

LIVING GODS WILL

Biblical Artists

RENI



GUIDO RENI

Born: 1575 – Bologna, Italy

Died: 1642 – Bologna, Italy

Guido Reni

Guido Reni (4 November 1575 – 18 August 1642) was an Italian painter of the **Baroque period**, although his works showed a classical manner, similar to Simon Vouet, Nicholas Poussin and Philippe de Champaigne.

He painted **primarily religious works**, but also mythological and allegorical subjects. Active in Rome, Naples, and his native Bologna, he became the dominant figure in the Bolognese School that emerged under the influence of the **Carracci**.

Born in Bologna into a family of musicians, **Guido Reni** was the only child of Daniele Reni and Ginevra Pozzi. At the age of nine, he was apprenticed to the Bolognese studio of **Denis Calvaert**.

Soon after, he was joined in that studio by Albani and Domenichino. He may also have trained with a painter by the name of Ferrantini.

When **Reni** was about twenty years old, the three Calvaert pupils migrated to the rising rival studio, named Accademia degli Incamminati (Academy of the "newly embarked", or progressives), led by **Ludovico Carracci**.

They went on to form the nucleus of a prolific and successful school of Bolognese painters who followed Lodovico's cousin Annibale Carracci to Rome.

Reni completed commissions for his first altarpieces while in the Carracci academy. He left the academy by 1598, after an argument with Ludovico Carracci over unpaid work. Around this time he made his first prints, a series commemorating Pope Clement VIII's visit to Bologna in 1598.

Work in Rome

By late 1601, **Reni** and Albani had moved to Rome to work with the teams led by **Annibale Carracci** in fresco decoration of the Farnese Palace. During 1601–1604, his main patron was Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati.

By 1604–1605, he received an independent commission for an altarpiece of the **Crucifixion of St. Peter**.

After returning briefly to Bologna, he went back to Rome to become one of the premier painters during the papacy of Paul V (Borghese); between 1607–1614, he was one of the painters most patronized by the Borghese family.

Reni's frescoed ceiling of the large central hall of the **Casino dell'Aurora**, located in the grounds of the Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, is often considered his fresco masterpiece.

The building was originally a pavilion commissioned by Cardinal Scipione Borghese; the rear portion overlooks the Piazza Montecavallo and Palazzo del Quirinale.

The massive fresco is framed in quadri riportati and depicts Apollo in his Chariot preceded by Dawn (Aurora) bringing light to the world.

The work is restrained in classicism, copying poses from Roman sarcophagi, and showing far more simplicity and restraint than Carracci's riotous Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne in the Farnese.

In this painting **Reni** allies himself more with the sterner Cavaliere d'Arpino, Lanfranco, and Albani "School" of mytho-historic painting, and less with the more crowded frescoes characteristic of Pietro da Cortona.

There is little concession to perspective, and the vibrantly colored style is antithetical to the tenebrism of **Caravaggio's** followers. Documents show that **Reni** was paid 247 scudi and 54 baiocchi upon completion of his work on 24 September 1616.

In 1630, the Barberini family of Pope Urban VIII commissioned from **Reni** a painting of the **Archangel Michael** for the church of Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini.

The painting, completed in 1636, gave rise to an old legend that **Reni** had represented Satan—crushed under St Michael's foot—with the facial features of Cardinal Giovanni Battista Pamphilj in revenge for a slight.

Reni also frescoed the Paoline Chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome as well as the Aldobrandini wings of the Vatican. According to rumor, the pontifical chapel of Montecavallo (Chapel of the Annunciation) was assigned to **Reni** to paint.

However, because he felt underpaid by the papal ministers, the artist left Rome once again for Bologna, leaving the role of the preeminent artist in Rome to Domenichino.

Work in Naples and return to Bologna

Returning to Bologna more or less permanently after 1614, **Reni** established a successful and prolific studio there.

He was commissioned to decorate the cupola of the chapel of Saint Dominic in Bologna's Basilica of San Domenico between 1613 and 1615, resulting in the radiant fresco Saint Dominic in Glory, a masterpiece that can stand comparison with the exquisite Arca di San Domenico below it.

He also contributed to the decoration of the Rosary Chapel in the same church, with a Resurrection; and in 1611 he had already painted for San Domenico a superb Massacre of the Innocents, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, which became an important reference for the French Neoclassic style, as well as a model for details in Picasso's Guernica.

In 1614–15 he painted The **Israelites Gathering Manna** for a chapel in the cathedral of Ravenna.

Leaving Bologna briefly in 1618, **Reni** traveled to Naples to complete a commission to paint a ceiling in a chapel of the cathedral of San Gennaro.

However, in Naples, other prominent local painters, including Corenzio, Caracciolo and Ribera, were vehemently resistant to competitors, and according to rumor, conspired to poison or otherwise harm **Reni** (as may have befallen Domenichino in Naples after him).

Reni, who had a great fear of being poisoned (and of witchcraft), chose not to outstay his welcome.

After leaving Rome, **Reni** alternately painted in different styles, but displayed less eclectic tastes than many of Carracci's trainees.

For example, his altarpiece for Samson Victorious formulates stylized poses, like those characteristic of Mannerism. In contrast, his Crucifixion and his Atlanta and Hipomenes depict dramatic diagonal movement coupled with the effects of light and shade that portray the more Baroque influence of Caravaggio.

His turbulent yet realistic Massacre of the Innocents (Pinacoteca, Bologna) is painted in a manner reminiscent of a late Raphael. In 1625, Prince Władysław Sigismund Vasa of Poland visited the artist's workshop in Bologna during his visit to Western Europe.

The close rapport between the painter and the Polish prince resulted in the acquisition of drawings and paintings. In 1630, **Reni** painted the Pallion del Voto with images of Saints Ignatius of Loyola and Francis Xavier, painted during the plague of 1630 that afflicted Bologna.

By the 1630s, **Reni's** painting style became looser, less impastoed, and dominated by lighter colors. A compulsive gambler, **Reni** was often in financial distress despite the steady demand for his paintings.

According to his biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia, **Reni's** need to recoup gambling losses resulted in rushed execution and multiple copies of his works produced by his workshop. Among the paintings of his last years are many unfinished works.

Reni's themes are mostly biblical and mythological. He painted few portraits; those of Sixtus V, and Cardinal Bernardino Spada are among the most noteworthy.

Reni painted one of his mother (in the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna) and a few self-portraits from both his youth and his old age. (The so-called "Beatrice Cenci", formerly ascribed to **Reni** and praised by generations of admirers, is now regarded as a doubtful attribution.

Beatrice Cenci was executed in Rome before **Reni** ever lived there and so could not have sat for the portrait.) Many etchings are attributed to **Guido Reni**, some after his own paintings and some after other masters.

They are spirited, in a light style of delicate lines and dots. **Reni's** technique was used by the Bolognese school and was the standard for Italian printmakers of his time.

Reni died in Bologna in 1642. He was buried there in the Rosary Chapel of the Basilica of San Domenico; the painter Elisabetta Sirani, whose father had been **Reni's** pupil and who was considered by some to be the artistic reincarnation of **Reni**, was later interred in the same tomb.

Crucifixion of Saint Peter

oil on wood (305 × 171 cm) – 1604-1605

The Crucifixion of St Peter, commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini for S. Paolo alle Tre Fontane, marked the first Roman success of Guido Reni. It was brought to Paris in 1797, and, after its return, became part of the Pinacoteca of Pius VII in 1819.

As soon as he arrived in Rome, the Bolognese artist approached the new revolutionary ideas of Caravaggio's painting, which, from their first appearance, had decidedly influenced the artistic life of the city. This influence is clear in the Crucifixion of St Peter, which is inspired by the same subject already dealt with by Caravaggio in the painting for the church of S. Maria del Popolo.

The Glory of Saint Dominic



Fresco on the cupola of the apse — 1613 - 1615

**St Dominic's chapel
Basilica of San Domenico
Bologna
Emilia-Romagna region, Italy**

Massacre of the Innocents

oil on canvas (268 × 170 cm) – 1611

The painting is based on the biblical episode of the Massacre of the Innocents, described in the Gospel of Matthew. It is housed in Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, Bologna Italy.

Two killer soldiers, one portrayed from behind while rushing on a screaming woman, and one kneeling towards the mothers with their children, hold knives in the right hand. The mothers are reacting in different ways: one is screaming and attempting to escape the soldiers who has grabbed her hair, another is fleeing towards the right while embracing her child, while another, in the lower left corner, is holding her child on her shoulders; another mother tries to stop a soldier with her left hand, and a kneeling woman is praying towards the sky above the children which have already been slaughtered.

David with the Head of Goliath

oil on canvas (22 × 147 cm) –1605

This is the case for this David with the Head of Goliath in the Uffizi: a subject that is most certainly in keeping with the repertoire of the Caravaggisti, but is portrayed here with elegant detachment rather than tragic sentiment.

David's pose is that of a dandy, with red feathered hat and his body illuminated by a moonlike light and barely covered by a rich cloak trimmed with fur; the light softly defines his body, while the shadow is propagated from the background. The youth is contemplating the giant severed head of Goliath; the action has already taken place and the drama has already melted into meditation.

The Baptism of Christ



oil on canvas (186.5 × 263.5 cm) — 1622 - 1623

Reni's depiction of this key event is presented in a calm and balanced manner, with gentle light, reverent gestures and a discreet lack of direct eye contact. At first glance, there is little to distinguish the appearance of the two protagonists from one another. The body of St. John the Baptist is darker, while Christ is depicted in the moment of his baptism as humble and gentle. The Dove of the Holy Spirit and the beam of light emanating from it repeat the diagonal of the cross that St. John is holding in his left hand and focus complete attention on the baptismal act. Reni elegantly veils the rock on which St. John's knee is resting – it makes hardly any visual impression at all. The glowing red garment at the center may be an allusion to the Passion of Christ.

Christ giving the Keys to Saint Peter



oil on canvas (343 × 218 cm) — 1624 – 1626

Housed in the Louvre Museum, Paris France

The Lord Jesus Christ undoubtedly elevated Peter as a "father" in the Christian family (Is 22,21), to guide his flock. And Peter is once again confirmed as the earthly shepherd of Christ's sheep, right after the Lord's Resurrection

Saint Matthew and the Angel



oil on canvas (68 × 85 cm) – 1635 – 1640

The picture is housed at the Vatican Picture Gallery.

Picture of the master of Bologna academicism Guido Reni "Apostle Matthew and the Angel". Saint Matthew, the original name of Levi, one of the twelve apostles and author of the first Gospel. Known under his name "Matthew's Gospel" is one of the oldest and least contested by criticism.

The Penitent Magdalene



Oil on canvas (74.3 × 90.8 cm) — 1635

According to Christian tradition, after meeting Christ, Mary Magdalene repented of her former sinful ways. With her ivory skin and long golden hair, the beautiful Magdalene turns her gaze toward heaven. Her cross and the skull make it clear she is meditating on the brevity of life and the salvation made possible by Christ's death.

Reni created an idealized, as well as classical style influenced by ancient sculpture and by the Renaissance artist Raphael (1483-1520). This influence is visible in the Magdalene's rounded, even features, painted so smoothly that the strokes seem to disappear, in contrast with the broad, energetic strokes used for the drapery, more typical of 17th-century painting.

Saint James the Greater

oil on canvas (98.8 × 132.3 cm) — 1636 - 1638

James the Greater, one of the 12 apostles and brother of John the Evangelist, was among the circle of men closest to Christ. James was present with Peter and John at the Transfiguration and again at the Agony in the Garden, when Jesus retired to the Mount of Olives to pray just before His arrest. Here, James is shown as Christ's apostle: bearded, with his dark hair parted and falling on either side in the manner of Christ, and with the pilgrim's staff.

John the Baptist in the Wilderness

oil on canvas (162 × 225 cm) — 1636 - 1637

This youthful but very earnest St. John the Baptist, who is announcing the coming of Jesus to a crowd of invisible listeners, is doing it so without any wild gestures or dramatic facial expressions.

The Baptist's body strikes me as naturally beautiful, by this I mean, an athletic, well proportioned, perhaps slightly embellished by Reni but not too much.