



BAROQUE VENICE

THE OPULENCE, DREAMS, AND ILLUSIONS OF A WORLD IN DECLINE

Massimo Favilla Filippo Pedrocco Ruggero Rugolo

The Book

In the long and complex history of Venice, the seventeenth century brought the city's last opportunity to respond on a cultural and artistic level to the inevitable destiny that was marginalising the Republic on the great stage of European politics. The urban fabric of the city still reflects the need that was felt at the time for grandiloquent signs of a supposed triumph – a desire that mingled hopes, dreams, and illusions with the harsh reality of politics and society. Excess and pomposity prevailed, fuelling a tendency for over-abundant ornamentation, a taste for the grotesque and the bizarre, and a craving for enormity and greatness. There was a clear intention to inspire wonderment and awe through the backdrop of a stunning theatrical performance that unfolded inside buildings and out, spreading across the entire breadth of Venice. The forms of Baroque we see are peculiar to a city of insubstantial aquatic consistency that was “founded on the impossible”. As time went by, this triumphal momentum gradually waned and, towards the end of the century and in the early eighteenth, it began to coexist with a more relaxed mood as the refined bon goût of rococo started to appear. Abandoning the symmetrical magnificence of Baroque, this new taste focused on lesser things, and on the transience of the senses, adopting a softer tone in its perception of intimate, impalpable emotions. In the end, all desire for dominance faded and the Republic closed in on itself, in a magnificent neutrality that ultimately proved fatal for the destiny of this glorious city.

The Authors

FILIPPO PEDROCCO, a Venetian art historian, is director of the Ca' Rezzonico Museum of Eighteenth-Century Venice. MASSIMO FAVILLA has taught urban and regional planning at the Università IUAV in Venice and now teaches the history of art criticism at the Università Ca' Foscari. RUGGERO RUGOLO has taught the history of modern art at the Università Ca' Foscari. LUCA SASSI is a photographer and a publisher of art, architecture, and photography books.

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