

IL RITRATTO VENEZIANO DELL'OTTOCENTO

VENETIAN PORTRAIT-PAINTING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Venice, Ca' Pesaro - Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna

21 October 2023 ó 1 April 2024

Curated by Elisabetta Barisoni and Roberto De Feo

Under the patronage of Regione Veneto

In collaboration with Gallerie dell'Accademia

Press Release

It was a century of major historical upheavals and great painting, of profound social, political and economic transformations. A century peopled by liberals and patriots, revolutionaries and reactionaries, nobles and bourgeois, intellectuals and artists who were Romantic, Neoclassical, Realist and Verist and who collectively led the way to the avant-garde movements. A century that saw the birth of public art galleries, civic museums, and the Venice Biennale. And now a century to be rediscovered in the faces and works of its protagonists in this exhibition, *Venetian Portrait-painting of the Nineteenth Century*, at **Ca' Pesaro - Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna** from 21 October 2023 to 1 April 2024, curated by Elisabetta Barisoni and Roberto De Feo.

The exhibition seeks to recount the **first century of the contemporary age** which in Venice opened with the fall of the Serenissima and spread throughout the country with the Restoration, passing through the uprisings of 1848, the Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy. But it is also, and above all, a project that ties in closely and precisely to the intuition and the resulting great exhibition that **Nino Barbantini, first Director of the Galleria di Ca' Pesaro**, organised exactly one hundred years ago, in 1923, with the same theme and with the same title: *Venetian Portrait-painting of the Nineteenth Century*. **It was one of the first retrospectives dedicated to this century**, a blockbuster exhibition for the time, crowned by great success with the public, press and critics. It was realised with the most up-to-date museographic criteria and with an exceptional number of works and loans from all over the Triveneto region: **241 works by 50 artists**, painters, sculptors, miniaturists, who worked from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the penultimate decade of the century, opening with **Teodoro Matteini** and closing with **Giacomo Favretto**.

Visitors had the opportunity to examine famous artists such as **Hayez, Molmenti, Grigoletti, Schiavoni, Lipparini**; artists discovered and rediscovered, who had lived and trained in Venice, leaving precious testimonies of the society, the spirit of the age, its protagonists and its great upheavals: **a heritage of images of families, intellectuals, artists, patriots, women, some of whom themselves artists**. People who animated the territory from Venice, a central melting pot, and spread to Padua, Vicenza, Bassano del Grappa, Pordenone, Trieste, Trento, Treviso and Belluno. These are the *eternal faces of the longest century of modernity* and, last but not least, the first example ó confirmed to this day ó of the artistic greatness of a forgotten century, in favour of the mythologising of the previous one. In the words of Barbantini himself: *to bring a little light to an unjustly obscure period in the artistic history of our city*.

All this comes to life again today thanks to meticulous and lengthy research work conducted by the curators to reconstruct the layout and catalogue of the historic exhibition: this enormous critical effort over two years has led to the **tracing of no less than 166 works by 52 artists from the original**

exhibition, now preserved in museums and collections throughout Italy. Alongside these are the masterpieces that have remained in Venice, drawn from the collections of Ca' Pesaro, the Museo Correr, and the Gallerie dell'Accademia, together with numerous private collections. The reconstruction that has made it possible to develop significant new contributions concerning Barbantini's project, including **re-attributions** ó with **11 new recognised authors** ó and **updated technical files** ó **279 for 60 artists** ó thanks to the work of a group of scholars, conservators and researchers from all over the territory.

In the **four sections into which it is divided**, the exhibition thus retraces *The birth of a century*, which starts with the Congress of Vienna (1815) and arrives after long ordeals at the unification of the country; significant monographic in-depth studies regarding *The great protagonists*, followed by *Life and society in the nineteenth century*, a mix of aristocracy and bourgeoisie, city and country; finally, *The evolution of the portrait towards modernity*, in which the pictorial matter is disassembled and develops new light, arriving at the turn of the twentieth century.

*"The 1923 exhibition,ö remind the curators of the current show, **Elisabetta Barisoni and Roberto De Feo**, öwas a great success with the public and stimulated a lively response from the press. Even today, it is still considered an event of capital importance for the rediscovery of Venetian art of an entire century, for the initiation of greater awareness of its protagonists and the promotion of many of the masterpieces that were exhibited there. The exhibition also inaugurated a new course for Ca' Pesaro and Barbantini's own work, which during the 1920s was directed towards the planning of significant monographic exhibitions on periods or individual protagonists of Italian art. Venetian portrait-painting of the nineteenth century also helps define a history of exhibitions and constitutes a valid and early museographic example of an exhibition dedicated to a theme or to a precise period of time. The present show is conceived as a philological review of an exhibition that made history and at the same time pays tribute to its brilliant curator, whose art-historical lesson lingers in the collections and whose voice resounds in the rooms of Ca' Pesaro. The re-presentation in the same venue of so many masterpieces by the most representative Venetian artists of the nineteenth century, shown in reproduction where lost, re-examined when already known, will also make it possible to visualise the traits of the Venetian protagonists of an entire century, chosen in 1923 by Barbantini out of instinct and thanks to his pioneering knowledge at the time. A century later, these works are still capable of fascinating and astonishing the public of Ca' Pesaro.ö*

The list compiled by Barbantini, organised in alphabetical order, not only contained essential biographical information about the artists, but also the **names of their owners at the time**. This information was the starting point for the detailed **research and identification** of the works one hundred years after their first exhibition at Ca' Pesaro. Thanks in part to the success of the exhibition, many of the paintings found their way into public collections, while others remained with heirs or entered private collections. While a small number have been definitively lost, other works are waiting to be found as their whereabouts are unknown to this day. About ten works were donated to Ca' Pesaro after the 1923 exhibition, and the institution thus went from **being a gallery to a museum**, taking in the first nucleus of nineteenth-century artists and enriching its collection, with nineteenth-century portraits finding a place alongside the work of international artists, acquired by the Venice City from the very first Biennale editions, and early 20th-century Capesariniø artists such as Arturo Martini, Felice Casorati and Gino Rossi.

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