

SELF-PORTRAIT OF “FOLLIA” (1882)



Antonio Mancini

(Roma 1852 - 1930)

Misure: 48 x 32,5 cm

Tecnica: oil on cardboard

Provenance: Casella collection (until 1930s); Tarragoni collection (since 1930s)

Exhibitions: 1938 Naples, Castel Nuovo; 1940 Turin, Gazzetta del Popolo; 1941 Milan, Galleria dell'Esame; 2008 Venice, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti.

Bibliography: Biancale, *La pittura napoletana del secolo XIX*, in S. Ortolani, C. Lorenzetti, M. Biancale, R. Pane, *La mostra della pittura napoletana dei secoli XVII-XVIII-XIX*, exhibition



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catalogue Ente Provinciale per il Turismo, Naples, 1938, ed. F. Giannini e figli, Naples, 1938, p. 342, no. 25; *Piccola guida della mostra della pittura napoletana del '600, '700 e '800*, exhibition catalogue Castelnuovo, Naples, March-June 1938, p. 116, no. 25; *Un capolavoro di Antonio Mancini: "Scugnizzo"*, in "Giornale d'Italia" – Cronaca di Napoli, 2 April 1938, p. 4; *Pittori dell'800 nella Raccolta Casella*, edited by D. Casella, Istituto Poligrafico d'Arte Alterocca, Rome-Terni 1939, p. 45, no. 177, reproduction table XLI; R. Clementi, *Antonio Mancini a dieci anni dalla morte*, in "L'Osservatore romano", 28 December 1940; C. E. Oppo, *Ottocento pittorico: Antonio Mancini*, in "Il Frontespizio", July-August 1940, XVIII, no. 7- 8, reproduction p. 423; E. Zanzi, *L'ora di Antonio Mancini*, in "Gazzetta del Popolo", 2 March 1940, p. 3 reproduction (*Autoritratto di Mancini malato*); *Mostre d'arte della Gazzetta del Popolo, 105 opere di Antonio Mancini*, Mostra commemorativa sotto gli auspici della Reale Accademia d'Italia, nel decennale della morte, marzo 1940 - XVIII, exhibition catalogue edited by E. Zanzi, Società Editrice, Turin, 1940, out of text tables reproduction; *Prima mostra della Raccolta Casella*, Catalogo della vendita, edited by A. Schettini, Milan, Galleria dell'Esame 1941, p. 13, no. 89, table reproduction XX on p. 36; M. Sciuti, M. *La malattia mentale di Antonio Mancini*, Excerpt from folder III, 1947 of the journal "L'Ospedale Psichiatrico", founded by Michele Sciuti, Tip. Ospedale Psichiatrico "L. Bianchi", Naples, 1947, pp. 40 reproduction, 52; A. Schettini, *Mancini*, Stipend Edizioni d'arte, Naples, 1953, p. 234; *I macchiaioli. Capolavori della collezione Mario Taragoni*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 8 March - 27 July 2008, exhibition catalogue edited by S. Bietoletti, Skira Editore, Milan, 2008, p. 133, nos 54 and 55 reproduction, and tables 54 and 55 on pp. 100-101; C. Virno *Antonio Mancini / Catalogo ragionato dell'opera, La pittura a olio su tela, tavola, carta e specchio*, De Luca editori d'arte, Rome 2019, vol. I, pp. 221 - 222, no. 288 reproduction.

In 1879, after returning to Naples from his second stay in Paris, Mancini began to show signs of mental instability, and from October 1881 to February 1882 he was admitted to the city's provincial asylum. During this period, however, he was allowed to paint. He made portraits of doctors, nurses, hospital workers and, above all, self-portraits. These are extraordinary works,



most of which are now lost, created with simple means and usually with few, simple strokes. They are often painted in monochrome or at most with two or three colours. The artist continued to produce this type of work in the period immediately after his hospitalisation. In the self-portraits, the painter depicts himself frontally or in three-quarter view, always strongly emphasising the characteristics of mental distress. This is why these works are called by most “self-portraits of follia” (self-portraits of madness).

This painting is one of the most representative of the genre. In the 1930s and 1940s, it was part of the important Neapolitan Casella collection, which also included Mancini's famous *Corallaia* (loaned by Giorgio Gagliardini to the Galleria d'Arte Moderna of Palazzo Pitti in Florence). The entire collection was exhibited in 1941 at the Galleria dell' Esame in Milan. Commenting on the exhibition, Alfredo Schettini expressly mentioned the “self-portraits of madness”, and admired this painting in particular: “... *he also tirelessly painted himself, almost as if he wanted to capture the shadow of his own madness in the various self-portraits: this one in the Casella collection is among the most realistic and, at the same time, spiritual in its ascetic expression.*”

The painting was executed with rapid, broad brushstrokes in shades of orange-brown with touches of black. The frontal position of the figure is pompous, the expression is static. The shirt, with its barely noticeable collar, reveals the paper support slightly enlivened, here and there, by a delicate layer of orange and light black strokes to suggest volume. In the background, the brushstrokes become tighter and more irregular, also incorporating the painter's untidy hair, rendered in the same way. The face emerges above everything, more attentive and pictorially refined to highlight a state of mind of absolute bewilderment. The eyes are fixed and wide open. The gaze, lost in the void, is directed ahead. The cheeks and mouth, framed by a light beard, are motionless and do not suggest any expression. Through these features, Mancini wants to enhance the sense of dismay that pervades him because of his madness.

During that difficult period in his life, it was almost a pleasure for him to emphasise his madness, to provide himself with a role he felt he did not have in society, to build himself a character. Like



the other self-portraits of the same phase, this one contrasts with the works of his final period, in which the consciousness of a life lived for art and the many experiences he had faced showed an artist who was constantly struggling with himself, but was finally aware of his own value.

Cinzia Virno

