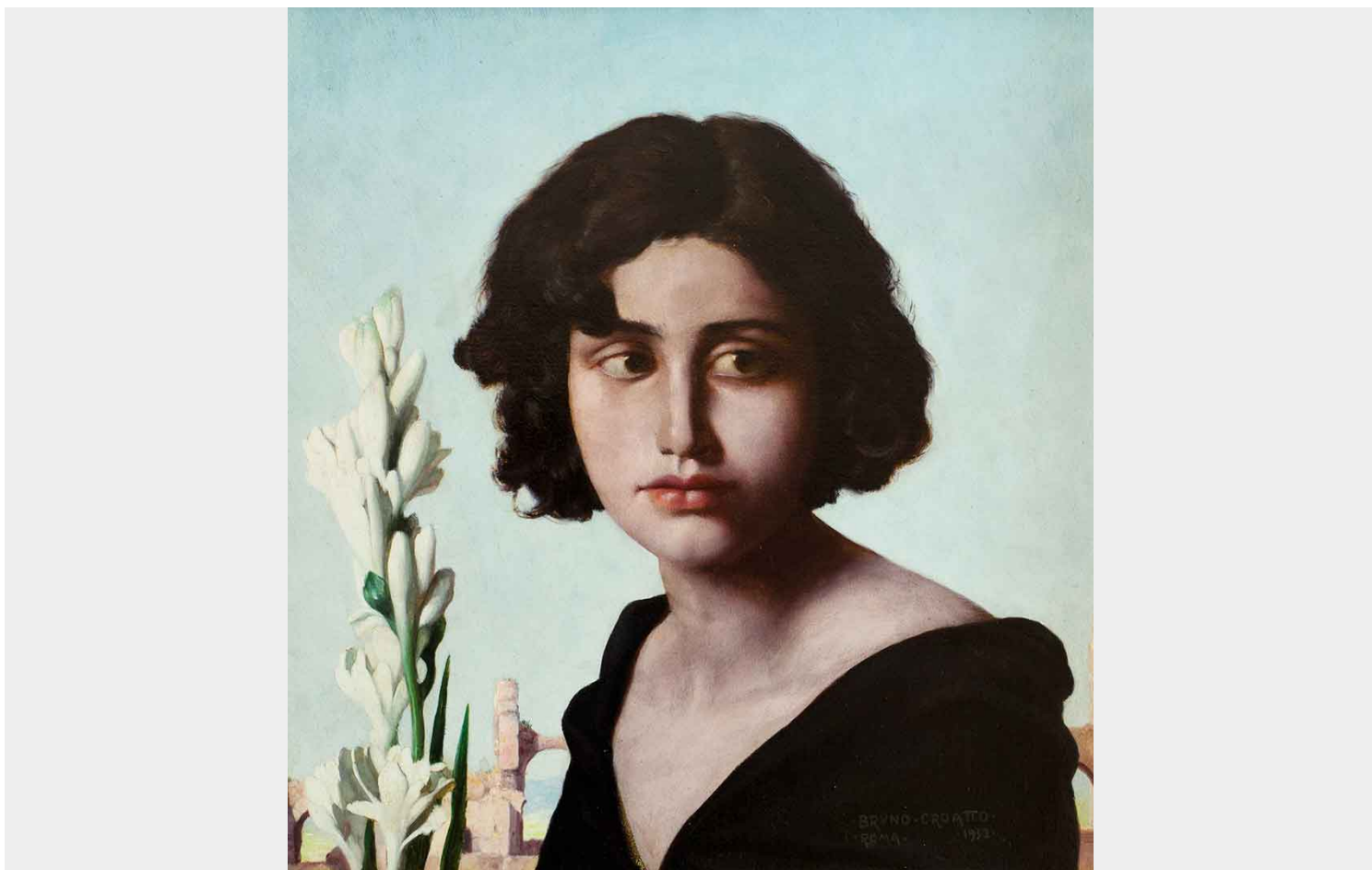


# BRUNO CROATTO (1875-1948):



Born on 12 April 1875 in Trieste, at the time a prosperous port and business center of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Bruno Croatto trained first in his hometown and from around 1892 at the Academy of Munich. In the lively Munich environment he knows the impressionist research on color filtered through the Nordic stylistic features of magazines such as “Jugend” and “Simplicissimus” and receives the stimuli of the Secession and of Max Liebermann and Franz von Stuck. Paradigmatic, however, must have been for the artist the classicism of Anselm Feuerbach through which he faced the lessons of the Italian and Flemish masters of the fifteenth century and of van Dyck and Rubens, studied in the halls of the Alte Pinakothek. After having made his debut in 1895 at the Trieste Stock Exchange with his fellow students Arturo Fittke and Achille Tamburlini, in 1897 he participated in the Venice Biennale, an exhibition which he will be



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exhibiting continuously between 1912 and 1924. Among his earliest known works there are the 1902 poster for the Nuremberg master singers, a graphic work of Nordic origin, and the Portrait of the sleeping mother, which can be placed after 1904, in which the lesson of Arturo Rietti from Trieste, from whom the use of the pastel, blends with Nordic suggestions and in particular with the lesson of Munch whose works published by Vittorio Pica in "Emporium" had aroused great interest. In search of new themes and motifs, around 1908 Croatto moved to Orvieto, D'Annunzio's "city of silence", where he made friends with Umberto Prencipe and specialized in etching and aquatint, privileged techniques for giving shape to dreamlike visions. and night. Over the course of two years, also thanks to his frequentation of Roman artistic circles, he makes every secret of copper engraving out of him. The drawing becomes an instrument of investigation through which to appropriate the essence of the phenomenal data and transfigure it into a dimension of pure objectivity, while the color becomes increasingly flat and the chromatic choices are oriented towards the contrast of warm and cold colors. The space is progressively cleared to give prominence to the human figure in the portraits in the still lifes to the objects. The period between 1910 and the outbreak of the First World War was marked by trips to Italy in search of motifs duly recorded through drawing and reproduced in engravings. The engravings allow us to trace the coordinates of the artistic career of these years. The close and fragmentary vision of reality common to Roman artists of the late 1910s is present in a series of views of the Villa Borghese; The nocturnal views of Venice, close to the visions of Mario de Maria, and of Rome, similar to the results of Roman divisionism, are placed around 1912. The exhibition activity is also intense at the same time. Alongside the exhibitions at the Trieste artistic circle (1897, 1912, 1924, 1926, 1928), there are also the reviews of the Amatori and Cultori in Rome (1908, 1912), the Opera Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice (1909) and the 'Munich Exhibition (1911). After the halt of the war, during which Croatto, who has always been an irridentist, is hospitalized in a clinic in Ljubljana so as not to fight with the Austrian army, the engraving style becomes more and more luminous, synthetic and drawing in line. with the contemporary developments of Italian black and white. Parallel to the pictorial research of the 1910s, which



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develops along the lines of post-impressionism. The study of atmospheric effects, rendered with a pasty material, is the protagonist of the views of Trieste, Venice and Rome. However, it was after the war that Croatto reached artistic maturity under the sign of the return to order in the direction of the magical realism theorized by Massimo Bontempelli. The abandonment of the avant-gardes and the study of the great masters of the Italian fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had led artists such as Antonio Donghi, Felice Casorati and Cagnaccio di San Pietro to a painting of pure vision, in which the real data was transfigured in an immobile and enchanted. The technique, the work, that constant practice exercised for years through the difficult technique of engraving, the backbone of Croatto's poetics, was captured by the critic Silio Benco: "he always suffered a kind of imperative, which came to him not only from the study of the fifteenth century, but from the suggestion of his own strongest individual qualities: the firm hand of the designer, the cold discipline of the eye to isolate itself on those realities exactly that he wanted to strike, his faculty to discern without doubt and to place local values". In works of the early 1920s, mostly portraits and still lifes, it is possible to recognize the new course of his painting. The protagonist and inspiration of a long series of works through which to follow the developments of Croatto's portraiture over the years is his wife Ester Igea Finzi, married in 1919. These are paintings that exude a bourgeois and timeless elegance, which is reflected in the sophisticated still lifes with flowers, vases and oriental objects. After moving to Rome in 1925, the artist stayed away from the mainstream of official art, although his home-studio in via del Babuino was frequented by an elite audience, often the protagonist of his portraits and his presence at exhibitions. local and national is constant, up to the international consecration with the personal in 1929 in Paris at the Galerie Reitlinger. With his style forged over years of work and through the study of the old masters, the artist finds himself filling a gap between tradition and modernity: traditional in language and technique, modern in setting, clothing and, sometimes, in a certain seductive impudence or on the contrary austere haughtiness of his models. His painting is the perfect representation of the aristocracy and the high bourgeoisie, made up of industrialists and financiers, politicians and diplomats, who populate the living rooms and places of Roman power.



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It is a reassuring, simple and non-changing world, similarly described by Ghitta Carell, the official photographer of the time. It is a society that chooses to be portrayed by a discreet artist and photographer, who shun the chatter of social life and the audiences of artistic debates, two true craftsmen of making. Scrolling through the names of the men, portrayed according to Renaissance stylistic features seated at the work table or against a landscape background, we recognize the art critic Francesco Saporì (1932), the general director of the Ministry of National Education Ernesto Franco (1935-36), Count Ernesto Vitetti (1938), Pietro Mascagni (1939). Evening and day dresses, velvets, silks and taffeta, furs, pearls, precious rings, fashionable hairstyles characterize, on the other hand, female portraits indoors or on a landscape background, sometimes divided by a dark drape based on the model of the Venetian Renaissance. In the compositions with flower vases and in the still lifes with fruit and game, chinoiserie and oriental ornaments are associated with precious Murano glass, a true cult object of the bourgeoisie of the 1930s. It is no coincidence that words of appreciation come from the critic Remigio Strinati in 1931 on the pages of the "Almanac of the Italian woman", a magazine dedicated to those ladies who are the recipients of his art: great class; in whose powerful painting they play exquisite trinkets for women and for the home ". The last years of Croatto's life are marked by professional satisfaction, but also by intense work. There are numerous self-portraits with which the artist examines himself and represents the tools of his profession with his hand. As testified by a letter addressed to his brother on March 3, 1942, on the occasion of the solo show held at the Galleria La Barcaccia, Croatto had come to create a painting every three days. This is one of his last labors, before his death in Rome on 6 September 1948.

A. Colantuoni, *Artisti della Redenta. Un poeta dell'acquaforte: Bruno Croatto*, in "L'Ardita", I, 1919, 1, pp. 465-469

B. , *La mostra di Bruno Croatto*, "Il Piccolo della Sera", 1 dicembre 1923

*Catalogo mostra Bruno Croatto. Acqueforti originali*, catalogo della mostra con presentazione di S. Benco (Bologna, Circolo di Cultura, 9 aprile 1926), Bologna, Stabilimenti Poligrafici Riuniti, 1926



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S. Benco, *La mostra di Bruno Croatto*, “Il Piccolo della Sera”, 7 febbraio 1927

*Bruno Croatto*, catalogo della mostra (Roma, La Camerata degli artisti, 1-15 febbraio 1932), Roma, 1932

P. Scarpa, *Bruno Croatto*, “Il Messaggero”, 21 febbraio 1934

R. Strinati, *Il pittore Bruno Croatto*, in “Il Regime fascista”, 18 marzo 1939

P.S. , *Mostre d'arte. Croatto*, “Il Messaggero”, 26 febbraio 1943

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