

BARBERINI
GALLERIE
CORSINI
NAZIONALI

ECO e NARCISO

Portraits and self portraits
from the collections of **MAXXI**
and Gallerie Nazionali
Barberini Corsini

Electa



ECO e NARCISO

Portraits and self portraits from the collections of MAXXI and Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini
Curated by Flaminia Gennari Santori and Bartolomeo Pietromarchi

Produced by Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini in collaboration with MAXXI

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Palazzo Barberini and MAXXI

BARBERINI
GALLERIE
CORSINI
NAZIONALI

Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica
Palazzo Barberini e Galleria Corsini

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18 May 2018 marks the end of a long story that began in 1949 when the Italian State bought the Palazzo Barberini with the intention of making it the new headquarters of the Galleria Nazionale di Arte Antica. The building has been mostly occupied by the Circolo Ufficiali of the Armed Forces along with various other institutions, and so only now, after almost seventy years, the complicated sequence of events of the restitution of the palace to the museum has reached a conclusion. It is a story that has strongly influenced the development and identity of the Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, founded in 1895 as a national art gallery, but that has never really become one.

These spaces have finally been re-opened to the public and have been integrated into the museum of Palazzo Barberini: they comprise the entire south wing of the main floor that includes 11 interconnected rooms overlooking the gardens which constituted the apartments of the Cardinals of the Barberini family in the seventeenth century.

To inaugurate this new extension, we decided to organize an exhibition that would ideally reconnect the past with the present and would connect the rich and complex history of the building with the modern and equally complex mission of the National Galleries. For this reason, the project has been conceived in collaboration with MAXXI (the National Museum of 21st Century Arts). The chosen theme, one that is always inevitably crucial, is that of the portrait and the self-portrait, following a path winding between ancient and contemporary art through works of the respective collections. The conversation published in the following pages between Flaminia Gennari Santori and Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, curators of the exhibition, reflects and articulates this dialogue and accompanies visitors as they discover the new spaces of the Palazzo Barberini.

Eco e Narciso is not an exhibition on a codified iconographic genre, nor about portraiture in the strict and traditional sense, but rather is a visual and conceptual reflection on the most complex issue of the representation of identity – not only individual but also collective – and on the essential role that the image has played and continues to play in the way we respond to our own appearance, and in the understanding and sharing of our social, cultural, ethnic, historical self-perception.

The aim therefore is to suggest an itinerary that allows the visitor to look from a long-lasting perspective (but hardly in a linear fashion) at some of the great masterpieces of the National Galleries alongside contemporary works – in some cases works created expressly for this occasion and for these spaces. From Caravaggio to Giulio Paolini, Luigi Ontani to Raphael, from Richard Serra to Bronzino, the themes of the self and the other, of duration and temporality, of intimacy and sociability, of fame and power, of eroticism and conventions, of identity and difference intertwine and unravel.

Let’s embark then on a journey, one in which we can see and reconsider, discover and rediscover, perhaps not only in order to look for new things, but also, as a famous writer said, to try to have new eyes. ■

ECO e NARCISO

Portraits and self portraits from the collections of **MAXXI**
and Gallerie Nazionali **Barberini Corsini**

Palazzo Barberini
Piano Nobile – Ala Sud

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(The family of the missionary)

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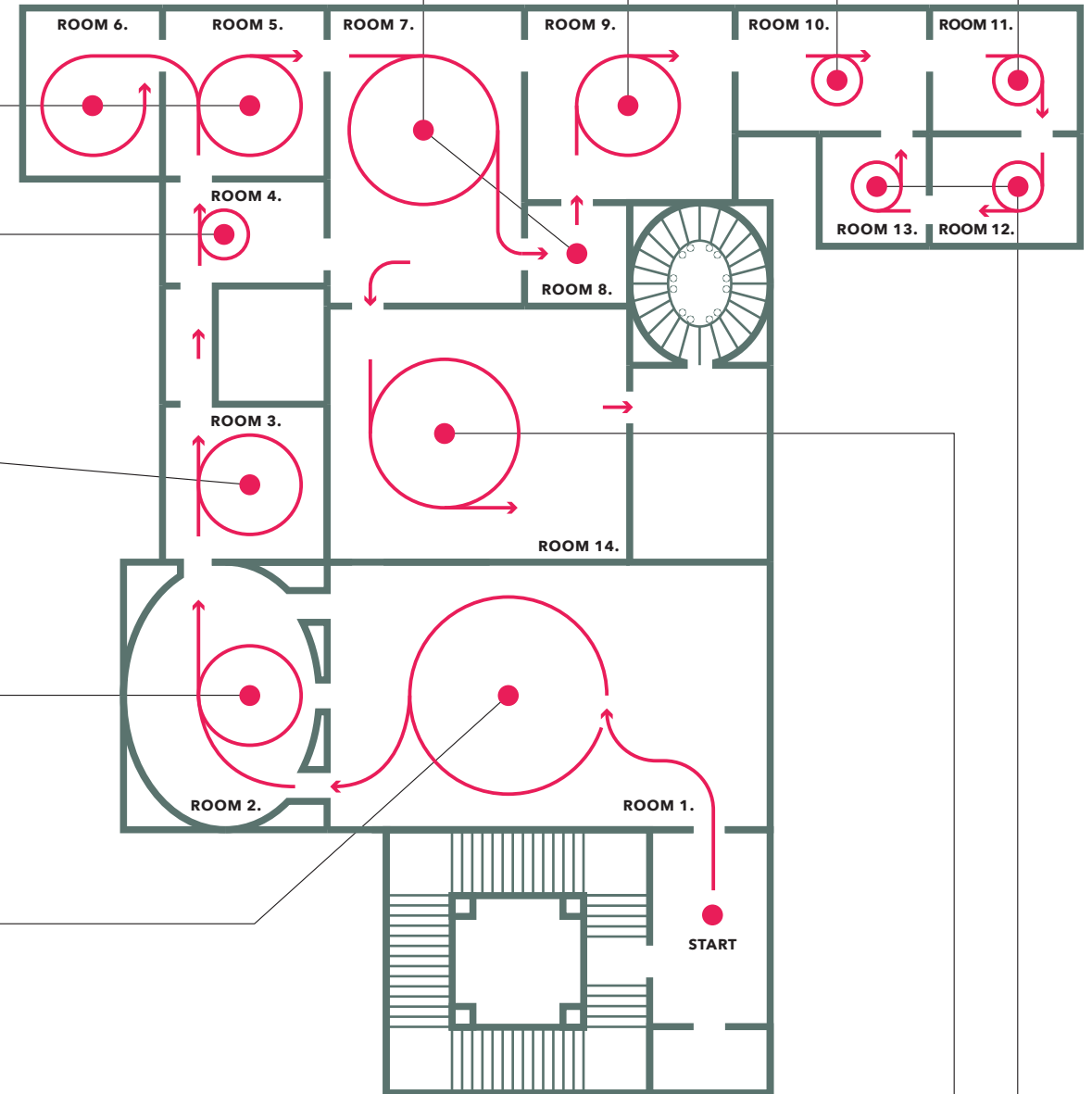
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GIAN LORENZO BERNINI - Portrait of Pope Urban VIII



ROOM 1. | SALONE PIETRO DA CORTONA
LUIGI ONTANI - Le Ore
PIETRO DA CORTONA - The Triumph of Divine Providence
and the Fulfilment of its Purposes under Pope Urban VIII

Flaminia Gennari Santori Our journey begins here, under the magnificent ceiling by Pietro da Cortona, which makes us feel almost like the disoriented “pilgrim” that is mentioned in the title of the first guide to the salon (*Il pellegrino, ovvero la dichiarazione delle pitture della Sala Barberina*, 1639), probably written by Francesco Bracciolini (1566-1645), the court poet of the Barberini who had conceived the plan of the monumental fresco. And in fact, to the visitor, the fresco is a large-scale representation, or rather self-representation of the Barberini family, an undertaking of unusual scale in a private palace. We find ourselves looking at a fresco of more than five hundred square meters celebrating the glory of Urban VIII with Divine Providence crowning the family emblem, and, in a multitude of mythological and historical scenes, examples of virtues that naturally prevail over vices. In reality, it is nothing but a portrait of Urban VIII *in absentia*: of the pontiff there is everything but his own image, perhaps only by false modesty. But the three huge bees, the laurel wreath – an allusion to his poetic ambitions – the crossed keys of papal authority and the tiara taken from the allegory of Rome, referring to the choice of the name Urban, make the fresco a kind of allegorical and conceptual portrait, in fact one that is extremely modern.

Bartolomeo Pietromarchi We find the same thing in *Le Ore* by Luigi Ontani, which is by definition a contemporary Narcissus. Throughout his work Ontani has always interpreted and found himself in the historical, mythological and symbolic themes and figures of the history of art. Ontani began as an artist in the late 1960s, when research by artists focussed on themes of personal identity, and in fact, using the most diverse kinds of media, he always chose his own self as a subject. We are therefore faced with a modern Narcissus whose presence is ostentatious and extreme, and obsessively repeated, in order to reinterpret through the mirror of his identity not only the cultural myth, but also the current problematic of masking, theatre, staging, of mirroring and reflection, and the necessity of self-representation in terms of social consensus and iconography. It is a highly topical theme of narcissistic prevalence, linked to the diffusion of images, but which seems to proliferate already in Baroque painting, as it is evident in the visual comparison between the images of Ontani and the undertaking of Pietro da Cortona, weaving an uncommon and yet revealing dialogue, on a psychological, allegorical and performative level.

FGS And in the performativity of the images we discover another common motif of the artists as well as of the theme of the exhibition: temporality. The fresco of Palazzo Barberini is surely an allegory of time and destiny which affect life events, though one tamed by Providence and, it can be said, by art. However, the spectacular painting by Cortona is not only an image *of* time, but also an image *in* time, in the sense that it imposes a specific duration on the experience of the spectator, a dynamic fruition that requires a certain amount of time to observe and to understand fully the interpenetration of the physical and the ideal that marks the nature of the Baroque. In short, we must move around to look at the fresco, as we must do at the Ontani *Ore*.

BP Of course, time is movement, it unites and divides. In the frescoed ceiling the movement is upwards, everything moves towards the top and projects us into this dimension. While on the ground, in counterpoint, there are the twenty-four figures of Ontani, which become almost like a procession, *tableaux vivants* of different moments, a profane theory that makes every hour of the day a game of further references: to the past, to myths, history, and to literature. But, like the ceiling, it is necessary to look at it from many different points of view, from the inside to the outside. And this internal-external movement, which is also at the heart of Baroque poetry and makes time and space of images react with real time and space, is another fundamental element of this exhibition. ■

ROOM 2. | SALA OVALE
CARAVAGGIO (?) - Narcissus
GIULIO PAOLINI - Eco nel vuoto

FGS From the Salon we proceed to the Oval Room, the typically Baroque form of the ellipsis – a figure of centrality and of movement – which Bernini uses here in a very original way in a private palace. The hall was originally intended for meetings of the so-called *Purpurei Cycni*, an inner sanctum for scholars in the circle of Cardinal Antonio Barberini, and was therefore a space for meditation and reflection. An ideal space to present the *Narcissus* by Caravaggio (or by someone else), which is the perfect icon of the idea of physical and psychic “reflection”, echoed here, quite rightly, by the installation of Giulio Paolini, *Eco nel vuoto*.

BP In fact, like Ontani, Giulio Paolini has been questioning, since his debut, the problem of personal identity, of the figure of the artist, of his role, of the relationship between the viewer and who is being viewed, and therefore on the theme of reflection, of the double, of the copy and of the original. Who better than he could have a dialogue with Narcissus? A game of mirrors and reflections, which right from the title, *Eco nel vuoto*, takes inspiration from the myth and the state of absence and solitude. The figure of Narcissus is present only through scattered fragments, while Echo falls from above on the rock onto which she is destined to transform herself. The echo is vanishing like the reflection on the surface of the water of the spring, and it disperses in an illusory play of refractions.

FGS The disappearance of the self-image is indeed the central meaning behind Caravaggio’s *Narcissus*. Emptiness is at the centre of the painting, depicted as essentially black. So, Narcissus is reflected in nothingness, in the nothingness of himself, which is only a shadow, an abyss into which to sink. This darkness is not often represented in the most well-known representations of the myth: here there is no more context, there is only Narcissus, lost within himself. The curse takes hold, avenging the cruelly rejected lover by the young man and condemning him to fall in love with himself and to lose himself in his effigy. The painting is a masterpiece and well known, yet one at the centre of a debate that disputes its authorship to Caravaggio, in particular, according to various scholars, ascribing it to the Caravaggesque painter Spadarino (1585-1652). Within the scope of this exhibition, the authorship is basically irrelevant. The *Narcissus* has become an emblem of Caravaggio’s painting and remains, in any case, an image of the cult that today more than ever we attribute to the painter and the narcissism that is projected on to him.

BP Alberti, in fact, alludes to the myth of Narcissus as an allegory of painting, and we read in his treatise *On Painting*, “What else can you call painting but a similar embracing with art of what is presented on the surface of the water in the fountain?”. With Paolini and Caravaggio, however, we are faced not only with an allegory of painting, but also with an allegory of the artist himself, like Narcissus condemned to chase an image, a reflection, an illusion destined to eternal solitude, to the consolation of the mirroring of oneself in the gaze of the other.

FGS We can then say that Narcissus became the inventor of the representation of the self, and we can therefore look at the myth as a tragedy but also as an *aition*, reflecting the original necessity of painting. *Narcissus* could not fail to have aroused a critical consideration about how works were to be observed, according to the aesthetic of reception that characterised the Baroque period. Of course, it is a painting borne of patronage and for private use, and perhaps precisely for this reason it is so poetic and enigmatically conceptual. But it is also a painting dedicated to the viewer, looking at it, we look at ourselves as in a mirror and, in a play of reflections, the inner mirror becomes the mirror of who is looking at it. ■

ROOM 3. | SALA PAESAGGI

MARIA LAI – Bisbigli, Il viaggiatore astrale, Terra

BP The unfortunate story of Echo leads us to the next room, the Sala dei Paesaggi, where we present the delicate works by Maria Lai: her *Libri cuciti* (sewn books), which not only have a strong autobiographical dimension, but also a reference to the idea of landscape and its ability to build sense and identity. Maria Lai was a Sardinian artist, originally from the small town of Ulassai, and her work has constantly maintained a strong bond with these origins and their archaic culture and traditions, but always with an equally strong tension towards cultural emancipation. These sewn books are a sort of diary. There are no words, but only lines that represent the passage of time and, taken together, page by page, draw landscapes. These are intimate and personal landscapes, contrasting with the noble and rhetorical scenes painted here on the walls of the room.

FGS The Barberini did in fact have this room painted by Filippo Cretoni in the mid-nineteenth century, well after their power and grandeur had waned, but nevertheless with the intention of representing views of their estates, scenes that have the suggestion of images of a past memory, rather than concrete reality. This is the only unrestored hall in the building, it looks a little dilapidated and bears the signs of a long history, of decadence after opulence. And it is significant that the books of Maria Lai are shown here, because the landscape is not an indeterminate space, but something lived and tied to a historical and narrative identity. Something that must be read, told and remembered, in an emotional and even literary association.

BP And here again we can perceive the mythical figure of Echo, literary figure, but at the same time in a sensitive and personal experience: the fact that the nymph is transformed into a rock and that this represents the mountain, where we can witness the phenomenon of the echo, strongly symbolizes the historical and cultural identity of a place. There is no echo without a landscape and there is no real landscape without the echoing of an echo. ■

ROOM 4. | SALA DELLE CINESERIE

MARKUS SCHINWALD – untitled (extensions) #X, Luis
LUCA GIORDANO – Philosopher

FGS We are in another room decorated in the nineteenth century, inspired by the fashion of *Japonisme*. But framed between the graceful pilasters we find paintings by Luca Giordano and Markus Schinwald and we immerse ourselves in the unforgiving examination of individuality. Luca Giordano depicts a philosopher, perhaps Crates of Thebes, as a man of extreme ugliness, taking up the tradition of a genre created by Jusepe de Ribera, in which ruthless realism and intellectual nobility clash. It is an imaginary portrait, although in a provocative sense. The cynical Crates, who lived in Athens between the 4th and 3rd centuries B.C. was known for having renounced his wealth and lived as a beggar. The young philosopher Hipparchia fell in love with him despite his inelegant appearance, and undeterred by the spurning of the man, she chose to renounce the fascination of artifice and of worldly comforts in order to adopt his lifestyle. In the painting, however, the philosopher addresses us in a silent dialogue, using the typically Baroque tactic of involving the viewer in a micro-narrative, including the viewer in the story that the character represents. We too are therefore faced with a choice.

BP The theme of ugliness and deformity, on the other hand, is already potentially present in the narrative of Narcissus, who, just as he tries to grasp his own image, breaks the surface of the water and thus makes the reflection irreversibly unrecognisable. The deformed face of the Cynic philosopher, in its brutal realism, is the other side of narcissism. And between narcissism and deviation, or even pathology, there is a link that Freud had already highlighted in a major essay in the history of psychoanalysis, *Introduction to Narcissism* (1913-14). In this exhibition, Markus Schinwald, an artist also from Vienna, at least by adoption, reworks the theme of the portrait. Starting from existing works, he intervenes after applying or inserting painted extensions, or prostheses, which completely transform not only their meaning, but also their psychological aspect. Schinwald is very familiar with the Freudian scenario, and in this case deformation has an explicit psychoanalytic value and contaminates the social aspects of self-representation.

FGS In spite of the differences in context, a further link can be seen in the relationship between the exasperation of portraiture and psychological analysis in the Vienna of Schiele and Kokoschka, on the one hand, and similar research in seventeenth-century Naples by Luca Giordano on the other, interested as he was in an uncompromising exploration of reality, bringing into play the problematic connection between external appearance, physicality, social conformism, models and interiority. ■

ROOM 5. / ROOM 6. | APPARTAMENTO D'ESTATE

ANGELO DI COSIMO TORI detto BRONZINO – Portrait of Stefano IV Colonna

HANS HOLBEIN IL GIOVANE – Portrait of Henry VIII

RICHARD SERRA – Butor, Melville

FGS With regard to social models and exteriority, in the two following rooms we address the theme of public “projection” of the personality, of its official, formal role. These rooms were the Cardinal’s bedroom and the audience chamber of His Eminence’s summer apartment, and thus combined public and private spaces in a configuration that was then essential. For this reason, we have hung the celebratory portraits of Bronzino and Holbein in the audience chamber.

BP While in the Cardinal’s bedroom there are the abstract portraits, no less celebratory, that Richard Serra has made of two of his favourite writers, Michel Butor and Hermann Melville.

FGS *Henry VIII* by Hans Holbein and *Stefano IV Colonna* by Agnolo Bronzino are portraits of power, character portraits, and both fully embody the *physique du rôle*. The paintings are almost contemporary, painted respectively in 1540 and 1546, works by two great masters of portraiture of the sixteenth century. Both Holbein and Bronzino reveal an extraordinary ability to synthesize a physiognomic and character accuracy and an essential compositional purity. In their paintings we see the man, but we also see, immediately, the historical character, the sovereign, the captain. It is a state portrait, a dynastic portrait, with its insignia, its symbols, its titles.

BP But even in the case of Richard Serra’s works, the problem of identity becomes a question of titles, names and declared personalities. Serra’s game is just that, on the one hand you have a black spot,

like the ink with which a writer incessantly covers the paper and, like the artist, on the other hand, eventually gets confused and deletes his own trace. An observer who does not read the caption will not recognize anything. The title of the work and its subject become an integral part of the identity of the work itself.

FGS The cult and the memory of a person emerges through recognition: for this reason, in the portraits of Holbein and Bronzino, there are also names, signatures, dates, words and not just images, which serve to fix an identity, to anchor the figures to a historical event, to a memorable narrative.

BP And here the motif of space and time intersect again. In these “celebrative” portraits – which are part of a series dedicated to authors such as Primo Levi, Italo Calvino, Jorge Luis Borges and Antonin Artaud – Serra lends, layer by layer, almost a physical weight and a materiality to the disappearing voice, to the disembodied echo of the poet and the writer. But the image cannot tell their story, that is left to our imagination and memory. ■

ROOM 7. / ROOM 8. | SALA DEL TRONO E CAPPELLA

SHIRIN NESHAT – Illusions & Mirrors
GUIDO RENI, attr. – Portrait of Beatrice Cenci

FGS Narrative, imagination and memory are in a certain way the central themes of the next two rooms: one huge and extravagant, called del Throne Room or “del Ponte” (Bridge), because it opens onto the “ruined bridge” designed by Bernini; and the other, intimate, that housed a private chapel. In the first we find two great paintings by Romanelli and Belloni, the *The Wedding of Bacchus and Ariadne* and *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*, which refer to mythological events in which women, for better or for worse, are protagonists. And it is the female point of view that is the focus in the work of Shirin Neshat, *Illusions & Mirrors*.

BP Neshat’s work is a short video (12 min), part of a trilogy of three portraits of women. Neshat explores here the idea of female emancipation, not only in relation to the Muslim culture from which she comes, but also, in a more universal sense, to the identity of women. The protagonist, played by Natalie Portman, moves in a dimension between dreamlike and surreal, between illusions and reflections. She pursues her ghosts, fleeing men and familiar family members, until the final scene in which the figure of the mother appears.

FGS And this brings us to the very famous alleged portrait of Beatrice Cenci, exposed in the chapel. Since the end of the eighteenth century, the picture has been considered the effigy of the unfortunate daughter of a Roman nobleman, who together with her brother and stepmother killed her despotic and violent father, and who was then beheaded in Rome in 1599 to much public outcry on the bridge of Castel Sant’Angelo. According to a legend that was popular throughout the nineteenth century, Guido Reni painted her the night before her execution. However far-fetched, the story is now an inseparable part of the work’s identity, as seen no less in the pages of Shelley, Stendhal, Hawthorne, Dickens, Artaud and Moravia than in the canvas itself. In this “mythical” context Beatrice becomes the “fallen angel, without sin”, as Hawthorne writes, an archetypal icon of moral innocence overcome by legal guilt.

BP After all, the very theme of Echo and Narcissus implies a not too latent tragic dimension, which is accomplished through the disproportionate punishments that the gods inflict on the two characters and condemn them both to desolation and loss. But it is precisely this that makes the two figures mirror images, not only between them, but of ourselves, universal figures of unresolved anxiety, like the one we project on to the ideal portrait of Beatrice Cenci or on the suggestive images of Neshat. ■

ROOM 9. | SALA DELLE UDIENZE

KIKI SMITH – Large Dessert

ROSALBA CARRIERA – Allegory of the Four Elements (Fire, Air, Earth, Water), Female Portrait

BENEDETTO LUTI – Head of Women

FGS From the chapel we pass into the great hall that Cardinal Barberini used as an audience chamber in winter, a space of representation, therefore, intended for the reception of guests.

BP And here we find the large installation of Kiki Smith, *Large Dessert*, conceived in 2004 for the Venetian palace of Querini Stampalia. From that eighteenth-century context and its collection, Kiki Smith reproduced the elegant, refined and precious atmosphere, observing the paintings of Pietro Longhi (1701-1785) and using the porcelain of Sèvres to shape her minute female figures, like little knick-knacks. The large table of *Large Dessert* evokes in fact a domestic setting, a social space where one meets and is in contact with others. The work is a sort of ideal family image, but it is also, more precisely, a self-portraying appeal to the personal themes of childhood and motherhood.

FGS The showing of the pastels of Rosalba Carriera and Benedetto Luti could seem visually unsettling, but their comparison highlights the themes you have just evoked. Carriera was a highly respected artist, not only in her native Venice, but also internationally, throughout Europe, an exceptional feat for a woman in the eighteenth century. The technique of pastel, already experimented by Luti, gained through the works of Carriera a softness and evanescence that make her pictures delicate but without sentimentality. Her portraits and “heads of character”, or even pseudo-portraits – like those exposed here – became fashionable and were the perfect expression of the tastes of an entire social class. The aristocrats – not only Venetian – saw them as the perfect backdrop for their eighteenth-century living rooms, furnishings but also playing cards of a great social game in which the members of a society could recognize each other. Yet the elegant and melancholy lightness of Rosalba Carriera also captures the sense of almost imminent end that had already pervaded that society. ■

ROOM 10. | APPARTAMENTO D’INVERNO

PIERRE SUBLEYRAS – Female Nude from Behind

STEFANO ARIENTI – SBQR, netnude, gayscape, orsiitaliani, etc...

BP With the next room we move from the theme of sociality, in all its female facets, to that of intimacy, through the comparison between the beautiful nude of Subleyras and the couple portraits by Stefano Arienti. In both cases, these images cause us to look provocatively beyond the public “facade” of the portrait.

FGS The portrait of a woman, so intimate and private, by Pierre Subleyras is perhaps even more provocative than it seems. Painted in Rome around 1740, it is one of the first paintings of a nude woman who is not represented as Venus or as a mythological figure, but simply as herself. Subleyras was an academic painter and in academic painting the representation of the body, especially the male one, was central to the education of artists. But this female nude, carefully rendered with a luminous and vibrant technique, is more than a mere instrumental study, it is a tribute to the body of a particular woman. Someone has put forward that it could be a portrait of Subleyras’s own beloved wife, a

miniaturist herself. It is a rather revolutionary and modern painting, which frees the representation of the woman from the symbolic, from the cultural, from the metaphorical and reveals it to us as it is. And this is precisely why it is an extremely erotic and disturbing image. Subleyras involves us in a voyeuristic game of lawfulness and illegality, in which we are "invited" to spy on his wife, with his consent. Indeed, it is he who paints so to make us look at her...

BP But the voyeuristic game is also a game of balance. That of Subleyras is in fact also a very classic image, which even refers to ancient sculpture – think of the famous sleeping Hermaphrodite. A similar ambivalence can be found in the work of Arienti, who since the Nineties has produced a series of works created from images taken from the history of art, classical to Pop Art. In this case, however, the subject stuff moves, and the images referred to in *SBQR*, *netnude*, *gayscape*, *orsiitaliani*, etc... (realized in 2000) are taken from the internet: portraits of gay couples, mostly of an advanced age, caught in very intimate positions. Here too, as in Subleyras, there is a transposition, even in the literal sense, of a private figure, of the naked body, through a technique that makes it somewhat subtler, almost suggested, hinted at. Which is all the more significant, if we think that these images were found on the internet, a place where today self-representation abounds, the primary place of a voyeuristic attitude to look at and be looked at, to exhibition and ostentation. ■

ROOM 11. | APPARTAMENTO D'INVERNO

MARCO BENEFIAL – Portrait of the Quarantotti Family (The family of the missionary)
YINKA SHONIBARE MBE – The Invisible Man

FGS Ostentation, on the other hand, always implies an ideal recipient and therefore an idealized representation, a community of reference, in short, a distinction. And it is precisely the theme we find in the works of Marco Benefial and Yinka Shonibare MBE. The group portrait of the Quarantotti family, painted by Benefial in 1756, is a bit of a collage, a composition of individual portraits. The main character is the young ecclesiastic Giovanni Battista Quarantotti, standing on the rug, preaching against the background of an outlandish exotic landscape, also a collage of plants, palms and forests, in other words, an imaginary portrait of the exotic, of the "remoteness". Also the colourful dresses that some of the sitters wear are as much exotic. They look at us almost as if they are impersonating or playing a role, as in a staging that shows signs of a taste, or rather a curiosity, for the exotic. The distant and the different become a piece of clothing, an object, a piece of furniture, elements of everyday life that reflect wider and wider horizons. But, as we know, this is only one side of the coin. Relations with the rest of the world were part of the global dynamics and policies that in Rome, in particular, were guided by a predominantly missionary objectives. These were also interwoven with other economic interests, those of trade, exploitation and not just proselytizing.

BP In a word, colonialism. And it is exactly the question that, right from the beginning of his career, Yinka Shonibare faced, as an artist of African origin transplanted to England. We therefore asked him to create a new work expressly for this exhibition inspired by the work of Benefial. Shonibare created a figure that represents a servant, someone who is indispensable to a family like that in the portrait, but in fact invisible. A servant carrying on his shoulders a large sack of provisions, wearing gaudy clothes, but without a face. In place of the head he has a kind of globe, a globe on which are engraved the names of the palaces of the nobility of Rome and Lazio. It is physically outside the virtual space of painting, but it fits

perfectly in the scene portrayed by Benefial, and in its ostentatious visibility it emphasizes a void, a lack of representation of the other, of the different. In fact, in the painting, the exotic is represented only by the fantastic, unusual and unknown landscape, and by the clothes with which the members of the Quarantotti family are "disguised". Then, Shonibare emphasized such an "exclusive" gaze, which appropriates the "other" from its own perspective, but excludes any interaction, any real understanding to impose its own point of view or its presumed cultural and moral superiority. ■

ROOM 12. / ROOM 13. | APPARTAMENTO D'INVERNO

PIERO DI COSIMO – Mary Magdalene

RAFFAELLO SANZIO – La Fornarina

MONICA BONVICINI – Bent and Fused

FGS We now enter the private rooms of His Eminence's winter apartment, on the opposite side of the palace, mirroring those rooms of the summer apartment with Serra's works. And here we find the *Maddalena* by Piero di Cosimo and *La Fornarina* by Raphael, one behind the other, as two sides of a coin, both portraits and non-portraits, portraits of people but also of ideas, and perhaps even, in different ways, the artists's self-portraits.

BP And here again we are dealing with eminently feminine figures, made by men, that can therefore engage in a useful way, albeit at a distance, with the work of Monica Bonvicini. Here instead the artist sheds light on the problem of a true process of empowerment of the feminine figure, on the full awareness and self-determination of self that, in art as in reality, clashes with forms of control, surveillance, manipulation, and power.

FGS That of Piero di Cosimo, painted around 1490, is in fact a peculiar image, halfway between a painting of private devotion and an imaginary portrait. It is an almost intimate, precious figure, inspired by Flemish paintings, which requires an intimate observation, and represents Mary Magdalene, not as the penitent in the desert, according to the iconographic tradition, but as a wealthy woman of the fifteenth century, as a young lady well dressed and concentrated on her reading. It is an ideal beauty, in appearance and moral conduct, though very characterized, so that we could even assume that the painting was commissioned by a woman whose name was Maddalena.

BP It is interesting to note here how the presence of books and reading, as an intellectual activity, was already an expression of cultural emancipation, even if permitted within certain limits and within a certain genre. In comparison to the absorbed figure of Mary Magdalene, Raphael's woman seems much more aware of her own role, and above all of her own femininity.

FGS *La Fornarina* is one of the last works painted by Raphael, shortly before his death in 1520, and is the secular version of what we see in the Magdalene, a portrait/non-portrait in which symbols and attributes are fundamental. The young woman is represented as *Venus pudica* (modest Venus), on a background of laurel and myrtle, symbols of love and virtue, but this does

not tell us anything about who this woman is. From the eighteenth century it was hypothetically identified as the painter's mistress, a certain Margherita Luti, daughter of a baker (fornaio) from Trastevere, hence the nickname. But among the attributes of the figure there are also the arm band with the name of Raphael, his signature, which is so actively present in the image, as one who presents his own woman to the gaze of the spectator. The "beauty" of Raphael is therefore a double affirmation of empowerment, as you said, of the subject and also of the artist, who represents "his" image, in every sense of the term, and forces the codes of Renaissance portraiture.

BP The concept of "force", if not forcing, also seems central to Bonvicini's work, where the blinding energy of light is a physical and symbolic manifestation that pervasively takes possession of space, but is reconciled and almost interwoven from the delicate interweaving of threads, as a reference to the traditional task of embroidery, a gender-specific activity of women. ■

ROOM 14. | SALA MARMI

YAN PEI-MING – Pape, Mao
GIAN LORENZO BERNINI – Portrait of Pope Urban VIII

FGS Finally, we return to the marble hall, where the exhibition of the Palazzo Barberini ends. In this hall, where the Barberini exhibited the most monumental pieces of their collection, including paintings, ancient statues and the enormous cartoons of the tapestries with the deeds of Urban VIII, we find the outstanding effigy of the owner, Pope Barberini, sculpted by Bernini, his trusted artist, the one who had given shape to the projects of Urban VIII and a new period of art. And, indeed, this bust is like the mirror of that implicit relationship of trust that is established between the portrait, the artist who portrays, and the observer of the work, a relationship that negotiates the ideological distance of the official, even transcendent, investiture, with the proximity of a more immediate psychological and human contact, grasping not only the traces and the weight of time, but also the intuition of a particular moment. Bernini's portraits are always striving to seize these moments, without fixing them, in an incessant, ever-changing pursuit of life.

BP Also in the two large paintings by Pei-Ming, flanking the Bernini bust, as monumental as the Barberini cartoons, we are faced with an image, now disjointed, of what could be spiritual and temporal power, which in any case cannot be separated from official scale, from the dominant ideology that informs it, and that which unites West and East. Even here, however, the symbolic, iconic gesture also counts, but in the paintings of Pei-Ming the gesture itself can no longer be a personal and spontaneous movement, but becomes itself a mediated and media image, which we have seen and re-seen an infinite number of times, the effect of a mass diffusion that affects every type of image.

FGS It is no coincidence that these works have the appearance and the size of posters, almost like urban furniture exposed to the constant gaze of the

public. On the other hand, even Urban, in his own way, had aspired to make Rome, through the works of Bernini, a visual outpouring of his pontificate, of his "persona", in the ancient sense of the term.

BP Of course, Pei-Ming overturns this perspective from within his work, because he not only shows images of powerful and famous men, but also of much more humble figures: of his father, of any individual, of unknown outsiders, giving them the same aesthetic dignity, with the same dimensions, the same technique, the same gesture. In the end, the image of power always depends on the power of images. ■

AT MAXXI | GALLERY 1

ANTONIO CORRADINI – La Velata (The Vestal Tuccia)
VANESSA BEECROFT – VB74

BP In order to emphasise, once more, the theme of the double implicit in the exhibition "Eco e Narciso" as well as the close cooperation between the two museum, we find another echo of the exhibition at MAXXI, where we have put on display the photograph VB74, taken from the performance Vanessa Beecroft realized for the museum, and the magnificent sculpture of *La Velata (The Vestal Tuccia)* by Antonio Corradini.

FGS The statue of *La Velata*, or of the *Vestal Tuccia*, is obviously not an individual or even allegorical portrait, although already when Corradini sculpted it, in Rome in 1743, it could easily be identified with the work of the artist, as he had made the technique of adherent drapery a personal and almost stylistic trait. The subject, as in other previous examples, is rather specious: the famous priestess of Vesta unjustly accused of having violated the vow of chastity is then miraculously redeemed by the same goddess. The sieve – with which the vestal extraordinarily manages to bring water from the Tiber to prove, as required, her own innocence – and the veil itself allude to the immaculate integrity of the woman, to her purity. But Corradini's virtuoso sculpture is also a delightful celebration of art, which through the appearance of its medium, veiling the subject makes it--however paradoxical it may seem-- truly visible. And it is precisely what happens fully in the portrait.

BP Corradini's *Velata* then finds a perfect companion in the work of Vanessa Beecroft, VB74, a performance realized in 2014 that incorporates a technique already experimented by the artist in constructing *tableaux vivants* with mostly semi-undressed women. On this occasion the figures are covered only by veils, and the image is then re-affirmed in a long tradition that in the history of art is charged with different symbolic meanings. Today, as we know, these images lead us to urgent and controversial topics of cultural, social and political identity. But it is also a philosophical and theological theme, as set out by Giorgio Agamben who was inspired by a performance by Vanessa Beecroft in his recent essay (*Nudities*, 2010). Nudity, as Agamben suggests, is perceived not as purity but as something negative, as a privation and an absence, even as something unrealistic and unthinkable in our Christian culture. In this sense, the attribute of beauty is not nudity but, on the contrary, the relationship between the object and its covering. After the expulsion from Paradise, man loses his sanctifying grace and is forced to cover his shame, so that at the origin of human and historical time lies this conflict between what is veiled, hidden, secret, and his "unveiling", his "undress", always only partial and provisional. Man's nudity is therefore inextricably linked to the theological idea of mercy and sin, between original unconsciousness and subsequent consciousness. The paradoxical "essential law of beauty", as Benjamin wrote in the *Angelus novus*, is "that it appears as such only when it is veiled". ■



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