

ANTONELLO DA MESSINA E LA PITTURA DEL '400 IN SICILIA NELL'ALLESTIMENTO DI CARLO SCARPA E ROBERTO CALANDRA¹

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Abstract

Antonello da Messina and Sicily's XV Century Painting in Carlo Scarpa and Roberto Calandra Exhibition Design Project

The idea to dedicate an important exhibition to Antonello da Messina dated from many years before, but the exhibition was finally inaugurated in march 1953. The exhibition, set-up in the town hall of Messina, became famous thanks to the project by Carlo Scarpa and Roberto Calandra and to the artworks' great value. It is still considered one of the most important exhibition of postwar period even though known, till now, only through some pictures from Pugliatti collection and Messina municipality catalogue, and two authentic drawings, probably subsequent to the exhibition. An exhaustive study has now been possible thanks to the previously unknown documents found in Calandra's and Scarpa's archives. Scarpa spent the whole winter 1952 in Messina, being constantly present during the work in progress. The two architects carry out a radical project inside the first floor of the palace, redefining the twenty-four rooms' spaces through the use of bright veils and other materials, and the wise use of natural light, of its colour and intensity. Scarpa and Calandra plan in detail an extraordinary exhibition itinerary, designing every exhibition component. The extreme rigour marking the choice of the individual artworks responds to a precise exhibitiv intent: very carefully selected pieces, within a continuous narrative path, in a spatial continuum where each object find its own dimension. The paintings' arrangement inside the rooms follows not only chronological reasons but, above all, a precise formal and spatial project; tilted, rotated, positioned at different heights, isolated or hung, all the artworks break the rooms' uniformity. The composition's rigour in each setting and the great refinement of the artworks' supports however can't disclose the extraordinary space of Antonello's room. It can be considered an authentic stroke of genius: the use of crossed cloth veils redefines a new ceiling's weave from which strips of veils fall down, making a new shell through a continuous sloping cross section. This important exhibition sees Carlo Scarpa and Roberto Calandra work hard, together with a large group of master artisans, in a long tour de force resulting in an incredible success with the critics and visitors. Only a few months later Giorgio Vigni, then Monuments and Fine Arts Office director, commissioned Carlo Scarpa the project for the new Abatellis Palace gallery, one of his most important works, which would become a reference for Italian museography design, and a crucial moment within Scarpa's artistic evolution.

Keywords

Carlo Scarpa, Roberto Calandra, Antonello da Messina and the Sicily's XV century painting, Exhibition, Messina.

Il 30 marzo 1953 nelle sale del nuovo Palazzo Municipale di Messina l'allora Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione Segni inaugura, sotto l'Alto Patronato del Presidente della Repubblica, la mostra su *Antonello da Messina e la pittura del '400 in Sicilia* [fig. 1], una delle più importanti esposizioni del secondo Novecento in Italia passata presto alla storia sia per lo straordinario allestimento realizzato da Carlo Scarpa e Roberto Calandra che per l'assoluto valoredelle opere raccolte². Di dedicare una grande mostra ad Antonello nella sua città natale, si parlava

in realtà ormai da diverso tempo, già nel novembre 1949 la storica dell'arte Maria Accascina³, direttrice del Museo Nazionale, ricordava l'impegno preso dalla cittadinanza e l'importanza internazionale dell'evento per una città, come era la Messina del dopoguerra, assai lontana dai grandi centri culturali ed economici del paese. Una città interamente ricostruita dopo il devastante terremoto del 1908 che si trovava ancora una volta a distanza di pochi anni a confrontarsi con i morti e le distruzioni lasciate dai bombardamenti alleati: «La città - scrive Stefano