



From family collection to House Museum

In Venice as elsewhere, collecting communicates a social condition: it is a manifestation of power and prestige, conditioned by the taste of the time and by cultural factors. The art market is a form of investment aimed primarily at the private accumulation of articles to be flaunted in social relations. But these “publicity costs” are, in some cases, open to choices of patronage.

An example comes from the testamentary dispositions laid down by Giovanni Querini, who with his Library gave Venice an immense documentary heritage and made the family home into one of the most important and best preserved House Museums in Europe. With its stuccoes, frescoes and original

furnishings, the piano nobile highlights the collections of the Querini Stampalia family, increased, transmitted and preserved in the same place for generations. Furniture, Murano glass chandeliers, globes, clocks, musical instruments, porcelain, biscuit, sculptures, tapestries, paintings: here is a furnished museum that recreates the style and the authentic, intimate and sumptuous atmosphere of a Venetian palazzo, as well as illustrating the daily life of the ruling class between the end of the Serenissima and the entry of Venice into Napoleonic and Risorgimento Italy.

The initial nucleus of the holdings was the picture collection, which was founded between 1515 and 1528 by Francesco Querini, who commissioned

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several portraits from Palma Vecchio, the family's painter.

The Gallery itself, cited in numerous archival documents, was founded in 1708 at the behest of Polo Querini, who bought works on the art market and displayed them in a room in the palazzo. The collection was progressively expanded according to the trends of the moment: from the neo-Byzantine composure of the *Coronation of the Virgin* by Donato and Catarino to the Renaissance works of Palma Vecchio and Giovanni Bellini. The amazing modernity of the *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple* by the latter is one of the symbols of the Querini Stampalia and of its experimental vocation. The Querini family members portrayed in the red robes of procuratori by Sebastiano Bombelli underscore the prestige of this lineage without doges, a family that paid dearly for having gambled on what proved to be a failed coup. The interior scenes, the hunting in the lagoon and the gambling room by Pietro Longhi, the women's regatta and the festivities by Gabriel Bella give a fascinating insight into eighteenth-century Venice.

Private donations have enriched the collection of works of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the contemporary artists from the Conservare il Futuro project have also drawn inspiration from the museum's rooms, as this is still a dwelling inhabited by a living beauty, just as Giovanni Querini Stampalia imagined it.

The appearance of the House Museum is the result, as for the entire site, of a process begun shortly after his death in 1869. The insights into the family history that welcome the visitor in the first rooms; the panels – one per room – which have been preferred to the intrusion of captions work by work; the illumination itself, which combines natural light with that diffused by chandeliers; everything aims at ensuring a full appreciation of the furnishings and works of art and at respecting the soul of a place that is a museum, but must also remain a true home, as it was as long as Giovanni lived there.

In 1872, the first curators of the Fondazione, Roberto Boldù, Giacinto Namias and Giambattista Lucietti, transferred part of the artistic heritage

↓ House Museum: Historical layout

House Museum: Historical layout ↓



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to the second floor of the building. The collection was replanned in museum terms and opened to the public for free one day a week. Twenty rooms were laid out: one reserved for paintings purchased after the establishment of the Fondazione, one for family mementos, the others organised mainly with thematic collections together with numerous everyday objects. During the First World War, visits were suspended and some of the paintings stored for safekeeping on the ground floor or out of town. At the end of the conflict the museum was in a "miserable state". Given the seriousness of the situation, the possibility was even considered of transferring the collection to the Museo Correr. Fortunately, the awareness prevailed of the value of the link between the works and the palazzo, which is an aspect that appears throughout the history of the House Museum.

The financial constraints did not prevent the reopening in 1925 with a new layout by Giovanni Bordiga and Angelo Alessandri. Moved by the aim – increasingly honed over the long story of the museum – to evoke the atmosphere of the Querini home, the two curators excluded all modern paintings and

furnishings acquired after the birth of the Fondazione.

In 1934, the new director Manlio Dazzi revised Bordiga and Alessandri's layout, with the sole initial intention of using some rooms as meeting rooms. Soon, however, a rethinking of the Gallery was begun. Vittorio Moschini, soprintendente and director of the Gallerie dell'Accademia, recommended reducing the number of works on display and radically reorganising the gallery. The furnishings, rare in the previous layout, were highlighted, along with personal objects, sculptures, miniatures, archaeological finds, arms, bronzes, ceramics, porcelain (including the Sèvres table service bought in Paris by Alvise Querini, the Serenissima's last ambassador in France). Dazzi bought the lampas tapestry in the Red drawing room on the art market and, bringing it down from the attic, for the first time presented the Pompeian drawing room furniture designed by Giuseppe Jappelli.

As in the First World War, so in the Second it became necessary to safeguard the most precious works and close the museum. It reopened on 8 June 1946

House Museum: Bedchamber ↓



after numerous major restoration interventions on the building, works of art and furnishings, while the electrical plant, air conditioning and focus on offering the public appropriate means of information was only attended to in the 1990s.

In the meantime, restoration began on stuccos and frescoes: those in the Portego and the Bedchamber in 1998, with the support of the French Committee for the Safeguarding of Venice and of Solange Gausson; in 2000, restoration was effected of those in the Dining room and the Mythology room, thanks to the contribution of the Soprintendenza.

Through the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, making use of "otto per mille" funds, in 2005 and in 2020 work was done on the other rooms.

This campaign led to a further review of the criteria underlying the layout. The conservation project by Mario Gemin, and the new layout project by Chiara Bertola, share the objective of reconciling the art-historical choices with the needs of protection, to guarantee the best conditions for enjoyment of the most significant works.

The current methods of communication take into account the expectations of various types of public. The visit to the House Museum provides a journey through the art and the social history of the city and offers interpretations to understand the present. The emphasis is on narrative, to encourage visitors to discover the domestic habits and daily rituals of an old Venetian palace, but also the customs and festivals that still in part mark the life of Venice today.

House Museum: Room of the 'Scenes from Venetian Life' ↓

