

Biography of Paolo Caliari known as the Veronese (1528-1588)

A leading figure, with Tiziano and Tintoretto, of the height of Venetian artistic production during the Sixteenth Century, Paolo Caliari known as the Veronese was born in Verona in 1528, to Gabriele "spezapreda" (a stone mason) and Caterina. His training began in 1541 and took place in the workshop of the painter Antonio Badile (although Vasari believed him to be a pupil of Giovanni Caroto), where he learnt a technical device that was fated to become a precious recurring element of his style: the line drawing that borders areas of coloured and juxtaposed surfaces - already present in some of the first works produced in the city of the Scala family, such as the "Bevilacqua-Lazise" altar piece and which, in addition to the construction complexity clearly of Manierist inspiration, also revealed a new and very personal sense of light and colour. In 1551 he ended up in Venice (where he will remain until his death, which took place in 1588), and immediately took up a very prominent position in local painting circles thanks to the "Giustiniani Altar", a work he produced for the Church of San Francesco, and the decoration - begun in 1553 - of the ceilings of the Council Room of the Dieci, inside Palazzo Ducale, that consisted of a series of panels featuring mythological and allegorical subjects (two of which are now preserved in the Louvre in Paris) that clearly owed a considerable debt to Michelangelo and the Manierist school of painting. The frescoes for the vestry and the Church of San Sebastiano may be ascribed to the period immediately following, a work he completed in various stages over a period of fifteen years and comprise one of the highest examples of his work, as well as being one of the greatest fresco cycles painted during the Sixteenth century in Venice. The "Histories of Esther", three large canvases painted for the ceiling of the nave, reveal a monumentality and a vigorous capacity for the use of light that foreshadow the outstanding quality of his mature artistic production.

The "Dinner at Emmaus" (Louvre Museum, Paris), dated around 1560, sets the stage for a series of compositions, known as "Dinners", in which the sacred subject - just as in the "Last Supper", The "Canaan Wedding", the "Dinner in the house of Simon" and the "Feast in the house of Levi" - is translated into a spectacular social event. The frescoes that adorn the "Villa Maser" of which Palladio had just completed the construction on behalf of the brothers Marcantonio and Daniele Barbaro are datable around 1560-1561: the representation of the myths of the classical gods is here achieved with great naturalism, devoid of all educational significance in line with humanist ideals, and is marked by an extraordinary musical combination of light and colour.

In 1566 Veronese painted his own town of birth in the splendid main altar piece for San Giorgio in Braida, the "Martyrdom of Saint George" and for the same church, "Saint Barnabas heels the sick" (Rouen Museum of Fine Art). Still busy with his run of sacred canvases, in the years of his full artistic maturity, in addition to the "Mystic wedding of Saint Catherine" (1575), he created the two large canvases for the Council Rooms of the Palazzo Ducale. "Virtue and Allegories of Venice" (1575-77) and later the "Triumph of Venice", in the Hall of the Maggior Consiglio (Major Council).

Over the last decade of his active life, Veronese softens his colours, clearly drawing closer to the painting of Titian, such as in "Lucretia" now found in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where one can already sense the first indications of a pre-baroque idea of light