

Galerie Canesso

Tableaux anciens

ALLEGRETTO NUZI

Saint Simon the Apostle

Tempera and gold on wood, 23,5 x 17 cm (approx. 9¼ x 7 in)

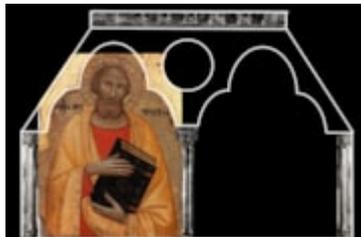
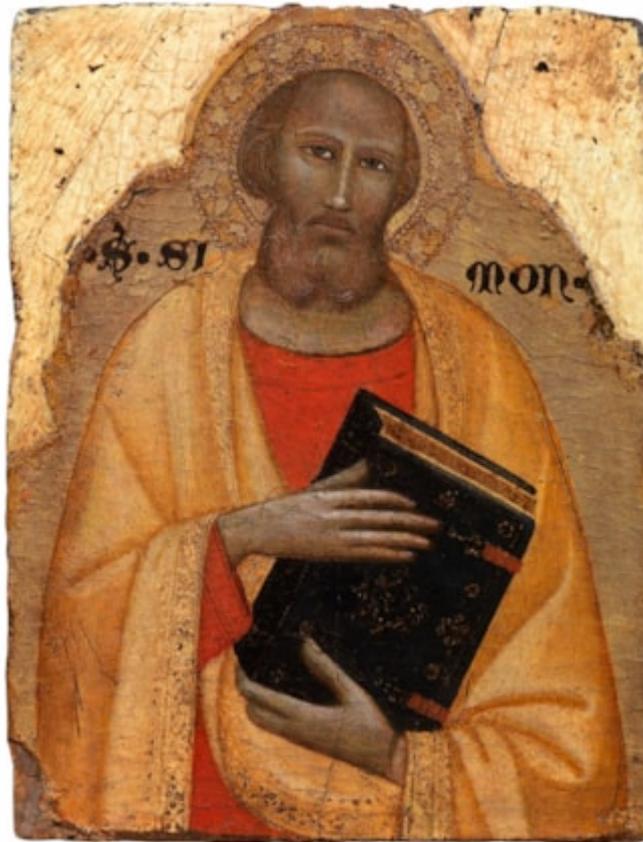


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

PROVENANCE

Collection of the Counts von Reischach, Schloss Riet, Vaihingen an der Enz (Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg), Germany; 2008, private collection, Switzerland.

A native of Fabriano, Allegretto Nuzi was trained in the 1340s, initially in Siena, frequenting the workshop brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti, and then in Florence, in the circle of Maso di Banco and Bernardo Daddi. Returning to his homeland, the Marches, he was active throughout the third quarter of the century, inspiring a profound innovation in local painting. This panel represents his art very well, and like the work of Maso and the later followers of Giotto, it involves a grand yet simplified figure, playing on inlays of vivid, bright colours – orange-yellow and red – against gold. The drapery folds are described in an essential, nuanced manner, lending softness to the fabric, and the chiaroscuro is subtle. Saint Simon is shown with a voluminous book, held firmly in both hands: Allegretto seeks to imitate Giotto's hands, with their strong, confident grip, yet he makes them more tapered, with a slightly elusive grip. Even the domed monumentality of this figure is softened, following a gentle curve, and his head is tilted to one side.

The face is constructed according to concepts of geometrical regularity, yet with an almost psychological focus on the intensity of the gaze, through the large, dilated eyes, blending colours into the flesh tones so that the whiteness along the bridge of the nose stands out slightly, and the beard seems soft. These pictorial qualities show that he also assimilated something of the tenderness and more self-confident tone of Sieneese art, particularly that of the Lorenzetti brothers. His language is therefore distinctive, not merely attributable to either Siena or Florence, and represents a Marchigian approach to what Vasari called the “dipingere dolcissimo e tanto unito” of Giotto in his maturest phase, and of his most sensitive pupils.

The inscription that identifies Saint Simon, delineated on either side of the figure in black brush against the gold background, appears identically in several privately-owned panels known to derive from the lateral pilasters of the most complex and ambitious polyptych Allegretto ever painted, around 1360, for the high altar of the church of Sant'Agostino in Fabriano. It is also clear, from the triangular wood insert on the left side, that our three-lobed panel was one of a pair of figures representing Christ's apostles. Saint Simon would form a pair with Saint Jude Thaddeus (Fig. 1).

An apostolic congregation would thus have occupied the upper registers of this polyptych (Fig. 2), according to a type of structure topped by progressively pointed panels. Its appearance can be reconstructed on the basis of similar Sieneese models (for example Pietro Lorenzetti's polyptych in the Pieve, Arezzo), but this is a unique instance among the altarpieces, otherwise all on a single register, painted by Allegretto Nuzi.