

# Cristoforo Casolani

(c. 1582-1630)

Italian painter

The son of the painter Alessandro and Aurelia, daughter of the painter Lorenzo Rustici, and brother of the painter Ilario, are not known for his biographical extremes, but one can assume that he was born in 1582 or shortly before. According to Baglione, his principal biographer in Rome and learned the secrets of painting by Cristoforo Roncalli called Pomarancio, his father's friend, and probably, as also Mancini, his most important teacher. In fact there are deep links between Casolani and Roncalli, some of which are proven by documents that can serve to determine approximately the birth date of Casolani.

The first documents relating to the artistic activity of Casolani testify to his participation (1601-1602), together with thirteen artists, to the mosaic transposition of the Pomarancio drawings, which supervised the decoration of the Clementine chapel in St. Peter. Around mid-1582, Casolani's father returned to Siena from Rome - where he had lived since 1578 with his friend Roncalli - and stayed there for a long, uninterrupted period. Since the work of. for Clementine was rather modest, but it required some technical skills, it can be deduced that he, at the beginning of the century, was about twenty years old.

Through the cycles of frescoes that Casolani painted, or to whose execution he oversees, it is possible to follow the development and evaluate the importance of his art (like Roncalli, the artist preferred fresh painting to that on canvas). From August 1601 to May 1602 he was occupied in the Clementine chapel. From September 1602 to August 1609 he devoted himself to one of his most important companies: the fresco decoration of the apse, dome and nave of the Madonna of the Mountains. From a stylistic analysis can be dated around 1603 the Saints flanking the Caravaggio altarpiece in the chapel of the Madonna in S. Agostmo. Between 1602 and 1605 Casolani was once again a collaborator of Roncalli in the fresco decorations of the church of S. Silvestro in Capite (dome and peducci, with minor interventions by G. Agellio) and most probably in the Rucellai Chapel in S. Andrea della Valle.

Stylish basics can be attributed to Casolani completing the chorus of St. Silvestro at the Quirinal. Shortly after 1608, Casolani painted the altarpiece of the Lombardi chapel in St. Maria in Via; even frescoes and canvas in the apse of S. Stefano del Cacco can be assigned to this period.

In addition to the aforementioned works, according to Baglione, Casolani performed in Rome other important pictorial skies that have been destroyed: as the decoration of the forum and the walls beside the altar of S. Maria delle Grazie, probably performed around the 1610, already unreadable at the beginning of the 16th century. And interventions in the choir of Annunziata (completely restored in 1640). Brogi lists numerous canvases in churches in Siena, some of which still exist.

Can not be ascertained the date of death of Casolani. It is documented in Rome in 1621. He was a member of Accademia di S. Luca, and the documents appeared to have been

present throughout 1622. No painting can be attributed to him in the early years after 1620, while in the previous two decades he was particularly active in the city and in the surrounding area. This is why he can be considered dead in Rome shortly after 1622.

A comparison between the work of Casolani and the production of Roncalli in the early 1900s highlights the artistic symbiosis between the two and clarifies the roots of the inspiration - of Casolani. Particularly relevant are the sculptural monumentality and the solidity of Casolani's figures, which originate not only from Roncalli's theories, but, most importantly, by a thorough study of Raffaello's mature works, which has become a model for most artists working in Rome at the end of the century. Even Casolani's colors, in his first "independent" work at Madonna dei Monti, originate, at the beginning, by Roncalli. Of this he was, in the first two decades of the century, pupil and chief spokesman, following along with a few others a path that drifted from the most widespread tendency to naturalism embraced by Caravaggio, and was instead geared towards more refined classicism, such as Annibale Carracci and his fervent followers. But perhaps Casolani's most important contribution to the development of Roman art is given by his illusionistic perspective experiments carried out in the frescoes of S. Silvestro at the Quirinale and in the Madonna dei Monti where, in both cases, the spaces were defined initially by architects; and the ceiling becomes a window open to an ethereal region populated by heavenly spirits. Casolani's results in this type of decoration are modest but interesting from a historic and conceptual point of view for the development of that particular aspect of Baroque taste that is reflected in the grandiose paintings of the Romanesque churches of the mid-century.

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