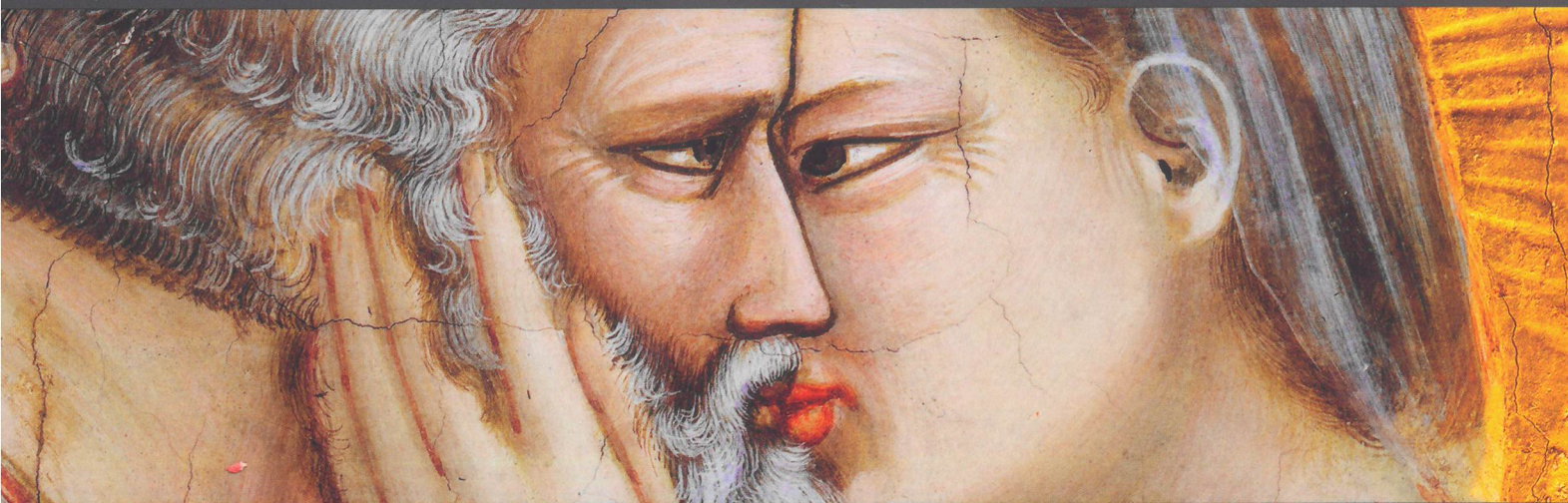


MAGISTER
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MAGISTER GIOTTO

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MAGISTER GIOTTO

Scuola Grande
della Misericordia
Venice

13 July
5 November 2017

Exhibition Advisory Committee

Giuliano Pisani *Exhibition Curator*

Alessandro Tomei *Exhibition Curator*

Cesare Barbieri

Stefania Paone

Scientific Advisor

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Dramatic Music

Paolo Fresu

Narrative Voice

Luca Zingaretti

Artistic Director

Luca Mazzieri

Executive Director

Alessandra Costantini

THE EXHIBITION

by Luca Mazzieri

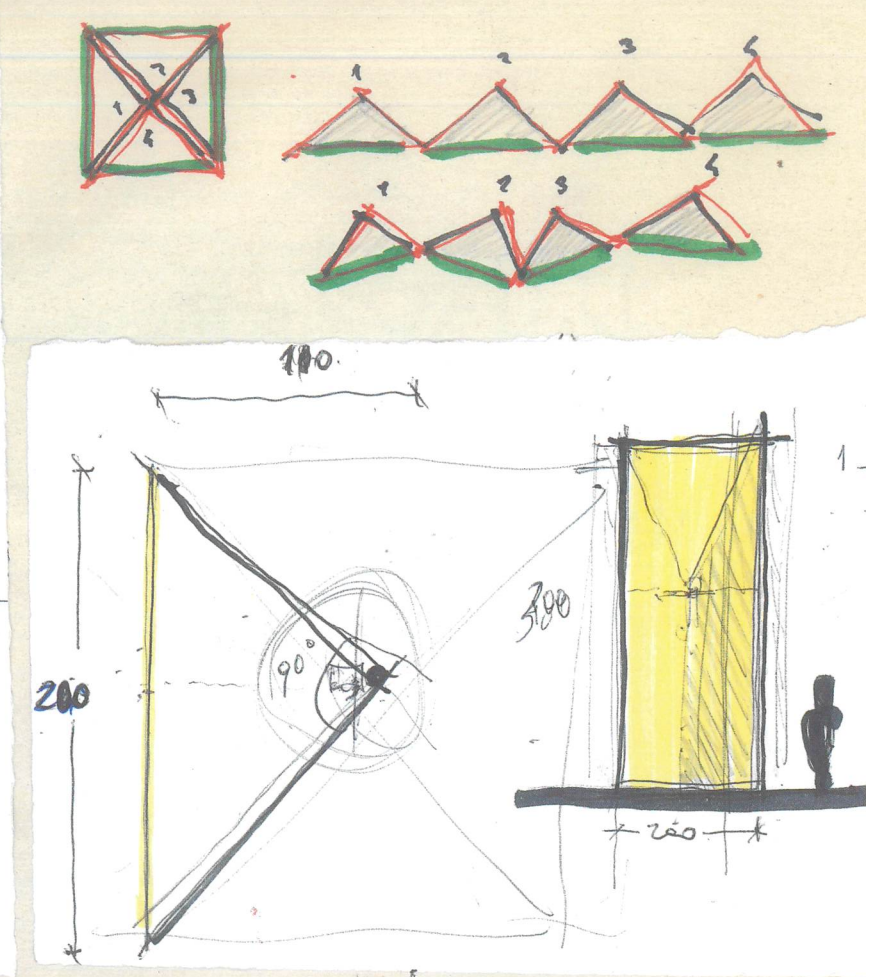
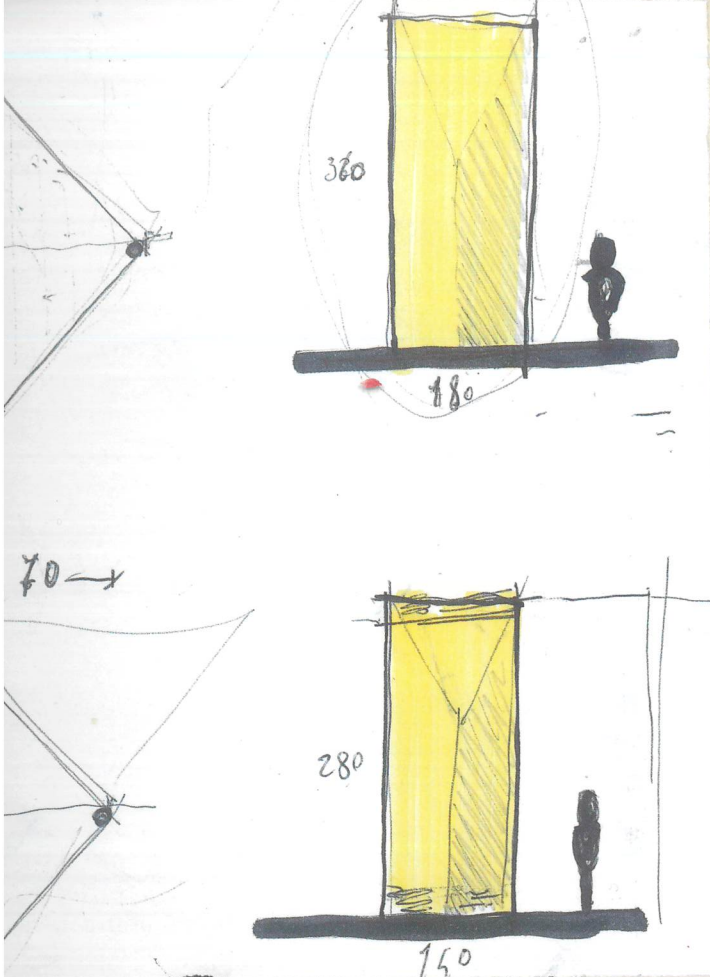
«The world owes a very great and enduring debt, not just to those first Italian artisans, through whose efforts the art of painting was rediscovered and given new life after having been mislaid and almost buried for so many years due to the malevolence of fortune and the times; but even more to those who were able, through their own virtue and industry, to raise it, rough and imperfect as it was in the beginning, to the high and wonderful degree of excellence that after two centuries it has reached.» So wrote the painter and acute essayist Cennino Cennini at the beginning of the fifteenth century in his sublime book about painting, *Il Libro dell'arte* (The Craftsman's Handbook). He suggests that in addition to the artists themselves, an important part was played by those who preserved, handed down and transmitted their works, both at the time and in times to come.

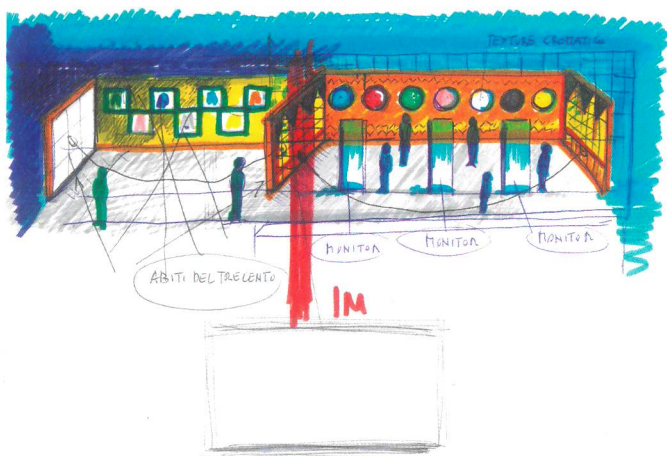
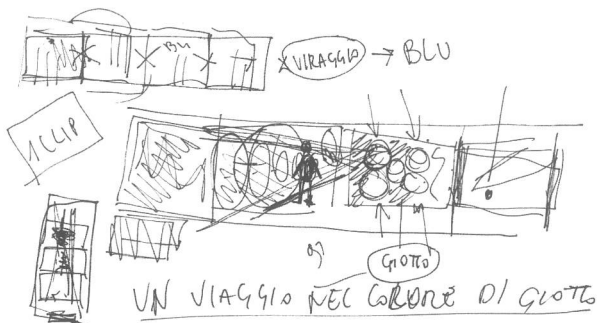
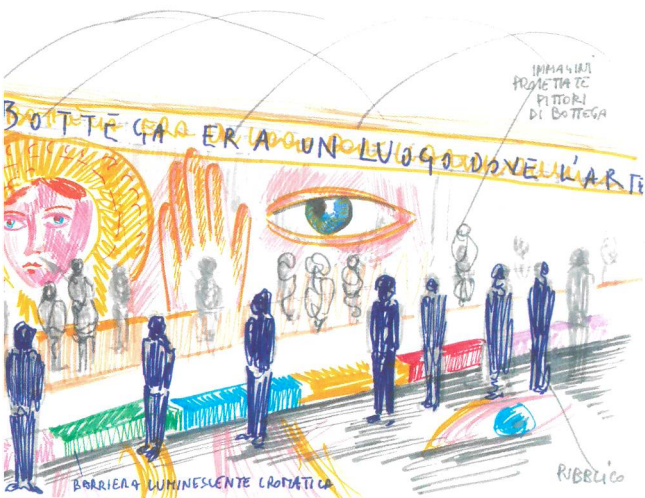
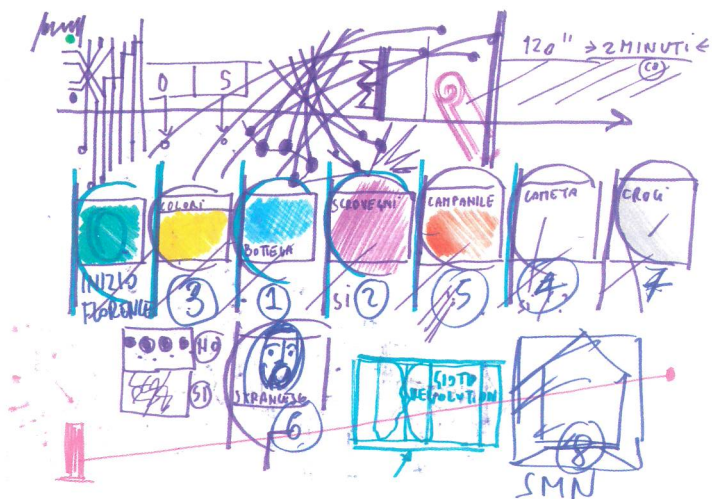
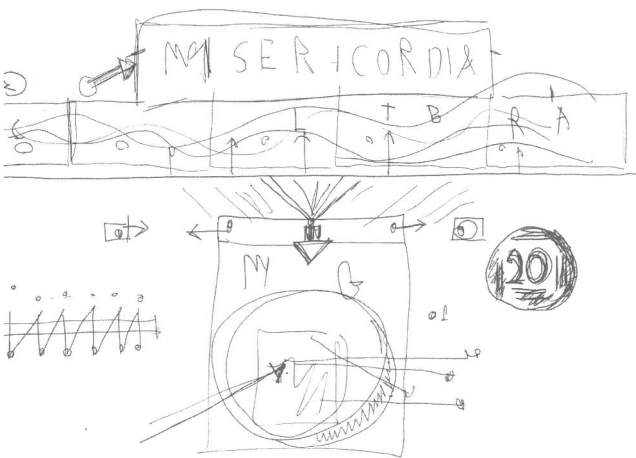
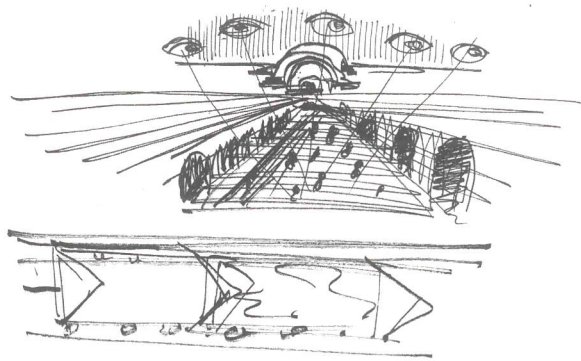
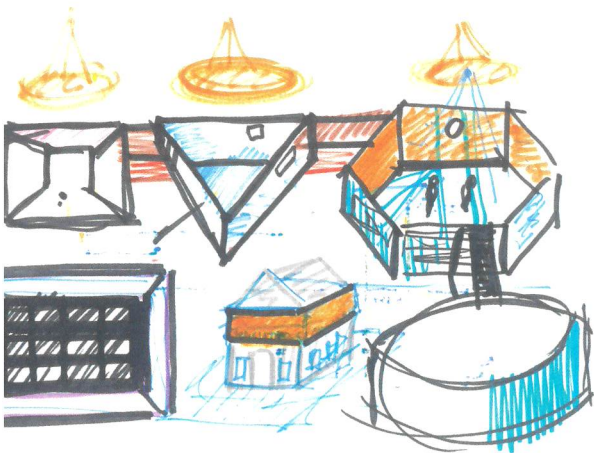
Giotto revolutionised art by painting figures that actually seem alive, with faces that express their emotions, by bringing the representation of architecture and space to a turning point, and by creating a sort of "testament in light and colour" that later artists would strive to emulate. Giotto called me to him, as Giuliano Pisani was to say upon seeing my first sketch – a sequence of rooms invaded by large eyes, as if Giotto's artistic workforce, his tireless and vibrant workshop were looking on and he himself, in a lordly manner, was keeping an eye on a legitimate contemporary celebration of a date as important as the 750th anniversary of his birth – the birth of an incomparable Master.

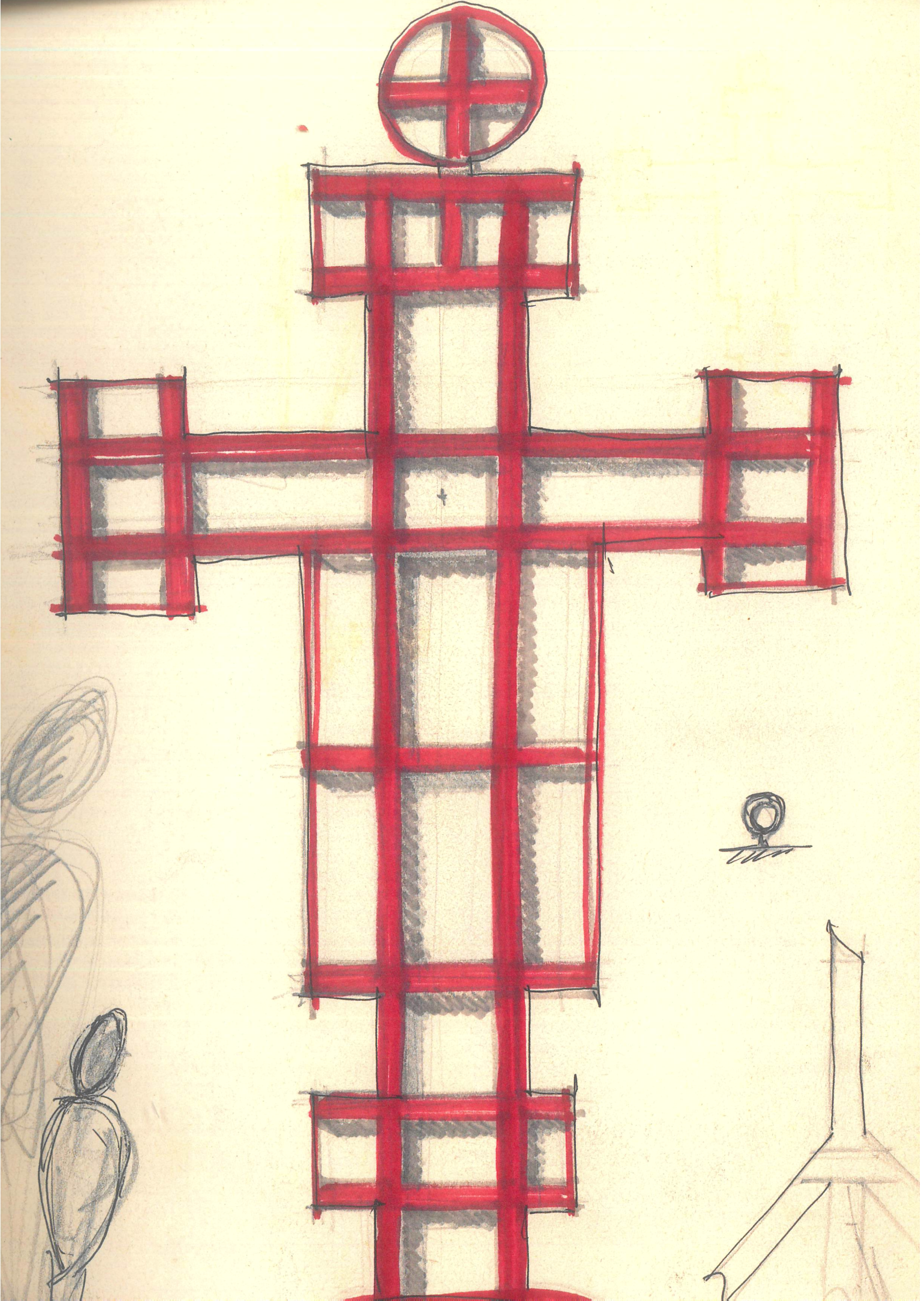
This is how the unique Magister Giotto project was brought into being, among sleepless nights and sparkling sunrises two years ago, during an enforced but most welcome trip to Padua to tell the story of the Scrovegni Chapel in a short film of mine, in which the new discoveries about the theological inspiration behind the painted narrative reinforce what is an extraordinarily beautiful interweaving of line and colour.

Every day, in the notebook I never leave home without, another drawing would appear, or another word, a new face, a tear sliding down a mother's cheek, a wrinkle carved into the face of an apostle or, again, a little sheep and so on, up to a Jesus in a mandorla of light that opens onto the divine sign in the Last Judgment: a basic story board in which everything becomes more macro, in a sort of blow-up like the one with which Michelangelo Antonioni reshaped cinema.

Giotto's pictorial language was enlarged in my eyes by the volumetric representations of the forms etched into the preparatory drawings that the Master and his







workshop carried out before applying the paint, where the contours of the figures are created by a series of very brushstrokes in the volumes.

Even this beauty, so disarming in its precision, was enough to calm me down: I asked myself how and where along the road I had missed this Magister. Why is it only now that he appeared before me in this new light and with an expressive force that I had never appreciated before? Was I then the presumptuous disciple who assumed that he had already understood the revered Master?

My groundless hubris of mine was swept ceremoniously away on the first day of filming the Scrovegni, when our camera, combing a rank of cherubim, recorded faces and expressions that were rowful and at the same time brimming with hope, cherubim that were light yet solid in their tidy clothes, they rose through the cobalt skies forming the backdrop to the Last Judgment.

I realised in that moment that I had to give other people the chance to experience the same emotion. At this stage, the premise was clear: Giotto should be made available to everyone in a contemporary way by means of the most sophisticated film technology.

And where imploring voices begged for salvation while others sued for justice or perhaps forgiveness, Giotto spoke out loud and clear to all of us: «...I have painted here and in other places and elsewhere, let my solution be understood...»

From that day forward, I could not give up on that solution and so, thanks to incessant work and wonderful travelling companions, MAGISTER was born. It is a format that will receive its first outing, long enough, with Giotto in Venice – a city that for centuries has been a window on the world, a crossroads of nationalities and cultures, a landing place for people and traditions.

More than simply an account of the artistic activities of the Master, Magister is an original artistic re-elaboration in contemporary terms of masterpieces of the past with many secrets still to be revealed.

And so, having crossed the threshold of the majestic Sala Grande della Misericordia and before climbing the upper floor to begin the journey of discovery of Giotto and his works, the visitor will encounter our design: the imposing contemporary reconstruction of the Cross from the Crib at Greccio. Filmic images of life-size stagecraft reconstructions of crucifixes and frescoes, represented with extraordinary expressive force in Luciano Emmer's landmark documentaries, crosscut with new footage shot in high definition to bring out

the emotion in the details and, as Ferdinand de Saussure theorized, give meaning to the linguistic sign, in which the signifier, being visual, verbal, tactile or even olfactory, acts as a vehicle for the signified.

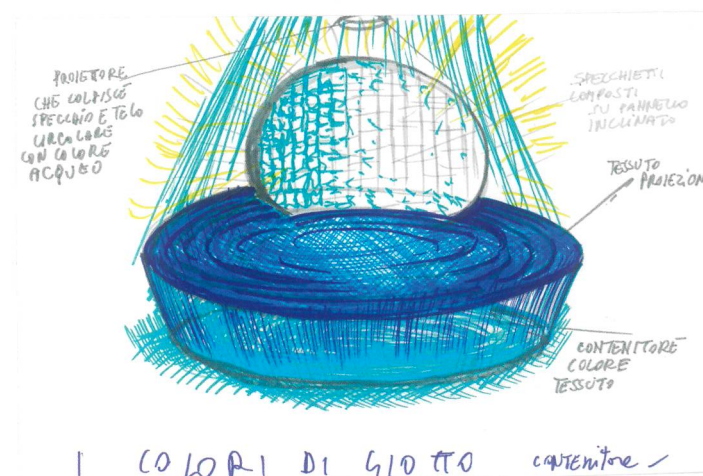
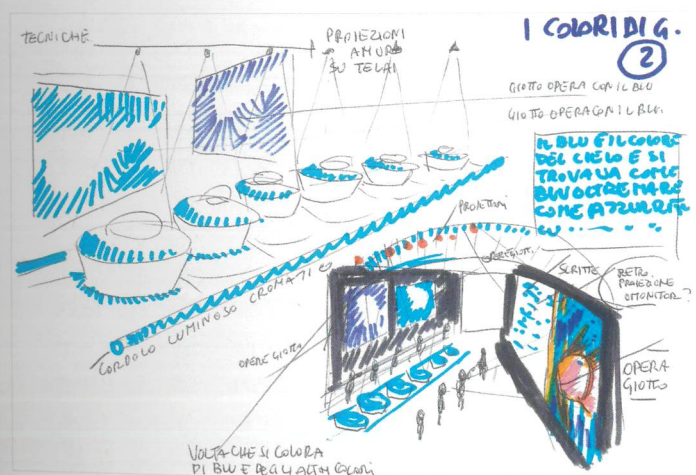
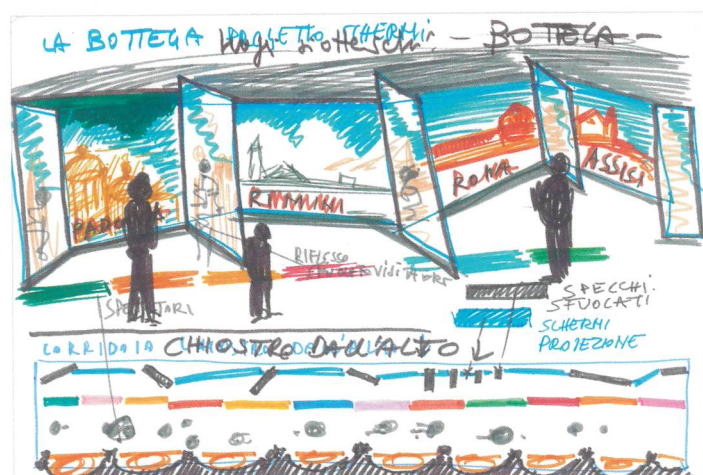
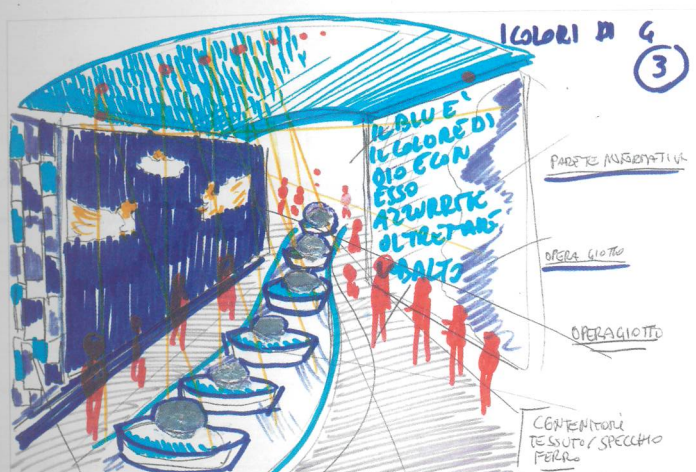
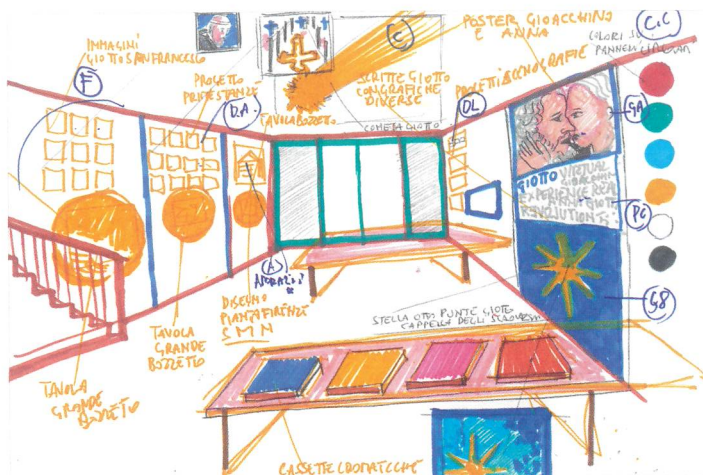
This intense and vibrant itinerary is held together by Luca Zingaretti's clear voice and thoughtful interpretation of the drama, and heightened by the limpid notes of Paolo Fresu's trumpet, in pieces that were specially composed and reworked to tell the story of a disciple who rapidly became an undisputed Master. The narrations are based on texts that were carefully conceived, filtered and woven with infinite patience into the fabric of the story by Alessandro Tomei and Giuliano Pisani, with Stefania Paone and Cesare Barbieri, and the academic consultancy of Serena Romano.

The itinerary begins with the Franciscan cycle in Assisi and unfolds through the Crucifixions to the Scrovegni Chapel and thence to the city of Florence, creating a journey that recounts Giotto's Italy through his works and those of his workshop. It ends in modern times with the mission of the Italian space probe named after Giotto, which in 1986 was the only one to manage to get close to Halley's comet, depicted by the Master in the Adoration of the Magi in the Scrovegni Chapel. Giotto's journey, in the form of a contemporary workshop, is the beating heart of Magister. This artistic project began two years ago with Cose Belle d'Italia Media Entertainment and has gradually expanded with the significant presence of Alessandra Costantini to incorporate professionals from many disciplines, who head up actual workshops in the areas of set design, graphic design, architecture, communication and cinematography, with the enthusiastic involvement of many young apprentices.

It is in this atmosphere of dialogue between the late-medieval and the contemporary, this hotbed of authors and artists, that a strategic significance for Magister has emerged from this very first instalment devoted to Giotto, which will cast off from the lagoons of Venice and carry its precious artistic goods out onto the open seas of the world.

This is just the beginning of Magister's dissemination of Italy's cultural heritage. Our next steps will be to tackle the new and irresistible challenges of Antonio Canova and Raphael, where I give my personal assurance that passion and courage will guide us, like the comet in Giotto's Adoration of the Magi.

12 July 2017



THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND

by Alessandro Tomei

In the fifth novel of the sixth day of his *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio writes thus of Giotto: «[He] was of so excellent a wit that, let Nature, mother of all, operant ever by continual revolution of the heavens, fashion what she would, he with his style and pen and pencil would depict its like on such wise that it shewed not as its like, but rather as the thing itself, insomuch that the visual sense of men did often err in regard thereof, mistaking for real that which was but painted. Wherefore, having brought back to light that art which had for many ages lain buried beneath the blunders of those who painted rather to delight the eyes of the ignorant than to satisfy the intelligence of the wise, he may deservedly be called one of the lights that compose the glory of Florence». At this very early date, therefore, a mere twenty years or so after Giotto's death in 1337, and in just a few lines, the great Tuscan writer perfectly captures the significance of the innovations in Giotto's painting. The naturalism of his images, first of all, the way they mirror nature so accurately that, Boccaccio goes so far as to say, the eyes of men can be deceived by them into mistaking what is painted for something real. Next, there is the recognition of the intellectual dimension to Giotto's works, which were created to meet the aesthetic expectations of the educated classes of his time, as well as the acknowledgment of Giotto's clearly defined personal style. To this might be added a point of local pride, in that Boccaccio emphasizes the prestige, the "light," that Giotto's work confers upon the city of Florence. And Giotto's painting does indeed present such a complex variety of forms and features to the observer's eye that it continues to amaze and capture the attention of us moderns. This variety ranges from the ability to create visually convincing spaces to the delineation of different facial features and expressions, from the inclusion of powerfully naturalistic images to, conversely, the depiction of imaginary, celestial visions, as, for example, in the *Last Judgment* or the representation of Halley's comet in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. The first to celebrate the excellence of Giotto's









painting and his fame as an artist, however, was Dante Alighieri, when, in Canto XI of the *Purgatorio* (vv. 94-96), he wrote: «Cimabue thought he held the field / In painting, but now the hue and cry is for / Giotto, and the other's fame is dulled.» We are in approximately 1315 here, not so many years after the execution of the Scrovegni Chapel frescoes therefore, which date to 1303-1305, and yet Dante credits Giotto with a fame large enough to have eclipsed that of Cimabue, the other great Florentine painter who had only fairly recently died. It is really most significant that the poet uses Giotto's celebrity to highlight the transience of earthly glory: the preceding tercet in fact opens with the famous line «O empty glory of our human powers!» and the one following contains a similar allusion to two poets of the thirteenth century, Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti.

Petrarch owned a panel painting of a Virgin and Child by Giotto («*operis loci pictoris egregii*» – “a work by Giotto an outstanding painter”) and in a letter of 1370 he reiterated the idea expressed by Boccaccio that the beauty of the work could only be understood by the more cultured and educated (*magistri*).

In 1381-82, the Florentine chronicler Filippo Villani turned to the painters of classical Greece, Apollodorus and Zeuxis, to illustrate the relationship between Cimabue and Giotto: Cimabue was the first to set off along the road towards naturalism, while Giotto was the one who took painting to the point where it could produce a true picture of reality.

A more specific and what might be called more stylistic assessment was offered by Cennino Cennini, being himself a painter as well as an essayist, active at the end of the thirteen hundreds. With reference to Giotto, Cennini wrote: «He translated the art of painting from Greek to Latin and brought in the modern; he had the most complete art that anyone ever had». Here, “Greek” means “Byzantine” and “Latin” refers to the recovery of the formal elements of what came to be regarded as the Western tradition. This tradition has its roots in the classical world, something that Giotto demonstrates a profound knowledge of,

Page 11
Giotto, Nativity. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

Pages 12-13
Giotto, Nativity. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

Above
Giotto, Adoration of the Magi. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

Page 15
Giotto, Adoration of the Magi. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.



ndoubtedly acquired "live" during repeated visits to Rome. In that city he had the opportunity to see not only the vestiges of Roman art itself, but also the revival and referencing of it in works by artists active there in those years, such as the Roman artists Pietro Cavallini and Jacopo Torriti and the Florentine Arnolfo di Cambio.

The early glory and fame that Giotto enjoyed were to increase exponentially during the course of the Renaissance, but unfortunately this has resulted neither in a well-documented biography nor in a precise chronology of his works: the most famous and celebrated artist of the medieval period, the man who breathed new life to Western painting has left us only three signed paintings and no works that are, or can be, dated with any certainty. The sole exception to this being the frescoes in the Scrovegni chapel, which can reasonably and with reliable approximation be assigned to the period from 1303 to 1305.

The three signed works are the panel with *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, produced for the church of San Francesco in Pisa and now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the *Polyptych* that has remained from the time of its original execution in the Baroncelli chapel in the basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, and a second *polyptych* now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna.

Information about the life of the artist is not particularly abundant in the written sources either: around 1340 in his *Nuova Cronica* (book XI, Chapter 12), the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani recorded the painter's death, on January 1336, and his burial by the Comune of Florence in the cathedral of Santa Reparata. In 1373, the poet Antonio Pucci asserted in his *Centiloquio* (Canto LXXXV, vv. 90-91) – a casting in verse of Giovanni Villani's *Cronica* – that Giotto was seventy years old at the time of his death, establishing thereby, albeit indirectly, the year of his birth as 1266. These dates were calculated according to the Florentine style and usually correspond to 1267 and 1337.

The earliest information about Giotto's output comes from Lorenzo Ghiberti, a sculptor,

architect and goldsmith, who lived at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and was the author of the famous *Commentarii*. Ghiberti provides a first list of works carried out by Giotto in Assisi, Padua, Rome, Naples and naturally Florence. It is also to him that we owe the first account of what was to become an enduring myth: the story that Cimabue, the glory of Florentine painting in the thirteenth century, discovered the talent of the young Giotto «...in a village near the city of Florence which is called Vespignano. A boy of marvellous genius was born who was drawing a sheep from life; passing by on his way to Bologna, the painter Cimabue saw the boy sitting on the ground and drawing a sheep on a flat rock. He was seized with great admiration for the boy, being so young in age to draw so well; he asked, seeing him to have his art from nature, he asked the boy what his name was. The boy answered and said: by name I am called Giotto: and my father is named Bondone and lives in this house close by.» This apocryphal story was retold many times over the centuries that followed, forming the basis for the belief, which is entirely unsubstantiated by the documentary evidence, that Giotto had been Cimabue's pupil.

It is to Giorgio Vasari, the painter and architect from Arezzo, that we owe the first complete biography of Giotto, which to this day continues to be the compulsory point of departure for any study of the artist's activities. In the two editions of his *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1560 and 1568), Vasari mentions an enormous number of works, refers to periods spent in different cities and recounts anecdotes revolving around Giotto.

Giotto is naturally considered to be the founder, together with Arnolfo di Cambio and Cimabue, of the Florentine school of painting which, in an unbroken chain, would reach the height of perfection in the works of Michelangelo.

Vasari takes up the theme expressed around two centuries earlier by Boccaccio and discusses it on several occasions, stating in the 1568 edition, for example, that his works «acquired for Giotto very great fame, by reason of the excellence of the figures and of the order,









proportion, liveliness, and facility which he had from nature, and which he had made much greater by means of study, and was able to demonstrate clearly in all his works. And because, besides that which Giotto had from nature, he was most diligent and went on ever thinking out new ideas and wresting them from nature, he well deserved to be called the disciple of nature and not of others.»

Vasari is also the original source of the famous anecdote about Giotto's "O," which has since become permanently grafted onto the collective imagination as a metaphor for perfection. In connection with certain paintings that Giotto apparently executed for the Camposanto (cemetery) in Pisa, the historian from Arezzo writes: «In like manner, the other figures in these scenes and the heads both of the males and of the women are very beautiful; and the draperies are wrought to such a degree of softness that it is no marvel if this work acquired for him so great fame, both in that city and abroad. It's no wonder therefore that Pope Benedict sent one of his courtiers into Tuscany to see what sort of a man he was and what his works were like, for the Pope was planning to have some paintings made in S. Peter's. This courtier, on his way to see Giotto and to find out what other masters of painting and mosaic there were in Florence, spoke with many masters in Sienna, and then, having received some drawings from them, he came to Florence. And one morning going into the workshop of Giotto, who was at his labours, he showed him the mind of the Pope, and at last asked him to give him a little drawing to send to his Holiness. Giotto, who was a man of courteous manners, immediately took a sheet of paper, and with a pen dipped in red, fixing his arm firmly against his side to make a compass of it, with a turn of his hand he made a circle so perfect that it was a marvel to see it. Having done it, he turned smiling to the courtier and said, "Here is the drawing." But he, thinking he was being laughed at, asked, "Am I to have no other drawing than this?" "This is enough and too much," replied Giotto, "send it with the others and see if it will be understood." The messenger, seeing that he could get nothing else,

17

2, Massacre of the Innocents. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni el, Padua.

5 18-19

2, Massacre of the Innocents. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni el, Padua.

2

2, Raising of Lazarus. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

21

2, Raising of Lazarus. Detail. Fresco. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

5 22-23

2, Crib at Greccio, from the Legend of Saint Francis. Detail. Upper Church, basilica of San Francesco, Assisi.





