

# Placido Celi

Italian painter  
c.1649-1711

He was born in Messina around 1649. The news about his life are provided by the contemporary F. Susinno. He began to study under the guidance of Agostino Scilla, a well-known local painter and philosopher. The latter, heir to the Roman classicist ideals of Carlo Maratta and Andrea Sacchi, went to Rome, where the Celi soon followed him, but left him to attend the Maratta school and that of A. Morandi. Definitely attracted by classicist painting, he attended the Academy of the Nude of the French and copied and designed the works of the Carracci and "so much ownership took that round way and admirable relief in the Farnese Gallery, which great designer became". Another characteristic of his, according to the biographer, was the speed of execution. Also in Rome, at the request of Scilla, he made a replica of the Maratta *Nativity* at S. Giuseppe dei Falegnami, which was sent to the Duke of Saponara di Messina.

In 1694 Celi returned to his native city where he painted an *Immaculate* for the Conception Monastery, and four canvases (*Adoration of the Shepherds*, *Adoration of the Magi*, *David and Isai*) for the church of the monastery of S. Maria dell'Alto (church and monastery destroyed today).

He then returned to Rome, where he married "a damsel of the Duke Altemps"; and from this moment, in addition to being maintained, "spent all day in the cafettieri shops". The consequences on painting should not be slow to make itself heard. When he picked up his brushes again, "as soon as he did, he tried to compensate for what he lost in the", but he had left "the first grateful way" to take a contrary "to Roman diligence ... intent on correction and clean dye". An oval canvas with Sdates back to this period. *Teresa, Jesus and Our Lady*, still preserved in the fourth chapel on the left of the church of S. Maria in Traspontina, and an *S. Leopold kneeling* for S. Maria dell'Anima, gone missing.

In August 1702 Celi returned for a short time to Messina, where for the parties organized in honor of the Count of Toulouse, he raised a "apparatus" that was a great success at the expense of the clergy at the expense of the clergy. For the church of the SS hospital Pietro and Paolo de 'Prete painted the *Souls of Purgatory and the Crucifying Crucifix*, in which he "sought ... to give a checkmate to his emollium, who prayed in vague color." He followed ... a certain accord, fleeing the vagueness, to poison any beauty with bright colors, using a greenish tint, with the field of all turchinetto ... " The work, which measures 1.80 × 2.83 m, is currently preserved in the National Museum of Messina. In this same period, for the Congregation of the Virgin Mary of the Sacred Letter, to which a chapel is dedicated under the cathedral, Celi executed the two canvases on the sides of the main altar depicting the *embassy of the city of Messina to the Virgin* and the *Sitting virgin writing to the city*. According to Susinno, before painting he made clay models, to better observe the natural effects of light and shade, and then covered them with "linen pieces soaked in water", to better study the folds of clothes.

Impatient of criticism, the Celi soon departed from Messina, where he was not very well liked, because of his always quarrelsome character that contrasted with his pleasant appearance and his amiable conversation. He then went to Rome, where he stayed for a short time, because he fell ill with jaundice and was forced to return to his hometown, where he had a commission for a painting depicting the *Temple of Health with Aurora* from the French Consul, which was brought to France. For the Messina cathedral he still made an *St. Joseph with the Child* and for the Jesuits of the house professed the *Transit of St. Joseph*, all works whose destiny is unknown.

Celi died in Messina on the 1st April. 1711, at the age of about sixty-two years, and was buried in the church of preaching fathers.

Most of his works were later lost to the Messina earthquake of 1908, so that for the purpose of reconstructing his artistic personality we had to accept uncritically what Susinno wrote about him.

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