

DELLA ROBBIA THEIR WORK IN FLORENCE



NO ARTIST of the Renaissance has suffered more severely from lack of discriminating judgment than Luca della Robbia. While every sightseer has now some idea at least of the main characteristics of his great contemporaries, the work of Luca, one of the most individual and uncompromising of sculptors, is known so little that his name is used more or less as a generic term for every enameled terra-cotta of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Not only are the works of Andrea constantly ascribed to him, but many of the most paltry productions of the later school. In some of the chief museums of Europe, nearly every work in glazed earthenware, or even painted stucco, bears his name, no matter how poor the modeling nor how coarse and theatrical the treatment.

It is perhaps natural that confusion should exist between work in many points so similar as the glazed terra-cottas of Luca and Andrea, but it is strange indeed to find productions so different in aim and quality as those of Giovanni and the atelier classed under a name so great—the name of a sculptor of the first rank, hardly inferior to Donatello himself for intellect, imagination, and creative power.

Luca is known to the public chiefly as the inventor, or to speak more correctly, the adaptor to sculpture of the process which bears his name, too little known as the sculptor in marble and bronze. Yet it is in marble and bronze that he has put forth his greatest power. Were his genius judged by the high standard of the Cantoria, the Bronze Doors and the Campanile Reliefs, the attribution to him of any trivially conceived or poorly executed work would be impossible. In appreciating the stately strength and classic simplicity, the splendid composition and workmanship of these noble sculptures, we cannot but feel regret that he should ever have worked in the slighter material of glazed terra-cotta. For, charming and attractive as is the art, its disadvantage, from the sculpturesque point of view, cannot be denied.—From "Luca and Andrea Della Robbia" by Maud Cruttwell.

