

# *Nardo di Cione*

Florentine, active from c. 1340; died 1365/1366

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## BIOGRAPHY

Although his name occurs in documents for the first time in the years between 1346 and 1348, when he enrolled in the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali* (the Florentine guild to which painters also belonged),<sup>[1]</sup> Nardo, brother of the painters Andrea and *Jacopo*, was already considered one of the leading painters of his city by midcentury.<sup>[2]</sup> An artist whose paintings have been described as fragile, delicate, dreamy, or remote, characterized by a peculiar, “lyrical mood,”<sup>[3]</sup> Nardo must have been trained under the influence of such painters as Maso and Stefano. Of the few works by his hand cited in the documents, only the fragments of a cycle of frescoes in the Oratorio del Bigallo in Florence, commissioned in 1363, have survived, but it has been argued, probably correctly, that an image of the Madonna formerly in the Ufficio della Gabella dei Contratti, once signed and dated 1356, can be identified with the panel of the Madonna and Child with four saints now in the Brooklyn Museum in New York.<sup>[4]</sup> It is also certain that the painter made his will in May 1365 and that by the following year he was already reported dead.

Nardo’s catalog has been reconstructed, especially thanks to Osvald Sirén (1908) and Richard Offner (1924, 1960), largely on the basis of stylistic comparisons with the frescoes (*Last Judgment*, *Paradise*, and *Inferno*) in the Strozzi Chapel in Santa Maria Novella, given to him by a trustworthy fifteenth-century source, Lorenzo Ghiberti.<sup>[5]</sup> The murals, especially the best-preserved scene in the cycle, that of Paradise, described by Offner as “one of the most ambitious and grandiose achievements in a single fresco in Florentine history,”<sup>[6]</sup> are undoubtedly to be considered Nardo’s masterpiece. They must have been painted immediately prior to 1357,<sup>[7]</sup> when the altarpiece painted by his brother Andrea was installed in the chapel. The close-packed throng of figures in this cycle, men and women of proud mien but also capable of expressing deep emotions, is modeled with extreme care, with delicate passages of chiaroscuro. A series of other paintings with similar characteristics presumably dates to the same period; they include such works as the polyptych formerly in the National Gallery in Prague (now in the Castle of Bojnice in Slovakia), *The Coronation of the Virgin* in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the two panels with saints in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. The final phase of the painter’s presumably brief career is exemplified in

turn by two polyptychs, both dated 1365, respectively in the Galleria dell'Accademia and in the Museo dell'Opera at Santa Croce in Florence. In both altarpieces the marked effects of plasticity and the rigor of the compositional structure reveal Nardo's gradual assimilation of the more essential and severe manner of his brother, Andrea di Cione. Still under discussion are the works produced during the artist's first phase, in the 1340s. We can probably place in it such works as the *Madonna and Child* in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts or another version of the same subject in the Yale University Art Gallery at New Haven,[8] and the detached mural paintings from the Cappella Giochi e Bastari in the church of the Badia in Florence, presumably completed in part before midcentury.

[1] According to Irene Hueck, "Le matricole dei pittori fiorentini prima e dopo il 1320," *Bollettino d'arte* 57 (1972): 121, contrary to what previous studies have maintained, Nardo could not have enrolled in the guild earlier than 1346.

[2] According to an undated document probably written shortly after the Black Death, which struck Italy in 1348 (Archivio di Stato, Pistoia, Patrimonio Ecclesiastico C 450), Nardo, together with his brother Andrea, was ranked among the best Florentine painters of the time. Cf. Andrew Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi: Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné* (Columbia, Mo, 1982), 257.

[3] Cf. Richard Offner, "Nardo di Cione and His Triptych in the Goldman Collection," *Art in America* 12 (1924): 99–112.

[4] Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton, 1951), 15.

[5] "Nardo, ne' frati predicatori fece la capella dello 'nferno": Julius von Schlosser, ed., *Lorenzo Ghibertis Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. 1, *Commentarii* (Berlin, 1912), 40. Cf. Osvald Sirén, *Giottino und seine Stellung in der gleichzeitigen florentinischen Malerei*, *Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien* (Leipzig, 1908), 71–76; Richard Offner, "Nardo di Cione and His Triptych in the Goldman Collection," *Art in America* 12 (1924): 99–112; Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 2, *Nardo di Cione* (New York, 1960).

[6] Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 2, *Nardo di Cione* (New York, 1960), v.

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[7] Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 4, vol. 2, *Nardo di Cione* (New York, 1960), v, 47–51.

[8] No. 1943.208; see Richard Offner, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 8, *Workshop of Bernardo Daddi* (New York, 1958), 115–117 (as “Follower of Daddi”); for the attribution to Nardo di Cione, cf. Richard Offner, Miklós Boskovits, and Enrica Neri Lusanna, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting: The Fourteenth Century*, sec. 3, vol. 3, *The Works of Bernardo Daddi*, new ed. (Florence, 1989), 385.

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**To cite:** "Nardo di Cione," *Italian Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Paintings*, NGA Online Editions, <http://purl.org/nga/collection/constituent/1745/2016-03-21> (accessed March 21, 2016).