

Giovanni Francesco de Rossi

Italian sculptor
(17th cent.)

Giovanni Francesco de Rossi, whose precise date of birth is unknown, was the son of Domenico (the name of his mother is not known, however), a sculptor from Fivizzano, in today's province of Massa and Carrara, and very active in Rome in some important construction sites directed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini until 1654, the year of his death. It must therefore be assumed that the young Giovanni Francesco learned the rudiments of the trade from his father and then developed a vaguely Algardian language, probably favored by the collaboration with Ercole Ferrata.

The first presence of the sculptor in a public commission is traditionally set in the early 1640s in the Roman church of S. Caterina in Magnanapoli, for which he executed the two stucco monumental statues of the eponymous saint and of S. Domenico for the niches of the portico d'entrance. The architect Giovan Battista Soria worked on the construction of the facade between 1643 and 1648 and it must be assumed that the execution of the two statues was only started towards the end of this building site. On the other hand, the two stucco figures of *Mercy* and *Fortitude* can be dated with certainty to 1647 seated on the arch of the main nave of St. Peter's basilica which opens towards the first chapel on the right: under the direction of Bernini, Giovanni Francesco built the first in collaboration with his father Domenico and the second in complete autonomy. Also in the same year we find the sculptor engaged in the execution of "two angels for the altar of the Santissima Madonna delle Grazie", to be identified with the primeval preparation of the altar - now lost and replaced by Antonio Asprucci in 1792 - of the *Madonna di Loreto*, who was crowned for the first time by the Vatican Chapter in 1644.

Rossi's involvement in the works of the Pasqualoni chapel in S. Lorenzo in Lucina dates back to 1648, for which he sculpted four portrait busts of family members, which today cannot be identified due to the removal of the epitaphs in the mid-nineteenth century. For these works, the last payment of which dates back to May 1657, the sculptor was paid a total of 126 escudos. In 1649, during the restoration of the Lateran basilica promoted by Innocenzo X in view of the Jubilee, the artist was assigned the execution of one of the twelve stucco reliefs above the niches of the central nave, designed by Francesco Borromini: the *Descent of Christ in Limbo* it constitutes one of the best proofs of Rossi, also thanks to the compositional suggestions provided by Alessandro Algardi, consultant of the construction site for the sculptural-decorative part. Still to 1649-50 the intervention of the sculptor must be placed in the crypt of the small temple of S. Pietro in Montorio, in whose vault he made a series of stucco panels with stories from his life.

After the aforementioned works, Rossi must have left Rome for Poland, perhaps looking for greater professional recognition. The causes and modalities of his arrival are still to be clarified, but it is very likely that the invitation came from Ludovico Fantoni, secretary of King Giovanni Casimiro (1648-68), who stayed in Italy from the autumn of 1650 until May 1651. Rossi landed in an environment in which Italian art was already highly appreciated and which, since the early 1630s, boasted the presence of the architect and musician Giovanni Battista Gisleni (1600-1672), with whom he would have more times collaborated. The artist therefore became a real 'court sculptor', as evidenced by the salary of 300 zlotys which he received between mid-1651 and mid-1653 and the two busts of King Giovanni Casimiro and Queen Ludovica Maria Gonzaga, today at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. In these years the collaboration with Gisleni was very fruitful, attested by the monument of Bishop Piotr Gombicki in the cathedral of Krakow, signed work (GIO. FRA.CO ROMANO) and of which there is the preparatory drawing drawn up by the architect, with some changes compared to the implementation of the sacellum. A stucco version of the bust of the same bishop is kept in the church of S. Maria in Krakow, in a niche above the entrance to the sacristy. Also in the competition with Gisleni, albeit in a dubious way, it is possible to associate the monument of Teodora Krystyna Sapieha in the church of St. Michael in Vilnius and that of Bishop Jerzy Tyszkiewicz in the cathedral of St. Stanislaus of the same city, of which only the bust of the blessing prelate resting on a mixtilinear base remains. Furthermore, Rossi made the bust of Bishop Adam Kos in the monument of the prelate in Chełmża Cathedral.

Rossi's professional experience in Poland ended in 1655, the year in which the sculptor returned to Rome, probably recalled by the family duties due to the disappearance, which occurred on February 6, 1654, of his father Domenico, who had named him universal heir. This new professional season began with the sculptor's entry into a large Bernini construction site, that of the decoration of S. Maria del Popolo, for which he created the stucco figures of *S. Teresa*, *S. Caterina da Siena*, *S. Martina* and *S. Agnese*, seated in pairs on the first and fourth arch respectively of the right side of the nave, and for which he received 130 scudi between 24 August 1655 and 14 November 1656. After being admitted to the Accademia di S. Luca in July 1657, we find him, the following year, to collaborate with Carlo Rainaldi, from whom he received 80 scudi «on behalf of some figures» for the high altar of St. Jerome of Charity. The decoration of the altar was renewed in 1737, and therefore we do not know what Rossi's actual contribution was, but *Charity* and *Faith* stucco laid on the arch could be assigned to his hand.

On 16 December 1660 Rossi was called by the Pamphilj to participate in the great decorative enterprise of S. Agnese in Agone, together with Ercole Ferrata, Melchiorre Cafà, Antonio Raggi: by 1664 he completed the relief for the first right side altar, with *Pope Sixtus III and Euphemian who find the corpse of s. Alessio*, perhaps his best known work, although not fully successful on a compositional level. Still in the same Pamphilian church, in 1669 he collaborated with Ferrata in completing the relief with the *Martyrdom of s. Eustachius di Cafà*, who died prematurely in 1667. During this decade Rossi was engaged in various types of sculptural creations: in 1661, for example, he sculpted the bust for the funeral monument of Giacomo Gamba in S. Maria ad Martyres (Pantheon; today in the first chapel on the right), commissioned by the brother of the deceased and welded for a total of 80 scudi. The commission for the seated figure of *St. Ptolemy* dates back to 1662, destined to be placed under the main altar of the cathedral of Nepi, where it arrived in 1664, while in 1663 Rossi was called again by the Pamphilj for a collective enterprise in the church of S. Nicola da Tolentino, where he stuccoed the octagon with the *Blessed Chiara da Montefalco* for the second span of the vault of the central nave and ten *Angels*, always in stucco, for the first two pairs of windows and for the large window of the counter-façade. Also in this context, on 2 June 1664 he was paid in full for the completion of the marble relief with *S. Nicola da Tolentino attempted by the devil*, located above the entrance of the convent, now the Pontifical Armenian College.

In that same year he began work on the *Cenotaph of Cardinal Francesco Cennini de 'Salamandri*, then placed in the counter-façade of S. Marcello al Corso in 1668, while in 1665 he received the balance for having executed the ten *Erms* for the exedra of the palace garden Sword. Given the good result obtained, the Marquis Orazio Spada thought to entrust him with the decoration with a *Glory of angels and putti* for the vault of the family chapel in S. Maria in Vallicella, designed by Camillo Arcucci. The first drafting of the work, dating back to 1666, was not appreciated by the Marquis, and also the second version, executed immediately afterwards, did not meet the approval of the client; only in 1667, with the extension of the vault by Carlo Rainaldi, Rossi made the final composition, including also the rounds in gilded stucco with *Stories of s. Carlo Borromeo*; perhaps due to the various accidents that occurred during the processing, the final balance was paid only on February 5, 1677.

The 1670's opened for the sculptor with a job for the marquis Fabrizio Naro, who, between September 1671 and the same month of 1673, paid him 166 scudi for two marble portraits: it is almost certainly two works intended for the chapel in S. Maria sopra Minerva, in which the portraits of the most illustrious members of the family appear, among which the effigy of Cardinal Gregorio sculpted by Bernini stands out. However, at the present time, it is not possible to identify the two busts made by Rossi, and the attribution to the sculptor of the portrayal of Bernardino Naro, who died in 1671, remains doubtful. Always at Minerva, Rossi took part in the collective enterprise of the tomb of Cardinal Carlo Bonelli, designed by Rainaldi, between 1674 and 1675 creating the figure of the *Temperance*, for which he received a reward of 190 scudi, while the following year he worked in the chapel of the abbot Elpidio Benedetti in S. Luigi dei Francesi, stuccoing the choir of angels adoring and putti garlands that emerge from the clouds of the dome. Rossi's last known work, dating back to around 1677, is the monument to Antonio Borani in the church of S. Isidoro. After this work there is no further information on the sculptor.

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