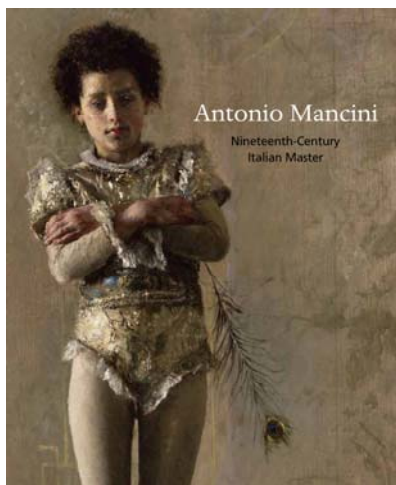


Antonio Mancini: Nineteenth-Century Italian Master/ Ulrich W. Hiesinger.--New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, November 2007.:--144 p.—ISBN-13: 978-0-300-12220-6: \$50.00.



This well-documented exhibition catalog chronicles the life and career of Italian painter, Antonio Mancini (1852-1930), and highlights a recent gift of fifteen paintings and pastels from Vance N. Jordan (1943–2003) to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Vance's hand-picked curator, Ulrich W. Hiesinger, translates and successfully weaves together secondary and primary sources, such as Cecchi's 1966 text, Schettini's biography of the artist, and letters full of first-hand accounts, to provide the most comprehensive, English-language book to date about this once famous painter and member of the Verismo movement, an Italian response to nineteenth-century realism.

Mancini was a precocious artist from an impoverished family living in Naples, who was admitted to the Institute of Fine Arts in Naples, at the age of 12. In the 1870s, he traveled to Paris and met past and future greats of the art world, such as Gérôme, Degas, and John Singer Sargent. The latter is said to have proclaimed Mancini the greatest living painter.

Early works, such as "The Street Urchin" (1868) and his famous "Il Saltimbanco" (1877-78), define him as a master figure painter and highlight his frequent use of cryptic iconography. Mancini's confidence in front of the canvas and his flamboyant mastery of tone and impasto can be contrasted with his failure at the art of life. He suffered a disabling mental illness and fretted away fame and fortune whenever it found him. If not for the kindness of strangers, patrons and dealers from Italy, France, the Netherlands, England, and America, one wonders if he would have survived to enjoy the success of his late years. On the other hand, the dominating influences of some patrons helped produce trivial, unmemorable works.

The book examines the many reflective self-portraits, which chronicle Mancini's manic moods and mental instability. It also details the society portraits he did of prominent English and American patrons. Finally, the text outlines Mancini's use of the mysterious graticola, his own invention, that utilized two identical grids of stretched thread, one strung across the canvas and another in front of the sitter.

The author acknowledges the difficulty of separating Mancini's art from his unique personality and the dramatic tale of his life. Nevertheless, Hiesinger provides in-depth analysis of the work, lavish illustrations, and asks questions that, hopefully, will be answered by future scholars. Detailed notes are followed by a helpful chronology, appendixes (translated letters and records from Groupil & Cie), and an index.

The book is recommended for museum libraries with an interest in nineteenth-century art (both American and European) and academic libraries serving advanced undergraduate and graduate students.

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