

Agostino di Duccio Biography

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Biography

The Italian sculptor Agostino di Duccio (1418-ca. 1481) evolved a highly personal style in relief sculpture. He executed his major works in Rimini and Perugia.

One of 10 children of a weaver, Agostino di Duccio was born in Florence. He left the city in 1433. This early departure and the style of his first independent work, an altarpiece with scenes from the life of St. Gemignano (Modena, ca. 1442), suggest that he may have studied sculpture under Jacopo della Quercia in nearby Bologna.

Agostino returned to his birthplace in 1442, but by 1446 he was forced to leave Florence for Venice because he was charged with the theft of silver from the Church of SS. Annunziata. Perhaps by 1450, and certainly by 1454, Agostino was engaged in the most important enterprise of his life: the sculptural program for the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini. His collaborator was Matteo di Pasti.

Executed with extraordinary precision, assurance, and delicacy, the reliefs of Rimini are carved in a style so dependent on finely incised curvilinear patterns that they evoke such far-ranging analogies as Oriental calligraphy, the "Neo-Attic" style of Greco-Roman art, and the ethereal designs of Agostino's younger compatriot Sandro Botticelli.

From 1457 to 1462 Agostino was in Perugia, chiefly engaged on the facade of the small oratory of S. Bernardino. The main emphasis is on the tympanum over the entrance door; the sensitive, frail figure of the saint is framed by angels playing musical instruments, and the angels are surrounded by a ring of gay and charming cherubim heads.

In 1463 Agostino worked briefly in Bologna preparing a model for the facade of S. Petronio. That same year he received commissions for two colossal figures for the Cathedral of Florence. The first, probably executed in stucco, is lost; the second, in marble, was not finished by Agostino, and the marble block was used 40 years later by Michelangelo for his *David*. During the next decade Agostino completed various smaller works, including the attractive tabernacle for the Church of the Ognissanti in Florence. In 1473 he again left Florence and spent his last years in Perugia executing a series of commissions that reveal a somewhat weary repetition of his fresher and more incisive earlier works. Agostino is presumed to have died after 1481.