



Civico Museo Parisi Valle
Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca – Lago Maggiore (Varese)
The Treasure of Imperial Maccagno

3. A Great Painter Pietro Antonio Magatti

Magatti was born in Varese on 20 June 1691, the fifth son of Giovan Pietro Nicola, an apothecary. In his early years he dedicated his time to the activity of a 'musician' and in 1713 he made a study trip to Bologna. His first works in Varese and Como, some of which have been lost, date back to 1715-23. In 1725-26 he painted the *Madonna of the Rosary* in S. Vittore in Varese and, together with the quadratur painter Giuseppe Baroffio, the presbytery and the vault of the church of S. Giorgio in Biumo Superiore, frescoes in which Magatti began to distinguish himself for a greater easiness of execution. In 1726 he completed the *Last Supper* in the refectory of the Augustinian nuns on Sacro Monte in Varese; for the first time he signed and dated a work. The collaboration with Baroffio continued in the Cappella dell'Addolorata in S. Vittore in Varese in 1727. His first work in Milan, in S. Nazaro Maggiore, dates back to 1728 and was followed by the prestigious commission for one of the 'quadroni' in the Dome (*Mary gives the last communion to a devout woman*). In those years, Magatti perfected the subject of the *Immaculate Conception*: for the Benedictine nuns of S. Margherita (the painting is now in the church of S. Carlo in Gorla Maggiore) and in 1731, in the lost *Immaculate Conception* destined for the choir of the Annunziata in Varese. Not by chance, the execution of the painting that is presented here falls within the same period of time.

In 1731, Pope Clemente XII admitted him to the Militia of the Golden Spur, appointing him a knight militiaman and Count Palatine of the Lateran. By then, Magatti had also gained prestige in Milan, which is testified by his probable activity in Palazzo Dugnani, alongside Giambattista Tiepolo.

In 1732 he signed the *Baptism* for the church of S. Francesco in Pavia, a true 'manifesto' of the artist's expressive abilities. The figures are strictly arranged according to a compositional structure that develops along diagonal axes; while the colour is spread with broad, transparent brushstrokes, in increasingly clear and delicate tones, by now entirely rococo. Magatti's figurative culture receives inspirations that go beyond his Emilian heritage, extending as far as



Civico Museo Parisi Valle
Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca – Lago Maggiore (Varese)
The Treasure of Imperial Maccagno

the Borromean painters, with references, among others, to Giuseppe Bazzani and Carlo Innocenzo Carloni from Como' (Silvano Colombo).

Between 1732 and 1734, he was invited by Ambrogio Mezzabarba, Patriarch of Venice and Bishop of Lodi, to adorn the oratory of the Bishop's residence in Pavia, where he painted, among other subjects, an *Immaculate in Glory* within stucco frames. The altarpiece depicts the *Martyrdom of Saints Quirico and Giulitta* and 'represents the finest accomplishment of the painter's artistic maturity. In this work, the composition becomes even more virtuosic, intensifying a typically Baroque languid elegance that mitigates the dramatic nature of the scene' (Colombo). In 1736-40, still in collaboration with Baroffio, he worked on a fresco cycle in the refectory of S. Antonino in Varese, a room now known as *Sala Veratti*.

By the 1740s, Magatti was playing an absolutely outstanding role in the art scene of Varese, a context in which he can be considered the most important painter of the 18th century. At that time, however, he began to reduce his activity, perhaps due to a serious illness that affected his eyes. However, he was still active in 1753. Magatti died in Varese on 26 September 1767. He was buried in the basilica of S. Vittore in his home town.

Extract from:
Valerio Da Gai, *Magatti, Pietro Antonio*,
entry in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Treccani), 2006

The Treasure of Imperial Maccagno
© Civico Museo Parisi Valle, 2022 | 12 | 10 – 2023 | 04 | 10

Thanks to:
MIC - Ministero della Cultura
Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio
per le province di Como, Lecco, Monza-Brianza, Pavia, Sondrio e Varese
Diocesi di Milano, Ufficio Beni Culturali
Galleria Aversa, Torino
Numismatica Varesina, Varese
Parrocchia di S. Stefano, Maccagno Inferiore