

THE TIGER AND HER CUBS (1893)



Giulio Aristide Sartorio

(Roma 1860 - 1932)

Misure: 35,5 x 76 cm

Tecnica: oil on canvas pasted on cardboard

Signed bottom right: "G. A. Sartorio London 1893"

On the back: a print of the artwork alongside the poem "Ghita all'arcolaio" by Goethe (translated by Giuseppe Chiarini), and a label with the inscription: «Prof. Aristide Sartorio from Rome.

Profound painter, exquisite poet of the Roman countryside, scholar and brilliant researcher of the lives of people in the Roman rural areas. Renowned and sober *animalier* artist of the present era in Italy. Piero Scarpa, Venice Exhibition, April 1914».

Bibliography: L. Serra, *G. A. Sartorio pittore animalista*, Turin: Edizioni d'Arte E. Celanza, 1914, table 39.



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The Tiger and Her Cubs, a work from 1893, is a painting that perfectly sums up the essence of the most refined *animalier* artistic production by Giulio Aristide Sartorio, especially because it was made during his first and pivotal trip to London - as revealed by the inscription in the bottom right-hand corner: “G. A. Sartorio London 1893”.

In June that same year, the painter was in the English capital as a correspondent for “Nuova Rassegna” to write a series of articles on the developments and innovations in European art. He visited some of the most important museums, studied Turner and Constable, attended the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy, and met Edward Burne-Jones. Among Symbolist, Romantic, and Pre-Raphaelite suggestions, the early nineties represented for Sartorio a moment of unceasing experimentation, which can be found in the works he executed during his stay in London: the pearly landscapes of the Thames, the streets of London, and various *animalier* works realised after visiting the London Zoo (the place that inspired his horizontal canvas *The Tiger and Her Cubs*). The animal world had always been fascinating to Sartorio, as is also evident in *Sansonetto Santapupa’s Tale*, a magical, fictionalised account of his life from childhood to 1883. Sartorio’s stories, which were serialised between 1926 and 1929 in the “Rassegna Nazionale”, were centred on his family history. When Sartorio was young, his father and grandfather were both sculptors and they often had animals introduced in their studios to be portrayed: “Quietly, Sansonetto spied on his father’s work while he was resting. He approached the horse and stroke it - the tremulous skin of the animal under his hands, gave him a sort of thrill he could feel happiness running through his veins” That childhood experience certainly left a mark on his artistic production. Tigers, monkeys, bears, oxen, snakes, lions and horses, always played a key role in his graphic and pictorial body of works, so much so that, in 1914, the inspector of the Royal Galleries of Venice Luigi Serra took an interest in Sartorio as an *animalier* painter, publishing an entire volume on the subject - a book that also includes a picture of *The Tiger and Her Cubs*. According to Serra, the origins of Sartorio’s predisposition towards the animal world can be traced back to the early stages of his formation as an artist, alongside his father Raffaele and his grandfather Girolamo. As a copyist of ancient art and *animalier* sculptor, his grandfather



provided the young artist with a constant inspiration to contemplate the natural world and systematically observe the attitudes and the anatomies of animals - both in the wild and in zoological gardens, which he used to visit in Italy as well as during his stays abroad in England and Germany. This is an aspect that brings him close to some of the most important Art Nouveau and Art Deco *animalier* sculptors from the early twentieth century, such as Rembrandt Bugatti (1884-1916) and Guido Righetti (1875-1958).

The “peaceful joy” Sartorio felt while painting animal subjects, supported by his impeccable technique and the use of a camera, can be observed right from his early works made in the nineties. *The Tiger and Her Cubs* belongs to that period, and it is characterised by realism hidden behind symbolic evocations that reveal a certain decorative *divertissement*. Isolated from humans, the family of tigers takes shape through vivid brush strokes made of long, bright, stripes or hasty brush strokes that overlap to imitate the elegant fur of the animals, which were captured in a fleeting glimpse, observed and portrayed among the rocks of the London zoo and outlined with a wider and faster use of colour. Tigers were particularly recurring animals in Sartorio’s production. They appeared for the first time in *Cain’s Sons* (1885-1888), a majestic example of allegory from the turn of the century. It was presented at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, in 1889, and then divided by Sartorio into four fragments in 1893 (the same year in which *The Tiger and Her Cubs* was executed). In one of the four fragments a tiger is crouching on a rock in a way that is very similar to the position of the animal in *The Tiger and Her Cubs*, especially the hind legs and the tail. More tigers appear in the coeval symbolist work *The Idol*, where they symbolise strength, strong-willed instinct, and our irrational component. Tigers and lions are quintessentially Dionysian animals in Roman mythology. They were used in ancient iconography to emphasise the exotic ancestry of the deity and to allude to the conquest of the East. However in this painting executed by Sartorio in 1893, tigers are more than just animals from a mythological Bestiary, they are seen from a naturalistic point of view, while resting quietly after their meal - as is evident from the bloodstain and the skull of an animal on the left, near the cubs. “A tiger playing with her cubs”, this is how the painting was described by Serra, who included it



in the series of the “resting beasts” differentiating it from other works where tigers were protagonists of animal fights - as in the iconic *Tiger Fighting With a Snake* - and from the many paintings or graphic works that portray fierce tigers eating, or about to attack, which were widely illustrated in the 1914 catalogue. In this production Sartorio seemed to take Delacroix’s *animalier* repertoire into account, where tigers resting or lurking recur, but the study from life carried out in the London zoo prevailed as a guideline in which empirical facts and nature were observed and verified on the real details fixed on photographs and then taken as a model, re-elaborated, and eventually used as scattered notes that helped build the painting. This painting is not about the dynamic tension, the dramatic primordial representation of feral fight scenes, it is a family portrait where the quiet of the animals is charged with solemn spiritual values. Sartorio seemed to symbolically identify himself with the tiger, taking on its traits of elegance, firmness, vigour and dexterity.

From the representation of exotic species to the portraying of oxen and sheep in the Roman countryside, Sartorio appeared in many exhibitions with his *animalier* subjects, such as the exhibition of *Amatori e Cultori delle Belle arti* in 1923, at the Sala degli Animalisti. In this regard, the zoo represents a fundamental place for him as an *animalier* artist, not only as a place of inspiration, but also because in 1930 it hosted the first National Exhibition of Animals, of which Sartorio was president and where he exhibited a large part of his *animalier* repertoire in a very large personal room. The attention to the naturalistic detail, the scenic taste of the composition that lies somewhere between illustration and symbolism, the modern layout, the bright and energetic brush strokes, the monumentality of the animals, combine with a delicate decorativism in which “each impression of reality is transfigured into artistic expression”

Bibliography

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