

Vincenzo Irolli, *L'Angelo Custode*
1860 – Naples - 1949

oil on canvas
62 ½ by 39 ¾ inches (159 by 101cm)
signed lower left: 'V. Irolli'

provenance: Private collection, Italy

exhibited: Galleria D'Arte Flori, Italy 1902

note: A gifted painter and draughtsman, Vincenzo Irolli (fig. 1) was born in Naples and was inspired to become an artist by seeing the works of Francesco Paolo Michetti and the young Antonio Mancini at the Esposizione Nazionale there in 1877. He became a pupil of Gioacchino Toma and Federico Maldarelli at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Naples, and first exhibited his work when he was still in his teens. He soon came under the influence of more Impressionistic painters such as Michetti and Domenico Morelli, although his style came perhaps closest to that of the Roman painter Mancini, who was a few years older. In 1879 Irolli exhibited a genre painting at the Esposizione Promotrice in Naples, which won the first prize.

Throughout his career, the artist made a particular specialty of genre paintings, interior scenes, portraits, still life subjects and religious scenes. In 1890 Irolli joined the Circolo Artistico Napoletano, and at around the same time joined several other local artists, including Giuseppe Casciaro, Vincenzo Migliaro, Attilio Pratella and Giuseppe De Sanctis, in contributing to the painted decoration of the elegant Caffè Gambrinus in the center of Naples. He continued to exhibit widely throughout Italy, notably in Naples, Venice and Milan, and also in Barcelona, Berlin, London, Munich and Paris, well into the 20th century. As one review of the Venice Biennale of 1920 stated, 'We notice also with great pleasure the interiors and figure studies of Vincenzo Irolli, warm in color and full of light.' Irolli's paintings came to be much in demand among collectors in France, England and Germany.

Irolli was highly praised as a draughtsman throughout much of his career. In 1923, when several of his works were included in an exhibition of the work of Italian and European watercolorists in Milan, a review of the exhibition in an American magazine noted that 'among the figure work the five paintings by Vincenzo Irolli claim a front place through their marvelous technique giving an effect which equals and almost surpasses that of oil painting in richness and depth of color.'

As Leopoldo Montanari, a close friend of the artist and a major collector of his paintings, wrote poetically of his work, 'Irolli has the portentous ease of drawing, a perfect chromatic perception, a profound sense of anatomy and a quick touch like lightning. In just a few moments, the fleeting impression of a thunderstorm, a sunset, a light effect, the smile of a child, the reproach of a sleeping child, the appearance of a guest, the agony of a fish.'

L'Angelo Custode was first exhibited in 1902 and squarely places Vincenzo Irolli within the international Symbolist movement of the time. Here, the artist employs the position of the figures to depict the subject of this work – the resurrection of the human soul. The pose of the statuesque guardian angel is emotionless and the delicate stance, pointing hand and finger reveal a calm, peaceful mood. The left hand of the angel gently holds that of the young girl, while weightlessly

lifting her up toward the direction of heaven. The red-haired maiden, eyes closed and seemingly asleep, rises from her grave, set indistinctly in the dark lower corner of the composition. In the background, behind the protective angel's wing, stands a grey vertical column marking her empty tomb. Employing Irolli's masteful painterly technique, *L'Angelo Custode* portrays a soul-bearing guardian angel who, embracing the dead, leads its human charge to the scared light and salvation of Heaven.

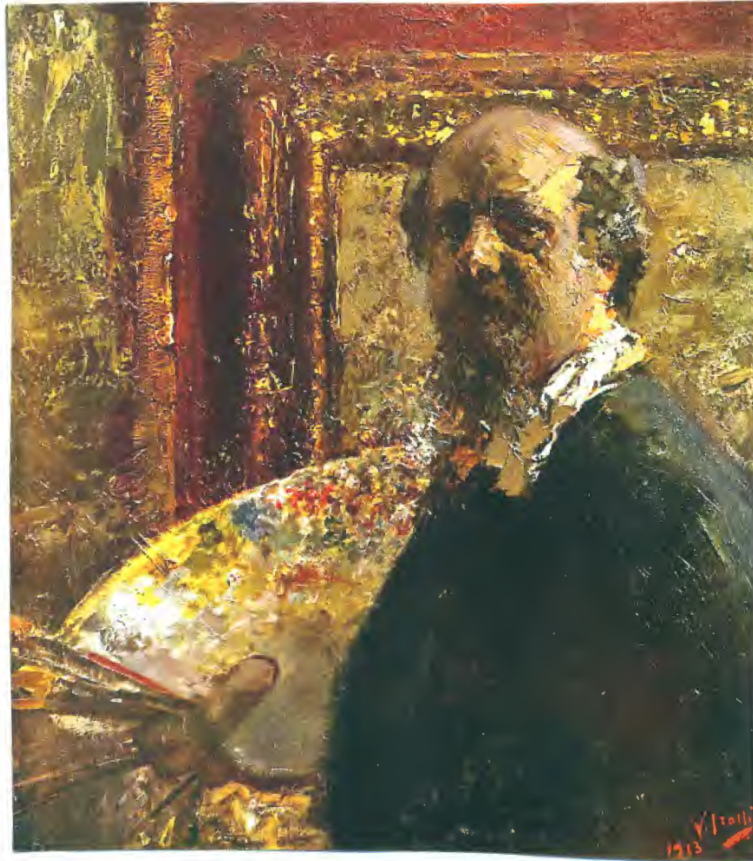


Fig. 1