

THE ANCIENT ROME OF INACO BIANCALANA

The collections of the National Museums of Lucca enrich today with seven wooden panels carved between 1965 and 1966 by the sculptor Inaco Biancalana (Viareggio 1912-1991), donated by Graziano Grazzini who commissioned those works in 1965.

The panels created to adorn the furnishings of his pastry with subjects dear to him, taken from ancient Rome's history, are unique in the production of the artist. Because of the subjects offered, the panels are presented in the museum in the area dedicated to the Roman Lucca. The intent is to make them dialogue with ancient works of art on display. Some of the details carved by Inaco Biancalana, can be easily compared with the marble reliefs of the Museum. The seat on which the emperor Nero is sitting, for example, recalls the "curule chair", symbol of the Roman magistracy, the same chair appears in a marble slab with a latin inscription. The senator with the scroll in his hand is similar to a figure on a sarcophagus fragment. The gladiator with the circular shield recalls the image of the soldiers represented in the funerary relief with banquet scene, and finally, the figure of the matron has behind her the reconstructed environments of a *domus* with mosaic floors and terracotta decorations.



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... An artist barely paid
for the great skill that offers ...
(Beniamino Gigli)

Inaco Biancalana was born in Viareggio, on September 24th, 1921. His father, a sailor and then a tinsmith, was able to get him just a primary school education. Inaco went to work in a barber shop, but instead of concentrating on his job, he preferred to devote himself to drawing. The interest in drawing and carving started as a child, watched his grandfather, nicknamed 'Mangialegno', literally 'wood eater', carving small wood boats, and then later as a young boy, while he watched the laborious work of shipwrights during the making of small boats in the bay of Viareggio. Among them was his future father in law, called the 'Morino', and Natale Marinai, a woodcarver who, late in life, donated as a gift his working tools to the young Inaco. His family did not encouraged his artistic interests, but the meeting with his future wife Livia, was a real turning point in the life of the young artist. She shared with him his passion for drawing:

was thanks to her that Inaco decided to devote himself to sculpture. In 1939, the two were married, the couple had three children: Giuseppe, Leandro, who died at the age of thirty-eight years after a short period dedicated to painting, and Clara. In 1941, Giulia Viani, wife of the painter Lorenzo Viani, promoted the first exhibition of the works of Inaco in the premises of the Hotel "Principe di Piemonte". His first major assignments came after the war, thanks to the future Minister for Public Works Giovanni Pieraccini, the Agnelli family and the famous tenor Beniamino Gigli, who, after visiting the exhibition that Inaco had set up in 1945 in Via Condotti in Rome, said about him that he was "An artist barely paid for the great skill that offers". In the same years he realized the busts of Stalin (purchased by the Soviet Embassy in Rome), Roosevelt (donated by the city of Viareggio to the American officer of the area) and Churchill (purchased by a private collection), using the wood of a plane shot down in Piazza delle Paure in



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Viareggio. Meanwhile, the Biancalana family moved from the house in which they lived, belonged to the tragic actor Ermete Zacconi, near the Canal Burlamacca, to a council house in the Dock, where the sculptor created his first studio in the basement of the building in 1960. His second studio was housed in a room, always in the area of the dock, which still exists today. These were the years in which he refused many job offers received from abroad and from Montecassino (where he was called for the restoration of wooden works damaged by the bombs of the Second World War). He decided not to accept those assignments, for his attachment to Viareggio and to his family. Even the visit in his study of the American director John Huston in 1967, during the filming of his movie *The Agony and the Ecstasy* based on the life of Michelangelo, did not made him change his mind. The activity of Inaco continued until his death, which took place in Viareggio on April the 14th 1991.



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1. Inaco Biancalana in his studio
2. The artist's studio in Via E. Janco in Viareggio
3. Inaco Biancalana with his wife and his daughter at the opening of the Grazzini pastry shop (1966)
4. Interior of the Grazzini pastry shop in 1966
5. *Chariots race*
6. *Muzio Scaevola*
7. *Roman legionary*
8. I. Biancalana, *Calafati e segantini* (1960), bas-relief, Viareggio GAMC



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THE ANCIENT ROME OF INACO BIANCALANA

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Photographic references
Archivio fotografico GAMC, Viareggio
Archivio fotografico Biancalana, Viareggio
Archivio fotografico Grazzini, Viareggio

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Opening times

From Tuesday to Saturday: 8.30 am-7.30 pm

Sundays in June, July and August: 8.30 am-1.30 pm

For information contact the museums:

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... a Self-taught in sculpture ...
(Giulia Viani)



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Several times the artistic production of Inaco Biancalana has been linked with that of fellow countryman Lorenzo Viani, which was thirty years older. Even though the two never had a real teacher-pupil relationship, Lorenzo Viani with his drawings and paintings based on the issues of often tragic everyday life, resolved with expressionist forms and caricatures, did influence the young Inaco. Not surprisingly, the wife of Lorenzo, Giulia, took him under his protection. In a letter, she describes him as a clever "self-taught in sculpture for the fierce passion he has for art". Viani and Biancalana, used in fact the same 'grammar' in art. Their style shared a similar figurative root that they used to describe the ordinary characters they met every day on the street,



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often portrayed in irregular poses and with mocking glances. However Inaco has always denied this recourse to the style of Viani, if anything its realism, as he used to say, came directly from the works of Giotto, Nicola and Giovanni Pisano and Michelangelo. The character of the Tuscan sculptural tradition is well expressed in his large



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graphic production and especially in the sculptures and wood reliefs, and in the seven panels presented here inspired by characters from ancient Rome, made between 1965 and 1966 to decorate a new pastry shop in a district of Varignano in Viareggio. The work was commissioned by the shop owner Graziano Grazzini, a passionate about Roman history. At first, Biancalana refused to carry out the series because the subject requested didn't appeal to him. His figurative repertoire was based mainly on the characters related to the life on the



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4b

sea. But he changed his mind when Grazzini reminded him of having helped, at the age of ten, along with a friend, the father of his wife Livia, who was lying on the road after a hangover. The two children were received and thanked by a young Inaco in his studio where he was working on a statue. His work and style attracted the attention of Graziano. This memory was so clear in the mind of Grazzini, that many years later, in 1965 he thought about him for the decoration of his pastry store. As stated in the press of the time, "the rebel, but also meek, Inaco was persuaded to return to the days of Nero with a series of sculptures that have been admired and praised": so, next to the Roman emperor, caught while singing and playing the lyre, from the artist's chisel came out a legionnaire, a senator, the legendary Muzio Scaevola, a matron, a gladiator's fight and a chariots race.



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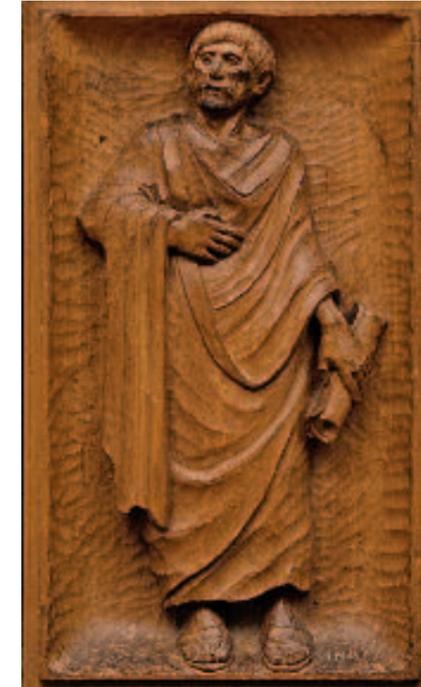
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1. Roman Matron
2. I. Biancalana, *Motherhood*, sculpture, Viareggio GAMC
3. I. Biancalana, *Motherhood*, charcoal drawing
- 4a. *Gladiators fight*
- 4b. Bas-relief with funerary banquet scene (1st century AD)
- 5a. *Nero playing the lyre*
- 5b. Fragment of Roman stele with inscription (1st century AD)
- 6a. Sarcophagus fragment (3rd century AD)
- 6b. Roman senator



6a



6b

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