



FONTEVIVO (PR)

L'AFFRESCO RITROVATO

An "enigma", hard to be dealt with both from an artistic and a historical point of view, is connected with the Church of the Frati Cappuccini of Fontevivo, founded in 1605, where you can now see the recovered frescoes of the nave arches. This worship place, standing nearby the Abbazia Cistercense (1142), that is used to hosting exhibitions and conferences, on 19th May 1611 was chosen as the ideal setting for a crime: the murder of Duca Ranuccio I Farnese, who had wanted both the settlement of the Convento Cappuccino, devoted to San Francesco, Santa Margherita and Santa Marta, and the church frescoed by an important 17th-century painter, currently under the experts' examination and still to be revealed. The plot, planned by the feudatories hostile to Ranuccio, was discovered and was the cause of the hanging or beheading of the conspirators, depending on their social position; among them was also Barbara Sanseverino, one of the best well-known ladies of the time, even mentioned in Torquato Tasso's poetry (*Ne le scole d'amor Barbara siede / quasi maestra de l'accorte menti, e tutte leggi sono i dolci accenti, / leggi di puro onor, di vera fede.*)

Today, on its internal façade, you can admire an extraordinary painting of the "Madonna with the Baby Jesus". Also called "Virgin Crowned by the Angels" and featuring anamorphoses, it is the religious hinge of the Franciscan complex. All the decorations of the church develop around the central figures of the Angels with their powerful twisting majestically flying bodies. Only the Angels' figures are under restorations at present.

The iconography of the Passion of Christ on the Cross is set in the ceiling of the nave. The exceptional architecture and decorations, richer than the ones of other simple and austere churches of the same religious order, is due to the magnate's desire for magnificence: he engaged the most reliable artists, among whom were Bartolomeo Schedoni and Fra' Semplice from Verona for the altar-pieces, and Giovanni Battista Trotti - called "Il Malosso" - for the furniture. The works of art were lost after the dissolution of the convent by Napoleon in 1805. But who was the painter engaged by the Duke that conceived and depicted the whole pictorial cycle? The debate is still open and a great interest has been developing around the process of the restoration works organized by the Soprintendenza ai Beni Storico Artistici of Parma, Assessorato alla Cultura of the Comune of Fontevivo and the Province of Parma.

Each figure as well as each fragment recovered from the walls of the church, hidden by paintwork and fake marble in the 18th century, then plastered in Napoleon's epoch, that even had a barn in modern ages, has regained some stylish, iconographic and historical elements useful to identify the artist who worked at Fontevivo court.

Who was the creator of the gentle oval-face of the flower breasted Virgin? Who was the painter of the Angels? Did the artist know Correggio or Parmigianino?

"The Church of the Frati Cappuccini was the Sanctuary of the Farnese family when Duke Ranuccio wanted it frescoed by important artists", explained Franco Ballarini - Cavaliere dell'Ordine di San Lodovico and who was fond of history. "It is quite clear that the iconography represents the Passion of Christ, but the painter of the frescoes must still be found. The experts have mentioned various artists such as Il Malosso, Frate Semplice from Verona, Amidano and even Cesare Baglione: everything has still to be studied and understood. The cycle of frescoes of Fontevivo has brought new light on the regional and national history of art, since its painter was very gifted and all the figures were endowed with volume and plasticity".

To visit the restored frescoes,

please call 0521-611921 - Comune di Fontevivo.