

GIOVANNI BATTISTA TIEPOLO

Venice, 1696–Madrid, 1770



Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

Portrait of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico

Detail of the fresco *The Apotheosis of Prince-Bishop Greiffenclau*, 1753

Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen

Residenz, Würzburg

Giovanni Battista or Giambattista Tiepolo was born on 5 March 1696 in Corte di San Domenico, Castello, Venice. In 1717 he was inscribed in the Venetian painters' guild, embarking on his career as an independent artist. He had previously trained in the workshop of the history painter Gregorio Lazzarini (1655–1730). A comment by his first biographer, Vincenzo da Canal, describing his style at the time as rapid and free relates precisely to this period of apprenticeship. In 1719 Tiepolo married Cecilia Guardi (1703–1779) and two of their nine children became painters: Giovanni Domenico (1727–1804) and Lorenzo (1736–1776).

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo's earliest assignments came from his immediate surroundings, such as the Venetian churches of Santa Maria dei Derelitti and San Stae. In the 1620s he secured his first major commission outside his city of birth: the fresco paintings on Old Testament themes to decorate the archbishop's palace in Udine (1725–26). In this cycle he established a style that would enjoy success at the European courts, consisting of sensual figures set in spectacular, highly dramatic architectural compositions. Everything is bathed in bright light and executed in pale tones, giving his works an elegant appearance.

The following years he worked in churches, palaces and villas in the Lombardy and Veneto regions, such as the Archinto and Dugnani palaces in Milan, the latter decorated with the story of Scipio. Notable works produced in Venice are the paintings for the church of Santa Maria del Rosario (Gesuati) and, in the 1740s, the scenes of Mark Antony and Cleopatra for the walls of the Palazzo Labia. Around the same time Tiepolo also engaged in engraving, producing two sets of etchings of an extremely high standard: the *Capricci* and the *Scherzi di fantasia*, whose enigmatic meaning continues to be subject to interpretation.

The 1750s were marked by another of the major commissions he received outside Venice: the decoration of the palace of Prince-Bishop Carl Philipp von Greiffenclau in Würzburg. He travelled to the German city with his sons Giovanni Domenico and Lorenzo, staying there for three years. His frescoes for the imperial hall (Kaisersaal) and the stairwell ceiling are among

his most spectacular cycles and constitute a milestone in Baroque painting on account of their colouring, composition and imaginativeness.

After returning to Venice, he was appointed president of the Academy in 1756 and continued to work on commissions for religious communities. The following year, 1757, he was involved in another large-scale decorative scheme, that of the Villa Valmarana, near Vicenza.

He spent the last stage of his life in Madrid, to which he travelled with his two painter sons, summoned by King Charles III to decorate several ceremonial rooms of the Royal Palace. Tiepolo also painted various large canvases for the church of San Pascual in Aranjuez. At the time of his death in 1770, he was designing a decorative scheme for the church of San Ildefonso de La Granja.

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