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After 30 Years, a Stolen Renaissance Masterpiece Returns to Italy With a Show in the Artist's Hometown

Pinturicchio's missing 'Madonna and Child' has gone on view at the
Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria.

Sarah Cascone, August 23, 2019



Pinturicchio, *Madonna and Child*. Photo courtesy of the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria.

It took nearly 30 years, but the Italian police have recovered Pinturicchio's missing masterpiece *Madonna and Child*.

The Italian police's cultural heritage protection unit found the painting, which was stolen from a private home in 1990, but have revealed little about its whereabouts since. It will soon be returned to its owners, but first it's going on view at the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria in Perugia, Pinturicchio's hometown.

"This latest recovery makes me particularly happy," the country's cultural heritage minister, Alberto Bonisoli, said in a video message played at the painting's unveiling on August 10, "because another fragment of our immense cultural heritage is back in our country."

The work is going on view alongside works by two other artists of the Perugian school, Bartolomeo Caporali and Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, under whom Pinturicchio is believed to have studied.



Pinturicchio's *Madonna and Child* being unveiled at the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria. Photo courtesy of the Italian Ministry of Culture.

"This recovery demonstrates, once again, the increasingly transnational character of criminal activities in this sector," said Fabrizio Parrulli, commander of the unit, at the painting's unveiling. He called on law enforcement in other countries to create "a consolidated system of international cooperation to effectively combat crimes against our cultural heritage."

Born Bernardino di Betto, Pinturicchio earned his nickname, which means “little painter,” because of his diminutive stature. The artist worked as an assistant to Pietro Perugino on the more famous painter’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. Today, the two artists are among the stars of the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria’s collection.



Pinturicchio’s *Madonna and Child* being unveiled at the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria. Photo courtesy of the Italian Ministry of Culture.

Later, Pinturicchio was commissioned to create work of his own at the Vatican, painting frescoes in a suite of six rooms in the Borgia Apartments in the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican, now part of the Vatican Library. Five of the six paintings can still be seen today.

“Madonna col Bambino attribuita a Pinturicchio” is on view at the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria, Corso Vannucci, 19, Perugia, Italy, August 8, 2019–January 26, 2020.