

Antonello da Messina

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Antonello da Messina, properly **Antonello di Giovanni di Antonio**, but also called **Antonello degli Antoni**^[1] (c. 1430 – February 1479), was an Italian painter from Messina, Sicily, active during the Italian Renaissance. His work shows strong influences from Early Netherlandish painting although there is no documentary evidence that he ever travelled beyond Italy.^[2] Giorgio Vasari credited him with the introduction of oil-painting into Italy.^[3] Unusually for a south Italian artist of the Renaissance, his work proved influential on painters in northern Italy, especially in Venice.

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Biography

Early life and training

Antonello was born at Messina around 1429–1431, to Giovanni de Antonio Mazonus and Garita (Margherita). According to a letter written in 1524 by the Neapolitan humanist Pietro Summonte, in about 1450 he was a pupil of the painter Niccolò Colantonio at Naples,^[4] where Netherlandish painting was then fashionable. This account of his training is accepted by most art historians.^[5]

Early career

Antonello da Messina



Portrait of Man, possibly a self-portrait.

Born	Antonello di Giovanni di Antonio <div>c. 1430</div> <div>Messina, Italy</div>
Died	February 1479 <div>Messina, Italy</div>
Nationality	Italian
Known for	Painting
Movement	Italian Renaissance

Antonello returned from Naples to Messina at some time in the 1450s.^[2] In around 1455 he painted the so-called *Sibiu Crucifixion*, inspired by Flemish treatments of the subject, which is now in the Muzeul de Artă in Bucharest. A *Crucifixion* in the Royal Museum of Antwerp dates from the same period. These early works shows a marked Flemish influence, which it is now understood he derived from his master Colantonio and from paintings by Rogier van der Weyden and Jan van Eyck that belonged to Colantonio's patron, Alfonso V of Aragon.

In his biography of the artist, Giorgio Vasari remarked that Antonello saw an oil painting by Jan Van Eyck (the *Lomellini Tryptych*) belonging to King Alfonso V of Aragon at Naples. Another theory, supported only by vague documentary evidence, suggests that in 1456 Antonello visited Milan, where he might have met Van Eyck's most accomplished follower, Petrus Christus. Since Antonello was one of the first Italians to master Eyckian oil painting, and Christus was the first Netherlandish painter to learn Italian linear perspective, such a meeting would be a convenient explanation for the evolution of the styles of both artists, but in fact, neither is known for certain to have been in Milan at the time.

Antonello's earliest documented commission, in 1457, was for a banner for the Confraternità di San Michele dei Gerbini in Reggio Calabria, where he set up a workshop for the production of such banners and devotional images.^[2] At this date, he was already married, and his son Jacobello had been born.

In 1460, his father is mentioned leasing a brigantine to bring back Antonello and his family from Amantea in Calabria. In that year, Antonello painted the so-called *Salting Madonna*, in which standard iconography and Flemish style are combined with a greater attention in the volumetric proportions of the figures, probably indicating a knowledge of works by Piero della Francesca. Also from around 1460 are two small panels depicting *Abraham Served by the Angels* and *St. Jerome Penitent* now in the Museo Nazionale della Magna Grecia in Reggio Calabria. In 1461 Antonello's younger brother Giordano entered his workshop, signing a three-year contract. In that year Antonello painted a *Madonna with Child* for the Messinese nobleman Giovanni Mirulla, now lost.

He probably painted his first portraits in the late 1460s. They follow a Netherlandish model, the subject being shown bust-length, against a dark background, full face or in three-quarter view,^[6] while most previous Italian painters had adopted the medal-style profile pose for individual portraits.^[7] John Pope-Hennessy described him as "the first Italian painter for whom the individual portrait was an art form in its own right".^[8]

Although Antonello is mentioned in many documents between 1460 and 1465, establishing his presence in Messina in those years, a gap in the sources between 1465 and 1471 suggests that he may have spent these years on the mainland.^[7] In 1474, he painted the *Annunciation*, now in Syracuse, and the *St. Jerome in His Study* also dates from around this time.^[9]



Antonello da Messina, *Salting Madonna*

Venice

He went to Venice in 1475, and remained there until the fall of 1476. His works of this period begin to show a greater attention to the human figure, regarding both anatomy and expressivity, indicating the influence of Piero della Francesca and Giovanni Bellini. His most famous pictures from this period include the *Condottiero*

(Louvre), the *San Cassiano Altarpiece* and the *St. Sebastian*. The *San Cassiano Altarpiece* was especially influential on Venetian painters, as it was one of the first of the large compositions in the *sacra conversazione* format which was perfected by Giovanni Bellini (Antonello's surviving work in Vienna is only a fragment of a much larger original).

While in Venice he was offered, but did not accept, the opportunity to become the court portrait painter to the Duke of Milan.^[10]

Return to Messina and death

Antonello had returned to Sicily by September 1476.^[6] Works from near the end of his life include the famous *Virgin Annunciate*, now in the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo, and the San Gregorio Polyptych.

He died at Messina in 1479: his testament dates from February of that year, and he is documented as no longer alive two months later. Some of his last works remained unfinished, but were completed by his son Jacobello.



The *Virgin Annunciate* in the Palazzo Abatellis in Palermo

Style and legacy

Antonello's style is remarkable for its union of Italian simplicity with Flemish concern for detail. He exercised an enormous influence on Italian painting, not only by the introduction of the Flemish invention, but also by the transmission of Flemish tendencies. However, no school of painting formed after his death, with the exception of the Sicilian Marco Costanzo.

Selected works

- *Sibiu Crucifixion* (1455) - Muzeul de Artă, Bucharest
- *Crucifixion* (1455) - Oil on panel 52.5 x 42.5 cm, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp
- *Abraham Served by the Angels* - Museo della Magna Grecia, Reggio Calabria
- *Ecce Homo* (c. 1470) - Tempera and oil on panel, 42.5 x 30.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City
- *Ecce Homo* (1470) - Tempera and oil on panel, 40 x 33 cm, Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola, Genoa
- *St. Jerome Penitent* - Various techniques on wood, 40.2 x 30.2 cm, Museo della Magna Grecia, Reggio Calabria
- *San Gregorio Polyptych* (1473) - Tempera on panel, 194 x 202 cm, Regional Museum, Messina
- *Ecce Homo* (c. 1473) - Tempera on panel, 19.5 x 14.3 cm, Private collection, New York City
- *Portrait of a Man* (1474) - Oil on wood, Staatliche Museen, Berlin
- *Madonna with Child (Salting Madonna)* - Oil on wood, 43.2 x 34.3 cm, National Gallery, London

- *Portrait of a Man* (1474) - Oil on wood, 32 x 26 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin
- *Annunciation* (1474) - Oil on panel, 180 x 180 cm, Museum of Palazzo Bellomo, Syracuse
- *St. Jerome in His Study* (c. 1474) - Oil on wood, 46 x 36,5 cm, National Gallery, London
- *Ecce Homo* (1475) - Oil on panel, 48.5 x 38 cm, Collegio Alberoni, Piacenza
- *Portrait of a Man (Il Condottiere)* (1475) - Oil on wood, 35 x 38 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris
- *Crucifixion* (1475) - Wood, 42 x 25,5 cm, National Gallery, London
- *Portrait of a Man* (c. 1475) - Oil on wood, Galleria Borghese, Rome
- *Portrait of a Man* (c. 1475) - Oil on panel, 36 x 25 cm, National Gallery, London
- *Portrait of a Man* (1475–1476) - Oil on panel, 28 x 21 cm, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
- *San Cassiano Altarpiece* (1475–76) - Oil on panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
- *The Dead Christ Supported by an Angel* (1475–78) - Panel, 74 x 51 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid
- *Christ at the Column* (c. 1475–1479) - Oil on wood, 25,8 x 21 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris
- *Virgin of the Annunciation* - Oil on panel, Alte Pinakothek, Munich
- *Portrait of a Man* (1476) - Oil on panel, Museo Civico d'Arte Antica, Turin
- *Virgin of the Annunciation* (c. 1476) - Oil on wood, 45 x 34,5 cm, Museo Nazionale, Palermo
- *St. Sebastian* (1477–1479) - Oil on canvas transferred from panel, 171 x 85 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden
- *Portrait of a Young Man* (c. 1478) - Panel, 20.4 x 14.5 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin
- *Portrait of an unknown man* - Oil on panel, Museo Mandralisca, Cefalu

References

1. Memorie storico-critiche di Antonello degli Antonj pittore Messinese (<http://books.google.com/books?id=8upKAAAacAAJ>), by Tommaso Puccini, Florence 1809.
2. Barbera 2005, p. 13.
3. Barbera 2005, p. 14.
4. The letter to the Venetian Marcantonio Michiel, of 20 March 1524, reporting on the state of art in Naples, and works there by Netherlandish painters, dwells upon Colantonio and his Netherlandish technique, which one sees assimilated in the art of Antonello; it was published by Fausto Niccolini, *L'arte napoletana del Rinascimento* (Naples) 1925:161-63. It is translated in Carol M. Richardson, Kim Woods and Michael W. Franklin, *Renaissance Art Reconsidered: An Anthology of Primary Sources* (2007:193-96).
5. Barbera 2005, p. 15.
6. Barbera 2005, p. 23.
7. Barbera 2005, p. 51.
8. Pope-Hennessy 1966, p. 60.
9. Barbera 2005, p. 22.
10. Barbera 2005, p. 29.

Sources


- Barbera, Giocchino (2005). *Antonello da Messina, Sicily's Renaissance Master* (exhibition catalogue). New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art Yale University Press. ISBN 0-300-11648-9 (online)






Crucifixion, Antwerp, detail.

(<http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15324coll10/id/51392>).

- Pope-Hennessy, John (1966). *The Portrait in the Renaissance*. London: Phaidon.
-  This article incorporates text from a publication now in the public domain: Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Antonello da Messina". *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

External links

- Antonello da Messina in the "History of Art" (http://www.all-art.org/gothic_era/messina1.html)
- Antonello da Messina – Biography and Works (<http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/a/antonell/>)
- Guardian article on "Portrait of a Man" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/portrait/story/0,11109,740337,00.html>)
- Best of Sicily Magazine article on Antonello da Messina and the technique of egg tempera / oil media (<http://www.bestofsicily.com/mag/art24.htm>)
-  "Antonello da Messina". *Catholic Encyclopedia*. 1913.
- *Petrus Christus: Renaissance master of Bruges* (<http://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15324coll10/id/91807/rec/320>), a full text exhibition catalog from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which contains material on Antonello da Messina (see index)



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| Renaissance painters | Italian portrait painters | Sicilian painters

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