

# Giovanni Gottardi

Italian painter  
1733-1812

He was born in Faenza on December 27th. 1733 by Giovanna Carradori and Francesco Maria, bricklayer, known as fra Barbino.

In 1750 he painted the *Madonna del Buon Consiglio* (Faenza, church of S. Agostino), a copy of the fifteenth-century frescoed image venerated in the sanctuary of the same name in Genazzano. With the favor of the Augustinians, about a year later, he went to study painting in Rome, where, supported by the general of the Order Carlo Vásquez, he was hosted in the same convent. Later he settled with his wife and two daughters in the parish of S. Agostino. Contemporary Faentine sources say that he is a pupil of AR Mengs and professor in Rome.

On Gottardi's catalog there is a real attributive "yellow" relating to a consistent group of works from Faenza. Despite numerous documents attesting the commissions and payments to Gottardi and some canvases bear his signature, in the mid-nineteenth century the chronicler GM Valgimigli accused him of having Cristoforo Unterperger painted the Faenza altarpieces by passing them off as his own, aware of the paucity of his means.

At the beginning the style of Gottardi appears linked to Marattesque ways and to a traditional late Baroque taste, as shown by the altarpiece with the *Madonna* giving her waist to the SS. Agostino and Monica, executed around 1760 for the Roman church of S. Agostino. On the same line is the altarpiece with *Saints John of God and James invoking the Virgin*, made for the church of the hospital in Faenza and placed on site on Jan 14. 1764; the commissioner of the work was probably the bishop Antonio Cantoni who was responsible for the construction of the new hospital.

Later Gottardi showed a progressive adaptation to the first phase of Roman neoclassicism. He already acknowledges the altarpiece with *St. Peter healing the paralytic*, made in 1765 for the church of S. Antonio Abate in Parma and paid to Gottardi 50 zecchini.

In the work in memory of Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri) and Guido Reni, elements of the seventeenth century of Romagna are combined, above all the accentuated realism of the characters inserted in large classical architecture; there are also evident connections with the altarpiece, of the same subject, by Francesco Mancini placed in 1750 on the altar in the tribune of St. Peter in the Vatican.

This style direction is confirmed by two works executed by Gottardi in 1766 for the church of S. Domenico in Ascoli Piceno: the canvas with *S. Vincenzo resurrecting a child*, bearing the name of the client and the signature of the author on the back ("Ioannes Gottardi iussu ARPM Philippi De Angelis / in Provincia magistri / pinxit Romae / an.

1766"), today in the local church of the cemetery, and the altarpiece with *Saints Paul and Thomas Aquinas* currently preserved in the town's picture gallery.

The two works, of remarkable quality, present typical stylistic features of the painter such as the couple of characters who converse in the background, the cherubs twirling at the apex, the well-highlighted drapery; the head of S. Paul, in particular, takes up that of the S. Pietro of Parma.

The altarpiece with the Ss. Felicita and Perpetua, painted for the church of S. Perpetua in Faenza and now preserved in the former church of S. Giuseppe in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in the city, is also placed in this lapse of time. The client was GC Boschi from Faenza, who had the patronage of the church, perhaps on the occasion of his appointment as cardinal in 1766; his heirs still kept in the nineteenth century the sketch of this altarpiece.

In the work, closely connected with the Ascoli altarpiece depicting *St. Vincent*, the update on Roman culture leads Gottardi towards a revival of the ancient halfway between the erudite quotation and the story of history which are joined by Renian references; on the attribution to Gottardi.

The sermon should also date back to the sixties. Antonio da Padova to the tyrant Ezzelino da Romano, in the church of the Suffragio in Faenza. The writing on the back says it was painted by Gottardi at the age of 29, that is, in 1762, while the footnote "Romae 1770" probably indicates the date of completion or delivery.

The work, attested in the church in 1777 as "a Saint Anthony of Padua by Gottardi", resumes in the face of S. Antonio the same typology of the S. Tommaso depicted in the altarpiece of the Pinacoteca di Ascoli and re-proposes the accentuated scenographic taste and the same proto-classical atmosphere of the altarpiece of S. Perpetua; she is also connected to this last work by an analogous, meticulous, descriptivism of customs and expressions that is not found in the style of Unterperger.

Two other works painted for the Faenza church of San Domenico date back to the second half of the 1760s: the *Visitation*, datable to 1766-67, based on documents owned by the client family, the Laderchi counts, and the altarpiece with *St. Dominic led by angels*. The latter undoubtedly marks a qualitative leap for formal elegance, the extraordinary sense of light, clear and bright colors that show a clearer tangency with neoclassical poetics.

In 1770 Gottardi became a member of the Congregation of Virtuosi al Pantheon. Between 1774 and 1778 we can date the three painted altarpieces for the oratory of S. Giacomo in Russi depicting the *Madonna with Child and S. Giacomo*, *The apparition of St. Antonio and S. Luigi Gonzaga* and *S. Francesco di Paola*; also commissioned by Bishop Cantoni, they are currently in the seminary of Faenza.

Datable to 1785, as attested by the payment document to Gottardi of April of that year, it is the banner of the Beata Vergine delle Grazie, preserved in Faenza in the oratory of S. Pietro in Vincoli; in this work the reference to Unterperger appears almost literal, in particular with the Communion of the apostles preserved in the cathedral of Jesi and

with the two heads of the apostles. Both strongly dependent on Renian, assigned to Unterperger.

The proposal that the upper part, of a more Emilian, almost Gandolfian style, is due to Gottardi and the lower part to Unterperger, an established artist at that time, appears unlikely. On the other hand, it is possible that Gottardi made use of common models, or copied Unterperger's inventions according to a widespread practice in the Roman environment and also attested for Gottardi who in 1781 asked the Accademia di S. Luca for permission to copy four works by illustrious authors.

In 1792 Gottardi became regent of the Congregation of Virtuosi at the Pantheon. He died in Rome in September 1812.

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