



City of Marsala

# GRIGNANI PALACE

(secc. XVI - XVIII)

City Painting Gallery

# Grignani Palace

"Among the noblest houses, definable as palaces, the house of Count Grignano takes place. It is situated in *piazza Carmine* and it fills up an entire wing of the area, with a distinguished inside garden". With these words, Marchese di Villabianca referred to *Palazzo Grignani* in his work "Storia di Marsala" at the end of the Eighteenth century. *Palazzo Grignano* (or Grignani, as the spelling fluctuates during the centuries) stands in the ancient and evocative *piazza Carmine*, enhanced by the old monastery of Carmelite friars (with a church consecrated to *Maria Annunziata* with octagonal bell tower) and by the neoclassical *palazzo Vaccara*, now transformed into hotel. Next to *palazzo Grignano* stood the palace of Cappasanta family. This family was protagonist of city life until the Seventeenth century, and later, when they extinguished or moved away, the palace became property of the Grignano family, which enlarged its house toward the south, but it never unified the two façades, for this reason the front is unfinished. Probably, the family couldn't combine the buildings because of financial straits. *Palazzo Grignani* is a solid building of the eighteenth century which maintains some elements of previous centuries, such as the three windows with lintels bordered by an horizontal frame typical of Manneristic style. The big portal with a rounded arch is framed by two tall pilasters of simple ashlar holding an horizontal frame. Among the balconies of the second floor, just one, which has a wavy and harmonic design, presents a threshold with a wavy outline lying on volute corbels and a wrought iron railing shaped like the chest of a goose; the modelled jambs hold up a broken pediment in which a decorated medallion is inserted. The building is enclosed by a ledge with projection held by corbels. On the side front of *via Garaffa*, the only relief element is a little balcony with the railing shaped like the chest of a goose, typical of eighteenth century. In the income statement of Antonio XI Grignano, a detailed description of the palace can be found; this is useful to acknowledge the original structure of the building, highly degraded by frequent damaging of the last century and by its state of neglect of the last ten years. The count "says he has got a big house, with three floors, in which he lives; starting from the ground floor, he says that in the court there are five arches hold by four columns of white marble and by nine doors". Following, a detailed description of ground floors rooms in which there are a stable, two big warehouses with three arches which contained two hundred *salme*<sup>1</sup> of corn, carriages room, two houses for the domestic staff, another store to contain until 80 *salme* of corn and a store to save he straw. A door gave access to "a garden used for entertainment time composed of two *tumoli*<sup>2</sup> of earth with four paths covered with vines", with fig, apple, pear, peach, pomegranate trees and many other plants. In this garden, enclosed by a stone wall, there was running water, a well (water was drawn through the *senia*<sup>3</sup>) and a toolbox for the gardener. Stairs of white marble gave access to the first floor, in which there were bedrooms and kitchen, the latter with running water "a *grilletto*". Proceeding to the second floor, there was a gallery with three arches held by three pilasters made of stones of marquetry. In this gallery, there was a door entering to the living-room, where two doors gave access to other bedrooms, the Chapel and a terrace with glass doors. The two small houses adjoining the palace, placed in the three courts of modern *via Garaffa*, belonged to the Count as well. The palace, restored to the city, now hold the town art gallery of *Ente Mostra di Pittura*.

<sup>1</sup> A *Salma* is a Sicilian unite of measure equivalent to 200 kg.

<sup>2</sup> A *tumolo* is a Sicilian unite of measure equivalent to 2000 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> A particular method to draw water thanks to mules that activate a mechanism with many pails.

## Cagnaccio di San Pietro - I Naufraghi (1934)

When, in 1934, Cagnaccio di San Pietro deals with the big *Naufraghi* canvas, he is widely well known in the artistic scene of that time. Even if his reputation arose from middle-class life's portraits and scenes, since his early artistic consciousness he pursues a study rich in strict moral consideration, connected to both social themes and religious iconography's revival typical of Italian Renaissance tradition. The prime example is represented by the great production of *L'alzana*, based on the two male close-up figures that pull a boat in a severe and sober scene.

In *Naufraghi*, the subject belongs to sea workers as well, with a more dramatic setting in which many of the features giving celebrity to painter's work can be found: the thin clearness of the pattern, the sober notation of physiognomic elements, the simple stillness of characters' postures, emphasized by the essential geometry of the production, while the bare floor of the building on the dock stands for wings, and the leaden sky over the sea seems closed and blocked like a gravestone slab. The stunned silence following the tragedy, highlighted by the long shadows thrown on the cobblestone by the lantern light, marks that existence's painful consideration that carefully emerged in paintings of previous years. This might represent the deepest bond with expressionist spirit of German New Objectivity.

However, in the half-circle arrangement of the figures around the body of the drowned sailor, Cagnaccio includes an allusion to the holy iconography: just as in *Maternità II* of 1937 the hardly gesture implied of characters follows the canonic type of *Madonne col Bambino*, *Naufraghi*'s structure calls to mind that one of a *Compianto sul Cristo Morto*. This harsh consonance, without declarative emphasis, is far from celebratory rhetoric that weighs down attempts of Italian group *Novecento*'s artists. However, despite agreeing with some of *Novecento* guidelines, Cagnaccio cannot be seen as a member of the group.

## Room 1

The period between the two wars is largely characterized by the atmosphere of the so-called "ritorno all'ordine", a sort of coming back to more traditional and figurative models after historical avant-gardes periods. However, for a long time, historiography has acknowledged to these researches, in which a monumental element and a renewed importance given to architecture dominate, not a make-shift sense, but rather a sense of different reproduction of the requests taken on by avant-gardes, whose leading figures in Italy and Europe were protagonists of this new period as well.

The clear and solemn language, which early to mid '20s was adopted by the group called *Novecento*, attracted artists of two generations, born in the period between the last twenty years of Nineteenth century and the first twenty years of the new century. Their artistic work (as for Funi, Tosi and Sironi) continued in the second post-war years with methods quite similar to those of the previous period. Starting from '30s, a new expressive need was accompanying that tendency. This new form of expression was based on color needs and liberty, here exemplified by the works of two Sicilian artists: Lazzaro (fellow of Scipione and Mario Mafai in Rome) and Lia Pasqualino Noto who set up in Palermo "*Il gruppo dei Quattro*", with Nino Franchina, Giovanni Barbera and Renato Guttuso.

## Room 2

In the second post-war years, artists who had started out during '30s developed some of the conditions of that period in different ways. Authors such as Corrado Cagli and Mirko Basaldella, who had a prominent role in turning Roman world's attention to the expression of a primordial strain, searched for a new mythic writing in non-European cultures, recovering some central clues of historic avant-gardes. Cassinari and Migneco, representatives of the *Corrente* group, remain consistent with their assumption of a representation focused on color: Cassinari with more fantastic ways, while Migneco with ways more connected to social realism.

Others, such as Bueno and Gentilini, developed a unique personal poetics independent on any school or tendency: for Bueno, a dreamy poetics, imbued with the great Italian fifteenth century tradition, while for Gentilini a transfigured and fabulous, in sign and color, poetics.

The ways connected to the representation and its references intersected with early research, especially in the period between '50s and '60s. Alberto Sughi was one of the representatives of the so called "Existential Realism", in which naturalist intent measures with the new themes of modern urban reality; In paintings, Bruno Caruso recovers the influence of the German New Objectivity, which was peculiar of his graphic art; he mixed it with some decorative elegances typical of Viennese Secession to make a cruel critique of contemporary society.

## Room 3

Even in the period of greatest fortune in research connected to abstraction, between '50s and '60s, the motif of landscape kept its own distinguishable continuity in Italian painting, following different developments: along with some informal experiences, like that one of "the last naturalists" theorized by Francesco Arcangeli, (Enzo Brunori and Ennio Morlotti were some prominent authors); breaking up more conventional aspects with a lyric and frenzied writing, like in the research by Achille Pace in '50s; or looking for a more marked relation with modern tradition, like Alberto Gianquinto's experience, representative (with Guccione, Vespignani, Calabria, Ferroni and Farulli) of the Roman group "*Il Pro e il Contro*".

Recently, the practice of landscape has become central again at the end of neoavantgardes' drain in Sicily, by some artists led by Piero Guccione and Franco Sarnari. They established *Scuola di Scicli*, which has presented again a vision of nature and Sicilian landscape through typical method of an excited and reflective lyricism. The refined author Vincenzo Nucci is one of the most important representatives of this school.

Francesco De Grandi's approach to landscape painting is different from others. He expresses a figurative, material strain connected also to the historical tradition of XIX, or even XVII century, but it is a concerned strain, a simmering sense of alienation and unease typical of contemporary perspective.

## Room 4

Abstraction's history in Italy begins in '20s, when in Lombardy, especially in Milan, a group of abstract painters was formed around the "Galleria del Milone", to which Carlo Belli and Kandiskij provided with theoretical and operative tools. Luigi Veronesi historically belongs to this geometric abstraction, thanks to his ideal harmony with the principles of rationalist architecture. In the second post-war period, the *Gruppo Forma's* artists (such as the Sicilian Accardi, Consagra and Sanfilippo), from '50s on, have developed an abstraction based on sign organization. They created a strain between writing and image, productive in the following ten years and central in monumental sculpture and graphic work of Arnaldo Pomodoro as well. Later, these research guidelines have evolved in different ways: more lyric and decorative for an artist like Ignazio Moncada; more connected to materials and color's tactile and visual element for Renata Boero; rich of oriental writing's influence for Elisa Montessori.

Works of Sergio Lombardo and Piero Gilardi, instead, show presence of such a poetics of objects spread in '60s during Pop Art atmosphere.

Lombardo reuses iconic systems of contemporaneity, while Gilardi performs an ambiguous exchange between nature and stylistic devices.

## Room 5

Starting from '60s, in the international artistic world, a need for a research of perception's primary elements stood out, with studies in geometry, space and color in their elementary data. One part of this tendency head towards the experiences of "kinetic art" or design production, another part remained consistent with the painting's shape, however developed in its object element. Simeti did it through monochrome shaped canvas, while Colombo did it through hypothesis of surface movement and vibration.

Representatives of *Analytic painting* (or painting painting, or New Painting) act starting from a different basis. Between '70s and '80s, they focus on painting persistence, tools and base code, checking geometry rigor with crumples, color fluctuation and movement. The main representatives of this period (whose creators are Griffa, Morales, Gastini, Masi, Nigro, Aricò, Cotani, Battaglia, Bartolini) are Pinelli, Oliveri, Verna and Marchigiani; these latter show the basic stages of an open research method with some historical works : for Verna, the blurred layout of monochrome geometries, for Marchigiani, the reflection (in plaster support as well) on colors of the fresco of Italian tradition.

## Room 6

The art installation *Sbarco a Marsala* was commissioned to Emilio Isgrò by the *Ente Mostra di Pittura* on the occasion of the art exhibition set up at *Convento del Carmine* for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Garibaldi's expedition. This art installation reworks the main elements of the Sicilian artist, especially the work of the last thirty years. The process of *deletion*, which has uniquely characterized his work since '70s (also overlapping famous texts or geographic maps), starting from '80s equally makes use of insects, ants and bees. So, in the so-called *Deletions in movements*, the play between what is hidden and what is shown does not represent an iconoclast act, but an interference sign which sets up the semantic and visual strain of texts or figurative elements.

This environment installation works in this way: as passionate notes of *Casta Diva* from Bellini's *Norma* thump through the mechanical sound of a music box, Garibaldi monument poses as a forgotten piece of ruins, the hero image broken up on the basement. The writing which had welcomed the *Mille expedition's* arrival remains marked with ants on the wall. Controversially, it seems as Isgrò wonders, beyond any celebratory rhetoric, on what of that redemption hope remains today.



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