

Veronese

Also known as

Caliari, Paolo

Veronese, Paolo

Venetian, 1528 - 1588

BIOGRAPHY

The son of a stonemason, Veronese was trained in his native city of Verona under the local painters Antonio Badile and Giovanni Francesco Caroto. Probably of equal significance for his formation was the mentorship of another compatriot, the distinguished architect Michele Sanmicheli, into whose biography Giorgio Vasari (1568) inserted a brief account of Veronese's earlier career. His earliest independent works, dating from around 1546, were painted for local patrons in Verona, and in 1552 he undertook an important commission for Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, the *Temptations of Saint Anthony*, for the cathedral in Mantua (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen), a work that reflects the influence of the court artist Giulio Romano (Roman, 1499 - 1546). Already by 1550–1551, however, Veronese was working for the Venetian patrician families of the Soranzo and the Giustinian. For the former he executed fresco decorations (surviving only as fragments) for their villa near Castelfranco, designed by Sanmicheli, an experience that was to stand him in good stead in his future career as a large-scale decorator in Venice, including as a painter of ceilings. For the Giustinian he painted his first Venetian altarpiece, for the family chapel in San Francesco della Vigna (in situ), a work that in its composition pays obvious homage to the leading painter in the city, Titian (Venetian, 1488/1490 - 1576). Soon afterward, in 1553, he was invited to participate in the ceiling decoration of a series of council chambers in the Doge's Palace, and about two years later he finally settled in Venice. Responsible for devising the iconographic program of the ceiling of the Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci was the eminent humanist and cleric Daniele Barbaro, and this association led to Veronese being commissioned circa 1560 to decorate the Barbaro Villa at Maser, near Castelfranco, again following a program devised by Barbaro. The early support of a network of wealthy and influential patricians meant that the course of Veronese's career ran much more smoothly than that of his rival Jacopo Tintoretto (Venetian, 1518 or 1519 - 1594), and the award of a golden chain for his contribution to the decoration of the Biblioteca Marciana reading room in 1557 was only one in an almost uninterrupted series of public successes in his adoptive city.

In 1555 he began his decade-long association with the church of San Sebastiano, with a succession of large-scale paintings commissioned by the prior, his compatriot Fra Bernardo Torloni. The decoration of the ceiling of the sacristy was followed by that of the ceiling of the nave, of the upper walls of the nave (in fresco), of the organ shutters, and of the chancel, with two large wall paintings and the high altarpiece. During the years 1562–1563, Veronese executed another major commission for a monastic patron, the huge *Wedding Feast at Cana* for the refectory of San Giorgio Maggiore (Musée du Louvre, Paris). An almost equally grand banquet scene, the so-called *Feast in the House of Levi* (Accademia, Venice) incurred the disapproval of the Inquisition, and Veronese's appearance before its tribunal in 1573 represents one of the very few setbacks of his career. But he evidently remained in favor with the secular authorities, since soon afterward he was awarded the major share in the redecoration of the Collegio and Anti-Collegio of the Doge's Palace (1575–1577). Probably in 1582 he was covictor with Francesco Bassano of the competition to paint the *Paradise* in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio—a work, however, that he did not live to execute. In the field of large-scale public works, Veronese was equally in demand as a painter of altarpieces and of large-scale wall and ceiling decorations. He also painted large-scale canvases for villas and palaces, usually with religious but sometimes also secular subjects, such as the masterly *Family of Darius before Alexander* of circa 1565 for the noble Pisani family (National Gallery, London). He was also active as a painter of mythologies, allegories, and portraits. Before the death of Titian in 1576, Veronese does not seem to have received many commissions from beyond the Veneto, but thereafter he came to the attention both of Philip II of Spain, and, more fruitfully, the emperor Rudolf II in Prague.

Already by the time of his early maturity Veronese had developed his own, highly distinctive style. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the *Wedding Feast at Cana*, with its magnificent display of handsome figures, luxurious fabrics, and noble, classicizing architecture. The color range is typically light, with pale shadows, and textures are rich and sensuous. The composition is animated by a slow rhythm, but even in subjects with a more pronounced narrative, effects of drama remain moderate. Except for a gradual darkening of his palette after about 1570, his mature style never underwent any radical alteration, and this essential stylistic consistency over several decades, together with his habit of producing variants of his own most successful compositions, sometimes creates problems of dating. Problems of attribution are less serious, except toward the end of his

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career, when he made increasing use of the assistance of various members of his family, including his brother Benedetto Caliari (Venetian, 1538 - 1598), and his sons Carlo (Carletto) Caliari (Venetian, 1567/1570–1592/1596) and Gabriele Caliari (Venetian, 1568 - 1631). It was the task of these relatives to produce a faithful imitation of their master's style, which they perpetuated for a decade or more after his death, sometimes inscribing their works with the collective signature "Heredes Pauli" (Heirs of Paolo).

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