Molto disegno e bellissimo colorito
A minimal digital exhibition on the Venetian altarpiece in the Quattrocento

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In this short report I will explain the structure of my final project for the course "Lab. DH - Mod. B" [ECC059], last module of the minor program in Digital Humanities at the International College Ca' Foscari. Indeed, during this semester I managed to develop a 3D virtual exhibition in Unity focused on the evolution of the altarpiece in Venice in the Quattrocento: in addition to offering a brief anthology of meaningful works of art, the project also provides a monographic analysis of the three altarpieces by Marco Basaiti, Vittore Carpaccio and Giovanni Bellini for the church of San Giobbe in Venice - Cannaregio.

In the following paragraphs the evolution of this project will be briefly outlined: firstly, I will justify the choice of the used software. Secondly, the original project will be explained and thirdly further corrections and developments to the initial plan will be described. In conclusion, I will mention possible enhancements of the project.

1 The methodology

The project is entirely programmed with the support of the software Unity. This choice has been led by two different factors. Firstly, this application could have provided me a gentle introduction to C#, in order to achieve a basic competency in this programming language, which I will hone during my master degree. Secondly, the availability of a huge number of online tutorials surely could have helped me in proceeding autonomously throughout the different steps of the project itself.

2 The initial project

In the initial sketch (handed in March 2021), the project was intended to be articulated in three different phases:

- Phase 1: development of a background through skybox and building of the virtual environment. Creation of an avatar, who is able to freely move in the 3D space. This corresponds to the Minimum Viable Product (MVP).

- Phase 2: outfitting of the room. There were several options which can have been pursued. A first choice had to be made to decide whether to reproduce an already existing room or to create from the beginning a personal exposition, which could highlight the diachronic evolution of a peculiar art-historical phenomenon or propose a comparison among different pictures. The final decision was took after the development of the MVP, when I had a deeper understanding of specific art-related topics, thanks to the attendance of the semestral course "History of Modern Art", held by prof. Fara: this helped me take a more mature and reasoned decision.

- Phase 3: creation of interactive elements (e. g. descriptions, reconstructions, reference to bibliographical sources, comparison with other works of arts). The development of this final section entirely depended on the final output of Phase 2.

3 Development and adjustment of the project

3.1 Definition of the project

As foreseen, the attendance of the aforementioned course helped me identify the main focus of the virtual exhibition: the evolution of the altarpiece in the Quattrocento. After this preliminary choice, several specifications needed to be made. Firstly, the spacial focus should be limited. Indeed, the origin of the *tabula quadrata et sine civoriis* is a primarily Tuscan phenomenon, made possible by the discovery of the perspective by Masaccio and its systematic implementation by Piero della Francesca, Beato Angelico, Domenico Veneziano and Filippo Lippi. Only the journeys of mainly Florentine painters in the Venetian lagoon (Andrea del Sarto, Donatello etc.) around the mid-century exported this genre in this area. Nonetheless, the unique chance to study and admire Venetian masterpieces at the Gallerie dell'Accademia and in the churches of the historic centre (San Zaccaria, San Giovanni Crisostomo, Madonna dell'Orto) led me the focus exclusively on this pictorial tradition.

Subsequently, thanks to the helpfulness of Prof Fara, I managed to choose relevant works of art to sum up the evolution of the genre in the Quattrocento. Contextually, the professor helped me providing me a first bibliographic support, spacing from the main sources of artistic literature (Vasari, Ridolfi, Dolce) to the major contemporary studies (first of all the monographs by Humfrey). The chosen works of art are nine. The first six are exhibited on the left and front wall of the the 3D environment:

1. Antonio Vivarini - Giovanni d'Alemagna. *Virgin and Child with Saints*, Chapel of San Tarasio, Church of San Zaccaria, Venice, oil on wooden panel, 1443.

2. Antonio Vivarini - Giovanni d'Alemagna. *Virgin Enthroned and Child in the Heavenly Garden with the Doctors of the Church, Sts Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, And Gregory*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, oil on canvas, 1446.

3. Bartolomeo Vivarini. *Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Louis of Toulouse*, Museo nazionale di Capodimonte, Neaples, tempera on wooden panel, 1465.

4. Cima da Conegliano. *Virgin and Child with Sts Jerome and Louis of Toulouse* (*Madonna of the Orange Tree*), Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, oil on wooden panel, 1496-'98.

5. Cima da Conegliano. *St John the Baptist with Sts Peter, Mark, Jerome, Paul*, Church of Madonna dell'Orto, Venice, oil on wooden panel, 1493-'95.

6. Giovanni Bellini. *St Jerome, with Sts Christopher and Louis of Toulouse* (*Diletti Altapiece*), Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, oil on wooden panel, ante 1513.

On the right wall, three altarpieces (painted as oil on wooden panels) are exhibited: they were originally housed in the right navy of the Church of San Giobbe, but nowadays are exposed in Hall 2 of the museum Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice

1. Vittore Carpaccio. *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, oil on wooden panel, 1510.

2. Giovanni Bellini. *Madonna and Child Enthroned with angels playing music and Saints Francis, John The Baptist, Job, Dominic, Sebastian, and Louis of Toulouse* (*San Giobbe Altarpiece*), oil on wooden panel, 1487.

3. Marco Basaiti. *Agony in the Garden with Saints Louis Of Toulouse, Francis, Dominic, and Mark*, oil on wooden panel, 1516.

The final project is available at the following link.

3.2 Adjustments to the original project and further developments

Due to time constraints the expected outcome of the demo 1.0 had to be revised and streamlined. Needed changes had to be implemented in both Phase 1 and Phase 3: as a consequence, the deleted features of the original project can be first enhancements for the next release of the demo.

- Phase 1: the main simplification concerns the virtual environment. Indeed, the original project was meant to be an almost realistic reproduction of the building of the Gallerie dell'Accademia and its neighbourhood (at least, the Accademia Bridge, the Grand Canal and the former Scuola grande della Carità). Up to now, the exhibition is hosted by a simple two rooms-building with textures reproducing modern materials (such as wood and concrete) surrounded by grass.

- Phase 3: the interaction between the character and the paintings is extremely simple: the player, pressing the key "F", can read short descriptions, written on the basis of an *ad hoc* bibliographical support (see Works Cited). The original project foresaw a more complex interaction, for instance through game-like activities (e.g. connect the masterpiece to the correct author).

Besides, further improvements to the project can be added. Firstly, the exhibition needs to be re-scaled so as to grant a better proportion between the main character and the altarpieces. Secondly, the most intuitive suggestion could concern the size of the exhibition itself. Indeed, this would allow the presence of side characters (such as ticket-office assistants, guides and/or museum attendants). Contextually, a greater space could enhance the nature of the exhibition. In particular, it would be possible to include references to the Tuscan tradition or to subsequent development of the Venetian altarpiece in the Cinquecento (e.g. *Pesaro Madonna* by Titian). Lastly, a possible improvement could include the presence of an audio background in the entire virtual museum.

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