Generalate – The large portrait of Frère Philippe exhibited at the Palace of Versailles



On 27 October, under the supervision of the official of the Superintendency of Rome, Ms Eleonora Leprini, the portrait of the ninth Superior General *Frère Philippe* (born Matthieu Bransiet and who lived between 1792 and 1874). The portrait, painted by Horace Vernet and displayed in the Generalate in Rome, will be exhibited at the ***National Museum of*** **the Palace of *Versailles* and Trianon as** part of the first monographic exhibition dedicated to Horace Vernet, open to the public from 14 November 2023 to 17 March 2024.

This is an exhibition of significant importance because it features almost 200 works by this French artist, of which such portrait is by far the largest.

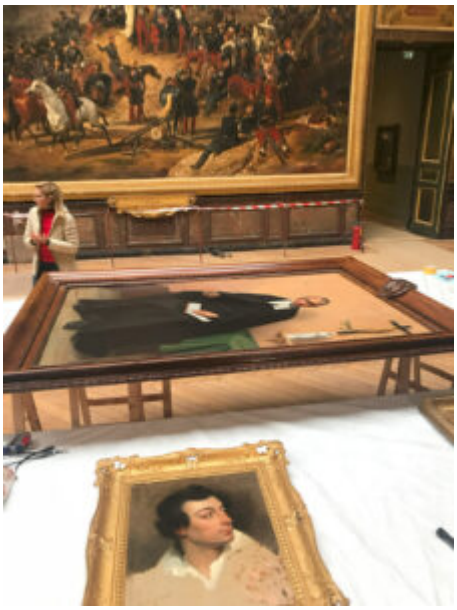
It has now been a couple of years since the exhibition curators learned of the existence in Rome of a painting by Vernet, which a French expert viewed in July 2022. Once its value was established, an official and formal request for loan was sent.



The bureaucratic process necessary to allow the Ministry of Culture – General Directorate of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape – to authorise the loan to a foreign country was followed by Ms Anna Cascone, director of the La Salle Museum Rome. It took about six months to produce all the necessary documentation for the transfer, albeit temporary.

In fact, the Italian State is very attentive to safeguarding the historical and cultural heritage on national territory, which is why the rules for authorising the circulation of works of art are followed in every detail, so as to ensure the protection of the assets.

After verification by an expert restorer from the Superintendency of Rome that Vernet's painting was in good condition, authorisation was received from the Direzione Generale Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio for the loan. A large crate, custom-built and internally made with state-of-the-art shockproof material, accompanied the painting on its journey from Rome to Versailles.



Following a detailed programme, the crate left the Generalate on 27 October and arrived in Versailles by land on 1 November.

On 3 November, at the National Museum of Versailles, in the presence of Ms Anna Cascone and Ms Eleonora Leprini, both appointed *heralds* by the Versailles Museum for the occasion, accompanied by Br. Diego Munoz, former director of the La Salle Museum Rome as a guest, the crate was opened and it was verified that Vernet's work had not been damaged.

Only after all these necessary procedures, did the splendid portrait of *Frère Philippe* take its place in the centre of a wall entirely reserved for a significant and imposing work measuring 228×195 cm.

Concerning the history of the portrait of Brother Philippe, we know that the painting by Horace Vernet would have been present at the *Maison-Mère du Saint-Enfant-Jésus* in the Faubourg Saint-Martin (1821-1847), because it was painted in 1844 and then exhibited at the Paris *Salon in* 1845 at the Musée Royal des Arts, now the Louvre Museum.

The painting was then moved to the *Maison-Mère Saint-Joseph*, rue Oudinot, around 1847 and again moved to Lembecq-les-Hal, Belgium, around 1905. It arrived in the new Generalate in Rome in 1935.



The exhibition in Versailles shows what a brilliant portraitist Horace Vernet was, who painted public figures and artists with great skill from 1810 to 1850. Many unknown portraits, including the portrait of *Frère Philippe*, will be presented alongside famous masterpieces.

On the occasion of the exhibition, a catalogue will also be published to demonstrate the complexity of this artist and the abundance of his inspirations. It will be edited by leading international specialists, historians and art historians.

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