



# The Reception of British Painting at the Venice Biennali, 1895–1914

Politics or Aesthetics?

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## Abstract

The opening of the Venice Biennale in 1895 provided an unprecedented occasion to bring international art to the Italian public. It thus enabled intellectuals, art critics and the wider public to see and judge national productions side by side. This paper proposes to look at the way biases developed along with the Biennale – in relation to the peculiar political situation in Europe. By looking at articles written by leading Italian art critics on newspapers and magazines such as *Emporium*, *Fanfulla della Domenica*, *Il Marzocco* or *Illustrazione italiana*, the paper will show that art often served as a pretext for a political analysis which ultimately pointed to the rising conflict between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente.

**Keywords:** British painting; critical reception; politics; Venice Biennale

## Introduction

The creation of the Venice Biennale in 1895 obeyed multifold objectives.<sup>1</sup> Officially it meant to commemorate the silver anniversary of King Umberto and Queen Margherita. Practically it enabled Venice to push its economic ambitions by using its long-standing cultural profile and integrating an already widespread system of international exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> The original political and commemorative functions were

seemingly soon forgotten yet from its inception the Biennale has often been seen as the playground for political aesthetics or propaganda exercises. Several publications have focused on episodes of more or less acute political takeover of some sections and pavilions.<sup>3</sup> However, its antebellum period has not been studied from a political perspective apart from passing anecdotes.<sup>4</sup>

## Historical Context

The late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was an era characterized by acute diplomatic tensions which kept Europe in a situation of 'armed peace' with a Damocles sword hung over the continent. After the end of the Napoleonic wars, countries increasingly locked themselves into a system of complex alliances mainly divided as the Triple Entente (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy from 1882) and the Triple Alliance (France, Russia and Great Britain from 1907) although both secret and public diplomatic negotiations as well as colonial expansion further complicated their relationships. The birth of the Venice Biennale therefore occurred in a period in which international politics dominated public life and in which neighbouring countries became a threat almost overnight, as occurred between France and Germany during the Tangier crisis in 1905–1906.<sup>5</sup> As an international platform exhibiting the contemporary artistic production by diplomatic allies and enemies, the antebellum Venice Biennale offers a fascinating case study of international politics. As a result, this article offers to probe what might have been the impact of such an extremely tense political situation on the art world and to study how far aesthetic appreciation and the diffusion of contemporary artistic expression may possibly be captured by a political agenda.

This article will focus on the British presence in Venice which will serve as a basis for comparison. The choice of Great Britain is interesting due to its paradoxical political and artistic position in Europe. On the surface, Great Britain adopted a policy of 'splendid isolation' for most of the period;<sup>6</sup> its apparent sophisticated aloofness from continental politics was balanced by a continuously expanding presence overseas. Due to its peculiar position the country played a hegemonic role in Europe in an era which has come to be defined as being

ruled by a *Pax Britannica* although it was increasingly challenged by Germany and to a lesser extent France. From an artistic perspective, Great Britain slowly relinquished its insularity in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and started to participate in international exhibitions on a regular basis slowly disclosing its production to baffled continental critics.<sup>7</sup> At Great Exhibitions, Britain was usually second only to France in the number of its fine art exhibits from 1855 onwards<sup>8</sup> with ever-growing sections at international exhibitions: 259 artists were present at the 1897 Brussels exhibition, 501 at the 1904 St Louis Exhibition and 511 at the Christchurch Exhibition in New Zealand in 1906–1907.<sup>9</sup> In Venice, Britain increased from 27 exhibits in 1895 to 142 in 1914,<sup>10</sup> whilst it was also amongst the first countries to open its own Pavilion in 1909, before France (1912) and Russia (1914). Furthermore the examination of the British artistic presence in Venice is rendered especially interesting due to the warm feelings of *Anglophilia* which existed in some Italian political and cultural circles. Indeed Great Britain generally represented a model of progress, often idealized.<sup>11</sup> In some cases, Italian writers established parallels between the Roman Empire and Great Britain. It was thus not unusual to read such comments as:

England is today's Rome. Instead of colonizing Europe, she is colonizing the rest of the world. Instead of building the Via Appia and Via Emilia, she embarked on colossal projects and is building railways from Cairo to the Cape.<sup>12</sup>

In his seminal essay on 'Art and the Language of Politics', the English art historian Francis Haskell sought to go beyond the traditional historiography equating politics and artistic styles. Rather he pointed out that the terminology used by art critics reflected the cultural context of their periods: while in the seventeenth century they called some painters 'heretics', their Romantic counterparts turned to the political sphere to find appropriate metaphors. Following Haskell's lead, this article studies the vocabulary used in Italian reviews of the British sections at the Venice Biennali between 1895 and 1914. It will assess how far the lexicon used by some leading Italian art critics of the time, including Vittorio Pica (1864–1930),<sup>13</sup> Diego Angeli (1869–1937)<sup>14</sup> and Ugo Ojetti (1871–1946)<sup>15</sup> referred to a broader cultural and political context.

A cursory look at the adjectives used by Italian art critics shows that they did not rely on an obvious political taxonomy. At first sight, early reviews do not even bear any apparent political references. The first British section at Venice mostly displaying academic and Pre-Raphaelite paintings provoked incomprehension as Italian art critics had great expectations but little knowledge of it. Their main acquaintance with British art had been formed through the writings of two French art critics: Ernest Chesneau (1833–1890) and Robert de la Sizeranne (1866–1932) whose publications were the most up-to-date and comprehensive sources on the topic in Italy in the late nineteenth century. In 1895, first-hand experience clashed with theoretical knowledge, which resulted in contradictory statements. Vittorio Pica could praise at the same time ‘the refined tendency of an aristocratic art’ whilst underlining that their ‘barbarian violence of colour... offends our educated Latin eye’.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, George Frederic Watts’s art also demonstrated ‘poetic conception’ and obviously ‘took its roots in the English soul’ but ‘had little chance of being appreciated by us Latin people’.<sup>17</sup> The strong dichotomies between ‘barbarian’ and ‘Latin’ or ‘English’ and ‘Latin’ created a partition between British artistic production and Italian aesthetic sensibility. In short, Italian art critics seemed to acknowledge their incapacity to judge British art.<sup>18</sup>

From 1897 onwards the British section slowly diversified and presented a mix of academic, decorative (Frank Brangwyn) pre-Raphaelite (Walter Crane, Byam Shaw) and Impressionist-influenced portraits and landscapes mainly coming from Scotland.<sup>19</sup> Of course other artistic exhibitions in the Peninsula also contributed to foster a knowledge of diverse forms of British art as was the case of the Turin 1902 exhibition where the much commented upon British section was designed by Art Nouveau designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh.<sup>20</sup> In Venice, the diversity of the British section evolved dramatically when the system of invitation used by the Biennale organizers in the early years was dropped after the opening of the British Pavilion in 1909. From that year onwards the selection was made by Marcus Bourne Huish, former Director of the Fine Art Society and editor of the *Year’s Art*, whose extensive home network and open taste changed the content of the British sections.<sup>21</sup>

During these years, Italian art critics refined their visual understanding of British painting but in their writings, recurring expressions

sometimes betrayed their intellectual postulates. The single most common expression and perhaps the only one shared by Pica, Ogetti and Angeli throughout the antebellum Biennali was ‘national character’. By and large, these art critics heavily insisted on painters displaying a ‘clear national belonging’ whereby each section needed to be compared and contrasted to others in order to separate their characteristics. Such insistence cannot be properly understood without an awareness of Italy’s own difficulties to build up a national identity after the *Risorgimento*. The birth of the Venice Biennale occurred during a decade marked by intense political promotion of nationhood through patriotism as advocated by Prime Minister Francesco Crispi and his successors.<sup>22</sup> Although the antebellum Biennale was created with the intent to foster these political aspirations, it increasingly yielded to regionalist tendencies as shown by its topographical and artistic choices polarizing Italian and non-Italian art.<sup>23</sup> The critics’ insistence on ‘national character’ was therefore partly self-reflexive and betrayed their anxieties of national fulfillment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the crucial concept of ‘national character’ comes from the positivist framework of artistic appreciation developed by French philosopher Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893).<sup>24</sup> What has often been reduced to the triad ‘race, milieu, moment’ was a philosophy or rather a science of art. It was intended as a positivist method to understand works of art as part of concentric personal, geographical and historical circles. Taine believed that art belonged to three main wholes: the artist’s *oeuvre*, his contemporary artistic period, and lastly a broader cultural climate which favoured its appearance. This article will focus on the last two circles as they lend themselves more to political interpretation.

Indeed, building on a sociological approach to art, Taine explained that ‘a work of art is determined by a whole which is the general mindset and surrounding customs’.<sup>25</sup> A staunch positivist, Taine used a comparative analysis taken from biology and explored the idea that what he called ‘moral temperature’ produced a specific sort of culture and art, the way physical temperature produces specific vegetation. In that respect, art could be but the expression of a people’s essence and should be judged only from that perspective to the exclusion of pure aesthetic concerns. This point was taken up by Diego Angeli who used it to diminish the importance of comparisons based on sheer aesthetics:

‘our judgment must be all the more relative as these paintings are the product of a whole society and a whole culture’.<sup>26</sup> First developed as part of his *Philosophy of Art*, this taxonomy of artistic production was taken further in *De l’Ideal dans l’Art* published in 1867.<sup>27</sup>

The terminology used by some Italian art critics was broadly underpinned by Taine’s philosophy of art. To them, good paintings generally acted as synecdoche for the nation they emanated from. Such definitions of national characteristics seemed all the more important in newly formed kingdoms which sought to foster a unified cultural identity.<sup>28</sup> This was the case of the kingdom of Italy created in 1861 after the *Risorgimento* but also of Germany broadly united as a single country after the Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871. Indeed German art critics also favoured what they called ‘homegrown’ art as they felt it would contribute to regenerate the nation.<sup>29</sup>

## **Taine’s Second Circle: Contemporary Artistic Production**

Given the wide-ranging variety of displays at the Biennale, including in any given national sections, the nature of ‘contemporary artistic production’ seemed particularly difficult to pin down. Although Italian art critics generally agreed that the British section offered expressions of ‘clear-cut national character’, they sometimes slightly diverged on its constitutive elements. For example in spite of his inspiration taken from the Italian primitive artists, Edward Burne-Jones’s ‘Dream of Lancelot at the Chapel of the San Graal’ was defined as ‘a bluntly English painting, in its national subject, in its outline of the characters, in its cold colours’.<sup>30</sup>

Apparently, ‘national character’ was not expressed through a particular medium even though watercolour was generally considered to be a British speciality. Nor was it linked to peculiar genres or movements although British portraiture and landscape generally attracted praise. According to French art critic Ernest Chesneau, already mentioned above, the ‘supreme quality’ of a national school of painting ‘consists in expressing with an absolute sincerity the emotions felt in front of nature, and to translate its thoughts and completely personal feelings with the *help of forms and colours* given by the exterior world’ (my italics).<sup>31</sup> This attempted to give a set framework to structure art criticism even though such a vague definition created possible contradictions.

Following Chesneau's recommendations and influenced by the Ruskinian principle of moral aesthetics, Italian critics were looking for sincerity of feelings in painting. For example, the adjective 'sincere' was used most commonly to describe the group formed by the Glasgow Boys.<sup>32</sup> These artists exhibited at the Biennale for the first time in 1897 and henceforth provided an ample portion of the British section, even benefiting from their own room until 1901. Acknowledged followers of Whistler and inspired from plein-air painting, the originality of this group struck the Italian public. Using Ruskin and Chesneau, Gilbert Secrétant praised the painters' ability to 'reproduce the truth, and transform it with feeling and imagination'.<sup>33</sup> Yet sincerity called other complementary adjectives in order to separate the diverse national characters, fostering for example comparisons with Scandinavian artists. Indeed sincere Scandinavian landscapists were 'faithful, straightforward and candid' according to Vittorio Pica while Scottish painters added 'refinement' and 'skill' to their sincerity.<sup>34</sup> Sometimes contradictory adjectives were used to describe the Glasgow Boys, including 'simple',<sup>35</sup> 'refined',<sup>36</sup> 'skilful',<sup>37</sup> 'sincere' or 'poetic'.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps this prompted Ojetti to try and synthesize the nature of Scottish art: 'for me they are simple and clever at the same time ... it has been said that they were all similar, on the contrary they have very different techniques, and they choose very different lights ... their only unity is their country and their youth'.<sup>39</sup> 'National' sincerity was thus difficult to define as it could be applied to diverse schools. Further attempts to classify the nature of sincerity sometimes gave rise to oxymoron as these quotations showed.

Colour theory was an important and controversial part of art criticism. Colours seem easier to discuss than sincerity yet British colours were fairly difficult to synthesize. At first influenced by French art critics such as Ernest Chesneau and Robert de la Sizeranne who sought to create watertight borders between English and French art, Vittorio Pica found Pre-Raphaelite colours fairly 'barbarian' and 'violent', concluding like their French counterparts that they 'offended our educated Latin eye'.<sup>40</sup> However a study of Edward Burne-Jones's colouring led another critic to assert that 'the English were particularly inclined to ... monotonous colours ... deprived of internal warmth which even the most mediocre painters of Latin race all have'.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps influenced by Charles Blanc's theory that colour is feminine,<sup>42</sup> he found that it was the sure sign of a

masculine and bold civilization. On the other hand, Valentino Leonardi praised the Glasgow Boys for being ‘in love with learned sfumature, caressing mezzotinte, with soft lights and very light hazes’.<sup>43</sup>

These few examples of the contradictory use of adjectives in reviews aimed to show that there were discrepancies between the theoretical framework provided by positivist thinkers such as Hippolyte Taine and the individual qualities of painters, which Italian art critics sometimes found difficult to reconcile. Indeed their lexicon reveals their struggle to generalize on the qualities of British production in terms of a national school when contrasted to other nations. At first, Italian critics made clear distinctions between English and Scottish production, especially when they were divided into different sections at Venice. However these national distinctions tended to disappear once all British artists were reunited into a single pavilion in 1909.

### **Taine’s Last Circle: The Broad Cultural Climate**

Britain’s seemingly longstanding political and cultural unity appealed to many Italian art critics. Indeed the adjective ‘traditional’ was repeatedly used to characterize the British sections at Venice, especially after it became clearer that some avant-garde movements wished to break away from the past.<sup>44</sup> Running contrary to the Futurist anger at tradition, art critic Ugo Ojetti praised British aesthetic unity as deriving from a continuous historical development of faithfulness to the Romantic ideals of truth to nature unimpeded by ‘rigid neoclassicism’.<sup>45</sup> In the same way as British political institutions provided a continuum unchanged by revolutions and the Napoleonic wars, so British art could directly hark back to its eighteenth-century models. Artists as different as Glasgow Boy John Lavery (1856–1941), Irish-born William Orpen (1878–1931) or ‘Edwardian aesthete’ Glyn Philpot (1884–1937),<sup>46</sup> who all showed at the Venice Biennale, were inspired in one way or another by eighteenth-century painters such as Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Lawrence or George Romney. As Italian critics generally underlined, these painters did not slavishly copy their models; rather they managed to produce individual modern syntheses: ‘the technique has been modified, but the feeling remains the same and whilst artistic evolution has dictated its new formulae to painters ... his soul remains unchanged and his eye was able to



catch with neat precision the same traits which had conquered the spirit of his predecessors'.<sup>47</sup> Thus in reinterpreting past pictorial formulae, British painters were seen to offer an alternative form of modernity, sometimes to the point of embodying the 'anti-modernist' camp. This can be observed when alternative modes of artistic expression appeared at the Venice Biennale. In 1907, art critic Diego Angeli thus praised the British painters: 'their balanced minds are not affected by the aesthetic exaggerations of the other European people'.<sup>48</sup> He had not changed his mind five years later when the first post-impressionist paintings were hung in the British pavilion as he argued that the British Impressionists 'even through foreign derivations, they keep intact their national soul ... they know how to stay English'.<sup>49</sup>

The supposed chasm between opposed visions of modernity as revivalisms or breakaway from the past sometimes gave rise to extreme interpretation. Targeting in particular the Fauves and the German Expressionists in 1912 Diego Angeli predicted a violent ending to what he considered as irreconcilable views:

We are now facing the break between the antique artistic formulae and the newest aspirations: we are not talking about two trends but rather two civilizations now fighting and trying to overcome each other. This is like in the great periods of barbaric invasions when coarse and winning expressions of a barbarian art and feelings took over the Greek and Roman refinement which had reached the highest level of soft expression.<sup>50</sup>

Thus what was identified by Hippolyte Taine as the last circle, or 'the broad cultural climate', was seen by some Italian art critics as an attachment to historical or civilizational values. The British faithfulness to tradition was commanded as a welcome alternative to the ever-growing modernist forces challenging the artistic choices of the Biennale organizers, in or outside Venice.<sup>51</sup>

## **Aesthetics or Politics?**

As shown above, the British painting sections at the Venice Biennali were promoted by some art critics as displaying a strong 'national identity', possessing a clear tradition and offering a bastion against what

was perceived as deviating artistic practices. These comments did not offer any overt political reference as such. Yet they point to an intellectual context which was increasingly influenced by politics as the First World War loomed.

In 1905, the British section curated by Corot-inspired landscapist Alfred East was contrasted to the newly formed Russian room curated by Sergei Diaghilev. Although the latter contained a mix of young and well-known artists such as Diaghilev's friends Leon Bakst (1866–1924) and Nicolai Ulyanov (1875–1949) or Ilya Repin (1844–1930), who had already exhibited in Venice, comments were scathing. Diego Angeli lambasted Diaghilev's arrangement describing it as 'ostentatious, the expression of a decrepit people which want to seem very young, of the unbalance of a body upset by a period of crisis, of the complete absence of tradition, of the uncertainty as to which objective to reach'.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the British section displayed 'the most sincere expression of a people sure of the way to go and that the way is drawn to the end of the world'.<sup>53</sup> Beyond his sheer dislike of Diaghilev's display, Angeli's comments seemingly referred to the deep social unrest storming Tsarist Russia from 1905 onwards with bloodshed, rebellions and strikes. As 1907 was also a year of social and economic crisis in Italy, the fear of contamination was present and possibly tainting some critics' aesthetic appreciation. Indeed, seen as a reassuring aesthetic stronghold and a strong political power in which reforms occurred without too much social unrest, Britain provided a political and social model.

As explained above, the dawn of the twentieth century saw an increased political partitioning of Europe between two main groups: on the one hand, the 'Triple Alliance' signed between Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy in 1882, on the other hand the 'Triple Entente' signed by Russia and France in 1894, and in which they dragged Great Britain from 1907. These treaties locked the signatories into defensive or supportive agreements which could potentially have a treacle effect in case of a war. From 1907 onwards, Italy and Great Britain were theoretically in different if not opposed camps. However, within this apparently rigid system, the two countries managed to remain on broadly friendly terms. Indeed German Ambassador to Italy Anton Monts observed in 1906 that 'In whatever circumstances and under whatever Government Italy will seek to hold herself aloof from a war against England. The Triplice was concluded under the

presupposition of friendly relations with England'.<sup>54</sup> When the war broke out, Italy's reluctance to embrace the cause of its allies partly accounted for its decision to secretly sign the Treaty of London in 1914. On 26 April 1915, this formalized Italy's decision to side with the Triple Entente in exchange of territories. However, during the crucial years leading to the war, such possibilities were already visible in the comments made by critics at the Biennale as the cultural arena seemingly allowed for more freedom to express anti-German feelings.

Indeed, although the Austro-Italian relationships were far from friendly, most attacks by art critics focused on Germany, then commonly opposed to Great Britain. Interestingly enough art mirrored politics as their Pavilions were facing each other in the Biennale *giardini*. For example, after visiting both pavilions in 1909 Arturo Lancellotti strongly contrasted the two countries:

Germany, a conquering country is, I would say, almost aggressive in her paintings: one can see the desire, nay the firm willingness, to gain the upper hand. And her paintings are vigorous, if vulgar at times ... England, which has already reached the height of prosperity, is looking even higher in her paintings. She is not preoccupied with overtaking others and succeeds with elegance and delicacy.<sup>55</sup>

That year, Secession painter Franz von Stuck (1863–1928) had a one-man show whilst the majority of German painters exhibited in the Bavarian Pavilion alongside artists from Switzerland or Norway. Von Stuck's historical paintings were appreciated although their 'pagan' vision was seen as containing 'barbarian virulence'.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand the newly-opened British Pavilion offered an array of almost one hundred painters, some of whom were much appreciated in Italy at the time. That year Italian officials acquired works by portraitist John Lavery, Charles Shannon or landscapist from the Glasgow school Grosvenor Thomas (1856–1923). Although the British display at the 1909 Biennale certainly encountered more success than the German one, Lancellotti's comments went beyond sheer artistic appreciation. It is tempting to see in Lancellotti's use of the adjectives 'conquering' and 'aggressive' a direct reference to Germany's naval policy which started with Alfred von Tirpitz's nomination as Secretary of the Imperial Navy office in 1896. His Naval Bills enabled Germany to build up her fleet to rival Britain's traditional naval

supremacy. From 1906 onwards, the threat became plainer as Germany incorporated the yearly construction of battleships into her fleet, which in return accelerated the Anglo-German naval race. At the time of the opening of the eighth Biennale in 1909, the 1908 German Navy Bill had provoked British retaliation with the ‘Navy Scare’ voted early that year.<sup>57</sup> Similar comments were to follow which also presented a lofty Great Britain being attacked by an invidious Germany:

Through her three or four major representatives, English painting seems to have reached a level of thoughtful and absorbed beauty as if she had received an infusion of the tranquil, diffuse and secure well-being of her Nation which, today, a younger empire, Germany, is envying so much, and that England might have to prepare to defend one day in the near future, perhaps with arms.<sup>58</sup>

By then, comments showed a plain intersection between politics and aesthetics as the war lexicon had invaded artistic comments. As shown earlier, this was further complicated by the opposition between visions of modernity. This type of comments was not exclusive to the Venice Biennale as similar impressions were expounded at the ‘Second International Exhibition of Women Fine Artists’ at Turin in 1913:

England and Germany seem to struggle between two hegemonies: that of an art educated to antique severity and that of an uninterrupted stream of new and disputable ideals. Who will win the victory palm? It is difficult to say.<sup>59</sup>

Thus contrary to early adjectives qualifying British art as ‘barbarian’, the lexicon used on the eve of the war suggested that Britain was the champion of classicism and civilization. Such a shift of vocabulary cannot be fully explained by the artistic ‘threat’ posed by the avant-garde. Only if politics are intersected with aesthetics can these comments acquire their full meaning.

## Conclusion

Haskell underlined that ‘the danger of political analogies is that they often tend to take a life of their own which becomes more and more

detached from the subjects that they were originally intended to illuminate'.<sup>60</sup> The lexicon chosen by Italian art critics to describe the British sections of the antebellum Venice Biennale is particularly interesting to study in that respect. Under the influence of French positivism and the international political situation, the vocabulary used to define 'British' qualities evolved dramatically. It transpires from the reviews that some critics developed a distinct aesthetic appreciation of the British school of painting, which clearly owed much to political admiration, to the extent that the former too often became subsumed in the latter.

## Notes

- 1 This article is based on one chapter of the author's unpublished PhD thesis: Marie Tavinor, 'Try what my credit can in Venice do: the Consumption of British Painting at the Venice Biennale, 1895–1914', 2016, Royal Holloway, University of London.
- 2 For a recent history of the Biennale, please see Enzo di Martino, *La Storia della Biennale di Venezia, 1895–1913* (Venice, 2013).
- 3 For example see Nancy Jachec, 'Anti-Communism at Home, Europeanism Abroad: Italian Cultural Policy at the Venice Biennale, 1948–1958', *Contemporary European History* 14:2 (2005) 193–217. For a nuanced study of the Biennale under Fascism, see Stefania Longo, *Culture, Tourism and Fascism in Venice 1919–1945* (PhD thesis University College London, 2004). For an in-depth discussion of the Biennale during the War years, please see Giuliana Tomasella, *Biennali di Guerra, Arte e propaganda negli anni del conflitto (1939–1944)* (Padova, 2001).
- 4 For example the General Secretary refused to lead a tour of the exhibition for German Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1905. Romolo Bazzoni, *60 anni della Biennale di Venezia* (Venice, 1962) 67.
- 5 Gregory D. Miller, *The Shadow of the Past: Reputation and Military Alliances before the First World War* (Ithaca, 2012).
- 6 For a recent discussion of Britain's position on the European checker, please see John Charmley, *Splendid Isolation? Britain, the Balance of Power and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 2009); for an *Anglophile* perspective on the question written by an Italian author, see Luigi Albertini, *Le Origini della Guerra del 1914, le relazioni europee del Congresso di Berlino all'attentato di Sarajevo* (Milan, 1942–3).

- 7 For example the 1894 Vienna exhibition showed for the first time works by Leighton, Alma-Tadema, the Glasgow Boys, or photographic reproductions of Burne-Jones's paintings, which were admired as 'strong and special one(s)' by Loris, aka Hugo von Hofmannsthal, art critic for the *Neue Revue* (quoted in Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Expanding World of Art, 1874–1902, vol. 1, Universal Expositions and State-Sponsored Fine Arts Exhibitions* (New Haven and London, 1985) 330.)
- 8 Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas, the Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester, 1988) 210; the author added a caveat for the 1900 Exposition Universelle when the British section (282 artists) was less numerous than the German and Austrian ones (207).
- 9 *Report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Trade to make enquiries with reference to the participation of Great Britain in great international exhibitions: together with the appendices thereto / presented to both houses of Parliament by command of His Majesty* (London, 1907) 9. In Italy, the 1911 Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition held in Rome displayed as many as 536 works by deceased and living artists in the British section.
- 10 These figures only include paintings and watercolours, not prints or sculptures.
- 11 For a discussion of the political development of *Anglophilia* in Italy between 1861 and 1914, please see Laura Cerasi, 'Anglophilia in Crisis: Italian Liberals, the "English Model", and Democracy in the Giolittian Era', *Modern Italy*, 7/1 (2002) 1–20.
- 12 Carlo Placci, *In automobile* (Milan, 1908) 190: 'L'Inghilterra è la Roma d'oggi, che invece di colonizzare l'Europa, sta colonizzando le restanti parti del mondo, che, iniziatrice d'impresе colossali, in cambio di vie Appie e vie Emilie, costruisce la via ferrata dal Cairo al Capo'.
- 13 Born in Naples of an English mother, Vittorio Pica was, together with Riccardo Selvatico and Antonio Fradeletto, the founder of the Venice Biennale of which he became the Secretary and General Secretary between 1910 and 1927. The interconnection between his work as a leading art critic on contemporary international art and his position within the Venice biennale organization made him a particularly powerful figure whose taste greatly influenced his contemporaries. In January 1902, the *Emporium* proudly announced that Pica had won the 'Primo premio della critica d'arte' for his review of the Venice exhibition, which undoubtedly furthered his position as leading art critic of international contemporary art.

- 14 Hailed as ‘one of the leading Italian critics’, he grew up in a journalistic and literary environment as his father Maurizio directed the *Gazzettino delle arti e del disegno*. His main biographical elements were outlined in the introduction to the *Cronache del Caffè Greco* (Stefano Stringini (ed.), *Diego Angeli, Cronache del Caffè Greco* (Rome, 2001)). A ‘Bizantino sui generis’, Angeli was initially very much influenced by his circle of friends composed of Gabriele d’Annunzio, Ugo Ojetti, the couple Edoardo Scarfoglio-Matilde Serao or the writer Edmondo de Amicis.
- 15 Ugo Ojetti graduated in Law at the University of Rome and was tempted by a diplomatic career due to his knowledge of English and French. However, after he met D’Annunzio who was eight years his elder, Ojetti turned to journalism and literary and art criticism. In Rome, he became part, together with Diego Angeli, of the group of intellectuals comprising Antonio della Porta, Giannino Antona-Traversi. Ojetti then transferred to Milan where he worked at the daily newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*. For more information on his activity as critic, see Giovanna De Lorenzi, *Ugo Ojetti critico d’arte: dal ‘Marzocco’ al ‘Dedalo’* (Florence, 2004). He covered the Venice Biennale throughout the antebellum period, gaining a ‘Premio della critica’ in 1899.
- 16 Vittorio Pica, *L’arte europea a Venezia* (Naples, 1895) 26.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 18 In that respect, Italian art critics were close to what French art critic Ernest Chesneau had expressed in his publication *La peinture anglaise* (Paris, 1882) 170: ‘L’esprit britannique dans les arts [...] a le même caractère que le pays; il est dur et mâle, et comme tel dénué de grâce; ce n’est pas celui qui nous touche et nous convient; aussi nous a-t-il fallu quelque effort pour y pénétrer’.
- 19 For a useful analysis of the British presence at the Venice Biennale, please see Sandra Berresford, ‘The Pre-Raphaelites and their Followers at the International Exhibitions of Art in Venice 1895–1905’, in Sophie Bowness and Clive Phillpot (eds), *Britain at the Venice Biennale, 1895–1995* (London, 1995) 37–49.
- 20 Rossana Bossaglia, Ezio Godoli and Marco Rossi, *Torino 1902: Le Arti Decorative Internazionali del Nuovo Secolo* (Milan, 1994). Shearer West has noted that the triumph of the international ahistorical Art Nouveau style at Turin somehow undermined the established connection between nationhood and artistic style. Shearer West, ‘National Desires and Regional Realities in the Venice Biennale, 1895–1914’, *Art History* 18:3 (1995) 424.

- 21 Anne Helmreich, 'Marcus Huish (1843–1921)', *Victorian Review* 37:1 (2011) 26–30.
- 22 For more information on Crispi and his policy, see Christopher Duggan, *Francesco Crispi 1818–1901: From Nation to Nationalism* (Oxford, 2002).
- 23 Shearer West, 'National Desires and Regional Realities in the Venice Biennale, 1895–1914', *Art History* 18:3 (1995) 404–434.
- 24 For more information on Taine's influence in Italy, see Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo. La cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin, 1985).
- 25 Hippolyte Taine, *Philosophie de l'Art* (Paris, 1865) 77.
- 26 Diego Angeli, 'L'Esposizione di Venezia I. I pittori rappresentativi', *Marzocco*, VI:19, 12 May 1901, 1.: 'il nostro giudizio deve essere tanto più relativo in quanto che esse sono il prodotto di tutta una società e di tutta una cultura'.
- 27 Hippolyte Taine, *De l'Idéal dans l'Art* (Paris, 1867).
- 28 Italian art critics often pointed out the absence of an 'Italian' painting which had become worse since political unity: for example Ugo Ojetti questioned 'Ma una pittura italiana è mai esistita? Nei secoli d'oro esisteva una pittura lombarda, una pittura toscana, una pittura umbra, una pittura veneta. Raggiunta l'unità politica è cominciato lo sgretolamento. Ora non vi sono che dei pittori. E in qualche città nemmeno quelli'. Ugo Ojetti, *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte di Venezia 1910* (Venice, 1910) 22.
- 29 Peter Paret, *The Berlin Secession, Modernism and its Enemies* (Harvard, 1980) 2.
- 30 Diego Angeli, 'L'Esposizione di Venezia, I. I pittori rappresentativi', *Marzocco* VI:19, 12 May 1901, 1: 'Quadro schiettamente inglese, nel soggetto nazionale, nella sagoma dei personaggi, nel colorito freddo'.
- 31 Ernest Chesneau, *Les nations rivales dans l'art* (Paris, 1868), 461: 'Si la suprême vertu d'une école en général – et en particulier de chaque artiste – consiste à exprimer avec une absolue sincérité de sensation les émotions que lui font éprouver les spectacles de la nature, à traduire ses pensées, ses sentiments absolument personnels à l'aide des formes et des couleurs dont le monde extérieur lui fournit les éléments et les modèles'.
- 32 For example Ugo Ojetti used this adjective in *L'arte moderna a Venezia, Esposizione mondiale del 1897* (Rome, 1897) 116.
- 33 Gilberto Secretant, *Il Fanfulla della Domenica* XIX:3, 17 January 1897: 'intende solo a riprodurre il vero, che trasforma col sentimento e con l'immaginazione'.



- 34 Pica, *L'arte europea a Venezia*, 3.
- 35 In Italian: 'semplice' and 'ingenuo' meaning 'naive'.
- 36 In Italian: 'raffinati'.
- 37 In Italian: 'sapiente'.
- 38 In Italian: 'poetico'.
- 39 Ojetti, *L'arte moderna a Venezia*, 2: 'Per me, essi sono ingénue e furbi a un tempo ... e stato ditto che essi sono tutti simili e invece hanno tecniche differentissime, e scelgono differentissime luci... L'unica unita e nella patria e nella giovinezza commune'.
- 40 Pica, *L'arte europea a Venezia*, 26.
- 41 Diego Angeli, 'Esposizione di Venezia I. Pittori rappresentativi', *Marzocco*, VI:19, 12 May 1901, 2: 'Quadro schiettamente inglese [...] nel colorito freddo e privo di quel calore interno che ebbero anche i più mediocri pittori di razza latina'.
- 42 Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin: architecture, peinture, sculpture* (Paris, 1880).
- 43 Valentino Leonardi, 'All' esposizione di Venezia IV, Amore il Conquistatore', *Fanfulla della Domenica*, XXVII:38, 17 September 1905, 2: 'la [pittura] scozzese, innamorata di sfumature sapienti, di mezzetinte carezzanti'.
- 44 The Futurists were particularly active in Venice where they threw their Manifesto from the bell tower on San Marco Square in 1910 calling for action against such a past-oriented city.
- 45 Ugo Ojetti, *Rome International Exhibition 1911, Souvenir of the British Section, Notes on the British Section* (London, 1912) 79.
- 46 Robin Gibson, *Glyn Philpot, 1884-1937: Edwardian Aesthete to Thirties Modernist* (London, 1986).
- 47 Diego Angeli, 'L'Esposizione di Venezia, I. I pittori rappresentativi', *Marzocco*, VI:19, 12 May 1901, 1-2: 'la tecnica è modificata, ma il sentimento rimane lo stesso e se l'evoluzione delle arti ha imposto le sue formule nuove ... la sua anima non si è deformata e i suoi occhi hanno saputo cogliere con nitida precisione i medesimi tratti che avevano colpito lo spirito dei suoi predecessori'.
- 48 Diego Angeli, 'Gl'Inglese all'Esposizione', *Marzocco*, XII:19, 12 May 1907, 2: 'le esagerazioni estetiche degli altri popoli d'Europa non hanno presa sui loro spiriti equilibrati'.
- 49 Diego Angeli, *Decima Esposizione internazionale d'arte della città di Venezia 1912* (Milan, 1912) 30: 'Gli impressionisti inglesi sanno mantenersi

inglesi e una volta di più, anche attraverso le derivazioni straniere, essi conservano intatta la loro anima nazionale’.

- 50 Angeli, *Illustrazione italiana*, 3: ‘Noi ci troviamo d’innanzi al dissidio fra le antiche formule dell’arte e le nuovissime aspirazioni: non sono nè meno più due tendenze, sono addirittura due civiltà che si combattono e cercano di sopraffarsi come nei grandi periodi delle invasioni barbariche, quando di contro alle raffinatezze greco-romane, giunte oramai all’ultimo grado di espressione morbosa, sorgevano rudi e vittoriose le espressioni di un’arte e di un sentimento barbarico’.
- 51 Young painters such as Umberto Boccioni or Teodoro Wolf Ferrari who were not allowed to exhibit at the Biennale showcased their works at the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa at Ca’ Pesaro under the aegis of its director Eugenio ‘Nino’ Barbantini (1885–1952) from 1908. Ca’ Pesaro thus represented a secessionist alternative to the Biennale. Emilio Franzina, *Venezia* (Bari, 1986) 442–444.
- 52 Diego Angeli, ‘Gl’Inglesi all’Esposizione’, *Marzocco*, XII:19, 12 May 1907, 2: ‘in una si ha l’ostentazione di un popolo decrepito che vuol sembrar giovanissimo, lo squilibrio di un organismo sconvolto da un periodo di crisi, l’assenza totale della tradizione, l’incertezza della méta da raggiungere’.
- 53 Ibid., 2 : ‘sono la più sincera espressione di un popolo sicuro della via da percorrere e conscio che questa via [...] è tracciata fino ai confini del mondo’.
- 54 Quoted in Luigi Albertini, *Le Origini della Guerra del 1914, vol. 1, Le relazioni europee dal Congresso di Berlino all’attentato di Sarajevo* (Gorizio, 2010) 232: ‘In qualunque circostanza e con qualunque governo l’Italia cercherà di sottrarsi ad una guerra contro l’Inghilterra. La Triplice è stata conclusa col presupposto di relazioni amichevole coll’Inghilterra’.
- 55 Arturo Lancellotti, *Le biennali veneziane dell’ante guerra, I-XI* (Alessandria, 1924) 75.
- 56 Vittorio Pica, ‘L’arte mondiale all’VII Esposizione di Venezia; I. Le mostre individuali di Besnard, Zorn e Stuck’, *Emporium*, XXX:175 (1909) 62.
- 57 Amelia Hadfield-Amkhan, *British Foreign Policy, National Identity, and Neoclassical Realism* (London, 2010).
- 58 Antonio Cippico, ‘Pittori rappresentativi: Charles Shannon’, *Vita d’Arte*, III:5 (March 1910) 96–97: ‘La pittura inglese invece, nei suoi tre o quattro maggiori rappresentanti, sembra essere giunta a un grado di bellezza pensosa e raccolta, quasi anche in essa si fosse riversata un’ondo di quel

benessere diffuso, tranquillo e sicuro della nazione che oggi, un impero più giovane, la Germania, così ansiosamente le invidia, e che ella stessa Inghilterra deve pu prepararsi a contendergli in un giorno non lontano, forse con le armi’.

- 59 Alfredo Vinardi, ‘L’esposizione femminile internazionale e la mostra degli amici dell’arte’, *Emporium* XXXVIII:223, (July 1913) 78 : ‘Tra due egemonie sembrano lottare Inghilterra e Germania ; quella di un’arte educata alla severità antica e quella di un irrompere baldanzoso di nuovi e discutibili ideali. A chi la palma della vittoria ? Sarebbe difficile rispondere’.
- 60 Francis Haskell, ‘Art and the Language of Politics’, in idem, *Past and Present in Art and Taste* (New Haven, 1997) 71.

## About the Author

**Marie Tavinor** studied British and American literature, culture and history in France before turning to the visual arts and focusing her interest on the development of the art market and art collections. She obtained her MA from the Institut d’Études Supérieures des Arts (IESA) and the University of Warwick and wrote her dissertation on the politics of donations in late Victorian England. Her PhD at the Royal Holloway researched the consumption of British paintings at the Venice Biennale between 1895 and 1914, thereby questioning the concept of ‘insularity’ attached to the diffusion of Victorian and Edwardian art. Over the past years, Marie has been a visiting lecturer at various Institutions, notably IESA (Paris, London) and has recently become a Lecturer at Christie’s Education in London. E-mail: mtavinor@christies.edu