

THE PAINTING COLLECTION



Palazzo Moroni's painting collection encompasses **fifty or so works hung in the rooms on the piano nobile in predominantly chronological order**. The original part of the collection was assembled by Francesco Moroni (1606-1674), who also initiated the construction of the building; the precious art collection contributed to the prestige of the family and its residence. During the 19th century, the composition of the collection underwent a radical change. Pietro Moroni (1792-1858) wished to revive the family's glorious reputation through its nominal link with the celebrated Albino-born painter, Giovanni Battista Moroni (c. 1521-1579/80). The collection was, therefore, recast in a new, definitive form that would see it go down in history. In 1817, Pietro acquired from Marcantonio Fermo Grumelli "four paintings by Moroni": *The Gentleman in Pink*, the *Portrait of Isotta Brembati*, the *Portrait of an Elderly Woman (Medea Rossi?)*, and a final unidentified picture.



DID YOU KNOW...?

The earliest evidence of the presence of paintings in the residence is a 17th-century manuscript which describes the arrangement of the collection room by room. Compiled on 28 September 1680, shortly after the death of Francesco Moroni, it lists all the moveable property that his sons, Alessandro, Antonio and Ludovico, would inherit and subsequently retain ownership of. One hundred or so paintings are listed, most of which depict religious subjects. Aside from Jacques Courtois, known as Borgognone (1621-1676), and Jacopo Bassano (c. 1515-1592), no artists are named.



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *The Gentleman in Pink* (detail), 1560, Lucretia Moroni collection



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Portrait of an Elderly Woman*, c. 1572



Andrea Previtali, *Virgin with Child and Donor* (detail), 1515- 20, formerly in the Moroni collection

The **oldest part of the collection**, conceived by Francesco Moroni, seems to have been intended **to provide a snapshot of the local pictorial tradition** and to commemorate important members of the family through portraits. It is interesting to note, in the 17th-century inventory, the presence of **twenty orange trees**, whose rarity made them an essential part of the collection. **In the mid-19th century**, with the acquisition of a number of portraits by Giovanni Battista Moroni, the collection **reached its apex**, with

only the Accademia Carrara holding more works by that artist. In addition, it was bolstered by important pieces from the Lombard Renaissance, works from the 17th and 18th centuries, and a significant series of Milanese paintings from the early 19th century. Many connoisseurs, travelling agents and art historians came to see the collection, including Charles Lock Eastlake (1854), who was among those responsible for assembling collections for the National Gallery in London, and Bernard Berenson (1895).

During the 20th century, the collection was partially broken up, due to the vicissitudes of the family members and their inheritances. After the deaths of the brothers Pietro (1880-1969) and Alessio (1876-1951) Moroni, **the heirs – Antonio, Elisa and Carlo – divided the moveable property into three parts**. This division included the art collection, from which many pieces were transferred to other residences, leaving those on Via Porta Dipinta as but a small reminder of an illustrious past.



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *The Portrait of Isotta Brembati* (detail), c. 1555



Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Crucifixion*, Ranica, 1550-60, formerly in the Moroni collection



Francesco Hayez, *The Unnamed* (detail), c. 1845, formerly in the Moroni collection