

Giovanni Micocca

Italian painter
(1763-1825)

He was born in Rome in 1763 to Domenico and Gertrude Angelini and was baptized on 8 March in S. Crisogono). The third of four children, Micocca is registered, until 1769, in a house in "strada dei Vinaroli" in the parish of S. Cecilia in Trastevere together with his parents, his sisters Rosa and Maria Clementina and his brother Daniele Maria, born in 1750, friar of the Order of St. John of God and artist-craftsman in the Rome of Pius VI.

Active during the early nineties alongside his teacher, Sermonetan painter A. Cavallucci, together with T. Sciacca, in 1794 he participated in the realization of a *Via Crucis* for the church of S. Francesco di Paola in Rome, performing the scenes with *Jesus condemned by the Sanhedrin* and *Jesus is denied by Peter* (current location unknown). Also in Rome between 1795 and 1796 he completed the frescoes in the gallery of the church of S. Martino ai Monti that the titular cardinal Francesco Saverio de Zelada had commissioned from Cavallucci.

For this same church he painted, in addition to the paintings of the choir that Cavallucci had started with his collaboration, a small circular painting with an *Ecce Homo* (Rome, Ss. Silvestro and Martino ai Monti), placed in the center of the wooden choir and, in 1797, for the baptistery, also renewed by the will of Zelada, a *Baptism of Christ* (stolen in 1999). The completion by Micocca of the canvas, already commissioned by the city of Ragusa in Cavallucci, depicting *St. Peter in prison* could also date back to this same period.

After 1797 and up to 1804, the year in which Micocca became part of the Virtuosi al Pantheon, the local literature lacks any mention of his works. Remembered between 1808 and 1810 as a restorer and, from 1811, among the regents of the Academy of Virtuosi, in 1812 he received the prestigious task of creating a painting (lost work), of large dimensions, depicting the *Temple of Concord* for the third salon of the empress set up in the new imperial palace of Montecavallo (the Quirinal).

Resident, from 1813 until his death, with his wife Anna Lombardi and their children Gaetano, Agnese, Balbina and Carolina, in Piazza Barberini (in a house of the prince of Preneste Maffeo Colonna Barberini Sciarra, whose family had maintained close friendships with Zelada), by Micocca, after the significant undertaking of the Quirinale, only one other work is known: the canvas with *St. Jerome* of the homonymous altar in the Sistine chapel in S. Maria Maggiore, which bears the inscription «Giovanni Micocca restauravit et pexit year 1818 ».

Micocca died in Rome on March 28, 1825 and was buried in the church of S. Bernardo alle Terme.

The role played by Micocca in the pictorial site of the Carmelite church of Ss. Silvestro and Martino ai Monti is due to the interventions of Barroero. The decoration of this church was Cavallucci's last work, which he undertook the same year of his death. The compensation agreed with Zelada was paid in part to Cavallucci and in part to Micocca, being the other traditional collaborator of Cavallucci, the Sicilian Sciacca, who died in that same 1795. On the basis of the detailed statements of De Rossi, Barroero was able to assign to Cavallucci the invention and execution of the sketches of the figures of the saints *Carlo Borromeo* , *Silvestro* , *Martino* and *Francesco Saverio*(Rome, National Gallery of Ancient Art, Palazzo Barberini, formerly the Lemme collection) and the final figure of *S. Carlo*. The rest of the preparatory materials and related paintings - the *Eternal Father* , the *Virgin and Child* , *Saints Peter* , *Paul* , *Teresa of Avila* , *Andrea Corsini* , *Maria Maddalena de 'Pazzi* , *Pier Tommasi*(Ibid.) - they would belong, instead, to a large extent to Micocca who elaborated and created them following for

some of the figures "sketches in watercolor" left by Cavallucci (De Rossi). The final result, according to Barroero, would be of good quality. The compositions of this decoration that Micocca would have created alone would in fact reveal «the collaborator's effort [...] not to betray the homogeneity and coherence of the whole» started with Cavallucci (Barroero, 1998). That Micocca enjoyed good credit even after the death of his teacher would be testified, again according to the scholar, also by the subsequent assignments assigned to him, namely the lost canvas of the Quirinale and that of S. Maria Maggiore. The meager catalog of Micocca that has come down to us, from which the canvas with the *Blessed Mary of the Incarnation* must be removed (formerly the Lemme collection), it seems rather to reveal that the Quirinale's undertaking was an isolated case in the path of Micocca, whose works are mentioned only in the *ordinary Diary* and who is remembered by his contemporaries mostly as a restorer. The work of Micocca, never worthy of appreciation by the academics of St. Luke and composed, for the most part, by replicas, in the few certainly autonomous tests reveals a fidelity to the teachings of his master that borders on plagiarism. However, the quality of Micocca's paintings is much less sustained. He, in fact, in *Baptism*, already considered by Röttgen to be Cavallucci's youthful work, is a less resolute draftsman, tougher, and a technically less refined and enameled painter. This weakness, almost the inability to work large - the best are the results in smaller paintings such as the *Ecce Homo* -, could find justification in the role he held, for a long time, at least from the second half of the Eighties, in his master's atelier. According to De Rossi, Cavallucci had few pupils; among these was Micocca who "learned the art under him from the very beginning" and for whom the master "always had a singular affection" (p. 40). In the nineties, the richest commissions, Cavallucci would have entrusted Sciacca and especially to Micocca they went back to painting and kneading them again "(De Rossi, p. 47). This procedure is singularly similar to that outlined by Bartoli in 1793 in describing the works of Rovigo del Micocca. Copies or paintings of invention, these paintings were all completed, finished, according to Bartoli, by Cavallucci. Micocca, as well as Sciacca, would then systematically create, again according to De Rossi, replicas of Cavallucci's paintings, often in a reduced format. De Rossi himself owned a copy of the *Virgin of the Rosary* (perhaps to be identified with the one recently passed on the Roman antiques market, doubtfully assigned to Micocca) and one of the *Vestizione di s. Bona*, which had been completed "by another hand" (De Rossi). Micocca's practice of copying for a long time in the workshop of his master and his poor skills as a draftsman could have led him to devote himself to the restoration and copying of ancient paintings, a market that at that time was very flourishing in Rome.

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