#Andrea Pisano (ca. 1295 – ca. 1348)#

##Sculptor and Architect##

As his surname suggests, Andrea Pisano came from the region dominated by the city of Pisa, located some 45 miles to the west of Florence on the banks of the Mediterranean Sea. Although not directly descended from the father-son team of [Nicola](insert link) and [Giovanni Pisano](insert link), Andrea’s contributions to the legacy of fourteenth-century art are no less important than those of his more famous predecessors.

Archival references to Andrea’s birth and upbringing have not survived, but later [records](insert link) indicate that the sculptor came from a small village called Pontedera that was, at the turn of the fourteenth century, under Pisan control. His father was a notary named Ugolino, and as an adolescent Andrea was sent to Pisa to apprentice as a goldsmith. He soon branched out into the world of sculpture and was active carving wooden figures in and around Pisa in the early 1320s. He seems to have worked in Siena and Orvieto as well, and by the beginning of the next decade had acquired a reputation elevated enough to earn him the commission from the [Arte della Calimala](insert link) to design, cast, and chase the monumental [reliefs for the south doors](insert link) of the Florentine [Baptistery of S. Giovanni](insert link). An inscription on that door dates the early phase of this project to 1330, and the last of the panels was installed just before June 24, 1336, the all-important Feast of St. John the Baptist.

As this project came to a conclusion, Andrea picked up a second major commission, this one from the [Arte della Lana](insert link), or Wool Guild. As [Giotto](insert link) oversaw the design and construction of the foundations for the [Campanile](insert link) adjacent to the cathedral, Andrea was charged with the task of producing marble reliefs dedicated to [scenes from Genesis](insert link). When Giotto died in 1337, however, Andrea appears to have taken control over the entire project: he seems to have revised the architectural plans for the structure, even then showing signs of weakness, and added a sculptural program that revolved around the subjects of the [Labors of Man](insert link), the Madonna and Child, and the [Sibyls and Prophets](insert link) that were placed in the zone of the niches. Although his name has been associated with the construction of [Orsanmichele](insert link), there is no way to confirm his role in the design of that building.

By 1343 Andrea had returned to his homeland, where he formed a working partnership with his son, Nino, in the city of Pisa. He stayed there for four years, overseeing the design and completion of a number of monumental sculptures for various churches in the city, including the cathedral, S. Caterina, and S. Maria della Spina. But in 1347 he moved back to Orvieto to take up duties of capomaestro of the cathedral’s works, a short-lived endeavor. By 1349, Andrea was either dead or retired, with Nino taking over for him as head of the works for that site. The absence of references to him after that year suggests that Andrea Pisano, like so many others in Europe, fell victim to the [Black Death](insert link) of 1348.

Andrea Pisano’s stylistic choices reveal a faithful adherence to the traditions forged by his senior Pisan forebear, Giovanni Pisano. With a preference for elongated figures that sway with Gothic undulations, Andrea’s approach to narrative and didactic art intentionally sacrifices rational order and distinctively naturalistic settings in order to highlight emotionally charged and dramatically compelling actions. Diminutive trees, abstracted mountains, and streams that have no perceptible banks serve merely as contexts for the more important gestural and expressive qualities of characters that Andrea tries to imbue with spiritual vivacity.

Andrea Pisano’s role in shaping the late medieval taste for sculpture in Florence cannot be exaggerated. The south portal of the Baptistery of S. Giovanni was the most important setting for the all-important ritual of [baptism](insert link) that welcomed infants into the community and forged essential links between parents, godparents, and family members. Andrea’s reliefs literally and figuratively framed that ritual after their completion in 1336, and it’s safe to say that every single person who had been born or who had parented a child in the city after that year had spent a long time looking at them at least once in her or his lifetime. Likewise, the hexagonal and diamond-shaped reliefs that Andrea executed for the Campanile, while more difficult to see due to their elevated placement, were (with the notable exceptions of those produced for the cathedral by [Arnolfo di Cambio](insert link))among the only other public works of sculpture that anyone could examine in Florence at the time of their completion: the effigies in the niches of Orsanmichele, many of the [sculptures for the façade](insert link) of the Duomo, and Ghiberti’s relief panels for the [North](insert link) and [East](insert link) doors of the Baptistery all came decades later.

The power of this Pisan artist at first served as an influential exemplum of the fashionable style in sculpture that was all the rage in Pisa, Paris, and beyond, and then later served as the foil for those artists of the next generations who aimed to alter that style and the tastes that celebrated it. Andrea Pisano both set the standard that future sculptors strove to meet and represented all the things they hoped to avoid.

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