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Art and Colonialism: the “Overseas Lands” in the History of Italian Painting (1934-1940)

When did Fascism recognize the propaganda potential of art in the construction of colonial imagery? What were the strategies through which art was put at the service of Mussolini's expansionist policy? The article will try to answer these questions, analyzing the instrumental use of Italian art history in the two major colonial exhibitions held in Naples in 1934-1935 and 1940, where for the first time specific sections dedicated to Old Masters were organized. In this phase, we can see the progressive development of the propaganda strategy, which gradually antedated the evidence of Italian expansion beyond its peninsula in a manipulative manner, leading to the “invention of tradition”. Old Masters' artworks were thus seen as proof of Italy's longstanding vocation for expansion into “Overseas Lands”.

Paradoxically, however, the more the role of art grew within these exhibitions, permeating the general set up, the less important became the relief of individual works of art. These were reduced to mere tesserae of a larger mosaic, whose meaning arose from its whole.

Foreword

On the four facades of the Palace of Italian Civilization in the EUR district stands the famous inscription: «Un popolo di poeti di artisti di eroi/ di santi di pensatori di scienziati/ di navigatori di trasmigratori», taken from Mussolini's speech on October 2, 1935, in which he announced the start of the war in Ethiopia. «Coll' Etiopia, abbiamo pazientato quaranta anni! Ora basta!»¹ proclaimed the Duce amid the clamoring crowd, as he evoked the defeat of Adua, which took place in 1896 and had remained unavenged. The aggression began the following day, inaugurating the final and bloodiest phase of Italian colonialism.

In reading this inscription mentioned before, we are struck by two features: first of all, the claim – above anything else – of Italian artistic genius; secondly, due to their position within the long list, at the beginning and at the end, the reader's memory captures and considers the association between artistic vocation and transmigration.

This precise connection is the subject of the present paper, which aims to analyze the instrumental use of Italian art history in the two major exhibitions held in Naples in 1934-1935 and 1940. In this phase, we can see the progressive development of the propaganda strategy, which gradually antedated the evidence of Italian expansion beyond its peninsula in a manipulative manner, leading to the “invention of tradition”. Obviously, this was closely related to political events. We know that, from the mid-1930s onwards, the regime's interference in

the cultural and artistic fields became increasingly evident: aggressive politics in Africa – which culminated with the Ethiopian war and the proclamation of the Empire in May 9, 1936 – gradual alignment with Nazism, and finally the outbreak of the second World War determined the need for totalitarian control of every area of the nation's life. No wonder if in the passage from one exhibition to the other, the re-reading and exploitation of Old Masters for imperialistic purposes became more extensive and brazen.

However, as we shall see, different needs and registers coexist in the press and catalogue. On the one hand, long-standing Italian colonial history – also attested by the paintings – is praised, while on the other, attempts are made to reconstruct an objective and scientifically founded context of reference. The consequences of these efforts reveal the incompatibility between the occasion (two clearly propagandized exhibitions) and the intentions of the art historians involved. With the addition of specific commercial objectives of unclear nature, the final result mixes paintings of public property and indisputable authorship with questionable works of private provenance, thus endangering both the persuasive force of the political message and the scientific effectiveness of the specialists' contributions.

Italian artists in the service of colonialism

The use of art for colonialist purposes is a phenomenon that found its natural field of experimentation in colonial exhibitions². Within them, however – at least in the early stages of the so-called Italian Scramble for Africa – the role played by artists was marginal. This is in contrast to what occurred in France, where a "Société coloniale des artistes français" was already active as early as 1907 and where since then the role of art at the service of expansionism appeared in a clear way; the aim of the Société was explicitly «l'expansion coloniale par l'Art, au profit de la France et de l'Art»³. In Italy it was only at the end of the 1920s that the need to question the goals of the novel genre of colonial art aroused, a sign of strong intervention by the regime at a time when the policy of expansion in Africa had assumed central importance in Mussolini's imperialist designs. This new interest gave rise to the first specialized rooms within exhibitions, which had not provided artistic sections explicitly dedicated to Africa for years.

Until then, the fluidity itself of the borders between exoticism and colonial art contributed to maintaining a certain ambiguity, as if it was unclear how to move forward, which direction to take, what to ask for and what to expect from artists. If we agree with Edward W. Said that orientalism has represented a «Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient» and that

at its root was the «idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all non-European peoples and cultures» we have to admit that between orientalism and colonial art there is no discontinuity, but rather evolution and transition⁴. With few exceptions, the artworks present in the spaces dedicated to the “Fine Arts” of the numerous national and international exhibitions between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries consist of a series of subjects evoking distant climes, in the wake of what is commonly referred to as “orientalism”: Odalisques, palm trees, slaves, harems, etc. The colonial sections were generally used for the display of commercial products and everyday artifacts. They did often include one or more villages inhabited by natives, but these were placed outside of the pavilion.

That being said, this does not mean that there was a lack of celebratory production, in particular dedicated to the representation of battles, such as that of Dogali, which carried on the thread of Risorgimento war painting⁵. What was acquired, along with the awareness or the aspiration to truly colonial art, was a methodical system: where previously the artists’ interest had been concentrated – or channeled – on certain subjects, with the Fascist politics of the image, everything of episodic nature became programmed, with little left to chance. Paradoxically, however, the more the role of art grew within the exhibitions, permeating the general set up, the less the relief of individual works of art. These were reduced to mere tesserae of a larger mosaic, whose meaning arose from its whole. The conquest of a recognized and autonomous space in the artistic representation of the Overseas seemed to go hand in hand with the clarification of the very concept of *colonial art*, as the set of artistic manifestations aimed at making their African domains near and dear to Italians.

Apart from a few previous minor attempts⁶, the First International Exhibition of Colonial Art in Rome in 1931 – organized by the Ente Autonomo Fiera di Tripoli – marked the explicit recognition and promotion of the role of artists in supporting colonialism. The choice of the nation’s capital as seat gave extraordinary importance to the initiative, which took place in a period of intense imperialist acceleration: in 1929, after an interim Ministry of Colonies (headed by Mussolini himself) that lasted about a year, a wartime figure, Emilio De Bono, was appointed to take his place. In 1932, he was commissioned by Mussolini to prepare a plan for the invasion of Ethiopia⁷.

The Roman exhibition was only one of the many events designed to serve as a backdrop and support for the Duce’s expansionist aims. It took place in partial overlap – and antagonism – with the great Exposition Internationale Coloniale in Paris, in which Italy participated. In essence, the Roman exhibition as a whole can be seen as a single, enormous competition with colonialism as its subject.

Never before had such an effort been univocally channeled towards the artistic representation of the colonies (including those of the Aegean). The Italian works selected by the admission jury amounted to around four hundred, one-third of those received. The re-launch of African subjects came after decades of bad information and episodes of regrettable defeats that – according to the organizers – had displeased Italians. The return to these subjects transpired with reference to «that imperial idea of expansionism that is the sacred legacy of Eternal Rome and to which the destinies of the Fascist Homeland are linked»⁸.

This is the age-old theme that Fascism has always presented. It was evident from the name itself as well as from the founding symbolism of the movement. It had gathered strength over the years and was easily bent to the circumstances of imperial designs⁹. The interesting point lies mainly in the role assigned to art, which becomes an ambassador of national destinies, a propagator – at home and abroad – of the image of Italian possessions:

We think that in order to reach the hearts and minds of people, there is no more rapidly convincing means than art. To beauty, however, and in whatever form expressed, to this invincible ambassador with whom there is no discussion, who wins only by showing herself, the Ente autonomo Fiera di Tripoli entrusts the honor and responsibility of propagating on a large scale the colonial idea¹⁰.

Past and present

Up to this point, we have referred to the contribution of contemporary artists who, for reasons of both political adherence and opportunism, sent their works to colonial exhibitions¹¹. However, we must also take into account the art of the past, which was called to play a part in the colonial cause in a variety of different ways, depending on the period and circumstance. Consider the events of 1911, on the occasion of the grand celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of unification, which provided for the organization of three parallel events in three different cities: an archaeological, artistic and ethnographic exhibition in Rome¹²; a portrait exhibition, accompanied by a floral and horticultural exhibition in Florence, while Turin was charged with representing the progress of industry and work, establishing its role as the industrial capital of Italy¹³. Indeed, the colonial initiatives were concentrated in Turin in a pavilion that housed the Exhibition of Italians Abroad, where considerable space was reserved for initiatives related to state colonialism:

The Colonial Exhibition of Turin 1911 could be considered as divided into three independent but closely-connected sections: an exhibition of colonial activities in the broadest sense, carried out with colonial studies of all kinds and with the preordained and well-ordered relief and graphic representations of the Colonial lands, presented by the Central Directorate of Colonial Affairs of

the Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It intended to give its exhibition a strictly and jealously Italian character; an exhibition organized and presented by the Government of Italian Somalia, with a small, aggregate exhibition of a private commercial company that had begun its activities in those territories (the Italian Society for Colonial Enterprises); a free exhibition of the Eritrean Colonies, largely subsidized and completed by the exhibitions of the institutions responsible for colonization¹⁴.

A large part of the exhibition was devoted to historical testimony, and a photographic review celebrated the spreading power of Italian culture abroad, especially in Europe, as explained in the catalogue:

the Historical-Artistic Exhibition of Italians Abroad makes up the final, agreeable surprise that the galleries in this section have in store for us. It is an original, highly attractive exhibition, which undoubtedly deserves to be preserved and completed when the exhibition is over. Faced with the poverty and the plagues of our emigration, of which relief is not always possible, this collection lifts the heart and spirit, showing all the nobility of the Italian genius, which has regally disseminated its works throughout Europe. The historical-artistic exhibition consists of photographs of Italian works of art abroad, and portraits of fellow countrymen made famous outside Italy. As one can see, the scale of the exhibition is vast, so it should be taken as but a sample of what could be done with more time and ease of research. Nevertheless, as it stands at present, it already offers a valuable resource for visitors, who are clearly pleased with its results¹⁵.

With the so-called “photographic paintings”, examples of Italian architecture, sculpture and painting were displayed that – by virtue of their refinement – had succeeded in making a distinctive mark on landscapes and cities. In fact, at one point, the organizers even claimed:

[...] artistic Paris could, without exaggerating, be said to be largely the creation of Italians. The first bridge of Notre Dame was executed by Fra’ Giocondo da Verona. The church of San Sulpicio (1733-1745) was made by the architect Servandoni. The gallery of Francis I at Versailles was painted by Rosso del Rosso. Furthermore, the endless paintings in the Louvre and the statues and tombs of the Kings of France in the Louvre itself and in the cathedral of St. Denis repeat to us at every moment, during the visit of Paris and its surroundings, the name of an Italian master¹⁶.

The great artworks of the past had embellished cities and foreign countries, and those of the present – schools, churches, stations, roads – were further improving life in the colonies.

In the years between the two world wars, the role of retrospectives – in the broadest sense of the term – became increasingly important: photographs played a decisive role, where in the historical sections they documented the richness of Roman remains and showed how deeply the styles and construction models of Rome or Venice had penetrated Eastern Europe and Africa. The paths paved by exhibitions at the beginning of the century continued onward, and progressively extended to non-European areas. Resources increased in the planning of archaeological exhibitions. Following the model of what had taken place in France

from 1906 onwards¹⁷, retrospectives dedicated to nineteenth-century painters –, who had contributed extensively to expanding familiarity of African territories, were also progressively enhanced¹⁸.

A further step was taken in the mid-1930s when even Old Masters were “enlisted” in the ranks of colonial artists: at the Second International Exhibition of Colonial Art in Naples in 1934, for the first time, a section was dedicated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The artistic hegemony that Italy had long enjoyed was thus invested with a precise colonialist value: beauty had to strengthen the idea of cultural and/or racial superiority that would justify imperialism.

The use of Old Masters for political-promotional purposes is not a new phenomenon. However, it exploded in the fourth decade: there were numerous exhibitions, in Italy and abroad, where the great Italian tradition was used for other intentions: from the exhibition in London in 1930, to Paris in 1935; from the Giotto exhibition in Florence in 1937, to the great Venetian exhibitions of the 1930s dedicated to Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese, up to the traveling exhibitions in the United States. Italian art thus became an ambassador for the regime, charged with exporting a positive and reassuring image of Italy¹⁹.

The efforts made by the regime in this direction, which included forcing recalcitrant superintendents and museum directors – concerned about the state of conservation of the works and the risks associated with travels – to loan out their works, reveals the centrality given to art in defining the distinctive features of the nation. This is one of the stereotypes that undoubtedly characterizes the Italian collective imagination even today, as one of the pillars of identity building. However, like all stereotypes, it suffers from a two-faced and trivializing nature. To quote Said, it is a trite locution of repertoire that ends up debasing what it exalts with words²⁰. Thus, in the exhibitions we currently examine, Old Master paintings were selected on an iconographic basis and forced to mean something other than themselves. Much in the same manner of the contemporary artworks, which in the grand Fascist colonial exhibitions became part of a whole that transcended them and from which they took meaning, the paintings of the past ended up illuminated by the refracted light of the expansive strength – not only metaphorical, but actual – of Italy, and assumed meaning and value (only) from this perspective.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as colonial?

The Second International Exhibition of Colonial Art took place in Naples between 1934 and 1935, shortly before the Ethiopian War. This time, Naples was

the chosen seat, a leading port for connections to Africa. In its obsession with planning, the regime left nothing to chance, meticulously organizing exhibitions and events from which it expected to bolster its image significantly. In a division of different areas of competence, Venice, as the seat of the Biennale, played the role of meeting point for international art; Rome, with the Quadriennale, promoted Italian painters and sculptors; Naples, by its position, since the African Society of Italy had been established here, and because it was the seat of the Oriental Institute, was entrusted with representing the history and destiny of the Overseas. Art was called upon to officiate the catharsis of state, transfiguring – through the kaleidoscope of thousands of images of Africa – the brutal reality of defeat, occupations, massacres, and what – shortly afterward – would be a hateful racial campaign, aimed at preventing crossbreeding and preserving racial purity. The artists, as usual, responded in droves, more than in Rome three years earlier. To encourage them to go to the colony, the Ente Autonomo della Fiera di Tripoli subsidized eight artists so they could paint African reality directly. Each was given a personal exhibition²¹. According to common practice – as mentioned – retrospective and contemporary exhibitions were held alongside, in compliance with the need to depict the link between past and present. Repeating with greater extent the experience of Rome 1931, the organizers ventured back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to show the early traces of colonial art in the works of certain, great artists, in particular from Veneto, including Paolo Veronese, Giovanni Mansueti, Titian, Vittore Carpaccio, Jacopo Bassano, Pietro, and Alessandro Longhi.

In the catalogue, the section of Old Masters was presented first and positioned in close connection with the nineteenth-century section:

In this section, the most significant artworks of 1400/1500 will be presented, when our glorious Maritime Republics were in relation with the East and when the sumptuous Sultans competed with one another to invite our artists to paint them and their families. However, the retrospective will also host a selected choice of works of the previous nineteenth century: Although those humble times, marked by such limited and uncertain politics, were not genuinely favorable to the expression of an expansionist idea, there was no lack of rare prescient artistic spirit with a genuine and sure colonial sense. Such as, for example, the great Michele Cammarano, whose pictorial strength has finally shone through today and whose work will justly be recognized as a shining exception of those times²².

In a schematic and simplifying reading, the evocation of the brilliant example of the Maritime Republics serves to contrast the political uncertainty of the post-unitary liberal state, which was unable to think on a large scale and unsuitable for expansionist designs worthy of its name. In the background – without being named – one can glimpse the defeat of Adua awaiting justice.

In the catalogue, the curator of the exhibition, Michele Biancale, illustrates his intention to inspire contemporary artists fumbling towards the path of colonial production through the example of the art of the past, whose superiority is bluntly affirmed. It is said that modern painters needed to visit a colony to produce something authentic and meaningful, because they «are not endowed with such fantasy, like the great Venetian fourteenth-century artists who were able to create with nothing but their power of fantasy, a Venetian Orient, or to imagine a colony they have not seen». The aim of the exhibition of the Old Masters is, therefore, «to show, with examples from the Italian fifteenth century, what the imagination of a great artist can do in evoking exotic motifs. Carpaccio, Veronese, Titian, Mansueti are called to demonstrate this assumption»²³. A binary scheme is set forth where contemporaries are asked for verisimilitude and concrete experience in the colonies, but the fantasy of an Overseas imagined solely by the Old Masters is exalted.

In the opening of the catalogue, Riccardo Filangeri di Candida describes the Great Hall (of the Barons) of the Aragonese Castle, dwelling on its history and decoration. It houses the “relics” of the Prince of Piedmont (sabers, daggers, cases, caskets received as gifts, all of different origins).

In the Sala dei Baroni two of the seven Avalos tapestries from the National Museum of Naples are exhibited, which narrate the battle of Pavia in 1525 between the troops of Francis I and those of Charles V, captained by Ferrante d’Avalos. They were donated to Emperor Charles V by craftsmen from Brussels wishing to celebrate his victory. The two tapestries chosen for this occasion are the IV (the Lansquenets invade the French camp), and the V (the cavalry of the Duke of Alençon retreats across a bridge of boats) and are presented in the catalogue by the archaeologist Amedeo Maiuri, superintendent of the Antiquities of Campania and professor of Greek and Roman Antiquities at the University of Naples.

Indeed, the Barons’ Hall houses the eighteen paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, all by Venetian artists, nine of which belonged to the painter Italoico Brass, a well-known and esteemed collector who had a rich collection of paintings in his Venetian residence at the Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia. Considered one of the discoverers of Alessandro Magnasco, Brass also owned numerous canvases by Bernardo Strozzi and Alessandro Longhi, as well as a significant group of fifteenth and sixteenth-century paintings, attributed to masters such as Mansueti, Tiziano, Tintoretto, Bassano²⁴.

Deemed the «crafty pioneer of overseas markets»²⁵, Brass engaged in intense mercantile activity, weaving profitable and sometimes dubious relationships with

antiquarians at the level of the Duveen brothers²⁶. Brass' presence in Naples in 1934 (and then in 1940) is not surprising since he lent works on occasion of all the most important exhibitions of the years between the two World Wars, e.g., the memorable exhibition of Palazzo Pitti in 1922, the Titian exhibition held in Venice in 1935 and the huge *De Cimabue à Tiepolo* at the Petit Palais of the same year. Such regularity undoubtedly demonstrates the important position Brass had gained, partly due to his excellent network of relationships.

The catalogue does not include a specific presentation of the works on display but merely provides a simple list with no indication of technique or measurement.

The location of the paintings, at the beginning of the itinerary and within one of the castle's most impressive rooms, meant that the press gave them significant importance; the paintings play the role not only of prologue but they also become the interpretive key to what follows. In an exhibition that did not include an archaeological section (as, for example, had occurred in the Italian pavillion at the Exposition Coloniale Internationale in Paris in 1931), the Venetian painting exhibition was called upon to assume the demanding role of the colonial "avant-garde". This explains the insistence with which reviewers linger on the historical significance of the paintings, mostly misrepresenting and mystifying it. Indeed, in the newspaper «Corriere della Sera», Alberto Consiglio concocts a whirling saga of kings and warlords, Christian heroes and Saracen enemies, Latin swords and Roman crosses:

The few admirable masterpieces of the Venetian Renaissance, which adorn the monumental and restored walls of the Sala dei Baroni, are a magnificent start to this vast exhibition. The new venue of this exhibition is not without comprehension and further symbols: the towers, free and proud, are reflected in the ancient royal decorum of the sea of Naples: it seems to show the rise of not only the shadows of those Italian kings who first felt the pride of an iron-clad, united State around the monarchy but also those of Ruggiero and Tancredi who made Byzantines and Saracens, on land and on the rough seas, feel the ineluctable force of the Roman cross and the Latin sword. Does it not seem now that this gathering seeks to foreshadow the resurrection of this part of Fascist Italy in its ancient role as a pier stretching towards Roman Africa? The walls that saw Petrarch and Boccaccio bow before the supreme head of the Guelph party, the "King of Sermon", which witnessed the tragic energy of King Ferrante, who was defending the unity of the Kingdom against traitors, are adorned with two tapestries by Bernardo von Orley; the famous drapes where the Flemish celebrate the worth of the greatest Italian leader, that Pescara who asked, under the walls of Pavia, the sword of Francis I. And all around, with a magnificence of colors and figures that only these walls can bear, there are the Fall of Constantinople, Palma the Younger, the Sultan of Titian, the Battle of Lepanto by Veronese, the Dispute of Santo Stefano by Vittore Carpaccio, the Archers by Castiglioni, the Moretto by Veronese, two scenes from the life of St. Mark in the East, the Doge Cicogna receiving a Persian delegation by Carletto Caliari, in short, all that great Venetian painting has had occasion to create that was related to the lands of Africa and the East. And these great Italian masters are, in fact, the fathers of colonial painting²⁷.

In the newspaper «Il Tevere» it is assumed that the exhibition, which is described through its most famous paintings, is the «retrospective section of colonial art». Instead, in the «Lavoro Fascista», there is an ironic comment about what is evidently felt as a strained interpretation:

Since this grand exhibition of colonialist artists includes *The Battle of Lepanto* del Veronese, where Ottoman troops are reduced to ants, nothing prevents us from considering as pioneers of figurative colonialism all those artists who dealt with the Palestinian topic of Epiphany, as amongst the three Magi there is a handsome Moor.

But the author then changes course:

Humor aside, there is no doubt that the customs and typologies of the Muslim East excited the imagination of Venetian painters, whether they embarked on a professional mission to Constantinople, like Gentile Bellini, to paint the portrait of Mohammed II, now in London, or whether the stories of their favorite saints, which took place in Asia Minor or Africa, allowed them to indulge in exotic color. And we can see it, in this cyclopean Sala dei Baroni, examining the triptych, dedicated to St. Mark, by the Bellini-esque Giovanni Mansueti and the quasi Giorgione-esque, the very musical *Dispute of St. Stephen*, a masterpiece by Carpaccio. Where does the memory and experience of reality end, and where do the poetic intuitions of fantasy begin?

Among the photos chosen to illustrate the article mentioned above – and various others – one of the highlights of the exhibition is the so-called *Sultan* of Titian, belonging to Brass himself. We have a description of the Brass collection in an enthusiastic article by the art historian Nicola Ivanoff, written a few years later. He indulges in describing the valuable paintings and their display, underlining the collector's attention to this aspect:

The presentation of a painting for him is the object of careful study and infinite expedients, and he was indeed one of the first to recognize the aesthetic importance of the environment composed around the painting. With peerless craft, he applies neutral or cleverly-toned curtains to the overall intonation or the salient detail of the painting²⁸.

It is precisely the position of the *Sultan* that brings us to understand the importance the owner attached to the work, ascribed to Titian by the first-class art historian Wilhelm Suida²⁹:

To fully judge the art of his display, one must enter the “sancta sanctorum” at the back of the hall. Here the works of the great sixteenth-century artists dearest to the collector are placed: Tintoretto, Veronese and Titian of whom, among many others, he owns a Pietà, a self-portrait in old age [...] the famous head of St. John the Baptist, an interesting portrait of a French gentleman, a Venus, etc... On the right, curtains in thick folds falling from an oriental carved wooden arch slowly open, revealing an alcove upholstered in soft velvet of a pastel blue. From the large invis-

ible window, the light skillfully filters by grades, eventually animating the famous portrait of the Grand Sultan (recently exhibited at the exhibition in Naples) in the center. Cunning, voluptuous, and cruel, with an enigmatic gaze seen within the slits of his half-opened eyes, his feminine hands softly crossed over his silky clothes, it is not clear whether he is witnessing with visible enjoyment an orgy or a torturing. In any case, he fascinates in the superb majesty of his solitude that focuses all attention on him³⁰.

The passage is of great interest to us, as a testimony of second-degree orientalism, which invests both the setting chosen by the collector and the *ekphrasis* of the art historian, imbued with the most consolidated and trivial of stereotypes: as Said observed, the representation of the East tends toward a constant iteration of the same modules, configured as a «repeatedly produced copy of itself» that builds a disturbing and unreal Orient in its static nature³¹. Thus, the device employed by Brass, recourse to the *cliché* of the ogival arch that leads into an alcove covered in velvet, is indispensable; the visitor's gaze is strongly conditioned, even before seeing the portrait: awaiting him is a staging of the Orient, played then by one of its key characters, the Sultan, who perfectly embodies, in Ivanoff's description, the Oriental "type", fierce, lazy, lascivious, and cruel all at the same time.

The fascinating character – an object of both attraction and repulsion – which became the symbol of this "colonialist" retrospective, did not however, arouse unconditional praise. There were those who, like Ermindo Campana who raised some objections in «Emporium»:

Let us cross, therefore, the Triumphal Arch of Laurana and go to the Sala dei Baroni where we find the collected works of Carpaccio (the *Dispute of St. Stephen*), Veronese (*The Artist with the Moorish*), Jacopo Palma the Younger (*The Crusaders at the Conquest of Constantinople*), Giovanni Mansueti (*Episodes from the Life of St. Mark*), Bassano, Pellegrini, Alessandro and Pietro Longhi. There is also a Titian, or rather two Titians, from a private collection. But both of these leave us all quite puzzled. We will say frankly that, in exhibitions like this one, we would prefer to see only works of undisputed authenticity³².

And the author of the article was entirely right, as in both cases they were not authentic works; and, in all truth, not even sixteenth-century paintings: even the *Sultan* was later placed in the eighteenth century³³, while the weak *Portrait of a Turkish Ambassador* was soon downgraded – as we shall see – to «unknown painter of the seventeenth century».

The Triumph of the Maritime Republics

The Triennale d'Oltremare has sought to remind Italians and to claim before the world the radiant contribution of civilization that this marvelous Latin race of ours has given to all

peoples overseas, in all times, from the Urbe dei Cesari to the Roma del Littorio. With the sanctity of work, with the ingenious contribution of technique, culture, art, and science, the Triennale wished to raise toward the heavens, on the Phlegraean Plain, sacred to pagan myths and imperial idleness, in imposing plastic representations, an idea and a faith: the idea of the millenary power of Italian lineage; the sure faith that such power, under the guidance of the Duce, will ever adapt to the vigorous efforts, the multiple abilities, the expansionist right of the Italian people³⁴.

It is precisely the claim of the “expansionist right” of Italy upon which the grandiose Triennale d’Oltremare of 1940 hinges. Its unrestrained ambitions soon clashed with the emergency of the war, which forced the organizers to close it only a month after its inauguration on May 9th³⁵.

Inside the exhibition, a section dedicated to Old Masters was re-introduced. In this case, it expanded the number of paintings as well as their areas of origin. The design was evident: not only artists from Venice but also those from all over Italy were called to demonstrate the expansionist vocation of our artistic tradition. From this point of view, the re-enactment of the maritime republics – Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa and Venice – «whose mercantile genius was able to unify the East with the West, reshaping a unitary Mediterranean civilization under Christ’s cross» assumed great importance. The fact that the peninsula was divided into multiple political entities and variously subjugated to foreign powers was obviously overlooked, and the feats and victories – first and foremost that of Lepanto – were celebrated as “national” glories.

The section “Ancient Rome on the sea” opened the historical part of the exhibition and was followed by the chapter of the Maritime Republics. Their merits acquired in the fight against the Muslims, culminating in the battle of Lepanto (an «authentic Italian glory»), were also celebrated thanks to the complete reconstruction of Marco Querini’s galley. This was referred to as «ideological emblem of the Maritime Republics: because it is thank to these Italian ships that we owe the rapprochement – following the medieval and Muslim night – of the East with the West, and thus the beginning of a unified Mediterranean civilization»³⁶.

The fourteen rooms dedicated to maritime history were ordered by Oscar Bacichi and set up by the Neapolitan engineer and architect Marcello Canino, who designed the entire complex. The 79 Old Master paintings (15 of which came from the Brass collection) were also displayed in this setting, together or alternately with diplomatic documents, commercial concessions, itineraries, treaties, dispatches, casts of illustrious figures and ancient ships, reproductions of *fondachi* (storehouses), engravings, and busts. It was not, therefore, an art exhibition in the strictest sense of the word, but rather a historical review where the paintings were used to reflect «the cultural, religious, political, naval, military

and commercial relations that always brought the East closer to Italy»³⁷.

In the official guide, the presentation of the paintings is rather hasty and in some ways reductive³⁸: in a small page entitled *The East in Italian Art*, the artists from Veneto receive particular mention, «the first group of European painters who, with a modern spirit, suggestively evoked environments and figures from the life of the Levant, were particularly fond of those costumes and lyrically breathed life into the picturesque and imaginative atmosphere». For further information, they refer to «the special catalogue of Art Exhibitions»³⁹.

On «Le Arti», Michele Biancale – the curator of the previous edition – claimed the role of forerunner of the 1934 exhibition, of which this was an extension, mentioning in detail the paintings already exhibited in Castelnuovo:

For the artistic retrospectives, this exhibition followed in step the previous one in Castelnuovo, which has already been mentioned, with some new contributions due to the hundredfold importance of the Triennale d'Oltremare, which allowed more research in the ancient and recent field. The rich catalogue compiled by Sergio Ortolani, Bruno Molajoli, and Felice De Filippis, respectively for Oriental and Italian Art, for the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century and for the nineteenth century, bears witness to this greater wealth of artists and works. Notable are the Carpaccio, the beautiful ones from the Gentile school, the Cima da Conegliano, the Veronese. But there are also portraits of Gentile Bellini, or attributed to him, there is the Mansueti, which was exhibited at the other exhibition, there is the beautiful Carpaccio fragment of a *Crucifixion* of the R. Uffizi Gallery, and the *Prophets* of the Civic Museum of Koper, the *Maga Circe* of Dosso Dossi. And we have works by Bronzino, such as *Andrea Doria*, *Titian Caterina Cornaro*, and the *Sultan* of the Brass collection who was also in Castelnuovo, and four portraits by Tintoretto and the *Apotheosis of the Battle of Lepanto*, which also appeared in Castelnuovo as a unique work by Veronese. The artistic documentation of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries with Strozzi, Giordano, Volterrano, Mazzoni, Castiglioni, Mola, De Lione, Falcone, Bonito and Longhi is very developed⁴⁰.

In the special issue of «*Illustrazione Italiana*» dedicated to the event, Luigi De Lillo summarized the meaning of the exhibition as proof of the «beaming of Italian Art to the most distant lands, from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century»⁴¹. And he continued with patriotic fervor:

A veritable gallery of paintings that, in addition to the unsurpassed artistic value of individual works, recalls and comments upon the divine language of Art. They are the glorious pages that Italic value enscribed indelibly within the golden books of human civilization. Next to the images of the Doges and Captains of the Venetian Republic, there are portraits of condottieri and warriors, who successfully planted the flags of the homeland to the broadest borders⁴².

Among the numerous paintings chosen to accompany the article were the *Battle of Lepanto* by Veronese, the *Portrait of the Bay of Tunis* by Volterrano, *The Evangelist St. Mark Healing Aniano* by Mansueti, the *Portrait of Agostino Barbarigo*

by Tintoretto, the *Andrea Doria* by Bronzino, the *Doge Mocenigo* by Gentile Bellini, the *Turkish Embassy* by Giuseppe Bonito, the Florentine tapestry of Florentine manufacture representing *America* and finally what was called Titian's *Portrait of a Turkish Ambassador*. This is the above-mentioned painting from the Brass collection exhibited in 1934, but in the 1940 catalogue, it is entitled differently (*Portrait of a Pasha*) and above all – as we have mentioned – prudently attributed to an «Unknown painter of the seventeenth century». Holding firm to its previous attribution, De Lillo thus perpetuates – in a magazine with extensive circulation – the false attribution to Titian. It is not known whether this is due to negligence or an intentional desire to favor the collector. What is more important to point out is the dissonance between this kind of politically engaged divulgation and the nature – scientific and substantially alien to the compromises of propaganda – of the catalogue edited by Sergio Ortolani, Bruno Molajoli and Felice De Filippis. In it, Ortolani wrote the introductory essay dedicated to *L'Oriente e l'arte italiana* (*The East and Italian art*), Molajoli prepared the catalogue of the paintings between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and De Filippis the catalogue of the nineteenth-century paintings. All three authors were art historians and played an institutional role: Ortolani was appointed director of the Pinacoteca di Napoli in 1930⁴³; Molajoli was superintendent of the Galleries of Campania (from July 16, 1939); De Filippis, who in the 1950s became director of the Royal Palace of Naples, was a young superintendent officer at the time.

In his introduction – strongly marked by his debt to the aesthetics of Benedetto Croce – Ortolani in fact proposed an interpretation that was unrelated to nationalist intentions, and presented the encounter among different figurative traditions (Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine) as a network of relationships that produced positive developments. In opposition to the Romanist' theses on the rise in that period, which sought to detach the origins of Italian art from Byzantine culture⁴⁴, Ortolani highlighted how medieval culture, in its universalism, had been marked by a complex mixture of oriental and Roman elements. He called for an end to the misplaced dilemma of “East or Rome” and compared the role of Byzantine art to that of the Latin language in literature:

As it was for language, Latin literature was the mother tongue of modern neo-Latin vernaculars and medieval writing, the same task was performed by Byzantine art, or more comprehensively by the Greek-Eastern artistic culture, in raising European figurative schools. And not only did it preserve and develop the very universalism of the Hellenistic “koinè” in the Western Middle Ages, the common foundation of them, it represented the bedrock from which Muslim art and culture, heirs of Asian Hellenism, also reconverged in part around the thirteenth century – both directly and through the mediation of Sicily and Moorish Spain⁴⁵.

As for the following centuries, he stressed the «profound humanistic influence that Byzantine art also had on our Renaissance»⁴⁶. He wished to distinguish the “orientalism” of the art of the past centuries from the modern one, and traced a significant history through the examples of specific artists as Gentile Bellini, Carpaccio «poet of sailors, of adventurous merchants, of explorers»⁴⁷, Cima, Tintoretto, Titian, Veronese, Bronzino, Maffei, Strozzi, Mola, and Tiepolo. His story unfolded through alternative examples to the paintings on display, with a few exceptions, such as *Circe di Dosso* (which was present in the exhibition): in it, he identified the budding idea of the East that was destined to mark Western sensibility:

And with that, all the filters and deceptions are reborn from the octaves of poems, and the mortal, loving mystery, that loss of self, the renouncement of the heroic, that East, the voluptuous marasmus, began to have meaning for western spirits, as once the beautiful Phlegraean Fields of ours appeared to the Hellenic descendants of Ulysses. The East that from dream descended to reality⁴⁸.

One has the impression that this lyrical transfiguration was far more welcome to Ortolani than the nineteenth-century declination of orientalism. To the point that speaking of Biseo and Cammarano, he wrote that «*they gave in to the official commitment, which could hardly save the most scrupulous and happy of preparatory studies*»⁴⁹. He made no mention of the various battles of Dogali, and was evident in announcing his preferences: «We will enjoy him better [Cammarano] when he is face to face with the barren and smoldering rocks, with the scorching, desert atmosphere, with the stains, stuck in the light of his mighty blacks»⁵⁰.

In short, even within a constricting frame, Ortolani managed to carve out a space of autonomy and build a discourse that is entirely different from the intentions and tones of the organizers of the exhibition.

It is the same path that Molajoli and his catalogue followed, commenting on the paintings with balance and competence, unmasking, at the same time, both the erroneous attributions and the forcing of content⁵¹.

The examples are numerous, starting with *Circe* already mentioned by Ortolani, interpreted in the complexity of its references and removed from the risk of trivialization in a pre-colonial key:

Here the presence of this dazzling and imperious sorceress, of this “sultanness dominatrix of the Elements” does not yearn for justification, to be protected from smiling irony, from the mediocre pretext of a coiled turban, even of the purest gold. Instead, she recalls the subtle and fascinating evocation of a whole world in poetic saturation that shines through in this masterpiece, behind the veil of its strange verses. And not even then, except for the iconography, would we dare to

decant the savory liquor of Dosso's work to isolate some specious precipitation of "orientalistic" component in its depths: that would be a naive and useless enterprise⁵².

There is no trace of overwriting propaganda in the descriptions of the paintings: Lepanto returns to being "Venetian victory" and not "Italic glory", while *condottieri* and saints are correctly inserted in their respective frames of history or legend, without emphasis or strained interpretation; the reader's attention is focused – strictly – on formal values. Some aphoristic judgments that set limits and merits of the different artists remain in mind. In the great *Stories of St. Mark*, Mansueti is defined as

A difficult, painstaking painter, dominated by the "horror vacui", maker of enormous and highly patient mechanical toys, which by chance do not work; willing to place his wooden and compacted figures everywhere, making them emerge from every which part, in a tingling oriental bazaar, within a very complicated set of packed and impossible architectures.

On the contrary, Carpaccio's reading is passionate, for example in the *St. Stephen's Disputation with the Elders* of the Pinacoteca di Brera:

In the sharp and limpid light that enhances the explicit modeling and glazed colors, the scene acquires, especially in the group of wise Orientals and in the delightful episodes in the background, a mobility that is typical of the anecdotal taste of this painter who, after Gentile Bellini, is the happiest and most varied narrator of life in his time⁵³.

Molajoli is opposed to the «sterile and pure intellectual sublimation» of the *Portrait of Andrea Doria* by Bronzino, and generally slightly inclined to Mannerism. He finds positive tones, commenting on the paintings by Strozzi, Mola or Giandomenico Tiepolo. It must be said, however, that, in general, he is reluctant to give in to enthusiasm, and in the case of the paintings owned by Brass, heavily restrictive: thus, the *Portrait of Caterina Cornaro* by Gentile Bellini is presented as a «faithful repetition» of the one in the Liechtenstein Gallery in Vienna; the *Grand Sultan* is ambiguously said to be «attributed to Titian by Suida»; of the three canvases by Grechetto, only one attribution is accepted; the aforementioned *Portrait of a Pasha*, given to the «Unknown Painter of the seventeenth century», does not merit a line of comment. Of the two portraits of a Turkish merchant by Pier Francesco Mola, one is considered «torpid and inarticulate», while in the second, «one can catch the accent of Mola, reduced to the surface at the service of an amusing illustrationism»⁵⁴. Some paintings, such as the *Portrait of Mustafâ Pascià* attributed to Pompeo Batoni, or the two *Portraits of Issuf Pascià* attributed to F. Toniolo are only mentioned, without the photos being published. Favorable opinions on the attributions and formal qualities are expressed only for the

Favorita by G.A. Pellegrini and the *Portrait of a Man in Oriental Costume* by Pietro Longhi. It is a rather dismal outcome for one of the best-known collections in Venice whose works were exhibited in most major official exhibitions.

From the contributions of Ortolani and Molajoli, in short, a parallel narrative emerges. It is a counterpoint to the official magniloquence, crossing swords with the accepted practice – widely established in the 1930s – that exploited the history of art, bending it to racial propaganda purposes⁵⁵. We are at the very heart of the complex problem of the relationship between intellectuals and Fascism: can a critique of the system made within a framework such as that of the Overseas Exhibition have efficacy, scope, and meaning? One could say, as Said did, that specialization and imprisonment within one's competence is the first conditioning of power; it forces the intellectual into a narrow field of knowledge, condemning him in this way to inoffensiveness⁵⁶. And one wonders who – if not other intellectual specialists – were able to perceive the subtle criticism inherent in each of the pages of the catalogue we have analyzed so far. In counterpoint, and in a veiled manner, one might say that this subject could undoubtedly have had communicative effectiveness, if only to the ears of the generation of well-read young people who – born and educated during Fascism – were beginning to realize its faults and failures. Not much else was available to them.

This essay is a re-elaboration of the lecture given at the first joint research seminar of IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca and Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies, Lucca, November 15, 2019, devoted to "Colonialism and its Images". Many thanks to Barbara Henry and Emanuele Pellegrini for involving me in that important and inspiring initiative. Thanks to Nadia Barrella, Linda Borean, Priscilla Manfren, and Vittoria Romani for their help and support, and thanks to Scott Alan Stuart for his careful revision of the text.

- 1 «With Ethiopia, we have waited forty years! Enough is enough!» (this and the following translations from Italian are by the Author).
- 2 For a reconstruction on the presence of art within the colonial exhibitions in the late nineteenth century and onward, see C. Belmonte, *Arte e colonialismo in Italia tra Otto e Novecento. Dinamiche politiche e strategie visive nella prima guerra d'Africa*, doctoral thesis, XVII ciclo, Università degli Studi di Udine, tutor A. Del Puppo, G. Wolf, M. Zimmermann, a.a. 2016-2017; G. Tomasella, *Esporre l'Italia coloniale. Interpretazioni dell'alterità*, Regesto delle esposizioni di P. Manfren e C. Marin, Padova, 2017; D. Jarrassé, *Usage fasciste de l'art colonial et dénis d'histoire de l'art. Les Mostre d'arte coloniale (Rome 1931 et Naples 1934)*, in «Studiolo», 13, 2016, pp. 236-263; P. Manfren, *Icone d'Oltremare nell'Italia fascista: artisti, illustratori e vignettisti alla conquista dell'Africa*, Trieste, 2019.
- 3 P. Sánchez, *La Société coloniale des artistes français puis Société des beaux-arts de la France d'outre-mer: répertoire des exposants et liste de leurs oeuvres, 1908-1970*, introduction by S. Richemond, Dijon, 2010. On the issue, see also «Nos artistes aux colonies»: sociétés,

expositions et revues dans l'empire français, 1851-1940, ed. by L. Houssais, D. Jarrassé, Paris, 2015.

- 4 Cf. E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1978, pp. 3, 7. During the nineteenth century, the fashion of orientalism also greatly influenced Italian artists and in their works, more and more frequently, alongside a fabulous Orient only imagined, appeared the representation of regions known by direct experience through travel: «Their subjects increasingly concern the Arab countries, or at least Islamic culture, from North Africa to Persia; but they do not only represent places and customs of great splendor, such as the views of cities with precious architecture, but also portray the life of nomadic tribes, describe caravans of Berbers, Bedouins, so the desert, the sand, the tents and so on» (R. Bossaglia, *Gli orientalisti italiani (1830-1940)*, in *Gli orientalisti italiani. Cento anni di esotismo 1830-1940*, exh. cat. (Palazzina di Caccia di Stupinigi, 13 settembre 1998 – 6 gennaio 1999), ed. by R. Bossaglia, Venezia, 1998, p. 3).
- 5 On these topics, cf. C. Belmonte, *Biografia di un dipinto. La Battaglia di Dogali di Michele Cammarano tra retorica coloniale e sfortuna espositiva*, in «Studiolo», 13, 2016, pp. 284-301.
- 6 For example, in the I Fiera Campionaria di Tripoli, held between February and March 1927, the *Prima Mostra Tripolina d'Arte* was held, where fourteen artists were exhibited (cf. *Prima Mostra Tripolina d'Arte*, Roma-Milano, 1927); another, more elaborate example can be found in the Exposition Internationale Coloniale, Maritime et d'Art Flamand held in Antwerp in 1930, where an exhibition on colonial art was also presented. On these exhibitions, see the detailed reports by P. Manfren in Tomasella, *Esporre l'Italia coloniale*, cit., pp. 152-155; 166-172.
- 7 For a general reconstruction of this issue see at least N. Labanca, *Oltremare: storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna, 2002 (with an extensive bibliography); E. Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922-1939*, Firenze, 2000; *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, ed. by A. Del Boca, Bari, 2008 (1991); A. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, Roma-Bari, 1976-1984, 4 voll.
- 8 *Programma* in *I Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale*, Roma, 1931, 2nd edition, p. 34.
- 9 Naturally, the bibliography on this topic is vast. For a specific examination I have limited myself to A. Giardina, A. Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma da Carlo Magno a Mussolini*, Roma, 2000; E. Gentile, *Fascismo di pietra*, Milano, 2007.
- 10 *Programma* in *I Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale*, cit., p. 33.
- 11 Of course, the situation changes over time and the participation and contribution of artists to colonial exhibitions of the late nineteenth century are very different from those, for example, of the fascist era. It would be impossible here to discuss these problems, for which we refer to the essays cited in note 2.
- 12 S. Puccini, *L'itala gente dalle molte vite. Lamberto Loria e la mostra di etnografia italiana del 1911*, Roma, 2005; *Catalogo della mostra di etnografia italiana in Piazza d'Armi - Esposizione internazionale di Roma 1911*, Bergamo, 1911.
- 13 On the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary, see: M. Nezzo, *Ugo Ojetti. Critica, azione, ideologia. Dalle Biennali d'arte antica al Premio Cremona*, Padova, 2016, especially pp. 39-54; *Il fatale millenovecentoundici. Le esposizioni di Roma, Torino, Firenze*, ed. by S. Massari, Roma, 2012; M. Nezzo, *La mostra del ritratto e le Biennali d'arte antica a Firenze, in Altrove, non lontano. Scritti di amici per Raffaella Piva*, ed. by G. Tomasella, Padova, 2007, pp. 85-90; *Le grandi esposizioni in Italia 1861-1911. La competizione culturale con l'Europa e la ricerca di uno stile nazionale*, ed. by M.A. Picone Petrusa, Napoli, 1988.

- 14 *Le Mostre coloniali all'Esposizione Internazionale di Torino del 1911*, Roma, 1913, p. 6.
- 15 *Guida Ufficiale dell'Esposizione Internazionale - Torino 1911*, Torino, 1911, p. 199.
- 16 *Ibidem*.
- 17 Concerning the clarity with which France was included in the support of art for colonial causes, see the writing of Léon Bénédite in the catalogue of the 1906 exhibition in Marseille, touting the colonial “propaganda mission” carried out by orientalists «Tout en restant fidèles à leur idéal étroitement pittoresque, les orientalistes ne pouvaient oublier que ce sont les littérateurs et surtout les artistes qui ont le plus contribué à faire pénétrer dans la foule les formes et les mœurs de l'Orient, à lui ôter chaque jour son caractère exceptionnel et inusité, à l'acclimater enfin parmi nous» (L. Bénédite, *L'Exposition de la Société des Peintres Orientalistes français*, in *Exposition Nationale Coloniale – Marseille 1906. Notice Officielle et Catalogue Illustré des Expositions des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, 1906, p. LIII). In much the same manner, in the catalogue of the Exposition Nationale de Marseille in 1922, nineteenth-century painters were recognized as true precursors to the colonial campaigns: «En continuant sa route, le visiteur verra une exposition de peinture où seront exposées les œuvres des différents artistes que le hasard de la guerre ou l'amour du nouveau et de l'inédit ont amenés au Maroc. Les peintres sont souvent des précurseurs et Delacroix, Dehodencq, Regnault et Benjamin Constant ont planté leur chevalet sur la terre maghrébiennne avant que les commerçants et les agriculteurs soient venus s'y installer. Une petite exposition rétrospective mettra en valeur leurs œuvres» (*L'Exposition Nationale Coloniale de Marseille 1922*, Paris, 1921, p. 48).
- 18 In Rome in 1931 fifty works were exhibited, mainly by Cesare Biseo, Stefano Ussi and Alberto Pasini. In Naples in 1934, the same number was present but the choice was made to include a greater amount of painters to represent the more diverse landscape. In the latter case Michele Cammarano, the protagonist of the first phase of Italian colonial painting, took part to the show as well, with eighteen works ranging from drawings to paintings. At the Triennale di Napoli in 1940, a large number of paintings, drawings and etchings was displayed, made by very well-known artists, some of whom had also been present at the two previous Triennial exhibitions. Works from lesser-known artists were exhibited alongside renowned ones. In line with the colossal dimensions of the exhibition, over 150 paintings and 200 drawings were presented. For a detailed description see the report by P. Manfren in Tomasella, *Esporre l'Italia coloniale*, cit., pp. 181-191; 194- 206; 223- 228. On the exhibitions in 1931 and 1934 see also Jarrassé, *Usage fasciste de l'art colonial*, cit.
- 19 The bibliography on this issue is quite vast: see *Monographic Exhibition and the History of Art*, ed. by M. Gahtan, D. Pegazzano, New York-London, 2018; *All'origine delle grandi mostre in Italia (1933-1940). Storia dell'arte e storiografia tra divulgazione di massa e propaganda*, ed. by M. Toffanello, Mantova, 2017; A. Salvatore, *Exposition de l'Art Italien de Cimabue à Tiepolo. Parigi-Petit Palais – 1935*, doctoral thesis, Università di Venezia Ca' Foscari, IUAV, Università di Verona, a.a. 2013-2014, tutor L. Corti; L. Carletti, C. Giometti, *Raffaello on the road. Rinascimento e propaganda fascista in America (1938-1940)*, Firenze, 2016; A. Monciatti, *Alle origini dell'arte nostra. La mostra giottesca del 1937 a Firenze*, Milano, 2010; *Donatello among the blackskirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, ed. by C. Lazzaro, R.J. Crum, Ithaca, 2005; F. Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum. Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition*, New Haven, 2000; G. Tomasella, *Venezia-Parigi-Venezia. La Mostra d'arte italiana a Parigi e le presenze francesi alla biennale di Venezia*, in *Il Futuro a lle spalle*, exh. cat., Rome 1998, ed. by F. Pirani, Roma, 1998, pp. 83-93.

- 20 Edward W. Said uses this locution in regards to the simplification of the language that was common of the “collective formulas” within the process of conserving national identity in *Representations of the Intellectual*, New York, 1994.
- 21 This refers to Plinio Nomellini, Giuseppe Casciaro, Cesare Cabras, Michele Cascella, Luigi Surdi, Domenico De Bernardi, Gaetano Bocchetti and Vincenzo Colucci.
- 22 *Programma*, in *Seconda Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale. Catalogo*, Roma, 1934, 2nd edition, pp. 23-24.
- 23 M. Biancale, *La 2^a Mostra d'Arte Coloniale*, in *Seconda Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale*, cit., pp. 40-41.
- 24 On Brass' collection see: N. Ivanoff, *La Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia e i suoi tesori*, in «Emporium», 554, 1941, pp. 71-80; M. Malni Pascoletti, “Una delle gallerie private più interessanti del mondo intero”. Note su *Italico Brass collezionista d'arte*, in *Italico Brass*, catalogo della mostra, Gorizia 1991, ed. by M. Masau Dan, Milano, 1991, pp. 43-52; A. Morandotti, *Italico Brass pittore, conoscitore e mercante nell'età di Giuseppe Fiocco*, in *Genova e il collezionismo nel Novecento*, ed. by A. Orlando, Torino-London, 2000, pp. 241-250.
- 25 Morandotti, *Italico Brass*, cit., p. 247. In reference to the sixteenth-century paintings of the collection, Morandotti cites the *Testa del Battista*, attributed by Fiocco to Titian in 1924 and then resold by Brass' son, Alessandro Brass in 1953 to the Cleveland Museum of Art. In the online catalogue today it is referred to as from «Spain or Northern Italy, mid sixteenth - mid seventeenth century» <<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1953.424>> (last accessed October 27, 2020). It should be noted that the painting had been exhibited in the great Venetian exhibition dedicated to Titian in 1935 – Italico Brass was part of the scientific committee – that took place at Ca' Pesaro and was organized by Nino Barbantini. On the fortunes of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Italian painting in the United States, see E. Zafran, *A History of Italian Baroque Painting in America*, in *Botticelli to Tiepolo. Three Centuries of Italian Painting from Bob Jones University*, ed. by R.P. Townsend, Seattle, 1994, pp. 21-108; *Buying Baroque. Italian seventeenth-century paintings come to America*, ed. by E. Peters Bowron, University Park, 2017.
- 26 For further information regarding the extent of Brass' mercantile interests, see also the Getty Provenance Index, from which seven paintings from Brass' collection are now found in American public museums. Paintings are by Veronese, Palma il Giovane, Piazzetta, Sustris, Tiziano, Magnasco, Tiepolo: cf. <<https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/provenance/index.html>> (last accessed October 10, 2020). The Getty Research Institute also possesses a dossier dedicated to the collector that eloquently testifies to his relationship with the Duveen brothers. Many thanks to Annalise Welte, from the Getty Research Institute, for her helpful hints.
- 27 A. Consiglio, *Opere d'arte dal Rinascimento ad oggi alla II Mostra internazionale d'arte coloniale*, in «Il Corriere della Sera», 30 settembre 1934.
- 28 Ivanoff, *La Scuola Vecchia*, cit., p. 77.
- 29 W. Suida, *Tiziano*, Roma, 1933, tav. CCLXXXV.
- 30 Ivanoff, *La Scuola Vecchia*, cit., pp. 77-78. On the unmasking of the fake Titian, see P. Cellini, *Per una revisione di attribuzione a Tiziano*, in «Arte antica e moderna», 4, 1961, pp. 465-469 and *id.*, *Falsi e restauri*, Roma, 1992. The controversial painting is also discussed in A. Donati, *Tiziano e il 'Gran Turco'*, in «Studi veneziani», LXXII, 2015, pp. 275-291.

- 31 Said, *Orientalism*, cit., p. 197.
- 32 E. Campana, *Cronache Napoletane. L'Italia alle II^a Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale nel Maschio Angioino di Napoli*, in «Emporium», 478, 1934, pp. 238-248 (239-40).
- 33 Attribution to Titian was shared by Berenson and then by Valcanover; Pico Cellini, the restorer, contested its attribution on stylistic and iconographic bases: cf. Cellini, *Per una revisione*, cit.; for the story of its attribution see the report in H.E. Wethey, *The paintings of Titian*, London, 1975, vol. III, p. 184. Wethey refers it to the French school of the eighteenth century; on the topic, see also Donati, *Tiziano e il 'Gran Turco'*, cit.
- 34 *Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare. Napoli - 9 Maggio. Guida*, Napoli, 1940, p. 7.
- 35 For the Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare see A. Ferlito, *Re-inventare l'italianità: la Triennale delle Terre italiane d'Oltremare di Napoli*, in «roots&routes», 23, 2016, <<http://www.roots-routes.org/?p=19616>> (last accessed October 20, 2020); G. Arena, *The Last Exhibition of the Italian Colonial Empire: Naples 1938-40, in Cultures of International Exhibitions 1840-1940. Great Exhibitions in the Margins*, ed. by M. Filipová, Farnham, 2015, pp. 313-332; *id.*, *Visioni d'oltremare: allestimenti e politica dell'immagine nelle esposizioni coloniali del XX secolo*, Napoli, 2011; G. Dore, *Ideologia coloniale e senso comune etnografico nella Mostra delle terre italiane d'Oltremare*, in *L'Africa in vetrina. Storie di musei e di esposizioni coloniali in Italia*, ed. by N. Labanca, Paese (Treviso), 1992, pp. 47-65.
- 36 *Repubbliche marinare, in Triennale d'Oltremare. Guida*, cit., p. 24.
- 37 *Ivi*, p. 30.
- 38 This assessment negatively invests the «sumptuous decorative tastes» of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, its orientaling taste is silenced by a superficial ornamentalism, cf. *L'Oriente nell'arte italiana*, in *Prima Mostra Triennale*, cit., p. 30.
- 39 *Ibidem*.
- 40 M. Biancale, *La Prima Mostra Triennale delle Terre d'Oltremare*, in «Le Arti», III, 1940, pp. 56-57.
- 41 L. De Lillo, *L'Oltremare nella pittura italiana del '400 all'800*, in «L'Illustrazione Italiana», 22, 1940, p. 853.
- 42 *Ibidem*.
- 43 On Sergio Ortolani, the scholar from the school of Adolfo Venturi and with close ties to Croce, see the entry of F. De Rosa nel *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 79, Roma, 2013, <<http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sergio-ortolani>> (last accessed September 18, 2020), with reference bibliography.
- 44 On the forced interpretation of the influx of Byzantine tradition, e.g. in the works of Giotto, see Monciatti, *Alle origini dell'arte nostra*, cit., especially pp. 44-51, where he highlights the balanced assessment of Toesca in the 1933 entry about Giotto in the *Enciclopedia Italiana*: «Nell'assolvere a questo ruolo, Toesca si poneva storiograficamente come ultimo esponente di una tradizione di studi che aveva invece ben chiaro che lo stile di Giotto non poteva prescindere dalla "pittura bizantina, o bizantineggiante, che insisteva sulla modellazione, anche se mediante formule", e che il suo fondamento figurativo non era il linearismo gotico d'oltralpe» (*ivi*, p. 48). See also A. Iacobini, *La Sapienza bizantina. Il contributo della Storia dell'arte (1896-1970)*, in *La Sapienza bizantina Un secolo di ricerche sulla civiltà di Bisanzio all'Università di Roma*, ed. by A. Acconcia Longo, G. Cavallo, A. Guiglia, A. Iacobini, Roma, 2012, pp. 9-37; F. Bernabei, *Inizi dello studio dell'arte bizantina presso l'Università di Padova*, in

Florilegium artium. *Scritti in memoria di Renato Polacco*, ed. by G. Trovabene, Padova, 2006, pp. 289-294; M. Bernabò, *Ossessioni bizantine e cultura artistica in Italia. Tra D'Annunzio, fascismo e dopoguerra*, Napoli, 2003.

- 45 S. Ortolani, B. Molajoli, F. De Filippis, *Le terre d'oltremare e l'arte italiana dal Quattrocento all'Ottocento*, Napoli, 1940, p. 8.
- 46 S. Ortolani, *L Oriente e l'arte italiana*, in Ortolani, Molajoli, De Filippis, *Le terre d'oltremare*, cit., p. 9.
- 47 *Ivi*, p. 14.
- 48 *Ivi*, p. 18.
- 49 *Ivi*, p. 22.
- 50 *Ibidem*.
- 51 On Molajoli's work in Naples, N. Barrella writes: «Soprintendente ai monumenti della Campania dal 1939 al 1960, Bruno Molajoli (Fabriano 1905-Roma 1985) va sicuramente annoverato tra quei soprintendenti "coraggiosi, determinati e concreti" che risultarono determinanti – unendo intuito, competenza e spirito di servizio – per la protezione del patrimonio artistico italiano e, in seguito, per la sua rapida restituzione alla pubblica fruizione. Nella fase cruciale del secondo conflitto mondiale (1940-1943), Molajoli coordinò uno straordinario piano di salvaguardia di circa sessantamila opere d'arte partenopee che furono tratte in salvo nei conventi di Cava de' Tirreni, Liveri di Nola, Montevergine e Montecassino. Dopo lo sbarco degli Alleati, così come molti altri funzionari statali, Molajoli seppe poi stabilire un'intensa e proficua collaborazione con il corpo militare americano della Commissione alleata per i beni artistici (Monuments and Fine Arts Sub-Commission) e dell'Allied Control Commission (ACC) per l'Italia, con i cui componenti effettuò sopralluoghi e verifiche sul campo al fine di valutare i danni prodotti dall'occupazione, nazista prima e alleata poi, sugli edifici di pregio. Direttore dei lavori di restauro di circa quaranta edifici monumentali di Napoli, a partire dal 1944, Molajoli si prodigò per la valorizzazione dell'ingente patrimonio artistico napoletano attraverso l'organizzazione di esposizioni temporanee e si dedicò al riallestimento dei principali musei napoletani di arte e storia» (N. Barrella, *Museografia postbellica nei musei d'ambientazione napoletani: alcune riflessioni a partire dai saggi di Bruno Molajoli*, in «Annali di Critica d'arte», 1, 2017, cit., pp. 375-76). On Molajoli, see also: L. Asor Rosa, *ad vocem*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 75, Roma, 2011: <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bruno-molajoli_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/>](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bruno-molajoli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/>) (last accessed September 18, 2020); A. Pampalone, *ad vocem*, in *Dizionario Biografico dei Soprintendenti architetti 1904-1974*, Roma, 2011, pp. 398-409; A. Pane, *Bruno Molajoli*, in B. Gravagnuolo, C. Grimellini, F. Mangone, R. Picone, S. Villari, *Facoltà di Architettura dell'Ateneo Fridericiano di Napoli 1928/2008*, Napoli, 2008, p. 400.
- 52 B. Molajoli, *Dal Quattrocento al Settecento*, in *Le terre d'Oltremare*, cit., p. 48.
- 53 *Ivi*, pp. 41-42.
- 54 *Ivi*, p. 96.
- 55 As evidence of the systematic way in which art history was used to racially "educate", see the emblematic example of the use of images in a magazine like «La Difesa della Razza». Here, models taken from our pictorial tradition were obsessively proposed to reassure about the perfection and purity of the Italian "race". The aim was consistent: in order to justify and reinforce the empire *oltremare*, it was necessary to construct a probative framework that

demonstrated – through a long history of cultural influences and biological superiority – the right to overwhelming imposition. On the abovementioned magazine, see the fundamental work by F. Cassata, «*La difesa della razza*». *Politica, ideologia e immagine del razzismo fascista*, Torino, 2008.

56 Cf. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, cit.

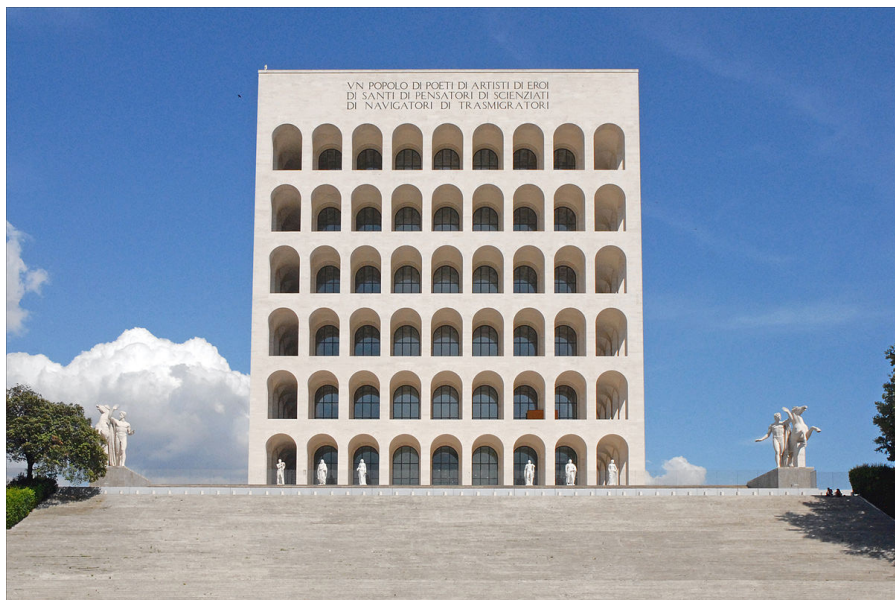


Fig. 1: G. Guerrini, E. Lapadula, M. Romano, Palazzo della Civiltà italiana, Rome.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons (Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, CCA 2.0).



Fig. 2: Poster of the Colonial Exhibition in Marseille, 1906.
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

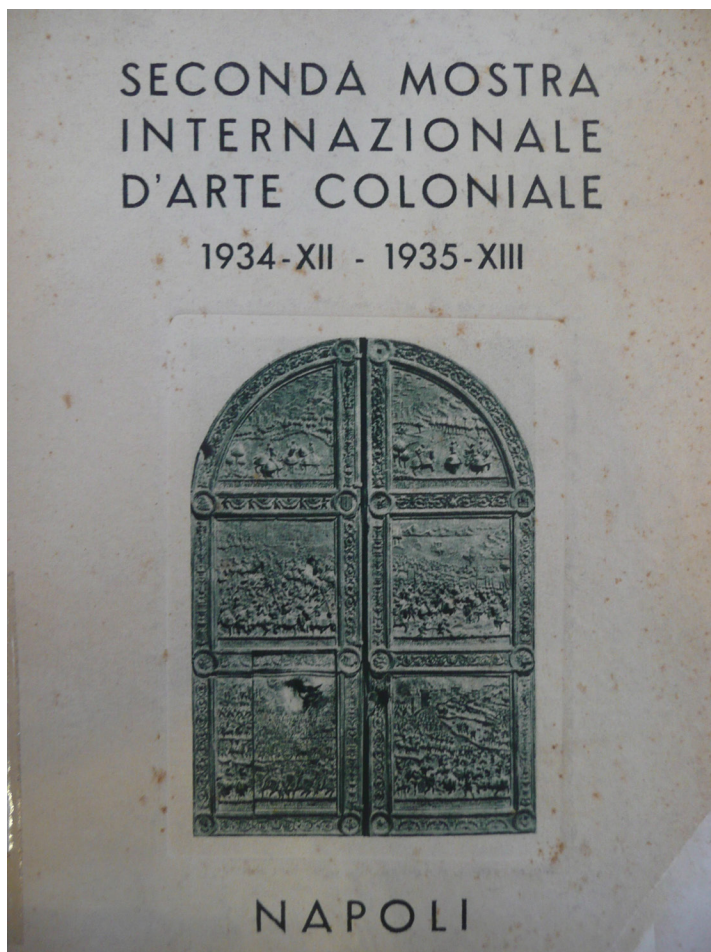


Fig. 3: Catalogue cover of the Seconda Mostra Internazionale d'Arte coloniale, Naples 1934-1935.



Fig. 4: Titian, *Portrait of Turkish Ambassador (The Great Sultan)*.
Photo: W. Suida, *Tiziano*, Roma, 1933, tav. CCLXXXV.



Fig. 5: Marco Querini's galley, reproduction on display at the I Mostra Triennale delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare, Naples 1940. Photo: A. Dal Pozzo Gaggiotti, O. Bacichi, Castello, C. Zaghi, A. Cepollaro, V. Costantini, *Prima Mostra delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare*, «Emporium», 548, 1940, p. 85.



Fig. 6: Unknown Painter of the seventeenth century, *Portrait of a Pasha*.
Photo: S. Ortolani, B. Molajoli, F. De Filippis, *Le terre d'oltremare e
l'arte italiana dal Quattrocento all'Ottocento*, Napoli, 1940, p. 93.

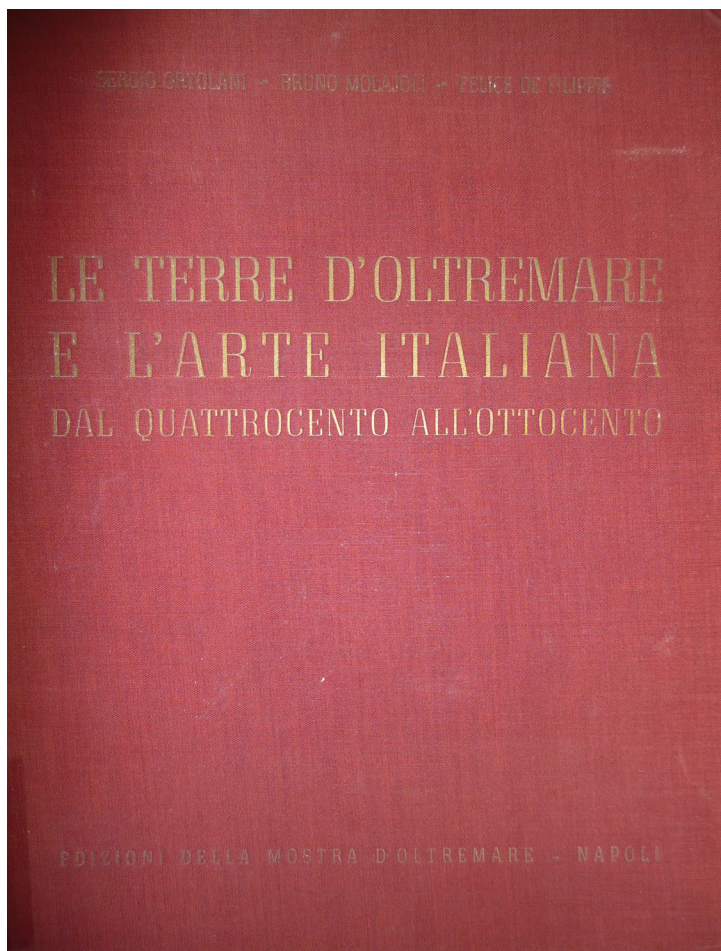


Fig. 7: Book cover of S. Ortolani, B. Molajoli, F. De Filippis, *Le terre d'oltremare e l'arte italiana dal Quattrocento all'Ottocento*, 1940.