

Guido Reni, *Aurora* Fresco from Palazzo Rospigliosi at Rome (print)

After Guido Reni, *Aurora Fresco from Palazzo Rospigliosi at Rome* (unknown date). Photograph. Donated by Anna Richmond, 1866.

Among the paintings, sculptures, and prints lining the walls and alcoves of the Athenaeum, the large photograph, framed and glazed^[1] of Guido Reni's [Italian, 1575-1642] *Aurora* fresco is a beautiful work that paints a narrative of Italian gods and goddesses parting golden clouds that give way to starry skies. The characters in the fresco exemplify Renaissance painting styles through the artist's use of color, light, and movement resulting in a dreamlike scene. The Athenaeum's copy of this work fits into the library's wide collection of works dating back centuries.

In 1614, the Renaissance painter Guido Reni, was commissioned to paint the ceiling of the summer house of the Roman Cardinal Scipione Borghese. The theme that he chose, shown here, is a narrative of the ancient Greek goddess, Aurora, leading her brother Helios' chariot through the night sky. Helios, the sun god, is surrounded by the goddesses of the seasons, the Horae. This celebrated fresco became regarded as a Renaissance masterpiece and has been recreated since its creation.

The Athenaeum acquired a 19th-century photographic copy of this Renaissance work in November 1866 from Anna Richmond [1863-1907]. The photograph is thought to have been brought to the library by Albert J. Jones (the same member who was believed to have brought Tommaso Cuccioni's Coliseum photograph from Italy) on his trip to Providence during the summer of 1866. Though the artist is not certain, there is speculation that the *Aurora* photograph was taken by Cuccioni himself^[1] "since it is known that [he] exhibited large-format photographs of frescoes from the Palazzo Farnese and other locations in Rome at an international exhibition in 1862 and that he sold all fourteen of them."^[2] Richmond was a prominent benefactor of the Athenaeum who aided in the construction of the fountain on the Athenaeum's Benefit Street façade. Built in 1873, it reflects her love for the Athenaeum and her desire to bring those from all over Providence to the library.^[3]

It is interesting that the Athenaeum's mid-nineteenth-century *Aurora* was in fact, a photograph and not an oil-on-canvas reproduction of the celebrated work. Photography was introduced in the mid-nineteenth-century but did not end up becoming common until the end of it and knowing that the work could not have been created before 1866, it would have been rare at the time. The use of photography over classic print-making or other forms of reproduction was novel and exciting in the mid-nineteenth century. As with Cuccioni's Coliseum photograph, the *Aurora* was an important acquisition by the Athenaeum.

[1] *Report Made to the Providence Athenaeum at the Annual Meeting* (Providence, Rhode Island: Providence Athenaeum, 1867), p.8.

[2] Austin, Nancy (2015) "The Half-Life & After-Life of New Media," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*: Vol. 2, Article 3. P. 19

[3] Ibid.

[4] Jane Lancaster, *Inquire Within: A Social History of the Providence Athenaeum since 1753* (Providence: The Providence Athenaeum, 2003), 90.