Strikingly similar but not identical, two paintings of the *Madonna of the Goldfinch* are unique among the works attributed to Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770), the premier Venetian painter of the Settecento. The first canvas (fig. 1) is dated to the period following his call to Madrid by Charles III in 1762, when he was commissioned to provide a frescoed ceiling for the Throne Room in the recently-completed Royal Palace (De Grazia and Garberson 285; Gemin and Pedroccho 466; Pedroccho, *Tiepolo* 310). The second work (fig. 2), closely modeled on the first and completed during the same time frame, has provoked critical disagreement, with some scholars assigning it to Tiepolo’s eldest son, Giandomenico (1727-1804), while others believe that it too was executed by the father Giambattista. Subtle differences between the two paintings may provide clues concerning authorship, or may be explained by requests from patrons.

Giambattista and Giandomenico, as well as a younger Tiepolo son, Lorenzo (1736-76), excelled at *invenzioni*, or the creative ideas generated by artists that would imaginatively transform traditional subjects. Eighteenth-century culture considered this skill to be more important than the singular qualities of painterly technique added by the touch of a master’s hand (Mariuz, “Giambattista Tiepolo” 172). Variations spun on a theme such as the Madonna and Child demonstrate the imaginative energy at work in the Tiepolo family painters.

Both versions of the *Madonna of the Goldfinch* stand in a long tradition of small devotional paintings. Beginning in the fourteenth century, images of the Madonna and Child became increasingly popular throughout Italy. The two Tiepolo Spanish Madonnas, painted four hundred years later, exhibit many of the basic characteristics established by their antecedents. Both are small, measuring 58 centimeters by 43 centimeters (fig. 1) and 63.1 centimeters by 50.3 centimeters (fig. 2), creating a sense of intimacy between image and viewer. While Mother and Child have been portrayed in countless varieties of poses, these Tiepolo iterations are in the most traditional form, with Mary holding the infant Jesus in her arms. The Virgin’s garb also follows well-known precedents. She wears a blue mantle, a contrasting robe of rose hues, and a white veil covering her head. In both

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1 This essay is the winner of the 2013 Pilar Saenz Annual Student Essay Prize from the Ibero-American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.
pictures, her gaze is directed downward in a pensive attitude, while her Son meets the spectator's gaze directly. He clasps in his left hand a goldfinch, a symbol relating to his Passion and to the soul. The figures have been placed close to the picture plane, with the Virgin's upper torso appearing as a pyramidal shape that stabilizes the composition and provides a strongly hieratic image for the viewer's contemplation.

Despite the enduring popularity of Mary and Jesus, no other similar devotional images from the Tiepolos' Spanish period have been identified. Giambattista's and Giandomenico's other depictions of Madonna and Child are grouped in distinct phases of their respective careers. Small images of Mother and Son attributed to Giambattista were executed at the beginning of his career, while Giandomenico's Virgins were painted after his departure from Madrid in 1770. The Spanish Madonnas are unique among the works created by father and son during their tenure at Charles's court, raising questions concerning the working methods of the Tiepolo family and their repetition of subjects and motifs. In addition, the reciprocal influences between father Giambattista and his artist-sons have not been
fully explored.

Giambattista Tiepolo received his artistic training in a traditional workshop run by Gregorio Lazzarini in his native Venice. During his years in the bottega, Giambattista learned by copying works of his master, and by studying and replicating well-known paintings by Venetian Old Masters (Barcham 8). In addition to receiving training in drawing and oil painting, he was instructed in the fresco technique then becoming popular in Settecento Venice. While skillful at composing secular scenes, his creative abilities also extended to sacred subjects. In 1721, the Venetian pharmacist Giacomo Tonini commissioned Giambattista to produce a large altarpiece of *The Madonna of Mount Carmel* for a chapel in the church of Sant’ Aponal (Pedrocco, “Becoming Tiepolo” 43). A small devotional painting of the Virgin and Child possessing facial features and poses seemingly based on the corresponding altarpiece figures was likely conceived during the same time period, and would be Tiepolo’s first image of Mary and Christ in a small format (Pedrocco, *Tiepolo* 202). Several other canvases of the Madonna and Child have been dated to Tiepolo’s early period based on the palette and dramatic lighting effects employed by him during the 1720s and 1730s. He received a number of other commissions for large-scale altarpieces in Venice and the Veneto during the 1730s, but no small-scale devotional paintings have been attributed to him that are modeled on these larger works, as is true of *The Madonna of Mount Carmel*.

By mid-century, Tiepolo was acclaimed as a leading artist of the Venetian Republic. He had married Cecilia Guardi, the sister of painters Antonio and Francesco, and the couple’s son Giandomenico was born in 1727. Both the Tiepolos and the Guardis followed in the Venetian tradition of establishing family workshops, a practice dating back to the fifteenth century. Giandomenico reached the age of apprenticeship as his father’s business flourished in the 1740s. He joined the family bottega, where he was trained in the same methods of copying and drawing that his father had studied during his own years in the Lazzarini workshop (Whistler, “Aspects” 385). The workers in a Venetian shop were instructed in a “house style” that would enable them to reproduce the master’s hand as closely as possible. Only those apprentices who showed particular promise were encouraged to develop an independent artistic identity (Rosand 8; Ubeda, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 27).

When younger brother Lorenzo joined the family business, he followed the course assigned to all apprentices in the Tiepolo shop in producing copies of his father’s works as part of his training. Three undated sketches of the sculptor Alessandro Vittoria’s bust of Palma Giovane have been identified as the work of Giambattista (fig. 3), with subsequent versions rendered by Giandomenico (fig. 4) and Lorenzo (fig. 5) (Thiem 333). Notably, the sons’ works are not exact copies, but instead present variations in the spirit of their father’s master drawing, using different points of view and distinct manipulation of the chalk medium.
Fig. 3
Giambattista Tiepolo
*Study after Vittoria's Bust of Palma Giovane*
undated
Heinemann Collection, NY
(reproduced in Thiem, "Lorenzo Tiepolo as a Draftsman")

Fig. 4
Giandomenico Tiepolo
*Study after Vittoria's Bust of Palma Giovane*
undated
Schlossmuseum, Weimar
(reproduced in Thiem, "Lorenzo Tiepolo as a Draftsman")
Giambattista accepted a lucrative commission from the Prince-Bishop of Franconia in his Residenz at Würzburg in 1751, and his two artist sons accompanied him to assist in the project. The elder brother’s contributions can be detected in various scenes, but the still-young Lorenzo was probably not entrusted with significant work (Pedrocco, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 20). The Tiepolos remained in Würzburg until 1753. The nature of fresco, which consists of painting in wet plaster, limits execution to the warmer months of the year, and both Giambattista and Giandomenico used the time when work on the ceilings was not possible to undertake numerous commissions from private patrons for oil paintings. The Würzburg years saw Giandomenico develop an independent specialty that remained popular with clients throughout his career, consisting of small genre scenes of festivals and daily life painted in his own distinctive style. He also created a series of twenty-four etchings concerning the Holy Family’s Flight into
Egypt, entitled Idee pittoresche sopra la fugg in Egitto di Gesù, Maria e Giuseppe, devising entirely new episodes to demonstrate his powers of invenzione by imagining original and engaging variations on a well-known story.

After the Tiepolos’ return to Venice, demand for their services remained high, and the workshop continued to support its master’s prolific output. In 1762, Giambattista was summoned to Spain by Charles III, who required the presence of the most accomplished fresco painter in Europe to provide a suitably grand subject for the ceiling of the Throne Room. The elderly painter reluctantly complied, once again choosing to travel with sons Lorenzo and Giandomenico to assist him in executing The Wealth and Benefits of the Spanish Monarchy under Charles III, a vast allegory created for the glorification of the new Bourbon king (Sánchez Cantón 7). Tiepolo was compensated handsomely by Charles for his work, receiving an annual salary of 1,310,100 reales de vellon (Whistler, “G.B. Tiepolo” 200). At the same time, the king bestowed upon Giandomenico a separate commission for the decoration of the ceiling in the Sala de los Trucos, where his subject was The Glorification of the Order of the Golden Fleece (Urrea Fernández, “Una famiglia” 222).

Thus, even though Giandomenico arrived in Spain as a member of his father’s atelier, he was retained for works in the Royal Palace as an independent artist, and he was remunerated accordingly (Urrea Fernández, “Una famiglia” 242).

The Throne Room fresco was begun in 1762 and was completed two years later. While done in Giambattista’s typical style, workshop participation in various figures was noted, though with the clear intent of harmonizing all elements with the master’s hand. For many years it was assumed that Giandomenico had acted as his father’s principal assistant on this important work, but the discovery that he received payment for his separate major commission in the Sala de los Trucos in the same year the Throne Room’s allegory was completed leads to the conclusion that Giambattista relied on Lorenzo as his collaborator-in-chief while his older son was occupied elsewhere (Whistler, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 35).

Giambattista solicited additional fresco work in the new palace, and was

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2 Spanish royalty had for centuries valued Venetian painting, and had acquired the works of artists such as Titian, Giorgione, Veronese, and Tintoretto.

3 In comparison, Francesco Sabatini, who was appointed as architect of the Royal Palace 1760 with oversight responsibilities for all work done in the palace, was paid 410,901 reales de vellon annually; and the court painter Francesco Bayeu received 24,000 reales each year.

4 Records show that in 1764 he was paid 108,000 reales as recompense for his work.

5 Lorenzo also decorated rooms and provided pastel portraits of the royal family for which he was paid separately.
commissioned to paint the ceilings of two rooms adjacent to the Throne Room, the Antecámara, or Antechamber, and the Salón de Guardias. As the Tiepolos moved into the adjoining Antechamber to execute Giambattista’s composition of The Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy, Giandomenico resumed a leading role in the actual painting of the scene (Wolk-Simon 51). The seventy-year-old family patriarch is credited with completing the final Tiepolo fresco in the Royal Palace, The Apotheosis of Aeneas, in 1766-67.

When the ceiling for the Salón de Guardias was finished, Giambattista wrote to the king and offered his services as a painter in oils, which suggests that he had not yet executed works in this medium for Charles (Barcham 46). In response, he received a commission for seven separate altarpieces for the new convent church of San Pascual Baylon in Aranjuez, where the monarchy had situated its royal retreat (Whistler, “Tiepolo” 242).6 The elder Tiepolo provided highly finished modelli, as was his usual practice for clients, and then completed the canvases by 1769, with assistance from Giandomenico.

Apart from his royal commissions, few oil paintings attributed to Giambattista Tiepolo survive to indicate that he accepted commissions for any work other than his assignments for the king. The two Madonna of the Goldfinch canvases are the only known paintings that would appear to be devotional works destined for private clients. Eight other small canvases in Giambattista’s hand that portray religious subjects have puzzled scholars since they first appeared on the art market. It is unclear whether Giambattista painted any or all of them for himself, or whether some were intended as pairs or possibly as a set for a single patron (Barcham 124). Stylistically, they are not similar to the two Madonnas, but contain small figures and the quick, flickering brushwork that had established Giambattista’s international reputation. They have been assigned to his Spanish period since they bear the hallmarks of his late manner (Brown 322).

Two of the paintings that may have been paired depict Passion scenes of the Lamentation and the Entombment (Christiansen 344).7 Madrid’s skyline appears in the background of the Lamentation, confirming Spain as the country of origin. Four additional paintings may have been devised as a set, or could be viewed as two separate pairs. All are based on the Flight into Egypt; two portray the Rest on the Flight, and the second set represents the

6 The king’s confessor, Joaquín de Eleta, was a member of the Franciscan order for the new church being constructed.

7 The sizes vary slightly: 59 cm. x 47 cm. and 56.7 cm. x 43.8 cm. Both are in a private collection.
flight itself. The sizes are similar, but not identical. Giambattista’s choice of the *Flight* is an interesting one, since it echoes Giandomenico’s etchings on the same subject over ten years earlier, and shows the elderly artist’s still-considerable powers of invention. In this case, however, it appears that the influence has run from son to father, indicating a free exchange of thoughts and ideas within the family workshop rather than a structure dependent solely on the maestro’s direction.

Giambattista Tiepolo was a sought-after and prolific artist throughout his life, with a busy workshop to support him. During his years in Würzburg, he took advantage of the cold winters when fresco work was impossible to complete commissions from patrons other than the Prince-Bishop. Despite the precedent in that court of producing oil paintings while awaiting warmer weather, Giambattista’s eight years in Madrid seemingly resulted in the creation of only eight small devotional canvases, in addition to the two Madonnas that are stylistically distinct. Given the paucity of documentation, it is only possible to speculate concerning the production of these oil paintings. Some scholars believe there were no patrons for the eight religious subjects, and that they were created solely for the aging artist’s personal pleasure and contemplation. The argument supporting this hypothesis focuses on the intimate nature of the works, and on the depth of feeling conveyed by them (Christiansen 344). Yet Giambattista Tiepolo was an inventive artist who, judging by the magnitude of work produced, devoted his entire life to creating objects for specific clients. It is possible that by the time he reached Spain, he decided to work less due to fatigue. Another explanation for his decreased activity when not employed on Royal Palace projects might have been contractual limitations imposed by Charles, who was paying an extremely generous salary (Gemin and Pedrocco 206). It is worth noting, though, that the Tiepolo sons, also employed by the court in individual capacities, produced other works unrelated to their royal commissions. Since the Tiepolos all worked for the Crown, it would follow that all of them were permitted to accept other employment when not occupied with the royal frescoes.

While a member of the Church would be an obvious candidate as a patron for either a Tiepolo Madonna or other religious subject, art purchases sponsored by the Church in Spain were rare (Urrea Fernández, *La Pintura* 53). However, members of the royal family have been identified as commissioning art from the Tiepolos. The Archbishop of Toledo and the son of Philip V, the Infante Luigi Antonio Giacomo, was a Tiepolo client, and given his position, he might have been particularly interested in

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8 They measure respectively, 60 cm. x 45 cm.; 55.5 cm. x 41.5 cm.; 57 cm. x 44 cm.; and 59.4 cm. x 40.8 cm.
religious images (Mariuz, *Giandomenico Tiepolo* 113). Diplomats or members of the court were other potential customers. Count Felice Gozzola, Charles III’s field marshal in Naples and an eminent collector, was involved in negotiating the Tiepolos’ engagement by the Spanish court, and also commissioned work from them (Whistler, “Hercules” 120).

In keeping with the eighteenth-century emphasis on *invenzione* rather than on the individual hand of a master painter, many works produced in Spain that are now attributed to Lorenzo and Giandomenico were originally ascribed to Giambattista as head of the Tiepolo enterprise (Sánchez Cantón 27). Both sons executed a number of small paintings of two distinct types of “fantasy heads,” consisting of attractive young women and of so-called “philosophers.” None of these works are dated, but all are attributed to the Spanish years on the basis of provenance (Gentele 101). Taken together, they demonstrate the cross-influences at work between father and sons, as well as the continuing difficulty in making firm attributions of individual canvases (Gentele 101; Knox, “Philosopher Portraits” 147).

Giambattista Tiepolo was the first Venetian artist to devise a “philosopher portrait,” picturing men, both young and old, with beards and turbans or another type of fantastic headdress (fig. 6) (Knox, “Philosopher Portraits”; Pedrocco, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 20).

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In another genre, Lorenzo provided pastel portraits to Charles III’s eponymous son (De la Mano 80).

Other diplomats who were engaged in arranging for the Tiepolos’ travel to Madrid, including the Marchese de Esquilache, the Duca de Montealegre, and the Venetian Ambassador to Spain, Sebastiano Foscarini, were also potential customers (Gemin and Pedrocco 196).

He may have drawn his inspiration from etchings by Rembrandt, or from a series of “wise men” painted by Jusepe de Ribera (Pedrocco, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 20).
A consensus of critical opinion holds that they were painted in Venice in the 1740s or 1750s, where they became the basis of similar works by other artists.\(^\text{12}\) When the Tiepolos moved to Madrid, both Lorenzo and Giandomenico produced numerous variations on this popular subject for what seems to have been an appreciative market (figs. 7, 8). All of the paintings in this genre with a Spanish provenance have now been assigned to the Tiepolo brothers rather than to their father (Ubeda, “Los pasteles” 50). None are copies of previous works by Giambattista, but are instead variations on a theme established by him. The brothers demonstrate that they have fully absorbed their father’s technique and essence, enabling all three Tiepolos to create freely in the same style.

\(^{12}\) Giuseppe Nogari painted this type of “portrait” frequently (Pedrocco, “Lorenzo Tiepolo” 20).
Fig. 7
Giandomenico Tiepolo
Teta di vecchio orientale
c. 1765-70
National Gallery, Prague
(reproduced in Romanelli and Pedrocchi,
Lorenzo Tiepolo e il suo tempo)

Fig. 8
Lorenzo Tiepolo
Teta di vecchio orientale
c. 1767-70
Private collection
(reproduced in Romanelli and Pedrocchi,
Lorenzo Tiepolo e il suo tempo)
In addition to the best-selling philosopher series, Giandomenico and Lorenzo devised another popular genre of “portraits” of well-dressed, attractive young women. Originally attributed to Giambattista, none of these canvases are now credited to him, although they may be based on several “fancy dress” paintings he created just prior to the Tiepolos’ departure for Spain. While Giambattista’s women can be viewed as part of a long Venetian tradition of courtesan portraits by artists such as Titian, in Madrid his sons invented a new format with less fanciful, more demure beauties who appear fully, though richly, clothed and with no accessories such as birds or musical instruments (Gentele 101). This more restrained presentation may reflect the more conservative Spanish culture, in which mildly erotic portrayals of women might not have been as popular as in the more relaxed Venetian milieu. As with the philosophers, a single female figure is positioned close to the picture plane. The young women meet the viewer’s gaze, while the philosophers look in varied directions. The colors are rich, and the brushstrokes display the trademark Tiepolo sprezzatura, or facility in handling. The small dimensions of all these canvases also indicate that they were designed to decorate domestic interiors. None of the Spanish philosopher portraits or those of young women are dated, but all of are the same approximate size, suggesting that the Tiepolos established a substantial market for character heads (Knox, Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo 294).

The two versions of The Madonna of the Goldfinch bear a closer resemblance to the imaginary portraits than to Giambattista’s small devotional paintings. Like the subjects of the portraits, Mary and Jesus dominate the pictorial space, and are placed close to the picture plane. The Child looks directly at the viewer, as do the young women created by Giandomenico and Lorenzo. While attributions for the Spanish character heads have shifted from Giambattista to his sons, he is still credited with painting at least one Madonna of the Goldfinch (fig. 1). Support for this attribution comes from an undated preparatory drawing that is accepted as being in his hand (De Grazia and Garber 288). Although the sketch includes the additional head of a young boy, possibly Saint John the Baptist, it contains the central motif of the Madonna holding the Child, who in turn

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13 A letter from 1760 indicates that his client was the Russian Empress (Barcham 118).

14 Other Settecento Venetian artists, such as Rosalba Carriera, made their own variations based on these Renaissance prototypes (Johns 39).

15 Given the extremely small middle class in eighteenth-century Spain, it is unlikely the Tiepolos found clients outside the court circle for these modest works (Weisner-Hanks 302).
holds a bird.

For his Spanish work, Giambattista decided upon a formal presentation of the Virgin and her Son containing echoes of centuries-old icons that were popular in his native Venice (Whistler, “Tiepolo” 225). The selection of a straightforward composition could reflect the conservative Madrileño society and the desire for clear, traditional images. Giambattista and his eldest son were equally knowledgeable concerning Biblical subjects. The elder artist was one of the greatest painters of religious themes of the eighteenth century, and was skilled at accommodating his clients’ wishes (Walker 216). Giandomenico was similarly proficient in sacred imagery, and has been referred to as “perhaps the most deeply religious painter of the eighteenth century” (Knox, Giambattista and Domenico Tiepolo 82). The Spanish Madonnas employ the device of the Christ Child looking directly at the spectator with a frank gaze as a signal that the supplicant has his complete attention, encouraging the belief that a fervent prayer will be answered (Gaston 144).

By the eighteenth century, many of the Christian symbols that traditionally accompanied the Virgin and Child disappeared as artists favored an approachable, domestic portrayal of Mother and Son. The Madonna of the Goldfinch uses a more orthodox approach, with a dignified depiction of Mary, and the inclusion of an iconic bird as a central motif. This metaphor for the soul appears in early Christian works in catacombs, and in even earlier Egyptian imagery (Friedmann 2). Italian artists began to include the goldfinch in their devotional images of the Madonna and Child in the thirteenth century. As the motif became more widely used, the small bird acquired additional meanings specific to its species. It was believed that the goldfinch fed on thistles, and so it became associated with the crown of thorns worn by Jesus during his Passion. A related tale recounted the small bird’s concern for Jesus’ suffering, whereby it plucked out a thorn that had become embedded in his forehead, and so was splashed by holy blood, which became a badge of honor in the red plumage on its head (Friedmann 23).

The basic elements of Mother, Son and goldfinch appear in both renditions of The Madonna of the Goldfinch, but the subtle variations between them have fueled the controversy over the authorship of the second painting (fig. 2). An x-radiographic analysis of both canvases reveals that the underdrawings of the basic forms of the Madonna and Child are identical, and that the differences between the two compositions arise only in the surface paint of the second rendition. The changes between the two compositions include the placement of the background drapery; the position of the Virgin’s arms and hands; her facial expression; the arrangement of her garments; and alterations in the Child’s hands as he grasps either a string tethering the bird or his Mother’s veil (Painting Conservation Department notes, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., July 20, 1990).
These modifications have been cited in arguing for Giandomenico’s authorship of the second painting. A slight change in the Virgin’s expression in the later version results in a softer, less haughty visage.\(^\text{16}\) Since Giandomenico’s personal style tended toward depictions of ordinary people, the more approachable second Madonna may reveal his hand. Mary’s garments also are refashioned in the second work, where a generic blue mantle replaces the earlier liturgical cloak. In the first canvas, the Virgin wears a vibrant blue cope used by clergy as part of their vestments during celebration of the Mass. However, a plausible explanation for the differences between the paintings could reflect the desires of two patrons, instead of a change in artists. The combination of the Madonna’s reserved expression with the use of a liturgical garment could indicate that the first rendition was destined for a religious institution or for a member of the clergy, while the softer presentation of face and drapery in the second iteration points toward its use in a domestic space.

The central iconic image of the goldfinch on a string suggests Giandomenico’s influence, as his independent work focused on genre subjects. Small children actually kept these creatures on strings as pets, because they were easily tamed (Friedmann 1). The bird’s clipped wings, indicative of domestication, are another carefully observed detail from everyday life (Friedmann 109). However, the image of the goldfinch at the end of a string held by the Christ Child is also iconographically significant, and could be credited to father or son’s invenzione. A soul is nestled in the palm of Jesus’ hand, protected and tethered to God through his Son. The Child’s direct gaze reassures the supplicant of divine protection and care.

In the second composition, which in some respects appears destined for daily use, the Son’s shy gesture of clasping his Mother’s headdress emphasizes the qualities of a human baby and stresses the domestic over the liturgical. This action possesses another significance beyond the quotidian, since by attaching himself to Mary’s veil, Jesus creates a visual link that emphasizes the Virgin’s unique role as the primary intercessor between humankind and her Son as God (Gaston 145). The second version stresses the mother-child relationship as Mary’s arms encircle her Child in a sheltering embrace, while the earlier canvas comports more closely with the ancient motif of the Madonna Hodegetria, showing Jesus perched on his Mother’s left arm as he is displayed to the viewer (Friedmann 45). The visual reference to this archaic image is reinforced by the swaddling cloth that takes the form of a scroll, perhaps as an allusion to the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible in the birth of the Savior. While the

\(^{16}\) Fern Rusk Shapley, a curator at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., cited the “superficial” expression of the second painting in attributing it to the Tiepolo workshop rather than to one of the Tiepolos. No other scholars concur with this position (Shapley 457).
altered motifs of the second painting include some domestic connotations, they posit multiple meanings and so cannot strongly support an attribution to either father or son.

A technical analysis revealing similar brushstrokes in both *Madonna of the Goldfinch* paintings has also been used to support an attribution of both canvases to Giambattista (De Grazia and Garberson 286). This argument, however, overlooks the fact that Giandomenico had fully absorbed his father’s style, and in other Spanish works such as the philosopher and young women portraits he produced images that were indistinguishable from those of Giambattista (Bonicatti 24). While Giandomenico also produced genre scenes in an entirely individual hand, he possessed the remarkable capability of simultaneously working in two wholly different styles.

The paintings produced by the Tiepolos in Spain point to a more fluid interchange of ideas and influences between father and sons than has previously been acknowledged. By the time they reached Madrid, the family’s working methods indicate a collaborative approach rather than a traditional workshop structure in which the master/father dictated to the workmen/sons. Instead, the sons made free variations on their father’s “fantasy heads,” and the father looked to Giandomenico’s work in creating his own series on the Flight into Egypt, and in using the genre motif of a goldfinch on a string. Lorenzo made his own variations of the Spanish *Madonnas of the Goldfinch*. A chalk study of the Virgin’s head, believed to be a variation based on the completed painting, originally was credited to Giambattista before the attribution shifted to Giandomenico and then settled definitively on Lorenzo through research on its provenance (Mena Marqués 7:142). In another composition, Giambattista’s original drawing of the Madonna and Child with a bird and the head of a young boy was transformed when Lorenzo substituted the head of Saint Joseph for that of the youth to produce a work in his favored medium of pastel (Thiem 340).

The two versions of the *Madonna of the Goldfinch* conceived by the Tiepolos exemplify the importance of *invenzione* to the eighteenth-century art world and the manner in which the Tiepolos excelled at this form of creativity. The Madonnas affirm the reciprocal influences that flowed between father and sons. Giandomenico’s uncanny ability to produce works so similar to his father’s that they still confound attempts to definitively establish authorship, while also executing canvases in his own distinctive style, shows a remarkable range of artistic talent. However, a focus on discerning the individual hand of any particular family member in a given artwork tends to obscure the real achievement of father and sons in attaining an unparalleled degree of *invenzione* in their creation of inspired works of lasting beauty.
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