

Fra Angelico

Paris Art Studies - Fra Angelico (Vichio di Mugello c. 1400 – Rome 1455)

c. 1395 – Fra Angelico was born Guido di Pietro at Rupecanina near Fiesole in Tuscany. Nothing is known of his parents. He was baptized Guido or Guidolino.

1417 - The earliest recorded document concerning Fra Angelico dates from October of this year when he joined a religious confraternity at the Carmine Church, still under the name of Guido di Pietro.

1418 – He is known to work as a painter thanks to two records of payment to Guido di Pietro for work done in the church of Santo Stefano del Ponte. He is known to have worked also in the Dominican friary in Cortona where he was possibly the assistant of Gherardo Starnina.

1423 - First record of Angelico as a friar dates from this year, when he is first referred to as Fra Giovanni, following the custom of those entering a religious order of taking a new name. He was a member of the Dominican community at Fiesole. Fra, an abbreviation of frate (from the Latin frater), is a conventional title for a friar or brother. According to Vasari, Fra Angelico initially received training as an illuminator, possibly working with his older brother Benedetto who was also a Dominican and an illuminator. The painter Lorenzo Monaco may have contributed to his art training, and the influence of the Sienese school is discernible in his work. He had several important charges in the convents he lived in, but this did not limit his artistic activities, which soon made him famous. According to Vasari his first paintings were a, now lost, altarpiece and a painted screen for the Carthusian monastery in Florence. In the 1420's he was based in Fiesole.

1436 - Fra Angelico was one of a number of the friars from Fiesole who moved to the newly-built Friary of San Marco in Florence. This move brought him to the greatest artistic center in Italy and also the patronage of one of the wealthiest and most powerful members of the city's Signoria, Cosimo de' Medici. Cosimo had a large cell reserved for himself at the friary as a retreat from the world. It was, according to Vasari, at Cosimo's urging that Fra Angelico set about the task of decorating the monastery, including the Chapter House fresco, the celebrated Annunciation at the top of the stairs to the cells, the Maesta with Saints and the many smaller devotional frescoes depicting aspects of the Life of Christ that adorn the walls of each cell.

1439 - Fra Angelico completed one of his most famous works, the Altarpiece for St. Marco's, Florence. The result was unusual for its times. Images of the enthroned Madonna and Child surrounded by saints were common, but they usually depicted a setting that was clearly heavenly, in which saints and angels hovered about as divine presences rather than people. But in this instance, the saints stand squarely within the space, grouped in a natural way as if they were able to converse about the shared experience of witnessing the Virgin in glory. This was the birth of a new genre

that came to be known as Sacred Conversations.

1445 – Summoned by Pope Eugenius IV to Rome to paint the frescoes of the Chapel of the Holy Sacrament at St Peter's; later demolished by Pope Paul III. Vasari claims that at this time Fra Angelico was offered by Pope Nicholas V the archbishopric of Florence and that he refused it, recommending another friar for the position. While the story seems possible and even likely, if Vasari's date is correct, then the pope must have been Eugenius and not Nicholas.

1447 - Fra Angelico was in Orvieto with his pupils, Benozzo Gozzoli and Zanobi Strozzi painting frescos for the Cathedral before returning to the Vatican where he executed the frescoes for the Niccoline chapel for Nicholas V. The scenes from the lives of the two martyred deacons of the Early Church, Stephen and Lawrence, may have been executed wholly or in part by assistants.

1449 -1452, Fra Angelico was back at his old convent of Fiesole, where he was named Prior.

1455 - Fra Angelico died while staying at a Dominican Convent in Rome, perhaps in order to work on Pope Nicholas' Chapel. He was buried in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

1982 - Pope John Paul II beatified Fra Angelico and in 1984 declared him patron of Catholic artists.

Other artists in Musée Jacquemart-André exhibition:

Lorenzo Monaco (Siena c. 1370 – Florence 1424)

Battista de Biagio Sanguigni (Florence 1393-1451)

Gentile da Fabriano (Fabriano c. 1375 – Rome 1427)

Masolino da Panicale (Panicale de Valdarno 1383 – Florence c. 1440)

Paolo Ucello (Florence 1397-1475)

Filippo Lippi (Florence c. 1406 – Spoleto 1469)

Zanobi Strozzi (Florence 1412-1468)

Domenico di Michelino (Florence
1417-1491)

Giovanni di Gonsalvo (mentioned
1435-38)

Benozzo Gozzoli (Florence c. 1421 –
Pistoia 1497)

Alesso Baldovinetti (Florence c.
1425-1499)