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Giovanni Battista Benvenuti, called L'Ortolano
(Ferrara c. 1487/88-c. 1525/27)

The Virgin and Child

With branded collector's mark 'LS' below a cross
(on the reverse)

Oil on panel

15 x 12 ¼ in. (38.2 x 31.2 cm.)

Painted c.1510-20.



Provenance

European Aristocratic family, from whom acquired by the previous owner.

Ortolano—who owed his soubriquet to his father's employment as a gardener—was evidently trained at Ferrara in the orbit of such artists as Domenico Panetti, in the first decade of the sixteenth century. Like his older Ferrarese contemporary Boccaccio Boccaccino, he came to express a contemplative ideal which owed much to the world of Venice, which he apparently visited with the young Garofalo; he would continue to respond consistently to painters with similar classical leanings, Perugino, Fra Bartolommeo and the mature Raphael.

This beautifully understated panel, intimate in scale, was evidently intended for private devotion, creating a style that was very much his own. Two early Madonnas, respectively in the church at Castelforte and at Gazzada, Fondazione Cagnola, show the head of the Virgin from the same angle as in this panel and with her hands similarly joined in prayer: these are dated not after 1506 by G. Frabetti (*L'Ortolano*, Ferrara, 1966, nos. 9 and 23). This hitherto unknown picture dates from the painter's early maturity in the following decade, as the characteristic landscape implies. The panel demonstrates at once Ortolano's personal taste and technical ability. We are indebted to Marco Tanzi for confirming the attribution to the artist on the basis of an emailed image.