

Andrea Mantegna 1431 - 1506

Paris
Art Studies & Autumn 2008

Andrea
Mantegna born c.1431 & dies September 13, 1506

c.1431 - Born in Isola di Carturo,
close to Padua
in the Republic of Venice,
second son of a carpenter, Biagio.

1442
- At the age
of 11 he became the apprentice of Francesco Squarcione, Paduan painter. Squarcione had a remarkable enthusiasm for ancient art, avidly collected statuettes, reliefs and vases which he also drew and made available to others to study. Many important Tuscan artists, such as Paolo Uccello, Filippo Lippi and Donatello had worked in Padua in the 15th century. Mantegna's early career was shaped by his impressions of these Florentine works. Squarcione also taught him Latin and instructed him to study fragments of Roman sculpture and perspective.

1447 & First
visit to Venice. First ties to Venetian painter Jacopo Bellini. Meets painters Viviarini, & Alemagna, Bonao da Ferrara.

1448 & Mantegna breaks with his
master after accusing him of having profited from his work without paying him his due. The same year he was called, together with Nicolò Pizolo, to work with a large group of painters entrusted with the decoration of the Ovetari Chapel in the apse of the church of Eremitani.
Squarcione's pupils, including Mantegna, had already begun a series of frescoes in the same church in the chapel of Saint Christopher. Having broken with his pupil Squarcione bitterly criticized the quality of his work. The frescos were almost entirely lost in the 1944 Allied bombings of Padua. The most dramatic work of the fresco cycle was the work designed from a radically low perspective, St. James Led to His Execution.

1449 - Visits the very progressive court of Ferrara (frequented by Alberti and Hellenist and Latinist Guarino). There he sees for the first time work by Rogier van der Weyden. The new influences are felt in his first mature work, The Adoration of the Shepherds 1450-51, probably painted for duke of Ferrara Borso d'Este. The new level of detail is inspired by Jacopo's albums and the emotional content by Guarino's poetry.

1453 - Mantegna marries Nicolosia daughter of Jacopo Bellini, father of Giovanni and Gentile also to become famous painters.

1456 - Commissioned to paint the grand altarpiece for the church of San Zeno Maggiore, in Verona.

1460 - Mantegna is appointed court artist in Mantua by the marquis Ludovico Gonzaga. He resided at first at Goito, but, from December 1466 he moved with his family to Mantua. His engagement was for a salary of 75 lire a month, an extraordinary sum for that period marking the high regard in which his art was held. He was the first painter of any eminence ever domiciled in Mantua.

1466-67 - Two trips to Florence. Impressed by the work of Andrea Castagno.

1474 - Finishes the frescos with portrayals of the Gonzagas for the celebrated Camera dei Sposi in the marquis's palace. The ten years that followed were not happy ones for Mantegna and Mantua: his character grew irritable, his son Bernardino died, as well as the marquis Ludovico, his wife Barbara and his successor Federico (who had made Mantegna cavaliere, "knight"). Only with the election of Francesco II of Gonzaga did the artistic commissions in Mantua begin again. He built a stately house in the area of the church of San Sebastiano, and adorned it with a multitude of paintings. In this period he began to collect ancient Roman busts, painted some architectonic and decorative fragments, and finished the St. Sebastian now in the Louvre.

1488 - Mantegna was called by Pope Innocent VIII to paint frescos in the chapel of the Belvedere palace in the Vatican. This series of frescos, including a noted Baptism of Christ, was destroyed by Pius VI in 1780. The Pope was less generous than the marquis of Mantua, leading Mantegna to bitterly complain of shoddy treatment, but the connection continued to 1500. In Rome Mantegna studies Roman antiquities first hand.

1490 - Returns to Mantua. Confronts new marquise wife of Francesco Gonzaga, the young, brilliant, difficult and ambitious Isabella d'Este.

1492 - Finishes the Triumphs of Caesar, which he had probably begun before his departure for Rome. They were sold in 1628 along with the bulk of the Mantuan art treasures to King Charles I of England. They are now in Hampton Court Palace,

1493-96 - Madonna della Vittoria painted in commemoration of the Battle of Fornovo, whose disputable outcome Francesco Gonzaga was eager to show as an Italian League victory. It features a portrait of the kneeling marquis.

1497 -

Mantegna was commissioned by Isabella d'Este to translate the mythological themes written by the court poet Paride Ceresara into paintings for her private apartment (studiolo) in the Palazzo Ducale: Parnassus (1497) and Pallas expelling the Vices from the Garden of Virtue (1500-02). After the death of his wife, Mantegna became, at an advanced age the father of a natural son, Giovanni Andrea. Financial problems and the banishment from Mantua of his son Francesco, who had incurred the marquis' displeasure, mark his declining years.

September 13, 1506 – Dies in Mantua. A handsome monument was set up to him by his sons in the church of Sant'Andrea, where he had painted the altar-piece of the mortuary chapel. The dome is decorated by Correggio.

Giorgio Vasari
eulogizes

Mantegna, although pointing out his litigious character. He had been fond of his fellow-pupils at Padua: and for two of them, Dario da Trevigi and Marco Zoppo, he retained a steady friendship. His spendthrift habits often got him into debt frequently repaid by his Gonzaga patrons.

He was greatly celebrated by his contemporaries for his mastery of nature, perspective and his impeccable antiquarian taste – painting “all’ antica”. He had a great influence over his younger brother-in-law the Venetian Giovanni Bellini and the greatest German artist of the Renaissance Albrecht Dürer, who was on his way to meet him at the time of his death. He is also the first great engraver of the Italian Renaissance. His linear precision, luminous colors, austere disposition, and the deep emotional quality of his religious work rank him as one of the greatest and most serious painters of all time.