



Rest on the Flight into Egypt

Date

c. 1655-65

Primary Maker

Elisabetta Sirani

Medium

Etching

Description

Elisabetta Sirani was born into a Bolognese family of artists; her father, Giovanni Andrea Sirani, had been the painter Guido Reni's primary assistant. She had already begun to paint professionally by the age of fourteen, when she established her own workshop—a very rare achievement at the time (although Bologna was one of the more progressive cities in Italy), given that women were prohibited from attending art academies, from joining guilds, and

from formally studying the male nude, which was considered fundamental to an artist's training. Sirani's death at the age of twenty-seven makes her oeuvre of approximately 190 works of art even more impressive. In addition to painting, Sirani was also skilled at drawing and produced ten or more original etchings. *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* is one of at least two prints by Sirani on the subject. This version is said to be after a composition by her father. The print depicts the Virgin Mary nursing the Christ Child in a moment of rest during their flight from Jerusalem to avoid persecution by the Romans. In her paintings, Sirani often portrayed women as protagonists, particularly heroines from antiquity and scripture. Here, she emphasized the maternal and life-giving aspects of the Virgin Mary. More than just naturalistic representations of motherhood, images of women—particularly Mary—engaged in the act of breastfeeding have carried weighty implications over the centuries. One of the dividing issues between Roman Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation was the Virgin's degree of holiness. Mary was the source of Christ's humanity—and thus his conduit to laypeople—but carrying the son of God also made her immensely holy; thus, images of Mary nursing Jesus and of her own (bodily) death became extremely popular and meaningful. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Sheet (trimmed within edges of plate): 6 7/16 × 6 7/8 in. (16.4 × 17.5 cm)