

Giovanni Conca

Italian painter
1690-1771

Son of Giacomo, he was born in Gaeta around 1690. He was Sebastiano's cousin but soon his brother was believed to be so close the bonds of friendship and work. He had his first teachings from Sebastiano before being a pupil of Solimena; it seems that he did not come to Rome together with his cousin as is generally written, but that he only reached it when the situation of this had become secure and definitive: he appeared there for the first time in 1719 when they lived together in the De Cupis palace in piazza Navona where Cardinal Ottoboni gave lodging to his cardinal "family".

20 February 1721 he married, in S. Maria in Trastevere, Anna Laura Scarsella of Castro, a Roman of Spanish origin, as probably CONCA themselves. They had at least eleven children including Tommaso, the last of the males, a painter himself. In the footsteps of Sebastiano CONCA he was admitted to the Congregation of the Virtuosi al Pantheon (February 8, 1722) and elected academic of merit, to St. Luke on March 6, 1735; on 3 April he handed over the picture for admission whose subject is not specified: it is the so-called *Vigilance*, or more precisely *Modesty*, a fine quality canvas, which was believed to have been painted by Sebastiano and given to the Academy by Giovanni. The new academic showed little interest in the institution's activities: in the early years he attended eight congregations out of more than thirty, then, from 7 July 1737, he no longer appears. In 1738, after the failed negotiations of the Savoy court with Corrado Giaquinto, it was CONCA, less demanding, to move to Turin. He left Rome in November with the whole family. Receipts of payments are kept for works in the royal palace, in the queen's summer apartment, until 15 July 1739, date of the last receipt. Despite the payment of sums for the costs of returning to Rome, CONCA stayed a long time in Turin, until the end of the succession war of Austria. Asked about the free status of his daughter Maria Rosa, born in Turin in 1740, CONCA said he had returned to Rome in June 1748, and in fact in 1749 he was registered in the parish of S. Cecilia in Trastevere. The first-born of the males, Diego, would, according to a tradition, have perished in the defense of Cuneo in 1744.

The paintings preserved in Turin have therefore been painted on site during their long stay. The links with the court will last: in 1753 there is talk of buying works by Titian and Rubens in Rome through his interest.

Except that in the ten years of Turin all his activity took place in Rome, exclusively in the wake of his cousin Sebastiano. A skilled artist "in painting both in fresco and in oil", he seems to have been a second-rate character, helping his cousin both for his extensive work and for teaching: Gaetano Lapis came to him entrusted by Sebastiano with an order to "give him housing and receive him with him and instruct him in his pictorial career", and in fact from the *States of the souls* it turns out that the latter lived very close in 1723 and in 1726, and precisely in the house of CONCA in 1728 and 1729. The author of the *Life of G. Lapis* (1787) underlines the pedagogical qualities of CONCA, who, if he did not have much inspiration, proved to be "a painter of good maxims, full of wise

warnings in the composition and singularly very studious in observing the accidents of the panels in reality", quality which could also validate his reputation as a copyist.

If the tradition that gives him two *Allegories* - of *Europe* and *Asia* - to the castle of Kozel in Bohemia taken from the works of Solimena in the Doria Pamphili collection is true, he is wrongly credited with four paintings today in the church of S Domenico to Urbino replaced four others removed in 1797 by French troops; all eight are "cartoons" for the mosaics of the basilica of St. Peter whose authors are known from the Fabbrica archive. On the contrary, it would be all his own, the altarpiece with a *Madonna of the Rosary* dating back to around 1727, that is, to the time when the canvases copied from St. Peter's were transferred to Urbino from Rome. The same year, in April, a note of expenses made at Montecassino for the arrival of Pope Benedict XIII records 8 ducats paid to CONCA "by the chiaroscuro drawing of the statue of NS in the Cassinese abbey". The fresco that adorns the vault of the oratory of the Christian Doctrine at S. Maria in Traspontina, representing the *Virgin in glory* worshiped by a group of Carmelite saints, by CONCA retouched by Sebastiano, is the only trace of their collaboration generally unspoken, and of the ability of CONCA as fresco painter. An inventory of 1725, the indicative as author of the four lateral paintings, *the Crucifixion*, *S. Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi little girl who teaches catechism*, *the Death of s. Joseph* and *the Holy Family* (one fifth, missing, represented *The souls in Purgatory*). This decoration can be dated to the years following 1715, the date of construction of the building. It is the first major work of CONCA in Rome, and shows a still insecure drawing and a color linked to the solimeneschi modes. It remains difficult to establish the stylistic evolution of the artist due to the scarcity of works and safe dating. Two paintings, *the Birth* and *the Marriage of the Virgin*, are preserved in the church of S. Maria della Scala (second chapel on the left) in Rome, works of higher quality than the previous ones; to S. Maria della Concezione, a *Christ who gives communion to the blessed Bernardo da Corleone* together with the sketch, preserved in the sacristy; at S. Salvatore in Corte (S. Maria della Luce), at the third altar on the left, *SS. Francesco di Paola, Francesco di Sales and Giovanna di Valois*, signed and dated 1752, placed in his place in 1753 and, opposite, a *Death of s. Giuseppe* signed and dated 1754. G. Roisecco in the *Description of ancient and modern Rome* mentions in the church of S. Giovanni in Ayno, now deconsecrated, an *S. Giovanni Evangelista* not available. Outside Rome, it is in the city of Turin that the most important set of CONCA's works can be found, even if the frescoes of the royal palace seem to have been destroyed and if from the list of the Vesme they do not remain today that an engraving by Valperga from a picture of the church of the Crucifix, and four paintings in the oratory of S. Filippo dedicated to the life of the Virgin: *Annunziata*, *Assunta*, *Visit as. Elizabeth* and *Presentation of the Child at the temple*. In Cagli, for the high altar of the church of S. Chiara (frescoed by G. Lapis) CONCA painted in 1739 a *Virgin with Child between angels and saints still in situ*. The Civic Museum of Sulmona preserves a large canvas with the *Apotheosis of s. Pietro Celestino* (1750) from the Badia Morronese. The last paintings of CONCA dated with certainty coincide with the departure of Sebastiano for Naples: this clearly indicates the dependence of CONCA from the cousin, while the rarity of the documented works demonstrates the scarcity of his fame and his talent.

He died in Rome on 19 October. 1771.

Translated from:

[Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 27 \(1982\)](#)

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