

# Gaddi, Agnolo

Florentine, c. 1350 - 1396

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## BIOGRAPHY

Grandson of the painter Gaddo di Zanobi, and son of Taddeo Gaddi—disciple of Giotto (Florentine, c. 1265 - 1337) and one of the leading exponents of Florentine painting in the mid-fourteenth century—Agnolo probably was trained in his father's shop, and by 1369 he must already have emerged as a recognized master in his own right. In that year he received payments together with a group of artists including Giovanni da Milano, Giotto, and his own brother Giovanni (also a painter but one whose works have not survived) for the now lost decoration in the palace of Pope Urban V in the Vatican.[1] His earliest works, including the triptych dated 1375 now in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma and the fresco fragments in the former monastery of San Domenico del Maglio in Florence, executed according to the documents in 1376,[2] are characterized by harsh color and rather crowded compositions; they are populated by figures of ponderous movement and massive physique, accentuated by the chiaroscuro by which they are modeled. In the early 1380s, evidently by then a well-affirmed artist, Agnolo obtained commissions of particular prestige in his native city: the designs for the sculptures to adorn the façade of the Loggia dei Lanzi; the frescoing of the Castellani Chapel in Santa Croce (stories of Saints Anthony Abbot, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Nicholas); and the painting of an altarpiece probably intended for the church of San Miniato al Monte, now divided between the Contini-Bonacossi bequest in the Uffizi, Florence, and the Kisters collection in Kreuzlingen. Other major commissions followed, including further designs for sculptures, this time for Florence Cathedral (1387, 1391);[3] the polyptychs now in the National Gallery of Art and in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (the latter datable to 1387); and the decoration of the choir of Santa Croce (stories of the legend of the Cross), the most extensive pictorial cycle produced in Florence in the later fourteenth century. In particular the frescoes of stories of the Cross, with their representation of this complex subject in a narrative cycle enriched with numerous secondary episodes and a series of vivid observations taken from everyday life, and, not least, their peculiarly sober, nervous, and incisive pictorial style, dominated by the linear component, would exert a decisive and enduring influence on the following generation of Florentine painters.



In the early 1390s Agnolo was active in Prato (frescoes of the Cappella della Cintola and the now lost decoration of the facade of the Duomo, and the fresco now in the Museo di Pittura Murale in the former Convent of San Domenico); these works were completed with the involvement of a large *bottega*.<sup>[4]</sup> But he also painted a crucifix for San Martino at Sesto Fiorentino and continued to obtain prestigious commissions from his hometown (designs for the stained glass of Florence Cathedral, 1394–1395; another altarpiece for San Miniato al Monte).<sup>[5]</sup> In this final phase of his career, likely stimulated by the neo-Giottesque current expressed in the work of various Florentine painters of the period, his compositions show a tendency toward simplification in form and a growing propensity—in conformity with the late-Gothic style of the time—to emphasize refinement in his protagonists’ actions. His figures are also modeled now with greater softness and reveal the artist’s ability to express inner emotions.

Though his contemporaries considered him the heir of the art of Giotto,<sup>[6]</sup> Agnolo sought to renew the figurative tradition of that great master and his late followers by proposing more varied and animated forms and compositions, and by trying to enliven his images with more dynamic curvilinear contours, new expressive formulae, and an original palette. His art indeed laid the foundation for the late-Gothic renewal of Florentine painting accomplished by his disciples, in particular Gherardo Starnina and Lorenzo Monaco (Florentine, c. 1370 - c. 1425).

[1] Documents published by Alessio Monciatti, *Il Palazzo Vaticano nel medioevo* (Florence, 2005), 317–329.

[2] Ada Labriola, “La decorazione pittorica,” in *L’Oratorio di Santa Caterina: Osservazioni storico-critiche in occasione del restauro*, ed. Maurizio De Vita (Florence, 1998), 57–58 n. 33.

[3] Karl Frey, *Die Loggia dei Lanzi zu Florenz: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung* (Berlin, 1885), 36–39.

[4] For the documentation relating to the frescoes of the Cappella della Cintola, see Giuseppe Poggi, “Appunti d’archivio: La Cappella del Sacro Cingolo nel Duomo di Prato e gli affreschi di Agnolo Gaddi,” *Rivista d’arte* 14 (1932): 363–369; Marco Ciatti, “Gli affreschi della Cappella della Cintola,” in *La Sacra Cintola nel Duomo di Prato* (Prato, 1995), 163–223. As Margherita Romagnoli recently showed, it was not Agnolo Gaddi, as generally asserted, but a namesake who painted the walls of Palazzo Datini in Prato. See Margherita Romagnoli, “La dimora di un mercante



pratese nel XIV secolo (parte 2): La decorazione interna di Palazzo Datini,” *Arte cristiana* 97 (2009): 22–24.

[5] For the documents relating to the sculptures and stained-glass windows, see Giuseppe Poggi and Margaret Haines, eds., *Il Duomo di Firenze: Documenti sulla decorazione della chiesa e del campanile, tratti dall’Archivio dell’Opera*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1909; repr. 1988), 1:19 (doc. 112), 93 (doc. 484); for those of the San Miniato altarpiece see Bruce Cole, *Agnolo Gaddi* (Oxford, 1977), 67.

[6] In the first chapter of his primer on the art of painting, *Il libro dell’arte*, Cennino Cennini attempted to prove the authoritativeness of his text by declaring that he had learned the art of painting from Agnolo Gaddi and was thus in some sense an heir, by direct lineage, of Giotto himself: “fui informato nella detta arte XII anni da Agnolo di Taddeo da Firenze, mio maestro, il quale imparò la detta arte da Taddeo suo padre; il suo padre fu battezzato da Giotto e fu suo discepolo anni ventiquattro” (I was trained in this profession [of painting] for twelve years by Agnolo di Taddeo of Florence, my master; he learned this profession from Taddeo his father; [and] his father was christened by Giotto and was his disciple for twenty-four years). See Cennino Cennini, *Il libro dell’arte*, ed. Fabio Frezzato (Vicenza, 2003), 62–63.

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