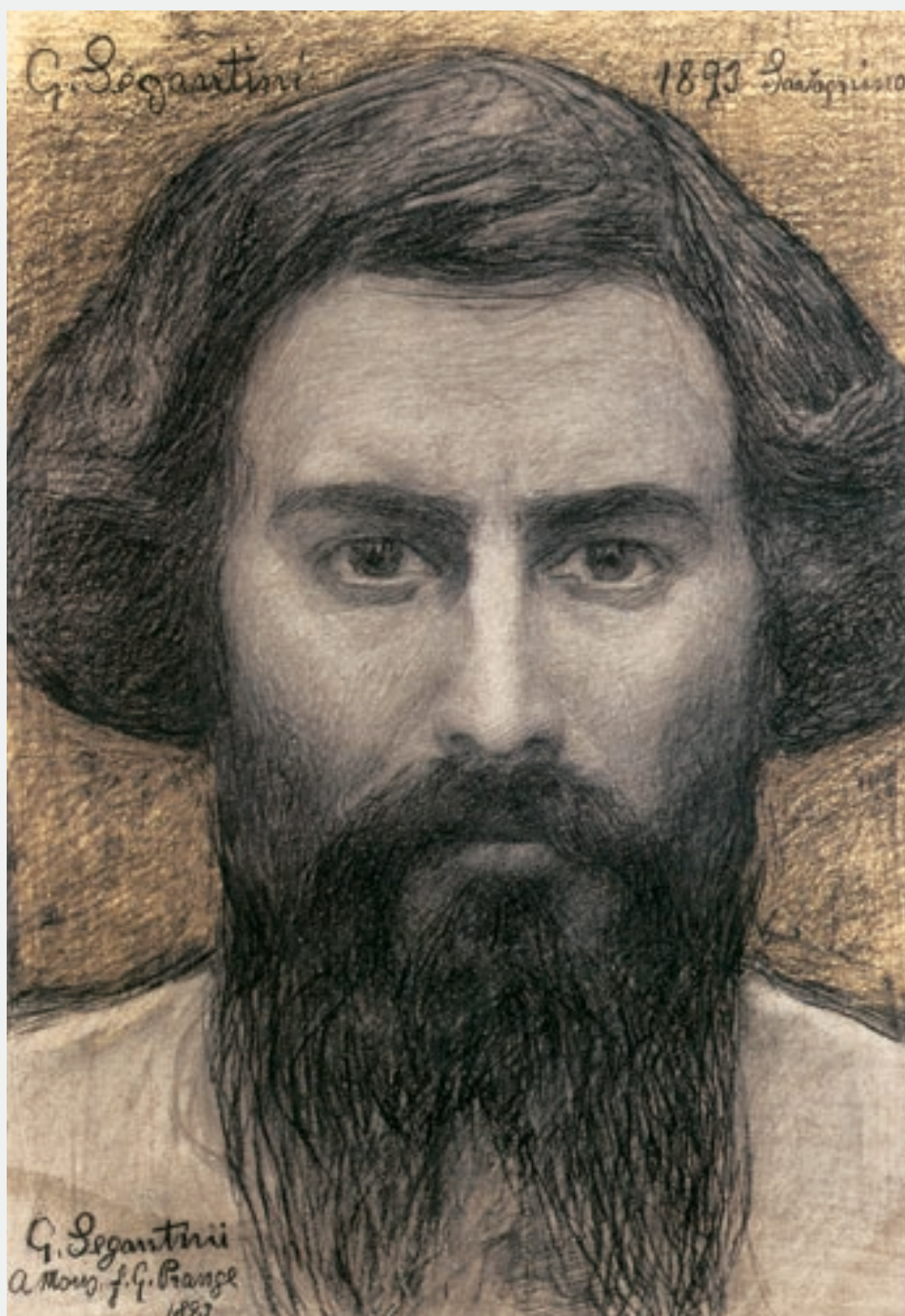

Giovanni Segantini

Light, colour, distance and infinity

by Pier Carlo Della Ferrera

with essays by Beat Stutzer, Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei and Franco Monteforte





Elisabeth stood beside me in front of a large painting by Segantini and she was totally engrossed in contemplation. The painting portrayed a group of peasants at work in a barren alpine meadow, and behind them, as a backdrop, steep jagged mountains, that brought to mind the Stockhorn mountain range, and, in a clear, cold sky, an ivory-coloured cloud, depicted in an indescribably gifted manner. It caught the eye at first glance because of its strange mass wrapped around itself like a ball; you could see that it had just been rolled up and kneaded by the wind, and was about to rise and sail slowly away. Elisabeth obviously understood it, because she was completely rapt in contemplation. And her otherwise hidden soul had appeared once again on her face, laughing softly from her now wide-open eyes, making her too small mouth seem soft like a child's, and smoothing out the austere furrow between her eyebrows, a sign of presumptuousness. The beauty and veracity of a great work of art forced her soul, which itself possessed the same beauty, veracity and sincerity, to reveal itself. I sat calmly nearby, gazing at Segantini's beautiful cloud and the beautiful girl enchanted by it.^a

The guiding thread that ideally links the cultural insert of this year's Annual Report, devoted to Giovanni Segantini, to that of last year, devoted to the German writer Hermann Hesse, runs through this passage from his novel *Peter Camenzind*. It is not by mere chance that it was precisely the sensitivity of a great artist that was able to fully grasp the meaning behind Segantini's painting, capable of constantly arousing new feelings, of bringing out the innermost aspects of the human soul and of transfiguring the observer to almost indissolubly blend him into the work of art.

Often Segantini is remembered by the hackneyed, stereotyped appellative of "mountain painter". In reality, in his works, mountains, sky and air represent "distant ideas lost in the blue which become outlined, take shape and come to life". Landscapes inhabited by peasants at work and animals mean Nature and life. Mothers and children clasped in a tender embrace conjure up from the depths of the soul the mystery of motherhood. In a blazing "light that gives life to colour and illuminates and gives atmosphere to distances and renders the sky boundless".

Previous page:
Giovanni Segantini,
Self portrait, 1893,
pastel on greyish paper,
34.4x24.2 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini
Museum, on trust by
the Otto Fischbacher
Foundation of St. Gall)

a. H. HESSE, *Peter Camenzind* (1904). Translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

The personal story of Giovanni Segantini

by Pier Carlo Della Ferrera *
from an interview with Gioconda Leykauf-Segantini **



Left and above:
Giovanni Segantini, **Hay Harvest**,
ca 1889-1898, oil on canvas, 137x149 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini Museum)

Giovanni Segantini, who only later on in life changed his name to Segantini from the nickname “*Segante*” given to him by his Milanese friends, was born in Arco in Trentino on 15th January 1858. His father, Agostino, was a fancy-goods peddler, who was very often away from home in an attempt to relieve the plight of the dramatically precarious economic condition of his family. His mother, Margherita de’ Girardi, was a young woman who originally came from the Val di Fiemme; immediately after giving birth she fell seriously ill and died, at thirty-six years of age, in March 1865. Among Segantini’s memories¹, it was precisely the memory of his mother, “as beautiful as a sunset in spring”, which was to become one of the dominant inspiring themes of his art.

When my grandfather^b was left motherless he was only seven years old. He set out on a journey with his father from Arco to Milan. They were poor and had to face a long, weary journey on foot – this man, who no longer had a wife, and this child, who no longer had a mother – but with the same deep grief



in their hearts.

Together with his father, he walked through the streets, squares and parks of Milan. Stopping under an enormous arch, his father told him that Napoleon’s troops had passed through it, and that from there it was possible to reach France. And one day my grandfather ran away from home and set out for France, heading in the direction that his father had indicated. Because he wanted to join up, not as a soldier – because he was too young – but as a drummer-boy.

In Milan, little Giovanni was put into the care of his nineteen-year-old half-sister, Irene.

However, her working hours prevented the young woman from taking proper care of the child and thus, abandoned and all alone – his father had also died in the meantime – “the personal story” of Segantini began. He himself described it as “alternately good and wretched, [...] because even sadness and pain do not make it entirely unhappy”². The boy lived in a state of total lack of guidance, on the outskirts of the lively Milanese society, of which he knew only the most poverty-stricken environments. In 1870 he was arrested for loafing and vagrancy and taken to the Marchiondi reformatory school, “assigned to the shoemakers section”, where he remained until 30th January 1873. He then moved to Borgo Val Sugana to stay with his half-brother, Napoleon, for whom he worked, without incentive or enthusiasm, as an errand-boy and assistant photographer. He returned to Milan more than one year later, probably towards the end of 1874.

For a certain period my grandfather worked as an apprentice in the workshop of a somewhat bizarre and original character. His name was Luigi Tettamanzi, but Segantini had jokingly nicknamed him “Teta-oss”, because of his lean, wiry build. He was a good-natured man, who painted flags, banners and buntings for patriotic and religious ceremonies, commercial signs and theatre scenery. Apparently, one day when Tettamanzi, pleased with himself, asked him: “Segantini, what would you do if one day you were to become a great artist like me?”, my grandfather irreverently and ironically answered: “I would throw myself out of the window!”

Frequenting the workshop of this singular character nevertheless enabled the young Segantini to develop his inborn inclination towards figurative art and begin to perfect those technical skills that he had already proved to possess in the past, both when he was an inmate of the Marchiondi Reformatory, and at the time when, as a street urchin, he amused himself by drawing portraits of his fellow vagabonds.

b. This and the subsequent interventions by Gioconda Leykauf-Segantini are a resumé of the account of the memories of the painter’s granddaughter, gathered by the author during their meeting at Maloja on 2nd September 2003.

View of Arco in Trento, the birthplace of Giovanni Segantini. On the left, after the bridge, the house where the painter was born.

Right:
Segantini's library in
Maloja, now lost.

Below:
Segantini as a student
at the Brera Academy
of Art.



My grandfather approached art for the first time very early in life. He was still a child, in Milan, when a mother called him to the bed-side of her little daughter on the point of death and asked him to draw a portrait of her, so that she could remember how she was when she was alive. He spent several hours over the portrait and, years later, he wrote about this episode: "I don't know whether the work came out artistic or not, but I do remember seeing the mother so happy for an instant that it seemed to me she had forgotten her sorrow"³. The intuition which later took root as the conviction that the artist must express

his feelings in his paintings, but must also and above all arouse feelings and emotions in those who look at them, perhaps dates back to that time.

The period spent in Milan starting from 1875 was decisive for Segantini's development and evolution both as a man and as an artist. He attended the Brera Academy of Art, first following the evening lessons and then the normal courses, and made friends with the Bertoni brothers, whose grocery shop was the daily meeting-place for intellectuals and artists. In contact with this culturally favourable environment, he worked hard and studied assiduously, which was an almost heroic effort for an illiterate person.



My grandfather had never been to school, and had never learned to read and write. One day, when visiting the Bertoni brothers, he came across a book with a beautiful blue leather binding which attracted his attention. It was an edition of Plutarch's "Parallel Lives". He had a few pages read to him, and was so fascinated that he wanted to learn to read at all costs, so that he could continue on his own, without having to resort to other people. It was at that time that he began to collect books on classic and modern literature, art, history, philosophy and religion: the first nucleus of an extraordinary library that he was later to set up in the studio in Maloja, full of true rarities, first editions, incunabula and texts in manuscript.

However, Segantini was less convinced when it came to academic studies and less willing to accept the strict rules of a school that he considered more suitable for producing mercenary art than for discovering and stimulating talent and genius. He nevertheless attended regularly and made good progress in the yearly courses which, until 1878, he always concluded brilliantly, earning medals and special mentions. However, he failed to complete his art school curriculum, perhaps because of the financial problems which continued to assail him and which he attempted to cope with by giving drawing lessons and even going so far as to pawn the medals that he won at the Academy.

A first turning point in Segantini's life, and not only in his artistic life, came in 1879, when *St. Anthony's Choir (Il coro di S. Antonio)*, the final exercise in the perspective course, was exhibited in Brera. The unexpected success of the work, which aroused the attention of the most important critics of the time, enabled Segantini to come into contact with the art gallery owners, Vittore and Alberto Grubicy de Dragon, who were organising a market of Ita-



Above:
The Segantini family at
the table in 1895.

Right:
Giovanni Segantini,
**Portrait of Vittore
Grubicy**, 1887, oil
on canvas, 151x91 cm
(Leipzig, Museum der
Bildenden Künste)

lian art in Milan along the lines of those held in London, Paris and Amsterdam. Convinced of the young art student's talent, Vittore began to purchase Segantini's paintings for his exhibitions; later on, in 1883, he stipulated a contract of trust with him which gave him the right to all Segantini's output, that he could freely dispose of, in exchange for a life annuity. Segantini's financial problems were thus solved, at least in part. During this period he devoted himself primarily to painting flowers, still lifes and portraits on commission. In 1879 he made the acquaintance of Luigia Bugatti, called Bice, the sister of his cabinet-maker friend Carlo, the future designer of fashion-

able furniture and father of Ettore, the famous racing car manufacturer. Bice sat for the painting, *The Falconer (La falconiera)*, and became his faithful lifelong companion. The couple never married and from their union, perpetually nourished by intense, profound sentiments, Gottardo (1882), Alberto (1883), Mario (1885) and Bianca (1886) were born.

My grandfather was a stateless person and this is one of the reasons why he was never properly married. He was born as an Austrian citizen, because Arco formed part of the Hapsburg Empire. In Milan, which had just entered the Kingdom of Italy, he renounced his Austrian nationality, but without applying for registration in the municipal registers. When he met Bice he could have become Italian. But Bice did not want him to, because otherwise my grandfather would have had to go into the army: "His hands – she used to say – were the hands of an artist, they were not hands made for touching weapons".

From October 1881 to the spring of 1886, Giovanni and Bice lived in Brianza moving house several times, from Pusiano to Carella, from Corneno to Caglio. As she was to write years later, in the peace, solitude and enchantment of this secluded spot nestled among the hills and lakes, "he reproduced the emotions he experienced, especially in the evening hours, after sunset, when his soul prepared itself for sweet melancholies"⁴. However, Milan continued to represent an indispensable point of reference for Segantini, both because of the commercial links with the Grubicy brothers, and to enable him to take part in cultural debates, especially with Vittore, but also with other intellectuals and artists. Segantini's benefactor played an extremely important part in the process of his artistic development; he acquainted him with French and Dutch realism, provided him with books and reproductions of paintings and encouraged his appreciation of Millet, which was to leave a perceptible mark on his works. And it was thanks to Grubicy, who exhibited his paintings in all the most important European cities, that Segantini was able to make himself known and attract attention on the international stage. His works during this period, which appear to be in harmony with a realism in which



ALESSANDRO VITTORIO GRUBICOV

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the genuineness of the common people is expressed with great emphasis by the formal rendering and by the outstanding pictorial technique, in reality take on a symbolic dimension which goes beyond realistic model and genre painting. This is the case of *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake* (*Ave Maria a tras-bordo*) and *Early Mass* (*A messa prima*). Painted in Pusiano at the suggestion of his painter friend, Emilio Longoni, *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake* seems to represent the celebration of a universal rite – which involves people, animals and nature – in the almost praying gesture of the rowing peasant and in the silent devotion with which the mother embraces the child. More than any other famous painting by Segantini, it contains elements and images that are powerfully evocative of the artist's religiousness, a synthesis of pantheistic philosophy and Catholic tradition, faith in a God which exists deep down in the hearts of all men as in all the manifestations of nature and the cosmos.

My grandfather was deeply religious, even though his relationship with God was on a very personal basis. He attended church with his mother, because when you are poor, sick and suffering you often go to church to pray. And the warm, mysterious atmosphere of the churches made an intense, long-lasting impression on the child. He built a little altar with the images of saints in a corner of his home. One day, the parish priest of the village

came to visit the family and presented the child with a picture of Mary's marriage, in which the figures of the priests were represented wearing gowns and vestments typical of the Hebrew tradition. My grandfather was so disappointed and confused to see priests dressed differently from the way he was used to seeing them and in which he believed, that he immediately destroyed the altar and from that moment on always eyed religious institutions with suspicion and scepticism.

The extreme simplicity and precision of the composition of *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, carefully calculated in relation to extraordinary light effects, can also be found in *Early Mass*, where the majestic staircase leading to the vast vault of heaven appears to symbolise an asceticism which elevates human devotion to the infinite spaces of illuminated nature.

The magnificence of a vast horizon, accompanied by the slow rhythms of the oxen and cows at rest, is the dominating theme of *At the Rail* (*Alla Stanga*), which expresses the peaceful harmony of life in the mountains and is a prelude to Segantini's works of the Swiss period. This painting, and the first version of *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, now lost, were awarded the gold medal at the international art exhibitions in Amsterdam in 1883 and 1886.

After a brief stay in Milan, in the summer of 1886 Segantini decided to move to a moun-

tain locality. He set out with his family on a long journey, on foot, and by any means available, which took him to Como, Valtellina, Poschiavo, Livigno, St. Moritz, Silvaplana. He finally arrived in Savognin, a small village in the Alps of the Canton of the Grisons at an altitude of 1,213 metres, nestled in a wide valley at the foot of Mount Julier. Here Segantini brought his personal Divisionist technique to perfection and started up a new phase of his pictorial poetics.

When my grandfather arrived in Savognin he was enchanted by the blazing light of that place and tried to find a way to capture it in his paintings. He cleaned his palette and started using only unmixed colours. He began to put them onto the canvas undiluted, with fine, clear-cut brush strokes, placing the primary colours and the complementary colours close to one another in the same proportions he would have used if he had mixed them together on the palette. It was the retina of the eye of the observer that had to blend them when looking at the painting from the right distance. In this way, he obtained more light, more air, more truth in his paintings.

From that moment on Segantini devoted himself to new subjects. The central theme of his art became the mountain and its inhabitants, who moved and lived surrounded by nature and in a village environment. The aspect that interested him most of all was light, sought and reproduced in all its manifestations by means of Divisionist effects. And light is the element which merges the foreground and boundless horizons of *Brown Cow at the*

Trough (Vacca bruna all'abbeveratoio, 1887) and *Girl Knitting (Ragazza che fa la calza, 1888)*, there are into a throbbing vibration of chromatic particles works in which the research into nature frees itself from all vestiges of sentimentalism.

In Savognin my grandfather received a visit from Vittore Grubicy, who stayed with him for several months to acquaint him with Divisionism. But grandfather had already developed his own idea on the subject and was already perfecting his technique. Since he was not very willing to accept advice and criticism and was always convinced of what he was doing to the point of obstinacy, apparently he very rudely made poor Grubicy hold his tongue. He decided to paint his portrait, to force him to sit still and, above all, to stay silent while he painted him.

True or not, the episode is nevertheless in keeping with certain aspects of the painter's character, described in the main biographies, some of which go as far as to maintain that Segantini suffered from a superiority complex and was affected by egocentrism. These attitudes were fostered by the increasing success of his works and by the growing fame of his art. It is also certain that upon reaching artistic maturity, Segantini became more and more intolerant of criticism and the paternalistic interest taken in him by Vittore. In 1886, he placed himself under the protection of Alberto Grubicy, stipulating a power of attorney agreement with him in place of the one stipulated in 1883; he gradually broke away from Vittore, with whom he maintained



Giovanni Segantini,
The two Mothers,
1889, oil on canvas,
157x280 cm (Milan,
Gallery of Modern Art)

a bond of friendship until 1891, which excluded any interference in artistic matters.

In 1889 Segantini took part in the International Art Exhibition in Paris with eight paintings, where he won a gold medal for *Cows at the Trough* (*Vacche aggiate*), painted the year before, and was unconditionally acclaimed by the critics. During the same year he painted *The Two Mothers* (*Le due madri*) which he presented in 1891 at the Triennial Exhibition in Brera and in 1896 he was awarded the State gold medal at the exhibition in Vienna. *Savognin in Snow* (*Savognin sotto la neve*) and *Return from the Wood* (*Ritorno dal bosco*), both painted in 1890, are two of the most intense works produced by Segantini, who imbues the vision of nature with a world of interior spirituality.

In addition to producing paintings, during this period Segantini devoted himself to publishing essays on problems of aesthetics, which bear witness to the extent of his philosophy. The passages written by Segantini on the theory of art express the necessity that the artist claims for himself: that of not only being a brush, but a brain. He also wrote the script for a melodrama, thereby demonstrating that he shared the conception of the relationship between the arts, but which due to its complexity was never ever set to music. Starting from the end of the Eighties, under the influence of European Symbolism, Segantini developed a sacred conception of art understood as a means capable of enabling man to reach the greatness of universal sentiments and to give expression to the uncon-

scious, the fantastic, the powerful energies of the invisible world.

My grandfather was deeply impressed by reading the poem Nirvana by Luigi Illica. It deals with refused motherhood, and the punishment of these bad mothers who must endure prolonged suffering to obtain redemption. This gave him the idea and inspiration for his first symbolist works. He always condemned women who only want to enjoy pleasure, and in The Punishment of Lust (Il castigo delle Lussuriose), painted in 1891, he expressed this condemnation; two twisted women, suspended in mid-air, wander in a desolate, barren wasteland. Three years later, in The Evil Mothers (Le cattive madri), he portrayed Illica's entire poem, from punishment to redemption; the trees seem to blossom again with the life that is created with motherhood and the mother obtains the forgiveness of her child.

The Angel of Life (L'angelo della vita) was painted at the same time as this latter work, of which it is the antithesis and complement, and to which *Fruit of Love (Il frutto dell'amore)*, painted in 1889, served as a prelude.

Despite the fact that he was not in a particularly well-to-do financial condition, Segantini lived in a beautiful, big, tastefully and luxuriously furnished house. In August 1894, because of his debts, he was forced to leave Savognin. He moved to Engadine, to Maloja, where he rented the Kuoni chalet. Here he lived with his family, with the exception of the winter months when he moved to Soglio, which enjoyed a milder climate.

In the same year several of his works, shown in a large one-man exhibition at the "Esposizioni riunite" in the Sforza Castle, did not meet with vast approval. However, in 1895 he won a medal at the 1st Biennial International Exhibition of Modern Art in Venice with *Return to the native Land* (*Paese natio*), and an issue of "Pan", the review of the Secession of Berlin, was dedicated entirely to him. It was precisely from the Germanic countries that the artist received important recognitions: in 1897 the first monograph on Segantini, written by William Richter, was published in Vienna, while *Love at the Fount of Life* (*L'amore alle fonti di vita*) won the golden plaque at the 1st International Exhibition in Dresden; in 1898



Sketch sent by Segantini to the critic, Vittorio Pica, to illustrate the project of the Engadine pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900 (St. Moritz, Segantini Museum)



“Ver Sacrum”, the review of the Secession of Vienna, published one of his articles *What is Art (Che cos'è l'arte)*, which theorises on the social aims of art, in reply to a question by Tolstoy.

The solitary years in Engadine mark a return to nature in Segantini's work, in a grandiose dimension which reaches points of extraordinary equilibrium with the symbolic-idealistic component.

From as early as 1896, Segantini had been working on the project of the *Panorama of Engadine (Panorama dell'Engadina)* for the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1900, an attempt to reproduce the panorama of that alpine region by visual means, lighting, sound and even hydraulic devices. *Life, Nature and Death (La Vita, La Natura e La Morte)*, the three scenic works of the spectacular *Triptych*, an outstanding example of synthesis between sentiment and nature, were all that remained of the project, which fell through due to organisational and economic difficulties.

In these paintings, the artist expressed himself fully, as if totally freed from the worldly contingencies that he had so painfully suffered; consolation and peace waft over the human being, determined to blend into this nature which, being eternal, blooms again each spring. More than ever before, his art opens up to eternity and the infinite; even when faced with death, his sense of serene acceptance seemed to be illuminated by a light coming from afar.

A few days before going up to the Schafberg, where he intended to go to finish the central painting of the Triptych, my grandfather was in his library resting. Bice walked in. Thinking she had disturbed him as he slept, she apologised: “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you”. “No, I wasn't asleep – replied my grand-father – but I had the feeling that the dead person they were carrying out was me”.

Almost a presentiment of the sudden untimely death that was to take him in his prime on the Schafberg on 28th September 1899 and bring to an end the intense human story of this great poet of nature.

* Consultant of Banca Popolare di Sondrio for cultural activities

** Granddaughter of Giovanni Segantini

The interior of the chalet on the Schafberg, above Pontresina, where Segantini died.



Giovanni Segantini: a forerunner of contemporary art

by Beat Stutzer *



Giovanni Segantini, **Noon in the Alps** (details),
1891, oil on canvas, 77.5x71.5 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini Museum, on trust by the
Otto Fischbacher Foundation of St. Gall)

Advertising postcard for an exhibition of Segantini's works, set up in 1906 in Milan at the Grubicy Gallery.

Towards the close of the 19th century, with the colossal triptych entitled *Life, Nature, Death*, Giovanni Segantini created one of the last and most significant programmatic works of his period. Devised as a monumental cycle to be displayed at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900, Segantini intended it to be a portrayal of human existence in perfect harmony with nature. In fact, the simple rural figures and animals depicted in it move within the perpetual cycle of the seasons. In addition, with the imposing panorama of the alpine landscape of Engadine, the artist created a pantheistic view of an extraordinary figurative impact, a winning pictorial counterproposal to the harsh and oppressive reality of metropolitan industrialisation. Segantini's international fame, as well as his merit in the history of art, are linked to the original co-existence in his works of nature, viewed in a non-critical manner, and a profoundly symbolic intrinsic value. The artist managed to make the alpine landscape, captured in all its nuances and without excessive illusionism, converge into allegorical images of extraordinary radiance. While on the one hand Segantini, with his views of the Alps, can be seen as one of the leading represen-

tatives of European symbolism, on the other, Italian Divisionism, which was considerably influenced by him, can consider him to be an innovator of pictorial art. And it is precisely in the paintings of the Divisionists that we can discover the secret of the radiance of Segantini's paintings. The Divisionist technique (characterised by fine brushstrokes of pure colour, very close to one another) represents his decisive contribution to the avant-garde trends shortly before the advent of the new century. Innovative and revolutionary, it had such an enormous influence on the subsequent generations of artists, that even the Italian futurists, the contemporary iconoclasts, upheld Segantini as their model of inspiration.

Milan and the retreat in Brianza

At seven years of age, Giovanni Segantini lost his mother and the following year also his father. The memories of his early childhood were so deeply impressed in his heart as to induce him to describe them several times during the course of his life – for example in his autobiography – and to turn them into a parable of his desire to return to the origins of life and to the maternal figure. In doing so, Segantini managed to tackle and overcome all the many adversities and to attend the Academy of Art in Brera, despite his poor level of education. In 1880 he set up his first studio in Via San Marco 28 and at only 21 years of age he gained his first success with the painting, *St. Anthony's Choir*, a work that revealed the great skill of the artist in the perspective construction of distances and in portraying characters, in addition to his ability to create masterly plays of light capable of contrasting with the internal darkness of the church, cleaved by a few beams of sunlight penetrating through a window.

In October 1881 Segantini moved to Brianza, in the region of the lakes, hills, fog and sudden changes of light. Here, he lived in different places, in search of rural reality and its animals, a theme which from that moment on became dominant in his art.

Segantini's first artistic production in Milan and in Brianza was influenced by the Lombard school of painting, by the Milanese Academy, and by the requirements and tastes of the local upper middle classes. In particular, in the numerous portraits and still life paint-





ings, the figurative genres at that time preferred by the artist, Segantini tackled painting with a sense of the realistic, and consequently more in compliance with tradition than with the pre-impressionist search for new forms of expression and new styles. His still-life paintings nevertheless met with such enormous success among the Milanese middle classes, as to constitute a steady and welcome source of income for the artist.

Besides the portraits and still lifes, Segantini introduced existential themes into his works by means of idyllic genre paintings and portrayals of rural landscapes, which represented with meticulous observation the human race in its relationship with the surrounding environment and with animals, and underlined the intrinsic value of these atmospheres by means of masterly contrasts of light and shade. In their close, familiar relationship with the shepherd, of a profound symbolic nature and therefore seen as the Good Shepherd, in this artistic phase, the sheep or the lamb represented the figurative motifs preferred by Segantini.

In the same way as many other artists had done, Segantini also broke away from mythological and religious subjects, as the Academy understood them, and opted for themes and situations taken from everyday life. Precisely for this reason, genre painting has very often been compared with realism, because through it everyday life entered by right into the world of art. First in France, and then in the rest of Europe, this type of realistic painting,

with its diverse manifestations poised between concrete reality and an ideal world, created an important trend which laid the foundations for the subsequent developments. Segantini's subjects originated from his meditations about his own origins as a man and very soon discovered their *humus* in the rural life of Brianza. Starting from his daily relations with farmers and shepherds, the artist managed to go beyond individual experiences, in favour of a generalising relationship with a world understood in the collective sense. All portrayed with a very concrete realism. Like his model of inspiration, Jean-François Millet, Segantini depicted the toil of farm work and the hardships of rural life in situations very often imbued with profound melancholy. The scenes of everyday country life were at the same time associated with a description of the human conditions of simple farmers and shepherds, and the artist consequently appealed to the sentiments of the observer, standing before the portrayal of the main human emotions and passions, such as pain and love, grief and happiness.

One of his masterpieces of the Brianza period is the work, *Early Mass* (page XXIV). In a decidedly widened format, here we see portrayed the imposing staircase leading to the courtyard of the church of Veduggio, near Pusiano. As well as on the staircase, skilfully depicted in its dematerialising in the dim light of the morning sky, the attention of the observer is focused on the figure of the priest who, with his mind absorbed, advances up the wide

Giovanni Segantini,
**Return from the
Wood**, 1890, oil
on canvas, 64.5x95.5 cm
(St. Moritz,
Segantini Museum,
on trust by the
Otto Fischbacher
Foundation of St. Gall)



steps, on his way to celebrate Mass. It is particularly interesting to note that the original version of the painting contemplated the presence of a pregnant woman with a dog, depicted as they descend the staircase and being mocked from behind by three corpulent monks (page XXV). But with the final version of the painting, Segantini managed to repress the anticlerical message thanks to a subsequent pictorial layer.

The first version of the painting, *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, was accomplished in Pusiano in 1882, while only in 1886 in Savognin did the artist paint over it, making use of the Divisionist technique (page XXII). Unlike French Divisionism, where the unmixed colours are applied in small dots which assume half-tone forms, Segantini used brushstrokes in the form of small commas or laid on the colours in very close proximity to one another. In this way, he not only managed to enhance the luminescent force of the colours, but also to render the structure and materiality of all the subjects depicted in diverse *nuances* of colour, while still retaining a compact, homogeneous unity. The complementary colours were not mixed on the palette, but used pure, to be able to preserve their full radiance. The painting, *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake* is not only one of Segantini's masterpieces, but also an icon of the late 19th century; in fact, it is one of those paintings which are included in the great universal repertoire of mankind and stand as figurative subjects *par excellence*, since they are very familiar to entire generations for their

innumerable reproductions on calendars, confirmation certificates or letters of condolence; due to its extremely vast popularity it can be found in almost every classroom and in many bedrooms. The painting shows the view from Pusiano, which over-looks the Lake of the same name and extends towards the opposite shore, with a church on the horizon. The main subject is a small boat containing, huddled together, an oarsman, a young mother with her child and a small flock of sheep. The young family is depicted in deep contemplation, after hearing the toll of the church bells in the distance. Here nature is a place of religious spirituality, with divine light to illuminate the scene; in fact, the sun which has just set on the horizon irradiates the vault of heaven. The reflection of the little boat against the light and its arched frames allowed the artist to make the central motif of the painting his main theme, of a formal and at the same time metaphorical value.

The glow of the mountains

In August 1886 Giovanni Segantini settled in Savognin, a village of the Oberhalbstein in the Grisons. In the winter of 1886-67 Vittore Grubicy also came to stay. He wanted to update his artist friend on the innovations in the field of painting. As he had done in Brianza, in this region Segantini again depicted peasants and shepherds in their everyday life, but this time no longer in the foggy atmosphere of Brianza, but in the crystal-clear light of the alpine landscape. In breaking away from realist genre painting, Segantini was a true

Giovanni Segantini,
The Evil Mothers,
1894, oil on canvas,
120x225 cm (Vienna,
Österreichische Galerie
Belvedere)

master, since he managed to evoke particular emotions of great intensity by means of pictorial instruments. In his painting *Return from the Wood* (page XV), the dim glow of twilight and the pure whiteness of the snow manage perfectly to convey the feeling of a bitterly cold winter evening. The icy cold is very effectively highlighted by contrast with the warmth of the candlelit windows of the distant houses of the mountain village. In the foreground, a peasant woman depicted from behind heads homeward pulling a sled overloaded with firewood; with great difficulty she had managed to procure the gnarled trunks and roots to be able to light a fire and prepare a meagre meal. The painting aims to symbolise the hard, humble life of the peasants living in the mountains and how they survive the cold, alpine winter. At the same time it is an allegory based on life and death; the fallen snow whitening the mountains, meadows and roofs is seen as an almost suffocating and oppressive element, which exposes the woman to a disheartening, inescapable solitude.

In his work, *My Models* (*I miei modelli*, page XVI), the artist, as usual, took people from his circle of acquaintances as his models. There is a young couple, in a reddish cone of light created by a lamp, reminiscent of Caravaggio, contemplating a painting set on an easel; they are Barbara Uffer, nicknamed Baba, the nursery governess of the artist's family, and a young farmer, their cook's son. The title of the painting has a double meaning: the two

paintings in the painting exhibited in a peasant's house are, on the one hand, a large painting entitled *The Plough* (*L'aratura*) and, on the other, a small unfinished painting, *Return to the Fold* (*Ritorno all'ovile*). In both paintings, even the animals, which need the daily care and attention of the two peasants lost in contemplation before the painting, appear to be "models" for the artist. However, they are not depicted in their usual reality, but in a transcendent reality, that of a work of art. The painting *Noon in the Alps* (*Mezzogiorno sulle Alpi*, page XII) is a particular example of Segantini's skill in reproducing the glow and radiance of alpine light. Against the background of a vast landscape, encompassed by imposing snow-clad peaks, stands a young shepherdess in her blue working clothes. In her left hand she is holding her staff, while in her right hand she is holding the brim of her straw hat as she shades her eyes from the sun. The intense, blinding light, still high in the sky, vibrates the whole landscape. The light breeze, in which the two little birds flutter free in the blue sky full of light, inspired the original title of the painting *Windy Day* (*Giornata ventosa*).

The last years in Engadine

In 1894 Segantini moved with his family to upper Engadine, where he rented the Kuoni chalet on the Maloja. From 1896 he also spent the winter months in Soglio, in Bregaglia, where he made the acquaintance of the local



painter Giovanni Giacometti, and Oskar Bernhard, a doctor and art collector from St. Moritz. In Engadine Segantini discovered extraordinary new subjects and interesting atmospheres, thanks to which his last works attained the highest artistic level. In a letter addressed to the writer, Neera (Anna Radius Zuccari), on the 15th January 1896, Segantini wrote that he had finally identified, in that area, the ultimate objective of his incessant searches, namely full and complete knowledge of nature in all its nuances, from dawn to sunset. He declared that in the effort to reproduce all the forms of creation, both man and beast, he was complying with an inner passion, aimed at creating works intended and destined to become the ideal model of perfection.

In Engadine Segantini strengthened the intrinsic symbolic value of his pictorial production. This is what emerges, among other things, from the famous painting, *The Evil Mothers*, (page XVII) centred upon the punishment of the woman who infringes the



sacred principle of motherhood. As purgatory and place of atonement the artist chose a desolate, frozen mountain plain, where the mother is portrayed with her child in a strange twisting and turning in the gnarled branches of a tree. In the background, on the left, appear three other stations of the mother's ordeal, from her punishment to her final redemption. Segantini transformed a literary manuscript (the poem, *Nirvana*, of Indian inspiration, composed by Luigi Illica) into a decidedly unique and original figurative interpretation. Despite the unreality of the theme it deals with, one of the most splendid snow-clad landscapes ever painted is represented. The artist himself spoke about a "symphony com-

posed of white and blue, of silver and gold"⁵. Segantini had always been deeply interested in the symbolic theme of motherhood. His painting, *The Angel of Life* (*L'angelo della vita*, page XXVI) marked a turning point in his work, which went from substantially naturalistic painting to a mystic-type symbolism. In the place of the mother depicted in a gelid environment and in the branch of a tree as in *The Evil Mothers*, here the artist represented the mother closely and affectionately embracing her child. In reality, it is the transfiguration of the Virgin Mary, who triumphs over death above the deep chasms of the lakeside landscape. With the allegorical and mystic transformation of the theme of motherhood into the natural essence of the tree, the landscape and the sky, with his paintings Segantini approaches the Pre-Raphaelite English painters.

The high opinion that Segantini had of himself is fully revealed in the *Self portrait* of 1895 (page XVIII). He is shown frontally, head and shoulders, filling the space entirely and placing himself in front of a gloomy distant mountain horizon and the sky. The gravity, typical of the icon, of the human figure thus portrayed, his piercing look and the facial features inevitably result in the subject being identified as the son of God. The gold dust used also contributes towards underlining this sacred impression. This figurative painting recalls the famous *Self portrait* by Albrecht Dürer of 1500, in which the artist unequivocally aims to portray himself as Jesus Christ. In his role as an artist, Segantini considered himself precisely as one chosen by God, a true "*deus artifex*": "Art as a divine duty"⁶, he claimed, thereby complying with the conception of the artist seen as a priest and bearer of absolute truths.

Since 1896 Segantini had been planning *Panorama of Engadine* for the International Exhibition in Paris in 1900, a work that fell through due to the exorbitant costs to be sustained. So he devoted himself mainly to *Life*, *Nature*, *Death*, the paintings that compose the famous *Alpine Triptych* (*Trittico della natura*). The preparatory sketches show that the paintings of the cycle of life were to be structured within a frame with medallions and lunettes, a figurative architecture which would have given them an even more solemn, metaphoric character. In the first painting

Giovanni Segantini, *Self portrait*, 1895, charcoal drawing with touches of gold dust and white chalk, 59x50 cm (St. Moritz, Segantini Museum)



(page XIX) the landscape of Soglio was used by Segantini to symbolise “the life of all the living creatures of the universe, which find their roots in mother earth”⁷. The mother and child on the stump of a tree, the herdsman driving a cow to the pasture, the two women on their way down from a hill animate the imposing alpine landscape, in which the mountain ranges are illuminated by the last rays of the late afternoon sun. The central painting (page XX) is distinguished by a perfectly symmetrical deep horizon, where the autumnal panorama meanders from the Schafberg to Upper Engadine, comprising expanses of deep blue lake water and a few houses of St. Moritz. On the alpine footpath which climbs slightly to the left a peasant leads a small herd of cows into the depths of the painting, followed on the right by a woman with a calf and a cow. The setting sun illuminates the sky with its golden light, which resembles an enormous halo, thus transforming the silent, peaceful unfolding of a normal working day, which has now come to an end, and giving it an atmosphere full of devotion. The third painting (page XXI) shows the surroundings of Maloja with a view towards Val Maroz, in Bregaglia. To use Segantini’s own words, the picture intends to portray “the death of all things”⁸. In fact, on the one hand, it is symbolised by the winter season, with its bitter cold weather and the oppressive weight of the snow, and on the other it is clearly referred to by the depicted event: a body is carried out of a house to be taken to the cemetery, loaded onto a sled ready to leave. However, an element of consolation and hope can be inferred: the road that the body must take leads into the depths

of the painting, where the morning sun, which has just risen peeps between the peaks of the mountains, and where an imaginary cloud formation, laden with mystery, alludes to a celestial presence and a new life after death. Despite his difficult childhood and his problematic adolescence and in spite of all the adverse circumstances, Segantini managed to make a name for himself as an artist thanks to his undeterred willpower. His growing success was accompanied by his social ascent. As a successful artist he lived a life of luxury. The representation of his youthful experiences, which Bianca, his daughter, decided to publish for the first time in 1909, should be understood as a posthumous self-affirmation of the artist of success, who attempted to free himself from the traumas of childhood by creating an “individual myth”.

In September 1899 Segantini went up to the Schafberg to devote himself to the central painting of the *Triptych*. On 18th September he suffered an acute attack of peritonitis, and on the 28th of the same month he died. His friend, Oskar Bernhard, his son, Mario, and his lifelong companion, Bice, were at his bedside.

Acclaimed and disparaged

While he was alive, and at least from when he settled down in Savognin in August 1886, Giovanni Segantini was an artist of extraordinary success. After the favourable criticism he received for the first version of the painting, *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, at the Exhibition in Amsterdam in 1883, the honours and praises followed in swift succession. Consequently, it is not surprising to

Giovanni Segantini, *Life*, 1896-1899, oil on canvas, 190x322 cm (St. Moritz, Segantini Museum, on permanent loan by the Gottfried Keller Foundation)



note that his landscapes were paid the highest prices of the time, and that even his less representative works reached exorbitant prices until 1914. In addition to the numerous important exhibitions set up in the international cities of art, the purchase of his masterpieces for wellknown collections and museums created a further reason for his precocious presence in numerous European cities. Segantini's enormous fame was twofold. The medals and honours he received came from the so-called "official" route, respectful of academic traditions; this earned him the epithet of "drawing-room painter" and "pompiere" artist. At the same time, however, Segantini was also acclaimed by the avant-garde movement, by the pioneers, for his innovative and progressive art. With the exhibitions in Paris and Vienna, two years after his death, the artist was literally adored and his triumph was complete; from that moment on he was hailed as one of the most celebrated artists of his time, and as one of the most extraordinary masters of symbolism. Until the outbreak of the First World War, his art was celebrated throughout Europe. A large crowd of admirers welcomed his message as though it were one of the Gospels. The height, and a particularly obvious sign, of the veneration of Segantini is the Museum in St. Moritz, dedicated to him, which was inaugurated on 28th September 1908, exactly nine years after his death. The view enjoyed from the central building and the majestic dome, situated in a position jutting out over the lake of St. Moritz, comes to rest on the Schafberg, where Segantini died suddenly in 1899. In actual fact, the Museum is a sort of mausoleum, a monument that can be visited, a place of memory

and of glorification in the form of hewn stone. This great love came to an abrupt end in the Twenties. Segantini's symbolism fell into disgrace, as did the works of the various artists Arnold Böcklin, Max Klinger, James McNeill Whistler and Franz von Stuck. As of 1903, with the publication of *Modern Art (Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst)*, a fundamental work by Julius Meier-Graefe, the interest of art historians was focused almost exclusively on the innovations and pioneer techniques adopted and proposed primarily by French art. From that moment on the attention of critics and art historians was addressed to those artistic productions that had contributed towards the introduction of certain radical changes in the perception and meaning of figurative pictures towards the end of the 19th century and had thereby explicitly complied with the avant-garde concept. Segantini's substantial contributions to art were completely overlooked; his giving free rein to colour, ridding it of melancholic, oppressive tones so that it could be directed towards a crystal-clear purity and luminous radiance, and his constituting a fundamental point of reference for the futurism which was to follow.

During the Fifties Segantini came back into favour because of his adventurous life full of suffering, on which a number of legends were based. He was included among the most well-loved and popular artists, and acknowledged as the "mountain painter"; thanks to artistic prints and reproductions produced in millions of copies, his works had become familiar and dear to the public at large. His mountain paintings depicted the serene harmony of a world supposed to be uncontami-

Giovanni Segantini,
Nature, 1897-1899, oil
on canvas, 235x403 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini
Museum, on permanent
loan by the Gottfried
Keller Foundation)

nated and now lost. However, Segantini was soon criticised by a number of experts, according to whom his art could be classified as outdated, nostalgic, sentimental and moralising. Moreover, he was reproached for taking refuge in the mountains to escape from the reality of proletarianism and an increasingly industrialised world, to paint pictures lacking any mention of the social problems of the time.

The now compromised reputation of Giovanni Segantini, considered nostalgic and traditionalist, left deep traces in its wake. This is due to the fact that the analysis of his artistic production was, for a long time and almost exclusively, concentrated on content, thereby overlooking pictorial quality and consequently earning very little consent. With the Divisionism technique Segantini managed to achieve truly unique and revolutionary pictures of snow-clad fields and summer landscapes, thanks to the vitality and radiance of the colours used, to the point that subsequent generations of artists drew inspiration from them. First with the great retrospective exhibition of 1990 in the Kunsthaus of Zurich, and later with the exhibitions in the Kunstmuseum of St. Gall and the Segantini Museum in St. Moritz on the occasion of the centenary of the death of the artist, his art regained vast consensus, worthy of this great mas-

one “of the greatest representatives of the great landscape tradition”⁹, together with Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, Ferdinand Hodler, Paul Cezanne and Claude Monet. In the first place, was it the obvious interest in contents, in symbolist themes, which really distracted the attention from the artist’s extraordinary pictorial qualities? Or perhaps the question is another one, and namely: among the works of the period there by chance any snow-covered winter landscapes or summer landscapes more beautiful and more convincing, or even only comparable, in terms of colours and intensity of light, than those we can see and admire in *Return from the Wood* or *Noon in the Alps*?

* Superintendent of the Segantini Museum in St. Moritz and Director of the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur



ter. It substantially consisted of a final “rereading” of Segantini from scratch. However, it may come as no surprise, in the opinion of Christian Klemm, if his art “were still to remain strangely isolated with respect to the customary treatments and discussions concerning the artistic production of the end of the 19th century”, even though Segantini was

Giovanni Segantini,
Death, 1898-1899, oil
on canvas, 190x322 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini
Museum, on permanent
loan by the Gottfried
Keller Foundation)



The poetry of Segantini in St. Gall

by Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei *



I fell in love with Segantini in St. Gall, a favourable city for lasting love. You enter the museum through a small park, with a rose-garden and an aviary which look as though they had been transported by air from Italy. It was 1999, an exhibition was being held featuring the works of the Fischbacher Foundation, created by the generosity of an art collector whose family is culturally and economically a central part of this Canton, in which I spent several years of my life. On other occasions, in St. Moritz, Milan, Vienna and Zurich I had inattentively come across paintings by this artist, but they left me unmoved. Many things seemed to me to be known and taken for granted. His distressed, vagabond childhood, his first job as a shoemaker, being thrown into a reformatory, attending evening art courses and then studying at the Brera Academy of Art, freedom from need and his introduction to the international purchasing public after attracting the attention of the famous art merchants, Grubicy. The painting, *Early Mass*, first possessed by Albert Grubicy and then by Umberto Tossi, had come in fact from Milan. It featured a priest viewed from behind on the steps. I found him there in front of me like a strange carrion-bird in his black cassock and wide-brimmed hat, in the first hall of the Kunst-

and sentimentally two-tone artist. *Early Mass* is a second version, it harbours a second meaning and transmits a second message. In this painting Segantini, like certain avant-garde “effacing poets”, concealed part of the portrayal already made, censored, isolated the only surviving character from the context and shows us the exact opposite of what he had previously conceived.

Paradoxically, he accumulated new meaning by subtraction. He re-used the composition and architectural structure of *The Malicious Comments (I commenti maligni)*, a painting that he had successfully exhibited in Turin in 1882. In this first painting he told the story of three clergymen, a pregnant woman and a little dog who were the characters of a figurative anecdote with an explicit anticlerical flavour. He assisted for those who had not understood with this subtitle: “Not absolved”. The new painting, which after the cancellation leaves only one priest on the dilated and metaphysical steps of the eighteenth-century church of Veduggio, appears to be quite the opposite. The scenario becomes impoverished and widened, transmitting a new meaning. However, the X-ray examination confirms that beneath it there is the old painting, memory and conscience of the new one. It seems to me that materially and intellectu-



ally different, but not antithetical, symbolisms are thus stratified. The concoction of real and imaginary elements, used by the artist, has wonderfully ambiguous outcomes. It is hard to understand, and this is a further enrichment, whether it is an expedient or the proposal of a further view of the world.

Segantini's magic cipher becomes easily decipherable, when reread in this Canton, which on certain days has the same singular light. The aura surrounding these paintings by Segantini resembles that of the apple and cherry orchards on the nearby shores of Lake Costance. This aura acts as a magnifying lens for the little mysteries of an ideologically

ally different, but not antithetical, symbolisms are thus stratified. The concoction of real and imaginary elements, used by the artist, has wonderfully ambiguous outcomes. It is hard to understand, and this is a further enrichment, whether it is an expedient or the proposal of a further view of the world.

Segantini undoubtedly manages to communicate the incapacity of his and our day and age to pray. The priest climbs the steps without raising his eyes to heaven. The church is architecturally rendered, and yet on the can-

Giovanni Segantini,
Early Mass,
1885-1886, oil on canvas,
108x211 cm (St. Moritz,
Segantini Museum, on
trust by the Otto
Fischbacher Foundation
of St. Gall)



was it is lacking, both as a construction, and as a sacral suggestion. There is no trace of the Absent One. But there is the splendid light of the Absent One. It is Segantini's real secret. This Italian light transported to the shores of the Lake Costance intrigues me; it is the light of a dawn with a strong presence, like that of the divinity that has escaped from these canvases. It is a maternal light. The artist always cherished loving, light-filled memories of his mother, Margherita Girardi, who died when he was seven years old, and used to tell his friends that she was as "beautiful as a sunset". It was out of love for her and love for himself and his homeland that he painted dawns or sunsets as a way of narrating life. The brightness of the dawn in this painting makes the blue of the sky more intense and the small moon in one corner of the panorama whiter. In the distance, in the day that has already arrived, the moon of *Early Mass* does not go, but remains just as we remain, because, like us, it wants to know how the story ends, what can be seen, all resting on the curved shoulders of the solitary priest, and what cannot be seen, hidden but not cancelled by the painter. If she was not absolved, as the subtitle says, what happened to the poor pregnant woman of the first edition of the painting, covered by the subsequent impasto of colours?

The light is created here by the colours, but by what psychic depths and by what unsolved relationships with the invisible were Segantini's colours in turn created? Faithful to nature and to its presence, which can be erased less easily than that of man, Segantini narrated scraps of truth veiled by his inner shyness.

I find this same sensation of modesty if not of mystery in another painting belonging to

the Fischbacher Foundation, *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*. It is the first attempt at Divisionism in the Italian context, and consequently an exceptional document. The unity of the colours and of the scene is shattered, but not dispersed; the meaning recomposes the unity. The light is at one and the same time that of evening and of dawn. Sunrise and sunset in Segantini become the same thing, as for the ancient alchemists.

There is an inner as well as pictorial motive in this enchantment that I also find in the third and fourth paintings of the Fischbacher Foundation, *Return from the Wood* and *Noon in the Alps*. I sat down to observe them on a bench at the Kunstmuseum and I heard concert music. I thought it was coming from the Tonhalle, the auditorium which stands a hundred metres away on the same Museumstrasse, but it wasn't. It was Segantini's paintings playing. They literally played a symphony of the blues, greens, greys and whites in the long alpine winter, which embraced the faceless woman and her sled on the snow; they played a slow waltz of the vermilion red, blue, ochre and yellow of the shepherdess and her sheep.

Segantini's women, like those of the Fischbacher Foundation of St. Gall, which has gathered together some of his most beautiful works and offers them to the pleasure of the world, are "rose petals". This is the title of another painting, belonging to a different private collection. These portraits guard the enigmatic cipher of Segantini, painter loved by modern man for his capacity not only reveal but to enable the observer to intuitively sense much more than meets the eye.

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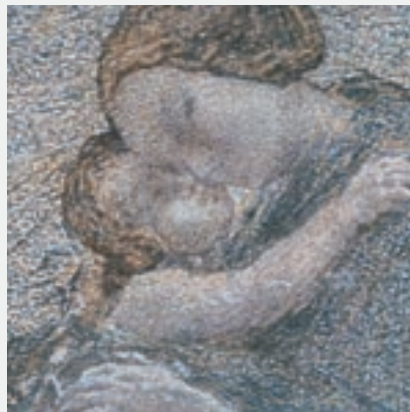
Giovanni Segantini,
**The Malicious
Comments or Not
absolved**, 1884-1885,
oil on canvas,
108x211 cm (visible
by X-ray under
Early Mass, St. Moritz,
Segantini Museum,
on trust by the
Otto Fischbacher
Foundation of St. Gall)



From Livigno to Maloja

Dominant themes of Valtellina in the artistic biography of Giovanni Segantini

by Franco Monteforte *





In the spring of 1886 Giovanni Segantini left the Lake of Pusiano and Brianza for good. His debts were mounting, and so was the hostility of the people towards that half crazy fellow with long hair and an unkempt beard, who expected them to serve him without being paid, surrounded himself at home with models and never went to church. Bice, his companion, had just given birth to their fourth daughter, Bianca, and Segantini was increasingly in need of money. But, more than money, he needed love and affection around him, two things that up until that moment life had denied him. For this reason he had immediately gone to live with Bice Bugatti, the sister of his friend at the Academy, Carlo Bugatti, the famous artisan cabinet-maker of Liberty-style furniture, father of Ettore, the designer of the legendary Bugatti racing car; for this reason he had forsaken the quarrelsome Milanese artistic environments, for Brianza, where the simplicity of nature and country life had whetted his creative powers, and the monthly cheque of 200 Lire from the art gallery of the Grubicy brothers, to whom he had made over his rights on his entire production (including that of signing his paintings), had enabled him to devote himself entirely to his artistic work, and maintain his large family in comfortable circumstances. It was here that he painted the first version, now destroyed, of *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, for which he was awarded first prize in Amsterdam, the magnificent *Early Mass* and *At the Rail*, the only one of his paintings to have been purchased by the Italian government for the Gallery of

Modern Art in Rome, in which Segantini had brought the expressive potentials of tonal colour, mixed on the palette or directly on the canvas, to the height of perfection in rendering the luminous texture of the grass and nature. But it was precisely in these works that the colour reached those limits of luminosity that Segantini tried in vain to surpass and the light remained as though imprisoned in the chromatic impasto and, with it, also that vague feeling of harmonious and religious blending between man and nature that lies at the base of all his work.

Apart from debts and the hostility of the people, this was perhaps the profound reason that forced him to move elsewhere. Hence, after a few months in Milan, in the summer of 1886, Segantini set off with Bice in search of a new place in which to settle down and after looking for it around Como, he headed towards Valtellina. Why Valtellina? He was certainly not told about it by Emilio Longoni, who had been with Segantini for a few years in Brianza but who only went to Valtellina to paint after 1902, when the railway was inaugurated. Perhaps he had heard about it from Alberto and Vittore Grubicy, who as young boys had been to boarding-school in Sondrio, from where they had run away to join Garibaldi on the Stelvio Pass, or from his friends of the Milanese Scapigliatura Movement, who went to take the ferruginous waters at Santa Caterina Valfurva. Without doubt, as Raffaele Calzini explains, it must have been described to him by "Carlinett de la Madonna", who modelled for him in Pusiano, and had travelled up and down the road of the Stelvio Pass.

Giovanni Segantini,
At the Rail,
1886, oil on canvas,
169x389.5 cm
(Rome, National Gallery
of Modern Art)

Segantini and Bice Bugatti arrived in Bormio and from there they continued until they reached Livigno. According to Reto Roedel, they were so deeply impressed with the valley of Livigno, so gentle, wild and deserted, as to decide to settle down there¹⁰. Segantini never made mention of Livigno in his writings and in his letters, and what we know of his short-lived stay we owe to the account made by Grubicy and by Bice Bugatti, on whose memories Raffaele Calzini probably based the famous episode in his romanticised novel of the life of Segantini, which contributed greatly to the artist's legend¹¹.

“The arrival of the sooty, black-bearded Segantini accompanied by a beautiful blonde creature – writes Calzini – attracted the attention of the whole village. It was a Saturday evening (the day of witchcraft); the two wayfarers were grudgingly given hospitality. The gestures and words of the mysterious couple were watched and discussed by the head of the village. The man's piercing look, the interest he took in everything aroused suspicion. It seemed that he carried a book in which he did not write words but drew strange undecipherable signs. The parish priest advised the town clerk to carry out a summary interrogation. Where did they come from? What was their occupation? What was their nationality? What was their religion? Segante's somewhat metaphysical, ironical answers increased their amazement. Their astonishment turned to hostility and later to anger. The next morning, instead of going to Mass, the couple had the terrified innkeeper serve them bread and salami and then set off for the mountains; the man carrying a book to write and the woman – unbelievable disgrace – a book to read! The people rebelled against the intruders who were forced to leave in great haste followed by not very benevolent words and by even less benevolent volleys of stones from the young boys”.

Is that what really happened? It is difficult to say. Segantini was not fond of remembering hostile episodes and his handbooks of notes, sketches and drawings have unfortunately been lost. However, if we are to believe Calzini, “he never spoke bitterly about the episode; he just smiled”.

But he did not smile any longer when, on leaving Livigno he arrived in Tirano, where the welcome was certainly no warmer and where undoubtedly something happened that wounded him so deeply that he decided to write a little-known letter to the Roman newspaper, “La Riforma”, which was later published by many newspapers in Milan and by the twice-weekly review of Valtellina, “La Provincia”¹².

“After an extremely distressing alpine crossing with my wife prostrate with fatigue, – wrote Segantini – upon our arrival at the Post-house hotel in Tirano in Valtellina, instead of the rest we were looking forward to, we were seriously troubled by the insolent, insulting witticism and quips that a group of local gentlemen sitting at a nearby table took the liberty of aiming at us, just to relieve their empty boredom.

An officer of the Carabinieri, who was part of the group, seeing that I had stood up indignantly and was about to lose my temper, ordered them to stop, which they did. But the fact is that, immediately afterwards, this defender of law and order and uniformed representative of authority, seemed to have taken on alone the task of provoking and the pleasure of making a poor devil, who was not doing



Segantini in a photographic portrait taken in 1885.

anyone any harm, go off the deep end by planting himself for half an hour in front of my wife (who with her feet ruined was unable to move), staring at her with ridiculous, not to say, offensive insistence, despite the repeated demonstrations of annoyance and scorn on her part. The looks thrown in my direction were not devoid of significance; they seemed to say: "Open your mouth and I'll have you flung in jail". I had no choice, I had to put up with it.

So much for the unctuous eclogues on the hospitality of our good-hearted mountain dwellers and on the extolled protection that the authorities offer to peace-loving citizens! Keep clear of them!"

The letter, no doubt corrected by his friend, Enrico Dalbesio, or perhaps by Vittore Grubicy, who at that time was the art critic of the Roman Liberal newspaper, was sent from Milan to "La Provincia", owned by Emilio Quadrio, who had just moved to Valtellina with his publishing house from the capital



Giovanni Segantini, **Portrait of his fiancée Bice Bugatti or Study for the head of a blonde young woman**, 1878-1879, oil on canvas, 36.5x28 cm (Milan, Gallery of Modern Art)

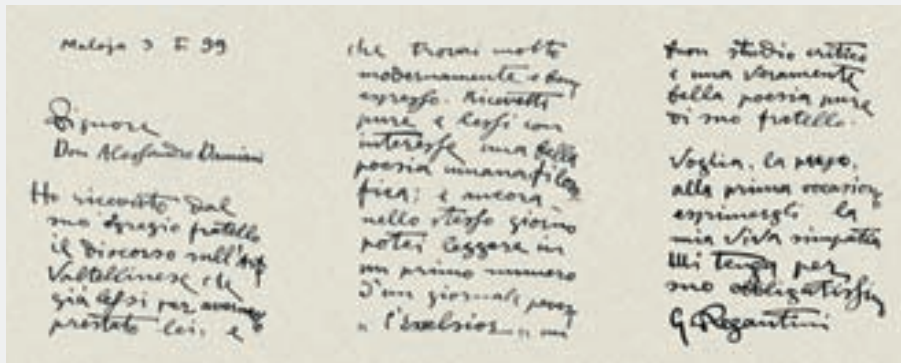
city of Lombardy, where he had lived in the same Scapigliatura environments frequented by Segantini. There was a reply in the newspaper¹³, in which the protagonists of the episode, which apparently took place not at the Post-house, but at the Italia Hotel, denied the threats, but admitted to not having, even for one instant, taken their eyes off "the painter's lovely companion" who "having unfastened an elegant travel cape, reveal-

ed and gave a glimpse of a world of beautiful things".

Segantini's brief interlude in Valtellina thus ended in Tirano. In Livigno he had found nature friendly, but had found the people hostile. He could not go back to the Austrian side of Trentino, where he was born, because as a convinced pacifist he had failed to report for military service and Bice had made him promise that his artist's hands would never touch a weapon. So they decided to continue their journey towards the Grisons to visit Via Mala, much praised by his friend Dalbesio, who had found it enchanting.

Travelling by stagecoach from Tirano (and not from Castasegna as Calzini wrote), through the Bernina Pass, they arrived in Silvaplana and from there, along the Julier Pass, they descended into the Oberhalbstein, but upon reaching Savognin Segantini stopped the stagecoach. Here, at an altitude of 1200 metres, the air was crystal-clear and, as in Livigno, the slopes grew gentler, the valley wide and the village stretched out in between. They decided to stay at the hotel belonging to the two Pianta brothers, native to Poschiavo, who spoke Italian well. But shortly afterwards they rented the small villa belonging to the Italian-born Donna Margherita Petterelli, widow of a medical officer.

The Pianta, Petterelli and other more notable families helped them settle into the village, and a 14 year-old shepherd girl, Barbara Uffer, known as Baba, became Segantini's inseparable, life-long model, governess and escort in the mountains. The Petterelli family, which included an ex-State Councillor and a member of the cantonal government, even managed, by way of exception, to obtain a special residence permit for him thanks to the guarantee deposit of 3000 Francs, paid out partly by Grubicy, and a simple birth certificate that Segantini had sent from Trentino through his friend G. Zippel. In fact, Segantini did not have a passport, nor a true nationality and chose to be a stateless person all his life. "I don't believe it is possible to achieve peace, and abolish war, while a National Parliament remains in power. – he wrote to Grubicy in 1891 – National Parliament means fatherland, and fatherland means a flag that must be respected, and consequently defended; and as long as there still flutters a shred of any colour, of this vestige of barbarity, symbol of



brutal arrogance and conquest, we will never, with reasoning, be able to stop ourselves, or our fellow-men from rushing off and barbarously, brutishly destroying themselves”¹⁴. For Segantini the world should have been an international Confederation of independent boroughs and provinces, “so that they can live with their own laws suited to the economic requirements and characteristics of their inhabitants”, in other words, a little Switzerland. And this, perhaps, explains why, once he had settled down in Switzerland, he never wanted to move away.

He did not go to church in Savognin, either. But, even though remaining on the outskirts, he liked being considered part of the community, to the point of offering almost free of charge to paint the fresco of the Virgin Mary with two Saints on the façade undergoing restoration of the parish church of “Nossa Donna”, a project which was warmly supported by the Capuchin Fathers who had befriended him, but finally rejected by the Town Council. In fact, Segantini did not pay taxes and in Savognin he had begun to run into debt again, despite the fact that his income had increased considerably. At that time he was the best paid painter in Europe, Alberto Grubicy had increased his cheque from 200 to 300 Lire a month, plus a variable amount for each painting sold, and he himself very often sold his paintings directly all over Europe, eluding the contract that bound him to Grubicy. But this was not enough for his princely lifestyle. His home, a two-storey, fourteen-room country house, was strewn with tapestries and Neo-Gothic style furniture, he paid models and housekeepers, refused to send his children to state school, employing a private tutor for them, and stocked up with the best wines from various dealers, including, according to Calzini, De Giacomi of Chiavenna. It was precisely

the latter who apparently advised him to go and taste “a famous archiepiscopal wine called Costanza in the little tavern right in front of the cathedral of Chur”, where Segantini first spoke to Alberto Grubicy about his desire to leave Savognin for good.

In fact, together with the hostility of the Town Council, he felt a growing need to renew his painting once again in a new alpine setting where the light was even more crystal-clear, almost as though, in him, the need for light and the need for love grew side by side.

In Savognin his painting had suddenly become vivid, radiant and vibrant, thanks to the new Divisionist technique, which he experimented with the encouragement of Vittore Grubicy, according to whom primary colours and complementary colours should not be mixed on the palette, but applied pure onto the canvas, one next to the other in fine threads that the eye of the observer itself would have blended when viewing them. He thus began to repaint many of his works produced during the Brianza period, including the famous *Ave Maria Whilst Crossing the Lake*, now imbued with all the luminous, melancholic intensity of twilight, and created masterpieces such as *The two*



Above:
Letter by Giovanni Segantini to don Alessandro Damiani, brother of the poet of Morbegno Guglielmo Felice (Colico, private Archives of Martino Fattarelli)

Right:
Giovanni Segantini, *Houses at Capolago*, 1895-1897, pencil and pastel drawing, 32x26 cm (private collection)

Mothers, Noon in the Alps, During the Thaw (Allo sciogliersi delle nevi), Return from the Wood, On the Balcony (Sul balcone), which were to bring Segantini great international renown, and in which we nearly always find Baba, the counterpoint of human femininity to the femininity of nature. That of Segantini is a maternal form of nature, whose life is harmoniously and lovingly bound to man's, in a pantheistic fusion of which light is an expression. And the roots of the original symbolism that Segantini was to arrive at during the last years of his life in Maloja, in my opinion, lie in the theme of the maternity of nature and its pantheistic vitality.

Segantini arrived in the vast plain of Maloja, where the Engadine looks out steeply onto the Bregaglia, in August 1894 and there he purchased the Kuoni chalet, built by an engineer who had worked on the construction of the St. Gothard Pass. The chalet seemed to have been made specially for him with that wording engraved on the façade, “*Schang stand uf, schau d'Suun schint sche*”, “Giovanni, stand up and look; the sun is already shining”. A few years later Segantini added the fanciful circular pavilion in which he organised his small library of incunabola and antique books, an extreme intellectual mannerism of the painter, who also had the monogram “Gs” engraved on all the household dishes and cutlery.

Maloja at that time was a small village about to be launched as a tourist resort, which Se-

the St. Moritz and Samaden hotel-keeper patrons backing the project, which was not carried out.

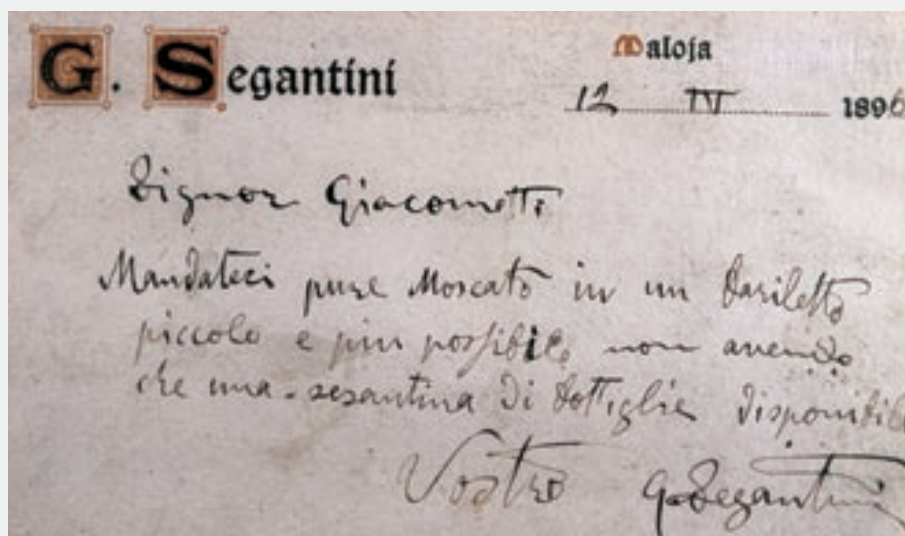
It was in Maloja that Segantini's Divisionism took on that dream-like and symbolistic tendency on the theme of life, love and above all motherhood, which Karl Abraham¹⁵ in 1911 associated with the theme of death. This was a persistently recurrent theme in Segantini's works in Maloja, due to the complex, ambivalent love-hate relationship that the artist had with the figure of his mother, who died at 37 years of age, by whom he felt rejected and for whose death he felt guilty.

However, while this can better explain some of his works, such as *The Evil Mothers* for example, and even Segantini's personality, it certainly does not hold good as an explanatory key to all his works where the theme of motherhood is perhaps not as abstruse as it is often thought to be, and as Segantini himself led us to believe. Segantini had a religious and sacral conception of nature as a Mother Deity, in which spring is the symbol of life and winter the personification of the rigidity of death. “Here the snow – he wrote in Savognin – continues to fall without a will of its own. [...] but in my heart I still retain spring in blossom, and all my dreams sing songs of love [...]. In the middle of all this white, which lasts for months, I cannot see things clearly, [...] I am waiting for the song of the birds and the fragrant smell of fresh grass”. All the scenes of sorrow and death in Segantini are winter scenes; we all feel the anguish of that snow-clad heath that in *Return from the Wood* separates the peasant from the distant village and “lies like the shroud that covers death”, wrote Segantini; we all see *The Evil Mothers* squirming with sensuality that denies motherhood, in a livid winter atmosphere, clinging to a tree (life) whose contorted branches turn into the umbilical cord that binds the bad mother to the rejected child. Conversely, the scenes of life are set amidst peaceful, luxuriant spring nature, such as *Springtime in the Alps (Primavera sulle Alpi)* with the two horses (hired in Chiavenna) held by the reins by Baba, or *Life*, the painting that Segantini worked on from 1896 to 1899 without finishing it, with the woman and child in the foreground sitting like a Madonna under the pine-tree, at the very roots of life, on the Pian Lutero



Partial view of the Kuoni Chalet, Segantini's home in Maloja, and of the annexed studio in a photograph of the period. In the background the Castle of Belvedere, for which the artist prepared several studies in view of its possible restoration.

gantini himself attempted to contribute towards with the imposing project of the *Panorama of Engadine*, a sort of “publicity-art” as he himself wrote, in which Carlo Fornara and Giovanni Giacometti also participated. However, the cost of the project, which rose in a short time from one hundred thousand to one million Francs, proved prohibitive for



crowned in the distance by the sunlit peaks of the Badile, the Ago di Sciora and the glaciers of Val Bondasca.

When we speak about Segantini as a mountain painter, we very often forget that in his paintings the mountain is that of the high spring pastures, the animals, the country folk with their work and the women with their sense of the maternal, and not that of the crests and peaks always in the far-off distance in his paintings. In the mountains Segantini sought a simple form of nature and an increasingly pure intense light, not an increasingly lofty peak or the cyclopean grandeur of a superior form of nature. In him there was no heroic or, worse still, superman-like conception of the mountain and of nature, no idea of struggle and of Nietzschean will for power, but only a religious bowing over life, “caressing with the brush the blades of grass, flowers, animals and man”, as he himself wrote in 1898. Segantini was undoubtedly a Nietzschean personality and considered himself a superman. “He was truly and sincerely convinced – wrote his children’s last tutor, Romeo Boldori – that he would have excelled in anything he put his hand to”¹⁶. He disdained other painters, he loved living alone, but revered and sought-after, he delighted in the mythology about him that sprang up all over Europe and he himself painted a heroic portrait of himself in his *Autobiography*. He was convinced that very few in art are true creators, and his symbolism reveals the aristocratic complacency that very few are capable of comprehending the symbols with which an artist’s work is scattered. But the superman in him stops here, on the

threshold of his paintings. He revelled in being worshipped as a superman, but in nature sought only the universal love that unites all living beings, a theme that became more marked in the years spent in Maloja. Here, Segantini very soon became a point of reference, not only for artists and intellectuals of Bregaglia, such as Giovanni Giacometti and Antonio Scartazzini, but also for two poets of Valtellina, Giovanni Bertacchi of Chiavenna and Guglielmo Felice Damiani of Morbegno, who sought his respect and aspired to his friendship.

The collection of letters published by his daughter, Bianca¹⁷, comprises an undated letter “To the poet Bertacchi” in which Segantini wrote:

“I read and reread the *Le due fontane* with increasing enjoyment and thank you very much for the book and for the dedication. Each time I happen to read one of your poetical or critical works in Reviews, I read it with interest, because I feel you to be a loving and sincere soul.



Above:
Epistolary message
by Segantini to Alberto
Giacometti
(1834-1900), manager
of the Piz Duan Hotel
in Stampa and father
of the painter Giovanni
(Stampa, Giorgio Dolfi
Collection)

Right:
View of Maloja in the
early twentieth century.

I express my wishes that you may be successful in your good dreams.”

Please consider me yours truly,
G. Segantini”.

It is highly unlikely that the letter – the recipient of which is without doubt an erroneous addition by Segantini’s daughter, Bianca, – was addressed to Bertacchi, who never wrote a work with this title, whereas it is almost certain, as was demonstrated by Martino Fattarelli in 1971¹⁸, that it was addressed to Guglielmo Felice Damiani, whose book *The two Fountains (Le due fontane)*, was published in 1899, which also makes it possible to date the letter back to the last few months of the painter’s life. Segantini’s flattering mention of some other “poetical or critical work”, also leads to Damiani, who a few months earlier had sent the painter more of his works, as can be seen from another letter from Segantini dated 3rd January 1899, also published by Martino Fattarelli, address-ed to Damiani’s brother, Don Alessandro Damiani, parish priest in Villa di Chiavenna, who was on very friendly terms with the artist.

“Don Alessandro Damiani,
I received from your illustrious brother the discourse on Valtellinese Art which I had already read since you lent it to me, and I found it very modernly and well expressed. I also received and read with great interest a beautiful human, philosophical poem; and again the same day I was able to read, in a



The guest-house Willy in Soglio (now Salis Hotel), where Segantini usually stayed in the winter during the period he resided in Val Bregaglia.

first issue of a newspaper published in Pavia, the “Excelsior”, a good critical study and a truly beautiful poem also by your brother. Would you be so kind, at the earliest opportunity, to express my sincere kindest regards to your brother. Yours respectfully.

G. Segantini”.

The works by Damiani to which Segantini refers here are the discourse *Pietro Ligari da Sondrio e l’arte valtelinese* published in 1898 in “La Valtellina”, the *Documenti intorno a un’ancona dipinta da Gaudenzio Ferrari a Morbegno* published in 1896 in the “Archivio storico dell’arte”, the essay *Tommaso Rodari e il Rinascimento in Valtellina* published in 1897 in the “Periodico della Società Storica Comense”, the *Canti dell’umiltà* published together with a critical study in “Excelsior” in December 1898, while the “human, philosophical poem” was *Il mendico*, which appeared in “Vita internazionale” in November 1898. Segantini read very little and it was Bice who read the occasional novel by Dumas to him as he painted, and therefore I do not know how far he had really read all these works by Damiani, even though he was extremely susceptible to the obsequious respects of his literary acquaintances. But if there was one poet whose melancholic mood was similar to that of Segantini, it was Damiani and *The two fountains*, the fountain of love and the fountain of sorrow, was a collection that Segantini very probably and sincerely appreciated.

Damiani and Segantini never met. Can the same be said of Bertacchi?

In May 1898, in order to escape from the police repression against socialists following the riots of that year, Giovanni Bertacchi, then professor at the Liceo Parini of Milan, took refuge in Bregaglia, a stone’s throw from Chiavenna, where he wrote the fourteen *Sonetti retici* dedicated to Segantini and published in “La Gazzetta letteraria”. Segantini, who received them from Bertacchi himself, answered with a letter.

“What words can I use that equal the pleasure I experienced on reading the beautiful, harmonious, significant verses that you had the kindness to dedicate to me? You were up here. Why did you not knock on my door? Brothers in art are always welcome.



Looking forward to shaking your hand. Affectionately yours”.

Did Bertacchi ever take up this invitation? According to the prevailing opinion, there was no meeting and, besides, Bertacchi never spoke about it in public. Except that there is a letter from Carlo Fornara to Bertacchi dated 9th May 1935, in which Segantini’s pupil and assistant wrote: “What great pleasure I had on reading the recollection of your meeting with the maestro in his round studio in Maloja!”¹⁹. According to Romeo Boldori, Segantini had no liking for Italian painters, whereas he admired literati, such as Pascoli, the symbolist poet, Tumiati, and Bertacchi, as it happens. “Another poet named with pleasure was dear, kind Bertacchi who also visited the maestro in Soglio”, wrote Boldori. So did Bertacchi and Segantini meet in Maloja or in Soglio? Boldori’s testimony cannot be disregarded, because, as mentioned previously, as of 1891 he was the private tutor of Segantini’s children and, to a certain extent, his private secretary. But how well did Boldori remember, since he wrote his testimony in 1940, more than forty years after the facts? Segantini was accustomed to spending the winter with his family in Soglio at the small Willy Hotel, in the eighteenth-century Palazzo Salis. It was in Soglio that Segantini made the acquaintance of Giovanni Giacometti (“He had little respect for him as an artist – wrote Boldori – but took a liking to him because he was his devoted admirer and

submissive.”), who on that Sunday 28th September 1899 on the Schafberg was to sketch out on paper the fine water-colour painting *Segantini on his Deathbed* (*Segantini sul letto di morte*), now in the Segantini Museum in St. Moritz. In the visitors’ books of the Willy Hotel, the signatures of Bertacchi and Segantini very often cross, but in different periods and, perhaps, the artist from Trentino and the scholar from Valtellina, who were often celebrated together with misleading rhetoric as artists of the mountain par excellence, were fated never to meet. In addition to the *Sonetti retici*, seven of which were found in 1903 in the collection *Liriche Umane*, in 1899 Bertacchi wrote the ode *In morte di Giovanni Segantini*, which in the original version is much longer than the version published in 1906 in the collection *Alle sorgenti*, but above all in 1921 he wrote *Al casolare dello Schafberg*, the most beautiful and undoubtedly the most well-known of all the poems dedicated to Segantini by the poet from Chiavenna, thanks also to the son of the latter, Gottardo, who in 1951 reproduced the first verse of it in a brief monograph on his father:

*The lonely little Alpine chalet,
clinging to the mountain’s edge,
seems crushed under
the vast emptiness of the air.
Up there, deep in contemplation,
he had before him
all the immense destiny
of his all too brief existence:*

Giovanni Segantini,
**Grisonian Costume
or Girl at the
Fountain, 1887.**
oil on canvas, 54x79 cm
(St. Moritz, Segantini
Museum, on trust by
the Otto Fischbacher
Foundation of St. Gall)

*to pursue every sense of light
from full sun into shadow;
the verdant days, the faded evenings,
the snow that
always appears white and never is.
To question with slow moving eye
moraines and glaciers;
to bow down in prayer to the flock
and the grass,
to feel the sharp gust and the gentle
breeze,
to hear the rumble and the tinkling;
to prolong the scattered voices beyond
hearing
into a mute word, as in the shadow
of a hymn,
and after that the only
glory that remains: to die.*

* Journalist and historian

The Segantini Museum in St. Moritz





The structure of the Segantini Museum, located on the outskirts of the little town of St. Moritz, is in the form of an imposing dome built of hewn stone. Because of its architectural form and the function it serves, it undoubtedly constitutes an exceptional case, since it is not intended as a mere building for exhibition areas, but as a memorial dedicated to a great artist with an outstanding personality. The idea of a museum in St. Moritz in honour of Giovanni Segantini sprang to mind for the first time at the beginning of 1907, when Oskar Bernhard paid a visit to Segantini's art dealer and promoter, Alberto Grubicy, in Milan. Shortly afterwards, the Committee for the Segantini Museum was set up, and the local architect Nicolaus Hartmann (1880-1956), was entrusted with the task of drawing up projects for building the memorial. There were three rules to be followed: the main axis of the museum had to face towards the east, towards the Schafberg and the chalet where Segantini died; the building had to be immersed in a woodland environment; the building itself had to be inspired by the pavilion designed by Segantini for the grand International Exhibition in Paris in 1900. The architect adapted the artist's project to the landscape and to its purpose; in fact, the museum is considerably smaller than the pavilion and was constructed using local building materials. The features of this panoramic building can also be found inside it. The sombre, narrow staircase which leads up to the first

floor strengthens the surprise effect, experienced by the visitor when entering this spacious dome-shaped hall. The light takes on an almost unreal appearance, and it is not until the visitor takes a more careful look that realises he that it penetrates from above, through a number of circular windows. The museum was inaugurated on 28th September 1908, exactly nine years after Segantini's death. As early as 1947 the architect Nicolaus Hartmann had submitted a project for the enlargement of the museum, due to an obvious lack of space. However, the enlargement by the addition of a hall 5 metres wide and 17 long could not be carried out until 1981. In 1999, on the occasion of the first centenary of the artist's death, the museum was restructured by the architect Hans-Jörg Ruch, and made accessible the disabled. The collection exhibited in the museum has been constantly enlarged over the years and, without doubt, is the most interesting and complete collection of the artist's works, thanks to the contribution of the twelve paintings of the Otto Fischbacher Foundation, made in 2001 as a longterm deposit.

The museum is open to the public:

From 1st June to 20th October and
from 1st December to 30th April

From Tuesday to Saturday:

10 a.m. – 12 a.m. and 3 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Tel. 0041 81 833 44 54

Fax 0041 81 832 24 54

E-mail: info@segantini-museum.ch

The room housing the
Alpine Triptych
at the Segantini
Museum of St. Moritz.

Quotations taken from Segantini's or other author's scripts are translated from the Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers.

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Photographic references

The postcards reproduced on pages XIV, XXXIII and XXXIV belong to the collection of Giorgio Dolfi (Stampa); the postcard on page XXXII belongs to the collection of Florio Fasciati (Maloja). The photograph on page XXXVII is by Max Weiss; the photograph on page XXXVIII is by Filippo Simonetti.

DESIGN AND CO-ORDINATION
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GRAPHIC DESIGN
Lucas Häfliger, Bellinzona

Reverse of flyleaf:
Letter to Vittore Grubicy,
Savognin, 21st May, 1891
(translated from the
Italian by Barbara Ferrett Rogers)