



# ITINERARIO LIBERTY



## The Cassa di Risparmio of Pistoia Building

The head office of the Cassa di Risparmio of Pistoia is a building situated in the medieval heart of Pistoia, a few steps from the Cathedral square.

In 1897 the Cassa di Risparmio of Pistoia, one of the most antique banks in Tuscany, founded in 1831, proclaimed a national competition for the construction of new, prestigious city premises. The project of the architect Azzolini, which corresponded to what was required, conformed to the taste of the period, and was inspired by the Florentine architectural forms of the 15th-century, was the winner. Despite the evident fidelity to the model of reference, some novelties were introduced in the external decorative elements of the building, the intent of which was certainly an attempt to refine the structure. Between the windows on the ground floor and those of the first floor there is a beautiful polychromatic frieze of inspiration from Robbia, realized in enameled and glazed earthenware, made up of medallions which bear the portraits of some famous Italian and foreign economists, alternated with the coats of arms of the Municipalities of the province of Pistoia. On the second floor, there was a series of frescos, now lost, which exalted, in an allegorical key, the work of man. In the corner to the left of whoever looks at the building, Charity and Providence were symbolically portrayed, and in the right one Work and Prosperity.

After passing the front door, one reaches a porticoed atrium in 15th-century style, with round arches supported by pillars in plain stone. On the right as one enters, there is a stairway which leads to the upper floor, the walls and the vault of which reveal the frescos of Galileo Chini in all their splendor. Other interventions which Galileo Chini made are the decorations, with the fresco technique, of some vestibules and of the main rooms of the second floor, as in the Meeting Room. Observing the decorative wealth it is possible to understand how, at that time, the so-called major arts (painting, sculpture and architecture) were still reciprocally integrated with the minor arts, that is with the manufacturing which we define as artisan, the patient work of skilled stonecutters, engravers and inlayers the heirs of the antique Tuscan workshops.

The frescos of the Cassa di Risparmio building represented for Galileo Chini his first important and demanding commission. Over a very vast surface he composed a continual development, sinuous and elegant, of figures and ornamental motifs, with intricate scenes of raceme, plumage of peacocks and festoons of laurel held up by puttos, which follow and accompany the refined architectonic scores in simple stone of the various rooms.

We can note that in this pictorial cycle Galileo Chini surpasses the neo-Renaissance taste and style, to draw nearer to the methods and typical forms of the Art Nouveau. The colours which Galileo Chini uses are pure and bright. The vivid, iridescent tones of the whites and reds and the ultramarine blue reach their maximum exaltation in the reciprocal comparison with the golden leaf. Such aesthetic solutions, quite innovative if we think of them applied the fresco, were typical of Galileo Chini, thanks to his renowned activity as a Liberty ceramist.