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An Altarpiece By Bernardino Luini — That
Isn't

THE DAILY PIC: Luini's painting at the Brooklyn Museum is 'only' a
copy by his assistants. Should we mind?

Blake Gopnik, August 31, 2016



THE DAILY PIC (#1624): Could there be any greater waste of time than the art world's constant kerfuffle over the authorship of paintings? That was brought home to me for the umpteenth time the other day at the Brooklyn Museum, when I came across this work from the workshop of the Milanese painter Bernardino Luini, a figure we adored 150 years ago but now almost ignore.

I got huge pleasure from the painting, as Renaissance viewers must also have done, despite knowing that it was just a studio knockoff on a famous 1523 altarpiece by the master. (Whatever "by" might have meant in a 16th-century workshop.) And then there's the indubitable fact that Luini himself was just a pale shadow of his own master Leonardo da Vinci, who was the source of most of Luini's signature moves.

It goes against most of today's most basic artistic values, but I think there can sometimes be as great a pleasure in witnessing utter competence in a style as in worshipping its creation. Or maybe the pleasure is of a quite different sort. There are moments when the Dave Clark Five delivers what the Beatles can't.