

The great exhibitions of 1999

Generali has intensified its links with the art world by backing a number of truly significant events. We provide in the following pages an overview of some of the exhibitions that the Company has sustained over the last few months.

Hokusai, the old man with a craze for painting

There is probably no Japanese artist, or for that matter Asian artist, who was as famous in Europe as Hokusai (a.k.a. Manji or Sori).

Barely ten years after his death, in 1849 at the age of 88, he had become a legend in the West, above all in France. His approach to art, passionate but at the same time also disen-



chanted, was shrouded in a haze of eccentricity that bordered on folly, which, in the collective consciousness of the 18th century, was the distinguishing trait of artistic genius.

What has been hailed by critics as the largest and so far the most complete overview ever organised

of Hokusai's work took place in Milan's Palazzo Reale. Sponsored by Generali and jointly organised among others by the City of Milan and The Japan Foundation, the exhibition was inaugurated last October by President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi of Italy (above). The mayor of Milan Albertini and the Japanese ambassador Hiromoto Seki attended the ceremony. Managing director Fabio Cerchiai represented the Company.

Some clues of Hokusai's complex personality may be inferred from the afterword he wrote to his *Hundred Views of Mount Fuji*. In it, Hokusai, besides setting down his artistic manifesto, also provides a brief but incisive spiritual testament.

"Since the age of six years I have the knack of copying the form of things, and since the age of fifty I have often published drawings; nothing of what I have depicted in these seventy-six years is worth any consideration. When I was seventy-three I began to understand the structure of animals and birds, insects and fish, and the essence of

herbs and plants, and thus when I am eighty-six I will progress further; at ninety I will understand even more the true essence of things, and when I am a hundred I will have truly attained the dimension of divinity and wonder. When I am a hundred and ten, a dot or a line will be endowed with life."

Italy: the one and only



The itinerant photographic exhibition that narrates one century of changes in Italy, "The One and Only", after having made stops in some twenty Italian cities, was shown in New York, at the UN building. It was the first time ever that an exhibition focusing on one country had been shown at the UN. The photographs belong to the world's oldest photo agency, Fratelli Alinari of Florence, with whom Generali boasts a long-standing partnership. Coming with the exhibition is a catalogue comprising 240 photographs taken by extraordinary artists, among whom Capa and Klein. The latest edition of the catalogue includes a CD-ROM.

Belgians at the Hermitage

The magnificent Hôtel Wielemans in Brussels hosted, with the sponsoring of Generali Belgium, *Peinture belges de l'Ermitage* ("Belgian Painting at the Hermitage"), a collection of some fifty paintings by the most interesting Belgian artists of the 19th century, taken from the rich collection of the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg. Subjects depicted include bourgeois interiors, rural landscapes and typical atmospheres. The most important works are by Louis Gallait, Ferdinand de Braekeleer, Henri Leys and Jean-Baptiste Van Moer.

The dream of a Cardinal at Rome's Villa Medici

Bruno Racine, the chairman of the French Academy in Rome, has defined the extraordinary exhibition *Villa Medici: il sogno di un cardinale* ("Villa Medici: The Dream of a Cardinal"), "France's tribute to Italy". In fact, the exhibition - which closed in March - was an impressive cultural operation, carried out by the Academy with the co-operation of its traditional partners, including Generali, aimed at providing visitors the opportunity of admiring Villa Medici as it was during its Golden Age in the second half of the 16th century when it was the residence of Ferdinando de' Medici (above), the brother of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, who



became cardinal at the age of... 14. At Villa Medici (below), the cardinal gathered a breath-taking collection of Roman and Greek antiquities and contemporary masterpieces.

According to the terms of the consolidated partnership with the French Academy, Generali also has the privilege of utilising the halls of the Villa for its events. The French government financed the restoration of the Villa's façades, which was completed in time for the opening of the exhibition.



Top: presumably, a self-portrait by Hokusai (1842)

Above: his masterpiece "The Giant Wave off Kanagawa" (c. 1830-32)