

Girolamo Pesci

Italian painter
1679-1759

He was born in Rome in 1679. The names of the parents are not known; a Pesci family, originally from Città della Pieve, had settled in Filettino near Frosinone, where Pesci executed some altarpieces for two places of worship.

He studied for eight years at Carlo Maratta, from whom he learned the correct design and balanced composition, then moved on to the school of Francesco Trevisani, from whom he learned an unusual color scheme, with unexpected combinations that were the hallmark of his pictorial production. The first document that recalls Pesci as an autonomous artist is dated October 10, 1699, when he collected thirty scudi for painting a new processional banner, lost, for the Arciconfraternita del Gonfalone, in anticipation of the Jubilee year 1700, during which he also accommodated the old processional standard. Probably thanks to Maratta, in 1704, Pesci executed the fresco for the ceiling of the sacristy of S. Onofrio, cited by Nicola Pio and dated by the same erroneously to 1724, with *S. Onofrio the Faith, Hope and Charity* where we note a dynamic layout, played on the diagonals, enlivened by a pleasant color. Perhaps of that period is the *Self - Portrait*, now at the National Museum of Stockholm, painted for Nicola Pio, his most important biographer. Still substantially marattesca reveals the *Madonna with Child that appears to the SS. Fabiano and Sebastiano*, executed in 1713 for the church of the Confraternita dello Santo Spirito in Carignano. In the same year, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, known through Trevisani, exhibited at the annual exhibition in the cloister of S. Salvatore in Lauro, the series with the *Savior, the Virgin and the Apostles*, including the *S. Barnaba* di Pesci.

Between 1714 and 1724 Pesci fired the altarpiece with *St. Teresa of Avila, S. Francesco Saverio, S. Carlo Borromeo* for the church of the Fathers of S. Bernardo in Turin, dispersed, but cited by Nicola Pio, and sent in England a *Madonna*, today in Oxford, and *The Bath of Callisto*, in Wilton. In 1716 he was welcomed among the members of the Virtuosi al Pantheon. Uncertain, but circumscribable to the early twenties of the eighteenth century, the dating of the two altarpieces for S. Maria delle Grazie in Zagarolo (Rome), with *the Immaculate Conception with St. Augustine and St. John the Evangelist* and *Saints Joseph, Anna and Dominic and the Marian monogram*.

The loss of the documents of the conventual fathers, in fact, does not allow to understand if the works, which are cut at the margins, have been made specifically for this church or if they come from the destroyed temple of the conventuals of Gallicano, whose furniture was entirely transferred, in I pay homage to the brief of Benedict XIV of 17 February 1748, in the new church of the fief acquired in 1670 by the Rospigliosi, great admirers of Maratta, who promoted a campaign of renewal from an architectural and decorative point of view in the first decades of the eighteenth century.

Dating back to 1721 are portraits, the only ones so far attributed to Pesci, by *Maria Clementina Sobiescki* (Madrid, Prado) and the one with *Maria Clementina Sobiescki with*

Prince Charles (Lutterworth, Stanford Hall). These effigies had already been remembered by Pio. The link between the Stuart and Pisci could be identified in the cardinal Filippo Antonio Gualtieri, his friend and his teacher Trevisani, commissioned by the pope to deal with the story of the Catholic king James II Stuart driven out of England and welcomed by the court of France, where the prelate he had served as papal nuncio from 1700 to 1706.

In the inventory of the properties of the silversmiths Giardini, dated 1722, *two half-heads of Satyrs* of Pisci were remembered. Between 1722 and 1726 Cardinal Ottoboni promoted restorations in the church of S. Francesco di Bolsena, entrusting the direction to Andrea Adami, master dean of the chaplains singers of the Papal Chapel, in contact with Trevisani and with Pesci, who painted the ceiling with *St. Francis receives the stigmata and the Assumption of the Virgin* and another canvas with *St. Francis in ecstasy*.

In 1724 the same prelate paid Pisci for a head of *Moretta*. Still in these years is the *Madonna in glory with St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist who appear to St. Francis* on the vault of the sacristy of the church of the Stimmate in Rome, commission perhaps obtained, once again, through Trevisani, author, for the same place, of two altarpieces. By 1723 Pisci painted in the parish church of Maria SS. Assumed in the sky of Filettino, two canvases: one with *the Assumption of the Virgin* for the high altar, the other of unspecified and lost subject, but remembered by the local poet Eleuterio Arquati on the altar to the right of the main one, dedicated to the Name of Jesus, mentioned in the pastoral visit of that year led by the bishop of Anagni Giovanni Battista Bassi. Perhaps of the same period is also a *Holy Trinity with St. Francis and St. Nicholas of Bari* in the oratory of the SS. Trinity of the same Ciociaria town. Also the angels on a yellow background frescoed on the small dome of the same place seem to belong to the same hand. Nicola Pio, who had played the role of advisor for the royal gallery of the Rospigliosi and therefore knew well Pisci and other minor artists, all students of Maratta and to whom he dedicated a monograph, attributed to Pesci a *S. Antonio Abate*, certainly completed within 1724, the year of the publication of his work, in the church of Jesus and Mary in Via del Corso in Rome, lost and replaced in 1765 by another canvas dedicated to the new patron of the chapel, *S. Anna*, performed by Ermenegildo Costantini.

In the meantime Pisci had gone to live in Piazza di Spagna, on the left side towards the Paolina road, as is clear from the *States of Souls* of 1725 of the parish of S. Andrea delle Fratte, which shows that he was forty-five and lived with the wife Francesca Torregiani, aged forty, and her nineteen-year-old sons Caterina, seventeen Virginia, Giuseppe di fifteen, a future painter, and a five-year-old Eustace. It is mentioned in the lists of the same parish again for 1731 and 1732.

Through the Academy of Arcadia the two Hungarian brothers Michele Federico and Michele Carlo Althann came into contact with Pietro Metastasio and with the circle of Cardinal Ottoboni. Michele Federico commissioned six paintings to Pisci, five of them destined for the diocese of Vâc. Among them the *Martyrdom of St. Gennaro* (once in the sacristy of the gothic church of St. Michael) and the *St. Bernard presenting his De consideration Books V to Pope Eugene III, St. Bernard who scolds his sister and The Virgin Mary and S Bernardo di Chiaravalle among the divine qualities of the Madonna*, signed, dated 1727 and preserved in the sacristy and in the chapel of the Virgin of the Cathedral,

a *Virgin with the Child*, in Vácraót, another painting at Arayosmarót, both of 1727, and a *Crucifixion* (1729) at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Pesci painted and signed the date, 1728, the canvas with *Saints Domenico, Francesco di Paola and Leonardo in adoration of the Trinity* for the church of S. Pietro di Zagarolo. In 1732 he signed and dated a *Bathsheba to the bathroom*, (Brno, Moravske Museum).

In 1733 also the Pallavicini, relatives of the Rospigliosi, contacted Pesci, perhaps through the architect Ludovico Rusconi Sassi, for the realization of the three ovals with the *Wedding of the Virgin*, the *Nativity* and *S. Vincenzo Ferrer* for the church of S. Andrea in Gallicano.

The canvases, welded in 1734, today blackened and in a poor state of preservation, testify to an involution in the style of Pesci, which is more conventional, also about private commissions such as the *Noah's Sacrifice* in the gallery of Palazzo Chigi in Ariccia, once in the Lemme collection, dated 1735.

In March 1734 Pesci delivered the altarpiece with the *Virgin, St. Joachim and St. Anne* for St. Joseph at Lungara, where his friend Rusconi Sassi was also active, whose model is kept in Calvi (Benevento) in monastery of the Ursulines, commissioned by the fathers Pii workers for whom Pesci later executed paintings on the walls of the staircase that connected the church of S. Balbina to the house of the same fathers, restored in 1813, 1825 and 1931.

Signed and dated 1738 is a painting with *Diana and Atteone*. For the choir of the Roman church of S. Maria Maddalena Pesci made paintings concerning episodes of the life of St. Camillus de 'Lellis, no longer on site, while they remain, the altarpiece with the *Assumption of the Virgin* and the fresco, retouched to tempera and surrounded by angels and flowers where he reveals all his technical mastery, the ceiling of the sacristy with the *Gloria of S. Camillo de 'Lellis and Filippo Neri welcomed in the sky by the Immaculate* of 1739. The model for the decoration of the sacristy is preserved in the Marini collection in Rome.

Stylistically close to these works is placed the table *S. Carlo Borromeo* performed for the Giustiniani palace in Bassano, donated by Prince Vincenzo to the local church of S. Maria Assunta. Pesci, moreover, had also drawn up the inventory of the assets of Caterina Giustiniani Savelli. Still by 1739 he painted for the Sacchetti Sassetti di Rieti the *Ecstasy of S. Francesco* and *S. Maria Maddalena*. In the church of Santa Scolastica in Rieti, now deconsecrated and used as an auditorium, Pesci left an *Assumption with Saint Benedict, Saint Scholastica, Santa Margherita and San Silvestro pope* a few years later.

The circle of admirers of Pesci had definitely widened: in the inventory of the properties of Pier Francesco Albicini of 1739 is mentioned an *Allegory of sculpture*, signed, executed as a pendant of an *Allegory of Painting* of Trevisani, which in 1770 was same collection in Forlì. In 1744 for Michele Carlo Althann, Pesci painted a *Susanna at the bathroom* (castle of Vizovice, near Brno). In the same year he completed an *Assumption of the Virgin* and the *Wedding at Cana* (private collections). Also dating from 1744 to 1745 is a painting with the *Israelites who collect the manna* in a private Roman collection. The name of Pesci is traced, between 1749 and 1750, in the minutes of the Congregation of the Virtuosi. In

1750 Pesci lived in the alley of the Merangolo, in the district of S. Lorenzo in Lucina, with a second wife, Angela Biondi, and other tenants.

On December 18, 1752, the *Chracas* reported the news that two paintings were sent by Pesci to Hungary, one representing the *Virgin sitting with the Child in her arms*, and the other *St. Paul, the first hermit*, of whom there is no more news .

Pesci died in Rome in 1759, as reported by Nicola Pio.

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