



Sir Charles Eastlake, the National Gallery and the Tuscan 'primitives'. Pursuing the Oldest Masters for the Newest Ends

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Questo articolo esamina il ruolo decisivo di Sir Charles Eastlake nel rimodellare le politiche di acquisizione della National Gallery attraverso l'acquisto di 'primitivi' italiani, in particolare toscani, tra il 1843 e il 1865. L'analisi punta a dimostrare che questo interesse si inserisse in un più ampio programma di riforma istituzionale della Galleria, sollecitato dalla Select Committee del 1853 e dal Treasury Minute del 1855. Attraverso un'attenta revisione degli acquisti, delle negoziazioni e degli scritti di Eastlake, lo studio ricostruisce la formazione del gusto per l'arte del Medioevo italiano e la creazione della collezione pionieristica di 'primitivi' toscani della National Gallery. L'analisi mostra come considerazioni storiche, educative e nazionali giustificassero l'inclusione di dipinti del Trecento e del Quattrocento nella nascente collezione nazionale, collocando al contempo l'attività di Eastlake nel più ampio contesto degli sviluppi europei e mettendo in luce la sua personale preferenza per l'arte veneziana, in parallelo con gli ideali preraffaelliti. Sebbene Eastlake apprezzasse le antiche opere toscane principalmente per il loro significato storico, il contributo dimostra come la loro acquisizione abbia radicalmente ridefinito la gestione, il personale, i finanziamenti e il prestigio internazionale della Galleria.

This article examines Sir Charles Eastlake's decisive role in reshaping the National Gallery's collecting policies through the acquisition of early Italian, especially Tuscan, painting between 1843 and 1865. It argues that the Gallery's embrace of the 'primitives' formed part of a broader programme of institutional reform prompted by the 1853 Select Committee and the Treasury Minute of 1855. Through a close analysis of Eastlake's purchases, negotiations and writings, the study reconstructs the formation of taste surrounding early Italian art and the creation of the National Gallery's pioneering collection of Tuscan 'primitives.' It demonstrates how historical, educational and national concerns justified the inclusion of Trecento and Quattrocento painting within the nascent national collection, while situating Eastlake's activity within wider European developments and highlighting his personal preference for Venetian art alongside Raphaellesque ideals. Although Eastlake valued the earliest Tuscan works principally for their historical significance, the article shows that their acquisition fundamentally reshaped the Gallery's governance, staffing, funding and international standing.

Keywords: Early Italian art, The National Gallery, Sir Charles Eastlake, Tuscan 'primitives', Art collecting

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Sir Charles Eastlake, the National Gallery and the Tuscan ‘primitives’. Pursuing the Oldest Masters for the Newest Ends

Susanna Avery-Quash

The British poet, art critic and civil servant Cosmo Monkhouse received a letter from Lady Eastlake, the widow of the first Director of the National Gallery, on 10 June 1887. Thanking him for sending her a copy of his latest publication, *The Italian Pre-Raphaelites* – a small guide to the National Gallery – she declared:

Few works c[oul]d interest me more deeply, for, as you well know, Sir Chas Eastlake was the chief purchaser of the Trecentisti & Quattro-Centisti for the Nat[ional]: Gallery – & almost every one you mention takes me back into the past. He felt it necessary for the gallery to have there early masters, & most of them were supplied by the Lombardi Baldi Collection. [...] Our old household God – the Annunciation by Fra Filippo – is charming.¹

The letter is a good starting point for what follows because it introduces the topic's key elements: this article investigates the origins of collecting early Italian art at the National Gallery in London and Eastlake's seminal role in that activity.² It also explores his nuanced reactions to it. Furthermore, it sheds light on the wide-ranging and revolutionary decisions which came about at the Gallery, not only concerning collecting and display but also governance, staffing and financing, precisely because of the decision to start collecting early Italian art in earnest.

Eastlake made many purchases of early Italian art during his decade as Director from 1855; indeed, this is the area of expansion of the national painting collection for which he is best remembered. The purchasing of such art, especially the earliest Tuscan paintings, was a radical change into a completely new area of collecting for the Gallery which, since its foundation in 1824, had been following a much narrower path. Such an extreme new direction was the result of an all-important governmental directive, which essentially reconstituted the Gallery, through a Treasury Minute issued in July 1855.

The ruling, in turn, stemmed from a report of a governmental Select Committee, established in 1853, to investigate, among other matters, «the Constitution and General Management of the Gallery».³ Fundamental questions were raised and conclusions reached about who the Gallery should ideally serve, what art it should collect, how that

art should be displayed and how the institution should be staffed and financed. Hundreds of witnesses were questioned, one of the most influential being Sir Charles Eastlake, who at the time was not only a practising painter but also Secretary of the Fine Arts Commission since 1841, President of the Royal Academy since 1850 and, on the back of that, ex-officio, a Trustee of the National Gallery.

Many of the findings, published in 1853, dovetailed with suggestions reported by an earlier governmental Select Committee of 1835-1836, but which had never been acted on.⁴ In both Select Committees evidence from leading continental European art galleries was gathered to supplement evidence from people involved in the art scene in Britain. Early Italian painting was mentioned more than any other type of art in the two Select Committee reports of 1836 and 1853 as well as the resulting 1855 Treasury Minute. This is because it became the nub of the matter, with significant and lasting implications for other key decisions.

Most directly, the inclusion of early Italian art for the first time in the Gallery's collecting remit had the effect of expanding the collection into new areas and pushed the starting point backwards by 400 years, from the mid-1600s to the mid-1200s. The Gallery was no longer to be «merely like the collection of a private gentleman, and nothing more»,⁵ to quote Earl Aberdeen in the 1853 Select Committee's report; in other words, it was no longer to privilege a particular constricted canon of art which favoured sixteenth and seventeenth-century Italian art, and seventeenth-century French, Dutch and Flemish art. It was felt that an expanded timeframe and related display arrangement would increase the reach and standing of the collection, with witnesses like Earl Aberdeen explaining that «some kind of chronological arrangement by epochs and schools of art» would «entitle it to be properly called a national collection».⁶

The justification for a new focus on early Italian art was largely three-fold: on historical grounds, on certain aesthetic grounds and on nationalistic grounds. In terms of an historical rationale, Gustav Waagen, a leading art expert from Berlin, who would become first Director of the Gallery at Berlin as well as first Professor of Art History at the University of Berlin, had explained in his witness statements in 1835: «in order to understand and still better appreciate the great masters, you must commence with those who immediately preceded them and who taught them».⁷ He went further, advocating the acquisition of a limited number of even earlier Italian paintings to show the very origins of western European painting: «There should also be a few specimens

of the earlier masters» in order to «giv[e] a history of the early art» that could then be «[traced] through the masters in the time of Raphael».⁸ This recommendation was repeated in the report of the later 1853 Select Committee, which made the case for this novel change of direction at some length:

What Chaucer and Spenser are to Shakespeare and Milton, Giotto and Masaccio are to the great masters of the Florentine school; and a National Gallery would be as defective without adequate specimens of both styles of painting, as a National Library without specimens of both styles of poetry. In order, therefore, to render the British National Gallery worthy of the name it bears, Your Committee think that the funds appropriated to the enlargement of the collection should be expended with a view, not merely of exhibition to the public of beautiful works of art, but of instructing the people in the history of that art, and of the age in which, and the men by whom, those works were produced.⁹

The factor of historical importance was emphasised given that most people at the time found the earliest Duecento and Trecento Italian art visually unappealing and not appropriate as artistic models for aspiring artists to follow. On the other hand, certain witnesses commended Quattrocento Italian art of the era before Raphael on account of its perceived piety and purity. For instance, the summary report of the 1835-1836 Select Committee noted: «It has been recommended by more than one experienced witness, that the pictures particularly sought for in our national collection should be those of the era of Raphael, or of the times just antecedent to it; such works being of a purer and more elevated style than the eminent works of the Caracci».¹⁰

Both committees were also interested in what leading continental European galleries were doing, motivated by a definite sense that the National Gallery's collecting strategy was lagging behind its foreign peers, in a fashion embarrassing to national honour. For instance, the 1835-1836 Select Committee noted: «Paintings of the Raphael era form the best nucleus of a gallery; they have been sought for on this account as the basis of the new National Gallery at Berlin».¹¹ Indeed, one of the witnesses before that 1835-1836 Select Committee was the businessman and *marchand-amateur* Edward Solly, whose collection of 3,000 pictures had been block-purchased in 1821 as the nucleus of the Gemäldegalerie's earliest holdings. This activity, which underscores Prussia's pioneering role in the acquisition of gold-ground paintings, formed part of a broader patriotic programme of cultural institution-building that followed the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815 and the recovery of works of art seized for the

Louvre.¹² Certainly, France had played a seminal role during the Napoleonic era in drawing attention to earlier Italian painting. Notably, under the direction of Dominique Vivant Denon, the Louvre had incorporated in 1814 works looted from suppressed Italian churches and convents into a broadly historical temporary display of the Italian schools, thereby helping to establish early Renaissance painting as a legitimate object of public collection and art-historical study.¹³ However, it was Waagen in Prussia who was especially systematic in the purchase of gold-ground pictures after 1815.

Interestingly, Eastlake, who had been aware of the Solty Collection from at least 1828, when Waagen had shown him round it, wrote in private correspondence in 1830 about similar changes he would like to see at the National Gallery in London:

I am afraid there is too little interest in England for early pictures which throw often so much light on the leading characteristics of schools of art. A most valuable collection was formed by an Englishman some years since in Italy [the Solty Collection], and since sold to the King of Prussia. [...] I hope the historical view of art will not be ultimately overlooked in our National Gallery.¹⁴

Alongside pinpointing the area of its collection in which the National Gallery ought to prioritize its expansion, both Select Committees highlighted matters which would need to change in order that early Italian art might successfully be acquired. One issue was the lack of specialist knowledge. To remedy the situation, the idea of a professionally qualified Director with executive authority was raised. The 1853 Select Committee laid out the necessary attributes for such a postholder:

The qualifications of a director [...] should comprise not only a complete knowledge of the styles of the various masters and schools of art, and of the value, both intrinsic and commercial, of their works, but also an enlightened taste in appreciating their several merits, to the exclusion of all partiality for particular schools, epochs, or authors.¹⁵

This was a tall order at a time when few people knew much about early Italian art and when most held fixed tastes and biases towards later art. Eastlake was appointed as Keeper of the Gallery in 1843 precisely because of his unsurpassed knowledge of Italian art among his countrymen. Additionally, he was known for his catholicity of taste.

The other big hindrance to making any kind of purchase had been the inability of the Trustees to act fast enough in securing necessary funds from the Treasury when eligible paintings came up for sale on

the market.¹⁶ Eastlake, among other witnesses in 1853, pressed for the establishment of an annual purchase grant.¹⁷ From 1855, an annual grant for buying paintings was established at £10,000 (much the figure that Eastlake had suggested as being reasonable).

Eastlake was chosen as the Gallery's first Director because, more than anyone else, he was deemed to possess the requisite knowledge and experience. For one thing, he had proved his administrative and diplomatic capabilities through the important positions he held in the Victorian art world, as noted above. For another thing, he had an enviable expanding network of connoisseurs, collectors, dealers and craftsmen at home and abroad. Furthermore, Eastlake had the intellectual standing for the post. He was recognised as knowledgeable about Italian art history, including early Tuscan art, which with his broadminded attitudes he was able to judge by their own lights. Thus, in Venice he recognised the qualities of Giovanni Bellini,¹⁸ and questioned the earlier reaction of Reynolds, first President of the Royal Academy:

Sir Joshua speaks of him, as compared with Titian, with too much contempt, because he was a high finisher. But Gio. Bellini was a great painter; with beauty, expression, often fine arrangement, and a glowing colour.¹⁹

In terms of Eastlake's publications concerning early Italian art, some of his most important early outputs were as an editor and translator, making the latest European thinking on the subject available – and acceptable – to his largely monoglot – and sometimes xenophobic – compatriots. He published his English edition of Franz Kugler's pioneering *The Italian Schools* in 1842, which drew attention to Duccio di Buoninsegna, while his long review essay in the *Quarterly Review* in 1840 of Johann David Passavant's recent book, *Rafael und sein Vater* (published in German in 1839) helped shed light on the life and work of Raphael and his father, the painter Giovanni Santi.²⁰ Furthermore, from 1847, Eastlake was responsible for editing the new-style National Gallery catalogues, which included entries on every new acquisition, including early Tuscan paintings.²¹

Eastlake, even before establishing any formal link with the Gallery, had already been involved with Gallery negotiations over early Italian art acquisitions, some of which heralded his future activity as Director. He had tried, ultimately in vain, to interest the British government in acquiring Sir Thomas Lawrence's extraordinary collection of drawings by the Old Masters, many by Raphael and Michelangelo. His first campaign took place in 1834, followed by a second in July 1840.²²

Also worth noting is that, in 1841, Eastlake saved the Gallery Trustees from buying a misattributed Raphael: the work in question, now in the Courtauld Galleries, is a *Holy Family*, which Eastlake attributed instead to Fra Bartolommeo; it is now catalogued as by Perino Del Vaga, who blended influences from Michelangelo, Raphael and classical antiquity, which indicates that Eastlake's suggested attribution was not far off the mark.²³

Eastlake first acquired early Italian art in an official capacity for the Gallery during his time as Keeper, a post he held from 1843 to 1847. He helped purchase Giovanni Bellini's *Doge Leonardo Loredan* in 1844 and Raphael's *Dream of a Knight* in 1847.²⁴ Art critics pointed out favourably the links between these new acquisitions and the new Keeper, the *Athenaeum* reporting in May 1844 of the first purchase, for instance:

It makes double sure our assurance of what Mr. Eastlake's conservatorship would attempt (we trust, accomplish) towards elevating and purifying popular taste, through the influence of [...] the National Gallery.²⁵

These two Eastlake-related acquisitions certainly were novelties at Trafalgar Square, even if they were soon followed up by the Gallery's first gift of early Italian art, when the Radical MP for Brighton, William Coningham in 1848 gave two fragmentary panels showing *Adoring Saints* by Lorenzo Monaco (then attributed to Taddeo Gaddi), which had once formed part of the *San Benedetto Altarpiece*, painted for the high altar of the monastery of San Benedetto fuori della Porta Pinti in Florence.²⁶ Yet, Eastlake was frustrated that, as a single voice standing up to the then reactionary board of Trustees, he was unable to drum up sufficient support to buy significant works of early Italian art. He not only failed to persuade the Board to purchase the Lawrence Collection, as noted, but he was also aggrieved when he lost *The Manchester Madonna*, a work he attributed to Domenico Ghirlandaio. That painting did eventually enter the national collection, but in 1870, and it is now catalogued as by Michelangelo.²⁷

The situation changed after the reconstitution of the National Gallery in 1855, when Eastlake, as inaugural Director, was given executive power to make decisions regarding purchases and had a strategic collecting policy to follow, which prioritised the collecting of early Italian art, enabled through a newly instituted £10,000 annual purchase grant. Indeed, the Treasury Minute of 27 March 1855, which reconstituted the Gallery's management, noted that among «the chief duties of the Director [...] preference should be given to fine pictures

for sale abroad [...] good specimens of the Italian schools, including those of earlier masters».²⁸

Eastlake had two competent members of staff, whom he appointed, to assist him: Otto Mündler, a Bavarian picture dealer, who acted as the Gallery's Travelling Agent, with the remit of scouting out potential acquisitions and assisting Eastlake with any ensuing negotiations, and Ralph Nicholson Wornum, who acted as Keeper and Secretary, tasked with cataloguing, framing and display, dealing with correspondence and the copyists.²⁹ Eastlake had already worked with Wornum from 1847, over the publication of a new style scholarly catalogue, noted earlier. And he knew of Mündler from the latter's bold work in publishing reattributions of many Italian paintings in the Louvre.

In terms of the early Italian art acquired for London during his directorship, Eastlake focused on three areas, largely predicated on Vasarian art history, which named as the three jewels in the crown of Italian art history, Michelangelo, Leonardo and Raphael. Eastlake's efforts focussed on acquiring works by the predecessors and contemporaries of Leonardo in Lombardy and of Raphael in Florence. Additionally, led by personal predilection, he sought earlier works which informed later productions of Titian and Giorgione in Venice.

In terms of the Tuscan 'primitives', most were supplied, as noted by Lady Eastlake in the letter quoted at the start of the article, by the Florentine business partners Francesco Lombardi and Ugo Baldi. The owners from 1838 had amassed a pioneering collection of about 100 works, which had been known to the Gallery since as early as 1847, although Eastlake recorded that he was the first person connected with the Gallery to have «an opportunity of seeing and reporting on the collection», which he did in the first year he was Director.³⁰ In a later letter to Gallery Trustees, dated 4 February 1856, he noted:

Many English travellers who have visited Florence, members of Parliament and others, are desirous that the Lombardi-Baldi pictures should be secured, as forming a foundation, in a chronological sense, for an Italian gallery. I have the same opinion of its importance in that sense.³¹

But negotiations were protracted and complicated since Eastlake did not want to acquire the entire collection for the nation – partly because there was very restricted space at Trafalgar Square and partly because he felt the quality of the collection to be patchy – and originally the owners were unwilling to countenance splitting it up. Eventually, the Gallery secured 22 works for £7,000, which Eastlake character-



ized as «[a]ll the justly celebrated and all the most historically valuable pictures». ³² The group included Margarito d'Arezzo's *Virgin and Child*, dated to probably about 1263-1264 (fig. 1), which remains one of the earliest pictures in the Gallery. Eastlake felt compelled to explain his decision to acquire works like this whose ugliness Victorian audiences found distasteful. In the Gallery's annual report of 1857-1858 – the first of its kind – Eastlake put on record:

1. Margarito d'Arezzo, *The Virgin and Child Enthroned*, probably about 1263-1264, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG564). Bought, 1857. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

The unsightly specimens of Margaritone and the earliest Tuscan painters were selected solely for their historical importance, and as showing the rude beginning from which, through nearly two centuries and a half, Italian art slowly advanced to the period of Raphael and his contemporaries. ³³

Eastlake was never himself reconciled to the crudeness of the very earliest Italian 'primitives'. He had even cautioned against purchasing too many such «specimens» in his 1853 witness statements, where he spoke about what he perceived to be a new fad in collecting early art:

I think there is a great deal of fashion in it; a large proportion of those early pictures are full of affectation and grimace; and many persons who have, or fancy they have, a taste for those pictures are insensible to the essential elements of painting, such as beauty of arrangement, harmony of colouring, and natural action and expression.

Consequently, he urged «a certain latitude and discretion» in such purchases. ³⁴

We should remember that Eastlake, as President of the Royal Academy, was tasked with encouraging the next generation of living painters in the best artistic paths. Also, worth bearing in mind is that from 1838 to 1869, a period including Eastlake's directing of both the Royal Academy and the National Gallery, both institutions shared the same building on Trafalgar Square, so that students could easily go from one side of the building to the other, from their practical art classes to the galleries to study examples of art of the past to inspire their own creativity. Unsurprisingly, Margarito's work was not promoted by Royal Academician teaching staff as a good exemplar for students to copy.

While Eastlake never warmed to the earliest Tuscan 'primitives', he did promote later Florentine art, especially of the era immediately preceding Raphael. It is worth noting at this point what a major painterly influence on Eastlake's own work as a painter was Raphael's idealizing beauty, and how contemporary critics often compared his style with Raphael's. For instance, W. M. Thackeray, in 1840, observed: «Happy are you, Charles Lock Eastlake, Esquire, R.A.! I think you have in your breast some of that sacred fire that lighted the bosom of Raphael Sanctius, Esquire, of Urbino».³⁵ And when Eastlake exhibited his painting, *The Sisters*, in 1841 at the Royal Academy, a reviewer in *The Observer*, praised it «for the Raffaelesque-grace, the Raffaelesque-elegance, and above all for the Raffaelesque-expression of the heads».³⁶ This interest in Raphael helps explain Eastlake's growing attraction to Raphael's Tuscan contemporaries and forbears.

One early discovery that Eastlake noted with particular pleasure was Fra Angelico (active 1417; died 1455), whose sweetness of style greatly appealed. In 1860 Eastlake purchased a group of five paintings by Fra Angelico from the Valentini Collection in Rome, which had the additional attraction of being in excellent condition and never having been restored (fig. 2).³⁷ Eastlake also purchased another work by the artist for his own private collection, which in fact never reached England, being lost at sea.³⁸

Other episodes concerning works negotiated in Eastlake's inaugural year as Director by Domenico Ghirlandaio, Benozzo Gozzoli and the Pollaiuolo brothers are likewise indicative of his commitment to Florentine Quattrocento art. As with his acquisitions which related to other schools of painting, Eastlake was pleased whenever he was able to add new knowledge about his acquisitions, whether in relation to their making, meaning, attribution, dating or provenance. Seemingly, his experiences of dealing with owners and the international art market in the field were no less complex or frustrating than in any other,



although his negotiations over early Italian art were often the first time he encountered certain issues, given that these acquisitions took place early on in his directorship. Eastlake's focused and increasingly expert interest in early Florentine art clearly raised its standing, which, in turn, encouraged Italian authorities to take a more sustained interest in such work, not least in preserving it in Italy. This partly explains why some of Eastlake's purchases of early Tuscan art hailed from centres outside Tuscany, where export laws were less stringent.

Indeed, Eastlake's very first hoped-for purchase of a work which he had newly identified as being by Domenico Ghirlandaio, was export stopped by the Tuscan authorities, jealous of Eastlake's potential prize.³⁹ The irritation regarding the UK's failed effort and sense of injustice is clearly expressed by the diplomat Lord Normanby. In a letter to his Florentine counterpart, dated 27 October 1855, Normanby recorded pointedly that his countrymen:

cannot be denied all the merit of having first called the attention of their brother connoisseurs [...] to the extraordinary value of the picture, which but for their thankless intervention might have remained another century in neglect and obscurity.⁴⁰

Eastlake's purchase of *The Madonna and Child Enthroned among Angels and Saints* by Benozzo Gozzoli, a pupil of Fra Angelico, followed quickly on the heels of the Ghirlandaio failed negotiation; it came from the remnant of the Rinuccini Sale in Autumn 1855.⁴¹ The following report to Gallery Trustees about its purchase demonstrates both Eastlake's increased awareness of the difficulties of exporting art, and

2. Fra Angelico, *Christ Glorified in the Court of Heaven*, central predella panel from the Fiesole San Domenico Altarpiece, about 1423-1424, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG663.1). Bought, 1860. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

his constant aim to discover and disseminate information concerning Gallery pictures:

This picture turns out to be the most historically interesting and probably the best altarpiece by the master extant. I made the purchase in the beginning of October last; in the following November some original documents were published [...] and among them is the contract for this altarpiece dated October 23, 1461. The description of the picture [...] identifies it perfectly. [...] After my experience of the difficulty of obtaining permission to export pictures from Florence, I am not without apprehension that endeavours may be made to detain this Benozzo Gozzoli, now that its merits and authenticity are proved. It happens also that there is no moveable specimen by the master, of any importance, in Florence; and that in the Galleries he is not sufficiently represented. I have only to hope that the circumstances under which I purchased the picture will give me a right to it not easily contested.⁴²

In this instance, all turned out well for Eastlake, and the painting was soon afterwards exported to the National Gallery.

Another important acquisition of early Tuscan art was *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, painted by Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo and purchased from Marchese Roberto Pucci in Florence in 1857 (fig. 3).⁴³ In this instance, Eastlake rated the work highly not only as an important work referenced by Vasari but also on account of what it demonstrated about the development of the technique of oil painting in Italy – we should recall that Eastlake's magnum opus, *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* of 1847, had traced the origins of the oil painting technique in the Netherlands during the fifteenth century. As Eastlake explained to Gallery Trustees in his annual summary of his activity abroad, the painting, completed in 1475, was

remarkable in the history of art [for being] one of the earliest extant, and certainly the most important example of the art of oil painting, as that art, adopted from the Flemish masters, was practised in Florence.⁴⁴

Lady Eastlake stated more than once that the four great Florentine painters whom she and her husband rated above all others were Sandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Fra Filippo Lippi and Filippino Lippi.⁴⁵ Given this important insight, a brief overview here of which works by these artists Eastlake managed to secure for the Gallery during his directorship seems appropriate. In relation to Ghirlandaio, we have noted the failed negotiation over *The Manchester Madonna*, which Eastlake thought to be a work of the master, as well as his failed attempt to export a Ghirlandaio in 1855. Eastlake did not acquire any other works by the artist during his directorship of the National Gallery.



3. Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, completed 1475, oil on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG292). Bought, 1857. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

Eastlake liked Fra Filippo Lippi's work, an artist whose style was formed in imitation of Masaccio but who, according to a later National Gallery Director, Martin Davies, although «slow in abandoning a Masaccesque uncouthness, [...] eventually evolved a more delicate style, usually said to be imitated from Fra Angelico».⁴⁶ The Gallery's first work now attributed to Filippo Lippi is *Saint Bernard's Vision of the Virgin*, which was purchased during Eastlake's time as a Trustee, from the Jolly de Bammerville Sale in London in 1854.⁴⁷ However, at the time it was at-



4. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, about 1450-1453, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG666). Presented by Sir Charles Eastlake, 1861. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

tributed to Masaccio. Eastlake was directly responsible in 1861 for two more works by Fra Filippo entering the national collection. That year, he gave the Gallery, from his own private art collection, *The Annunciation*, mentioned in Lady Eastlake's letter quoted at the start as their «old household God» (fig. 4).⁴⁸ Eastlake had just purchased its companion piece, *Seven Saints*, from a London auction of the collection of Alexander Barker.⁴⁹ Eastlake explained to the Gallery Trustees that his motivation for purchasing *Seven Saints*, which was a relatively expensive acquisition, involving him in having to buy two other works at the same time to secure it, was largely governed by the fact that, because he owned *The Annunciation*, he would be able to reunite a pair of works, originally commissioned by the Medici, Florence's ruling dynasty and premier art patrons.⁵⁰ After their acquisition, Wornum had a pair of identical frames designed for them, which made their original connection more immediately apparent to visitors.

In connection with the Filippo Lippi *Annunciation*, we might usefully say a little more about Eastlake's private art collection, on which I have written extensively elsewhere.⁵¹ His paintings, displayed at his home in Fitzroy Square, comprising mostly pre-1600 Italian art, were mostly bought when he was conducting business abroad for the national collection. Eastlake always gave the Gallery first refusal on anything he acquired for himself. For instance, he dithered about whether he should retain Piero della Francesca's *The Baptism of Christ*, worried about its physical condition, but was quickly persuaded by his colleague and future Gallery Trustee, Henry Austen Layard that it was too important

a treasure not to go to Trafalgar Square.⁵² Soon afterwards, Eastlake acquired a second Piero – the *Saint Michael* – although he bought it thinking it was by Fra Carnevale.⁵³ The connections between the two collections became closer after Eastlake's death, when his widow of-



5. Francesco Pesellino and Fra Filippo Lippi and workshop, *The Trinity*, from *The Pistoia Santa Trinità Altarpiece*, 1455-1460, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG727). Bought, 1863. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.



6. Filippino Lippi, *The Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Dominic*, about 1485, oil and egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG293). Bought, 1857. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

ferred all the pictures purchased during Eastlake's directorship to the Trustees of the National Gallery at the same prices that her late husband had originally paid for them; the Trustees purchased a portion in 1867, including Piero's *Saint Michael*. Over time and through different channels, other works with an Eastlake provenance have been acquired by the Gallery: there are currently 26 paintings at Trafalgar Square with an Eastlake provenance.

Returning to Fra Filippo Lippi, Eastlake also purchased for the Gallery, albeit unknowingly, another painting now associated with him: a fragment depicting *The Trinity* from *The Pistoia San Trinità Altarpiece* (fig. 5).⁵⁴ Today, the altarpiece is considered to have been begun by Francesco Pesellino, left half-finished at his death, and completed in 1457 by Fra Filippo. Today, the work is displayed complete since the four remaining fragments and predella have either been acquired or are currently on long loan to the Gallery.

Eastlake secured one work for the national collection by Filippino Lippi, the son of Fra Filippo, who, after his father's death, lived and worked in Botticelli's Florentine studio. This purchase was an impor-



7. Sandro Botticelli and Filippino Lippi, *Adoration of the Kings*, about 1470, egg tempera on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG592). Bought, 1857. Credit: © The National Gallery, London

tant altarpiece depicting *The Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Dominic*, referred to by Vasari, which Eastlake acquired in Florence, in 1857, from Cav. Giuseppe Rucellai, a descendant of the original patron (fig. 6).⁵⁵

Another Filippino associated with Eastlake is *The Virgin and Child with Saint John*, purchased from a sale of Lady Eastlake's collection which took place on 2 June 1894.⁵⁶ It had been one of the pictures offered to the Gallery by her in 1867, as noted above, and thus was a work originally bought by Eastlake as Director, between 1855 and 1865.

Turning to Botticelli, who had originally trained as a goldsmith with one of the Pollaiuolo brothers and was, according to a pre-Vasarian tradition, trained as a painter by Fra Filippo Lippi, Eastlake's first purchases were two roundels both depicting the Virgin and Child. Both were bought in Florence in 1855, and both are now catalogued as by his workshop.⁵⁷ Later, Eastlake purchased *The Adoration of the Kings*, which is considered one of Botticelli's earliest works – which explains its similarities with Fra Filippo's style – produced in collaboration with Filippino Lippi (fig. 7).⁵⁸ It was acquired in 1857 as part of the Lombard-Baldi purchase.

Eastlake also acquired *Saint Francis of Assisi with Angels* in 1858 from the Costabili Collection, Ferrara (fig. 8) and *Portrait of a Young Man* in 1859, from the Northwick Sale, although, at the time of purchase, it was catalogued as a self-portrait by Masaccio.⁵⁹

It is important to contextualise these representative examples of Eastlake's early Florentine art acquisitions by noting the other types of early



8. Sandro Botticelli, *Saint Francis of Assisi with Angels*, about 1475-1480, egg tempera with some oil on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG598). Bought, 1858. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

Italian art on which Eastlake focused attention and directed government funding. This is because Eastlake put equal, if not more, effort into two other areas, especially during the second half of his directorship. One was early Lombard art, with the aim of contextualising the later work of Leonardo, a topic on which I have written elsewhere.⁶⁰ The second, which I would like to say a little about here, was the earlier Venetian school as Eastlake was consistently interested in understanding and ex-

plaining the influences on Titian of the earlier Venetian school. In my opinion, this is where Eastlake's personal preference lay, in distinction to Lady Eastlake's abiding love of Florentine Quattrocento painting. Certainly, in terms of influence on Eastlake as a painter, alongside Raphaelesque beauty already alluded to, the other most important influence was sixteenth-century Venetian art, especially the work of Titian, principally on account of its luminous colouring. For instance, in 1830, Eastlake resided in Venice for two months, where he made sketches after Titian, Giorgione and Paolo Veronese. The British landscape painter John Constable alluded to Eastlake's indebtedness to Cinquecento Venetian art when, at this time, he expressed delight in Eastlake's decision to return to England permanently after his fourteen-year residency in Rome: «it is melancholy to think of a man of such a mind and talent mouldering away at

9. Giovanni Bellini, *Madonna of the Meadow*, about 1500-1505, oil, originally on wood, transferred to composite board. London, The National Gallery (NG599). Bought, 1858. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.





Rome – pursuing the ghosts only of Titian and Giorgione». ⁶¹ Eastlake himself acknowledged his abiding debt to Titian which overtook his previous love for the classical past. In an early private letter to his art patron, Jeremiah Harman, he enumerated his prime, evolving influences:

Long ago I never thought I should get attached to Italy for any other reasons than [...] for its antiquities and classic materials. I have since loved it more for its landscape and modern costume; and I have lastly loved it most for its being the country of Titian, and still containing what we admire in his pictures, not forgetting landscape. ⁶²

It is Eastlake's deep interest in Titian and landscape that inspired his sustained interest in Giovanni Bellini, of whom Lady Eastlake recorded her husband saying: «Giovanni Bellini is so great in his finest works as to bear a comparison with any of the precursors of the Augustan age of painting in Rome or Florence». ⁶³ During Eastlake's directorship, to add to the *Doge Leonardo Loredan*, purchased, as noted, during his Keepership in 1844, Eastlake bought four more works by Giovanni Bellini, which is a record in terms of numbers

10. Giovanni Bellini, *The Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr*, about 1505-1507, oil on wood. London, The National Gallery (NG812). Presented by Lady Eastlake, 1870. Credit: © The National Gallery, London.

of works he purchased by any one painter: *Saint Jerome reading in a Landscape*, in Venice in 1855, from a certain «M. Marcovich»; *The Virgin and Child*, likewise purchased in Venice in 1855, from Baron Galvagna, and for which painting he happily paid for another nine works just to secure it (and thereby save it from purchase by the Louvre); *Madonna of the Meadow*, bought as a Basaiti from Achille Farina, in Faenza in 1858, but which Eastlake immediately recognised as a masterpiece by Bellini (fig. 9), and finally *The Agony in the Garden*, purchased at the Davenport Bromley Sale, in London in 1863.⁶⁴

Of further relevance in the current discussion is the fact that the widowed Lady Eastlake presented Giovanni Bellini's *The Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr* in 1870 as a thank offering (fig. 10).⁶⁵ This came immediately after the Trustees had purchased Eastlake's private art history library of some 2,000 volumes.⁶⁶ This second and final gift followed her earlier one of three years earlier, when she presented to the nation in 1867 Pisanello's *The Virgin and Child with Saints Anthony Abbot and George* to commemorate Eastlake's directorship.⁶⁷

Most of Eastlake's early Italian purchases, and all his acquisitions of Tuscan 'primitives', occurred during the first half of his directorship. Indeed, in 1861 he declared that he felt sufficient examples had been acquired and henceforth he would be turning his attention to filling gaps in other areas of the collection. Certain important individuals disagreed with his assessment and continued working in his pioneering footsteps to acquire further examples.⁶⁸ For one thing, in 1863, four early Italian pictures, along with sixteen early Netherlandish and five early German ones, were gifted by Queen Victoria, in accordance with the wishes of Prince Albert, who had died in December 1861, and who had been an important early collector of early Italian art.⁶⁹ The Prince Consort had originally hoped to donate the entire Oettingen-Wallerstein Collection of early art, which he himself had received from a distant cousin to settle a debt. But, as with the Lombardi-Baldi Collection, Eastlake was willing to accept only the best part – in this case some twenty-five paintings – partly due to an ongoing chronic lack of space at Trafalgar Square, partly to uphold the quality of the collection, and partly to maintain a balance among the different parts of it. The second and third Directors of the National Gallery, William Boxall and Frederic Burton, continued to make some significant purchases in the field. Another wave of important Quattrocento Florentine art acquisition followed at the start of the twentieth century, notably with the Layard Bequest of 1916 and the Mond Bequest of 1924. Most recently, a group of

significant early Tuscan painting entered the collection around the Millennium and early 2000s, largely through the remarkable efforts of Dr Dillian Gordon, the National Gallery's then Curator of Italian Paintings, pre-1500.

Whether the earliest Italian art was to Eastlake's artistic liking or not, he certainly succeeded, as I hope this short article has proved, in creating a very significant and pioneering group of early Italian art for Britain. What I also hope to have demonstrated is that apart from changing the nature of the collection fundamentally, the decision to introduce early Italian art into the national collection affected a host of interconnected decisions of the most profound kind about the Gallery's function, personnel and financing, which set it on completely new tracks, whose consequences are still felt today.

¹ Letter from Lady Eastlake to Cosmo Monkhouse, 10 June 1887, National Gallery Archives, London, NGA59/12.

² For an overview of the story of the National Gallery's collecting of early Italian art, including the earliest Tuscan painters, see Susanna Avery-Quash, *The Growth of Interest in Collecting Early Italian Art with Special Reference to Paintings in the National Gallery*, in *National Gallery Catalogues. The Fifteenth-Century Italian Paintings. Vol. 1*, edited by Dillian Gordon, National Gallery Company, London, 2003, pp. XXIV–XLIV.

³ *Report from the Select Committee on the National Gallery. Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index. Ordered, by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 4 August 1853*, H.M.S.O., London, 1853.

⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures. With the Minutes of Evidence, Appendix and Index. Ordered by the House of Commons, 16 August 1836*, H.M.S.O., London, 1836.

⁵ *Select Committee 1853*, cit., paragraph 5307: 10 June 1853.

⁶ Ivi, paragraph 5308: 10 June 1853.

⁷ *Select Committee 1836*, cit., paragraph 84: 27 July 1835.

⁸ Ivi, paragraph 85: 27 July 1835.

⁹ *Select Committee 1853*, cit., p. xvi.

¹⁰ *Select Committee 1836*, cit., p. x.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² For the Solly Collection, and its purchase for the Berlin Gallery, see *The Solly Collection, 1821–2021. Founding the Berlin Gemäldegalerie*, edited by Robert Skwirbli, in collaboration with Roberto Contini, Stephan Kemperdick, Katja Kleinert, Neville Rowley and Sarah Solomon, exhibition catalogue (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, October 21, 2021–January 16, 2022), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin and Munich, 2021, and Idem, *Gustav Friedrich Waagen storico dell'arte: approccio, metodo e*

obiettivi, in *Il mestiere del conoscitore. Gustav Friedrich Waagen, Charles Lock Eastlake*, edited by Neville Rowley, Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna, 2025, pp. 12–59.

¹³ See *Dominique-Vivant Denon. L'œil de Napoleon*, edited by Marie-Anne Dupuy, exhibition catalogue (Paris, Musée du Louvre, October 20 1999–January 17 2000), Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Paris, 1999; Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum. Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000, pp. 40–44; Cecil Gould, *Trophy of Conquest. The Musée Napoléon and the Creation of the Louvre*, Faber, London, 1965, pp. 87–99, 109–115 and 127; Marie Louise Blumer, *La mission de Denon en Italie (1811)*, «Revue des Etudes Napoléoniennes», 38, November 1934, pp. 237–257, and Eadem, *Catalogue des peintures transportées d'Italie en France de 1796 à 1814*, «Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art français», 1936, pp. 244–348.

¹⁴ Charles Lock Eastlake, *Contributions to the Literature of the Fine Arts. Second Series. With a Memoir Compiled by Lady Eastlake*, John Murray, London, 1870, p. 133.

¹⁵ *Select Committee 1853*, cit., p. XVI. For more on the National Gallery's evolving criteria for its Directors, see Susanna Avery-Quash and James Carleton Paget, *The Artist as Director at the National Gallery, London. Intention or Happenstance?*, in *Artists Work in Museums. Histories, Interventions, Subjectivities*, edited by Matilda Pye and Linda Sandino, Wunderkammer Press, Bath, 2013, pp. 33–47.

¹⁶ *Select Committee 1853*, cit., paragraph 6034: 17 June 1853. See also ivi, paragraphs 6297, 6307–6313.

¹⁷ See ivi, paragraphs 6294–6307.

¹⁸ See David Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1978, p. 33.

¹⁹ Eastlake, *Contributions*, cit., pp. 132–133.

²⁰ Eastlake's review of Johann David Passavant's *Rafael von Urbino und sein Vater Giovanni Santi* appeared in the «Quarterly Review», LXVI, June 1840, pp. 1–48. Eastlake's edition of Franz Theodor Kugler's *Handbook of the History of Painting. Part I. Italian Schools* was published by John Murray in London in 1842.

²¹ Ralph Nicholson Wornum, revised by Charles Lock Eastlake, *Descriptive and Historical Catalogue of the Pictures in the National Gallery. With Biographical Notices of the Painters*, H.M.S.O., London, 1847.

²² See Eastlake, *Contributions*, cit., pp. 151–157; Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 51–53; Susanna Avery-Quash and Julie Sheldon, *The Eastlakes and the Victorian Art World*, National Gallery, London, 2011, pp. 37–38.

²³ See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 53–54.

²⁴ NG189 and NG213, respectively.

²⁵ «Athenaeum», 11 May 1844, p. 430; see also Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 80.

²⁶ NG215–216. N.B. Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* of 1434 (NG186) was first displayed at the National Gallery in 1842.

²⁷ NG809. See Neville Rowley, *Manchester 1857: una mostra e una Madonna*, in Rowley, *Il mestiere del conoscitore*, cit., pp. 330–353.

²⁸ Treasury Minute, 27 March 1855, National Gallery Archives, London, NG5/18.

²⁹ See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 140–141; Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *The Eastlakes*, cit., pp. 136–137. For more on Mündler, see Jaynie Anderson and Carol Togneri Dowd, *The Travel Diaries of Otto Mündler, 1855–1858*, «The Walpole Society», LI, 1985; for more on R.N. Wornum, see Jeanne Nuechterlein, *German Renaissance art through the eyes of the National Gallery*, «The Burlington Magazine», CLVI, 1331, February 2014, pp. 76–84.

³⁰ NG564-594. See, for the whole episode, Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 124-125, 145, 174, 176 and Gabriele Fattorini, *I primitivi di Francesco Lombardi e Ugo Baldi da Firenze a Londra*, in Rowley, *Il mestiere del conoscitore*, cit., pp. 194-235. For more on Ugo Baldi, see also the essays in the current volume by Matthew Hayes and Mattia Barana. The first early Italian painting that Eastlake bought during his directorship is Spinello Aretino, *Two Haloed Mourners* (NG276), acquired from the Samuel Rogers sale, 3 May 1856.

³¹ See Eastlake's letters to National Gallery Trustees, dated 4 February 1856 and 14 November 1857, transcribed in Susanna Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks of Sir Charles Eastlake*, 2 vols., «The Walpole Society», LXXIII, 2011, vol. II, p. 102 and pp. 109-110, respectively. See also Eastlake's later letter to the Gallery Trustees, dated 27 November 1862 (transcribed in Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks*, cit., II, p. 130), when he informed them that he had purchased Piero di Cosimo's *A Satyr Mourning over a Nymph* (NG698) from the Lombardi Baldi Collection: «This picture had formed part of the selection from the Lombardi gallery & was only omitted at the time of the original purchase from the difficulty of coming to terms».

³² *Report of the Director of the National Gallery for 1857-1858*; reprinted in Martin Davis, *National Gallery Catalogues. The Earlier Italian Schools*, National Gallery, London, 1961, Appendix I, *The Lombardi-Baldi Collection*, pp. 565-567; here p. 567.

³³ *Ibidem*. 'Margaritone' refers to Margarito d'Arezzo's painting, NG564.

³⁴ *Select Committee 1853*, cit., paragraph 6472.

³⁵ Quoted in Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 248.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 45, note 8.

³⁷ NG663.1-5. See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 192-193.

³⁸ See note 51 below for further details about Eastlake's private art collection and the loss of the Fra Angelico.

³⁹ Domenico and Davide Ghirlandio, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Dionysius the Areopagite, Dominic, Clement, Thomas Aquinas and Angels*, about 1480-1483, tempera on panel. Florence, Uffizi.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 149.

⁴¹ NG283.

⁴² Sir Charles Eastlake's letter to National Gallery Trustees, 4 February 1856, NG5/125/2, transcribed in Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks*, cit., II, pp. 101-102.

⁴³ NG292.

⁴⁴ See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 165; see also Eastlake's letter to National Gallery Trustees, 4 February 1856, NG5/125/2, transcribed in Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks*, cit., II, p. 102.

⁴⁵ For more on Lady Eastlake's devotion to early Tuscan art, see Julie Sheldon's contribution in this volume.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Earlier Italian Schools*, cit., p. 291.

⁴⁷ NG248.

⁴⁸ NG666.

⁴⁹ NG667.

⁵⁰ See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 195, note 42.

⁵¹ See Susanna Avery-Quash, «A gallery of art». *Fresh light on the art collection of Sir Charles Eastlake (1793-1865)*, «British Art Journal», XV, 3, Spring 2015, pp. 11-37.

⁵² NG665. See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 194-195.

⁵³ NG769.

⁵⁴ NG727.

⁵⁵ NG293.

⁵⁶ NG1412.

⁵⁷ NG226 and NG275. For an overview, see Susanna Avery-Quash, *Botticelli and Victorian art collecting*, in *Botticelli Reimagined*, edited by Mark Evans and Stefan Weppelmann, exhibition

catalogue (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, March 5-July 3, 2016), V&A Publishing, London, 2015, pp. 68-74.

⁵⁸ NG592.

⁵⁹ NG598 and NG626, respectively.

⁶⁰ See Susanna Avery-Quash and Silvia Davoli, *The National Gallery in Search of Leonardo. Acquisitions of and Contributions to Knowledge about the Lombard School*, in *Leonardo in Britain. Collections and Historical Reception*, edited by Juliana Barone and Susanna Avery-Quash, Olschki, Florence, 2018, pp. 141-163.

⁶¹ Quoted in Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., p. 39.

⁶² Quoted in Avery-Quash, *The Travel Notebooks*, cit., II, p. 94.

⁶³ Eastlake, *Contributions*, cit., p. 132.

⁶⁴ NG281, NG280, NG599 and NG726, respectively. See Giacomo Alberto Calogero, «A High Finisher». *Giovanni Bellini tra Gustav Friedrich Waagen e Charles Lock Eastlake*, in Rowley, *Il mestiere del conoscitore*, cit., pp. 294-329.

⁶⁵ NG812.

⁶⁶ See Avery-Quash and Sheldon, *The Eastlakes*, cit., pp. 203-204; see also, *ivi*, pp. 161-162, and Susanna Avery-Quash with Elspeth Hector, *The Eastlake Library. Origins, History and Importance*, «Memofonte», X, 2013, pp. 3-45.

⁶⁷ NG776.

⁶⁸ For an overview of the National Gallery's continued interest in acquiring early Italian art, post-Eastlake, see Avery-Quash, *The Growth of Interest*, cit., pp. XXXII-XXXIX.

⁶⁹ See Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake*, cit., pp. 319-320. See also Susanna Avery-Quash, «Incessant Personal Exertions and Comprehensive Artistic Knowledge». *Prince Albert's Interest in Early Italian Art*, in *Victoria & Albert/ Art & Love*, edited by Susanna Avery-Quash, online publication, pp. 2-14; <https://media.rct.uk/sites/default/files/V%20and20A%20Art%20and%20Love%20%28Avery-Quash%29.pdf>. Accessed June 2026.