

VIVA VENEZIA! THE INVENTION OF VENICE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

18 February to 4 September 2022

Lower Belvedere

Viva la Mamma!* A pivotal moment in the 1950s film captures “Sissi” embracing her child amid the cheering crowds in St. Mark's Square. The scene has its roots in a myth that has been part of Austria's collective memory since the 19th century: Venice. Like many myths, this vision of the lagoon city had to be invented first – also by way of numerous pictorial representations. *Viva Venezia!

Curated by Franz Smola

From the first half of the 19th century until 1866, Venice and Veneto were part of the Habsburg Monarchy. Austrians had long been captivated by the city on the lagoon to their south. The coastal landscape there promised a light-hearted, simple life and a break from the bourgeois confines of their native land. In three thematic sections, this exhibition traces the orchestration of this dream.

The first section examines history painting of the 19th century: opulent scenes from Venice's glorious thousand-year history captured by Austrian and Italian artists. One notable example is Hans Makart's painting *Venice Pays Tribute to Caterina Cornaro*; over ten meters long and not often exhibited due to its unusual size, it is one of the highlights of the show. The second section focuses on the city's close historical ties with Austria. Due to geographical proximity, Austrian artists such as Antonietta Brandeis, Leopold Carl Müller, Carl Schuch, and August von Pettenkofen often spent long periods in the city in search of inspiration. Venetian motifs also left their mark on the Viennese cityscape: the Vienna Arsenal, for instance, a large complex built in the 1850s, not only explicitly references the Venetian model by name but also echoes its unique architectural style. Finally, the third section sheds light on Venice as a place of longing – the myth that has

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defined the city from the beginning of the 19th century to the present day. Painters and, above all, writers from Europe and the U.S. surrendered to the magic but also the melancholy of the city; to this day, some see Venice as a metaphor for "dying in beauty."

The exhibition includes around 80 paintings, the majority of which come from the Belvedere collection. In addition, numerous examples from literature and film offer deeper insight into the artistic exploration of this fascinating city.

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