

Angera's Open-Air Art on Lake Maggiore

The work chosen by the artist for this homage to Da Vinci is that known as *La Scapiliata*, a perhaps unfinished painting produced between 1492 and 1501 on a board of walnut wood, using white lead (lead carbonate), iron-based pigments and cinnabar, on a white lead background with copper-based pigments and lead-tin yellow; it is kept in Parma National Gallery (Palazzo della Pilotta).



The work was recorded for the first time in a Gonzaga inventory dated 1627; we know very little about how it reached Parma or the identity of the woman it portrays. The original painting measures 24.7 x 21 cm and shows a female head tilted forwards and to the right; the face is three quarters on and occupies most of the available space; below, on the left there is a hint of the shoulder. The pleasant, youthful features suggest a nymph, Leda or the Madonna, similar to the Vergine delle Rocce.

The downward-looking eyes are half shut, the lips are small but soft and almost hint at a smile. The forehead, cheekbones, nose and chin are highlighted in white, giving the face a three-dimensional aspect.

The wavy brown hair has a central parting, and shows the grace, movement and life characteristic of Da Vinci's genius.

The side locks are like small waterfalls blown by a light wind, which move in every direction, wavy streams that curl and twist. This feature above all suggests its association with a text by Leonardo da Vinci that seems to describe it exactly: ... make hair with locks that play together in unreal wind around youthful faces, with various revolutions that decorate them gracefully. And do not do as those who besmear them with glues, and make it seem and look as if they were glazed; increasing human madness, for which it is not enough that sailors bring gum arabic from the eastern parts, to ensure that the wind does not disturb the uniformity of these tresses...

Head of young woman, known as La Scapiliata, from a work by Leonardo da Vinci, painted on occasion of the 500th anniversary of his death.

Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 1,5 x 1 m.

The Sala di Giustizia paintings celebrate Ottone Visconti's victory over the troops of Napo Torriani at Desio on January 21st 1277 and his triumphal entry into Milan, where he was at last welcomed by the clergy and civic authorities as the city's archbishop, after years of bloodshed.

The artist has chosen a detail of the scene depicted on the southern wall of the room: Napo Torriani, in helmet and armour, kneels in the foreground on the left, pleading for mercy from Ottone; in the original the bishop sits on horseback in front of him. Behind Napo a soldier turns with raised sword to stop other armed men on foot and on horseback who approach threateningly. The soldiers wear helmets of various shapes; they stop with shields and swords raised, waiting for the bishop's decision. Napo was later imprisoned in the tower of Baradello Castle, near Como, where he died of his privations.

The Visconti family took control of Milan and Angera; after obtaining the castle, they decided to celebrate the victory at Desio on the walls of the Sala di Giustizia a few years later. The historical episodes represented faithfully reproduce the history of events narrated in the Latin verse account *Liber de rebus gestis in civitate Mediolani*, attributed to Stefanardo da Vimercate. The chamber also contains the Wheel of Fortune and a female figure interpreted as Virtue or Justice, together with other decorations including Sun and Moon chariots, signs of the zodiac, pagan images and heraldic symbols. The castle dates back to the 11th century; after the Visconti, it was enlarged in the Sforza era and then by the Borromeo family, the current owners. The Sala di Giustizia has maintained its original aspect over the centuries; the wall frescoes are among the finest and best preserved Lombard Gothic medieval paintings and a rare example of secular, political and celebratory art. See [Angera Open-Air Museum Site 27 - www.angera.it](#)

Detail showing Napo Torriani begging for mercy to Bishop Ottone Visconti, from the wall paintings in the **Sala di Giustizia, Angera Castle**. The room was decorated by an anonymous Angera painter in the late 13th – early 14th century.

Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 2 x 1,5 m.

Andrea Ravo Mattoni, a.k.a. Ravo, is an artist from Varese, son and nephew of artists. From an early age he has been interested in street art and experimented the use of spray paints for his first graffiti; this became his preferred medium, notwithstanding familiarity with more traditional painting techniques acquired during his studies at the Brera Fine Arts Academy in Milan. Art history studies kindled his passion for great Italian and European artworks from the period 1400 to 1700 and he began to plan to bring these masterpieces into the community through an ambitious public art project, creating a bridge between museums and the street. Having learnt new pictorial techniques – and a profound connoisseur of the possibilities offered by spray paints and with a keen eye for classical art – in 2016 Ravo started his project to create an open-air art gallery: 120 wall paintings or large canvases, reworking past artists' masterpieces, to be created and displayed in the streets of towns and cities, in historic centres and suburbs. Each work is closely linked to the locality for which it is intended; sometimes Ravo chooses a subject from an (often local) painter, or from an original that is not accessible to the public or exhibited in a museum distant from the place for which the work was created. In April 2016 the artist received from Angera Council his first public commission in north Italy, when he was entrusted to create a large mural covering some Nazi-Fascist slogans that had appeared on a wall in the old town centre. Thus in September that year the *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* was produced, a reworking of a painting by an artist from Lombardy, Caravaggio. This work in Angera caught the attention of a director of the Musée du Louvre, with the result that Ravo became involved in the European art scene. In 2018 he began a fruitful collaboration with the Louvre and a period of fervent activity in France, Spain and Italy: his work is appreciated internationally. In May 2019 the artist presented 5 large canvases at Château d'Amboise to celebrate the genius of Leonardo Da Vinci, receiving compliments from french and italian presidents Macron and Mattarella. His affection for Angera means that Andrea Ravo Mattoni willingly returns to work here; we will see more of his paintings in the future.

The original work belongs to the parish and is not open to the public; it comes from the church of St. Anthony the Great, which was in Via Paletta but was deconsecrated and partly demolished in the latter half of the 19th century; today all that is visible from the street of the church is a door jamb in Angera stone with a floral decoration. This patron saint of livestock epidemics and infectious human diseases was especially important to farmers, as evidenced by the numerous Masses, livestock blessings and processions to the stables recorded in the chapter diaries of the Parish of Angera, studied by Luciano Besozzi. The main festival was celebrated on January 17th.

St. Anthony the Great was born in the 3rd century in Egypt to a wealthy Christian family; from a young age he lived the desert and dedicated his life to prayer. An expert in medicines and also remedies against the Devil, he attracted many followers and was renowned for the spiritual powers that enabled him to cure terrible diseases. His disciples later founded the order of the Hospitaller Monks of St. Anthony the Great and soon became known for their ability to cure numerous illnesses, in particular Saint Anthony's fire. To soothe the pains caused by herpes, they treated the patients with ointments made from pork fat. The pigs raised for hospitals wore a bell to identify them and were not to be mistreated. This led to the medieval tradition that Anthony was the protector of pigs, and then all domestic animals. The original Angera painting shows the elderly saint standing, with a long white beard and halo, dressed in a dark tunic fastened by a belt from which hangs a rosary, cloak and sandals. His right hand is open and upturned, while in his left hand he holds the book of the Holy Scriptures from which a flame emerges, probably a reference to Saint Anthony's fire. At his feet there are two oxen instead of the more usual pig – but different animals were often shown, especially in zones such as Angera where mainly cattle were raised. The background is a hilly landscape with trees. See [Angera Open-Air Museum Site 48 - www.angera.it](#)

Painting showing the face of **St. Anthony the Great**.
Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 2 x 1.5 m.

The painting was recently rediscovered and restored during rebuilding work in the Casa Forni, in Via Greppi; it is not open to the public. It is located on the upper part of a wall in a room on the first floor which has paintings on all four walls. Portraits of men and women belonging to local noble families, including the Castiglioni, Besozzi and Sforza, are enclosed by garlands and flanked by their coats-of-arms; the Roman emperor Nerva (perhaps associated with legends regarding the Sforza family) is also shown. The portraits include Francesco I Sforza, Bianca Maria Visconti and Ludovico Maria Sforza, known as Il Moro. The coats-of-arms and portraits would appear to date to the late 1400s, just before the fall of Ludovico il Moro in 1499.

Beneath them are decorative plant motifs joined by knotted ribbons, similar to frescoes by Leonardo da Vinci in the Sala delle Asse in Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Studies suggest that the house may have belonged to Ettore Besozzi and Clara Castiglioni and that the wall paintings were executed on the occasion of their wedding. The presence of Sforza coats-of-arms and portraits may also indicate that the building was the seat of the Captain of the Lake, a magistrate who controlled the shores of Lake Maggiore on behalf of the Duke of Milan.

The Visconti's possessions on the lake, including the Rocca di Angera, passed to the Borromeo family in 1447. Ludovico il Moro tried to regain control of the Maggiore duchy by basing the Captain in Angera, giving it the status of 'città' (independent of the feudal system) in 1497 and thus guaranteeing its autonomy from the Borromeos. Moro also granted Angerans the right to hold one market and two fairs each year, one for cattle in spring, and one in September for the harvest, which is still celebrated today with parades of wagons. The wall paintings are currently being studied. See [Angera Open-Air Museum Site 8 - www.angera.it](#)

Detail of wall painting from the Casa Forni with a portrait of **Ludovico Maria Sforza** (known as *Il Moro*) in armour surrounded by a garland.

Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 1,3 x 1,3 m.

The original work belongs to the parish and is not open to the public; it comes from the church of St. Liberata in Via Lombardia which was deconsecrated and became private property in the 19th century. The original painting shows a standing young woman, dressed in fine yellow and green robes and a red cloak, with pearl earrings and a precious clasp on her chest. Her hair is gathered and covered with a light

cloth wrapped around her head; her face and gaze look leftwards towards the sky. The saint holds a newborn baby completely wrapped in white bands in her right arm, her left hand rests on a stone surface on which lies another sleeping child in a white robe. The dark background does not allow the setting to be clearly seen; it appears to be a natural landscape with trees and rocks. In Angera the cult of St. Liberata was followed for a long time; she was revered as a child's nurse and protector against the dangers of childbirth and childhood diseases. Until a few years ago, the women of Angera, Capronno, Cadazzate, Ispra and numerous nearby municipalities used to meet on 18th January for a lunch in her honour, reserved only for women married or soon to be so – a Women's Day festival! Liberata's history is old and complex; in fact there are several saints who bear this name, but all share the feature of having cult

companions, sisters or other saints, with whom they protect the health of unborn children and pregnant women. It seems that the veneration of the saint and her sisters is the Christian transposition of an age-old pagan cult linked to the cycles of birth, destiny, death and regeneration – the cult of the **Matroneae** goddesses, protectors of mothers and children, also called **Fatae** because they could predict fate, the unborn child's destiny. There is evidence that this cult has existed in Angera and its surroundings for at least 2000 years, for example an important Roman altar found in Angera and now on display in the Varese Archaeological Museum, which shows the goddesses holding hands, dancing under an oak tree. See [Angera Open-Air Museum Site 49 - www.angera.it](#)

Painting on canvas showing the face of **St. Liberata**.
Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 2 x 1.5 m.

The church was founded in the 11th century and has undergone several rebuilds. The earliest wall paintings appear to be of 15th century date and decorated the apse; further frescoes were painted in 1578. The church was restructured in 1865 and painted once more in the early 1900s; the parts with 15th and 16th century paintings were turned into service rooms.

The detail chosen by the artist comes from the oldest decorations. The fragment depicted features the fine-featured face of a boy with short blond hair, wearing a yellow cloak with a red collar; his holiness is indicated by the presence of a halo. It has been speculated that it may be St. Quirico, who is highly revered locally, together with his mother Giulitta. No attributes are present that allow them to be identified with certainty, but the suggestion seems confirmed by the boy's youth and attestations present in the records of pastoral visits in 1579. Mother and son were martyred in the East; in the early 4th century the emperor Diocletian ordered the persecution of Christians. Giulitta, a Christian widow originally from Iconium, in present-day Turkey, refused to deny her faith. Seeing his mother being whipped, three-year-old Quirico said 'I'm a Christian too!' He was thrown to the ground, banging his head and dying as a martyr; his mother thanked God for welcoming him to the Kingdom of Heaven and was then beheaded. The two martyrs are revered in the East on July 15th and in the West on June 16th. On June 16th 1412, Francesco Maria Visconti entered Milan, where he became duke and later offered (and imposed) important donations to celebrate Quirico and Giulitta. The church on San Quirico Hill in Angera predates these events, but Visconti's measures encouraged the saint's veneration; this would explain why it was also decided to name the church of Capronno after the martyrs. See [Angera Open-Air Museum Site 37 - www.angera.it](#)

Detail of face attributed to **Saint Quirico**, from the wall paintings discovered in 1993 in the sacristy of the church of St. Ambrogio and Maddalena in Capronno.

Andrea Ravo Mattoni, 2019, spray paint on PVC canvas, 1,5 x 1,5 m.