



# EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE

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Photography by Luca Sassi

## THE BOOK

At the dawn of the eighteenth century, Venice was no longer the magnificent theatre of Baroque grandeur it had once been. It was now a place of strict rules, where surfeit and pomposity were giving way to the more muted tones of rococo *bon goût*. The Venetian *Barocchetto* style abandoned grand rhetoric and turned to the smaller things in life. Decoration moved into the most secret of places - the boudoir - an intimate place where friends would gather and converse. The grandiloquent allegories of the Baroque age, with their celebratory symbolism, were replaced by a gentler form of art, which introduced a wealth of naturalistic elements and graceful ornamentation. Colours too were toned down, as dazzling white stuccoes interlaced with gold gave way to soft, relaxing pastel shades. This rococo model of beauty brought about a reversal of terms, in which the minuscule became majestic. An Enlightenment-inspired conversion from rhetoric to anti-rhetoric aimed to immortalise the interiors and exteriors of a Venice that was no longer mythical, but “human” at last. The century captured the essence of the city in the brushstrokes of Canaletto and it caught the aristocracy, and even the bourgeoisie and the popular folk, going about their everyday lives, as we can see in the canvases of Pietro Longhi and in the comedies of Carlo Goldoni. The eighteenth century was anything but uniform, for while it strayed off into Tiepolo’s boundless skies and lingered on the necklines of nuns immortalised by Francesco Guardi, experimental illustration became scientific in Francesco Grisellini, anthropological in Gaetano Zompini and literary in Pietro Antonio Novelli. These artists shared a poetic vision that may appear superficial, but that in actual fact was inspired by a moralistic striving for an improvement of mores and for social advancement. This vibrant powerhouse was abruptly brought to an end in 1797, when the oldest Republic in the world collapsed in on itself, dying out under the unbearable weight of its own history and toppled by the violent incursion of General Bonaparte.

## THE AUTHORS

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