

Golden Glow: Gold and Silver Altarpieces in Venice and Beyond

23 – 24 January 2025

Bocconi University | Room N08 | Piazza Sraffa 13 Milano

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

[REGISTRATION FORM](#)



Caorle, Santo Stefano. Golden Altarpiece, detail. Photo by Domenico Ventura.

Between the 12th and the 17th centuries, the churches of Venice gleamed with the brilliance of gold and silver altarpieces and frontals. Radiating from dim interiors, they provided a unique and awe-inspiring backdrop for the celebration of liturgy. Large-scale and materially sumptuous, these altarpieces—possibly inspired by the Pala d’Oro in the Basilica of San Marco—were ingenious and dramatic viewing machines. They could be opened and closed horizontally to reveal different layers of imagery. When closed, they were further screened behind purpose-made panel paintings (or *pale feriali*).

These multimedia ensembles exerted significant appeal among contemporaries. In Venice, they continued to play a vital role as intermediaries between architecture and ritual in later centuries, when they functioned as the fulcrum of radical architectural renovations. In addition, less costly specimens made of painted or gilded wood were also commissioned for the adornment of churches across the lagoon. Finally, outside of Venice, precious silver and gold-plated *pale* have also survived along the northern and eastern Adriatic coast, further demonstrating the popularity of these peculiar altar adornments throughout Venice’s colonial territories.

As visual palimpsests that could be opened and closed during liturgy, gold and silver *pale* hold unique potential to transform our understanding of Venetian sacred spaces, and to illuminate the performative nature of medieval and renaissance religious and artistic experiences. This bilingual workshop examines these opulent artifacts and their *pale feriali* within their architectural, liturgical, and acoustic settings and in conversation with comparable visual materials from other Mediterranean regions. In doing so, it seeks to demonstrate the relevance of these rich artifacts for our understanding of broader art-historical issues, including: the artistic geographies and visual identities of Venice’s colonial empire; the material agency of painted and metallic surfaces; the interactions between artistic and technological knowledge in medieval times; sacred spaces across the eastern and western Christian Mediterranean; and the transformations of architectural environments in Venice across the medieval–early modern divide.

Organized by GREEN – Bocconi University | Si ringrazia MUR- Prin 2022- Prot. 2022JRXA9L – Next Generation EU (CUP J53D23013290001).

Program

Day One – 23 January 2025

2:00 - 2:05 pm Welcome and Opening Remarks

SESSION 1 THE METALWORK ALTARPIECES OF MEDIEVAL VENETIA

2:05 - 2:45 pm **A Gold Standard? The High Altar of San Marco and the landscape of Venice's pale d'oro**
Stefania Gerevini Bocconi University

Chasing Gold: Venice's lost pale d'oro

Giosuè Fabiano Bocconi University

2:45 - 3:10 pm **... e quando si apre la pala si accendono ventotto candele. Le pale d'argento in Istria e lungo la costa dalmata: fonti, contesti e (ri)uso**

Danijel Ciković University of Rijeka

3:10 - 3:30 pm Q&A Session

3:30 - 4:00 pm Coffee Break

SESSION 2 GOLD AND GILT

Chair **Serena Romano** Université de Lausanne

4:00 - 4:25 pm **Three Gold Pale, a Missing Madonna and the Body of Christ**
Alison Wright UCL

4:25 - 4:50 pm **La pala mobile di Malamocco: novità e proposte**
Gabriele Matino Save Venice

4:50 - 5:10 pm Q&A Session

Session 3 REVELATIONS: FOLDABLE FORMATS IN THE LAGOON

Chair **Serena Romano** Université de Lausanne

5:10 - 5:35 pm **Le pale ribaltabili in area veneziana e adriatica: varietà tipologiche e funzionali**
Cristina Guarnieri Università degli Studi di Padova

5:35 - 6:00 pm **La pala opistografa di San Giorgio a Pirano: un caso di metodo**
Andrea De Marchi Università degli Studi di Firenze

6:00 - 6:20 pm Q&A Session

End of Day 1

Day 2 – 24 January 2025

SESSION 4

BEYOND THE ALTAR

Chair **Martina Corgnati** Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera

9:00 - 9:25 am

Altarpieces, Iconostases, and their Elusive Interconnectedness

Michele Bacci Université de Fribourg

9:25 - 9:50 am

Beyond the Liturgical Stage: Material Agency and Sacral Sensibility of Metalwork Georgian Icons

Bella Radenovic The Courtauld Institute of Art

9:50 – 10:10 am

Q&A Session

10:10 – 10:40 am

Coffee Break

SESSION 5

SENSING SPACE

Chair **Antonio Mazzotta** Università degli Studi di Milano

10:40 - 11:05 am

Of Organs and Altars

Jamie Reuland Princeton University

11:05 – 11:45 am

Changing Tastes at San Salvador and San Pietro di Castello

Andrew Hopkins Università degli Studi dell'Aquila

Architectural Spaces for Silver Altars: Case Studies of San Salvador and San Pietro di Castello

Stefano Colombo Università degli Studi dell'Aquila

11:45 am – 12:10 pm **Q&A Session and final remarks**

End of day 2