# PERUGIA

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF UMBRIA

# 4 MARCH – 11 JUNE 2023

# A MAJOR EXHIBITION TO CELEBRATE

# PIETRO VANNUCCI, PERUGINO

# ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIFTH CENTENNIAL OF HIS DEATH

# Entitled *“Italy’s Greatest Maestro”. Perugino and his Time,* the exhibition aims to restore the role that the public and his age once assigned to the artist, presenting his greatest masterpieces, all previous to 1504, the moment when he reached the pinnacle of his extraordinary career.

**Curated by Marco Pierini and Veruska Picchiarelli**

**2023 will go down as the year of Perugino.**

**From 4 March to 11 June 2023, on the occasion of the fifth centennial of his death, the National Gallery of Umbria in Perugia will be holding a major exhibition to celebrate Pietro Vannucci (c. 1450-1523), the most important painter active in the last two decades of the fifteenth century.**

Entitled ***“Italy’s Greatest Maestro”. Perugino and his Time*** and curated by Marco Pierini, Director of the National Gallery of Umbria in Perugia, and Veruska Picchiarelli, a conservator at the same museum, the exhibition will **employ Perugino’s greatest masterpieces, all previous to 1504**, the moment when he reached the pinnacle of his extraordinary career, with the aim of restoring the role of artistic pre-eminence that the public and his contemporary age once assigned to an artist who was an unquestioned protagonist of the Renaissance.

The exhibition will be the flagship event of the centennial celebrations, which are co-ordinated by a National Committee established by the Ministry of Culture and chaired by Ilaria Borletti Buitoni and will involve some of the leading museums in Italy and worldwide, such as the Uffizi in Florence and the National Gallery of Washington, in a fully-fledged scientific partnership.

“This exhibition at the National Gallery of Umbria constitutes the fulcrum of the celebrations marking the fifth centennial of Perugino’s death”, states **Ilaria Borletti Buitoni**. “The contributions of many major international museums make it fundamental to achieving an understanding of the role played by the artist in his day, the fame he enjoyed during his lifetime and his acknowledged status as a maestro.”

“Perugino is an artistic name with such a strong sense of identity that over the years it has become a symbol of the city of Perugia itself”, **observes Andrea Romizi, mayor of Perugia**, “and it is no coincidence that the city’s first municipal painting gallery, now the National Gallery of Umbria, was named after Pietro di Cristoforo Vannucci. The events lined up to mark the fifth centennial of his death and the much-awaited exhibition “Italy’s Greatest Maestro”, as he weas justifiably described by the banker Agostino Chigi, are destined to go down in history and to write a new chapter about the lively cultural atmosphere in Perugia, Umbria and our country as a whole. Perugino is not only the painter of the sweet angelic Madonnas or of the altarpieces that blossomed like pieces of heaven on earth: he is also the very identity of Umbrian culture as it is known all over the world. By way of bearing witness to this, we have the works that will make their way here from some of the world’s leading museums. I want to thank the Director Marco Pierini for the work done so far, together with all his staff, the Perugino 2023 Committee and its President Ilaria Borletti Buitoni, conscious that we are only at the beginning of what promises to be a very intense and highly emotional year.”

“In a letter dated 7 November 1500, Agostino Chigi, one of the leading artistic patrons of his day, described Perugino as ‘Italy’s greatest maestro’. The decision to use this expression as the title of the exhibition hosted at the National Gallery of Umbria to celebrate the fifth centennial of the artist’s death is an explicit statement of intent”, **point out the curators Marco Pierini and Veruska Picchiarelli**, “whose purpose is to tell the story of his prominence as it was seen through the eyes of those who had the chance to admire his work from a privileged perspective, without that appreciation being distracted by his particularly prolific (and sometimes even serial) later work and, above all, without being conditioned by what at the very least can be described as the fluctuating fortunes of critique.”

The event is the ideal complement to the project of historical and critical analysis of the creative itinerary of Perugino, launched in 2004 by the National Gallery of Umbria, which holds the greatest number of works by the maestro, with an exhibition that focused its investigations primarily on the last twenty years of his career.

The curators of this exhibition, which will feature **more than seventy works**, decided to focus exclusively on Perugino’s paintings executed before 1504, the year when he worked on three commissions that marked the pinnacle of his career: the ***Crucifixion*** painted for the Chigi Chapel in the church of Sant’Agostino in Siena, the ***Battle between Love and Chastity***, previously in Mantua and now in the Louvre in Paris, and above all the ***Marriage of the Virgin***for the Chapel of the Holy Ring in the Cathedral of Perugia, now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Caen (France).

The exhibition aims to give as complete an account as possible of the fundamental milestones in Perugino’s career: from his early work in Andrea del Verrocchio’s workshop to the major enterprises in Florence that made his name and fortune (such as the **three panels previously in the church of San Giusto alle Mura** and now in the Uffizi, or the **San Domenico Altarpiece** in Fiesole) and from his extraordinary portraits to his monumental altarpieces, such as the **Galitzin Triptych**, now in the National Gallery in Washington, and the **Polyptych for the Pavia Charterhouse**, most of which is now in the National Gallery in London, but which has now been recomposed on the exceptional occasion of this event.

The exhibition will reflect the role actually played by Perugino on his contemporary artistic scene, detailing the relationships he cultivated with the other great masters of the day and following his movements and those of his works across the length and breadth of Italy. It is surprising to discover what lasting marks Perugino left of his mastery in all the localities in the peninsula that were touched by his activity, from north to south, obviously starting from Umbria and Tuscany, the most outstanding arenas of his work, as well as the homes of his workshops in Perugia and Florence.

The ground-breaking enterprise of the decoration in the Sistine Chapel, for example, is at the root of an Umbrian-Latium strand of ‘Peruginism’, sublimely interpreted by such artists as **Antoniazzo Romano**, or **Antonio da Viterbo known as Pastura**. The impression made by the frescoes of the *Stories of Christ* and the *Stories of Moses* in artists who originated from profoundly distant geographical and cultural backgrounds and came into contact with them during their study tours, assimilating their lessons as fundamental educational input, generated some utterly unique phenomena, such as those found in the work of **Macrino d’Alba**, who disseminated Perugino’s manner in his native Piedmont. Similarly, in the same region, the study of Perugino’s masterpieces he had seen in Florence and Pavia is reflected with surprising results in the work of **Gaudenzio Ferrari**.

The presence of works by the Umbrian maestro in Romagna and in Emilia, from Fano to Senigallia and Bologna, is at the root of the work of **Francesco Francia**, **Lorenzo Costa** and **Antonio Rimpatta**.

A Lombardo-Venetian strand of the Perugino style, witnessed in particular in the works of **Tommaso Aleni** and **Francesco Verla**, is traceable to the *Madonna and Child between Saint Augustine and Saint John the Evangelist* in the church of Sant’Agostino in Cremona.

Last but not least, the great *Assumption* in the Cathedral of San Gennaro furnished further driving force to the dissemination of Perugino’s lexicon, not only in the immediate vicinity of Naples itself, with the work of **Stefano Sparano** or of **Cristoforo Faffeo**, but also in other regions of southern Italy.

The catalogue will feature contributions from the leading specialists in the painter, tracing the milestones of Perugino’s career, from his early training to his return to Umbria at the beginning of the sixteenth century, with introductory essays designed to furnish a comprehensive description of the maestro’s times, detailing their history, the prevailing mindsets, places and spaces. Ample space will be reserved for the Directors and curators of the collections to which the works offered on loan belong, so as to highlight the choral character of an undertaking that has come about primarily as a result of an effective collaboration with such major institutions as the **Uffizi**, the **National Gallery of Washington**, the **National Gallery in London**, the **Louvre in Paris and the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin**.

The museums that have been invited to loan works have in fact also been invited to make a more substantial effort, in terms of the number and quality of the works loaned, so as to become fully-fledged partners in the project, taking part in reciprocal initiatives and providing scientific consultancy.

The ultimate goal is to succeed in seeing things just as Perugino’s contemporaries saw them, to go back to the point when the artist was held up as an unquestioned model of the Renaissance, a position he held for at least two decades.

Perugia, 3 March 2023

**“ITALY’S GREATEST MAESTRO”. PERUGINO AND HIS TIME**

Perugia, National Gallery of Umbria (Corso Pietro Vannucci, 19)

**4 March – 11 June 2023**

Curated by Marco Pierini and Veruska Picchiarelli

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