

# Salvatore Fontana

Italian painter

(d. 1590)

The year of birth of this painter was unknown, born in Venice and was active in Rome, where his presence was attested from the ninth decade of the sixteenth century.

Annotated among the "foreign" pupils of Cavalier d'Arpino, Fontana is considered a probable pupil of C. Nebbia that, for the arrival of Fontana in Rome, suggests a contact with G. Muziano: the Brescia painter, who came to town in 1549, became here a point of reference for Venetian artists.

The first documented work of Fontana dates back to 1583, the year in which he was commissioned to perform the canvas with the *Assumption of the Virgin* for the altar of the Congregation of St. Peter in the Duomo of Siena. The painting was left unfinished for payment disagreements and was finished by Raffaello Vanni, son of the best-known Francesco, so that the Fontana's intervention could hardly be identified.

Better documented is the participation in the decoration of the Sistina chapel in S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, where Fontana worked under the direction of C. Nebbia and G. Guerra in 1587, since the final payments were made on 3 January 1588. He painted the fresco on the altar of the chapel of S. Gerolamo, depicting *S. Gerolamo dying*. The painting was completed by October 24th. 1586, according to the payment of the payment by the fog for the altar of the side chapels "which he and his companions are painting". For the poor conservation conditions the fresco was replaced by a canvas painted by R. Micocca in 1817.

Certainly to be considered autographs are the frescoes depicting *Herod ordering the massacre of the innocents* in the chapel of S. Lucia and the *Annunciation* on the entrance to the chapel of S. Gerolamo.

On the basis of the autograph of the latter scene Zuccari attributes to Fontana the canvas with the *Annunciation* in the parish church of Casemasce, near Todi, a work of clear, non-autographed imprint. The scholar, hoping for an in-depth study of paintings born from the influence of the orvietan master in Umbrian territory, recognizes the composition of the fresco of S. Maria Maggiore, proposed "in a different format, in a less aulic style more suited to a peasant environment" . Much closer to the Muziano modules, for the monumentality of the figures with a melancholy detachment, the scenes with *Eliud, Eliazar, Mattan and Jacob* can be considered on the entry arch of the crib's chapel, and the canvas with the *Census of Maria and Joseph*, on the bottom wall of the same chapel, brought to the hand by F. da Zuccari, which also assumes an intervention by the artist also in the scene with the *Announcement to shepherds*.

Fontana is not reminded of the sources for having participated in other Sistine companies but Zuccari does not exclude the possibility that the painter intervenes in the box with the *Capture of Christ* in the vault of the Scala Santa, where he recognizes "shaded figures with rounded faces" characteristics of his art.

Fontana died in Rome on July 26, 1590 in the parish of S. Lorenzo in Lucina; in the register of the dead, in addition to the confirmation of his Venetian origin, there is the news that he lived "via Condotti, near the Rucellai".

by Laura Mocchi - Biographical Dictionary of the Italians - Volume 48 (1997)

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