

[Christ Carrying The Cross](#) by [Simone Martini](#)

Original Lithographic Bookplate - Main Subject: Religion & Belief



**Item Number**

3240324945

**Retail Value**

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**Dimensions (As Shown)**

6W x 10H Inches

15.24W x 25.4H cm

**Medium**

Original Lithographic Bookplate

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**About Simone Martini**

Giotto in Florence and Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti and Simone Martini in Siena were the principal figures in the transformation of Italian painting from a traditional Byzantine mode into a vehicle for the depiction of the varieties of visual and psychological experience. Their impact on Italian art is thus analogous with the roles of Dante and Petrarch in the history of Italian language and literature.

The earliest evidence of Simone's activity is the *Maestà* fresco in the Palazzo Pubblico (Town Hall) in Siena, signed and dated 1315 (restored and perhaps revised by Simone's himself in 1321). The relationship between Simone's fresco and Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Maestà* altarpiece of 1311 for the Cathedral of Siena, in the theme of the Madonna in Majesty and in the figure types, suggests that Simone may have received his training in the shop of that earlier Sienese master. If Giorgio Vasari's statement that Simone died at the age of 60 is correct, then the painter was born about 1284 and the *Maestà* is a mature work by a man of 30, for whom there is no trace of formative years.

The divergence from Duccio's primarily Italo-Byzantine form and expression indicates that Simone's art was rooted in the French Gothic tradition, although there is still no answer to the question of whether he actually worked in France in his earlier years. In the courtly treatment of the subject, the emphasis on richly decorative detail, and the naturalness of space and scale, Simone's fresco announces a new Sienese style. The Virgin's specific role as protector of Siena is conveyed by the location of the fresco in the Council Room of the Town Hall, by a moralizing inscription on justice and oppression, and by the presence of the patron saints of the town.

About 1317 King Robert of Anjou called Simone to Naples and knighted the painter during his stay. The French accent in Simone's art was welcome at the Angevin court. *St. Louis of Toulouse Crowning Robert of Anjou* (Naples) depicts the saint, canonized in 1317, receiving the heavenly crown and bestowing on his brother the secular crown of the Angevins, thereby renouncing his right to the throne. The altarpiece thus served as both votive icon and testimony to the right of kingship. Simone reveals in this work his consummate skill in the use of the tempera medium and ornamented gold leaf. A series of small scenes (*predella*) beneath the main panel, depicting episodes from the life of St. Louis, heralds the painter's subsequent works in the varieties of spatial construction and the dramatic force of figure groupings, facial expressions, and gestures. The Renaissance preoccupation of a century later with methods of space depiction had its origins in such early Sienese works.

Following the sojourn in Naples, Simone worked in Pisa (*Madonna and Saints*, 1319) and Orvieto (*Madonna and Saints*, 1320). There are no documents or works to affirm Vasari's mention of Simone's activity in Florence, nor is there certainty as to the period of his stay in Assisi, where he frescoed the Chapel of St. Martin in the Lower Church of S. Francesco. These frescoes, along with the fresco *Condottiere Guidoriccio da Fogliano* (1328) in the Town Hall in Siena, demonstrate Simone's superb talent as a mural decorator and as a recorder of the world of Gothic chivalry and elegance.

In the St. Martin frescoes the entire range of the artist's vision and method unfolds: the sophisticated rendering of interior space and details of architectural setting; a rich interplay of linear rhythms, subtly variegated and luminous colors, and elaborately ornamented costumes and trappings; the close observation of facial expression and a clear division of the personages of a narrative into a social hierarchy through the differentiation of types. The fresco of *Guidoriccio* faces Simone's earlier *Maestà* so that in the same official room the religious and secular protectors of the city are confronted. The condottiere had liberated the Tuscan fortress-towns of Montemassi and Sassoforte in 1328. He rides his handsomely bedecked horse proudly in the foreground, both master and steed displaying the armorial device of diamond and vine. At the crest of the barren landscape the besieged towns rise in stark silhouette against the deep-blue background, while the general's encampment holds the far-right hill and valley. This fresco stands as the first in a series of equestrian portraits of heroes in Italian medieval and Renaissance art.

In contrast to the concern for time and place in the frescoes, the *Annunciation* altarpiece, painted in 1333 for the Cathedral of Siena (now in Florence), emits an atmosphere of sublime unreality. The inscription on the panel records that Lippo Memmi, whose sister Simone had married in 1324, collaborated on the altarpiece. In its elegance of line and rhythm, the exquisitely rendered details of costume, setting, and flower symbols, and the fragile sentiment of the participants in the sacred event, the *Annunciazione* is a supreme masterpiece in the history of lyrical art.

Simone spent his last years at the papal court in Avignon, where he arrived in 1340 accompanied by his brother and collaborator, Donato. They came to Avignon as artists and as official representatives of the Church in Siena. Only one signed and dated work is known from this period in France, the *Holy Family* (1342; Liverpool). Frescoes in the Cathedral are in a ruined state. A group of four small panels with scenes of the Passion and an *Annunciation* diptych (now in various museums) project a fervent emotionalism and dramatic tension matched only by the late sculpture of Giovanni Pisano. At Avignon, Simone and the poet-humanist Petrarch formed a close friendship. The painter executed a frontispiece for Petrarch's copy of *Commentaries on Virgil* (now in Milan), and the poet records in one of his sonnets that Simone painted a portrait, now lost, of his beloved Laura.

Subsequent generations of lesser Sieneese painters of the 14th century relied heavily on Simone's model, but a more crucial inheritance is found in that late Gothic mode of European art about 1400 - the International Style. It was Simone Martini who brought Sieneese painting into the mainstream of European art.

## Original Lithographic Bookplate

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