

Michelangelo Cerruti

Italian painter of the Baroque period
(1663-1749)

Also known as "Candelottaro", he was born in Rome in the year 1663 and was baptized on May 8 in the parish of San Lorenzo in Damaso, with the name of Michele Bernardino. Very little is the news about his life and his activity.

Ignored by contemporary or slightly later biographers, he is only mentioned in the *pictorial history* of Abbot Lanzi together with another little-known Roman painter of the eighteenth century, Biagio Puccini: Lanzi says that they worked under the pontificates of Clement XI and Benedict XIII. "they were kept practical good". Time guides reserve him no better luck. It is not mentioned, for example, in the editions of the Titi published in the early decades of the eighteenth century and only in that of 1763 is cited as the author of some frescoes and paintings, indications that are not even complete.

His apprenticeship, which began quite late, at twenty-five, under the guidance of Giuseppe Passeri, from whom he learned "the way to color"; he then spoke of his journey of about ten years in Lombardy, a term which probably probably indicates Northern Italy, if he adds that he stopped above all in Turin. Returning to Rome, he became interested in problems of geometry and perspective, studied in the circle of Fr. Pozzo; but nothing of the prospective illusionism remains in the known works of Cerruti. At the service of the Ruspoli, he painted in 1707 for the church of Vignanello a *Gloria of St Antonio* and, in April of the following year, he elaborates the scenographies and the apparatuses for the representation of the oratory of Händel *The Resurrection*. The first two decades of the century is certainly a series of works: an oil painting with the *Presentation of the Madonna in the temple* and two small side frescoes with the *Annunciation* and the *Immaculate Conception* in the church of San Pietro in Montorio; a fresco with the *Assumption* and a canvas with the *Nativity of Mary* in San Venanzio dei Camerinesi.

This last fresco was lost with the destruction of the church due to the alterations that the area below Aracoeli underwent to make room for the Vittoriano, but the canvas, passed to the National Gallery of Ancient Art in Rome, was deposited (from period of the last war) at a church on the island of Ponza.

He also worked as a decorator of aristocratic houses. Paintings in the earthly halls and in the auditorium of the Ruspoli al Corso palace (1715) and landscapes, always in gouache, in all "the apartment that S. Em.za [Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni] made again to accommodate "in the Chancellery building. Two works by Cerruti, now dispersed, are remembered: a *Christ that appears to Our Lady* and the *Delivery of the keys*. The biography of Cerruti recalling it in full activity for churches and palaces in Rome.

And in reality, even if he did not participate in important official works, very intense was his work during this period. Probably the lack of official commissions during the papacy of Pope Albani was due to the corporate opposition of the academics of St. Luke, jealous of their privileges and eager to extend them. Although he was a member of the Confraternity of the Virtuosi del Pantheon for a year, Cerruti was unable to be part of the Accademia di S. Luca. Cerruti was probably among the most tenacious adversaries of the new provisions if he is remembered in the Acts as representative, together with other artists, of non-academics for the resolution of the contrast with a transaction that fully recognized the rights of the latter (1723).

His activity in the great decorative enterprises of the Roman churches began from the third decade of the century. Probably from this period it is the fresco decoration of the vault of the chapel of St. Pius V in S. Maria sopra Minerva with the symbol of the *Holy Spirit and a Glory of Angels*. But in 1722 his first important work: the picture reported in ceiling of the church of S. Anastasia with the *Martyrdom* of the titular saint, commissioned by Cardinal Acunha. Due to its complexity and richness of solutions, his masterpiece must be considered the decoration of the church of S. Maria dell'Umiltà (circa 1726). The subject is the *Assumption of the Madonna* between angels and cherubs scattering flowers and allegories of *Religion* and *Humility*, gilded frames and stucco paintings frame the figurations and, articulating the surface of the vault, put it in relation with the rich and elegant church architecture. A similar need for integration and adaptation of the figuration painted with the real architecture of the church can be seen in the decoration of the ceiling and the arch of the tribune in S. Maria Maddalena, completed in 1732 on behalf of his father Costantini, provincial of Rome, with novelty and wealth of inventions. We recall, among other things, the solution given to the fresco of the tribune in which the *Supper at the Pharisee's house* is represented as if it were the figuration of a tapestry explained and enlarged by angels in flight.

Other works attributed to Cerruti are: a *San Antonio da Padova* in the Church of the Nativity of Jesus Christ or of the Agonizzanti; an *Annunciation with the SS. Filippo Neri, Francesco di Paola, Antonio da Padova* (1718) in San Gerolamo degli Schiavoni; the *Immaculate Conception, S. Luigi Gonzaga and Cardinal Bellarmino in adoration of the heart of Jesus, a Glory of St. Joseph*, with good conditions of conservation and, above all, very repainted, in the church of S. Macuto; an *S Elena* in the church of the SS. Cosma and Damiano dei Barbieri.

The ceiling decoration in S. Giovanni dei Genovesi is lost due to the nineteenth-century reconstruction of the church and the works, remembered by Titi, in S. Bartolomeo de 'Vaccinari, a church destroyed by the demolition of the Umbertine period, were dispersed.

Cerruti was also an engraver and is remembered as the author of a *nymph with the dolphin*. He died in Rome on December 24th of the year 1748.

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