

Paolo Dattari, Jewellery and the Italian Court at the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-81

by Ruth Dwyer

Ruth Dwyer is a freelance researcher. She has contributed to a number of publications, notably A History of Hawthorn, the suburb in which she lives. The areas of research generally undertaken include work on the non-British in nineteenth century Victoria, and the documentation of silver, jewellery, furniture and dwellings of that period. She also has a particular interest in agricultural and viticultural research using early Victorian records, including material pertaining to the various sections of the Land Acts of the 1860s.

'Almost all Melbourne', not less than ten thousand of them under umbrellas, gathered in anticipation of the laying of the foundation stone of the Royal Exhibition Building in the Carlton Gardens on 19 February 1879. Here would be held Victoria's first International Exhibition. The sun emerged and a fine steamy afternoon set in for the ceremony, performed by His Excellency the Governor, Sir George Bowen. The magnificent Italianate building was to be erected by David Mitchell to the design of the architects Messrs. Reed and Barnes. By the opening of the Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880-81 on 1 October 1880 it would be in the full flight of business.¹

Harvest tool and husbandry,
Loom and wheel engin'ry,
Secrets of the sullen mine,
Steel and gold, and corn and wine,
Fabric rough, or fairy fine,
Sunny tokens of the Line,
Polar marvels, and a feast
Of wonders out of west and east,
And shapes and hues of Art divine!
All of beauty, all of use,
That one fair planet can produce,
Brought from under every star,
Blown from over every main...²

Countries represented in the various courts [exhibition spaces] were Australia, of which the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Queensland and South Australia exhibited, Great Britain, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Ceylon, Jamaica, Mauritius, Fiji, the Straits Settlements, Japan, the United States of America, other minor exhibitors, and the European nations, Austria, Belgium, Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Italy.³

[To] *The Honorable The Commissioner of Crown Lands Melbourne*

[From] *Italian Consulate [Ref] No. 1028.*
Melbourne 15 November 1880

Sir, I have the honor to inform you that I took the liberty of appointing as Italian Jurors at your splendid International Exhibition four distinguished gentlemen of your Department, i.e. Messieurs Carlo Catani, Ettore Checchi, Paolo Dattari and Pietro Baracchi.

I hope no rule or regulation might prevent them from acting in the above capacity, and I shall feel extremely obliged to you by your causing the same gentlemen to be kindly favoured by your Department with all the facilities that might help them in rendering the Colony their services also in the said capacity and in complying of their best with all the very delicate duties which are attached to.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient servant

C A de Goyzueta

Consul and Commissioner General for Italy.⁴

At this time, Paolo Dattari⁵, an architect and a talented gentleman of many parts, was employed as a draftsman in the office of the Engineer in Chief of The Department of Crown Lands and Survey.⁶ James Cosmo Newbery, Superintendent of Juries and Awards, notified Dattari that he had been nominated as an International Juror for Section XI, Class 24, Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Work, and Class 39, Jewellery and Precious Stones.⁷ Dattari was given leave to act in this capacity.⁸ Jurors were selected for their character and known expertise pertinent to the particular Section to be adjudicated.⁹ Surely this was an acknowledgement of his craftsmanship in carrying out the manufacture of the fine silver and gold Italianate casket presented to the Chief Commissioner of Police in Victoria, Captain Frederick Standish, in 1880.¹⁰ His fellow jurors were drawn mostly from the Victorian community, and otherwise were representative of the European countries, Great Britain and the United States of America.¹¹

Undoubtedly one of the courts of major interest to Dattari would have been that of his native Italy. The Italian court contained a display of magnificent Venetian glassware, and delicate mosaics exhibited by the Compagnia Venesia-Murano, majolica and antique porcelain, jewellery, bronzes and other castings, works in alabaster, marble, terra cotta and more. Another section of it exhibited furniture, such as the two carved bookcases from G. B. de Lotto of Venice. Marco dal Todesco sent a suite of inlaid bedroom furniture, and Lenera Brothers, of Turin, showed several cases of silks and damasks for furnishings. The wines and liqueurs of Italy were represented. A large kiosk was erected in the centre of this stand, with wine bottles forming the pillars and roof. Bacchus, sitting astride a cask, quaffing a goblet of wine, crowned the exhibit. The alimentary products such as confectionery, Bologna sausages, hams and cheeses, olive oil and pasta occupied a large area. Perfumery, silks in various stages of manufacture, Venetian laces, and textiles, hosiery, articles of fine straw, and clothing were on display. Cigars, ink, carriage lamps, musical instruments, photographs, even a gondola . . .¹²

Medals and certificates were awarded for exhibits. The prize in the competition for the design of these 1880 medals for the Exhibition was won by Ernst August Altmann, but it was not found possible to carry out their manufacture in Victoria. Instead a form partly taken from the recent Ashantee war medal showing the head of Queen Victoria in profile was used with the words *Melbourne International Exhibition, 1880*. The reverse was a simple design by Harry Stokes, also entered in the competition. The dies were cut by Stokes and Martin of Melbourne. The Melbourne Mint struck the medals, gold, 1 1/2 inches in diameter and to be of the value of £6-10 worth of the metal, silver medals, 2 inches, and bronze, coated over copper, 3 inches. The metals were melted in the improved furnaces with the new fronts made of sand, cement and brickdust. The process of striking the blanks was carried out with the new hydraulic press designed by Mr. George Dint, foreman of machinery at the Mint. Four applications of pressure applied by one man sufficed, with the annealing process being carried out between each application.¹³

The jury of which Dattari was a member would have awarded medals and certificates for the courts of all countries exhibiting in Section XI, Classes 24 and 39. Here we deal only with that of Italy. Those represented in Classes 24 and 39 in

this court, Goldsmiths' and Silversmiths' Work, Jewellery and Precious Stones, were Cavaliere Bendendo and Cavaliere Olivieri of Venice; Stefano Beretta, Francesco Ciapponi & Co., A. Fasoli, Francati & Santamaria, A. Rey, and Pio Siotto of Rome; S. Beretta & Fransone, F.R. Costa, and E. Sivelli of Genoa; T. Bianchini, Giovanni Boncinelli and Sons, A. Folcini, L. Fossi, Mariotti & Fantoni, Arturo Meyer, Oscar Meyer and Eredi Taddei of Florence; A. De Caro, P. Donadio, M. Palomba and R. Petrucci of Naples; Galbiati Brothers of Vercelli; Giojuzza & Giobertini of Palermo; Martino Mayer of Turin; L. Radi, Murano, and Pietro Venturini of Ascoli Piceno. The goldsmiths of Italy have indeed been celebrated for many centuries. At this time they numbered some ninety manufactories in Milan alone, five hundred goldsmiths with four hundred women and children being engaged in polishing. Of goldsmiths in other areas, Naples recorded eight hundred workers, Genoa had fifty manufactories, and in the Venetian and Florentine areas a great percentage of the workforce was thus employed.¹⁴ This period of the late nineteenth century heralded the beginning of industrialisation as opposed to the artisan, and a revival of earlier styles, such as Gothic, Renaissance and Etruscan.¹⁵

The Chairman of the Jury, the Rev. Walter Fellows, M. A., reported on behalf of all members indicating that they had taken into account the skill displayed by the goldsmiths, the quality of the materials used, and most importantly, the innovative designs. Also mentioned were the utility of objects and costs involved.¹⁶

No gold medals of the first order of merit were awarded to the Italian artisans exhibiting in these Sections. However two silver of the second order of merit were awarded, one of them to Francati and Santamaria of Rome, [and Paris and Florence], for their gold and silver jewellery. Fronting the avenue [aisle] was a row of showcases from Francati and Santamaria. One or two of these contained very beautiful filigree work, in imitation of the old Etruscan. In years past, Castellani, 1793-1865, after years of unsuccessful experimentation, had found craftsmen in some of the most sequestered recesses of the Apennines believed to be still practising these ancient techniques, and had brought them out to impart their knowledge to other Italian goldsmiths, particularly in regard to their methods of melting, soldering and wire drawing, as well as enamelling. Still the technique of producing

granulated gold eluded him, but the further research of his sons Alessandro and Augusto enabled the simulation of the process. Of the necklaces, bracelets, brooches and earrings of Francati and Santamaria some claimed special attention. Severely pure in design and very delicate in workmanship, the overlay resembled pollen-dust in its fineness. They also showed cameos. A tiara, necklace, brooch, earrings and bracelets of shell cameo were indeed works of art, the design and materials being in perfect harmony. In one section of the court, a small case was devoted to showing the entire process of cutting a cameo, from the first sketch on the bare piece of shell mounted on a small wooden block so as to steady it. The Queen's Conch shell was the one most favoured by this firm. The outline was then scratched in to be followed by the removal of the outer layers surrounding it. The artist then proceeded using very fine tools, some little larger than an ordinary needle, to work the cameo, using the lowest strata of colour for the ground, the next for the figures and the last for any superficial decoration. The place of honour on a revolving pedestal on their stand was occupied by a cameo representing the triumph of Neptune, the subsidiary decoration being pure white on a delicate pink ground.¹⁷

A silver medal was also awarded to Mariotti and Fantoni for their exquisite mosaic jewellery and the collection of different kinds of stones used in Florentine mosaic, such as malachite, coral, chalcidion, agate, jasper, turquoise, and lapis lazuli. The *Official Record* stated: *None but the hardest stones are used. Every separate piece must be backed by thicker slices of slate or marble to obtain additional strength, and every minute portion must be ground until it exactly corresponds with the pattern previously cut.* They also displayed old Etruscan necklaces, with fine cameos or mosaics inlaid, turquoise ornaments, and specialities in gold and silver including narrow wrought-gold bracelets.¹⁸

No less than eighteen certificates of merit in various orders of achievement were awarded to the exhibitors in these Sections. To name but some, Boncinelli and Figli for their fine work in Florentine mosaic and the specialities in turquoise jewellery, Giojuzza and Giobertini, Petrucci, and Palomba from Torre del Greco, Naples, the centre for the engraving of corals and cameos, for their exhibits of coral, A. De Caro of Naples for his cameos in shells and parure in lava, &c, Martino Mayer of Turin, who exhibited

corals, filigree of Genoa and jewellery in silver, and Sivelli of Genoa for his filigree work were awarded certificates.¹⁹ To quote from a recent catalogue, *Vicenzaoro Australis '90*, an Exhibition of the Finest Italian Gold Jewellery at Georges of Collins Street, Melbourne,

The image of Italy in the world has been always associated with an instinctive love of beauty and with refined taste.

Notes

- ¹ *Argus* 20 Feb. 1879 p.5.
- ² *Argus* 17 Feb. 1879 p.6.
- ³ *Official Record, Melbourne International Exhibition 1880-81*, Mason, Firth & McCutcheon, Melbourne, 1882.
- ⁴ P.R.O.V. V.P.R.S. 619 Unit 13 File 25594 Crown Lands and Survey.
- ⁵ For Dattari, see Ruth Dwyer, 'To Honour a Noted Botanist' in *The Victorian Naturalist*, Vol. 113(4) 1996, Mueller Issue, reprinted in the *Italian Historical Society Journal*, July - December 1996, Volume 4, No. 2, p. 11. Later Dattari was to be transferred to the Victorian Railways Department, commencing on 4 October 1882, again to be employed as a draftsman. He remained here until his services were dispensed with on 11 October 1887. See Public Record Office of Victoria, V.P.R.S. 619 Unit 17 File D15070 for Lands Department material, and Railway Employees C19 Victoria p. 85, State Library of Victoria, also available at the P. R. O. Victoria.
- ⁶ P.R.O.V. V.P.R.S. 619 Unit 19.
- ⁷ P.R.O.V. V.P.R.S. 619 Unit 17.
- ⁸ P.R.O.V. V.P.R.S. 619 Unit 17.
- ⁹ *Official Record*, op. cit., p.3.
- ¹⁰ *The Australian Sketcher*, 28 May 1881, in J. B. Hawkins, *Nineteenth Century Australian Silver*, Antique Collectors' Club, Suffolk, England, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 258.
- ¹¹ *Official Record*, op.cit., p. 83.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. cxix-cxxi.
- ¹³ John P. Sharples, *Medals as Art, Australia and the Meszaros Tradition*, Museum of Victoria and the Royal Australian Mint, 1990; *Argus* 2 April 1881 p.8.
- ¹⁴ *Official Record*, op.cit., pp. 266-267; *Argus* 23 Oct. 1880 p.58.
- ¹⁵ Guido Gregoriotti, *Italian Gold Silver and Jewelry their history and centres*, Alfieri & Lacroix, Milan, 1971, p.8.
- ¹⁶ *Official Record*, op. cit., p. 83.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.266; Harold Newman, *An Illustrated Dictionary of Jewelry*, Thames and Hudson, New York, 1987, p. 59; Gregoriotti, op. cit., p.8; *Argus* 15 October 1880 p.29; 28 October 1880 p. 35.
- ¹⁸ *Official Record*, op. cit., p. 266; *Argus* 28 October 1880, p. 35.
- ¹⁹ *Official Record*, op. cit., pp. 266-267.

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