

LAMBERT SUSTRIS



Sustris, detail of the frieze in the Ancient Figures Room

Lambert Sustris was born in Amsterdam (1510-15) and died in Padua around 1584. He may have been trained in the workshop of Jan van Scorel (1495-1562) before reaching Venice in the early 1530s. Shortly thereafter, he made his way down to Rome to study the antiquities and the works of Raphael, and it is likely that, on making his way back to Venice, he stopped off in Florence and Mantua - the latter being the city where Giulio Romano was working as a painter and architect. Having returned to engage once more with the sense of colour and light of the Venetian painters (Titian, above all), he made his name as a key figure in the renewal of painting in Venice. In the city, Sustris was a member of the cultural circles that were interested in “on-trend” painting, in synch with intellectuals such as Pietro Aretino, Francesco Marcolini, Sperone Speroni and Marco Mantova Benavides. The artist’s success in Venice was the reason for his being summoned to paint in Padua, where he worked from 1541 to 1548. His most important commission was undoubtedly the fresco decoration of the Villa dei Vescovi (1542-43).



DID YOU KNOW

Sustris arrived in Padua in around 1541, and soon made a name for himself as an original exponent of the Raphaelesque current. He was highly esteemed by the cultured Paduan patrons who were involved in those years in large-scale construction and art projects. He also participated in the creation of the cycle depicting kings and Roman emperors in the Room of the Giants at the Palazzo del Capitaniato, and he frescoed the central hall of Alvise Cornaro’s Odeon. Together with the Paduan painter Gualtiero Dell’Arzere, he carried out a plethora of decorative projects at palazzos in the city and at country villas, and received commissions for altarpieces and frescoes in churches and oratories in Padua.



Sustris, Ancient Figures Room



Giulio Romano, Mantua, Palazzo Te, Room of the Emperors

When the Bishop of Padua, Francesco Pisani, asked Giulio Romano for advice on the decoration of the villa (“so that the design shall be pleasing”), Giulio knew that in the Veneto region Sustris was one of the few painters with a suitably deep understanding of painting both ancient and modern. Among Raphael’s pupils in Rome, his reference points were Giovanni da Udine, Polidoro da Caravaggio, Perino del Vaga and Giulio Romano himself. He then enhanced his skills yet further thanks to his relationship with the Mannerist painters Francesco Salviati, Giuseppe Porta and Giorgio Vasari, who had come to the Veneto from central Italy.

The Mantuan frescoes by Giulio Romano are the direct precedents of certain solutions adopted by Lambert Sustris in the decoration of the Villa dei Vescovi, such as the imbuing of the walls with architectural dynamism through *trompe l’oeil* apertures on seascapes and rural landscapes, faux niches with statues, caryatids, pergolas and festoons with putti.

Although not documented, it is very probable that the Flemish master travelled to Mantua and would have seen the frescoes at Palazzo Te.



Sustris, Room of the Pisani Lions



Giulio Romano, Mantua, Palazzo Te, Room of the Horses



Sustris, Ancient Figures Room



Domenico Campagnola, Landscape with ruins, private collection

In the landscapes of the Villa dei Vescovi, all of the artist’s originality is on show, merging Roman evocations, through the presence of ruins, with the Nordic tradition of bird’s eye views and, at the same time, with the rural, bucolic settings of the landscapes of **Titian** (1488/90-1576) and of the Venetian **Domenico Campagnola** - artists from whom he also acquired his sense of colour and light. In this way, Sustris garnered a reputation as an artist on the cutting edge of Venetian figurative culture.