

# Vanni, Andrea di

Also known as

Andrea di Vanni d'Andrea Salvani

Vanni, Andrea

Andrea di Vanni d'Andrea

Sieneese, c. 1330 - 1413

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## BIOGRAPHY

A bureaucrat, as well as an artist, Andrea di Vanni was a prominent member of the Riformatori, a political faction that ruled the city of Siena from 1368 to 1385. The extent to which this painter was occupied with governmental affairs makes it somewhat remarkable that he was able to accept and fulfill major artistic commissions. Elected to the General Council in December 1357, Andrea must have already reached the age of majority, suggesting that he was born in or around Siena sometime in the early 1330s. His political career began in earnest amid the interfactional strife that accompanied the arrival in Siena of Emperor Charles IV in 1368. During the violence that erupted on December 13 of that year, Andrea was elected to represent his district's military company, the Spadaforte. Two weeks later, on December 27, he was appointed chief magistrate to the newly formed Council of the Riformatori and for the next three months Andrea's presence is recorded among the city's most important legislative councils, indicating that he was closely involved in subsequent political developments. In addition to serving on various committees, Andrea undertook lengthy diplomatic missions to Rome, Naples, and the papal court at Avignon, he served as Castellano of the fortress of Montalcino in 1369, and in 1379 he was appointed Capitano del Popolo ("Captain of the People"), head of Siena's civic militia. It was during this time that Andrea is believed to have befriended Saint Catherine of Siena, who wrote to the painter on at least three occasions.[1] Andrea also belonged to the important religious confraternity of Santa Maria Vergine and served as an advisor to the Opera del Duomo, the cathedral's board of works.

The first artistic reference to Andrea dates from July 21, 1351, when he was paid for decorating a pair of small chests (*cofanetti*) in the Palazzo Pubblico, seat of Siena's communal government.[2] Two years later, on December 3, 1353, he entered into a partnership with the local painter Bartolo di Fredi (c. 1330–1410) and together they contracted to rent a workshop.[3] Andrea is also known to have collaborated with

his brothers Cristofano and Francesco, who were also painters, as well as with the Florentine-trained artist, Antonio Veneziano (active 1369–1419), with whom he executed paintings for the cathedral in 1370.[4] Andrea is noted as a registered member of the Sienese painters' guild (the *Arte dei Pittori*) in the list of artists appended to the 1356 statutes and his name also appears in the successive lists of 1363, 1389, 1394, and 1402.[5]

Most of the documents concerning Andrea are unrelated to his artistic career and, as a consequence, his stylistic development remains highly problematical.[6] The artist traveled frequently within Sienese territory and is believed to have created paintings in Naples and Sicily.[7] Of the surviving works that can be securely dated, the majority were executed toward the end of the painter's life, such as the polyptych (1400) he created for the church of Santo Stefano alla Lizza in Siena.[8] It is therefore difficult to determine a chronology for the artist's activity. What is certain, however, is that Andrea's works reflect the lasting impact of Simone Martini (Sienese, active from 1315; died 1344) and the Lorenzetti brothers on Sienese art; his paintings almost invariably echo a stylistic idiom developed over the previous fifty years.[9] For example, the *Madonna and Child* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and the *Saint Paul* from the Sant'Eugenio polyptych now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, reveal close study of Simone's rich textures and figure types, combining a comparably delicate comportment with sharply delineated contours. At the same time, the sculpturally conceived folds of the Fitzwilliam Madonna's drapery and the sophisticated spatial organization and circumstantial details of the triptych at the National Gallery of Art grant Andrea's work the plastic force and rationalized pictorial space of Pietro Lorenzetti (Sienese, active 1306 - 1345). Even Andrea's latest works, such as the Santo Stefano polyptych or the *Crucifixion* at the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena (inv. no. 114), are clearly dependent on artistic models of the previous generation.[10] Such conservatism might best be considered not as a deficiency but as a persistent belief in what were regarded as the most authoritative representations of the divine.[11]

Like many of his contemporaries, Andrea worked in diverse media and his oeuvre includes large- and small-scale panel paintings, polyptychs, frescoes, sculpture, manuscript illuminations, and ephemera such as heraldic standards.[12] Among the many surviving works attributed to his hand, the triptych now in the National Gallery of Art is agreed to be the most successful. More than any other work by the artist, this painting displays the sophisticated use of gesture, brilliantly contrasted

colors, boldly silhouetted forms, and narrative clarity that represent the best of Sienese Trecento painting.

[1] In these letters, Catherine urges Andrea to judge others as he would judge himself and to treat all citizens equally. Saint Catherine, *Le Lettere di S. Caterina di Siena*, ed. Piero Misciattelli, 6 vols. (Siena, 1913–1921), 5: nos. 358, 363, 366. Andrea is often dubiously attributed with the earliest known painting of Saint Catherine. The fresco is located in a chapel at the Sienese church of San Domenico and depicts Catherine holding a lily with one hand as she reaches down with the other to touch the lips of a kneeling penitent. Early in its history, this “portrait” of Saint Catherine was accredited with miraculous agency. In a letter to his mother from February 22, 1416, Fra Giovanni Dominici claimed to have been cured of a speech impediment when he prayed beneath the image. See B. Giovanni Dominici, *Lettere spirituali*, eds. Maria Teresa Casella and G. Pozzi (Freiburg, 1969), 227 (espistola 55). The diary of Andrea’s friend, Cristofano Guidini, records another early painting of Saint Catherine in the Chapel of Saint James Intercisus at Siena Cathedral. This painting has also been attributed to Andrea. See “Ricordi di Cristofano Guidini,” *Archivio storico italiano* 4, pt. 1 (1843): 39 n. 40.

[2] Ettore Romagnoli, *Biografia cronologica de’ bellartisti senesi, 1200–1800: opera manoscritta in tredici volume*, 13 vols. (Florence, 1976), 3: 19.

[3] They were to rent the workshop, located near the church of Santa Maria della Misericordia, for two years. See Scipione Borghesi and Luciano Banchi, *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’arte senese* (Siena, 1898), 27.

[4] Gaetano Milanesi, *Documenti per la storia dell’arte senese*, 3 vols. (Siena, 1854–1856), 1(1854): 305–306.

[5] See Alberto Cornice, “Andrea Vanni,” in *Il gotico a Siena: miniature, pitture,oreficerie, ed oggetti d’arte* (Florence, 1982), 286. As Laurence B. Kanter has noted, the list added to the 1356 statutes probably dates from sometime between 1378 and 1386. Laurence B. Kanter, in Timken Museum of Art, *European Works of Art, American Paintings and Russian Icons in the Putnam Foundation Collection* (San Diego, 1996), 28. See also Pia Palladino, *Art and Devotion in Siena after 1350: Lucca di Tommè and Niccolò di Buonaccorso* (San Diego, 1997), 74 n. 14.

[6] Cf. Gaetano Milanesi, *Documenti per la storia dell’arte senese*, 3 vols. (Siena, 1854–1856), 1(1854): 264, 275, 294–307, 385–386; Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting, vol. 2, The Sienese School of the*

14th Century (The Hague, 1924), 432–451; George Harold Edgell, *A History of Sienese Painting* (New York, 1932), 170–174; John Pope-Hennessy, “Notes on Andrea Vanni,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 74, no. 431 (1939): 92, 97; John Pope-Hennessy, “A Madonna by Andrea Vanni,” *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 83, no. 484 (1943): 174–177; Enzo Carli, *La pittura senese* (Milan, 1955), 154–158; Federico Zeri, “Appunti nell’Ermitage e nel Museo Pushkin,” *Bollettino d’arte* 46, no. 3 (1961): 223–226.

[7] See Scipione Borghesi and Luciano Banchi, *Nuovi documenti per la storia dell’arte senese* (Siena, 1898), 54–55; and Ferdinando Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli, 1266–1414, e un riesame dell’arte nell’età fridericiana* (Rome, 1969), 325–326.

[8] This date relies on the testimony of the sixteenth-century historian Sigismondo Tizio, which is recorded in Gaetano Milanesi, *Documenti per la storia dell’arte senese*, 3 vols. (Siena, 1854–1856), 1(1854): 306.

[9] Andrea is often considered a late follower of Simone Martini and is presumed to have been a pupil of Simone’s brother-in-law, Lippo Memmi, although there is no documentary evidence to support this claim. See George Harold Edgell, *A History of Sienese Painting* (New York, 1932), 170; Bernard Berenson, *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance. Central Italian and North Italian Schools*, 3 vols. (London, 1968), 1: 441; Valerie Linda Wainwright, *Andrea Vanni and Bartolo di Fredi: Sienese Painters in their Social Context* (PhD diss., University of London, University College), 1978, 114–157; and Alberto Cornice, “Andrea Vanni,” in *Il gotico a Siena: miniature, pitture, oreficerie, ed oggetti d’arte* (Florence, 1982), 286–289.

[10] David Alan Brown has noted that the outlines are harder and the figures more stiff in Andrea’s later works than in what are presumed to be earlier works, which, in his opinion, appear more directly indebted to the art of Simone Martini. See David Alan Brown, “Andrea Vanni in the Corcoran Gallery,” in *The William A. Corcoran Collection: An Exhibition Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Installation of the Clark Collection at the Corcoran Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC, 1978), 36. A similar opinion is voiced by Raimond van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting, vol. 2, The Sienese School of the 14th Century* (The Hague, 1924), 435.

[11] Cf. Valerie Linda Wainwright, *Andrea Vanni and Bartolo di Fredi: Sienese Painters in their Social Context* (PhD diss., University of London, University College,

1978), 148–149.

[12] See Alberto Cornice's summation in "Andrea Vanni," in *Il gotico a Siena: miniature, pitture, oreficerie, ed oggetti d'arte* (Florence, 1982), 286–289; as well as Valerie Linda Wainwright, *Andrea Vanni and Bartolo di Fredi: Sienese Painters in their Social Context* (PhD diss., University of London, University College, 1978), 145–157; and G. Vailati Schoenburg Waldenburg, ed., *La miniatura italiana in eta romanica e gotica. Atti del congresso di storia della miniatura italiana, Cortona, 26–28 maggio 1978* (Florence, 1979), 553–574.

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