

Strand 1: Art Nouveau Cities: between cosmopolitanism and local tradition

Art nouveau in Verona? A critical assessment.

The aim of this paper is to offer an overview on *art nouveau* in Verona (Italy) and to sketch some considerations about how this local version of the very first international artistic movement dialogues with its other national and foreign expressions.

Before approaching this issue, we would like to highlight a certain ambiguity of the *art nouveau* architectural samples in the city. Local critics have generally been quite vague, denying or affirming the presence of *art nouveau* in Verona, without a deeper analysis.¹ A certain lack of studies devoted in general to the arts in Verona since late XIX century² encouraged its reduction to an ignorable provincial version of international *art nouveau*. This attitude, facilitated by the late acknowledgment of the Italian *art nouveau*, overlooks the importance of the local peculiarities for defining the

¹ For example, it is given as a fact in Maria Grazia Martelletto “Le nuove residenze extra moenia: dimore al tramonto dell’aura” in *Verona nel Novecento: opere pubbliche, interventi urbanistici, architetture residenziali dal’inizio del secolo al ventennio (1900 – 1940)*, catalogue of the exhibition curated by Maristella VECCHIATO, Chiostro di San Fermo, Verona, 1998. Diverse opinions can be found in *Pittura murale a Verona. Catalogo delle superfici esterne intonacate e dipinte. Volume IV: 1900-1930*, Verona, Banca Popolare di Verona, Accademia G.B. Cignaroli, 1991: Renzo Chiarelli generically affirms that “di edifici nello stile Liberty e stili assimilabili o coevi, grandi o piccoli, a Verona ne esistono ancora molti”, briefly mentioning the *FIAT garage*, the *Dopolavoro Ferrovieri* and some constructions in Borgo Trento neighborhood, but then speaks of “*liberty* casalingo e nostrano” (“Il liberty a Verona ieri e oggi”, p.7); Renzo Magonari highlights the very late arrival of *art nouveau* influences, but observes that “neppure si può dire che Verona sia assente sul fronte dell’Art Nouveau” (“La pittura murale del primo Novecento a Verona”, p.16-19). The most accurate analysis is by Giorgio Forti, which in his concise, tough brilliant, intervention denies the presence of *liberty* in Verona, based on a drastic contraposition between *liberty* and *art nouveau*. (“L’architettura e la tecnologia della pittura murale”, p.10-15). Since we do not share such a dichotomy, the results of our paper will bring us to a quite different position, although we do actually agree with other aspects of his argument.

² Since the death of its protagonists and the unequalled director of the Musei Civici Licisco Magagnato, few studies have adopted a focus that diverges from a generic time-frame approach and aspires to define stylistic questions. Moreover, there are only few monographic studies of the relevant artists and architects working in Verona since the second half of XIX.

not univocal — in fact essentially plural — character of the international *art nouveau*, to which the case of Verona may contribute.

In the last decade of the XIX century, while *art nouveau* was giving birth to its first master pieces, Verona was slowly recovering from a difficult period. The inclusion in the newborn *Regno d'Italia* (1866) and the retreat of the Austrian troops caused the loss of a strategic military position and a collapse in the economy, exacerbated by a major flood of the river Adige in 1882. Nevertheless, Verona, as any territory of the new reign, was participating in Italy's ideological effort to build a cohesive nation starting from a mosaic of deeply diverse regions.

Architects and artists were certainly not external witnesses of this political effort to shape a national identity. However, their works reflected the contradictions and ambiguity of this era and revealed the persistence of both regional traditions and transnational influences: the political ambition of a common language for the unified country was inevitably translated into diverse realizations.

Verona, does not constitute an exception, and its consolidated heritage strongly interacted — harmoniously— with the new “Italian” style and, later, with the *art nouveau* in a more complex way.

Which was its specific heritage?

Before the *Risorgimento* and after being under the Venetian domain for almost three centuries, Verona had not only become a strategic military bastion of the Austrian Empire, but also the city glorified by Ruskin as a supreme example of the Italian beauty because of its gothic monuments.³

Furthermore, while the revocations of a Medieval past, bended to contemporary needs, enlivened the XIX century European nationalisms, in a not yet Italian Verona the *Genio Militare* (the Austrian team of military architects and engineers) was constructing and restoring the Arsenale, Castel San Pietro, Porta Vescovo following the *Rundbogenstil* because of the belief in the superiority of Nordic Romanesque structures

³ Ruskin, who visited Verona in numerous circumstances, glorified the city in *The seven lamps of Architecture* (1849) and in *The stone of Venice* (1851-53). About his relation with the city see Terence MULLAY, *Ruskin a Verona*, (exhibition catalogue, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, 1966), Verona, Tipografia litografia Cortella, 1966.

in fulfilling defensive needs. Therefore, the medieval heritage dominated as architectural model already with the Hapsburgs: as noted by Romanelli⁴, most of the recently erected architectures paradoxically anticipated the medievalism later claimed by the unified reign as a truly Italian common style.

A unique fusion of the castle-inspired and the local urban medievalism were characterizing the city.⁵ Therefore, after the *Risorgimento*, Verona, which not only stood out for extraordinary Romanesque and Gothic constructions, but also counted with administrators with an uncommon preservative attitude toward monuments, blessed architect Camillo Boito's idea of declaring the style of the *Comuni* of the *Trecento* as the one capable to restore Italy to its prominent position. The image of Verona was represented by the glorious XIII-XIV century *Signoria scaligera* and the extraordinary civil and ecclesiastic architectures constructed at the peak of its domination.

It is, though, easy to understand why the medieval past, deeply embedded in the local culture, remained a major reference in the late XIX century, when a new bourgeois class started to ask for private residencies. While the demand for comfort was directing the renovation of the interiors towards a little more attention to function and distribution, the exterior design was still adopting gothic features as a solution for obtaining uniform facades, sometimes reducing them to mere theatrical wings.

However, an eclecticist approach brought to blend this medieval influence with other suggestions. The tradition marked by Michele Sanmicheli, a prominent architect for the *Serenissima*, was a privileged source for classical inspiration. In addition, the solidity and austerity of Sanmicheli majestic style, characterized by a unique use of

⁴ Giandomenico ROMANELLI, "Il mito del medievale: tra Ruskin e Boito", *Verona 1900-1960: architetture nella dissoluzione dell'aura*, (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Francesco AMENDOLAGINE, Arturo SANDRINI, Andrea VIVIT, Chiostro di San Fermo, Verona, 1979), Verona, Cluva Ed., 1979.

⁵ See Giandomenico ROMANELLI, "Il mito del medievale: tra Ruskin e Boito" in *Verona 1900 - 1960... Op.cit.*, and Pierpaolo BRUGNOLI, "Eclettismo, neoromanico e neogotico nell'architettura dell'Ottocento" in Pierpaolo BRUGNOLI and Alessandro SANDRINI, *L'architettura a Verona dal periodo napoleonico all'età contemporanea*, Verona, Banca Popolare di Verona, 1994.

columns and surfaces *a bugnato*, was combined with baroque components, whose gentle and not exasperate curvature were adhering to the same severity.

Romanesque, Gothic, a monumental Renaissance and an austere Baroque were, then, the source of the repertoire used by eclecticist architects in Verona. Some of these traits appear also in the buildings that better testify the presence of *art nouveau* in Verona. It is not an unusual occurrence: in the definition of *art nouveau* – and not only in Italy – the line between eclecticism and *art nouveau* has been one of the most difficult to trace, causing the strongest disagreement between art historians. On the other hand, disentangling this difference is crucial. In fact, apart from a few common elements, eclecticism and *art nouveau* are based on substantially different conceptions. Although some not fully developed pieces resemble eclecticist works because of certain discrepancies between the *art nouveau* ideals and their translation into actual works, critics generally agree that the *art nouveau* ability to convert a various repertoire in a new and unique creation is what makes it the very first modern art movement, inspired by the past while projected into the future.

In the case of Verona, we can easily recognize some general features of *art nouveau* aesthetics.

For example, the aspiration for a total design, from the general project to the smallest details, in order to merge all arts in a unique synesthetic experience, may be traced in architect Ettore Fagioli⁶, who showed special attention to ornamental details in exteriors and interiors, under the clear influence of Morris and the Art&Crafts movement. In addition to architectural projects, Fagioli designed wrought iron elements like gentle curved gates, balustrades and lamp holders as well as chandeliers, though not always following *art nouveau* patterns.

Another relevant factor is the location of the new cottages by Fagioli and his colleagues: the green neighborhoods now called Borgo Trento and Valdonega, an almost uninhabited area beyond the Adige river. This unusual setting —that may resemble the urban situation of the Eixample's modernist buildings erected in a previously unconstructed land— embodies on the other hand the ideal of the garden

⁶ For an overview on the architect see *Ettore Fagioli*, Parma, Arte Grafica Silva, 1984.

city. Although *art nouveau* is a urban movement, the natural environment surrounding the cottages, whose floral decoration dialogues with trees, plants and flowers, perfectly stands for *art nouveau*'s eulogy of nature as quintessential element in art and life.

A further significant convergence with *art nouveau* aesthetics is visible in the structure of the workshop of decorator and painter Attilio Trentini: the older artist was working together with his three sons Guido, Nurdio and Eligio, as well as the younger Angelo Zamboni and Pino Casarini, incarnating Ruskin's and Pre-Raphaelites' ideal of the artistic process as a collaboration between different artists and artisans, an ideal which strongly influenced *art nouveau*. Also the techniques utilized by Trentini's workshop (frescos and tempera directly applied on the wall) are anchored in such tradition. Furthermore, the workshop was devoted to mural decoration and, therefore, while continuing the tradition of Verona as *urbs picta*⁷, it was following the *art nouveau* inclination toward a spread decoration in uninterrupted dialogue with architecture, more than toward isolated paintings.

The preference for artisanal structures of the work and the focus on decorative details as essential parts of the project, does not exclude an attention to new materials and the use of industrially produced components, as it is visible, for example, in the conglomerate features in the balustrades, cornices, window frames of *Villa Cipriani* (1912) and the *FIAT Garage* (1919) by Fagioli (Fig.1). A contradictory relation of rejection-admiration for the industrial production, welcomed as element of modernity and democratization, but at the same time criticized for creating distance between the works and its creator and, in some case, for its poor quality, is a trait that characterized *art nouveau* internationally.

Finally, the decoration frequently embraced *art nouveau* themes. For example, in the house in Corso Cavour 43, designed—in strict coherence with his pictorial style—by Attilio Trentini, a girl's face surrounded by an ivy motive appears in the window frames.⁸ In general, as claimed by *art nouveau*, flowers and plants motives appears in

⁷ This epithet appeared in the Renaissance, when most of the facade were painted with frescoes.

⁸ The sober and lineal facade clearly shows the Trentini's adhesion to the *Secession* aesthetics.

the frescos on the external walls, in the sculptural details of windows frames and ledges, and in the wrought iron gates.⁹

However, these floral patterns almost never developed asymmetries nor *coups de fouet*. A very severe and essentially symmetric structure defines the the decoration. Quite unusual in early *art nouveau*, this fact may be explained by both the local vocation to frugality and simplicity and the evident influence of the *Secession*, whose architectures also rarely opted for flourishing and articulate ornamentation, preferring sober curvatures and a certain linearity of the general composition.

While this peculiarity just demonstrates the tendency of *art nouveau* to develop itself into various and rich declinations, it remains more problematic to explain —at least within the *art nouveau* aesthetics— why certain well resolved floral decorations do not always integrate into the general architectural project. For example, the house in viale Bixio 6 shows an excellent ornamentation, partly with flowers transformed in an articulated though well composed motive, partly with an interesting horse chestnut decoration (Fig.2). However, the rigorous scheme of the facade combines the severe *Jugendstil* inspired window frames with a brick and stone medieval angular tower, crowned by a *Renaissance* inspired trifora. Here the overlap of sources prevents the decoration to really embodying its structural essence and becoming symbol of its function.¹⁰

Another factor that may raise doubts about the inclusion of Verona's architectures in the international movement is its late appearance. While Torino had already positioned itself as an *art nouveau* city in 1902 during the *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna*, in Verona no trace of the new style appeared until a decade

⁹ In the floral decorations the botanical species is sometimes indiscernible and transformed in a continuous ornamental motive, while in other cases is perfectly recognizable like for the orchids and carobs in the cottage in via D'Annunzio 2, the sunflowers in via Anita Garibaldi 2, the roses in via dei Mille 8.

¹⁰ This characteristic of *art nouveau* ornament is strongly claimed in Lara VINCA MASINI, *Art nouveau: un'avventura artistica internazionale tra rivoluzione e reazione, tra cosmopolitismo e provincia, tra costante ed effimero, tra "sublime" e stravagante*, Firenze, Giunti Editore, 1976, p.46.

later, except, possibly, for the temporary iron structures for the 1900 exhibitions.¹¹ In fact, the city, enclosed in the ancient walls up until the Hapsburg, was already too densely built, leaving no chance for new constructions. It was only the 1910 town plan regulating the neighborhoods of Borgo Trento and Valdonega, which, by imposing the residential use, converted the green area of the Campagnola into the exclusive reign of the local high society. Most cottages in that area date to the second decade of the XX century, and consequently present traits that could reasonably be referred to as late *art nouveau*, as well as *art déco* or even *Modern Movement* anticipations. This consideration also holds for the 1919 *FIAT garage*, located in the city center: the building, which perfectly fits in the contemporary debate on industrial architecture, was designed to host an auto dealer and mechanic (Fig.1). While integrating inspiration from *Secession*, Behrens, Sant'Elia and even Saarinen, the *FIAT garage* shows its modernity in the use of modern material like concrete, iron and glass, the search for light and the distribution of architectural elements, particularly the static solution resolving the diagonal between the building's orientation and the street with a geometrically sculpted buttress. May such an essential building, where the structural research implies a linear and simplified design, be still defined as *art nouveau*?

A similar question could be applied to the Wagner inspired *Dopolavoro Ferroviario* in via XX Settembre, which adopts *liberty* ornamentation, an angular solution for the entrance, but again very technically oriented structural solutions and materials like glass, iron and concrete; the garage building just opposite to it, showing structures

¹¹ Lorenzoni explains that for the 1900, exhibition organized by the *Società delle Belle Arti*, was constructed “una nuova sede con strutture portanti in metallo... piccoli chalets a tetti spioventi, ingentiliti da motivi ornamentali... anticipando i primi villini in stile eclettico destinati a sorgere dopo pochi anni nel quartiere di Borgo Trento”. See Giuseppe PAVANELLO, Nico STRINGA, *La pittura nel Veneto. Novecento*, Electa, Milano, 2007, p.286. We have not been able to see images of the chalets and, therefore, the eclecticist style mentioned by Lorenzoni could possibly be referred only to the Borgo Trento cottages, while the chalets could had shown more convergences with *art nouveau*, as often happened in temporary structures. This hypothesis could be supported by the *liberty* poster by M. Spaventi, we found in the magazine *The Poster* (February 1900, p.250,) referring to Verona 1900 regional agricultural exhibition and a series of accompanying exhibitions, including fine and applied arts. It is probably a poster for the exhibition mentioned by Lorenzoni and, consequently, its pre-Raphaelites influenced floral style could possibly induce to suppose a more general influence of *art nouveau* in the chalets themselves.

vaguely inspired by the Rationalism sweetened by a floral ornamentation; the gently and soberly decorated *Officine Galtarossa*, another functional building.

Furthermore, this late and mature development surprisingly coexisted with an abundant eclecticist architecture that was actually dominant. In some cases the *art nouveau* patterns undeniably became just one of the possible elements of a wider repertoire that, as said, includes Romanesque, Gothic, Sanmicheli Renaissance and Baroque. The *Villino Brugnoli* (1911) is probably the most extreme example in that respect, since it melts medieval and Renaissance elements with the Moresque, completely unrelated to local tradition, in order to create a fairy-tale exotic architecture.¹² Even Fagioli's architectures, moved among different sources of inspiration —although he never searched for picturesque effects and maintained solidity and sobriety— and his wrought iron gates and chandeliers, showing a deep understanding of *art nouveau* aesthetics, coexisted with cabinetwork deeply linked to the Renaissance and Baroque tradition.

Also the diversity of the project presented at the competition for the Cassa di Risparmio headquarter in the centric Piazza Erbe demonstrated that *art nouveau* was far from being the dominant architectural trend, with Central European *art nouveau* accents only visible in the proposal by architects Cantoni and Sant'Elia.¹³

Nevertheless, apart from the already mentioned FIAT Garage, *Dopolavoro Ferroviario*, the garage in via XX Settembre and the *Officine Galtarossa*, most houses by engineer Alfonso Modonesi reveal the presence of *art nouveau* in Verona. This is the case for the interesting solution for the central window in the *Palazzina Scavini* (1910-13) in via Caprera 6, or the articulated and geometrically resolved facade of the *Palazzo Bachbauer Canella* in via D'Annunzio.

Some other interesting house in via D'Annunzio and via Caprera still ask for a study, as well as the entire work of the extremely fascinating architect Aldo Goldschmidt. His unfortunately lost garage in via Leoncino 49, provocatively facing the

¹² Traditionally ascribed to master builder Tomaso Contini, architect Francesco Banterle would be the author for Maria Grazia Martelletto. "Le nuove residenze extra moenia: dimore al tramonto dell'aura" in *Verona nel Novecento... Op.cit.*

¹³ On the project presented for the competition see Giulio ARATA, "La Piazza delle Erbe di Verona", *Emporium*, 1915, n. 243, p.196-199.

centric *Arena* with his Central European and Scottish inspired compact facade, stood out for the protruding brick elements and the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decoration.¹⁴ His evident attention toward the quality of materials returns in villa Manzini in via Rovereto 16, displaying concrete detritus simulating stones.

The interest of these diverse and in some cases contradictory architectures may not be enough to claim the existence of *art nouveau* in Verona. However, we still suspect that more detailed studies—for example on the temporary iron structures for the 1900 exhibitions, and also on interior design and applied art which have been lost, but may be still documented in photos— could possibly provide additional evidence. The hypothesis would be supported by the alignment to *art nouveau* of local painters in the same years. In fact, apart from the already mentioned workshop of Attilio Trentini, in the second decade of XX—therefore again with some delay— many painters based in Verona followed a common aesthetics, strongly informed by the most updated *art nouveau* in those days, the *Secession*.¹⁵ Even if critics tend to give to *art nouveau* architecture and applied arts more relevance than to painting, in our case the coherence of the language achieved by a group of artists does represent an interesting case.¹⁶

This vital “school” started when a young Felice Casorati moved to Verona in 1911.¹⁷ Welcomed by the local *intelligentsia*, he quickly became a pivotal figure in the effervescent cultural gatherings, counting on the young painters Guido Trentini, Ettore Beraldini, Giuseppe Zancolli, the veteran Attilio Trentini, the mid-generation Angelo Zamboni, and also sculptor Eugenio Prati, architect Ettore Fagioli, literates Lionello

¹⁴ We do only have a photo of the building before the demolition in the ‘30s.

¹⁵ Commenting the 1901 biennial Pica already speaks of the “ossessione nordica” in the painters from Lombardy and Veneto. Vittorio PICA, *L’arte mondiale alla IV esposizione di Venezia*, Bergamo, Istituto Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, 1901, p.5. The *Secession* is seen as the main source for Italian *liberty* in general in Renato BARILLI, *Il Liberty*, Milano, Fabbri Editori, 1984, p.50.

¹⁶ However, in *Art nouveau: un’avventura artistica internazionale...*, *Op.cit.*, Vinca Masini declared that the *art nouveau* painting was traditionally excluded by the mainstream of art history because of a more general denegation of *art nouveau* by previous generations of critics.

¹⁷ On Casorati’s work until the ‘20s see *Felice Casorati prima di Torino*, Torino, Le immagini, 1984, and *Casorati. Opere grafiche, sculture, scenografie*, (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Zeno BIROLLI, Marco ROSCI, Palazzo Broletto, Comune dei Novara), Milano, Afieri Lacroix, 1968.

Fiumi, Sem Benelli, Filippo Nereo Vignola and musicians Vittorio Gui e Riccardo Zandonai.¹⁸

In the local pictorial tradition the Hapsburg domination had left a profound attention to Central European referents, which was combined with influences from Venice.¹⁹ The connection with Venice's vibrant culture —since 1895 the famous art biennial constituted the entrance door for new international movements in Italy— was reinforced by Casorati, a close friend of Nino Brabantini.²⁰ Thanks to these connections, the artists related to Casorati had the chance to be immersed in the briskly Ca'Pesaro circle, to host in the exhibitions held Verona relevant works by non-local painters, and also to exhibit their own work in the most ground-breaking Italian venues.²¹

For few single years those artists demonstrated a coherent style, for which a fundamental reference was the older Attilio Trentini. The decorator and painter had studied in a Munich, plunging into Aestheticism and absorbing suggestion from Klimt

¹⁸ Meeting point for the vibrant local intellectuals were the house and workshop of Attilio Trentini and the so-called *Accademia montebaldina*, promoted by patron Dr. Antonio Veronesi, and whose headquarter was decorated with caricatures of the attendee, now unfortunately lost. For an overview about these rendezvous see Giulio Cesare ZENARI, *Cronache montebaldine*, Verona, Editoriale di Vita Veronese, 1953, as well as *Verona Anni Venti* (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Licisco MAGAGNATO and Gian Paolo MARCHI, Castelvechchio, Verona, Editrice Società delle Belle Arti, 1971). For an introduction on XX century painting in Verona see Laura LORENZONI, "Verona", in Giuseppe PAVANELLO, Nico STRINGA, *La pittura nel Veneto... Op.cit.* and Carlo PIROVANO, *La pittura in Italia. Il Novecento/1 1900-1945*, Milano, Electa, 1992.

¹⁹ Moritz Lotze's large stays in Verona strengthened the relation with the countries beyond the Alps, also thanks to the many exhibitions of artists of Munich from his collection. The link with Venice is demonstrated by the venetian directors of the local Accademia Cignaroli, Napoleone Nani or Mosè Bianchi. See Pierpaolo BRUGNOLI, *La pittura a Verona dal primo Ottocento a metà Novecento*, Verona, Banca Popolare di Verona, 1986.

²⁰ On Brabantini see Guido PEROCCO, *Le origini dell'arte moderna a Venezia (1908-1920)*, Treviso, Canova, 1972.

²¹ Thanks to Casorati, the 1913 *II mostra del Comitato Artistico Nazionale Giovanile* in Naples devoted an entire room to the artists from Verona, separated from Venice and Trieste. In 1913, 1914, 1915 and 1916 exhibitions of the *Secessione romana* as well as in 1919 and 1920 Ca'Pesaro shows, and even in the 1920 *Promotrice* in Turin, Casorati mediated for the participation of his friends and artists from Verona. Meanwhile, the *Pro assistenza civica* (1918) and the *Cisalpina* (1919) exhibitions, held in Verona, counted with guests like Gino Rossi, Arturo Martini, Scopinich, Moggioli, Wolf Ferrari.

and the Austrian and German *Secession*.²² His synthetic decorativism; inclination toward precious materials and use of golden backgrounds (Fig.3); dreamlike and symbolic atmospheres; strong domain of the tempera technique were extremely influential for the younger generation, whose most brilliant figure was Casorati.²³

Perfectly settled and enthusiast of both Verona *milieu*²⁴ and his Venetian frequentations (including Wolf Ferrari, Vittorio Zecchin, Gino Rossi and Arturo Martini), Casorati abandoned since 1912 both the naturalism embraced in Naples and his evolution into a decadent symbolism, and experimented —using a new tempera technique learned from Attilio Trentini—, a personal language. A precious decorativism and dematerialization of the figures (*Mary Bozzo*, 1915; *Preghiera*, 1913); nocturne and dreamlike suggestive atmospheres (*Notturmo a San Floriano*, 1913; *Via Lattea*, 1914; *Trasfigurazione*, 1914), winks to Klimt subjects (*Nevicata*, 1912), delicate feminine figures with backgrounds citing the contemporary floral wallpapers (*Tre donne*, 1909-13); etchings and drawings, mainly published in the ephemeral magazine *La Via Lattea*, whose deforming lines recall Schiele as well as Arturo Martini (*Vecchia nuda*, 1911;

²² Maddalena Brognara Salazzari affirms that during his studies Trentini certainly got to know the works by Germans and Austrian masters like Klimt, Moser, Wagner, Böcklin, Klinger, Hodler, Toorop, but also the British Beardsley, Morris, Mackintosh, and the French symbolists Moreau, and Redon. See “Casorati e gli artisti veronesi” in Sergio MARINELLI, *Felice Casorati a Verona*, (exhibition catalogue, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, 1986), Milano, Libri Scheiwiller, 1986, p.95.

²³ Thanks to the sketches collected by his scholar Gino Breoni, we do know his repertoire as locally acclaimed decorator. The critics remark Trentini’s delicacy, elegance and creativity as well as the freshness of his chromatic harmony and touch of gold in the chiaroscuro, as highlighted in the press recollection by Bruno MENEGHELLO “Il giudizio dei contemporanei. Dalle cronache giornalistiche veronesi 1894 – 1919” in Maddalena BROGNARA SALAZZI, *Guido Trentini e il suo tempo* (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Licisco MAGAGNATO, Castelvecchio, Verona), Verona, Cortella, 1981.

²⁴ Although a posterior change of aesthetics and the pressure of critics like Piero Gobetti and Lionello Fiumi, induced Casorati to partly deny these juvenile years, he had in Verona some personally pleasing and professionally fruitful years. The serenity and fulfillment of that time is clearly stated in the epistolary exchange with Miss Tersillia as well as in the conference at the University of Pisa in 1943, both transcribed at Sergio MARINELLI, *Felice Casorati a Verona... Op.cit.*, respectively in Maria Mimita LAMBERTI, “Felice Casorati dal 1907 al 1916: l’apprendistato attraverso un carteggio” and Maddalena BROGNARA SALAZZARI, “Casorati e gli artisti veronesi”. The intimacy with the Trentini family is also demonstrated by the fact that Ada and Alfa, daughters of Attilio and his more recurring models, also became Casorati’s favorites models. Furthermore, thanks to the friendships he made in Verona, he met Dr. Antonio Veronesi, which became an important collector of his work and also of other friends of him.

Testa di vecchia 1912-13): all these elements induce to include Casorati's work within *art nouveau*.²⁵

Also Guido Trentini, son of Attilio and intimate of Casorati²⁶, veered toward an anti naturalistic decorativism that recall the Munich and Wien *Secession* in works like *Le perle del lago* (1914), the sophisticated bed headboard *La fanciulla sommersa* (1914, Fig.4), and the elegant screen (1915), with influences from *japonisme*. He achieved his peak with the synthetic quality, unusual contrast of tones and sinuous linearism of *La pianta rossa* (1913).²⁷

In the same years the decorator and frescoist Angelo Zamboni, create a frieze representing the four season at Villa La Paravana (1914), extremely close to Galileo Chini's and Gino Rossi's works: an embodiment of *Jugendstil* linearism and chromatic tones, evoking Klimt's Beethoven frieze for the position of the soldiers, deployed in defense of Nature.²⁸ Furthermore, suggestions from *art nouveau* may be traced in Zancolli's nocturne and bohemians subjects, depicted with precious details; in the late *Secessionism*, with pre-Raphaelite roots, of Zamboni's scholar Carlo Donati, called "the Mystic"; in the strong debts toward Klimt of Pino Casarini's canvases.

Such common aesthetics was drastically interrupted by World War I, when the cultural gatherings stopped, dictating the end of a season. The three *Pro Assistenza Civica* (1918) and the *Cisalpina* (1919) exhibitions represented an important chance to show the achievement of local artists and the wide nets of creators they were able to host, but did not offer a more developed research on *art nouveau*. The contingency of

²⁵ The mentioned letters with Miss Tersillia reveal the dreamlike and nocturne artistic universe of Casorati and his love to Klimt's work.

²⁶ Again the letters with Miss Tersillia demonstrate the intimate friendship with Guido Trentini.

²⁷ For the many versions of the painting see Francesco ARDUINI, *La stagione degli alberi rossi*, Verona, Arte Studio, 1995. For Guido Trentini's work see also the interesting recollection of articles "Il giudizio dei contemporanei. Dalle cronache giornalistiche veronesi 1894 – 1919. Ricerca storica di Bruno Meneghella" transcribed in Maddalena BROGNARA SALAZZARI, *Guido Trentini... Op.cit.* Guido Trentini's adherence to *art nouveau*'s eulogy of the applied arts appears in the fact that he painted more headboards, as declared in a conversation with Magagnato. See *Verona Anni Venti... Op.cit.*, p.14.

²⁸ The frieze was located in a property of the cultured countesses Ruffoni. The Villa was a gathering point of artists, an idyllic refuge immersed in the natural landscape of Valpantena. Unfortunately the Villa Paravana is not open to the public since many years and we can only count on a poor reproduction of the fascinating frieze.

the war marked a breaking point and induced the most receptive artists to redirect their practice. While Attilio Trentini had already passed away, in 1919 Casorati moved to Turin and undertook a change in his works, completely abandoning any influence from the *Secession*. Similarly Guido Trentini embraced the *retour a l'ordre*.²⁹

These intense and coherent *art nouveau* phase experimented by the most interesting painters working in Verona is a strong enough reason to claim a deeper analysis on the contemporary architectural results, in search of a convincing parallelism.

Therefore, these preliminary notes pretended to offer a general overview on the topic, that refocuses and links previous studies on single architects, artists or timeframes, and aims to be the starting point for a more developed research.

²⁹ Exceptions were the mural decorations by Zamboni and Donati. Both frescoists followed a primitivist and pre-Raphaelite patterns, with some *art nouveau* parallelism, until the end of the '20s. For Zamboni see *Angelo Zamboni, pittore veronese: 1895-1939* (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Licisco MAGAGNATO and Maddalena BROGNARA SALAZZARA, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, 1985), EBS, VERONA, 1985, and Laura LORENZONI, *Angelo Zamboni*, Verona, Banca popolare di Verona - Banco S. Geminiano e S. Prospero, 2000. About Donati see Francesco BUTTURINI, *Carlo Donati, Agostino Pegrassi, Albano Vitturini: arte sacra a Verona (1900-1950)*, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 2000.