

Pisanello

Born in Pisa, Antonio Pisano, called Pisanello was raised in Verona by his mother, Isabetta, a native of that city, after the death of his father, Pucio di Giovanni, a Pisan. Nothing is known of Pisanello's early years. He may have been a pupil of Stefano da Verona, whose influence is seen in Pisanello's early Madonna of the Quails (ca. 1415).

Between 1419 and 1422 Pisanello was in Venice collaborating with Gentile da Fabriano on the frescoes for the Great Council Hall of the Ducal Palace (repainted 1479). From 1422 to 1426 Pisanello was in Mantua and Verona. The frescoed Annunciation above the Brenzoni tomb in the church of St. Fermo, Verona, is signed and dated (1424-1426). He journeyed to Rome after the death of Gentile da Fabriano in 1428 to complete Gentile's frescoes (destroyed) in St. John Lateran. He remained there until July 1432, when he was granted a safe-conduct to leave the city by Pope Eugenius IV.

From 1432 to 1439 Pisanello moved back and forth between Verona and Ferrara. Most of his extant paintings date from this period, including the frescoed Legend of St. George on the entrance arch of the Pellegrini Chapel in St. Anastasia, Verona; the Vision of St. Eustace; the Portrait of a Ferrarese Princess, sometimes called Ginevra d'Este; the Portrait of Lionello d'Este; the Madonna in Glory with Saints Anthony Abbot and George; and the Portrait of the Emperor Sigismund. In these works Pisanello blended decorativeness with carefully observed naturalistic detail. His interest in naturalistic detail and in subtly stylized courtly figures can better be seen in the numerous extant drawings by him and his school, including those in the famous Codex Vallardi.

The Byzantine emperor John VII Palaeologus attended the Church council which convened in Ferrara in 1438. Pisanello's earliest extant medal with a portrait of the Emperor was cast in 1439. His medals were cast rather than struck, a method which permitted much greater subtlety of modeling. A fine portraitist, he took great pains with the reverses as well, showing a special fondness for animal figures. His medals are among his finest works, displaying a breadth of modeling and conception most unusual for the time.

In 1439 Verona, then under Venetian protection, was sacked by the army of the Duke of Mantua, a supporter of Milan in its war with Venice. After Venice recovered Verona, Pisanello, who was a member of the court of Mantua at the time, was accused of offenses against Venice. He was condemned to prison but was allowed to leave Venice in 1442, when his mother died in Verona.

In 1443 Pisanello cast a medal to commemorate the wedding of Lionello d'Este and Maria of Aragon in Ferrara. In 1445 he made a medal for Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini. In 1448 he was in Naples, where he was a member of the court of King Alfonso III of Aragon. His medal of the King dates from 1449. After 1450, documentary references to Pisanello disappear. He died in October 1455, according to a letter written by Carlo de' Medici.

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