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Lost Raphael' surfaces in Spain

Authentic and rare copy of Madonna of Foligno rediscovered in private collection

By Belén Palanco. News, 07 April 2014



There may be more than one Madonna of Foligno by Raphael

The Italian High Renaissance painter Raphael did not, it is generally believed, make copies of his own works. However, the University of Granada, in Southern Spain, says it has found an authentic copy of Raphael's *Madonna of Foligno* (around 1511), which is displayed in the Vatican Museums (Room VIII). Luis Rodrigo Rodríguez Simón, a conservator and lecturer at the university, says that the rediscovered work has come to light in a private collection in Cordoba.

Known as *The Madonna of Foligno, Small*, the work was painted on a wooden panel and later transferred to canvas at the end of the 19th century: pages of a book printed in 1872 were pasted on to the reverse of the canvas. Simón says that the transfer was made in France. **A European journey** Simón says that, following scientific analysis of the picture and archival research, the links between the Granada and the Vatican paintings are apparent, and suggests that *The Madonna of Foligno, Small* could even be a study for the main Vatican painting. "An ancestor of the current owner of the smaller Madonna was a businessman in France and brought the painting to Cordoba [in Southern Spain]," he says, although it unclear when. It is also not known how the painting made its way to Paris in the first place, although the city was a major centre for the sale of art in the 19th century. There have been mixed reactions to the discovery. Stefano Alessandrini, an art historian and adviser to the ministry of culture and the advocate general of Italy, says: "The painting might be a good copy made while the Louvre Museum was exhibiting the *Madonna of Foligno* from 1797 to 1816; the painter sketched in a structure of squares to work out the proportions of the original work." He says he observed cracking in the work typically found in paintings of the 19th century but not, he said, on canvases transferred from panels. **To Paris and back** The accepted *Madonna of Foligno* was made by Raphael in the Vatican City for the Church of Santa Maria of Aracoeli in Rome. In 1565 it was moved to the monastery of Santa Ana in Foligno, Perugia, where it remained for more than two centuries (and where it acquired its current name). Napoleon confiscated a large number of works from Italy, including the *Madonna of Foligno*, after the Treaty of Tolentino in 1797. The canvas was returned to the Vatican in 1816. While in France, the Louvre's chief conservator, François Toussaint Hacquin, transferred the work from its wooden panel onto canvas between 1800 and 1801.