



Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Department of Philosophy
and Cultural Heritage

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Organiser:
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Image: Gian Battista Arzenti, *Veduta di Venezia* (detail),
c. 1620 – 30. Deposito Museo del Buon Consiglio di
Trento, Museo Correr, Venice.

Charitable Associations and Healthcare Provisions
in Early Modern Venice

On Display: Disability, (In)visibility, and Public Space in Early Modern Venice

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Charitable institutions have long been a focus of civic and scholarly attention in the history of early modern Venice. Indeed, charity is often portrayed as being dependent on a division between benefactor and benefitted, with the latter seen as passive and lower in status. Much less studied are organizations such as the Confraternity of the Blind (*Ciechi*) formed in the early fourteenth century so its members could beg for alms. Archival documents reveal not only the various locations where the Confraternity of the Blind (Scuola dei Ciechi) met but also, as a result, their interactions with other residents of the lagoon city and members of other scuole with whom they shared religious space. We might expect that conflicts would arise in these situations; however, the fact that one key conflict erupted over the Ciechi's altarpiece allows us to explore the way they cared for and lived with visual art as a central part of their confraternal life. Central to these interactions were issues of visibility and invisibility not only of the Ciechi but also of the art they displayed and maintained. The paper will further argue that these conflicts grew out of a desire to move this particular group of Venetians out of their meeting place and, thus, out of the ambit of one of the most powerful magistracies in Venice. Analyzing these relationships through the lens of disability studies reveals the importance of the visibility of this group of Venetians—affected by the social process of disablement—who were instead not subjects of care but active agents.



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