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The "Mostra del Quarantennio" and the canon of modern art at the Venice Biennale in the interwar period

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I am very thankful to Matteo Piccolo (Ca' Pesaro) who shared with me key information about the works included in the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni". He and Paolo di Marzio (Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna) provided me with images of the rarely-seen artworks exhibited in the Mostra, which allowed me to virtually reconstruct some of its sections. Elena Cazzaro and Marica Gallina at the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (Venice), and Clementina Conte, Cristina Tani, and Stefania Navarra at the Archivio Storico della GNAM facilitated the archival research for this paper. Neil McWilliam helped me to reformulate the theoretical framework of the article, and shared with me his knowledge of interwar artistic debates. Hannah Jacobs very patiently worked with me on the digital model of the "Mostra". The research for this article has been supported by numerous grants from the Visualizing Venice project. I am very thankful to Caroline Bruzelius and Donatella Calabi who initiated and sustain the program, to Mark Olson and Victoria Szabo who first introduced me to digital technologies for art historical visualization, to Kristin Love Huffman who encouraged my research in more ways that can be counted, to Francesca Castellani who directed the Visualizing la Biennale project, and finally to Elisabeth Narkin, Iara Dundas, Ludovica Galeazzo, and Chiara Di Stefano who shared with me the joys and sorrows of art historical research.

Abstract

In 1935 the Venice Biennale organized an atypical exhibition commemorating its 40th anniversary. The "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" was mostly devoted to art from the Triveneto. Yet four rooms showed works by European artists who had exhibited in the Biennale, and were part of the collections of the Gallerie d'Arte Moderna in Rome and Venice. The show reflected on the evolution of modern art and of the Biennale between 1895 and 1935, exemplifying the aesthetic criteria of Italian public collections at the time. It included many artists that are still considered part of the modernist canon but most of them are now all but forgotten. It thus represents an optimal case study to analyze renegotiations of the artistic canon. Furthermore, the "Mostra" played a key role in re-defining the international role of Venice within fascist artistic organization. As the "Mostra" took place in the gap year between two Biennales and received little support from governmental institutions, it is generally overlooked in the literature on the period. Yet, on the basis of unpublished archival documentation and of the digital reconstruction of these rooms, this paper argues that the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" is crucial for our understanding of the history of the Biennale and of the cultural policies of the fascist state.

Nel 1935 la Biennale di Venezia ha organizzato una mostra atipica per commemorare il proprio 40° anniversario. La "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" era in gran parte dedicata all'arte dal Triveneto. Eppure quattro sale espongono opere di artisti europei che furono in mostra alla Biennale, e divennero parte delle collezioni della galleria d'Arte Moderna di Roma e Venezia. La Mostra riflette sull'evoluzione dell'arte moderna e della Biennale tra il 1895 e il 1935, esemplificando i criteri estetici adottati a quell'epoca in collezioni pubbliche italiane. Vengono esposti molti artisti ancora considerati parte del canone modernista. Essa rappresenta un caso di studio significativo per analizzare la rinegoziazione del canone artistico. La Mostra, inoltre, ha giocato un ruolo chiave nella ridefinizione del ruolo artistico internazionale di Venezia all'interno dell'organizzazione fascista. Poiché la Mostra ha avuto luogo durante l'anno di intervallo tra le due Biennali e ha ricevuto poco sostegno da parte delle istituzioni governative, è generalmente trascurata nella letteratura sul periodo. Tuttavia, sulla base di documentazione archivistica inedita e della ricostruzione digitale di queste sale internazionali, questo saggio sostiene che la "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" è fondamentale per la nostra comprensione della storia della Biennale e delle politiche culturali dello stato fascista.

In 1935 the Venice Biennale organized an atypical exhibition commemorating its 40th anniversary. The "Mostra Commemorativa dei Quarant'anni della Biennale" ("Commemorative Exhibition of the Forty Years of the Biennale") was devoted to art from the "Triveneto" or "Tre Venezie" (that is, the Veneto, Trentino-South Tyrol, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia regions), a regionalist move that run counter to the international aspirations of the prestigious art venue. Yet four rooms showed works by international artists who had exhibited in the Biennale and who were included in the collections of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome and of the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in Venice, the two major Italian museums of modern art. The show included many artists who are still considered part of the modernist canon – Mark Chagall,

Gustav Klimt, Moïse Kisling, Pierre Bonnard, Auguste Rodin, among others – but most of them are now all but forgotten. It thus represents an optimal case study to analyze renegotiations of the canon of modern art in the interwar period.

Unlike modern art museums elsewhere, Italian "gallerie d'arte moderna" mostly focused on local art, and rarely purchased foreign paintings and sculptures[1]. Because of the proximity of the Biennale, the Venetian museum was exceptional because since its inauguration in 1902 it collected international art, in addition to works by Venetian and Veneto artists[2]. The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, by contrast, was instituted in 1883 with the explicit aim of promoting contemporary Italian art; its original statute established that «paintings, sculptures, drawings, and engravings, with no preference for genre or manner», would be acquired in Italian exhibitions of fine arts[3]. Yet the lack of important art shows in Italy – the Venice Biennale opened only in 1895 – prevented the purchase of important works, and the collection had considerable lacunae. In 1912 the aim of the Gallery expanded to include Italian artworks from the early nineteenth century to the contemporary period[4]. But the collection continued to grow in a haphazard manner, and through donations and acquisitions in the Venice Biennale and in the International Exhibition of Rome of 1911, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna came to include foreign art as well[5].

As early as 1919 Italian public intellectuals suggested a division of roles between Rome and Venice's museums of modern art to avoid redundancy[6].

1 Lorente 2013, p. 117.

2 Among its first artworks were paintings by British, Danish, and Russian artists, as well as by Italians; they were acquired at the second Venice Biennale in 1897 and donated by one of the first patrons of the gallery, Prince Alberto Giovanelli. Palazzo Pesaro was donated by Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua to the city of Venice with the condition that it hosted exhibitions of young artists. The Bevilacqua-La Masa art exhibitions, organized by Nino Barbantini (who was also the director of Ca' Pesaro) often went against the prevailing taste of the Biennale, for example devoting an important retrospective to Umberto Boccioni in 1910. Yet despite some exceptions, until the postwar period Ca' Pesaro was the "memory of the Biennale", as Flavia Scotton described it, and no traces of its avant-garde shows remained in its collection. Only in the 1960s were masterpieces by these young artists who had exhibited in Ca' Pesaro added to the permanent collection. Scotton 2002, p. 21.

3 Fleres 1932, p. 3.

4 «Il Decreto 7 marzo 1912 stabilisce, correggendo la Legge di fondazione, che la Galleria Nazionale d'arte moderna deve contenere "opere di pittura, scultura, disegno e incisione, senza distinzione di genere e di maniera, degli artisti fioriti dal principio del secolo decimonono in avanti e di quelli viventi». Roma, Archivio Storico della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (from now on, AS GNAM). Roberto Papini to Ministro della Educazione Nazionale- Direzione Generale delle Belle Arti, *Riordinamento della Galleria*, June 2, 1934, POS.7 Galleria 7E Riordinamento 1913-1979.

5 For the acquisition policies of the gallery between 1933 and 1941, see Margozzi 1999 and di Fabio 2004.

6 Michetti, Bistolfi, Ojetti 1919.

The artist Francesco Paolo Michetti, the art critic Ugo Ojetti, and the sculptor Leonardo Bistolfi proposed that, in accordance to its name, the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna ceased the acquisition of artworks made by foreign artists. The Roman gallery should be exclusively devoted to *Italian* modern art, the Venetian to *international* modern art, in ideal continuity with the vocation of the Biennale. The international holdings of the Roman galleria should be sent to Venice, and in exchange, the Venetian gallery would loan its collection of Italian modern art to the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, which in 1915 had moved to its current premises in an expansive Beaux-Arts palace in the Valle Giulia area.

Michetti, Ojetti, and Bistolfi's suggestion was not heeded, but in 1930 Ojetti proposed it again[7]. In the ten intervening years the quality of the collections in the galleries had not improved much. Yet the times were more mature for a division of roles between the two museums. The Venice Biennale now responded directly to the government in Rome, and more importantly, while the Venetian modern art museum was still under the control of the municipality, the city was now headed by a podestà, not a democratically elected mayor but an administrator directly appointed by royal decree and therefore under direct control of the centralized state. Furthermore, the director of the Gallery of Rome, Roberto Papini, was committed to the idea that this museum should represent a «public documentation of [Italian modern art], a period that was not without glory and that has not been until now sufficiently appreciated and understood by the Italians and the foreigners»[8]. Therefore, he suggested improving the quality of the collection of the Galleria Nazionale through gifts, permanent loans, acquisitions, and exchanges with other galleries in Italy.

The project of the artistic exchange between the Venetian and Roman galleries was finally brought to fruition in 1938, so the international rooms of the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" were a testing laboratory for their new installations, and re-defined the international role of Venice within the fascist art system. As the "Mostra" took place in the gap year between two Biennales and received little support from governmental institutions, it is generally overlooked in the literature[9]. Yet on the basis of unpublished archival documentation

[7] Ojetti 1930.

[8] «scopo precipuo della Galleria è di rappresentare degnamente l'arte italiana, dal Canova ai nostri giorni in una ordinata esposizione storica, artistica e documentaria che metta in evidenza i principali periodi e le più singolari figure d'artisti, si da dare un'idea quanto più è possibile completa ed esauriente di ciò che è stata e ciò che è l'arte italiana moderna. Manca infatti in Italia una tale documentazione pubblica della arte d'un periodo che non è senza gloria e che non è stato finora, appunto per tale mancanza, sufficientemente apprezzato e compreso da italiani e da stranieri». Roma, Archivio Centrale dello Stato (henceforth ACS). Roberto Papini to Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale-Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti, June 9, 1934, *Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale-Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti, Divisione III 1930-1935* b. 215.

[9] Exceptions are Alloway 1968, p. 112, and Di Stefano 2008.

that I have retrieved in Venice and Rome, and of the partial reconstruction of these international rooms, I will argue that the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" is crucial for our understanding of how the Biennale envisaged its own history during the interwar period, and more importantly, our understanding of the canon of modern art before the normalization of the avant-garde and the institutionalization of modernism.

1. *The Organization of the Show*

In the inaugural speech of the Biennale of 1934, the President of the institution, Count Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata reassured Venetian artists that their work would soon return to be prominently displayed in the next editions of the Biennale. The creation of the Venice Biennale in 1895 had indeed been inspired and supported by local artists, who suggested that an exhibition of international art was an appropriate way to celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of the King and Queen of Italy – a pretext to revitalize the cultural and touristic potential of Venice[10]. Yet in the first decades of the 20th century, as the venue acquired more prestige, its international character trumped its connection with the local art scene.

This process accelerated after 1927, when the ambitious Antonio Maraini, a sculptor and art writer, became the new Secretary of the institution. In this capacity, Maraini implemented important changes in the functioning of the Biennale, with the aim of increasing its international stature and publicizing the fascist art system. As Sileno Salvagnini and Marla Stone have pointed out, under Volpi and Maraini the Biennale incorporated popular culture – the Music Festival was launched in 1930, the Film Festival in 1932, and the Theatre Festival in 1934 – as a way of attracting mass tourism to the Venice lagoon[11]. One of Maraini's more drastic, and controversial, measures, was to implement a system by which only artists directly invited by the jury could participate in the Biennale. Since Maraini aspired to render the Biennale a truly cosmopolitan venue, he carefully avoided inviting many of the Venetian and Veneto artists who had local fame but no international prestige.

Maraini's decision to separate the Biennale from the local art scene echoed the restructuring that the fascist government had imposed on the institution, which was to become the official showcase of international art in Italy[12]. Originally

10 Franzina 1986; Stringa 2014.

11 Stone 1999; Salvagnini 2000.

12 «Ora però che il Governo Nazionale ha costituito la Biennale in Ente Autonomo, dopo averla riconosciuta per Legge come unica Esposizione Ufficiale Internazionale, i suoi compiti divengono più precisi e più vasti." ACS, Relazione dalla XVII alla XVIII Biennale, 1930, *Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario*. Esposizione Internazionale Venezia b. 10231.

administered by the Venice city council, in 1930 the Venice Biennale was transformed into an Ente Autonomo (Autonomous Corporation) that directly responded to the central government. The Roman Quadriennale, another state-sponsored art exhibition that opened in 1931, would concentrate on promoting contemporary Italian art, so the Venice Biennale could devote itself to showing international tendencies, and «Italian artistic production worthy of being placed in competition with international art», as a *memorandum* from the Biennale administration to Mussolini stated[13].

Many Venetian artists protested this state of affairs, and in June 1934, while the Biennale was still open, they sent an anonymous letter to the Duce. They lamented that «[Maraini's] well-known artistic ineptitude and boundless and unquestionable role» had caused a decrease in the quality of the artistic contributions to the Biennale. To protest that an «artist so partial and incompetent» was given such an unlimited power, the Venetian artists claimed, even those of them who had been invited did not send their best work or refused to participate[14]. Maraini and Volpi, however, had no intention to pay heed to the Venetian artists' complaints by undoing the changes they had implemented. Their ambition was for the Venice Biennale to be an internationally prestigious venue, and as he had indicated in a meeting with Maraini in 1932, this was also Mussolini's plan for the institution – it was to become a "Geneva for Contemporary International Art," an expression that many journalists employed until it became tragically ironic when Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and was expelled from the Society of Nations[15].

13 «ora che esiste la Quadriennale Romana con fini unicamente nazionali, la Biennale Veneziana potrà proporsi di selezionale al massimo la produzione italiana da porre in gara con la produzione internazionale. Ed in al modo l'ordinamento delle Esposizioni troverà nella Biennale il sommo di quell'ordine di gerarchie che si è inteso giustamente creare». ACS, Relazione dalla XVII alla XVIII Biennale, 1930, *Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario*. Esposizione Internazionale Venezia b.10231.

14 «Il livello inferiore della presente Biennale non è causato da una minore capacità collettiva, e gli artisti, anche invitati, sono concordi nel vedere la causa maggiore nel lato organizzativo, e specialmente nella persona dell'On. Maraini per la ben nota incapacità artistica e la veste assoluta e insindacabile. È assurdo pensare che una mostra d'importanza mondiale come la Biennale Veneziana, alla quale è inoltre legata la tradizione artistica nazionale, sia affidata ad artista così poco obiettivo come critico e così incapace.[…] Ecco una causa dell'insuccesso; artisti invitati che non hanno aderito, altri, e particolarmente i più noti, che potevano presentare liberamente senza la visita di Maraini, hanno mandato di proposito una produzione inferiore. Per quanto riguarda gl'inviti, ci sarebbe molto da dire, Eccellenza, specialmente per questo ripetersi di imparzialità [sic] che creano degli equivoci e falsano i valori personali». ACS, Artisti Veneziani Anonimi to Benito Mussolini, June 24, 1934, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936* b. 14.1.283.

15 «Ora io vorrei richiamare la Sua attenzione [di Mussolini] sul fatto che la conclusione del Congresso d'Arte è stata quella di considerare Venezia come "una Ginevra per l'arte contemporanea internazionale" (vedi l'accluso ritaglio). E se ardisco tanto è perché Egli proprio aveva detto in una delle udienze concessemi, che a ciò la Biennale doveva mirare». Rome, ACS. Antonio Maraini to Guido Beer, May 12, 1932, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936*, b.14.1.283. It is worth noting that Mussolini's was not too keen about this expression. In a note with Maraini's report on

Yet the complaints of the Venetian artists could not be disregarded, so during the opening of the 1934 Biennale Volpi officially announced that in the following year, to celebrate the 40 years since the foundation of the Biennale, the Ente would organize an homage to «artists from Venice and the Veneto who had so validly contributed to the arduous but steady ascent of the Biennale»[16]. At the moment in which the Biennale became autonomous from the administration of Venice, the "Mostra" trumpeted the "Venetianness" of the institution.

The organization of the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" began as soon as the 1934 Biennale closed. To acquiesce the belligerent Venetian artists, three distinguished local glories were invited to head the jury: Ettore Tito (1859-1941), Alessandro Milesi (1856–1945), and Italico Brass (1870-1943). Tito, Milesi, and Brass – three living Venetian artists with market and critical success – would each have a retrospective of their work. Tito, who was a member of the steering committee of the 1895 Biennale, was given a place of honor, occupying the three first rooms of the central pavilion.

However Tito quickly understood that the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" was a "contentino" (sop) for local artists, and a strategy to avoid including them in the actual Biennale exhibitions[17]. As the show was devoted exclusively to artists from the Triveneto, many would be included who had not made the cut in recent Biennales, and who would not be invited to future shows because their work was considered outdated or not aligned with Maraini's taste. Thus Tito refused to participate in the jury, claiming a conflict of interest, as he would be at the same time an exhibitor and a member of the selecting committee. Milesi and Brass followed suit[18]. Maraini harshly condemned Tito's gesture.

the 1932 Art Congress that had convened in Venice, Mussolini wrote down «male!» next to the the expression «the Geneva of the Arts». ACS, Appunto per S.E. il Capo del Governo, May 25, 1932, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936* b. 14.1.283.

16 «PRESIDENTE [Volpi] ricorda che quest'anno si compiono i quarant'anni dell'apertura della Prima Biennale. Fin dallo scorso anno abbiamo solennemente promesso alla presenza di S.M.il Re di fare per questa occasione una manifestazione di omaggio agli artisti veneziani e veneti, che hanno validamente contribuito all'affermarsi della Biennale nella sua laboriosa e sicura ascesa». Venice, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee (henceforth ASAC). Adunanza Del Comitato d'amministrazione tenutasi in Roma in Palazzo Volpi il giorno 28 gennaio 1935 XIII ad ore 15, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Organi di gestione*. Serie: 2.2.3. Verbali. Minute, copie, trascrizioni, stenogrammi. b001. Atti delle adunanze del Consiglio di Amministrazione, 1934-1942. 1. Relazioni, ossia verbali delle adunanze e relazioni.

17 «Mi permetto inoltre osservare che questa Esposizione non potrà avere che un interesse puramente locale e ciò, mi si lasci francamente dire, è ben poca cosa». ASAC, Ettore Tito to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, December 16, 1934, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia*. Serie: Attività 1894-1944 (Serie "Scatole Nere" b. 104 B. Mostra dei quarant'anni di arte veneta. «Non ce lo nascondiamo; l'Esposizione del maggio venturo ha il carattere di un contentino per i rifiutati dell'ultima mostra. Non mi interessa e non sento di parteciparvi». ASAC, Ettore Tito to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, January 4th 1935, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia*. Serie: Attività 1894-1944 (Serie "Scatole Nere" b. 104 B. Mostra dei quarant'anni di arte veneta.

18 Rome, Fondo Antonio Maraini, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna (henceforth FM GNAM) Ettore Tito, Italico Brass, and Alessandro Milesi to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, December 18,

In a personal letter to Volpi, he accused Tito of lacking «solidarity towards less famous Venetian artists and towards the new generations»[19]. Maraini suggested replacing him with someone younger, someone who «having been raised in fascism's atmosphere of discipline and duty has a stronger spirit of comradeship»[20].

Yet Tito's point that the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" was a mediocre enterprise unworthy of Venetian artists and of the glorious history of the Biennale, worried Volpi. Maraini, then, suggested occupying the three main rooms of the exhibition, which were left vacant after Tito's resignation, with a «very selective anthology of the most celebrated foreign artworks» presented in the Biennale, «which remained in Italian galleries and collections»[21]. Volpi liked the idea because «it will serve to elevate the tone of the exhibition while preserving its character of homage to the 40 years of the Exhibition», as he wrote to Maraini[22]. Thanks to the collaboration of the Podestà of Venice Mario Alverà, under whose jurisdiction was the Venice museum of modern art, and of Roberto Papini, the director of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, the "Mostra" would include a selection of international art showing the foresight of public collecting as well as the changes in taste between the first and the nineteenth Biennale.

The "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" thus began to take shape. It would take place in the central pavilion of the Biennale (the Padiglione Italia), whose façade had been redesigned in 1932 in a streamlined style by the architect

1934, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

19 «So il grande affetto che Ella porta a Tito e comprendo anche come al grande artista che ha raggiunto ormai il massimo della fama e degli onori, questa Mostra non possa molto interessare. Bisognerebbe per questo che egli l'avesse guardata prescindendo totalmente dal suo vantaggio personale e quasi dirò con un po' di spirito di sacrificio mirando soprattutto a far opera di cameratismo verso i colleghi veneziani meno grandi e meno fortunati e verso le generazioni nuove. Ma questa non è mai stata una caratteristica della generazione di Tito». FM GNAM, Antonio Maraini to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, December 24, 1934, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

20 «Il gruppo dei giovani che fortunatamente non hanno le perplessità e i dubbi degli anziani, e che allevati nell'atmosfera di disciplina e di dovere del Fascismo, sentono di più lo spirito di cameratismo». *Ibidem*.

21 «Che se potesse sembrare opportuno di aggiungere un interesse internazionale alla Mostra si potrà dedicare i grandi saloni cui Tito rinuncia a radunare una sceltissima antologia delle opere straniere che più furono celebrate al loro apparire e che sono rimaste nelle Gallerie e nelle collezioni italiane». *Ibidem*.

22 «L'idea di adornare il Salone centrale, al quale rinuncia Tito, con le maggiori opere internazionali raccolte nelle Gallerie italiane mi pare buonissima, e servirà a rialzare il tono di tutta la Mostra, pur mantenendolo in quello di onoranza ai quarant'anni di Esposizione». FM GNAM, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Antonio Maraini [Segretario Generale della Biennale], December 26, 1934, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b. 13 . "Mostra artisti veneziani," 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

Duilio Torres. The "Mostra" was divided in three sections: one for Triveneto artists who had exhibited in the Biennale between 1895 al 1914; another for Triveneto artists who had exhibited in the Biennale between 1920 al 1934; and four central rooms – the biggest, most important ones, located right in front of the entrance and at the center of the pavilion – reserved for foreign art exhibited in the Biennale between 1895 and 1934 (fig. 1). These central rooms, named "Homage to Foreign Art," are the focus of the next pages.

2. *"Omaggio all'arte straniera"*

As anticipated in the introduction, the peculiar nature of the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" – a non-Biennale that celebrated the history of the Biennale – partially explains the scarce information available on this show. For example, although a catalogue was published, contrary to their usual practice the administrators of the Biennale did not preserve an extensive documentation of the rooms' layout. I have found very few photos of this exhibition in the archive of the Biennale, and only three of the international section; moreover, the information they provide is partial because they record the inauguration of the show so the guests impede clearly seeing the works on view[23]. A short clip filmed by the Istituto Luce provides more images of the display, but very few scenes were taken in the international rooms[24]. This very fragmentary information can be supplemented with the numerous reviews of the exhibition that appeared in the Italian press. Nevertheless, with the material available at the moment it is possible to reconstruct with certainty the layout of a few walls in the "Omaggio."

The first artwork that the visitor of the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" viewed after entering through the portico of the central pavilion was a massive polychrome bust of Mussolini by the artist, cultural promoter, and jury member Paolo Boldrin. From the entryway into the next room, where the international show began, the visitor would see an enfilade of galleries that culminated in the tribune, where Tito's tondo *The Triumph of Venice* (1910) occupied a place of honor (fig. 2). The message was clear: the *foreign* art on view in the show, such as Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker,* which was in the line of vision, was meant to glorify the *Italian* institution that had exhibited it. This was in accordance with Maraini's overall intentions for the Biennale. As Massimo De Sabbata has

[23] Venice, ASAC. *Fondo Arti Visive. Fototeca. Attualità Allestimenti*. b.18. 1935. Mostra commemorativa 40 anni della Biennale.

[24] Giornale Istituto Luce B0685, May 29th 1935, *Inaugurazione della Mostra dei 40 Anni della Biennale*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4dPuu_3gvMI&feature=youtube_gdata_player>, 29.08.2016.

shown, for the Secretary of the Venice Biennale the foreign participation was meant to pay tribute to Italian art, emphasizing the centrality of the classical tradition for the contemporary arts of other countries[25]. It is worth noting that the international participation to the Biennale increased significantly under Maraini: before his tenure, there were only 7 international pavilions; in 1934, there were 15.

The first room of the Homage to Foreign Art (Sala II) was the so-called "Sala della Rotonda." Redesigned by Giò Ponti in 1928, its domed ceiling had a linear white plaster decoration that covered the colorful Art Nouveau cupola painted by Galileo Chini in 1907. The space, characterized by classicizing and restrained ornamentation, included a series of niches in which were placed portraits such as John Lavery's *Woman in Pink* (1910), William Nicholson's *Nancy* (1901), and Charles Shannon' *The Lady with the Feathered Hat* (1903), which elaborated on eighteenth-century precedents (fig. 3). Other pairings, however, aimed at showing that although the art exhibited in the Biennale was rooted in the past, it also moved forward. For instance, the room included the restrained nude *Eva* (1870) by Henri Fantin-Latour, as well as the symbolist *Medusa* (1908) by Franz von Stuck, one of the masterpieces of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Venice (fig. 4 and fig. 5). In the center of the room were two sculptures that despite their colossal size purposely represented elevated themes in an unheroic manner: Rodin's *The Burghers of Calais* (1914) and Emile Bourdelle's *Hercules Throwing Arrows* (1901). The first belonged to the Venetian Galleria d'Arte Moderna, the second to the Roman Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna – the presence of these two iconic artworks signaled that the "Omaggio" was a collaborative project between the two major Italian modern art museums – even if the exhibition included almost three times more artworks from Venice than from Rome.

The second room (Sala III) of the "Omaggio" was a rectangular space with squared edges, illuminated from above, that connected with the next three rooms through wide doorways. The Sala III is the room that is best recorded by the photographic information on the "Mostra", so it has been possible to digitally reconstruct its aspect (fig. 6). The entryway from the Sala della Cupola was framed by two bronze sculptures: *Salomé,* by the Bohemian artist Jan Stursa (1920) and *Dancer* by the Belgian Marnix D'Haveloose (1912). To the left of *Dancer* was Emile Claus' landscape *Autumn* (1903). At the corner of the room, a place of honor was given to Gustav Klimt's *Judith* (1909), one of the showpieces of the Venetian museum. To the right of *Salomé* was *The Communion of Saint Simon Stylite* (1894), by the Welsh painter and designer Franck Brangwyn, one of the first works to enter the collection of Ca' Pesaro. In the two main walls of the room two massive paintings faced each other: on the left, *The Laughter* (1899) by the Russian naturalist painter Philip Maliavin; on

[25] De Sabbata 2014.

the right, Charles Cottet's *Procession of Saint John in Brittany* (1899). To the left of Maliavin's brazenly colorful painting was an idealized Mediterranean seascape of 1905 by Emile Ménard, placed over Hermen Anglada y Camarasa's *Horse and Rooster* (1904). To the right, two scenes of peasant life painted by the Belgian Eugène Laermans: *Winter* (1912) and *Shadows and Lights* (1922). The other side of the room is harder to reconstruct. In the only view that I have been able to retrieve, a guest is covering almost completely the paintings on view. However, it is possible to glimpse – and to confirm this hypothesis on the basis of the artworks' measurements and reviews of the show – that Lucien Simon's *Holy Thursday* (1901) was placed over Heinrich Zügel's *The Pasture* (1906), while on the corner of the room, mirroring Klimt's *Judith,* was Anders Zorn' nude in a landscape, titled *The Stream* (1900). On the remaining walls were Albert Besnard's *Feminine Vision* (1890), a moody scene set in a dark interior by the German Ernst Oppler, another bucolic scene by Heinrich Zügel, an autumnal landscape by Emile Claus, and Lucien Simon's lighthearted *en plain air* scene *The Boat* (1912).

The majority of the artworks on view in these two rooms had been acquired between 1895 and 1914, that is, during the first administration of the Biennale under Antonio Fradeletto (1858-1930) (fig. 7). Fradeletto – a professor of Italian literature and a tireless cultural promoter – tolerated the conservative taste of the Venetian founders of the Biennale, even if during he tenure he frequently clashed with them when they insisted on having a more prominent role in the organization of the exhibition[26]. Yet Fradeletto's Biennales included some riskier choices, such as shows of Gustav Klimt, Gustave Courbet, and Pierre-Auguste Renoir in 1910. Despite these overtures, Fradeletto's Biennales were cautious at best; it was his decision, for example, to remove an artwork by Pablo Picasso from the Spanish pavilion in 1905. By 1912, many critics accused Fradeletto's administration of being backward-looking and doing a disservice to the aesthetic education of Italian and foreign audiences by catering to the conservative taste of the bourgeois market[27].

By contrast, the third room of the show (Sala IV) hosted, in the words of one journalist, «the more recent, or with an incorrect but maybe more understandable expression, the more «modernist» works by foreign artists who have exhibited in the various Biennales»[28]. It is unfortunate that the installation of this room has not been recorded in any of the visual materials that I have found on the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni." Only a sequence from the short clip by the Istituto Luce shows that at its center was Rodin's plaster for *The Thinker*, and that sculptures were positioned at the ends of the four dividing walls (fig. 8). The

26 Donzello 1986 and Ceschin 2001.

27 Barbantini 1945.

28 «È destinato a raccogliere le opere degli stranieri più recenti, o, per dirla con espressione impropria ma forse più chiara, più «modernisti» che figurarono alle varie Biennali». *Come si allestisce*, May 17, 1935.

two recognizable ones from the clip are Symbolist: George Frampton's *La belle dame sans merci* (1909) and George Minne's marble sculpture *The Man with the Wineskin* (1909). From the catalogue, we know that six more sculptures were placed in this small space: two sculptures by Constantin Meunier, the bust of the poet Arnold Goffin (1903) by Jules Lagae, two female peasants by the Belgian Charles Van der Stappen, and a bronze sculpture of Atlas by Franz von Stuck whose whereabouts are currently unknown[29]. Except Stuck's, these sculptures belong to the Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna in Venice.

On the walls in the small Sala IV were the more experimental paintings exhibited at the Biennale from 1920 to 1932, that is, during the administrations of Vittorio Pica and Antonio Maraini. It is not a coincidence that most of the works on view were French and Belgian, while the other rooms included an international miscellany of artists (fig. 9). Pica, an early champion of Impressionism, became Secretary of the Biennale in 1920 and attempted to open the Biennale to the international avant-garde. For example, the 1922 Biennale included a retrospective of the work of Amedeo Modigliani, and a contentious exhibition of African sculpture. The first editions of the Biennale under the supervision of Maraini were similarly open to foreign art, although with less space devoted to experimental artworks. For instance in 1928 the Biennale held the first Italian retrospective of Paul Gauguin – who had died in 1903 – and an important show on the *École de Paris,* which included works by Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, and Ossip Zadkine.

Among the earliest works on view in the Sala IV were Marc Chagall's *Rabbi from Vitebsk* (1922), a copy of a 1914 artwork that had been exhibited in Venice in 1928 (fig. 10)[30]. The Sala IV included three paintings shown in the French Pavilion at the Biennale of 1920, which had been curated by the neo-impressionist Paul Signac and included a retrospective of Paul Cézanne: Charles Guérin's *The Ladies' Bath* (1914), Maximilien Luce's *Rotterdam Harbour* (1900), and the Nabis Ker-Xavier Roussel's *Silenus* (1905). The majority of the works on view in this room, however, had been first exhibited in the Biennale during Maraini's tenure. For example, André Derain's *Pine Grove* and Moise Kisling's *Dutch Girl* were exhibited in 1932, and Pierre Bonnard's *Woman at the Mirror* and Cuno Amiet's *Garden* in 1934. Another modernist work worth noting was *Pub* (1930) by the Hungarian expressionist Wilhelm Aba-Novak (fig. 11).

[29] Although the catalogue of the Mostra does not indicate the provenance of this sculpture, and all the works on view were claimed to belong to the two public modern art museums, I have found a document in the Biennale archive in which this work is described as "Franz von Stuck, Propietario Casa de Blaas, bronzo, "Atleta". ASAC, Elenco di opere provenienti da Venezia, n.d., *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Ufficio Trasporti.* b. 35. Quarant'anni d'Arte Veneta. Mostra Commemorativa della Fondazione della Biennale. Maggio-luglio 1935- XIII "Venezia". Eugene von Blaas (1843-1931) was an Italian-Austrian painter who lived and worked in Venice.

[30] Scotton 2002, p. 56.

After the "modernist" interlude of the Sala IV, the last room of the "Omaggio" again included artworks acquired for the most part during Fradeletto's tenure as Secretary – indeed, the majority of the artworks in the "Mostra" had been acquired between 1897 and 1912. The right wall of the Sala V was captured in the short Istituto Luce clip, so it is possible to digitally reconstruct its appearance (fig. 12). The place of honor was given to Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida's *Sewing the Sails* (1896), exhibited in 1900 in the Paris International Exhibition, and then in 1905 at the Venice Biennale[31]. To its right was Heinrich Knirr's *Family Portrait* of 1904, hanging over Emile Ménard's *Opal Sea*. To the left of Sorolla's massive painting was a view of a Dutch dock covered in snow by Albert Baertson (1898), hanging over *Susanne* (1929) by the Hungarian Istvan Csök. To the left of these paintings was Jacques-Emile Blanche's *Study for the Portrait of Andrew Noble* (1912), and on the corner of the room a Normandy riverscape by Fritz Thaulow (1899) and a somber portrait of the sculptor August Shreitmüller by Wilhelm Leibl (1867), the oldest artwork on view, which had been exhibited in 1897 and donated to Ca' Pesaro by the collector Ernst Seeger. To the right of the entryway was a full body portrait by John Lavery, *Polimnia* (1909), and *Melons* (1905) by Franck Brangwyn – who in 1905 had been awarded a prize for his decoration of the British room of the Biennale.

On the other side of the doorway – from which it was possible to accede to the podium with Tito's *The Triumph of Venice* – the public could see *Fisherman of Skägen* (1892) by the Danish painter Michael Ancher, a naturalist scene that was the first painting to be donated to the Venetian modern art gallery, and the celebrated Hungarian portraitist Philip de Laszlo's *Portrait of My Wife* (1907). Opposite to Sorolla's painting was an equally massive painting, Wladimir Schereschewski's *Syberian Deportees* (1892), which depicted the suffering of the Polish people after the failed 1863 "January Uprising" against the Tsar; it had been acquired by King Umberto I at the second Biennale and donated to Ca' Pesaro. No photos or films record the remaining walls, but from the catalogue we know that among the works on view were Blanche's *Berenice* (1899), Robert Brough's *Saint Anne of Brittany* (1895), Ferdinand Khnopff's *Portrait of Mademoiselle de Rothmaler* (1889), Ignacio Zuloaga's *Aunt Luisa* (1903), and Franz von Lenbach's portrait of Pope Leo XII, which had been awarded a gold medal when it was exhibited at the 1903 Biennale. Two sculptures from the Venetian modern gallery were also in the room: Joseph Bernard *Water Carrier* and Max Klinger's *Bather* (1907).

It is not easy to parse the criteria by which these four rooms were organized. I have been unable to find any documentation about the rationale that guided the distribution of these artworks; they are not organized by date, nor by Biennale, nor by the artists' national origin. The material in the Biennale archives reveals

[31] Lorandi 2000 and Lacagnina 2007.

that Romolo Bazzoni (an administrator of the Biennale who had worked in the institution since its first edition), Count Giorgio Viola, and the journalist and art critic Elio Zorzi were in charge of selecting which works from the Venetian and Roman galleries would be exhibited in the "Omaggio"[32]. Maraini and Viola were the ones ultimately responsible for the distribution of the artworks in this section, although it was Bazzoni who suggested placing in the Sala della Cupola the selection of portraits[33].

Art critics of the time similarly struggled to identify the organizing principles behind the layout of the international rooms. The critic for the Roman newspaper *Il Messaggero* suggested that the "Omaggio all'Arte Straniera" recapitulated the characteristics of the three phases in the history of the Biennale, determined by the «temperament and inclinations» of the Secretaries: the «literary and almost journalistic» tone of Antonio Fradeletto, Secretary from 1894 to 1920; the «eclectic and cultural» approach of Vittorio Pica, at the helm of the institution from 1920 to 1926, and the «rhythmic and stylistic» method of Maraini[34]. Yet, as I have shown, the rooms were not organized chronologically; neither were there informative labels or wall texts, so the general public would have been unable to identify when each artwork had been exhibited and acquired, and thus to derive any conclusions about the aesthetic preferences of each Secretary of the Biennale.

Indeed, above all journalists noted that what the four rooms of the international section revealed was the scarce quality of the holdings of Italian public collections of modern art. Art critic Giuseppe Marchiori, for example, observed that the majority of the paintings on view – he singled out Zuloaga, Sorolla, von Stuck, and Lazlo – was «either vulgarly naturalistic or pointlessly symbolic or decorative»[35]. Only Laermans, Fantin-Latour, and Klimt represented the best of European art at the turn of the twentieth century; only Derain, Bonnard, Kisling, and Chagall illustrated contemporary international tendencies. This was not the fault of the organizers, Marchiori observed, but evidence of the failings of the national modern art collections; «the homage» to foreign art, he concluded, «is purely symbolic»[36].

[32] FM GNAM, Romolo Bazzoni to Antonio Maraini [Segretario Generale della Biennale], February 4, 1935, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

[33] ASAC, Romolo Bazzoni to Antonio Maraini, April 30, 1935, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Serie: Attività 1894-1944* (Serie "Scatole Nere" b.105 (Mostra Commemorativa 1935). Fasc. Corrispondenza con l'On. Maraini.

[34] Berardinelli 1935.

[35] *Ibidem*.

[36] Marchiori 1935, p. 393.

3. *An overlooked exhibition*

Despite gathering a selection of international art that could not be viewed elsewhere in Italy, and bringing back to Venice works that had not been seen in the city since they were first shown in the Biennale, the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" was hindered in multiple ways. When the show had initially been proposed, it included only artists from the Veneto, and the criteria with which admission would be granted were not made explicit. Therefore it had been framed as a "Mostra Sindacale," that is, one of the artistic shows organized by the local chapter of the syndicate of artists. However, after Tito's defection, the inclusion of foreign artists, the introduction of some measure of selectiveness to elevate the quality of the art on view, and the renunciation of Teodoro Gianniotti, Regional Secretary of the Fascist Syndicate of Fine Arts, from the jury, the "Mostra" could no longer be properly considered one of the "Sindacali." This was not a minor problem. In the interwar period all artistic shows had to be authorized by the Ministry of Corporations, which oversaw that no conflict of interests between different syndicates took place and approved the budget for all public events. By January 1935, when the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" began to take shape in its definitive form, the deadline to ask for permission had passed[37].

Volpi decided to play by ear, and to forfeit asking explicit permission from the authorities[38]. When in mid-January Maraini requested an audience with Mussolini to talk about "the summer projects of the Biennale", the secretary of the Duce reminded him that the next Biennale would be in 1936, and to be in touch later in the year[39]. Unlike Volpi, Maraini was aware that not going through the official channels would be a mistake; in the rest of his correspondence with the Secretary of Mussolini, he alludes to many of the summer activities of the Biennale but carefully avoids mentioning the "Mostra".

In April 1935 the Ministry of Corporations began to question the legality of this show; the regulations of the Biennale explicitly stated that the exhibition would take place every two years, and the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" clearly went against them. In a stern letter, the subsecretary to the Ministry announced that the show would be cancelled, because it went against the regulations of the Biennale, and even if it was to be considered an out-of-the-ordinary

[37] FM GNAM, Antonio Maraini to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, January 1935, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b.13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

[38] ASAC, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Romolo Bazzoni, January 7, 1935, Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Serie: Attività 1894-1944 (Serie "Scatole Nere" b. 104 B. Mostra dei quarant'anni di arte veneta.

[39] ACS, Antonio Maraini to Osvaldo Sebastiani, January 16, 1935, *Segreteria Particolare del Duce. Carteggio ordinario* b. 524.260. A handwritten note of the Secretary reads, «la prossima biennale avrà luogo nel 1936- dirlo a questo ambizioso»; («the next Biennale will take place in 1936 – tell it to this power-hungry man»).

show, it still had not received authorization[40]. Maraini, however, was an able diplomat, and he counter-argued that the show was only local, unlike the Biennales, and that it had been authorized by the Syndicate of Fine Arts; it was not, therefore, a Biennale and should be exonerated from following the statute of the Ente[41]. Although ultimately the Biennale was allowed to continue organizing the "Mostra," the authorities gave it very little economic and press support. President Volpi encouraged Maraini to contact the Ministry of Press and Propaganda so that the show could be promoted in the days before the inauguration, but he also cautioned against using too many resources for the remodeling of the rooms because he did not expect the "Mostra" to be a financial success[42].

Even the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna proved unhelpful, as it insisted – contrary to its practice for loans to other more prestigious shows organized by the Biennale, such as the major show on nineteenth and twentieth century art that opened in that same year at the Jeu de Paume in Paris – on having all its works insured, thus causing a significant expense to the Biennale[43]. Volpi di Misurata invited Mussolini to participate in the inauguration – he had visited the 1934 Biennale – but the Duce had other commitments[44]. Volpi then set his sights on Cesare Maria De Vecchi, the Minister of Education, but he could not attend either[45]. Volpi had to content himself with a minor political figure, Renato Ricci, a subsecretary of Physical Education, and a minor member of the Savoy House, the Duke of Genoa[46]. This meant that the inauguration of the show received only cursory attention in the press.

[40] FM GNAM, Ferruccio Lantini to Antonio Maraini, April 1, 1935, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. b. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani" , 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

[41] FM GNAM, Antonio Maraini to Ferruccio Lantini, April 1935, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

[42] FM GNAM, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Antonio Maraini, April 25, 1935, Sezione 3, serie 2, sottoserie 1: *Esposizioni Biennale Internazionale d'Arte*. 13. "Mostra artisti veneziani", 08/02/1934 - 08/10/1935.

[43] AS GNAM, Roberto Papini [Direttore della R. Galleria d'Arte Moderna] to Romolo Bazzoni, May 1935, POS.9B *Prestiti Opere d'Arte* def. 1931-1939. 2. 9b. 40. Prestiti opere di autori vari per mostra d'arte italiana e straniera a Venezia; Venice, ASAC. Romolo Bazzoni to Ditta Tartaglia, May 2, 1935, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Serie: Attività 1894-1944* (Serie "Scatole Nere" b.105 (Mostra Commemorativa 1935).

[44] ACS, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Benito Mussolini, May 15, 1935, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936* b.14.1.283/7.

[45] Ivi, Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata to Benito Mussolini, April 18, 1935, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936* b.14.1.283/7.

[46] Ivi, Benito Mussolini to Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, May 24, 1935, *Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri 1934-1936* b.14.1.283/7; "Uomini, Cose e Avvenimenti. S.A.R. il Duca di Genova, accompagnato dal conte Volpi di Misurata e da S.E. Ricci, si reca all'«Esposizione dei 40 anni» organizzata dalla Biennale di Venezia", *L'Illustrazione Italiana* LXX, no. 22 (June 2, 1935): 907.

Furthermore, the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" coincided with other more interesting events in Venice, such as a major exhibition on Titian that took place in Ca' Pesaro at the same time[47]. Nino Barbantini, the curator of the Venetian Galleria d'Arte Moderna and of the show, had secured loans from museums all over the world, and paintings usually secluded in dark churches or private palaces were for the first time easy to admire[48]. Thus, although many newspapers published news about the "Mostra," the press coverage of the show was cursory at best. After all, by definition the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" did not include any new art that had not been exhibited already in previous Biennales. Most journalists, like the aforementioned Marchiori, understood that the show's most important feature was its symbolic import as an homage to the artists who had participated in the Biennale, rather than the works on view. Indeed the most authoritative art critics of the national press – for example Ugo Ojetti, Margherita Sarfatti, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, and Nino Barbantini – did not dedicate any coverage to the "Mostra". An anonymous note in the Biennale Archives hypothesized that «the newspapers did not cover the show because they deemed it to have regional character and therefore to not be well-regarded by the government»[49]. Its *déja vu* character did not help either.

4. *The "Omaggio all'Arte Straniera" and the Modern Art Canon*

What is the meaning of the eclectic selection of international artworks on view in the "Omaggio"? It might be tempting to read the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" as reflecting the history of the Biennale and of the artists that exhibited there. However, this would be misleading. Important international artists who had exhibited in the Biennale were not included in the "Mostra" because their works were not acquired by the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna or by Ca' Pesaro. For example, the first Biennale included works by Puvis de Chavanne and Odilon Redon; the second Biennale exhibited Claude Monet

47 This show was one of the so-called "Biennales of Ancient Art"; in addition to the show on Titian, an exhibition was devoted to Tintoretto (1937) and to Veronese (1939), and they took place on odd years to avoid overlapping with the Biennale. Some journalists suspected that the international section of the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" had been organized to free the rooms of Ca' Pesaro needed for the Titian exhibition. See Piovan 1935.

48 Torriano 1935.

49 «Per la propaganda in Italia ho l'impressione che i giornali credano opportuno di non occuparsi della Mostra ritenendo che essa abbia carattere regionale, e perciò non sia ben vista dal Governo. A prova di questa mia asserzione sta il fatto che gli articoli inviati da Zajotti al Giornale d'Italia, da Haertsarich alla Tribuna e da Bergamo alla Gazzetta del Popolo non sono stati pubblica». ASAC, "Promemoria," 1935, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Serie: Attività 1894-1944* (Serie "Scatole Nere" b.105 (Mostra Commemorativa 1935). A. Mostra del Quarantennio: Ufficio Stampa.

and Arnold Böcklin. In 1920, Alexander Archipenko and Natalia Goncharova were represented in the Russian Pavilion, and the French Pavilion had works by Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, and Georges Seurat, while in 1922 the German Pavilion included Expressionist works by Oskar Kokoschka and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, among others. In 1924, Maleviç and Rodchenko participated in the Biennale. None of their works were acquired by Italian public art galleries. The Biennale commissions were more progressive in their taste than the acquisition committees for the Venice and Rome modern art museums[50]. As they had a limited budget to expand their collections, acquisition committees favored conventional rather than controversial artworks, hoping that the former would maintain their value over time.

If exhibition venues and shows contribute to the construction of the canon by integrating artists and artworks into the history of art, what view of modern art was promoted in the "Omaggio all'Arte Straniera"?

Firstly, it was one that run counter to the French-centered canon of modern art currently in place, but rather included a plurality of national traditions. Although France was still the nationality most represented in the show with 25 artists, it was followed by Belgium (18), Germany (11), and England and Hungary (6 artists each). The catalogue emphasized contested national identities as well, for instance specifying that Anglada y Camerasa was Catalan and Brangwyn Welsh. Artists from peripheral European regions, for example Eastern Europe (Poles, Russians, and Czechs) and Scandinavia (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedes) were included, while only one artwork by an American was exhibited.

Secondly, the "Omaggio" had a conservative view of what genres dominated a narrative of modern art. Most of the artworks on view developed genres with a long-standing tradition: portraiture, landscape, history painting, genre painting. The "Omaggio" prominently featured Impressionists, Realists and Naturalists, Symbolists, and only very few Modernists – and none of the ones more commonly reproduced in modern art textbooks, or their more subversive artworks[51]. No ruptures were displayed: even the "modernist" Room IV included artworks belonging to traditional academic genres. Abstraction and non-figurative art were completely absent from the overview presented in the

[50] Or than other collectors of the time, for that matter, as Claudia Gian Ferrari points out: "collecting was not channeled either spontaneously by its own preparation, or by the art critics who should have partaken of a more informative and propositional role, towards the most interesting choices among those presented by the ample exhibiting panorama". Gian Ferrari 1995, p. 72.

[51] A special note should be devoted to the critical fortune, or lack thereof, of the French Impressionists in the Venice Biennale. Maria Mimita Lamberti had devoted several studies to this issue. She has concluded that «the international market for the impressionists flew rather higher and further so much so as to be able to ignore the Venetian stage. While the protagonists still alive, like Monet and Renoir, were by then producing for wealthy and highly qualified United States collectors, the historicization by museums of their earlier painting placed them in many ways outside of the myopic gaze of those who frequented the Biennale». Lamberti 1995, p. 43. Her other analyses of this phenomenon are Lamberti 1975, Lamberti 1982, and Lamberti 2004.

"Omaggio" – and in the modern art collections of Venice and Rome, even if as I have mentioned they were shown at the Venice Biennale.

Lastly, although many works on view demonstrated an attention to regional folklore – for example scenes set in Brittany or in the Russian countryside – they were depicted in common international styles. The view of modern art that the "Omaggio" promoted was one in which artistic styles transcended national borders; the colorful impressionism of Anglada y Camarasa, Anders Zorn, or Albert Besnard were representative of Impressionism as a movement, and it was unnecessary to look for its origins in 1870s Paris[52]. As early as 1914, the critic Gino Damerini condemned this situation and denounced: «why does [the Biennale] pretend to spurn the masters, when it opens its doors to their disciples?»[53]. More than ten years later, the art historian Lionello Venturi could diagnose in this trend the origins of a certain provincialism that affected Italian contemporary art. «Renoir and Cézanne have been overlooked in favor of Zuloaga and Zorn», Venturi observed, which made it hard to promote the art of the French Impressionists among the Italians; rather, critics condemned Impressionism tout court without having encountered the work of its original practitioners. The result was that Italian artists of the first half of the twentieth century were, in Venturi's view, «provincial to the second degree: not only imitators, but imitators of the imitators»[54]. For Venturi, the Scandinavian, German, Belgian, and Dutch impressionists had translated the pictorial language of Renoir and Cézanne in a more traditional way; it was this domesticated, not experimental version of Impressionism that Italian artists followed[55]. Venturi's assessment derived from his first-hand knowledge of the international developments of art at the time. Most Italian critics who attended the Biennale, however, instead of focusing on international art styles and tendencies, frequently emphasized the national peculiarities of the artists;

[52] For example, in 1903 the critic Diego Angeli, describing contemporary artistic tendencies on view at the Biennale, mentioned Sorolla, Brangwyn, and Raffaelli as representatives of Impressionism. Angeli 1903.

[53] «Nelle varie sale molti pittori non nascondono, anzi vantano, nelle loro opere, una strettissima parentela spirituale con maestri quali il Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse e via discorrendo: ebbene, perché dunque si finge di ignorare i maestri quando si aprono le porte ai discepoli?» Damerini 1914.

[54] «Dopo aver esaltato al pubblico Zorn e Zuloaga, come persuaderlo che Monet e Renoir erano artisti autentici? [...] In seguito [alla mostra di Roma del 1911] ci si accorse pubblicamente che la pittura italiana stava male. Come curarla? Troppo impressionismo, si disse, senza accorgersi che il male derivava dall'ignoranza e dall'incomprensione dell'impressionismo autentico, quello francese, e dalla fiducia nell'impressionismo falso, quello scozzese, olandese, svedese, spagnuolo, o che so io. Era cioè avvenuto che la tradizione italiana, provincialotta anzi che no, pure capace ancora di sviluppi, era stata troncata non dal gusto di chi era alla testa del movimento pittorico mondiale, ma da chi gli andava dietro. E quindi i pittori italiani che si misero sull'orma degli Olandesi, dei Tedeschi, degli Svedesi, divennero, senza accorgersene, non solo imitatori, ma anzi imitatori degli imitatori, provinciali alla seconda potenza». Venturi 1926.

[55] Venturi 1927.

the fact that, like in universal exhibitions, in the Biennales artists were grouped according to national origin, favored this form of reading.

As De Sabbata has observed, this was also part of a broader strategy on the part of Maraini. In his years as Secretary of the Biennale, he accurately promoted «the illusion of a unitary Italian art […] finally liberated from regional differences»[56]. The equivalent strategy for the international contributions to the Biennale was that foreign countries «should tap from their artistic past and free themselves from foreign impulses, in order to draw an artistic landscape in which the concept of internationalism was based on the juxtaposition of different national languages»: promoting national traditions was for Maraini the best way of condemning "cosmopolitanism" and "cerebralism," his main targets during his tenure at the helm of the Biennale[57]. The "Mostra dei Quarant'anni" did include innovative artists from the School of Paris, such as Moisé Kisling and Marc Chagall. However, neither *The Rabbi of Vitebsk* nor *Dutch Girl* are among their most representative or innovative works. In other cases, by being exhibited alongside contemporary works in a more conservative style, the disruptive import of inventive artworks was tamed. For example, Klimt's *Judith* was described by a reviewer as «clearly revolutionary», but was shown side by side with more conventional artworks such as Emile Claus's *Autumn* (1903) and Emile René Ménard *Errants* (1905)[58].

Furthermore, the distribution of the rooms of the "Mostra" – with works organized neither by country, nor by period, nor by style – resulted in a tamed and pacified version of the conflictual history of the Biennale, presented in terms of similarities rather than contrasts, as if a common view of art had been carried forward from 1895 to 1935, throughout the three administrations of the institution. Instead of emphasizing the stark differences between the various administrations, it represented them in ideal continuity, concealing the struggles and debates that had characterized the first forty years of the Biennale.

As a retrospective view of the history of the Biennale, the show should also be considered as part of Maraini's project to historicize the institution, and to go beyond its ephemeral nature as a temporary exhibition. Since the beginning of his administration, Maraini had aspired to render the Biennale autonomous from the interferences of the Venetian city council, under whose jurisdiction it had been since 1895 and on whose budget approval it depended. The foundation of the Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee was, in the words of Chiara Rabitti, «the modern expression of a clear desire for stability and permanence by way of a work of documentation […] giving an identity that was visible, both from the inside and from the outside, independently of the chronological rhythm of the

[56] De Sabbata 2014, p. 84.
[57] *Ibidem*.
[58] Hartsarich 1935.

two-year exhibition»[59]. This process of increased autonomy and historicization could be then considered to have had three important steps: firstly, the creation of an archive to document the history of the Biennale (1928); secondly, the royal decree of January 1930 by which the Biennale became an autonomous body, independent from any inferences of the Venetian municipality; thirdly, the "Mostra dei Quarant'anni," a temporary museum that recorded, in visible rather than archival form, the exhibition history of the Biennale. As has already been noted the "Mostra" was an experiment for a new permanent installation of Ca' Pesaro that would reunite in Venice the international artworks acquired in the Biennale by both the Venetian and the Roman museums of modern art. This installation, which opened in 1938 and lasted until the mid 1950s could be considered the fourth ideal phase in Maraini's process of historicization and autonomization of the Biennale. The museum gave permanence to what had been created as an ephemeral exhibition, and concealed its fundamentally commercial nature under the pretenses of museography. A book published by the Biennale in 1933 made this very clear: it published the story and statistics of the exhibitions between 1995 and 1932, and stated that Ca' Pesaro was «nothing more than a huge artwork that with one thousand paintings shows the trajectory of Art in the period of the different Biennales»[60].

As Volpi had predicted, the "Mostra" was not a success of public; it only received 20.373 visitors, while a normal Biennale would have more than 300.000[61]. Years later, Romolo Bazzoni described the show as a success, but documents from 1935 prove otherwise[62]. In a meeting of the board of trustees of the Biennale, the causes for such lack of interest were mentioned: the "Mostra" was not publicized enough; the Titian show obscured any other artistic events taking place in Venice; the railway administration – contrary to its practice for actual Biennales – did not grant any fare discounts[63]. Yet as I have shown in the previous pages, the "Mostra" is worthy of study as it was an attempt on the part of the Biennale to control the narrative of its own history, concealing its most radical and subversive episodes – as if the avant-garde had never been exhibited in Venice. The show also reveals the negotiations and debates in the processes of canon formation, since with the "Omaggio" Maraini and his collaborators sought to present an alternative view of the development of modern art between

[59] Rabitti 1995, p. 33.

[60] Varagnolo 1933, p. 61.

[61] ASAC, "Visitatori alla Mostra dei Quarant'anni," 1935, *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia*. Serie: Attività 1894-1944 (Serie "Scatole Nere" b.105 (Mostra Commemorativa 1935). G. Mostra dei Quarant'anni: corrispondenza.

[62] Bazzoni 1962, p. 133.

[63] ASAC, "Adunanza del comitato d'amministrazione tenutasi Venezia nella sede della Biennale in Palazzo Ducale il giorno 31 luglio 1935 XIII ad ore 17:15.," July 31, 1935. *Fondo Storico La Biennale di Venezia. Organi di gestione*. Serie: 2.2.3. Verbali. Minute, copie, trascrizioni, stenogrammi. b001. Atti delle adunanze del Consiglio di Amministrazione, 1934-1942. 1. Relazioni, ossia verbali delle adunanze e relazioni.

1895 and 1935, a view that expanded the range of what was considered worthy of being exhibited by consecrating a plurality of national artistic traditions, while at the same time rejecting all the disruptive experiments of the period.

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Appendix

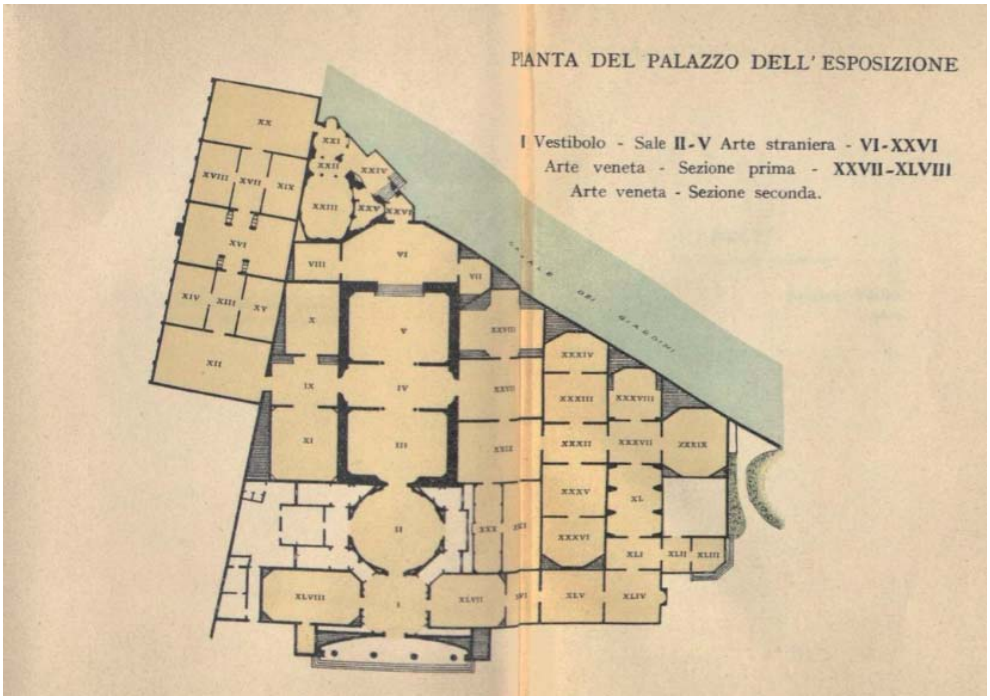

Fig. 1. Map of the "Omaggio all'Arte Straniera", Mostra dei Quarant'anni della Biennale (1935), Venezia: Officine Grafiche Carlo Ferrari

Fig. 2. Clip from Cinegiornale Istituto Luce, "Inaugurazione della Mostra dei 40 anni della Biennale", May 29th 1935

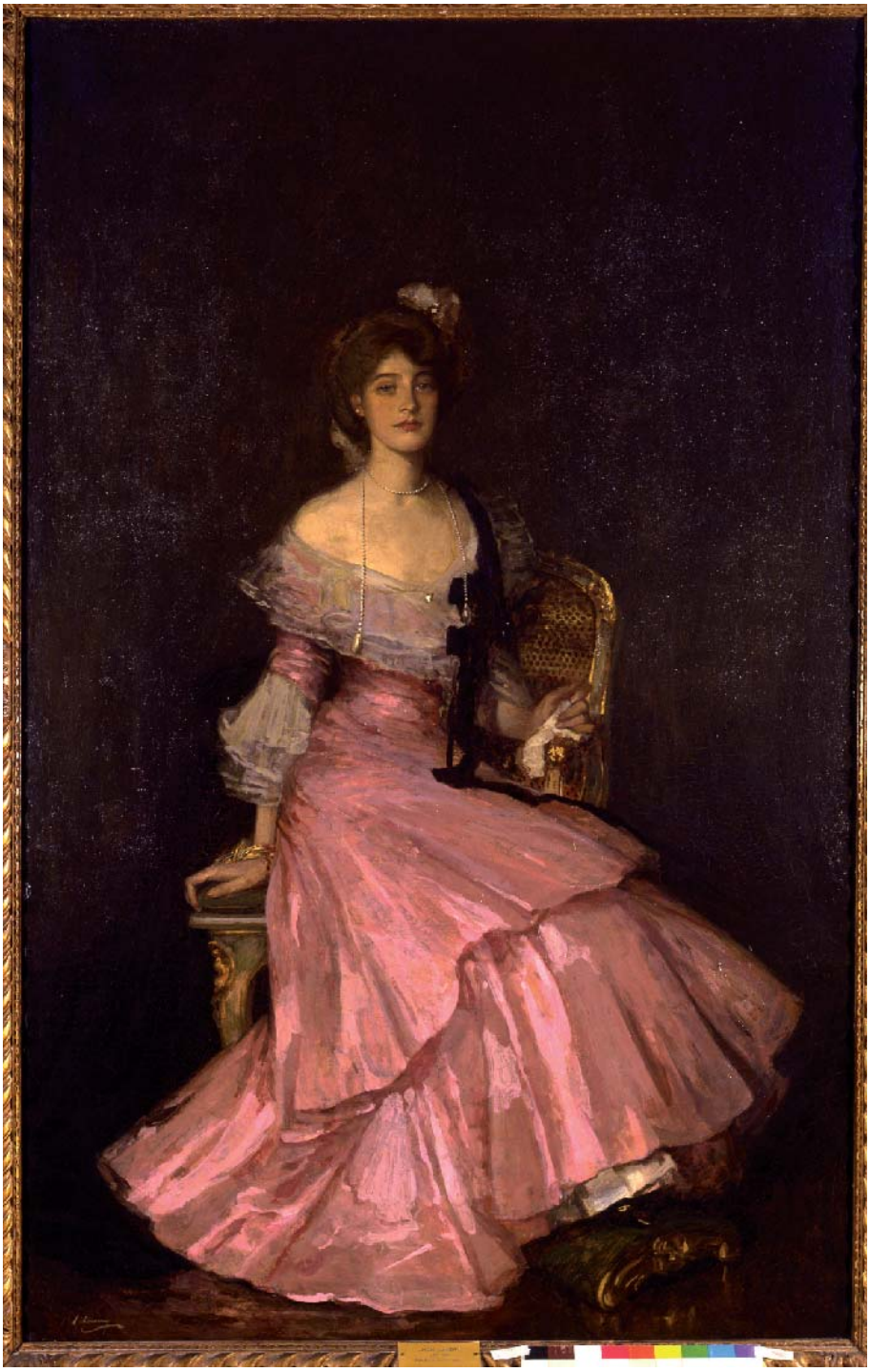

Fig. 3. John Lavery's *Woman in Pink* (1910), oil on canvas, Venice, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

Fig. 4. Henri Fantin-Latour, *Eva* (1870), oil on canvas, Venice, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

Fig. 5. Franz von Stuck, *Medusa* (1908), oil on wood, Venice, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

Fig. 6. Digital reconstruction of Sala III, work by the author using Sketchup program, recreated in Autodesk Maya by Cameron McKenzie (Colgate University)

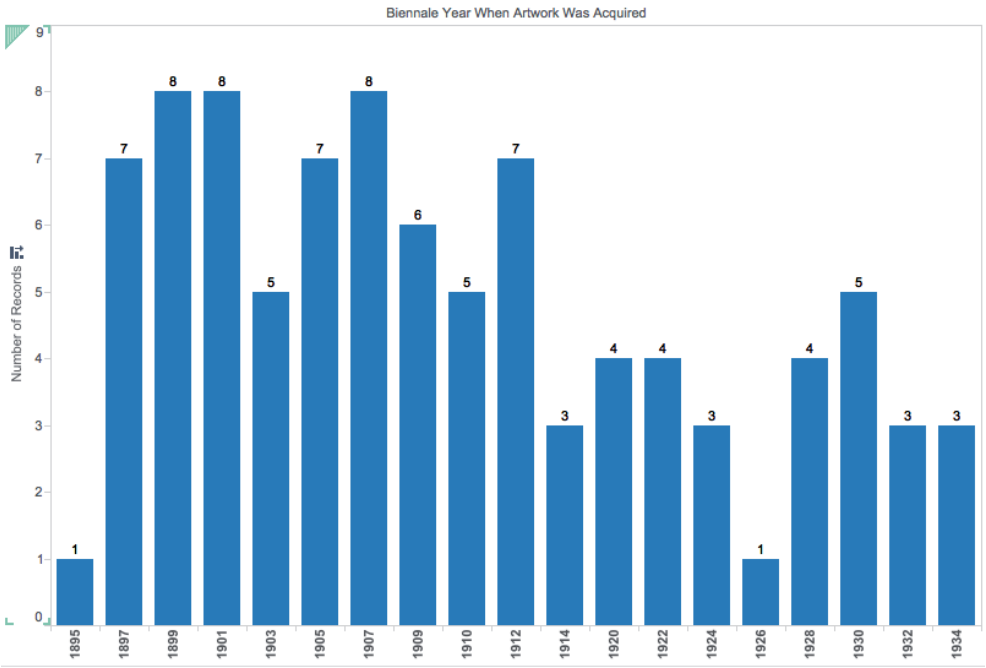

Fig. 7. Distribution of artworks by acquisition date, visualization by the author using Tableau program

Fig. 8. Clip from Cinegiornale Istituto Luce, *Inaugurazione della Mostra dei 40 anni della Biennale*, May 29th 1935

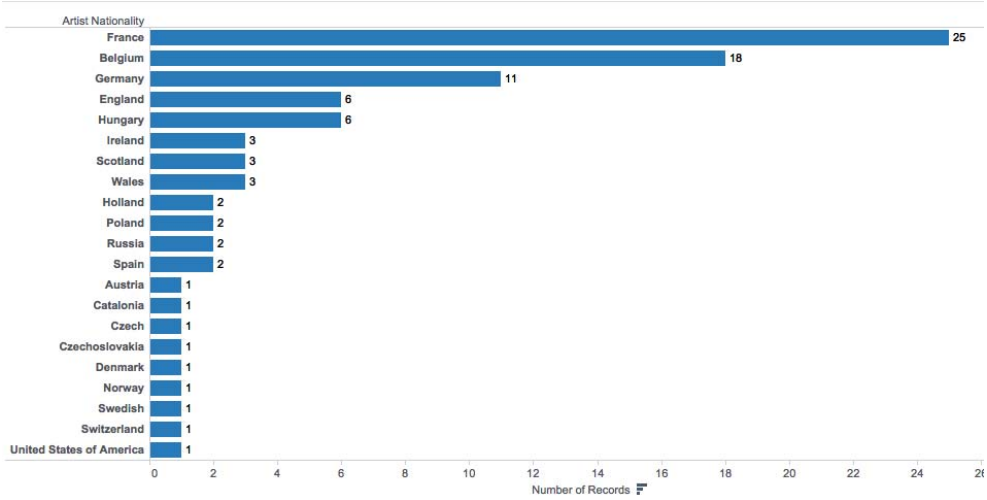

Fig. 9. Distribution of artworks by artist's nationality, visualization by the author using Tableau program

Fig. 10. Marc Chagall, *The Rabbi* (1922), oil on canvas, Venice, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia

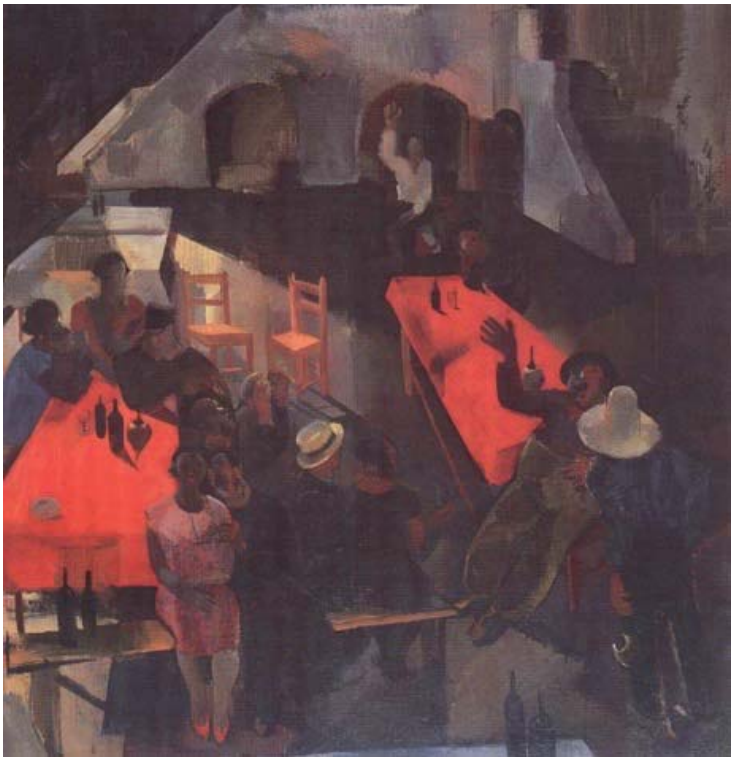

Fig. 11. Vilmos Aba-Novak, *The Pub* (1930), oil on canvas, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome. Su concessione del Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività culturali e del Turismo

Fig. 12. Digital reconstruction of Sala V, work by the author using Sketchup program, recreated in Autodesk Maya by Cameron McKenzie (Colgate University)