

CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUES WITH TINTORETTO

The reasons for the exhibition

“What does it mean to paint today? What conceptual and stylistic issues are faced by painters with different and distant cultural traditions? How the representation of the human face is defined to underline the most significant elements of expressions, in an anthropological, symbolic or social sense?

As Jean Paul Sartre wrote "*Tintoretto is Venice even if he does not paint Venice*", with a will of psychological introspection that makes the painter's characters extremely modern, able to stimulate a reflection on the evolution of the contemporary portrait, from a descriptive act to an interpretation of the depicted character.

The artworks by international artists of the last generations invited to "**Contemporary Dialogues with Tintoretto**", offer a constellation of images that are disquieting or monumental, traditional or irreverent, to outline an overview of different portraits in a stimulating and surprising dialogue with the paintings by **Tintoretto**. From the master Emilio Vedova, who had had a privileged relationship with Tintoretto since his youth, to Chinese artists such as Yan Pei-Ming, from African artists like Wangechi Mutu, to Americans like Matthew Monahan or Josh Smith, the exhibition is an opportunity to think about the extreme modernity of Tintoretto, who is still able to dialogue with the most successful painters of the contemporary art scene. In a backward journey, from the **Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro** to **Palazzo Ducale**, we discover the strength of a sixteenth-century giant in dialogue with a twentieth-century master and a group of artists of the latest generations. Touched, like him, by the "*madness of painting*".

Ca' d'Oro

The main venue of the exhibition "**Contemporary Dialogues with Tintoretto**" is the **Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro**, that preserves the painting "**Portrait of the Procurator Nicolò Priuli**" (1549), a superb example of Tintoretto's portraits, included in the prestigious collection of Giorgio Franchetti, along with other great artworks focused on portraits such as "Double Portraits" by Tullio Lombardo, and the "Bust of a Boy" by Giovanni Cristoforo Romano.

In a context where the different types of representation of the human face, in the different historical periods, appears as a possible starting point for reflection about the

relationship between Renaissance and contemporary art, the exhibition offers a sort of ideal collection to present the dialogue between Tintoretto's work and twelve portraits of different international contemporary artists, with different ages and nationalities: **Michaël Borremans, Glenn Brown, Roberto Cuoghi, John Currin, Chantal Joffe, Victor Man, Yan Pei-Ming, Matthew Monahan, Wangechi Mutu, Celia Paul, Markus Schinwald and Josh Smith.**

The “**Portrait of the Procurator Nicolò Priuli**”, made by **Tintoretto** around 1549 and considered an early work but of remarkable physiognomic quality, represents the Venetian nobleman dressed in clothes without reference to his political offices. The artwork is part of a large group of portraits of Venetian aristocrats, usually depicted at the top of their political career, that Augusto Gentili called “*role portraits*”. From Jacopo Soranzo to Marco Grimani, from Alvise Cornaro to Alessandro Gritti: each of these gentlemen is portrayed with an obsessive attention to detail, to fix on the canvas the actual expression of a non-artificial but real face.

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In the work by the Belgian artist **Michaël Borremans**, “The Measure II” (2007), we find grotesque elements typical of Flemish painting, emphasized by the artifice that makes it difficult to define the border between the subject's nose and the fingers of his left hand, painted with an almost obsessive virtuosity on a small wooden panel. Even the protagonist of “Nostalgia” (2016) by the English artist **Glenn Brown**, has characteristics similar to the sixteenth century academic painting, made artificial and almost psychedelic through bright and fluorescent colors, in perfect line with the desire to re-appropriate works from the past, typical of his research. The portraits of the Italian artist **Roberto Cuoghi** tend to exasperate the somatic features of their subjects: in the work included in the exhibition, “Untitled” (2009), the portrayed man has the appearance of a sort of contemporary saint in a punk version, with signs of bites around his almost closed left eye. “Anita Joy” (2001) by the American artist **John Currin** is the portrait of the actress Anita Ekberg, a symbol of joy and happiness, realized with a style that reminds, on one hand, the Baroque portraits and, on the other, the photography of the Hollywood stars' era. The British painter **Chantal Joffe** made “Moll in Pink” (2017) with a deliberately casual and distorted style, to underline the importance of capturing the most intimate essence of her subject, in a subtle game between sensuality and self-disclosure. “Untitled” (2011) by Rumanian artist **Victor Man** is the portrait of a young mysterious man, with a melancholic and absent expression, suspended in an indefinite time, which reminds the style of the New Objectivity. On the other hand, “Napoleon, crowning himself emperor” (2017) by the Chinese **Yan Pei-Ming**, who depicted an iconic character of Western history to bring

out the excessive, almost grotesque side of the self-proclaimed French emperor, appears assertive and arrogant. “Secret handshake” (2016) by the American **Matthew Monahan** is a collage on paper that reinterprets classicism with a light and ironic touch, almost in a pop style, projecting its iconography into a contemporary dimension. The Kenyan artist **Wangechi Mutu** has developed layered imaginary around portraying the objectification of the woman, which combines varied techniques and materials, characterized by a complex and refined aesthetics as in the work “Automatic Hip” (2015). “Head of Kate” (1993-2014) by the Indian-born British artist **Celia Paul** recalls the School of London artists, focusing only on the faces of her four sisters, among them Kate, caught in a meditative and melancholy attitude. The work “In the sand” (2017) by the American **Josh Smith** is more enigmatic: the character, depicted with a quick pictorial style, seems to come out of a Ku Klux Klan ritual. Even more mysterious is the canvas by the Austrian artist **Markus Schinwald**, “Beth” (2012), where the artist presents a woman who has the face covered with a damask cloth, which recalls the video of the homonymous song by Kiss, recorded in 1976, where the singers wore a make-up with black and white motifs.

Palazzo Ducale

For **Emilio Vedova**, Jacopo Robusti, known as Tintoretto, was much more than an ancient master, and he was the main point of reference of Vedova’s artistic training. *“Tintoretto was one of my identification. / That space precisely / a series of events. That / directing with rhythms / syncopated and / cruel, magmatic energy / passions / moved emotions”*. Thus, wrote in 1991 Emilio Vedova, who had referred to Tintoretto since he was very young: his first studies date back to 1936. In the monumental and prestigious context of Palazzo Ducale two of his works are exhibited in dialogue with Tintoretto: “Non Dove '87 -1” (1987) and “... Dagegen ... 1987-'95-2” (1987-1995). They are large double-sided circular panels (inspired by the dome of Santa Maria della Salute, said Vedova) painted by the artist in a free gestural way, with tones and colors inspired by Tintoretto's canvases. A dialogue that allows us to measure the influence of Robusti on a great master of the twentieth-century abstract painting. *“Tintoretto had the contents”* said Vedova: the same contents on which reflect the artists of “Contemporary Dialogues with Tintoretto” exhibition.

Ludovico Pratesi