

A Mona Lisa for the banker at Villa Farnesina

Thanks to the agreement with the Primoli Foundation

*"The Naked Gioconda" now exhibited in the hall that housed Agostino Chigi's studio
July 6, 2020 - October 3, 2020*

The Naked Gioconda, oil on canvas after Leonardo's cardboard, was lent to the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei thanks to the generosity of the Primoli Foundation, and will be exhibited at Villa Farnesina, just inside the Chigi Room, which housed once the studio of the banker Agostino Chigi. The artwork derived from the cardboard *Femme nue dite La Joconde nue* in the Musée Condé (Chantilly), attributed to Leonardo da Vinci or his atelier, has already been exhibited at Villa Farnesina during the exhibition "Leonardo in Rome. Influences and Inheritance" held from October 2019 until January 2020, and restored for such purpose. The only certain datas in the sequence of origins (which however can be imagined more complex and excited) are its belonging to the very rich gallery of Fesch, cardinal and uncle of Napoleon (who settled in Rome from 1814 until his death in 1839), and the following transition to Palazzo Primoli, among the artworks of Count Giuseppe. The catalog of the Fesch sale, which was among the main events in the artistic and social market of the mid-nineteenth century - "avec 20.000 francs on aurait pu gagner 40.000 à la vente du cardinal Fesch", will write Balzac in 1846, returning from Rome -, thus presented the artwork: "dans une galerie d'où la vue s'étend entre deux colonnes sur un campagne semée de rochers arides, la jeune beauté est représentée nue et assise", dressed only "d'une draperie violette, dont l'un des pans recouvre ses genoux et entoure son bras droit ". The painting, in the Fesch catalog, anticipated a lot referring to Bernardino Luini, among the very early Lombard followers of Leonardo da Vinci. The most recent studies (Blumenfeld 2019) have offered good arguments to believe that the cardinal, in addition to the current *Gioconda* Primoli, was also the owner of the drawing-model now preserved in Chantilly, so that the both, cardboard and painting, would coexist for a time in the same collection. In the first stock of the Primoli Foundation (without date) the canvas is again described, in its place, among the shelves of the library: "an oil painting depicting the *Gioconda* by Luini". It is therefore probable due to the count or his family that the painting was believed to be the work of Bernardino Luini.

The work expresses a clear identity of subject and figure with Chantilly's design, down to certain details, such as the left eye slightly lowered than the right or the slight twist of the lips. In comparison with the cardboard, which gave no indication either on the background or on the possible continuation of the female figure, the *Gioconda* Primoli - like other paintings belonging to this kind - introduces the leg, which appears between the balustrades of the seat and the drape, the colonnades of the portico and the background view, which is the happiest and most interesting executive aspect of the work, for being created without drawing, in evanescence, and for the evident recovery of the rocky landscape, with flounces, typical of Leonardo.

Recent technical analyzes have also shown, in the rays, despite a substantial compositional coherence, an underlying figure with more subtle features in some points (in the neck, for

example), while the study of pigments has revealed the use of glaze, already found elsewhere in the work of Leonardo and his followers. The references, of posture and context, with the figure of the Parisian Gioconda are rendered in explicit ways; and on the other hand, a page from the diary of the Cardinal of Aragon (edited by Antonio de Beatis) was invoked several times: in October 1517, visiting the French study of Leonardo, one could observe between his works a portrait of "certa donna fiorentina facta di naturale ad istantia del quondam magnifico Juliano de Medici" (= a certain naked Florentine woman just like the magnificent Juliano de Medici). This ancient information suggested to some critics (cf. Schneider 1923, Brown - Oberhuber 1978, Delieuvin 2019) the hypothesis that in the "certain woman" the subject of the naked Gioconda could be guessed.

THE RESTORATION

The painting was in a fairly good state of conservation. The main problems concerned the damages to the pictorial and preparatory layers, for the presence of a substantial yellowing due to the oxidation of the paints used in previous restoration interventions, to fatty deposits (nicotine, black smoke, greasy dust), the chromatic alteration of the pictorial shots taken in the past and present mostly on the sky, on the drapery and in many parts of the complexion as well as an evident crust of "crocodile skin" spread over the whole pictorial film, are all factors affecting the aesthetic appreciation. At a grazing light observation a rise in the central portion of the crust was visible. The extensive pictorial shots had been carried out in a more or less arbitrary way also in the logic of the taste of the time, aimed at "compensating" the chromatic loss especially of the sky and the drapery. The sky, made of smalt, over time had lost its intensity as a result of the natural graying of the pigment and its denaturation had also changed the chromatic ratios of the drapery, so as to appear a very dull pink color. It is plausible to think that many of the lacquer finishes on the drapery have been removed following careless cleaning. A similar fate is probably also to have occurred to the balustrades of the seat. Only the backgrounds of construction and the showy dark brushstrokes remained visible, so as to lead one to think of an "unfinished", if not, even, of heavy retouches of subsequent interventions. In the past, to intensify the color of the drapery and the balustrades of the seat, resin was also used, perhaps mixed with pigments, which over time, due to oxidation processes, hardened and darkened. The restoration carried out on various parts of the canvas allowed first of all to restore a correct refractive index for adequate enjoyment of the work. The restoration was carried out by Cristiana De Lisio and Alessia Felici (ConsorzioRecro). As mentioned above, the painting is currently housed in the Chigi Room of Villa Farnesina, now open according to the criteria of the health protocol: visitors must be equipped with a mask and respect the sanitary distance of 2 meters. No more than 5 visitors are allowed to enter each room (1 person in the Galleria delle Grottesche, as well as in the Pompeian Hall and 2 people in the bookshop). Guided individual tours as well as group tours are forbidden, it is also forbidden to cause assemblies in the garden and inside the Villa. The distribution of the audio guide is suspended, but an app can be downloaded for free on the mobile phone. Furthermore, for the Loggia of Cupid and Psyche, it is recalled that the link <http://vcg.isti.cnr.it/farnesina/loggia/> is active with an interactive system that allows to observe

at a close distance both the stories of Cupid and Psyche , the work of Raphael, Giulio Romano and Giovan Francesco Penni, both the very particular pergola and the animal species created by Giovanni da Udine on a design by Raphael.

INFO ABOUT VILLA FARNESINA

BUY ON LINE THE TICKET OF VILLA FARNESINA

FROM JULY 6 ENTRY TO THE MUSEUM IS ONLY ALLOWED WITH ONLINE PURCHASED TICKET

(<https://www.booking-villafarnesina.it/it/booking-1/>)

Opening hours: The Villa is open from Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 2 pm, on every second Sunday of the month from 9 am to 5 pm.

Visitors presenting their Vatican Museums ticket (within 7 days from the date of visit to the Vatican Museum) will be entitled to a reduced entrance fee to the Villa Farnesina.

Ordinary tickets: 10.00 Euros (18-65 years old);

Reduced Tickets: 9,00 Euros (65 + years old; teachers with credentials; ICOM holders; FAI and Touring Club Italiano members);

Reduced Tickets at 7,00 Euros (10-18 years old; students single);

Free ticket (children under 10 accompanied by parents; disabled people with a guide; journalists with credentials).

For organizing tour according to the current security provisions to Covid 19 protocol, please refer to the website www.villafarnesina.it

For the images of Villa Farnesina: <http://bit.ly/32ck2Zh>