

# Giovanni Battista Lenardi

Italian painter  
1656-1704

He was born in Rome in 1656. The names of his parents are unknown; little or nothing is known about his youth. His name appears for the first time in 1672, when at the age of sixteen he won the interior design competition for the students of the third class of the Accademia di S. Luca. Thus, at the Roman Academy, Lenardi gained his first achievements and official awards - here he still won the subsequent drawing contests of 1673 and 1679 - connecting in those same years one a close relationship, intended to last in time, with the workshop of the painter Cortonese Lazzaro Baldi, his direct master, who would nominate him, together with other students, in his own will of 1698.

Inside the convent of S. Sabina in Rome, and precisely in the cloister, there is the oldest witness of the artistic activity of the artist. Here, in fact, the two panels are preserved with S. Domenico who preaches the rosary in S. Sabina and St. Gregory the Great setting up litanies - frescoes once placed near the apse of the church and later detached during the restoration work of 1919 - attributed to Lenardi already by Pietro de' Sebastiani in his guide to Rome published in 1683, which indirectly becomes thus a useful term ante quem for the dating of the works themselves. It is reasonable to assume that the artist may have received the commission of these frescoes by British Cardinal Philip Howard from Norfolk, Dominican, who had already provided other renovation work in the ancient basilica. Since the same cardinal pursued a political approach of approaching between the English court and the Holy See, it is not excluded that he may have favored the contacts between the Roman painter and John Michael Wright (sometimes also translated as Writ), author of a pamphlet celebratory release published in 1686 at the diplomatic mission in Rome by British ambassador Roger Palmer, Count of Castlemaine. To Lenardi, in fact, he was entrusted with drawing drawings for the frontpage and illustrated drawings with the paratrooper ceremonial carriages designed by Ciro Ferri, drawings then translated by Arnold van Westerhout, with which Lenardi would later collaborate several times.

This work marks the start of the graphic artist's work - indeed very fruitful and still missing a complete catalog - a field in which he seems not only more comfortable from a technical point of view, for a lesser temptation binding compositional stereotypes, but also more favored by the point of view of the committees, because they are more free to enjoy a network of independent contacts independent of Baldi's mediation, while constantly present in the case of more challenging pictorial commissions.

In fact, probably due to his participation in the decorative campaign in S. Sabina, Lenardi had the opportunity to know the scholar and archaeologist Giovanni Giustino Ciampini, who was at that time performing the reliefs of still surviving mosaics. This is why he performed the titlepiece, still engraved by Westerhout, of his most famous work, the Vetera monument, published in Rome in 1690. Again, it was thanks to the contacts with the Jesuits - witnessed by the request of his advice in 1695 regarding the approval of the projects by Andrea Pozzo for the altar of S. Ignazio al Gesù - that

Lenardi received the commission of a celebratory drawing in honor of Peter II of Braganza king of Portugal, always engraved by Westerhout and kept today at the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome.

In the meantime, Lenardi had gone through all the important stages of the career of an artist in the late seventeenth century Rome. In 1684 he was elected a member of the Pantheon Virtueous Congregation, and on July 16, 1690, he was listed on the List of Merit Academics of St. Luke. At the Academy for some time, Lenardi did some teaching activity, teaching the drawing from the naked, later occupied the post of administrator of the church of the Ss. Luca e Martina, and then served as a cadre estimator, ending his career in 1700, after being last mentioned in 1699 for the first rector charge.

These were precisely these parallel commitments and activities to divert Lenardi from a more substantial and fruitful pictorial production. In fact, there are very few paintings that are firmly attributed to him - most of the altarpiece always performed in the Baldi shop - and even less those plausibly attributable to his hand.

Concordantly recorded by the oldest sources is his intervention for the church of the Fatebenefratelli, on the Tiberina island, around 1690, on the occasion of the canonization of John of God, founder of the Order. Lenardi painted the *Death of S. Giovanni Calibita*, still in situ, and the canvas with the *Appearance of Christ to S. John of God*, now preserved in the convent but perhaps destined to originally decorate once in the same church.

His most famous work remains the burial of S. Andrea, still today housed in the apse of the apse of the church of S. Andrea delle Fratte in Rome, a well-documented painting, of which some interesting drawings are also kept at the National Printing House in Rome and the new Kunst Palast Museum in Düsseldorf.

The canvas is part of a cycle of three paintings devoted to the martyrdom of the holy apostle - the other two depict, respectively, the *Death of S. Andrea*, by Lazzaro Baldi, in the center of the apse behind the main altar, and on the left, the *Crucifixion of the Saint* by Francesco Trevisani - according to a typology similar to the one already experienced, to fresco, by Mattia Preti in S. Andrea della Valle. It is known that the commission was entrusted to Baldi in 1686; but as far as the execution of the painting of Lenardi is concerned, the criticism is incompatible with the dating, which remains, according to the various proposals of scholars, between 1688, 1700 and 1704.

Certainly, in 1697, the altarpiece was completed with the *Conversion of S. Paul*, for the church of S. Giovanni Battista, also known as dell'Ospedale, in Velletri. Recent documentary research has made it possible to clarify the Roman provenance and the chronology of the work, which was consecrated on March 8, 1697. This discovery thus excludes the old attribution of the painting to Pietro Berrettini and authorizes the subscription, comforted by stylistic analysis, to Lenardi catalog.

Even as regards the realization of the ceremonial banner executed for the Brotherhood of S. Maria del Pianto of Rome, there seems to be no doubt about its proper attribution, which is now firmly acknowledged by Lenardi although the entire commission was entrusted to usually, to Baldi, who in this case also resorted to the help of his closest collaborators.

The two great paintings, the *contingency of Scipione* and his pendant, the *Suicide of Bruto*, now held in the Alberoni College in Piacenza, but once a part of the Roman collection of Cardinal Giulio Alberoni.

Lenardi died at the age of forty-seven, in 1704, in Rome, where he was buried inside the church, now no longer existing, of St. Nicola in Arcione.

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