



## Biography

A painter of genre scenes and an engraver, Oreste Cortazzo was born in Rome in 1836. After an apprenticeship with his father Michele Cortazzo, he met the painter Léon Bonnat in 1858 during his study in Rome. Oreste Cortazzo joined Bonnat in his Parisian studio where he earned his teacher's precise technique and interest in human figuration. He was noticed by the renowned art dealer Adolphe Goupil and specialized in highly detailed genre scenes paintings, popular among the bourgeois clientele.

In 1870, Cortazzo exhibited for the first time at the Salon with "The Interrupted Sitting", then several times between 1874 and 1885. He presented his work at the Universal Exhibition of 1878 and 1889, where he showed "The Portrait of Mrs. O. A." His talent was rewarded with an honorable mention and a second-class medal.

In "The Revealed Masterpiece", the elegance and virtuosity of the drawing combine with the abundance of artistic references, which was very appreciated by collectors of the time. This scene of study and contemplation of five women in a monumental gallery allowed the painter to depict various detailed artworks and objects: seventeenth-century tapestries, Renaissance furniture, a baroque marble table and decorative objects. Like most artists of his time, Oreste Cortazzo had a broad knowledge of Italian art and traveled to Spain and England to perfect his artistic education and his knowledge of history and styles.

His painting "The Revealed Masterpiece" was a tribute to the arts and good taste. In this painting, Oreste Cortazzo showed his taste for the Far East with the bronze statue and Chinese porcelains. He was probably inspired by the oriental exoticism in vogue at the end of the 19th century and the paintings of his teacher Léon Bonnat after his trip to the East in 1870. Cortazzo exhibited "A Japanese Woman" and "Japanese Fantasy" at the Salon of 1874.

The theatrical display of the characters and the refinement of the toilets resembled the works of Rococo painters such as Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Antoine Watteau. Cortazzo highlighted the delicate and elegant gestures of the female figures. Their sophisticated eighteenth-century dresses blaze with textures and extremely bright contrasting colors. Cortazzo's taste for rococo-inspired staging could be seen in more bucolic paintings such as "A Fete on the River Brenta" or "The Merry-go-round of Love".

Oreste Cortazzo was a careful observer of human behavior and created engravings of bourgeois scenes and everyday life, with compositions inspired by the first photographs of the time. He illustrated some of Honoré de Balzac's books such as "La Rabouilleuse" or "Physiology of Marriage", "Yvette" by Guy de Maupassant and an edition of "Romeo and Juliet" by William Shakespeare. Some of Cortazzo's works belonged to his teacher Léon Bonnat and are now preserved in the Bonnat-Helleu Museum in Bayonne (France). Original etchings such as "Le Passage de la Mariée" are kept in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

## Museums

Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Bayonne

Fine Arts Museums, San Francisco

## Bibliography

Monneret Sophie, L'Impressionnisme et son époque, Robert Laffont, coll. Bouquins, Paris, 1991

Schiavone Clara, " La pittura di Oreste Cortazzo ", Annali Cilentani, n° 11, janvier-décembre 1995, p. 21-37