

Italian and Spanish paintings

MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE, GENEVA

From 26 June 2015

PRESS RELEASE

Rediscovering the Italian and Spanish collections at the MAH

May 2015 – The Musée d'Art et d'Histoire of Geneva has more than 260 Italian and some ten Spanish paintings from the 14th to the 18th century in its possession, making up the largest group of these schools in Switzerland. On the occasion of the publication of a book marking the completion of an important study, restoration and photo project, the MAH presents a new hanging of these paintings in the fine arts galleries with a selection of works to be rediscovered that are as remarkable as they are little known.

Displayed in four rooms and three cabinets, the new hanging underlines the importance of Italian and Spanish painting in the history of Genevan collections and, in a larger sense, in the history of the city's artistic taste and cultural patronage.

The first room displays a few 14th- to 16th-century Italian paintings in juxtaposition with elements from the European production of the time. The second room completes this theme with a selection of contemporary Italian and Spanish pieces that were rediscovered in the museum's storage rooms. The subsequent rooms recount the history of the museum's collections. A room dedicated to the Napoleon donation pays tribute to the weight of the Italian contribution amongst the 21 paintings given to the city in 1804–1805, while the following room offers a choice of large paintings from the *Seicento*, highlighting the change in taste from the late 18th century among private collectors like Jean Sellon, some of whose pieces would join the Musée Rath from 1826 on. Two cabinets evoke the parallel personalities of Walther Fol and Gustave Revilliod, each of whom bequeathed a private museum of an encyclopaedic nature with an inclusion of "Primitives": the former with the creation of the Musée Fol in 1871, the latter with the donation of the Musée Ariana in 1890. The third cabinet illuminates the enhancements to the MAH collections since 1910 thanks to collectors such as Jacob-Adolphe Holzer, Frédéric Battelli, and Ernst and Lucie Schmidheiny.

The Italian and Spanish paintings at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire are more or less equivalent in number to the Flemish and Dutch paintings and nearly double the pre-1800 French paintings. The complete span of Italian painting is covered with an emphasis on the 17th century, the reflection of a golden age in the history of Genevan collections from the end of the 18th to the early 19th century. Moreover, by integrating the Fol and Revilliod donations, the collection perfectly illustrates the encyclopaedic ideal that characterised the second half of the 19th century (the illustration of all techniques, all regions and all epochs) and that the identity of the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire was founded upon at the time of its opening in 1910. As with the museum's Flemish and Dutch paintings, today the space is lacking for many of the Italian and Spanish works to be shown for a truer reflection of the breadth and quality of the collections.

Exhibition Curators

Frédéric Elsig and Mauro Natale

Catalogue

Peintures italiennes et espagnoles du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle. Genève, Musée d'art et d'histoire, edited by Frédéric Elsig and Mauro Natale, Cinisello Balsamo, Silvana editoriale, 2015, colour illustrations.

Contact

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Open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. - Closed on Monday

Entry free of charge for the exhibition

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