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Visiting hours
Museo petrarchesco piccolomineo
9 a.m. - 1 p.m., Thursday also 3 p.m. - 7 p.m.
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Free admission

Guided visits:
Saturday at 11 a.m.
Thursday at 5 p.m.

Information and reservations:
Tel. 0039/0406758184
Fax 0039/0406758194
Website: http://www.museopetrarchesco.it
e-mail: museopetrarchesco@comune.trieste.it
Did women have a Renaissance?

The Museo petrarchesco piccolomineo replies to this question with the rare sixteenth-century printed editions of the “Hortis” Civic Library - all described in the on-line catalogue https://www.biblioest.it -, and with some paintings, engravings, sculptures and costumes, expressions of femininity of the 16th and 17th century, from museums in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The exhibition is conceived and curated by Maiko Favaro, who with this scientific work completes in Trieste the project with which he won the “Marie Skłodowska-Curie” fellowship of the European Commission in 2015 (Horizon 2020 programme). The preparation of the exhibition integrates the research activity in which he has been engaged for two years at the “Freie Universität” in Berlin.

The exhibition presents cultured women with a strong personality who emerge as interlocutors in the literary dialogues of the period, such as Emilia Pio in the Cortegiano by Baldassarre Castiglione, Franceschina Baffo in the Ravetta by Giuseppe Betussi and Isabella Bentivoglio in the Discorsi by Annibale Romei. In the sixteenth century, a woman could achieve social recognition not only as a wife, mother or nun, but also as a writer. Vittoria Colonna, Veronica Gambara, Isabella di Morra, Tullia d’Aragona, Laura Terracina, Laura Battiferri, Gaspara Stampa and Lucrezia Marinelli are some of the most well-known names in a female literary spring that started from Petrarchan tradition, allowing the expression of their sentiments and emotions even outside the private environment.

A number of important painters also emerged: we can mention the talented Sofonisba Anguissola, by whom we admire a copy of the “Portrait of a nun” attributed to Emilia di Spilimbergo, or the refined Fontana Zappi, painter of the “Portrait of a Gentlewoman”. In the scientific field there were experts in natural remedies, such as Camilla Erculiani, a pharmacist in Padua. It became fashionable to discuss the excellence of women, with the aim of demonstrating that the female sex is not inferior to the male. Collections of poetry which exalted the gentlewomen of the period as “heavenly goddesses” were published (sometimes such collections were imagined as “temples of rhymes”).

In the age of Counter-Reformation, Angelica, who made Orlando furioso by preferring Medoro to him, became the protagonist of Angelica innamorata by Torquato Tasso adopted a moralistic tone in describing the marital bond in the episode of Olindo and Sofronia in La Gerusalemme Liberata (1581).

Between the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Renaissance faded into the Baroque, a misogynistic attitude became more frequent in literary production.

This climate also affected feminine involvement in the cultural field: after 1610/1620, fewer women were active in the literary environment. Rather than a “heavenly goddess”, the woman was often considered a “daughter of Eve”.

She could be redeemed by identifying herself with the Virgin Mary, the “new Eve” who atoned for the guilt of her ancient ancestor by giving birth to Christ, the Saviour of humanity.

The Marian cult was particularly strong in Italy during the Counter-Reformation. Especially after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, there was a great devotion to the Madonna of the Rosary, referred to in the Rosario by Luis Granada (1573). Saints like Mary Magdalene often featured in paintings and literary compositions as exemplary models.