



BRUNO MOLAJOLI CIVIC ART GALLERY

ROOM 1

The Thirteenth Century in Umbria and Marche

Since the 13th century, Fabriano has been a leading center of artistic and cultural production in the Umbria and Marche regions, thanks to municipal autonomy and the presence of numerous religious orders. The room houses three frescoes from the ancient convent of S. Maria Nova, later known as S. Agostino, founded in 1216 by Gualtiero Chiavelli. The cycle, created by the anonymous master of S. Agostino, active in the second half of the 13th century, provides a vivid portrayal of the Augustinian order's history through subjects such as "St. Augustine Delivers the Rule to the Hermits" and the hermit saint "William of Maleval." The master's work is noted for its narrative skill and decorative richness; the uncertain architectural perspective is similar to the frescoes created in the Assisi workshops. Also from the same complex is a 14th-century fresco attributed to the Fabrianese master Franceschino di Francesco, depicting a procession of religious orders in prayer, adhering to the rule of St. Augustine. The painted cross by the Spoletan master Rainaldetto di Ranuccio, dated between 1250 and 1260, and the Madonna and Child by an anonymous, possibly itinerant, master represent examples of excellent craftsmanship and extraordinary decorative richness.

ROOM 2

Fourteenth-Century Frescoes from Fabriano Abbeys and Churches

This room displays monumental frescoes that adorned abbeys between Marche and Umbria, demonstrating the lively artistic production and circulation of artists and influences. Giotto's work and the large Assisi workshop had impacts in Fabriano, leading to the formation of a school of artists, including the anonymous masters of Campodonico and Sant'Emiliano, who creatively reinterpreted Giotto's lessons. The latter developed an autonomous style, mastering

spatial rendering with rhythmic scanning and perspective architectures, incorporating monumental figures to create various compositional planes. The master of Campodonico is another key interpreter of Giotto's lessons, distinguished by his expressive strength, spatial conception, and popular realism. His works here include the monumental Crucifixion and the niche with the Annunciation and the Flagellation, from the abbey of San Biagio in Caprile. The confraternity of Saints Joseph and Augustine in Fabriano contributed two significant frescoes: the Madonna of Mercy by Francescuccio di Cecco and St. Anne with the Madonna and Child, created by an artist influenced by the master of Campodonico.

ROOM 3

Allegretto Nuzi and His Contemporaries

Allegretto Nuzi, active between the 1340s and 1370s, is a reference point for what can be identified as the Fabrianese school of art in the mid-14th century. Registered as a painter in 1346 with the Compagnia di S. Luca and the guild of Medici and Speziali in Florence, possibly earlier in Siena, Allegretto is documented in Fabriano from 1347 until his death in 1373. His Tuscan education had a tremendous influence between Umbria and Marche, in partnership with his fellow countryman and pupil Francescuccio di Cecco. They imported a calm, monumental language, shaped by comparisons with the expressive tenderness of the Lorenzetti in Siena and the solemn volumes of Florentine Giotteschi painters like Maso di Banco and Bernardo Daddi. In his techniques, Allegretto freely experimented with punches to compose floral decorations on halos and displayed shimmering fabrics with bird and turtle patterns, using scratched color to reveal the gold background.

ROOM 4

The Fifteenth Century

The works in this room allow an understanding of various masters who adopted Gentile da Fabriano's schemes with different sensitivities, reproducing them in more intimate and archaic forms. This artistic personality is exemplified by the so-called Master of Staffolo, who left several local works, including the frescoes outside the gallery, in the entrance loggia. Another artist in this room is Antonio da Fabriano, whose formal spiky style was influenced by Flemish lessons probably absorbed in the South. Upon returning permanently to Marche, his style became less rigorous and more meditative, reflecting the artistic production of Camertine painters like Giovanni Angelo di Antonio and the influence of Crivelli's lessons, as evidenced by two detached frescoes depicting the Madonna of Loreto and the Madonna and Child, recently attributed to Lorenzo d'Alessandro from San Severino.

ROOM 5

The Manner and Art of the Sixteenth Century

After the Chiavelli family's rule ended with their massacre (1435), Fabriano, after a brief Sforza domination, came under the direct control of the Apostolic See. The city experienced difficult times, culminating in economic and cultural decline. This room features paintings by out-of-town artists of the 16th century. Noteworthy are the altarpieces by Filippo da Verona and Francesco Menzocchi, based on a typical "pyramid" composition: the Madonna with the child in her arms depicted above the clouds, with saints below, in the foreground at the sides. The horizon features broad landscapes. Also in this room are works commissioned for Fabrianese churches between the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century, marking the introduction of new iconographic and expressive canons defined by the artistic and iconographic culture of the Counter-Reformation, introduced by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Art returned to simple compositions intended to inspire prayer. The room displays the Nativity by Simone De Magistris from Caldarola, a significant figure in Counter-

pag. 3

Reformation art in the rich Apennine territory, including Macerata, Camerino, and Fabriano.

ROOM 6

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Orazio Gentileschi's presence in Fabriano and his works greatly influenced local masters and was one of the channels through which Caravaggio's lessons spread throughout the Marche region. Several of Gentileschi's works remain in city churches, with the Madonna of the Rosary from the church of San Domenico displayed in the museum collection. Before Caravaggio's revolutionary style, artistic influence in Marche was defined by the Counter-Reformation art of the Zuccari and Barocci, whose luministic lessons were adopted by Florentine painter Andrea Boscoli, whose Nativity is exhibited here. At the century's end, Roman painter Giuseppe Cades created five large canvases for the demolished church of San Francesco, three of which are displayed in this room. Cades is distinguished by his exceptional drawing talent and expressive autonomy. An important testimony of early 17th-century Ferrarese art, the Holy Family by Carlo Bononi from the Brera Art Gallery, is on deposit at the Civic Art Gallery, previously loaned for the 2019 exhibition dedicated to Orazio Gentileschi.

The Tapestries

Count Stefano Montani del Grillo donated 13 Flemish tapestries from the 16th and 17th centuries to the Cathedral Chapter, which were acquired by the Municipality between 1911 and 1913 for restoration and preservation. Currently, four are displayed in the museum's rooms, divided into two cycles: the "Cycle of the Acts of the Apostles" and the "Cycle of the Deeds of Alexander the Great," along with the 17th-century scene of the Betrothal.

ROOM 7

The Sculptural Group of the Beati Becchetti

This room is dedicated to the sculptural group representing the Sacred Calvary by the anonymous master of the Beati Becchetti, created to decorate the namesake oratory in the church of Sant'Agostino. The sculptures were commissioned by the Blessed Pietro and Giovanni Becchetti upon their return from a pilgrimage to Palestine. Attributed to a late Gothic sculptor active in the second half of the 14th century, the group is notable for its intense physical realism, giving it a dramatic intensity. The chapel below Monte Calvario possibly housed the Beati Becchetti's chest, created by Ottaviano Nelli in the 1420s.

ROOM 8

The Fifteenth-Century Sculpture

In this room, visitors can admire the only work in Marche attributed to one of the fathers of the Florentine Renaissance, Donatello. The sculpture, made of carved and painted poplar wood, depicts St. Peter Martyr, the Dominican friar and inquisitor assassinated in 1252. The work shows clear stylistic similarities with other Donatello works, such as the face of Gattamelata, the condottiero standing proudly on his horse in front of the Basilica of St. Anthony of Padua. Another factor supporting the attribution to Donatello is the close network of relationships between the Florentine and Fabrianese Dominicans. The room also features two local wooden sculptures of the Madonna enthroned with the child, characterized by refined drapery and vivid colors, used for processions and liturgical furnishings. Additionally, the room displays a group of painted wooden statues attributed to the master of the Magi, depicting the three Wise Men and St. Joseph from the church of Misericordia, with polychromy in the figures' clothing similar to those painted by Allegretto Nuzi and his contemporary Fabrianese painters.

THE HOUSE OF ESTER

The collection features works by major Italian 20th-century artists and was donated to the city of Fabriano and the Civic Art Gallery by Ester Merloni, a member of the notable Fabrianese entrepreneurial family and an avid art collector. The exhibition replicates as closely as possible the original arrangement of the works in "Ester's House," from the entrance to the fireplace room. A unique foray into the 19th century is an unpublished pencil portrait by Giovanni Boldini, a renowned Belle Époque Parisian painter, who personally experienced and depicted it in his paintings. Another noteworthy portrait is Giacomo Balla's depiction of his daughter Elica, perhaps the first work acquired by Ester, revealing the intimate side of the Italian Futurism protagonist. The collection continues with major masters who shaped Italian art in the two post-war periods: from artists like the De Chirico brothers to De Pisis, all contributors to the magazine "Valori Plastici," to painters from the second wave of the Roman school such as Capogrossi and Afro Basaldella. It proceeds with the spatialism master Lucio Fontana, the material abstractionist Alberto Burri, the minimalist Enrico Castellani, and Piero Dorazio, a leading figure of the late 20th-century Italian abstract movement, particularly appreciated by the collector who knew him personally. Lastly, two Fabrianese-origin sculptors trained in the Roman context are featured: a portrait of Ester Merloni by Quirino Ruggeri and two "Ideas" in bronze and glass by Edgardo Mannucci.