SPHINX FINE ART

Luigi Ossipovich Premazzi (Milan 1814 - Istanbul 1891)

Afternoon Pursuits of a Lady

signed and dated 'L. Premazzi 1846' (lower left);
signed, inscribed and dated on the mount 'L. Premazzi Milanesi, a St Pietroburgo 1846'
watercolour over pencil on paper
16 x 24 cm (6 x 9 in)

Afternoon Pursuits of a Lady is an accurate depiction of a brightly lit *loggia,* and exemplifies Luigi Osipovich Premazzi's masterly control of perspective. A lady is seated in the shade, engrossed in her embroidery, and at her feet a small dog sits upright on a red cushion. As the viewer's eye wanders along the gallery, it meets a woman and child holding hands and strolling slowly along the *loggia.* The woman, dressed in white from head to toe, may be a religious figure, caring for the seated lady's child in her summer retreat. Indeed, such situations were not uncommon, and the lady in this painting may well have repaired to a convent in the mountains to escape the cruel heat of summer in the town.

The recession of the gallery into a vague and undefined distance is arguably the dominant feature of the work; the perspective is reinforced by the repeated rhythm of the arches, their shadows and the wooden beams of the vault. This dynamic composition contrasts with the still, airless atmosphere of the scene. In the landscape on the right-hand side, where the Neapolitan mountains are just visible, Premazzi exploits the medium of watercolour in order to convincingly reproduce the fiercely bright sunlight.

Afternoon Pursuits of a Lady demonstrates many of the qualities that made Premazzi such a success among nineteenth-century Russian high society. Perhaps the artist's most famous commission was to depict the halls of the New Hermitage, in collaboration with Konstantin Ukhtomsky (1818-1881) and Eduard Hau (1807-1870). *Interiors of the NewHermitage. The Room of French Art,* is an example of Premazzi's contribution to the series; it is clear that capturing the architectural effects and atmosphere of the building is Premazzi's chief concern, as it is in the present work. The angle of study seems to

have been chosen to best capture the depth and recession in the room. The symmetrical patterning of the ceiling and tiled floor help to emphasise this, just as the archways do in *Afternoon Pursuits of a Lady.* Once more, figures serve to indicate a scale and guide the eye through the composition, but they do not detract from the main architectural representation.

In addition to this depiction of architecture, another key feature of *Afternoon Pursuits of a Lady* is Premazzi's rendering of light. His ability to do so is proved repeatedly throughout his oeuvre, for instance in *Landscape with the Cameron Gallery and the Zubov Building*. In both works the sky is rendered in white and soft blue hues, which creates the impression of a sunlit atmosphere.

Premazzi was born in Milan and began his artistic education there, at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1839, he moved to Russia, where he taught painting at the Institute of Baron Stieglitz; his pupils included Princess I. Gagarin. He soon gained the attention of Tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918), and became one of the most popular masters amongst Russian aristocrats in the mid-nineteenth century. From 1854, he bore the title of Academician of the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg.

Premazzi travelled extensively, and effected many sojourns in Italy, including Naples, where this work is set. He obviously found here an ideal opportunity to develop and demonstrate yet again the two specialities of his art: architectural depictions and bright, sunlit landscapes.

Artist description:

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Collections

Luigi Premazzi is represented in collections in Russia, Vienna, Paris and London.