

Francesco Corallo

Italian Painter and Gilder
(17th century)

Artist of unknown origins, he worked in Rome in the last three decades of the 17th century together with the numerous artists who gravitated around the court of Cardinal Flavio Chigi, notoriously one of the most important centers of the late Roman Baroque.

Engaged in 1671 as a gilder in works of little importance for the casino of Nettuno, a few years later he characterized his activity at Chigi also as a painter. In fact in 1676 he was paid for some gilding and for having painted "a traccagnino, a puffin, a Cola and a peasant". Having become a protégé of Cardinal Chigi, Corallo between 1679 and 1683 worked assiduously in Formello and Rome on the decoration of Chigian buildings (unfortunately today largely lost).

In fact, he decorated the ceiling of the hall of the Formello palace with gilding, frescoes, false architectures, cherubs and vases of flowers, while along the walls he designed "several columns that pretend to be theater with different views of villages and with other ornaments with flowers and fruits and his base around in chiaroscuro". On the ceiling of the anteroom then "a figure in a field of air" in the midst of eight putti, and in another room he drew a Flora with putti and views of countries and flowers. Finally, in the nearby villa of Versaglia, above the door, he painted a town. In Rome, in the casino of the Quattro Fontane garden, in addition to various gilding and paintings, he executed a *Venus* for the cardinal.

Probably thanks to Chigi's friendships with the Medici court and with Cardinal Francesco Maria de' Medici, Corallo was subsequently engaged for three years in Tuscany, where, in addition to the Marquis Salviati's villa in Valle di Marina, he worked on the decoration of important factories. Chigi himself, after receiving (1677) the feud of San Quirico d'Orcia as a gift from Cosimo III, between the end of 1684 and June 1687 had his protégé decorate the rooms of the building built in that locality to a design by Carl Fontana. In this building (today dilapidated), Corallo created a perspective in front of the loggia and the painting of the chapel, and still gilding, woodland and floral motifs in 28 rooms and in other environments.

To meet the decorative and magnificence needs of the client, Corallo formed a real workshop of artists, including gilders, perspective artists, landscape architects, painters of figures and flowers, which helped to spread a taste for decoratorism also in Tuscany late Baroque already widely established in Rome.

Precisely in the years in which Florence became an important center for the story of the Italian Baroque, with the presence of Luca Giordano and the activity of young artists trained in Rome at the school opened by the Academy of Design, Corallo was called by the Grand Duchess Vittoria Della Rovere to decorate the new hall she created based on a design by G. Marmi at the head of the large courtyard of the villa of Poggio Imperiale.

In that hall, originally intended as a gallery, and currently the refectory of the boarding school of the SS. Annunziata, the artist with his workshop painted an aerial *Olympus* in fresco on the ceiling supported and framed on the side walls by fake architecture, floral and woodland decorations; moreover, in eight ovals, above as many doors, he represented the *Labors of Hercules* in monochrome.

After completing the works in Poggio Imperiale, the Roman artist frescoed the sernibotte vault of the chapel of the Villa di Lappoggi for Cardinal Francesco Maria de' Medici. Between 1685 and 86 Corallo was again engaged in Siena and San Quirico d'Orcia. In August 1686 in Siena, in the palace of Cardinal Francesco Maria, he painted the corridor, or gallery, "which winds around the palace from two branches... above the courtyard".

In the cathedral of Albano, after the concession (1686) of that bishopric by Innocent XI to Cardinal Chigi, he decorated the ceiling of the sacristy "with eleven panels of church trophies with arms of His Excellency amidst cherubs in chiaroscuro on a yellow background".

From October 1687, after having completed the decoration of the palace of San Quirico d'Orcia, the artist returned to work in Rome, always employed by his patron.

In Ariccia, in the cathedral, he decorated the frontal of the altar, where the body of St. Martyr Deodatus. In the first half of 1688 he frescoed the picture of the altar, the vaults and the walls of the chapel of the casino of the Quattro Fontane; and finally in July of the same year he carried out "a new gilding of the circle of the dome of the Chigi chapel in S. Maria del Popolo".

After these works, Corallo's position at the Chigi court was consolidated to such an extent that he became an artistic attaché employed by the cardinal for the contract and payment of the works. Thus, with the exception of some small work carried out personally such as the decoration of the box of the Tordinona theater in 1690, in 1691 Corallo performed the functions of chamber assistant to the cardinal and the following year those of "wardrobe".

After the death of his powerful patron in 1693, the activity of Corallo also suffered a backlash. From that date, in fact, we find him mentioned only once in 1695 among the gilders paid by the Jesuits for work carried out in the new chapel of S. Ignazio di Lojola in S. Giovanni in Laterano.

Despite the small number of works that have come down to us, it is possible to place Corallo with sufficient reliability among that group of artists of heterogeneous origins who converged and worked in Rome at the courts of the great Roman families in a climate of by now latent crisis of the Baroque experience.

Originally a gilder, as evidenced by the first works for Chigi and his participation in 1681 as an expert, in an official appraisal of some frames, he was also engaged as a painter together with the artists of his workshop, such as the florist N. Stanchi and the monsu landscape painter Francesco Borgognone, in fresco decorative cycles of Cortona ancestry with uncertain and hasty results.

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