

Bernardino Gagliardi

Italian painter of the Baroque period
(1609-1660)

He was born in Città di Castello, in the locality of Piano di Sotto, from Girolamo and Lucrezia Niccolai, or Nicolucci, around 1600, more probably in 1609. Gagliardi began his studies of painting in his hometown, at the studio of the painter and architect Rinaldo Rinaldini, or de Rinaldi, moving some time later to Rome at the famous, and now old, Avanzino Nucci. In the workshop of this painter Gagliardi would have been employed as help in various enterprises - for example, his involvement in the frescoes with the *Stories of S. Francis* executed by the Nucci in the Roman basilica of the Ss. Apostoli - bringing to completion some after the death of the master (1629).

In Rome, Gagliardi quickly received considerable success, so much so that his finances allowed him to take a long journey, "for the State of the Church, and for Lombardy", which he undertook for the purpose of be known outside the Roman environment, get new commissions and expand their pictorial culture.

He stayed for several months in Bologna to study classicism (the Carracci family and, in particular, Guido Reni). He then went to Venice, Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Mantua, Milan and Turin. During the return journey he stopped for a short time in Florence.

When he returned to Rome, he put immediately and with alacrity, the benefits he had learned during the journey. Among his patrons are the cardinals Bernardino Spada, for whom he painted a lost *naval battle*, and Fabio Chigi, owner of four small paintings with *sacred stories*, also lost. To 1628-33 belong the frescoes for the apsidal basin in the church of S. Sebastiano al Palatino (*Father Eterno in glory*, *S. Sebastiano edited by Irene*), work of pleasant plant commissioned by Taddeo Barberini, prefect of Rome.

Despite the financial solidity that had been building, even dedicating himself to the activity of an art dealer that he exercised throughout his life, he did not resolve to take a wife until he was forced to do so from the inopportune insistence of Pietro Berrettini da Cortona. Unknown is the date of the marriage with Constance Celestini, his countryman; from the union three sons "and numerous daughters" were born; only remembered Caterina, married in second marriage with the painter Giuseppe Tassi and mother of Guido and Matteo Tassi, the only heirs of Gagliardi.

In 1636 or 1637, following a violent clash with the Spanish party's supporters, Gagliardi he found himself forced to leave the city for his Umbrian homeland.

The abandonment of Rome was not definitive, as attested in the following years works executed by him certainly *on site*: for example, the frescoes of 1649 with *Stories of the Passion* in the chapel of the same name of the church of S. Maria in Traspontina, in the opinion of Mancini between the most unhappy works left by his brush; the frescoes (1652) for the chapel dedicated to S. Filippo Benizi in S. Marcello al Corso (*Miracle of Bread*, *Funerals of St. Philip*); the decoration of the dome of S. Bernardino ai Monti (1653) in which we note the reference to the painting by Domenichino as well as a participation in the Baroque scenographic structure; finally, the works carried out in about 1654 for the basilica of S. Marco (frescoes of the side aisles, decoration of the chapel of the Pietà) which gave it a great reputation. He also painted a *Madonna with Child*, now in the chapel of the Madonnella di S. Marco in Piazza Venezia.

In 1654 he was elected prince of the Roman Academy of St. Luke, to which he was registered at least since 1652; also in 1652 his admission to the Congregation of the Virtuosi al Pantheon dates back.

Its presence in Umbria was however conspicuous, both in terms of time and works. An initial period of permanence in Perugia may be between 1636 and 1639. In 1639 it was, in fact, in Città di Castello, where the altarpiece of the *Holy Trinity* was commissioned by the Confraternity of the *Holy Trinity*, now in the church of the Graces of the same town. The painting was supposed to be a perfect copy of the altarpiece made by Reni in the mid Twenties for the Trinità dei Pellegrini in Rome, but Gagiardi preferred to make some modifications to the model, while remaining stylistically very faithful to the original Rhenish.

He remained in Città di Castello permanently until 1643, when it seems to have begun a second stay in Perugia. The chronology of its movements between Città di Castello, Perugia and Rome is very complex, being only rebuilt through poor documents and some dated works.

The vast activity carried out for the city of birth can be exemplified through some works commonly considered among its most successful: first of all, the decoration of the Eleosari chapel in the cathedral, for which in 1641 he executed the canvas with the *Madonna del Soccorso* and several frescoes (*Samson fights with the lion, Tobiolus and the angel, Assumption*, fresco of the vault, *Abraham's sacrifice, David calm Saul with music, Biblical stories, Ss. Alberto bishop, Brizio deacon, Ventura and Donnino*); in the same cathedral he decorated the Chapel of the Guardian Angel with the paintings depicting the *Archangel Raphael and Tobio*, the *Archangel Raphael binds the devil*, and with the fresco of *God the Father with an angel*. In these works the dictation of the Bolognese school is particularly evident, but the brush does not always follow the thought adequately.

Important commissions were also the decoration of the oratory of S. Maria delle Grazie, damaged by the earthquake of 1789 and then partly recovered (*Stories of the Virgin*, frescoed lunettes, 1641-43), the frescoes of the dome of Santa Maria di Combarbio and those for the oratory of the Confraternita di S. Caterina.

The dates of the subsequent stays in Perugia - and relative Roman intervals - of Gagiardi (1644-48, 1651, 1656-60) further confirm that the withdrawal from the Roman scene was only temporary and punctuated by long re-entries. In 1638 he probably obtained Perugian citizenship; in 1644 he became prior to the art of the painters of Porta Eburnea; he had also opened a highly successful painting school.

In Perugia in 1648 the painter entered into excellent relations with the governor of the city, who took him with him to Macerata when he was in charge of the government of that city; this news seems to be confirmed by the painting depicting *St. Ignatius*, in the church of S. Giovanni, attributed to him.

Also in Perugia the activity of Gagiardi was frenetic and of discontinuous quality. Among the most appreciated enterprises are the paintings for the oratory of St. Augustine (*St. Philip baptizing the daughters, the Martyrdom and the Crucifixion of St. Philip*, 1656-59); the *Martyrdom of S. Agate* of 1657, already in the church dedicated to the saint and now in the bishop's curia, work in which the painter engages with the Caravaggesque manner; *S. Elena who adores the Cross* in S. Maria Nuova.

Works by Gagiardi are also found in other Umbrian centers. *Stories of S. Francesco* of the former convent of S. Francesco a Trevi (1645) - at the guest house of which there are other frescoes attributed to him - show by Gagiardi a discreet freshness in pursuing the narrative expertise of Domenichino. In Bevagna he painted *Stories of Saint Francesco* in the cloister of S. Francesco., today almost lost, dated and signed. In Spoleto, in the Diocesan Museum, but coming from the church of S. Maria delle Lacrime di Trevi, the canvas signed with the *Circumcision*, of not high quality, is preserved.

Paintings for the Romagna region and for the Marche region (works not traced) are also mentioned. Some paintings of Gagiardi in the Roman palace of the Dandini family (purchases of the bishop of Cesena Muzio), and that some of the most prestigious Perugian collections boasted

his paintings. Two paintings in his collection and several other paintings in private property in Città di Castello, including a *Testa di S. Giuseppe with the Child* with remarkable lanfranchian traits.

Gagiardi died in Perugia on February 18th. 1660 and was buried in the church of S. Domenico.

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