

1) Title

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

-First of all I want to thank Ambassador Varricchio, for his hospitality and the organization of this symposium on Tintoretto's exhibition at the National Gallery.

Our Guardian Grando, Franco Posocco, is not with us. We should have come together but an accident forced him to stay at home. I would like to convey to you all his best regards and his sadness for not being here.

-At the time of Tintoretto, there were six Scuole Grandi in Venice. Until the Republic fell, they played a very important role in the religious life and charitable activity of the city, organizing what amounted to a fully-fledged welfare system extended to the whole population.

Their members were non-patrician citizens who worked in trades and professions; in many cases with great economic benefits.

Given the fact that they were excluded from the oligarchic government of the Republic, they were still able to play a prestigious role in Venetian society.

For this last reason there was a sort of competition among the various Scuole to make their buildings the most beautiful and richest in works of art.

The Scuola Grande di San Rocco was the youngest of all. But it soon became the richest.

Its official year of birth dates back to 1478 when, the

Republic of Venice approved the first statute of the Scuola: the so-called **Mariegola**.

2) *Mariegola: the first statute*

- Let me now show you three images of our premises

3) *Church and Scuola- from outside*

4) *Church- the nave*

5) *Scuola Grande- the Chapter Hall*

-The Scuola is famous not only for its Church, its Renaissance building and Tintoretto's pictorial cycle, but also for many other works of art that demonstrate the cultural open mindedness and interest of our past brothers.

Let me show you a couple of them that Tintoretto knew for sure :

6) *Giorgione: Christ Carrying the Cross*

7) *Titian: Annunciation*

-Today our Fraternity is still active and is the only one of the ancient Venetian Scuole that survived the fall of the Republic.

All the others were suppressed by a Napoleonic decree in 1806. For ours the order was revoked, even if, on that occasion, it lost many of its properties: money, houses, and estates.

-Currently the Scuola has more than 400 members and is governed by a board of 15 people who are morally obliged to work on a voluntary basis.

The current Statute dates back to 1913 with two main aims. Namely:

-Charity towards the poor and the needy

-Maintenance and restoration of its remarkable artistic heritage

-We pursue essentially the same goals as in the past, but we interpret them in a broader way, let's say, in a way more suited to today's way of life.

Therefore, while we continue to practice charity towards the poor, we also consider our mission to actively contribute to the dissemination of the historical and artistic values of our heritage.

For this reason we do not limit ourselves to the simple maintenance of our works of art, but we also try to spread our moral and cultural values through various other activities.

- Thus, on the occasion of the fifth centenary of Tintoretto's birth, we first thought of restoring all the magnificent stone works that adorn the halls that house his paintings.

It has been a very long and hard work!

Here is an example of what was done:

8) Restoration works on the monumental archway to the Chapter Hall

9) The difference: before.....after

-Furthermore, with the sponsorship of the Italian company iGuzzini, last November 30th, we inaugurated a brand new lighting system for the entire Chapter Hall.

The impact of the new system has been extremely positive with a great improvement for viewing Tintoretto's paintings.

- In the meantime we published two books : "**Looking at Tintoretto with Ruskin**" by Emma Sdegno and "**Tintoretto and architecture**" by Marcel Grosso and Gianmario Guidarelli . Both books will be on sale in the bookshop of the National Gallery

10) The two books

- Last year, in the ground floor room, we organized an exhibition of a promising young painter, Jorge Pombo, who was inspired by Tintoretto's "Massacre of the innocents". A second exhibition is planned for next summer.

11) J. Pombo exhibition

-But the most important undertakings were related to the restoration of some Tintoretto canvasses.

So with enormous help from "**Save Venice**" committee, we undertook some very hard and significant work on three large paintings inside the Church.

Agnese Chiari will tell you more about this.

We are very very grateful to "Save Venice"!

- At the same time, the committee "**Friends of San Rocco**" financed the conservation of the Portrait of Marco Balbiani.

Many thanks to our friends!

12) Tintoretto: Balbiani's portrait

- Last but not least, a complete restoration of the so-called "**Two Marys**" was carried out.

Their restoration was sponsored by **SKY ARTE HD** which, in the meantime, produced a film: "**Tintoretto: a rebel in Venice**". Next month it will be broadcast by satellite.

13) Two Marys

Well...the two Marys crossed the Atlantic to come to Washington and now they are in the famous National Gallery ready to be shown off!

Allow me to say: our Scuola is very proud of this!!

Thank you.