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**Predella** journal of visual arts, n°41-42, 2017 [www.predella.it](http://www.predella.it) - Monografia / *Monograph*

[www.predella.it/www.predella.cfs.unipi](http://www.predella.it/www.predella.cfs.unipi)

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**Predella** pubblica ogni anno due numeri online e due numeri monografici a stampa /  
**Predella** publishes two online issues and two monographic print issues each year

*Tutti gli articoli sono sottoposti alla peer-review anonima / All articles are subject to anonymous peer-review*

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**Predella** journal of visual arts - ISSN 1827-8655

pubblicato nel mese di Settembre 2018 / *published in the month of September 2018*

*«Discovering the Trecento in the Nineteenth Century»*, began as a conference. The first part took place in London in March 2013 at the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection; the second part took place in November that year in Venice, where it was hosted by the departments of Storia dell'Arte (Università Ca' Foscari and Università IUAV) and the University of Warwick. The events were sponsored by the National Gallery, the Wallace Collection, the Seminar for Collecting and Display and IESA, with additional funding from a patron of the National Gallery.

*Developed out of the research programme of the IESA MA in the History and Business of Art and Collecting, which was validated by the University of Warwick, and through discussions with John Law, the steering committee for the conference included Adriana Turpin, Academic Director of the programme; Susana Avery Quash, Senior Research Curator (History of Collecting) at the National Gallery, London; Susan Bracken, co-ordinator of the Seminar on Collecting and Display at the Institute of Historical Research; and John Law, Honorary Research Fellow, College of Arts and Humanities, Swansea University.*

## Introduction

In the last fifteen years, studies of Victorian writers have mushroomed and so has research on Victorian art historians, collectors and collections<sup>1</sup>, helped by societies and journals<sup>2</sup>, exhibitions and symposia<sup>3</sup>. Thus when this project began in 2013 there could be no doubt that quite a bit had been said and written about the period's interest in Early Italian art. The original questions posed by the Steering Committee were, however, a little different from what had been asked before<sup>4</sup>. We were relatively well informed about the rediscovery of the Italian Renaissance, but what about the Trecento? Was it an altogether different «discovery» from that of the Quattro- or Cinquecento? How did nineteenth-century historians, art historians, writers, collectors and artists engage with the Trecento, if at all? Did they study, collect and display its artefacts as distinctive «objects», or as part of something bigger? And what was their purpose in studying, collecting or writing about Early Italian paintings? Was it on account of taste: a matter of perceived «simplicity», a «primitive, uncorrupted style»<sup>5</sup>, in «acceptance of the Vasarian paradigm»<sup>6</sup>, as «devotional accents of a religious interpretation»<sup>7</sup>, or perhaps on account of the politics of the late nineteenth century? Or was it more pragmatically because a dearth of later works on the market meant that trecento art was cheaper? These were the initial questions which shaped the two conferences behind this volume,

dedicated to *Discovering the Italian Trecento in the Nineteenth Century*, the first held at the National Gallery London and the Wallace Collection, the second at the University of Warwick in Venice.

Restricting the discussion to the nineteenth century alone would have precluded the possibility of throwing new light on either the beginnings of the «discovery» of the Trecento at the end of the eighteenth, or the disjuncture of the beginning of the twentieth century. As Francis Haskell long ago remarked, the «reversal of artistic values which occurred between about 1790 and about 1870... is the most vociferous of which we know», and «vast changes in taste occurred after 1870 - not least in the United States»<sup>8</sup>. The collected essays in this special issue therefore bring together material documenting the «long» nineteenth-century's interest in the Trecento<sup>9</sup>.

The contributors, mainly scholars of nineteenth-century studies, are based in France, Germany, Italy, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and the volume benefits from the vantage point of specialists trained in different traditions. This also means that the horizons of investigation expand far beyond Victorian Britain to encompass the international outlook of many of the subjects of study. For ease of consultation, the essays are divided into three parts to reflect the different approaches and subjects of investigation: the first focuses on collectors, connoisseurs and art historians from England, France, Italy, Germany and the USA. The contribution that «nineteenth-century» artists made to the discovery of the Trecento occupies part two, and the volume ends with other contexts, to remind us that politics, literature and the economics of the art market, as of dealers, also played key roles in bringing trecento art and themes to the fore. Rather than following this structure, this introduction will draw out some of the key themes.

Everything Italian was fashionable in Great Britain in the 1800s, but it was the discovery of trecento authors, literature and political events that formed the backbone necessary for the rediscovery of trecento art. For Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), poet, painter and son of a Neapolitan expatriate, translating Dante Alighieri's *Vita Nuova* was the inspiration for rethinking his own work, as discussed by Chiara Moriconi. Earlier in the century, an Italian exile, Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827), investigated here by Assunta De Crescenzo spent the last decade of his life in London writing commentaries on Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and producing the first modern Italian novel. France also had its share of exiles driving fascination with Italy, including Niccolò Tommaseo (1802-1874). As Roberto Riso

shows, for Tommaseo, choosing to rewrite the medieval tale of the expulsion of the Duke of Athens from Florence in the 1820s/30s was a symbol of resistance to contemporary foreigners, in part inspired by a trecento fresco.

It should be no surprise that Florence and the Florentine painter Giotto occupy a prominent place in this volume. After all, according to Luigi Lanzi's *Storia pittorica dell'Italia*, first published in 1795-96 and reissued in a larger edition in 1809, "Giotto was the father of the new painting" and "no one succeeded so much, nor so contributed with his examples to the growth of art, as the Florentine"<sup>10</sup>. The European market responded to this by buying, selling, locating and identifying ever more works and even assigned Giotto cameo appearances in novels. Indeed, Sam Smiles and Elisa Camporeale recall that in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the English novelist Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) described his characters' "drooping of their heads [as] being that of Giotto's 'Two Apostles'." Smiles traces the reception history of fragments then ascribed to Giotto, originally in Florence's Carmelite church but salvaged from fire by the English painter and engraver Thomas Patch (1725-1782). Camporeale traces the "Primitives" in English homes and novels, paintings and photographs, such as Giotto's *Ascension of St John*, sold by Alinari, one of a handful that became integral to the plot line in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*.

Giotto could be useful in other ways: in the defense of the Nazarenes' practice of copying Old Masters or as a fundamental step towards the later (and better appreciated) course of the history of Italian art, as discussed in Corina Meyer's study of the German painter and writer Johann David Passavant (1787-1861). Giotto also aroused passion in the British painter Winifred Knights (1899-1947), and inspired her to change the way she painted, as we learn from Lyrica Taylor. Such changes are all part of the Giotto mythology which persists today, though in different forms, as Robert Gibbs reflects in a postscript to this volume.

Despite the early fashion for the Florentines, the fascination with Siena and Sienese painting soon caught up, and often found its way into major collections. Paul Tucker investigates Frederic Burton's twenty years of acquisitions as director of the National Gallery of London (1874-1894), including numerous now familiar Sienese works. Corina Meyer places Passavant at the centre of the development of the Städel collection, touching on the role of Johann Friedrich Böhmer (1795-1863) whose Sienese paintings ended up in the Frankfurt museum. Julia Nauhaus, meanwhile, investigates, among other things, the Sienese interests of Bernhard August von Lindenau (1779-1854), who founded the museum named after him

in Altenburg, Thuringia. And finally, Corentin Dury unravels the purchases of the little known collector and connoisseur Évariste Fouret (1807-1863) in Le Mans, while Anita Moskowitz draws on the career of John Graver Johnson (1841-1917) in Philadelphia, USA for her wider account of collecting «mavericks», including Sienese holdings.

It was not just nineteenth-century galleries of 'Old Masters' that saw an expansion of trecento imagery. Trecento works often exerted real impact on new artistic commissions, though not always in determining ways. Alan Crookham observes that the painters Cimabue, Giotto, and Orcagna were all included among figures of worthy artists from the past on London's Albert Memorial (completed in 1876), and its mosaics are Italianate and trecento in inspiration. The Gothic cross, however, is self-evidently not: there was no compunction about combining aesthetics. Martina Beccatini's study of the collections and spaces of display conceived by the Anglo-Florentine Frederick Stibbert (1838-1906), again shows that the interventions of the painter and restorer Gaetano Bianchi (1819-1892) could be reminiscent of numerous trecento schemes yet at the same time also driven by his own imagination.

As to whether collectors and consumers preferred fourteenth to fifteenth-century works of art, and/or perceived them as distinctive products, there are no easy answers. Kathleen McLauchlan, investigating the taste for early painting in France during the 1820s and 30s, together with the response of the establishment as represented by its Academy of Fine Arts, discovers an equal interest in Giotto and Fra Angelico. Johann David Passavant seems to have felt the same way, recording his views in notes to the Städel, as published by Meyer. On the other hand, Lynn Catterson finds that during the last three decades of the 1800s the American market seems to have deliberately been more receptive to the Quattrocento. This was however, she argues, not so much a matter of taste as «the particular cultural disposition of the dealer». Instead, Julia Nauhaus observes eclecticism in von Lindenau and his wide circle of friends and advisers, many of whom were correspondents or pupils of the art historian Carl Friedrich von Rumohr (1785-1843). Their interests and taste ranged from classical to contemporary sculpture (including Thorvalden), from fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Italian paintings and to contemporary works by the Nazarenes. The Trecento was not singled out.

Not every collector of trecento paintings became an «advocate» of Giotto or of the Sienese. As Smiles notes, many were more interested in the ability of the

works to illustrate the past rather than in any aesthetic quality they might possess. Moskowitz records initially low levels of enthusiasm in the United States for example, a lack of passion that was typified by Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), Harvard's first professor of Fine Arts. Even the National Gallery of London's first director, Charles Eastlake, was lukewarm about much trecento art, as Tucker also reminds us.

The complex and mixed responses to Trecento art are addressed in several other essays. For example, the British painter William Blake (1757-1827), whose illustrations to Dante's *Comedy* are investigated by Hayley Flynn, could praise Giotto yet steer clear of imitating him. In his case, contemporary artists such as John Flaxman were more important for inspiration than trecento artists, however much admired. We learn from McLauchlan that Jean-Baptiste Ingres (1780-1867), painter and director of the French Academy in Rome in the 1830s, even warned the Rome fellows of the dangers of following Giotto and the like too closely describing it as a step backwards and a sign of a lack of taste.

How far was it licit for nineteenth-century painters and sculptors to seek models from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, paintings held to be «decadent» by some and the antithesis of European academy's standards? Laura Lombardi touches on this question as part of her analysis of French sculpture and the attitude of the masters of the École du Louvre, who promoted northern, Flemish and Burgundian models, while Antonella Bellin documents the inner struggle of the Tirol born and Venetian trained painter Carl Blaas, who eventually abandoned his Titian-based roots for Tuscan and Umbrian frescoes and panel paintings. The attraction to the middle ages and its «spiritual» subject matter was not universal, but spiritual responses to trecento art were not uncommon. Bellin records that Blaas had a spiritual experience in 1839, while John Ruskin (1819-1900) was deeply inspired by St Francis of Assisi and the frescoes in the Upper Church of the founder, as explored by Marie Tavinor. Most dramatically perhaps, early in the twentieth century, Stanley Spencer's encounter with trecento painting could be described as «receiving the stigmata», as Taylor observes, a remarkably Franciscan response.

Finally, the long nineteenth-century «rediscovery» of the Trecento was also achieved through the new technology of photography. As Laura Fenelli demonstrates, early photographic campaigns can still be fundamental to our understanding of little known and inaccessible frescoes such as those from the sup-

pressed Gerolamite church of Le Campora, outside Porta Romana in Florence.

The conversations begun in London and at Warwick in Venice in 2013 have yielded many important insights, revealing the rich potential for further research both on the Trecento itself and on its reception.

- 1 See for example *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, eds J.E. Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen, Farnham 2005.
- 2 No fewer than ten Victorian studies associations are listed on: <<http://www.english.ufl.edu/vsf/associations.html>> (11/6/2018).
- 3 One useful example was *Victoria & Albert: Art & Love exhibition* (The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, London, 19 March to 5 December 2010) and published papers from a symposium organised with the National Gallery, ed. S. Avery-Quash, available online: <[https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/victoria-albert-art-love/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/biographies-of-contributors#/>](https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/victoria-albert-art-love/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/biographies-of-contributors#/)> (31/5/2018).
- 4 I wish to express my thanks to the committee for their support.
- 5 R. ROSENBLUM, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art*, Princeton 1969, p. 166.
- 6 Much has been written on the baggage that comes with the terms «Primitives», «Primitifs», «primitivi». See most usefully C. HOENIGER, *The Restoration of the Early Italian «Primitives» during the 20th Century: Valuing Art and Its Consequences*, «Journal of the American Institute



for Conservation», 38, 1999, pp. 144-161: 146.

- 7 D. LEVI, 'Let agents be sent to all the cities of Italy': British Public Museums and the Italian Art Market in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 33-53, p. 35.
- 8 F. HASKELL, *Rediscoveries in Art: some Aspects of Taste, Tashion and Collecting in England and France*, Oxford, 1980 (orig. publ. 1976), pp. 5 & 7.
- 9 On the problems of defining the long nineteenth century and art history, see the review by Juliet Bellow, *Surveying the "Long Nineteenth Century": A Review of Art-History Textbooks in the Field*, CAA Reviews, June 21, 2007: <<http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/999#.WvSfQN-Pwb0E>> (10/5/18).
- 10 L. LANZI, *Storia pittorica dell'Italia dal Risorgimento delle belle arti in fin presso al fine del secolo XVIII*, 3 vols, Bassano, 1795-1796; ID., *Storia pittorica dell'Italia dal Risorgimento delle belle arti in fin presso al fine del secolo XVIII dell' Ab. Luigi Lanzi*, 3rd edition, 6 vols, Bassano, 1809. The translation is that of H.B.J. MAGINNIS, *Painting in the Age of Giotto. A Historical Reevaluation*, University Park 1997, p. 48.