

# Francesco Nuvolone

Italian sculptor  
17<sup>th</sup> century

The date of birth of this seventeenth-century artist, originally from Riva San Vitale, in the Canton of Ticino, is unknown, as an inscription on the base of the statue of Pius V he made for the city of Pavia says.

Like many countrymen he carried out a large part of his activity in Rome and was distinguished by the qualities of sculpting, mainly working on the creation of models and stucco decorations. The first known reference to his presence in the Roman area dates back to 1672 when, in the company of two collaborators, he stayed for nine months in Cave to make the altar of the right transept of the church of S. Carlo commissioned by the Gramiccia family.

It is a work with a very traditional structure for the period, with the richly decorated section of the mixtilinear tympanum, characterized by two little *angels* supporting the central medallion with the *Assumption of the Madonna*, two other crown holders at the top of the architecture, and two larger and all-round kneeling figures of *Angels* that denote a practice of the material already acquired but a still immature style.

After a long period of silence, on April 18, 1684, he received 15 scudi for the execution of the terracotta model of the 'chupolino' for the bronze tabernacle created by Ciro Ferri on the altar of S. Maria in Vallicella in Rome; although Ferri's drawing, preserved in the Royal Library of Windsor Castle, does not provide for volute coverage as currently seen, one can reasonably assume that for his Nuvolone model he followed Ferri's compositional indications.

Two years later, he was engaged in a choral decorative enterprise in the church of S. Ignazio, which saw Antonio Raggi in the direction of the works. At first the Jesuit fathers had decided to assign the eight figures of the *theological and cardinal Virtues* to the young Camillo Rusconi for the two chapels on the sides of the high altar, however the general lack of important artistic commissions suggested to divide the works more fairly. The stucco statues of the *cardinal virtues* in the right chapel were made by Rusconi, while the rest of the opposite chapel were divided between Simone Giorgini (*Faith*), Giacomo Antonio Lavaggi (*Hope*), Francesco Rainaldi (*Religion*) and Nuvolone (*Charity*) who were paid 15 scudi each.

*Charity* reveals a more mature manner and Raggi's fully baroque design appears to be interpreted with good expressive autonomy and remarkable mastery of the technique. The collaboration with Raggi and mutual trust are also evidenced by a notarial deed of 20 July 1686 in which Nuvolone acted as procurator of the seriously ill master, for the collection of a payment for works carried out in the Ginetti chapel in S. Andrea della Valle.

In 1688, he was again engaged in the church of S. Carlo in Cave, where he made the four frame-holding *angels* in stucco which frame the fresco of the vault with the *Apparition of s. Francesco on the fire chariot* of the Roman painter Angelo Aleri.

On April 23, 1690 the Jesuit father Giovanni Francesco Durazzi entrusted Nuvolone with the execution of the sacristy sink for the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale, of which an unusually marble model had already been approved.

The sculptor, who would have received 54 scudi, undertook to deliver the finished and "glazed" work by mid-August; despite its small size, the work reveals a delicacy of accents that moves away from the baroque full of Rays to approximate Rusconi's more measured manner.

Of much larger size is the statue of Pope *Pius V blessing* placed in 1692 in the square of the Ghisleria Pavia college. As can be read in the inscription at the base of the monument, the invention is due to Nuvolone who created the mighty model - to be identified with a terracotta exhibited at the Heim Gallery in 1983 - while the bronze casting is due to Filippo Ferreri.

Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, in his *Emerologio in Rome* (1713), provides a detailed account of the commission in which it is recalled that the direction of the works had been entrusted to Ciro Ferri; this is interesting news both for the past collaboration between the painter and Nuvolone alla Vallicella and because it would anticipate the beginning of the works to a period prior to 1689, the year of Ferri's death: «It was this, Primary Architects in Sculpture, and Foundry of Metals, and they were Francesco Nuvolone; Giacomo Pucci da Piscina, and Filippo Ferrerio Argentiere, with the assistance, and Director of Ciro Ferri, famous Painter, all primary architects of our times ». As evidenced by the documents reported by Cavagna Sangiuliani (1909), the payments for the sculpture were in fact paid from 30 June 1688 and continued until 2 January 1696 for a total expenditure of 38,566 lire, while transport from Rome in Pavia, via Genova, it cost the college Ghislieri 3312 lire.

The creation of models destined for casting became a real specialization for Nuvolone who was also involved in the monumental undertaking of the altar of S. Ignazio al Gesù under the direction of Father Andrea Pozzo. The stylobates of the columns and the base of the altar aedicule were to be decorated with seven gilded bronze reliefs which were assigned to René Fremin (*St. Ignatius extinguishes the fire ; The sick man recovered from the oil of the lamp of St. Ignatius*), Angelo De Rossi (*S. Ignazio exorcises a demon possessed*), Lorenzo Merlini (*S. Pietro appears to St. Ignatius convalescent*), Pierre-Étienne Monnot (*S. Ignazio frees the prisoners*) and Nuvolone who, at the end of 1695, carried out the composition for the relief depicting the *meeting between s. Ignatius and s. Filippo Neri*.

On March 21, 1696 the sculptor received 35 scudi and 40 baiocchi for the 'invoice' of the model which was cast in bronze by Bernardino Brogi (180 scudi, 20 November 1696) and gilded by Filippo Ferreri (105 scudi, 3 December 1696).

After this documentary notation the traces of Nuvolone are lost, who must have plausibly died in Rome by the end of the century.

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