

Giovanni Antonio Mari

Italian sculptor

c.1630-1661

He was born in Rome, around 1630-31, from Baldassarre and Caterina Masetti, into a family of sculptors and restorers of ancient statues operating between 1628 and 1676. His formation took place within the paternal workshop; its activity, concentrated in the years between 1650 and 1660, took place entirely within the sphere of GL Bernini. On April 25th 1656 received the appointment as an academic of S. Luca; he was also a member of the Accademia dei Virtuosi al Pantheon.

The family was erroneously considered to be of French origin: Baldassarre was identified with Balthazard Marsy; in reality the family is Italian and precisely from Todi, as mentioned in the act of death of Baldassarre. The Mari had to reside in Rome for a long time because in the testament of 1673 Baldassarre is said to be the son of a Francesco Angelo "Romanus"; from the marriage with Caterina Masetti were born at least five children: two females being nuns (Candida Ermellina and Agnese Francesca) and three males (Mari, Francesco and Domenico), who followed the paternal profession, dying all at a rather young age without being able to free from role of collaborators on Bernini shipyards. The family, residing in via Paolina, was perhaps related to the sculptor GB Naldini who married a Virginia Mari of Todi; subsequently they tightened ties of kinship with the sculptor FA Fontana, the sister of whom he married Francesco.

The first report of the activity of Mari regards the work done next to his father in the cardinal coat-of-arms of the Saints Vincent and Anastasia in the Bernini yard of the Cornaro chapel in S. Maria della Vittoria: in his favor there is only one payment, of an entity modest (12 scudi), paid in July 1651 for unspecified works. In the same year the troubled story of the completion of the fountain, today called del Moro, was started, in front of Palazzo Pamphili in Piazza Navona.

After the construction of the *Fontana dei Fiumi*, Bernini was commissioned by Innocenzo X to enrich the sixteenth century fountain by G. Della Porta with a sculpture to be placed in the center of the basin: in the following two years different solutions were presented but did not satisfy the pope and sister-in-law Olimpia Maidalchini. At the end Bernini came to the solution of a naked male figure placed on a large shell; the giant, mentioned in the Tritone documents and only afterwards - for the negroid features of the face - renamed the Moro, is inspired by the nearby statue of Pasquino and is intent on holding for the tail a dolphin, with the head between the legs of ' man pours water into the fountain.

The realization of the marble group was entrusted to Mari: the *Moro* is certainly his most famous work, even if his contribution was rather limited.

In fact, to sculpt the statue, he faithfully followed Bernini's indications, which are known through drawings, sketches and preparatory models including the head of the Moro, in terracotta, preserved in the Museum of the Palazzo di Venezia in Rome, and

the large model an entire figure, also in terracotta, appeared on the antique market and purchased in 2004 from the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. To sculpt the «tritone, pescie e lumacone» (as Bernini defines them in the payment request), Mari received, in installments between August 8, 1653 and July 19, 1655, 300 scudi; another 10 scudi were added for a marble festoon, initially unforeseen, that had to cover the lead pipe that brings water to escape from the fish's mouth.

Immediately after Bernini entrusted to Mari the realization of the statue of *St. Barbara* for the cathedral of Rieti. The chapel of St. Barbara (the fourth of the left aisle) was decorated by bequest of don Antonio Petrollini, apostolic writer, who died in Rome on March 10, 1650; to fulfill the legacy a congregation of twelve citizens was appointed. The chapel was designed by Bernini and the works began in August 1653; two years later, on April 13, 1655, the congregation resolved to spend 150 scudi for the statue of the saint.

On 8 May 1655, Bernini himself asked Fra F. Vecchiarelli to "pay to Gio. Antonio Mari, sculptor, scudi coins at a cost of 150 scudi as for the price of a marble statue [...], which represents S. Barbara [...] conforms to the design [...] made by me » on 10 May the congregation approved the cost of 15 scudi for the lining of the statue. The works were suspended due to the plague that hit Rieti until the spring of 1657 and the statue reached its destination only in September of the same year. The agreements for the completion of the chapel according to the Bernini project were not followed and *S. Barbara* remained in a bare place until the first half of the eighteenth century, when she received a new plastic decoration realized by L. Ottoni.

After the election of Fabio Chigi, Pope Alexander VII, in April 1655, Bernini was in charge of directing the embellishment yard of the church of Santa Maria del Popolo. In the central nave, on the arches connecting the side aisles, eight pairs of holy virgins and stucco martyrs were placed; in addition to Mari, GF De Rossi, P. Naldini, Morelli, Raggi and G. Peroni collaborated in the enterprise; Mari is the author of the couple on the third bay on the right, with *S. Cecilia* and *S. Orsola*, for which he received a deposit on 24 August 1655 and was paid on the next 5 October.

Of *S. Orsola* there is also an autograph sketch by Bernini, the only survivor among those prepared by the master for the execution of the statues; the drawing allows us to verify how Mari was precise and diligent executor of the Bernini models, not always followed by the numerous and stylistically different sculptors involved in the enterprise. The works in S. Maria del Popolo continued with interventions in the transept.

Altars were placed at the ends enclosed in marble frames supported by pairs of marble angels; the poses of the angels, conceived by Bernini, were defined through the drawings of his collaborators; the realization was divided between four sculptors: the angels of the left arm, on the sides of the blade of B. Mei, are of Mari (on the left) and of the rays (on the right); the angels of the right arm, on the sides of the blade of GM Morandi, are by E. Ferrata (on the left) and A. Giardè (on the right). The latter is, however, also assigned to Mari. For the work Mari was paid in six installments between May 28, 1657 and July 17, 1658.

In the same period the works for the *sepulchral monument of the Spanish cardinal Domenico Pimentel* in S. Maria sopra Minerva, built according to a project by Bernini in the chapel on the left of the apse used to pass outside. Pimentel had been named cardinal in 1652 and died in 1653; the testamentary executors obtained the space for the tomb, on the right wall, only in March 1655; the work was probably completed within a couple of years. Bernini studied the architecture of the monument and the poses of the five figures (the deceased and the virtues) but entrusted its execution to his collaborators: Ferrata executed the portrait of the kneeling cardinal and the two secondary virtues (*Wisdom* and *Faith*); while the all-round *Virtues* in the foreground were sculpted by Raggi (the *Charity* with two cherubs) and by Mari (*Justice*, weeping and with hands on the face, accompanied by a putto). The work marks, with its intense *pathos*, a further step towards the complete affirmation of Mari, an excellent interpreter of Bernini's rhetorical emphasis.

Mari is present one last time in 1660 in a restoration work: in July he received 69.50 scudi to "accomodate, and to restore the marble Angel, which is placed on the top of Castel S. Angelo"; that same year the statue of Raphael da Montelupo had been severely damaged during the work to undo the pennant of the banner: Mari was given the task of recomposing the pieces detached and redo the right arm, part of the helmet and drapery.

Mari died in Rome in 1661.

by Claudio Gamba - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 70 (2008)

Translated from:

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-antonio-mari_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovanni-antonio-mari_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)