



FONDAZIONE ROMA
ARTE - MUSEI

Hogarth, Reynolds, Turner. British Painting and the Rise of Modernity

15th April – 20th July 2014
FONDAZIONE ROMA MUSEO - PALAZZO SCIARRA
ROME

Following the successful exhibition *Rome and Antiquity. Reality and Vision in the Eighteenth Century*, held in 2010, that focused on the role played by classic antiquity as an indispensable model for the development of the arts, erudition and taste which, starting from the Papal Capital spread throughout Europe, the exhibition **Hogarth, Reynolds, Turner. British Painting and the Rise of Modernity** intends to concentrate on the British context when a national artistic identity - capable of rendering the very *modernity* that became a common language throughout the Continent during the nineteenth century - was established as an alternative to the classicist language.

Promoted by Fondazione Roma and organised by Fondazione Roma-Arte-Musei, the exhibition **Hogarth, Reynolds, Turner. British Painting and the Rise of Modernity** will be held from the 15th April to the 20th July 2014 in the Museo Fondazione Roma, Palazzo Sciarra, Rome.

The exhibition curated by Carolina Brook and Valter Curzi intends to offer to the public a comprehensive overview of the social and artistic development that took place during the XVIII century in step with the hegemony gained by Great Britain at the historical, political and economic level.

For this purpose a corpus of over one hundred works belonging to prestigious institutions such as the **British Museum, Tate Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Royal Academy, the National Portrait Gallery, the Museum of London** and the **Uffizi Gallery** has been formed and is accompanied by a nucleus of

works from the important American collection belonging to the **Yale Centre of British Art**.

The Chairman of Fondazione Roma, Professor Emmanuele F. M. Emanuele states that, “Following the exhibition devoted to the role played by Rome as a centre for culture in the XVIII century, which attracted public and critical acclaim, I believed it appropriate to look abroad in order to review those exceptional circumstances in which Britain was at the centre of a socio-economic evolution that led to the establishment of an original British artistic language, which then became a model for the whole of Europe during the nineteenth century.

The exhibition has been accomplished in association with the most important international institutions such as the British Museum, Tate Gallery and the Victoria & Albert Museum and is a further demonstration of my well known belief that private parties, especially non-profit organisations, constitute an ineluctable resource for the development of high profile cultural projects whilst providing an innovative management model in the field of culture.

This exhibition, held after almost fifty years from the last retrospective concerning British painting in the eighteenth century shown in Rome, adds another tessera to the cultural project launched in 1999 by Fondazione Roma, which I have the honour to Chair, whereby forty three innovative and culturally stimulating exhibitions have been accomplished, enriching the cultural offer in our city”.

With a population growth of 700.000 in the first half of the eighteenth century, London became the beating heart of the British Empire. The **first section** of the exhibition focuses on this context with works by **Scott, Marlow** and **Sandby** as well as the mastery of the Venetian **Canaletto**, who, with their views, became witnesses of the constant evolution of a city that soon became the emblem of a modern metropolis.

The **second section** concentrates on the so-called **New World** in which the social and cultural distinction between aristocrats and the middle class dwindled. Hence the artists were able to rely on a new class of professionals who were interested in patronising and promoting those painters and themes that could affirm their new social standing. The highlights of this section are the portraits by **Zoffany, Hodges** and **Wright of Derby** of emerging industrialists, merchants, scientists, explorers as well as musicians, actors and sportsmen, who had become the favourites of an increasingly demanding and socially engaged public. Therefore, this section renders the consecration of the industrial expansion, the citizens’ passion for art and sport, interest in science and, finally, their enthusiasm for the epic exploration of new continents.

The growth of the middle class patronage and the establishment of an art ‘market’ for an increasingly wider public played a fundamental role in the radical transformation

of the relationship between the national culture and visible arts. A British school of art had been established for the first time, albeit considerably later than in other European countries.

The **third section** investigates the context that led to a **national iconography: Hogarth and Fuseli**. The contribution of both painters, the former a British citizen by birth and the latter by adoption, was essential to the accomplishment of a true and typical British art.

This section contains a selection of Hogarth's most important engravings, such as works from the *Marriage à-la-mode* and *The Humours of an Election* series in which the artist's critical and disillusioned eye documents contemporary scenes of social and political life, which became highly successful during the century.

Citizens of all social classes were devotees of the theatre, which at the time dominated cultural life in Britain. Hence, this is the environment in which theatrical painting matured becoming one of the most emblematic genres of British art. Initially rendered by **Hogarth**, who dwelled on depictions of famous actors performing on stage, this genre was subsequently developed by **Fuseli**, a young Swiss artist who had moved to London, destined to become one of the most famous artists of Shakespearean plays.

In the British milieu - heavily imbued with Protestantism that refuted religious paintings - portraits reached a level of popularity unrivalled in any other European country. The importance of this genre became evident in Britain in the early eighteenth century through books by Jonathan Richardson, in which he claimed that portrait painters have the duty of handing down to posterity the virtues of great men.

In the **fourth section, the heroic age of portraits**, the works, especially those by masters such as **Gainsborough, Reynolds, Ramsay and Zoffany**, enhance the achievements of British portraiture, which by introducing admirable original compositional solutions show a distinctive feature. This section is composed of a gallery of portraits of elegant noble ladies, generals and family groups, which invites visitors to observe a society that is highly satisfied with its goals and achievements.

Portraiture is not the only genre to have prospered in Britain during the eighteenth century. British artists were encouraged to engage in landscapes throughout the century since citizens loved this genre and had already started to collect Italian and Dutch sceneries in the seventeenth century.

On a par with portraits, landscapes reflected clients' political and public ambitions by painting castles and mansions built in the middle of their estates. Scripts by Alexander Pope and James Thomson, whose lyrics were inspired by Virgil's poem the Georgics, manage to produce a poetic vision of the British countryside describing

it as a modern Arcadia, custodian of beauty and harmony, thus helping this genre to prosper.

Works referring to this genre are shown in the **fifth section, on the spot landscapes**, which focuses on watercolour painting, which during the eighteenth century spread remarkably precisely in Britain. The most representative artists who were engaged in watercolours are found in this section with their refined and intense images of British and Italian landscapes captured at dawn or dusk under sun-drenched or leaden skies.

The **sixth section, Variations on landscapes**, reviews large oil paintings by the most renowned artists who addressed this genre. This section features works by **Richard Wilson**, the influential pioneer of British landscapes who became interested in this genre during his formative years in Italy, though he created a personal style by basing his compositions on the typical British climate and the effects of nature. The commitment to Italian landscapes is found in the magnificent veduta of the *Grotto in the Gulf of Salerno* by the painter Wright of Derby, who awesomely renders the lighting effects of moonlight, which became one of his favourite subjects (*Snowden by Moonlight*, Victoria Gallery, Liverpool).

The exhibition closes with the **last section** devoted to **Constable** and **Turner**, the internationally renowned champions and excellent representatives of the evolution of British landscape painting in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The art of these masters of landscape painting is the result of an elaboration of eighteenth century figurative traditions, which moves towards what may be defined as the age of modernity by means of relentless experiments. This course of research managed to impose a new figurative language that, for the first time, allowed Britain to be considered as a model throughout the nineteenth century.

A Catalogue published in Italian and English by Skira will complement the exhibition.

HOGARTH, REYNOLDS, TURNER

British Painting and the Rise of Modernity

Fondazione Roma Museo – Palazzo Sciarra (via Marco Minghetti, 22) Rome
15th April > 20th July 2014

Opening hours

Mondays 14:00>20:00

Tuesdays to Thursdays and Sundays 10:00 > 20:00

Fridays and Saturdays 10:00 > 21:00

Last admission one hour before closing time

Catalogue by Skira

INFORMATION & BOOKINGS

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