

# Corrado Mezzana

Italian painter

1890-1952

Born in Rome on 7 June 1890 by Giuseppe, an official of the Post Office, and Rosa Morelli.

In 1906, at the same time as his high school studies, he attended the studio of the landscape painter P. Joris. The training then continued at the free school of the nude at the Institute of Fine Arts (1908-10) and at the University of Rome, where he graduated in jurisprudence in 1912 with the thesis *Legislation of Fine Arts and Antiquities*, published the following year in Rome.

Starting from 1906, the first charcoal portraits are also documented and from 1911 the works with a social subject such as *Port unloaders*.

In 1914 Mezzana got in touch with G. Giovannoni and F. Hermanin, through which he developed a keen interest in architecture. In the same year he participated with *naked Man* in the painting competition of the Regia Accademia di S. Luca and obtained the qualification to teach drawing in technical schools and artistic institutes. Moreover, he exhibited the oil painting *Rinascita* at the exhibition of the Society of amateurs and lovers of fine arts in Rome, which saw him annually present until 1928 with the *Consecration of Chinese bishops*. In the same period, in tune with the widespread taste in the capital of those years, Mezzana matured a predilection for the crepuscular atmospheres (*Dante al Monastero del Corvo*, 1914, Rome, Mezzana collection), represented with a connatural sentimental vein and a spelling dry and sharp.

In 1915 he was invited to the San Francisco International Exposition, where he presented the *Antoninian Baths* and began to teach drawing in the Michelangelo Buonarroti circle and in the ornamental arts school of the Municipality of Rome.

During the war period Mezzana suspended the activity of scholar and artist to devote himself to the organization of the military hospital De Merode of Rome (1916-17) and was then an artillery officer (1917-18).

In 1919 he married Albertina Giorelli, with whom he had six children, and began working as a production designer in the production company Tespi film in Rome (1919-22).

In 1922 he created the first framework of social commitment, *Glauco* with a clear symbolist imprint, in the wake of the masonry works of A. De Carolis and A. Calcagnodoro.

The evocative and didactic approach is characteristic of the works of Mezzana, especially in this period except for landscapes, where he expressed his best his artistic qualities, painting with scrupulous respect for the truth.

In the same years he carried on the work of publicist and from the pages of the Catholic magazine *Gioventù nuova* (1914-24) he came to the heart of the issues of historical-artistic philology. He also continued his exhibition activity by participating in the second and third Rome Biennial in 1923 and 1925. In the latter he exhibited a collection of decorations and the sketch for the altarpiece, *Christ between S. Catherine of Siena and S. Margherita Alaquoque* (1922), realized for the chapel of the Sacred Heart in the Basilica of S. Maria sopra Minerva. At the same climate and in the same period belong the tempera dedicated to the life of S. Giovanni Bosco (1929) and the cartoons for the stained glass and mosaics of the chapel of the relics in S. Croce in Gerusalemme in Rome, pervaded by a pictorialism and expressive sentimentality pathetic tones.

From the beginning of the 1930's, the main focus of interest was the commitment to artistic issues as a scholar and conservative. Designed, assisted by A. Muñoz, the crypt under the church of S. Caterina Magnanapoli (1933) and obtained the setting up of the hall of industry and craftsmanship at the Augustan Show of Rome (1937). Especially after 1932 Mezzana devoted himself to the study of a series of great figures: Leonardo da Vinci, GL Bernini, Giotto di Bondone. In the sphere of the most markedly philological research there are also the interventions that he held at the Beato Angelico Institute of studies of sacred art in Rome (*The themes of sacred painting, the concept of deformation and sacred art*, Rome 1936) and the prolatations that he published repeatedly in the journal *Faith and work* (1937).

In his artistic production of these years there is a crystallization on formulas of classical academicism, especially in sacred works (in Rome: *Last Supper*, 1937, S. Eustachio, *At the tomb of Lazarus*, 1940, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus Panfilo), while in the sketches of postage stamps, to which he devoted himself diligently since the 1930s, Mezzana succeeded in synthesizing the compositional complexity of the details and the expressive immediacy of the allegory.

The Virgiliana series dates back to 1930, where the subjects taken from the *Eneide* are interpreted according to a perfect classical style, granting Renaissance, Mannerist and Neoclassical models with photographic and cinematographic technical solutions. Subsequently he was commissioned the models of the main series issued by the fascist regime, including, in 1932, the one for the tenth anniversary of the march on Rome; in 1938 the series on the proclamation of the Empire and in 1941 the series on the Rome-Berlin axis. From 1936 to 1952 he was the author of the papal issues, of which the series for the coronation of Pius XII (1940) and that dedicated to the history of the Basilica of St. Peter, posthumously released in 1953.

During the 1940s Mezzana continued to produce stamps and to paint works in a pictorial style of easy visual impact, *St. Francis and the Franciscan saints* (1948; Marcianise, S. Francis). At the same time, stimulated above all by the situation that had arisen in the immediate post-war period and by the close collaboration with the Pontifical Central Commission for Religious Art in Italy (1945), engaged in the recovery of damaged churches, he dedicated himself to raising awareness his writings are the questions concerning the defense and conservation of the fine arts. His commitment also turned in favor of crafts, promoting in 1945 the National Center of Crafts, which he

left in 1947 to take over the presidency of the National Agency for the craft industry and small industries of Rome (ENAPI).

Mezzana died in Rome on September 15th. 1952.

In 1990, on the occasion of the centenary of his birth, Mezzana was honored with a stamp issued by the Italian Post Office. Series of its stamps are documented in the Historical Museum of Posts and Telecommunications of Rome and in the Philatelic and Numismatic Museum of the Vatican City.

by Rosanna Ruscio - Biographical Dictionary of Italians - Volume 74 (2010)

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