

Clemente Majoli

Italian painter
17th cent

The date and place of birth of this painter are not known, documented between the fourth and eighth decades of the seventeenth century. From an archival revision, the most ancient attestation that qualifies Majoli as already active would turn out to be not already the 20th week. 1634, presumed date of entry into the Roman Academy of St. Luke, but 7 Nov. 1639, date relative to the payment of 5 scudi for the execution of an oval square with *The call of S. Peter*, unidentified. The hypothesis of a Roman origin of Majoli is joined, still, by that of its Ferrara origin, advanced by the first biographers due to the numerous interventions that bound it to the Emilian city (Cittadella).

The sources and the modern historiography agree instead in placing in Rome the artistic formation of the Majoli: under the guidance of Pietro Berrettini da Cortona or, rather, of Giovan Francesco Romanelli.

It is probable that Majoli has passed more simply from the alumnus with the first to the attendance of the second, to which it is precociously associated in the circuit of the commissions of Barberini. The beginnings and the first activity of the artist (engaged by the illustrious Roman family for almost thirty years, above all in the execution of copies by Romanelli himself, of small-format paintings with a precious miniaturist taste and of tapestry boxes) can be reconstructed only indirectly, because all the works cited in the Barberinian documents are lost or at least not currently identifiable. To the two-year period 1642-43 belong the copies from Romanelli depicting *The reading Madonna with the Child and S. Giovanni* with a landscape background, on copper, a *Madonna* and a *S. Maria Egiziaca*; the two oval paintings with the *Pietà* and *Oration in the garden* and the *Healing of the possessed* in a lapis lazuli ovate; the cardboard for the tapestry with the *hunt on the ostrich*, part of the series woven by Pietro Lascotti.

In the same period he had to enter the Academy of St. Luke: the 29th of September 1642, in fact, Majoli participated for the first time in the sessions of the Academy and there was present, subsequently, in that of 24 January 1644.

Moreover, in the 1640s, Majoli had to move towards achieving a different artistic maturity. It can be deduced from the counting of the tasks entrusted to him by the Barberini family starting from the following decade, implying new technical and creative responsibilities.

In 1651 Majoli executed a portrait of Innocent X "sent to Valmontone", a copper with the *Holy Family* on a landscape background and an *Assumption of the Virgin* on amethyst. It is not certain whether, in that same years, Majoli took part, beside and in the alternative, in Romanelli's decoration of the chapel of the Madonna del Rosario in the church of Ss. Domenico e Sisto, where he was assigned the frescoes of sottarco with *The Coronation of the Virgin*, the *Assumption* and *Pentecost*. The undertaking, datable to the end of 1652, the year in which the chapel was completed, would represent the beginning of its

application to the fresco, a privileged exercise by Majoli in the continuation of his activity. Already in 1653 the artist was engaged by the Barberini for the realization of a fresco copy of a *Last Supper* by Romanelli for the church of S. Ippolito in Porto, lost, and paid for having "retouched the paintings" in Grottaferrata and for "other works" not better specified.

At the same time, Majoli continued to take part in the academic life as attested by the minutes of the September 1653 and September, November and December 1654 congregations. Between the second half of the Fifties and the beginning of the following decade, Majoli corresponded to the requests of the Barberini, performing paintings, restoration works and committing themselves continuously to the tapestry industry.

Of March 14, 1656 is the order for payment of 40 scudi for a picture on the subject *Pasce oves meas* and a cardboard box with the *delivery of the keys*; in February 1659 Majoli was paid for "all the exploits" of Pope Alexander VII of the tapestry with the *Annunciation* given to the pontiff and, in the same year, he was paid for a restoration intervention to a fresco on the ceiling of the Palazzo della Cancelleria. From that date, moreover, Majoli participated in the realization of the series with the *Stories of Apollo*, woven by Maria Maddalena della Riviera and completed in 1663: on 19 June 1659 he received payments for the cardboard with *Apollo and Daphne*; June 30, 1660, for that with *Apollo and Mercury*; on 2 November 1662, finally, for that with *Apollo and the nine muses*. By stylistic analogy and operational coherence, it was assumed that Majoli also executed the cartoons of the two remaining pieces of the cycle with *Apollo and Marsia* and with *Latona, Apollo and Diana*; but the inventive paternity of the entire group has more recently been questioned in favor of an attribution of the models of the cartoons to Romanelli, artistic superintendent of the manufacture from 1637 to 1662.

Between 1661 and 1665 Majoli increased his participation in the academic sessions and worked on his most prestigious Roman enterprise: the fresco decoration of the vault of the Alexandrian Library in the Roman University La Sapienza.

The fresco, depicting the *Triumph of Religion*, was conducted in two stages: in March 1662 Majoli completed the central portion with the allegory of *Religion* and the underlying *Evangelists*; from February to April 1665 he performed the *Doctors of the Church* and the *Theological Virtues* in the angular sectors. For this first official assignment, Majoli chose to move along the lines of a consecrated model, the Cortona fresco of the Barberini palace hall: in fact he took up the general conception and individual compositional solutions, without being able, however, to restoring the vitalistic energy of the figures and the illusionistic effect of perspective breakthrough. The work, paid for a total of 130 scudi, was still appreciated and earned Majoli other important public assignments assigned to him starting from the completion of the first phase of the work at La Sapienza.

From 6 March to 21 June 1663 they date the payments for the fresco decoration of the apsidal wall of S. Bernardino da Siena in Via Panisperna, commissioned by Sister Maria Chiara Caroli. Respectively to the right and to the left of the high altar, Majoli painted *The preaching of S. Bernardino*, signed and dated "Clemens Maiolus pinxit a. 1663", and the *Death of S. Bernardino*; also in this context he used a graphic figure exemplary on the

cortoneschi modules, but not free from "archaisms and hardness" and more cursive in the resolution of the second floors.

On 3 Aug. 1663 Majoli received a payment of 3 scudi for having "restored the painting of Andrea Sacchi" in the Barberini palace at the Quattro Fontane. On 12 August of the same year he was accepted among the members of the Society of St. Joseph of the Holy Land of the Pantheon, where he entered the following September 16. The painting with the *Saints Lorenzo and Agnese*, already on the altar of the church of Santa Maria ad perhaps to be placed in more recent times to this documented relationship with the Company and to a highly productive and qualitatively significant season. Martyres (the Pantheon) and now in the second chapel on the right.

Despite the canvas present the Serlupi Crescenzi coat of arms painted on the base on which it rests S. Lorenzo, the date and circumstances of the commission are ignored. The uncritical revival of the figurative sources and in particular, of the painting by Romanelli with the *Persian Martyrs* of around 1640 (Rome, S. Carlo ai Catinari) could suggest a prior dating; but, on the other hand, it is precisely towards the language of Romanelli, to whom this unique painting of Majoli had been early attributed, which would have oriented the future production of the artist.

Between 1663 and September 1664 the payments for the painting with the *Council of Nicea* destined to the altar of St. Nicholas in S. Lorenzo in Damaso, are climbed.

Oct. 5 1664 Majoli was elected a member of St. Luke together with Giovan Pietro Bellori.

The indication, for which it is not possible to provide further information, is placed on the edge of the academic history of the painter, documented for the last time in the session of February 1, 1665, and, more generally, of the "Roman" one, since the date on which the artist performed the fresco decoration, lost, of the vault of S. Apollonia is not known.

It is therefore likely that Majoli moved to Ferrara as early as the second half of the 1660s, because the number of interventions reported there from the sources would be better explained in the light of a prolonged stay even by the date of 1671, the only one that attest to his presence in the city. From March to December of that year, Majoli received payments for the impressive fresco decoration of S. Maria dei Teatini, including the *Stories of s. Gaetano* in the walls of the presbytery and in the lunettes above the cantorie, of the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the ceiling of a chapel adjoining the presbytery and of the *musician Angels* in the two fake windows on the sides of the main portal; "near the said Cantorie", moreover, Majoli would have performed "oil paintings" unidentified.

The Ferrara cycle marks the passage from the "weighted" cortonism of Roman frescoes to the most delicate interpretation of Romanellian classicism, softened by the brightness of the backgrounds with views of the Urbe and by delicate chromatic choices. But it is not possible to add other significant examples to this linguistic maturation of Majoli, since all his other interventions in Ferrara have been lost: the *S. Nicola da Tolentino dying* on the eponymous altar of S. Giuseppe; *S. Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi* in S. Paolo, executed in 1674 for the last chapel on the right; the *Ss. Giorgio and Maurelio* in the oratory of S. Ludovico; the *Saints Antonio and Filippo Neri*, probably in fresco, at the

entrance of the castle's snail staircase, and already replaced in 1770 by wall paintings by Giuseppe Travagli.

There is no other news of Majoli, whose place and date of death are unknown.

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