

Giuseppe Franco

Italian painter

1565-1628

Also known as Giuseppe Monti, or de 'Monti, or dalle Lodole, he was born of Domenico, in Rome in 1565. Nothing is known of his initial formation, as the first records date back to the time of Sixtus V (1585-90), when, already twenty years old, he is remembered active in the decoration of the Vatican Library and also "in the other works of painting at that time by the Pope commanded". The hand of Franco was identified in the panels of the Library depicting the *Nicene II Council* and the *Lyon II Council* and in the figures of *Menone Foroneo* and *Palamede* painted on two pillars.

The frescoes attributed to him in the apse of the church of S. Liberato in Bracciano, dated 1589, can be ascribed to the same period, with a *Madonna with child* in the center and to the sides *S. Marciانو martyr* to the left and *S. Marco martyr* to the right. From this same year he is remembered among the members of the University of painters. He then moved to Milan, where "he dwelt some time and operated many things". There are no reports of his exploits in that city, even though it is in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana that the most conspicuous number of paintings of his production still exist, still made in Rome, commissioned by Cardinal Federico Borromeo and sent to Milan. These works belong to the rich series of portraits of saints, pontiffs and illustrious personalities collected by Cardinal Borromeo for didactic-moralistic purposes.

On the basis of the documentation it emerged that surely thirty portraits, seven of which have been lost, were painted by Franco, charged with tracing the oldest or traditionally consolidated prototypes in Rome in order to make faithful copies of them. Also attributed to Franco are twelve other portraits, including that of *Cesare Baronio*, that the documents date back to 1599. If the hypothesis were valid, this would be the year of the first posting and the term *post quem* for the return of the painter to Rome. In 1602 he sent a head of *Ecce Homo*, lost, from an original, also lost, of S. Pulzone; in 1608 he was commissioned twenty-nine portraits paid 3 scudi each; he still worked on portraits in 1613, 1617 and 1621.

When he returned to Rome at the end of the century, in addition to performing his copyist activity, however, he painted an oil banner for the Compagnia di S. Andrea delle Fratte and two oil paintings for the fathers of S. Maria in Via.

In the standard of S. Andrea delle Fratte was depicted on one side *St. Andrew the Apostle hugging a cross* and on the other *St. Francis of Paola*, work "widely praised by all", but never mentioned by the guides and still missing; in the oils of S. Maria in Via there was a *St. Andrew the Apostle standing* and a *St. Jerome in the act of doing penance*, in which he would have painted "(yes, like in other places) different birds, and Lodole, from which the Professors took the opportunity to name him Giuseppe dalle Lodole". This last work, which was originally located in the third chapel on the left above the altar, has been lost, while the *S. Andrea apostolo* is still placed on the altar of the first chapel on the left, built by the Del Bufalo. The canvas, signed "Ioseph Franchi Roman. Fecit anno 16 ..", can be dated by 1610, the year of the death of Cardinal Innocenzo Del Bufalo

reported on the plaque erected in the chapel. The work is also marked by the symbolic signature of the artist: in the lower left, on a bare thorny shrub, a lodoletta is recognizable. The activity of Franco in S. Maria in Via is also demonstrated by a payment document of 16 scudi and 60 undated baiocchi, signed by the painter. In *S. Andrea* significant recurrent stylistic modules were found in the works attributed to Franco, also found in the portraits of the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. The proposed derivation of the work from the painting of a similar subject by Giovanni Baglione in *S. Cecilia in Trastevere*, executed between 1601 and 1602, becomes more than plausible in light of the copyist practice that emerged from the Milanese documentation, and for which he must perhaps have enjoyed a certain fame in his time. The lost "four Greek doctors of the church all golden", paintings for Asdrubale Mattei in April 1625, appreciated by the client, for each of which received 6 scudi were also works of derivation.

Two oil paintings on canvas, signed, depicting one *Rinaldo and Armida* and the other the *Adoration of the Magi* date back to a late phase of his activity, however, following *S. Andrea* of S. Maria in Via. The *Adoration of the Magi*, a large work, testifies to the influence of Lombard naturalistic painting assimilated by Franco during his stay in Milan; the tassesco episode, perhaps later, reveals the adaptation to the novelties of the classicist Bolognese current in Rome, in particular of the Albani and the Domenichino.

Franco lived in Rome, residing permanently in the parish of S. Maria in Via from 1610 until his death with his wife Eugenia, who died the 4 Aug. 1626 and, in the first years, with the five sons Giuseppe Domenico, Lorenzo, Margherita, Francesco and Gregorio. In 1627, Franco contracted a second marriage with the young Barbara Lauri.

Franco died in Rome on 5 January. 1628 and was buried in the church of S. Maria in Trastevere.

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