

PRESS RELEASE

His name has been compared to those of Tintoretto and Caravaggio. Guido Reni rightly admired Bononi's "great mastery of drawing and the strength of his colours" and few have been able to paint stronger or more attractive male nudes. Created in tragic times of famine and pestilence in early 17th century Italy, his canvases are true pictorial wonders that are respectful, if not completely acquiescent, to the Counter-Reformation.

The exhibition opening in October 2017 at Palazzo dei Diamanti offers a golden opportunity to explore a little-known but crucial chapter of art history.

Ferrara's own Carlo Bononi, one of the great painters of the 17th century, whose name has often been mentioned alongside those of Tintoretto, the Carracci and Caravaggio, will be featured in the exhibition.

The show, the first solo exhibition devoted to Carlo Bononi, is organized by Fondazione Ferrara Arte and is curated by Giovanni Sassu, curator of Musei d'Arte Antica of the city of Ferrara, and Francesca Cappelletti, professor of History of Art at the University of Ferrara.

For centuries, Bononi, like most of the ferrarese 17th century, lingered in the shadow of the extraordinary Renaissance period that took place under the Este family rule. Art critics and scholars have been piecing together this period, gradually focusing on this unique artist, one who sublimely and intimately interpreted the religious tensions of his time.

Painter of great sacred decoration projects and altarpieces, Bononi created a pictorial language based on emotions, the intimate and sentimental relationship between the painted figures and the observer. In the tragic years of religious conflicts, of earthquakes and plagues, his clever use of light and the masterful way he staged his paintings made him one of the foremost painters of the Baroque period in Italy, as can be seen by the captivating decorations in the church of Santa Maria in Vado.

But Bononi was also a great naturalist artist, and in his works, the sacred converses with everyday life. Canvases like *The Miracle of Soriano* or *Guardian Angel* show how important it was to the artist to convert religious stories into reality, to personify saints and the Madonna as real people.

From this perspective, few were able to combine the representation of the male nude with the dogmas coming from the Counter Reformation's Italy at the beginning of 17th century: his martyrs and saints are depicted in a strong and flawless way, they are at the same time sensual but without any voyeuristic touch.

Bononi was not only a painter of religious subjects, but also a great interpreter for commissions coming from a cultured class, those who were interested in the arts, particularly music, as can be seen in the various exemplars of the *Genius of the Arts*, a masterpiece in which Bononi directly dialogues with Caravaggio and his followers.

All of this was apparent to his contemporaries. A few years after Bononi's death in 1632, the great Guido Reni described him as an "extraordinary painter," endowed with "great knowledge of drawing and the force of colour," with a "great and preeminent way of doing things." An echo of Reni's praise can be found in the tribute paid him by another great, il Guercino, who loved stopping at Santa Maria in Vado to gaze at the majestic decorations of the nave, transept, and apse "with tears of joy."

And the declarations of admiration documented by other highly satisfied patrons of his work increased during the 18th century, the era of the Grand Tour, with the no less flattering judgments from intellectuals the likes of Charles Nicolas Cochin and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. In the *Cicerone* (1855), Jakob Burckhardt described standing before the decorations in Santa Maria in Vado and being certain that he was before the work of one of the greatest minds of his time, thereby reinforcing the idea that Bononi was an influential figure in art history.

The opinions of Reni, Goethe and Burckhardt will be put to the test through January 7th 2018: Bononi's mastery of drawing and the strength of his colours await to amaze and beguile you at the Palazzo dei Diamanti.

CARLO BONONI

The Last Dreamer of the Ferrarese School

Ferrara, Palazzo dei Diamanti

14 October 2017 – 7 January 2018

Exhibition curated by Giovanni Sassu and Francesca Cappelletti, organized by Fondazione Ferrara Arte and Gallerie d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Ferrara in collaboration with Musei di Arte Antica del Comune di Ferrara.

Information

tel. +39 0532 244949 | diamanti@comune.fe.it

www.palazzodiamanti.it

Press office

Studio ESSECI – Sergio Campagnolo

tel. +39 049 663499 | info@studioesseci.net

www.studioesseci.net