

# Paolo Gismondi

Italian Painter  
(1612-1685)

He was born in Perugia around 1612, according to Pascoli, he conducted his first apprenticeship with the Perugian painter Giovanni Antonio Scaramuccia. At least from 1633 he had to move to Rome where he came into contact with the workshop of Pietro Berrettini from Cortona and with the *entourage* of the artists who gravitated to it: in particular with Giovanni Francesco Romanelli of Viterbo who, protected by the cardinal and vice chancellor of the Church Francesco Barberini, between 1632 and 1634 he had "some rooms" at the Palazzo della Cancelleria, intended for his own *studio*, frequented by other painters including Gismondi.

The decoration of the church of S. Agata dei Goti by Gismondi, executed since 1633 on commission of Cardinal Barberini within the renewal of the ancient diaconia wanted by the prelate, and concluded in 1636.

In the apsidal basin the *Glory of S. Agate*. The *Stories* of her life, painted on canvas, are found on the walls of the aisles; while in the pendentives of the apsidal arch and in the curtains on the sides of the choir there are depicted *Hope, Faith, Fortitude* and *Humility*. These works gave some fame to Gismondi, despite the pictorial language full of hesitations and quotes from Michelangelo to Cavalier d'Arpino, Giuseppe Cesari, despite the fact that here he proves to be still an inexperienced painter, and uncertain on a formal level, showing, in its immature cortonism, evident limits in the definition of the faces, in the chromatic drafts and in the construction of the spatial system.

The proximity to Romanelli had to bring Gismondi, who in 1641 became a member of the Academy of S. Luca, to collaborate during the fifth decade on one of the enterprises conducted by the painter from Viterbo in the land of France. To Romanelli, perhaps precisely at the suggestion of Francesco Barberini, the cardinal and bishop of Carpentras Alessandro Bichi had entrusted the decoration of the episcopal palace, built in the French town starting from 1640. And Romanelli, it is not certain if in Rome in the first half of the 1640s, or directly *on site*, on the occasion of his first trip to France (1646-47), he had made the canvases (of mythological, allegorical, old and New Testament subjects) intended to adorn the five rooms on the main floor with a large participation of aid. Among these we wanted to recognize just Gismondi, also on the basis of the stylistic proximity of his fresco works to the drawings, perhaps preparatory, referring to the Carpentras enterprise, already attributed to Romanelli and kept in Rome in the National Prints Cabinet.

Mainly linked to public and private Roman commissions, as Pascoli testified, Gismondi's activity also took place with short parentheses in the places of origin. Around 1650 he painted the *blessing S. Antonio*, altarpiece of the main altar of the Perugia church of S. Antonio; the execution of the two canvases for the side altars of the sanctuary of the Madonna dei Bagni near Deruta dates back to 1660: the *Glory of s. Benedetto* and *Ss. Antonio da Padova and Tommaso da Villanova*, the latter signed and dated "Paulus Gismondus Perusinus faciebat 1660". At the same time, or perhaps around 1665, the realization of the two paintings, depicting *S. Francesco* and *S. Ludovico*, should be placed, placed on the sides of the altar in the Perugia oratory of S. Francesco, already decorated on the walls by the paintings of Giovanni Antonio Scaramuccia. Lost, however, is another Perugian work documented by the sources depicting the *Madonna with S. Filippo and musician angels* for the church of S. Filippo.

In 1664, perhaps after a Neapolitan stay remembered only by Pascoli, Gismondi is documented again in Rome. In fact, in October a payment of 50 scudi was recorded in his name for the works he conducted in the sacristy of the church of S. Agnese in Agone where, on commission from Prince Pamphili, he frescoed the vault with the *glory of the saint*, the pendentives with *Purity and Religion* and, at the altar, the *Virgin in glory with angels*, who today is in a bad state of conservation.

In these works of the sixties Gismondi, who on February 19. 1668 he became a member of the Congregation of the Virtuosi at the Pantheon, he demonstrated that he had reached a substantial artistic maturity and a language that was now fully Baroque, thanks above all to the accomplished meditation on the most recent enterprises of Pietro da Cortona. Another testimony is another painting created following a commission from Perugia, the *Birth of the Virgin*, intended to adorn one of the lunettes of the oratory of the Congregation of Artists (located below the apsidal area of the Church of the Gesù), and perhaps executed in the second half of the decade, plausibly around 1669, when the other lunettes with the *Visitation* and the *Presentation in the temple of the Virgin*.

The other great Roman enterprise of Gismondi, almost completely lost, dates back to this period. In 1668, cardinal Cesare Rasponi had a ceiling with a flat wooden frame built to hide the existing trusses in the church of S. Giovanni in Porta Latina. On this occasion, Gismondi was commissioned to carry out the large central panel with the *Glory of S. Giovanni Evangelista* (remains a pen drawing in the Département des arts graphiques of the Louvre in Paris, already attributed to Pietro da Cortona) and of the paintings intended to decorate the portions of the wall between the windows of the central nave, painted "of natural figures, ovals, medallions, architectural divisions, and chiaroscuro ornaments" representing episodes from the life of the titular saint or alluding to his virtues (Crescimbeni).

Gismondi's paintings have all been lost (except for the *condemnation of St. John the Evangelist* still preserved in the church, which was summarily worked on in 1912) on the occasion of the restoration of 1940-41, which led to the restoration of medieval structures also later to the decision to bring to light the 12th century frescoes, already rediscovered in 1913.

Gismondi probably died in Rome in 1685 (Pascoli, p. 204).

by Giovanna Mencarelli - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 56 (2001)

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