

Antonio Bianchini

Italian painter
(1803-1884),

He was born in Rome on 18 September, 1803 from Filippo, a merchant from the Canton of Ticino reduced to poverty, and from Annamaria Barbiellini. After studying the first elements of painting at D. Corvi, he was admitted free to the Roman seminary. Distinguished in classical literature, he was appointed in 1823 the chair of Greek in the Urban College, which he did not obtain for the intrigues of a rival. Bianchini then attended the theological academy of the University of Rome, graduating in theology. In 1827, with F. Mercuri and G. Cannonieri, he founded the printing company, which first published six volumes (out of ten) of translations of Bianchini himself from the homilies of the Greek Fathers.

The first two comprise nineteen homilies and a sermon of s. Basilio Magno; the third, four funeral orations of Gregory the Theologian; the fourth, the fifth and the sixth, twenty-three homilies of s. Giovanni Grisostomo. The fourth also contains a dedicatory letter to Chateaubriand. Actually, Bianchini had decided to dedicate the work to Fr. Giordani, but the dedication had been rejected by ecclesiastical censorship (P. Giordani, *Epistolario*, VI, Milan 1864, letter to Fr. Brighenti dated 9 June 1828, p 25, letter to the Marchesa Trivulzio Poldi of 17 October 1836, p. The style is forbidden and supported, according to the canons of that literary purism that had the ideal model of the Giordani; but Bianchini was almost always kept away from the excesses which some of the Roman classicists received.

In 1828 Bianchini also had the courage to treat an anthology of Italian classics of the fourteenth century, for which he asked advice and suggestions to many illustrious men of letters, including his father A. Cesari. But the failure of the printing company (1829) prevented the realization of the project.

A frequent visitor to the Roman artistic circles, Bianchini occasionally collaborated, between 1831 and 1853, with the *Giornale Arcadico* (he published, among other things, a Latin epistle directed to G. Laureani, titled *Antonius Bianchinius Gab. Laureanio S Pl.*, Followed by a translation essay in Latin hexameters of the beginning of the book III of the *Argonautics* of Apollonius of Rhodes: XXXIV [1827], pp. 344-349), in *L'Album* and *L'Ape italiana*. Admitted in Arcadia around 1830 under the name of Arginto Mergario, it was from 1833 to '53 secretary of the Roman Society of amateurs and lovers of fine arts. Finally he was a member of the Ernica Academy of Alatri and, in the last years of his life, a member of the Commission of Sacred Archeology. In 1866 he was called to teach Greek literature at the Urban College, and remained there for three years.

In 1831 Bianchini visited Romagna, coming into contact with some patriots of the region. Under Pius IX he was part of the City Council of Rome; elected conservative, in November 1847 he was entrusted with the direction of health, medical police and charity. He took part in the drafting of the notification of the 1st genn. 1848 relating to the new functions of the municipal judiciary, of the petition with which on 6 March the City Council requested the status of the pontiff and that of the following 16 of thanks

for its grant. Deputy of the College of Castelnuovo di Porto, *he* was elected Secretary of the Council of Deputies, and in this capacity he was the material extensor of the scheme to respond to the papal message, examined and discussed on 25 June. In July he resigned from the office of conservator.

Appreciated by his contemporaries as a miniaturist and watercolourist (he made copies from Raphael, Tiziano, Sassoferrato, Giambellino, Guido Reni, P. Batoni, the tsar bought his *episode of the plague of Florence in 1348*), in oil painting he was inspired by mythology and literature, but mostly devoted himself to religious painting. The only work that can still be identified today is the large altarpiece with S. *Giovanni de' Rossi* in the Roman church of the SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini. In December 1850 he was given the task of restoring the gallery of maps in the Vatican, where he collaborated with Luigi Lais, with whom he also restored (1553-54) the fifteenth century paintings in the underground chapel of S. Scolastica in Subiaco. In the summer months of the years between 1855 and 1860 he restored the frescoes of the chapel of the corporal in the cathedral of Orvieto, work that was interrupted when Umbria was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy.

Bianchini is however remembered in the history of art more than for this artistic activity, that his repertoire of available paintings appear to be mostly poor, for the brief writing of *Purism in the Arts*, Rome knows, which, having received the approval of Minardi, of Overbeck, of Tenerani, is considered the "manifesto" of the Roman purism: he brings together a series of ideas already expressed previously, especially in the second (1838) and in the third (1839) an allocation read at the Roman Society of the amateurs and lovers of Fine Arts.

Rather than proposing the 14th and 15th century painters as models of study, they must never be copied, but must be used to learn "the severe, simple, evident demonstration of the things represented, that is, of the subject of painting" (p.), Bianchini states that the purist is concerned, "not being able to man, when to fail and when to exceed, touch point of perfection", to "put before the minor defect, which is to aspire to the end by means not pleasant in itself, but effective, instead of abandoning it or neglecting it for the sake of useless but pleasant means to those who use it".

A typical product of the confessional education of pontifical Rome, Bianchini, as already in the *alocation of the foundation to sound judgments on art* (1841), reaffirms here his preference for religious painting, whose purpose was to help to pray and not to distract from prayer; and this for Bianchini was the lesson to be learned by the painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In spite of this, as a lover of the form, Bianchini, who followed Vasari's theories of art, so as to create an illustrated description of the basilica of St. Francis in Assisi that served to complete the history of art from the "decay" after Constantine to the "Risorgimento" in the sec. XIII (see the speech of June 12, 1839), never renounced to appreciate artists such as Bonifacio Veronese and Titian, trying to remedy this inconsistency with respect to his purist creed with the valorization of these, especially the religious subjects, neglecting the spirit with which they had been treated.

He died in Rome on February 27th. 1884.

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