

Lippo Memmi

Also known as

Filippo di Memmo

Sieneese, active 1317/1347

BIOGRAPHY

Son of the Sieneese painter Memmo di Filippuccio, Lippo probably was born towards the end of the thirteenth century and trained in his father's shop. His earliest signed and dated work (1317), the *Maestà*, is in the Palazzo Pubblico in San Gimignano, the city where his father was long active. Similar in composition and style to the more famous version of the same theme painted two years earlier by Simone Martini (Sieneese, active from 1315; died 1344) in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, the fresco implies the existence of artistic relations between the two at this time. These relations would become even closer in the following years, leading to collaboration between the two, sometimes in the execution of the same work, and even to ties of blood. Simone married Lippo's sister in 1324.

A proper evaluation of Lippo's oeuvre is now hampered both by the inclusion of some works by Simone Martini that have come down to us in poor condition and by attempts to assign some of his paintings to other artists. Donato Martini and Federico (or Tederico) Memmi, respectively brothers of Simone and Lippo, painters of whom no authenticated works are known, have been proposed on various occasions, for example, as attributions for paintings that should more properly be given to Lippo Memmi himself. Some scholars have gone so far as almost to eliminate Lippo's activity as an independent master altogether, preferring to speak of an indistinguishable *bottega* of members of the Memmi family.[1] These attempts lead to no convincing results. Sometimes, admittedly, in particular in the *Annunciation and Saints* now in the Uffizi, Florence, the stylistic kinship between the two brothers-in-law is so close as to make it difficult to distinguish the work of the one from the other. It would be mistaken, however, to consider Lippo merely as an able imitator of the style of Simone. His considerable artistic stature clearly emerges from various signed works, which also permit a satisfactory reconstruction of his career.

After painting the robust figures arrayed in rather wooden poses on either side of the Virgin in the San Gimignano *Maestà* and in the *Madonna dei raccomandati* in

Orvieto Cathedral, also a signed work although probably executed with the help of an assistant, Lippo developed a more delicate style, skillfully combining the needs of linear elegance and subtlety of modeling with the volumetric compactness of three-dimensional bodies. Works exemplifying this more suave and aristocratic style include such paintings as the polyptych painted for Pisa Cathedral (now in the church of San Niccolò, Casciana Alta); the *Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas* in the Pisan church of Santa Caterina, probably painted shortly after the canonization of the saint (1323); and the signed Madonna in the Lindenau-Museum in Altenburg (Germany). In 1325 or in the years immediately following, Lippo painted a polyptych for the church of San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno in Pisa, whose panels have now been dispersed among the museums of Altenburg, Avignon, Douai, Palermo, and Pisa.[2] The finesse of modeling and the exquisite rhythmic modulations of the design of this latter polyptych—a work that Giorgio Vasari (Florentine, 1511 - 1574) claimed bore the signature of Lippo—have led some scholars to remove it from the painter's oeuvre and to reassign it to "Barna," an artist who was not cited in documents known today. However, in his *Commentarii*, Lorenzo Ghiberti claimed that Barna was the master of the New Testament cycle in the Collegiata of San Gimignano. Since the words "Lipus de senis pinsit" are found scratched into the plaster in various passages of the cycle, we may assume that Lippo was the real author of the works assigned to Barna.

In 1333 Lippo painted the figure of the female Saint (Massima?) in the triptych of the Annunciation in Siena Cathedral, signed together with Simone, and, in the same year, placed his own signature on the diptych now divided between the Gemäldegalerie of Berlin and a private collection. To the fourth decade we can assign, apart from some precious small panels for private devotion, some important public commissions: the *Madonna del Popolo* from the church of the Servi in Siena (now in the Museo Diocesano) and the Madonna no. 595 in the Pinacoteca Nazionale of Siena, the two lateral panels of which are now in a private collection.[3] After having worked with his brother-in-law in 1344 for the Ospedale della Scala in Siena, in 1347 Lippo signed a now-lost panel in the Franciscan church in the papal city of Avignon. In this same year the painter is once again recorded in Siena, where sometime later he painted his last work known to us, for the church of San Domenico: a fresco of the Madonna and Child with saints (now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale), which bears his signature and the fragmentary date "MCCCL ... " Faithful partner and *fratello in arte* of Simone Martini, Lippo created works that would constitute, no less than that of his brother-in-law, a firm point of reference for the main Sienese painters of the second half of the fourteenth

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century.

[1] Cristina De Benedictis, *La pittura senese 1330–1370* (Florence, 1979), 14–22; Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi, eds., *Simone Martini e “chompagni”* (Florence, 1985), 82–102; Pierluigi Leone De Castris, *Simone Martini* (Milan, 2003), 172–188, 328–336 et passim.

[2] Miklós Boskovits and Johannes Tripps, eds., *Maestri senesi e toscani nel Lindenau-Museum di Altenburg* (Siena, 2008), 28–37.

[3] Alessandro Bagnoli and Luciano Bellosi, eds., *Simone Martini e “chompagni”* (Florence, 1985), 90–93.

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