FRANCA COIN: “HOW I WILL BRING CANOVA TO NEW YORK”

From Possagno, in the middle of the province of Treviso, to the Fifth Avenue the step is remarkable. But not for a plaster colossus that crossed the Pillars of Hercules to reach the United States in its marble version already in the early nineteenth century.

We are talking about the statue of George Washington that Thomas Jefferson commissioned to Antonio Canova in 1816. The work reached its final destination only in 1821 and it was placed in Raleigh, in the Hall of the Senate of the State of North Carolina. However, ten years later, a tragic fire destroyed the building, shattering the precious marble statue.

On the 22nd of May, on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the original statue, Canova’s George Washington life-size plaster cast will be transferred from the Gypsotheca e Museo Antonio Canova of Possagno (where it is currently kept and from where it is has never been moved) to the Frick Collection of New York.

This is an important goal, resulting from constant communication and fundraising activities carried out with energy by Franca Coin throughout the years. “The story began six years ago. I was already President of the Board of Directors of the Venice...
International Foundation, a private association founded with the aim of supporting the management of the Civic Museums of Venice and, *de facto*, one of the first forms of collaboration between the public and the private sector” says Franca Coin. “Our activity focused mainly on restoration. No one knows why, but restoration is considered a femminine activity”.

But let’s take a step back. How was born the idea of supporting the activities of the Civic Museums of Venice through the collection of private funds? “Our association was created by the then Mayor of Venice Massimo Cacciari. At the beginning, we didn’t have a clear mission. I have a professional background in the field of communication and advertising, I worked for *Vogue France* and I lived in Milan during the golden years of advertising and of the Italian economic boom. Then I married my husband, Piergiorgio Coin, I moved to Venice and at a certain point I realized that I was tired of being a housewife. I don’t remember it well, but I think that originally my husband received an offer to collaborate with the Civic Museums of Venice.

And then somehow I took control of the situation and I started to gather friends from around the world. I created an association and I started to collect the first membership fees. **The Venice International Foundation worked in collaboration with the Civic Museums of Venice** and together we were regularly asking the City of Venice on which projects was it appropriate to invest. We started with restoration. Then six years ago, I realised it was better to expand this micro patronage, commonly known today as crowdfunding”.

And so it is at this point that sparks your interest for Antonio Canova, right? “I decided to use my network of contacts living in the United States, given that here contributions are tax-deductible to donors. And so I created **Friends of Venice Italy, an non profit organization that raises funds to preserve Venice**. The United States needed initiatives that would make people proud to take part in big projects.

I was suggested to support the **restoration of the 5 rooms of the Correr Museum dedicated to Antonio Canova**: a challenging task, from which originated the **SUBLIME CANOVA project**.

Later, the **Accademia Galleries of Venice suggested me to support the restoration of the 7 rooms of the Palladian wing**, which houses several statues of Antonio Canova. And then one day when I was in Possagno, at the Gyspotheca e Museo Antonio Canova, I saw the original plaster cast of the statue of George Washington, commissioned by Thomas Jefferson. This is where the idea of the **Canova’s George Washington exhibition** came from”.

In the meanwhile, Franca Coin meets **Xavier F. Salomon, Chief Curator of the Frick Collection** and together with him and in collaboration with **Mario Guderzo, Director of the Gypsotheca e Museo Antonio Canova**, they develop the idea of bringing back to the United States the statue of their first President.
They also came in contact with the **Consulate General of Italy and with the Italian Institute of Culture** in order to create **at the same time a photography exhibition and an exhibition on Canova’s tempera paintings**. The tempera paintings are artworks of extreme beauty, which so far have never left the Museum of Possagno.

In 2019, there will also be an exhibition dedicated to Canova’s artworks at the National Gallery in Washington, thanks to the collaboration with the curator C.D. Dickerson III, Head of Sculpture Department.

**What are your goals now?**

“Venice is a worldwide megaphone. My younger friends describe it as a platform, a term that I want to borrow in its most positive connotation. The idea is to take care of the beauty that surrounds us, to be proud of it and to communicate our culture at a global level in the right way.

I believe that small contributions lead to big results: they give each one of us a huge sense of satisfaction. I am also confident that the project to digitize the heritage stored in the Gypsotheca of Possagno so that it can be accessible for everyone will be a success”.

**What contribution can you bring to the Museum of Possagno, which contains the world’s largest collection of Canova’s works?**

“I don’t think that increasing museum attendance is the only way to help museums. The Gypsotheca is visited by a small number of visitors: approximately 50,000 per year. Our goal is to find the right means to support our great beauty and to make it accessible for free. We also need funds to rebuild the roof.

From the fashion industry, I’ve learnt that the payment of royalties has contributed to the success of several *Made in Italy* brands. I would like to adopt and to spread the same approach also for museums and their content”.

**What do you think of immersive art initiatives? A digital exhibition dedicated to Canova will open soon in Venice.**

“These initiatives are useful to spread the love for an artist and his art, to stimulate curiosity and above all they are easily distributable. Increasing the knowledge about Antonio Canova means contributing to spark the interest for his artworks and for the territory where he comes from. Our great advantage is that we have all Canova’s artworks in one place: the Museum of Possagno”.

**What are your plans for the future?**

“I would like to focus on the private collections of Antonio Canova’s artworks”. 