

Martino di Bartolomeo

Also known as

Martino di Bartolomeo di Biagio

Sieneese, active 1393/1434

BIOGRAPHY

Sieneese painter and miniaturist, Martino probably was born around 1365 and must have been trained in his hometown, perhaps in the *bottega* of Jacopo di Mino del Pellicciaio. It is likely, too, that at the beginning of his career he was also in contact with a painter from Lucca, Angelo Puccinelli, who is known to have been working in Siena around 1380.[1] According to a document of 1393, Martino resided in Pisa in that year.[2] and he continued to dwell there until the early years of the new century. At the same time he was also working in Lucca, where he illuminated the choir-books of the cathedral in the mid-1390s.[3] The frescoes signed by the artist with stories of the Old Testament in the church of San Giovanni at Cascina (Pisa) date to 1398. In 1402, Martino produced a polyptych, commissioned from him together with Giovanni di Pietro, a painter from Naples, for the Pisan church of Santa Chiara. In the following year, another polyptych was signed by Martino alone, for the Spedale dei Trovatelli, the Pisan foundlings' hospital (both works are now in the Museo Nazionale in Pisa). With their figures of ponderous physique who pose with solemn but rather wooden composure in clearly defined spaces, Martino's works during this period reveal that he was influenced by some artists then active in Lucca and Pisa, such as Spinello Aretino, Antonio Veneziano, and the Orvietan painter Piero di Puccio.

In 1405, Martino was once again back in his hometown, where he painted the now lost frescoes in the chapel of San Crescenzo in Siena Cathedral. He was also entrusted with other commissions of great prestige, such as the decoration of the ceilings of some rooms in the Palazzo Pubblico and perhaps also the laterals of a polyptych that still remain in the seat of Sieneese government. Another polyptych, now dismantled and dispersed, comes from Asciano; its central panel, a Madonna and Child bearing the date 1408, is now in a private collection, while the lateral saints are in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena (no. 120). Dating to a slightly later phase are the panels with stories of Saint Stephen in the Städelches Kunstinstitut in Frankfurt, perhaps with a provenance from the Sieneese church of Sant'Agostino,[4] and two additional dispersed polyptychs: the main panels of one

are now in the Pinacoteca in Siena (no. 160), and those of the other are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.[5] Dating to 1425 is the great polyptych that originally adorned the altar of the butchers' guild in the church of Sant'Antonio Abate a Fontebranda, again in Siena; it too is dispersed among various museums and private collections.[6]

Working side by side with Taddeo di Bartolo after his return to Siena, at the time they were both decorating rooms in the Palazzo Pubblico, Martino developed a more graceful style and his compositions became more animated; they were enriched with observations taken from everyday life and lightened by a more fluid linear style. Yet in principle Martino preferred an imposing classicizing manner to the more ornamental complexities of the late-Gothic style that enchanted his colleagues of the younger generation. It would be this characteristic that would distinguish in an ever more decisive way his rather repetitive works in the final decades of his life. Still active in 1432, two years later the artist made his last will and testament. By April 1435, he was dead.

[1] On Angelo Puccinelli, cf. Andrea De Marchi, in *Sumptuosa tabula picta: Pittori a Lucca tra gotico e rinascimento*, ed. Maria Teresa Filieri (Livorno, 1998), 148–159; Stefan Weppelmann, in *Maestri senesi e toscani nel Lindenau-Museum di Altenburg*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and Johannes Tripps (Siena, 2008), 226–229.

[2] See Miria Fanucci Lovitch, *Artisti attivi a Pisa fra xiii e xviii secolo* (Pisa, 1991), 205.

[3] See Ada Labriola, in *Sumptuosa tabula picta: Pittori a Lucca tra gotico e rinascimento*, ed. Maria Teresa Filieri (Livorno, 1998), 208–214.

[4] Rudolf Hiller von Gaertringen, "Seven Scenes of the Life of Saint Stephen by Martino di Bartolomeo in Frankfurt," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt (Washington, DC, 2002), 314–339.

[5] The Sienese polyptych, generally dated c. 1410, has been recognized as part of the same altarpiece to which belongs the predella now divided between the El Paso Museum of Art and the Johnson Collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Art; cf. Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Italian Paintings, 1250–1450, in the John G. Johnson Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia, 2004), 242–247. The four lateral panels of a polyptych, apparently with a provenance from Orvieto and now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, are presumably of similar date; see Federico Zeri and Elizabeth E. Gardner, *Italian Paintings: Sienese and Central*

Italian Schools; A Catalogue of the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
(New York, 1980), 33–35.

[6] See Enrica Neri Lusanna, in *Die Kirchen von Siena*, ed. Peter Anselm Riedl and Max Seidel, 3 vols. (Munich, 1985–2006), 1, pt. 1: 282–283; Ada Labriola, in *Maestri senesi e toscani nel Lindenau-Museum di Altenburg*, ed. Miklós Boskovits and Johannes Tripps (Siena, 2008), 95–101.

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