

## THE PINACOTECA MEETS THE LOUVRE

### RECONSTRUCTION OF THE POLYPTYCH OF THE GESUATI

The *Polyptych of the Gesuati*, signed by Sano di Pietro in 1444, is the first documented work of the painter, representing a fundamental piece for reconstructing his career. The panel, of high quality and in excellent state of preservation, reveals a mature artist, who is at once indebted to his training alongside Sassetta, yet sensitive as well to certain developments in Florentine painting such as the effects of light on the figures. However, several elements of continuity with the works of the Master of the Osservanza place this piece at the center of the debate regarding the identification of Sano di Pietro's early career with that of this anonymous master.

The collection history has long separated the polyptych from its predella, which has now finally been reunited in this temporary exhibition. The polyptych was first mentioned in the Pinacoteca's catalogue compiled by Cesare Brandi in 1933, though the exact date of its entry into the collection is uncertain. The predella's provenance is easier to trace; it was purchased by the Louvre in 1863 from the Campana Collection in Rome and, until 1852, belonged to the Rinuccini Collection in Florence. There is no doubt that this work corresponds to the one described in ancient sources as belonging to the church of the convent of San Girolamo in Siena, home of the order of the Gesuati, founded in 1355 by Blessed Giovanni Colombini, a figure of great devotion in Siena for his commitment to aiding the poor.

The reunion of the predella with the polyptych allows us to fully appreciate the complex iconographic program of the work, designed to exalt the ideal of ascetic and penitential life promoted by the Gesuati and embodied by Blessed Colombini and Saint Jerome. The former is depicted at the center of the polyptych, receiving the Virgin's blessing, while the latter, the eponymous saint of the church, appears in the left panel. The profound connection between the saint and the Gesuati order is further explored in the predella, where significant episodes from his life are narrated, with particular attention to the spirituality of penance. In addition to an image of the saint in a cave surrounded by scorpions and snakes, there is the rare episode of the dream in which Saint Jerome saw himself being dragged before Christ and accused of dedicating himself to the study of classical texts rather than the Doctrine, for which he is beaten by two angels.

The large central compartment depicts two scenes: Saint Jerome removing a thorn from the lion's paw and the same lion returning a stolen donkey to the monastery, after it had been taken by merchants. The final two panels illustrate the saint's death and his appearances to Cyril of Jerusalem, Sulpicius Severus, and Saint Augustine.

The painting is notable for its excellent state of preservation and the substantial integrity of its original frame. Particularly striking is the use of vibrant colors, with precious pigments such as the lapis lazuli used for the Virgin's robe, which still retains a refined enamel-like effect. The palette, fresh and luminous, shines especially in the predella, where the almost fairy-tale landscapes and meticulous details are bathed in a crystalline light, creating the effect of a grand miniature.



Musei  
Nazionali  
di Siena