



LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

GIULIO ARISTIDE SARTORIO
Rome 1860-1932

MADONNA
1929

Oil on canvas; signed on lower right: 'G. A Sartorio Fregene MCMXXVI'; on the back: Galleria Pesaro label
160 x 133 cm

PROVENANCE

Varese, private collection;
Galleria Berardi, Rome,
until acquired by the present owner in 2024.

EXHIBITED

Mostra personale di Giulio Aristide Sartorio, La Galleria Pesaro, Milan, 1929, n. 36.

LITERATURE

Mostra personale del pittore Giulio Aristide Sartorio, Milano, Bestetti & Tumminelli.

Giulio Aristide Sartorio ranks among the most important Italian artists between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, above all for the international scope of his rich oeuvre. He was one of the principal exponents of the Pre-Raphaelite current in Rome during the Symbolist period and a leading figure in the codification of the official and celebratory language of public decoration in early twentieth-century Italy. A versatile artist, he was a refined practitioner of animalier painting as well as war reportage, the Roman countryside, and the places he encountered during his numerous journeys to the East and Latin America. He reached the height of his artistic expression in the final years of his career, spent between official commissions and the development of the more intimate language of his so-called Fregene cycle, in which the protagonists of his last and most significant works are light effects and family affections.

Madonna, painted in 1926 and exhibited by Sartorio in 1929 in his solo exhibition at the Galleria Pesaro in Milan, belongs to the Fregene cycle, the artist's precious swan song. In this kind of paradisiacal testament, the essence of a new expressive phase and a renewed existence is preserved even as his career approached its conclusion. As Sartorio himself wrote:

"Today, in palingenesis, I ask to express the present and signify the smiles of optimism. In the hospital in Gorizia, Dr Francesco Marani also saved my right leg, which was condemned to amputation, so that this unexpected existence, surrounded as it is by a happy family formed after the war, seems to me like an unexpected paradise. The plastic manifestation of this new life finds itself on display in the Galleria Pesaro."¹

Palingenesis, rebirth, and an idyllic passage toward smiling and pure sweetness are the sentiments Sartorio experienced in the aftermath of war and condensed into these luminous late canvases devoted to his family and the beach at Fregene. This intimacy originates in the Roman residence Horti Galateae and reaches the coast in the graceful, opalescent depiction of Marga Sevilla holding little Lucio, born in 1923. A Madonna understood in the Dantean sense of the term — the *mea domina* of the *Dolce Stil Novo* — an earthly figure imbued

¹G. A. Sartorio, *Mostra personale del pittore Giulio Aristide Sartorio*, Milano, Bestetti & Tumminelli, p.n.n.



LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

with an angelic and mystical aura who, through her virtuous and almost divine nature, can elevate and perfect the soul of her beloved. This vision aligns closely with the Pre-Raphaelite interpretation of Dante's myth, which Sartorio encountered during his travels to England in the 1890s.

The capture of a maternal moment recurs in several paintings of the Fregene period — notably *Stella maris*, exhibited alongside *Madonna* in the Milan exhibition — and marks a shift in style and intent. The softness of sea foam in the background, the delicacy of sunlight, and the expressive and chromatic luminosity signal a new phase dedicated to familial serenity, following a career in which the artist had “taken as an axiom in [his] endeavour that Italian art must be eternal.” In his own words: “I had spent my life realising the axiom [...]. The dream had to die.”² This results in a more personal mode of painting, far removed from any celebratory ambition to eternalise symbolism, yet retaining a strong experimental dimension visible in the vertical composition and spontaneity of execution, perhaps also connected to contemporary explorations in photography and cinema.

The Fregene cycle is thus composed of family affections and luminous seascapes, in which sky, sea, and sand converge in limpid chromatic harmony and a compelling narration of everyday beauty. Beneath this apparent simplicity, however, the mythic dimension persists: Marga assumes the guise of the nymph Galatea, while the sea retains its classical significance as a place of *nostos* and as a symbol of transparent and authentic nature. This naturalistic-elegiac sensibility may reflect Sartorio's engagement with the work of Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923), regularly present at the Venice Biennale from 1895 (like Sartorio) until 1926. Sorolla's paintings, centred on the suspended lightness of Spanish beaches, explore the study of light in iridescent marine reflections and in the modelling of figures of children playing in the waves or fishermen confronting daily labour. Sartorio's evocation of this energetic painting of light, filtered through reflection on domestic life, reveals particular attention to the private sphere, the human figure, and the fusion of spiritual and natural dimensions within subtle chromatic harmony. A body of work long out of public view, the Fregene paintings were rediscovered in a 1973 exhibition at the Galleria Emporio Floreale in Rome.

Giulio Aristide Sartorio was born in Rome in 1860. Initiated into artistic study by his father and grandfather — both sculptors — he attended the Institute of Fine Arts in Rome under Francesco Podesti (1800–1895). His early production focused primarily on small neo-Pompeian and neo-eighteenth-century motifs influenced by the brilliant and fluid style of Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874). Toward the end of the 1870s he travelled to Naples, where he encountered Domenico Morelli (1823–1901). Shortly thereafter he made his debut at the 1883 International Exhibition of Fine Arts with *La Malaria (Dum Romae consulitur morbus imperat)*, a dramatic work in the Verismo idiom. Yet contact with Nino Costa (1826–1903) and the international milieu gravitating around the In Arte Libertas group soon positioned him among the Italian proponents of European Symbolist and Pre-Raphaelite ideas.

In 1886 Sartorio was among the artists selected to illustrate the *editio picta* of D'Annunzio's poetry collection *Isotta Guttadauro*, fully embracing an aestheticising symbolism in harmony with the English Pre-Raphaelite tendencies circulating in fin-de-siècle Rome. During a trip to Paris in 1889 with Francesco Paolo Michetti (1851–1929), Sartorio was drawn to the evocative and intimate landscapes of the Barbizon School. He participated in the Universal Exposition with *I figli di Caino* and soon afterwards spent the summer in Francavilla with Michetti and D'Annunzio.

“Giulio Aristide Sartorio is a unique artist. Rich and powerful colourist, and bold draughtsman,

² *Ibidem*.

LULLO | PAMPOULIDES

he has been illustrating the Byzantine era in his paintings for some time, that extraordinary age of decadence that is still largely unknown and obscure. [...] Those architectures and those precious sculptures [...] where chimerical figures of animals and symbols and sacred enigmas and flowers alternate with infinite variety of forms and attitudes, in short, all those things that bear the mark of a complex and refined art.”³

With these words, Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863–1938), writing under the pseudonym *Il Duca Minimo*, praised the young Sartorio in *La Tribuna*. The two first met in Rome in the early 1880s at the editorial offices of *Cronaca Bizantina*, located in Palazzo Sciarra, where Sartorio worked as an illustrator and D’Annunzio as a journalist.

In 1890 Count Gegè Primoli commissioned him to paint the triptych *Le Vergini savie e le Vergini stolte* (Rome, Galleria Comunale d’Arte Moderna). Sartorio travelled frequently between Paris and London, where he stayed during the 1890s and visited Liverpool and Manchester; it was in this context that he encountered Pre-Raphaelite poetry and wrote an essay on Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) for Adolfo De Bosis’s journal *Il Convito*.

He pursued study of English Romantic painters and in 1893 authored an article on John Constable for *Nuova Rassegna*. In 1896 the Grand Duke of Weimar invited him to teach at the School of Fine Arts, where he became acquainted with Secessionist circles. He participated in the Venice Biennale until the First World War and in 1908 received the commission to decorate the new Chamber of Deputies designed by Ernesto Basile.

In 1915 he enlisted voluntarily; captured by Austrian forces, he remained imprisoned in Mauthausen for nearly two years. In 1919 he married his second wife, Marga Sevilla, with whom he lived in the villa Horti Galateae. In the early 1920s he travelled first to the Middle East and later to Latin America, while also directing the film *Il mistero di Galatea*. These activities were combined with Biennale participations and solo exhibitions, including those at the Galleria Pesaro in Milan. He also cultivated his literary interests, composing the illustrated poem *Sibilla* and *La favola di Sansonetto Santapupa* (1929), an autobiographical text. Sartorio died in Rome in 1932.

Elena Lago

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Mostra personale del pittore Giulio Aristide Sartorio, Milano, Bestetti & Tumminelli.

R. Miracco, *Note per un’estetica del paesaggio in Giulio Aristide Sartorio: dalla campagna romana al Ciclo di Fregene*, in *Giulio Aristide Sartorio 1860-1932*, catalogo della mostra a cura di R. Miracco (Roma, Chiostro del Bramante, 24 marzo – 11 giugno 2006), Roma, Maschietto Editore/Mandragora, 2006, pp. 145-151.

T. Sacci Lodispoto, *“Un paradiso inaspettato”: pittura di luce a Fregene*, in *Sartorio. Mito e modernità*, catalogo della mostra a cura di G. Berardi (Roma, Galleria Berardi, 24 ottobre – 14 dicembre 2013), Roma, Galleria Berardi, 2013, pp. 59-63.

³ Il Duca Minimo (G. D’Annunzio), *Cose d’arte. Un ventaglio*, in “La Tribuna”, 11 novembre, 1886, ora in G. D’Annunzio, *Scritti giornalistici*, 1882-1888, Milano 1996, pp. 671-673.