



DONATELLO

(Firenze 1386-1466)

Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi, better known as Donatello, began his activity as an assistant to Ghiberti on the first set of doors for Florence Baptistery. He went on to work with Filippo Brunelleschi, with whom he went to Rome in the early years of the fifteenth century. Donatello's art is distinguished by great expressive force, given artistic form in his use of 'stiacciato,' a very low relief with which he manages to create profound depths of field, in strict accordance with Brunelleschian perspective despite the minimal difference between the planes.

CATHEDRAL

- *Tomb slab of Giovanni Pecci (1426-27)*

This tomb slab is a masterpiece of the Italian Renaissance. The tomb cover was made of bronze and cast in three sections between 1426 and 1427 by Donatello himself. The work, signed OPUS DONATELLI, is, in Enzo Carli's words, "a true gold-mine of perspectival solutions." Despite the thinness of the bronze plate, an extraordinary effect of three-dimensionality distinguishes Bishop Pecci's boots, the curl on his pastoral staff, the cushion on which he rests his head, and the cartouche held by two little angels.





- *Saint John the Baptist (1547)*

This is a late work, made in Florence in 1457 and brought to Siena once it was finished. It is very similar in style and feeling to the Mary Magdalene now in the Opera del Duomo museum in Florence. The thin figure of Saint John exudes drama with his haggard face, sunken eyes, protruding veins, and bristly hair and beard. His half-open mouth and stunned, fixed stare give evidence of his deep suffering.



MUSEO

- *Tondo of the Virgin and Child (1457)*

This tondo was originally over the door to the Chapel of Pardon, which was moved to another position around 1660 when work began on Bernini's Chapel of Votive Offerings. The sacred image was made by Donatello toward the end of his life as a sculptor (1457) and shows the Virgin and Child with three cherubs in a round frame specifically designed for viewing from below, as revealed by the foreshortening of the figures and the space behind them. The sweet, melancholy face of the Virgin Mary seems to foresee the fate awaiting her Child. A tender note is struck by the very natural gesture of the Baby Jesus as he slips his hand under his mother's veil to touch her bare skin. The stiff, schematic rendering of the cherubs behind the main figures indicates a later addition by another artist.



BAPTISTERY

- *Baptismal Font (1427-1430) Faith and Hope – Virtues on the corners The Feast of Herod – panel*

The two small statues on the corners, representing Faith and Hope, were made by Donatello in 1429. The gentle, beautiful faces of these two figures communicate a deep spirituality, and their slender bodies and elegant draperies are very finely modeled. The panel of The Feast of Herod is one of the great masterpieces of Renaissance sculpture. Donatello creates an intensely dramatic atmosphere in a very shallow space, due to his masterful use of a flat perspectival relief that he called “stiacciato” (the Tuscan word for “flattened”). The figures in the foreground, energetically modeled in high relief, are in the grips of deep emotion at the tragic sight of John the Baptist’s head being brought in on a platter, while the figures in the background, rendered in very shallow relief, go calmly on with what they were doing.

