

31 juli 2005

Beste ouders
in 's H H K,

Vader schreef een
brief met een
opsumming v. l.
aantal verwonderingen.
Ik heb er nog één.



"I had another bad dream about Social Security."

Het Metropolitan

Museum in New York kocht voor USD 45 mil/jen
een paneeltje "Madonna and Child" van Duccio di
Buoninsegna. De afmeting van het paneeltje
bedragen 11 inch x 8 inch. Een inch is 2,54 cm.

In centimeters ~~verreken~~ onopgerekend zijn de afmetingen:

$28 \text{ cm} \times 20.3 \text{ cm} = 568 \text{ cm}^2$. $\frac{\text{USD } 45 \text{ mil/jen}}{568 \text{ cm}^2}$ is

USD 79,225 per cm^2 is er voor betaald.

Men zegt wel dat de waarde bepaald wordt
door wat de pek er voor heeft. Zou de aankoop
voor dit bedrag het grootste nut opgeleverd hebben?
Dan refereer ik naar mogelijke alternatieve
aanwendbaarheden. Maar misschien is de
aankoop een "hedge" voor een mogelijke devaluatie
van de US dollar. Wie weet?

Tat slot sluit ik nog een gerevisseerd
"Na woord" in en mijn laatste email
"exchange of correspondence" met Sina
Nasaction ontrent de heikelen punten
van het verleden van Adriana:
Haar "onbaatsheerlijkheid" en haar
"doctorstittel"

Dan zijn jullie "au courant".

Veel lief & groeten

Ernst

THE MISSING MADONNA

The story behind the Met's most expensive acquisition.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's recent purchase of an early Renaissance "Madonna and Child" by Duccio di Buoninsegna, for a price said to have been between forty-five and fifty million dollars, has been greeted by most New Yorkers with unruffled calm. Although the acquisition was covered extensively last November, with emphasis on the price and the extreme rarity of works by this Sienese master, the little picture (it measures eleven inches high by just over eight inches wide, and is painted in tempera and gold on a wooden panel) has not attracted the multitudes that would make it difficult to see. In 1963, when the "Mona Lisa" came to the Met for a month, more than a million people stood in long lines; but on a number of occasions this spring, when I went to look at the Duccio, I was the only person in the room. To be sure, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian paintings lack the popular clout of works by Leonardo or van Gogh, but you'd think more people would be curious about something that cost more than double what the Met had spent on any previous acquisition.

Small as it is, the painting has a powerful presence. It captures the eye from a distance, and commands, up close, something like complete attention. Holding the Christ child in her left arm, the Virgin looks beyond him with melancholy tenderness, while the child reaches out a tiny hand to brush aside her veil. Centuries of Byzantine rigidity and impersonal, hieratic forms are also brushed

aside in this intimate gesture. We are at the beginning of what we think of as Western art; elements of the Byzantine style still linger—in the gold background, the Virgin's boneless and elongated fingers, and the child's unchildlike features—but the colors of their clothing are so miraculously preserved, and the sense of



Bernard Berenson once called the Duccio "a treasure you should dive for."

human interaction is so convincing, that the two figures seem to exist in a real space, and in real time. Candle burn marks on the frame, which is original, testify to the picture's use as a private devotional image. It is dated circa 1300.

Although the "Madonna and Child" was well known in art-historical circles

so surviving paintings to remain in private hands, its whereabouts had been uncertain since the death, in 1949, of its last registered owner, the Belgian collector Adolphe Stoclet. In fact, the picture never left the Stoclet house in Brussels. Stoclet and his wife, who died within a week of each other, had willed the house and much of their collection, including the Duccio, to their son, Jacques, whose widow held on to it until her death, in 2001. Soon after that, her heirs (four daughters), who are very high on anonymity, agreed to lend it to an important exhibition in Siena of Duccio and his school. A color-plate reproduction of the picture—the first one ever made—

was printed in the exhibition catalogue, but a few weeks before the opening, in 2003, the painting was withdrawn. This coincided with rumors of an impending sale, which turned out to be true.

Although everyone involved in the transaction is bound by *omertà*, it is known that both Sotheby's and Christie's, the principal auction houses, engaged in lengthy and fiercely competitive negotiations with the heirs, and Christie's eventually won the prize. "The family was very keen that the painting go to a public museum or institution," according to Nicholas Hall, international director of Christie's Old Master department. This was one reason that the family decided upon a private "treaty" sale, in which the auction house and the seller determine a price and then offer the work to selected potential buyers, rather than letting it take its chances at

public auction; another reason was that a private sale is more private. "We got it by putting a significantly higher valuation on the painting than anyone else—by multiples—based on its being the last Duccio in private hands and its being so impeccably preserved," Hall told me. Hall himself never met the sellers. "The contract doc-