landscape features and figures in the background that are no longer visible on the surface. That some of these reappear in early copies and variants of the composition supports the idea that the background may have been left unfinished by Leonardo and completed only later.

The painting was the focus of an exhibition, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mystery of the Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, organised here at the National Gallery of Scotland in 1992.

For further information please contact the National Galleries of Scotland Press Office on 0131 624 6325/6314/6332 or pressinfo@nationalgalleries.org.

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