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Italian Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Paintings

Puccio di Simone

Also known as
Master of the Fabriano Altarpiece
Florentine, active c. 1330 - 1360

BIOGRAPHY

The artist, who was enrolled in the Arte dei Medici e Speziali in Florence between 1346 and 1348, must have been an established artist by this time, not only because a document datable between 1348 and 1349 lists him among the best Florentine painters of the day,[1] but also because various paintings identified as his work seem to date to the 1340s or even earlier. Knowledge of Puccio in the art historical literature was confined for a long time to the signed polyptych in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence (no. 8569), but the clumsy repainting of its central panel hardly facilitated a reconstruction of the painter's oeuvre. However, in 1947 Richard Offner was able to identify many of the works now assigned to him in a group of paintings that, on the basis of the location of one of them in Fabriano,[2] previously had been attributed to Allegretto Nuzi (Umbrian, active from c. 1340; died 1373). Art historians generally have recognized the congruity of this group assembled by Offner under the conventional name of Master of the Fabriano Altarpiece, but Roberto Longhi (1959) reassigned it to Puccio di Simone, having discovered the artist's name in the inscription legible on one of the works in the catalog of the Fabriano Master. The painting in question is the *Madonna and Child* formerly in the Artaud De Montor collection in Paris and now in the Alana collection in New York, which with its date (1360) also indicates the end point of the artist's oeuvre.[3] Indeed, it seems probable that Puccio, recorded for the last time in documents in 1357, died a few years later. Puccio's apparent presence in Fabriano in 1353–1354 and his partnership with the local master Allegretto, testified by the triptych cataloged here, obviously implies stylistic contacts between the two. Apart from that, art historians have long recognized the painter's indebtedness to the art of Bernardo Daddi (active by 1320, died probably 1348), conjecturing that his career had indeed begun in the shop of this master.[4] According to some more recent hypotheses, Puccio must have served a previous apprenticeship in the atelier of Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) or of one of his disciples.[5]

Puccio undoubtedly was a charming and accomplished painter. Offner commented, "at its best his work is shot through with a winsome, sunny lyricism

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rare in the period." "Our painter's color," Offner continued, "like his humor, is pitched in an upper key,"[6] and these characteristics clearly distinguish his paintings from the more composed and solemn manner of Bernardo Daddi. We may cite, as examples of works probably executed in Daddi's atelier in the 1340s, two polyptychs, one divided between the Galleria Nazionale in Parma and a private collection and the other between the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Ghent and the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, and also the recomposed polyptych in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence (nos. 443, 6140). In the early 1350s, however, Puccio distanced himself from Daddi's manner. He now embraced some of the more naturalistic currents developed by such artists as Stefano Fiorentino and Giottino, but he also succumbed to the influence of the effects of monumentality and strong simplification of form that distinguish paintings produced in the atelier of Andrea Orcagna; it is these aspects that characterize the final phase of Puccio's career.

[1] An undated document in the Archivio di Stato in Pistoia, probably written shortly after the plague epidemic (the Black Death) that struck Tuscany in 1348, listed Master Puccio among the six reputedly best Florentine painters of the time; Andrew Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi: Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia, Mo, 1982), 56, 257 doc. 49.

[2] The panel in question is *Saint Anthony Abbot and Group of Devotees* now in the Pinacoteca Civica in Fabriano. The local historiography had traditionally attributed it to Allegretto, and Bernard Berenson used it as the basis for his attempted reconstruction of Allegretto's catalog. See Bernard Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1909), 131.

[3] Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 5, *Bernardo Daddi and His Circle*, ed. Miklós Boskovits, Ada Labriola, and Martina Ingendaay Rodio, new ed. (Florence, 2001), 485–488; Ada Labriola, in *The Alana Collection*, vol. 1, *Italian Paintings from the 13th to 15th Century*, ed. Miklós Boskovits (Florence, 2009), 172–176.

[4] "Our painter's type, forms, style, his store of shapes and motifs bear the stamp of Daddi's atelier in the latter thirties or early forties, when he was learning his craft," wrote Offner in 1947; Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 5, *Bernardo Daddi and His Circle*, ed. Miklós Boskovits, Ada Labriola, and Martina Ingendaay Rodio, new ed. (Florence, 2001), 341. For his part, the present writer has identified the hand of Puccio in the series of saints now displayed in the Galleria dell'Accademia,

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Florence (no. 6140), which had in the past invariably been considered a product of Daddi's shop. I therefore propose a direct collaboration between Daddi and Puccio in the 1340s. Miklós Boskovits, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 9, *The Miniaturist Tendency* (Florence, 1984), 77–78.

[5] The present writer conjectured that Puccio spent an initial apprenticeship in Giotto's *bottega* , while Ada Labriola (2005) saw the painter's exordium instead not in direct contact with Giotto himself but with one of his pupils, such as Maso di Banco or the Master of San Lucchese. See Miklós Boskovits, in *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 5, *Bernardo Daddi and His Circle*, ed. Miklós Boskovits, Ada Labriola, and Martina Ingendaay Rodio, new ed. (Florence, 2001), 17–21; and Ada Labriola, in *Da Bernardo Daddi al Beato Angelico a Botticelli: Dipinti fiorentini del Lindenau–Museum di Altenburg*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and Daniela Parenti (Florence, 2005), 192–195. Angelo Tartuferi (2005), on the other hand, revived the hypothesis of the artist's formation at the side of Bernardo Daddi. Angelo Tartuferi, "Puccio di Simone: Osservazioni sulla cronologia e lo svolgimento artistico," in *Da Puccio di Simone a Giottino: Restauri e conferme*, ed. Angelo Tartuferi (Florence, 2005), 13–16.

[6] Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 5, *Bernardo Daddi and His Circle*, ed. Miklós Boskovits, Ada Labriola, and Martina Ingendaay Rodio, new ed. (Florence, 2001), 339.

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