

Ballroom

70 years after Longhena's death, Giorgio Massari created two new areas over the old ones, which added to the spectacular effect of his predecessor's project: the staircase and a large ballroom. The latter monumental room, made by demolishing the ceiling and thus exploiting the whole height of the two main floors, was unrivalled in Venice as regards both its size and the quality of its painted decorations.

It was 1751. Since Tiepolo was away in Germany working for the bishop prince of Wurzburg, the painting of the frescoes was commissioned from a highly original artist, Giambattista Crosato, fresh from his successes as Savoy court painter in Turin. As recent studies have revealed, Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna, Giambattista Tiepolo's great quadratura or architectural *trompe-l'oeil* painter, who had remained in Venice after his friend's departure, collaborated with Crosato. Mengozzi Colonna created here an highly effective illusionist space. Stretching behind a front order of gigantic pilaster strips with gilded capitals alternating with fake statues, is a perimeter of grey marble columns. These support an architrave in red Verona stone, faking the module of the actual front doorway. In the upper part the artist has expanded the space, suggesting a flight of rooms beyond the loggias and the balconies painted at the sides.

In the middle of the ceiling, Giambattista Crosato has shown Apollo the sun god, rising with his chariot to radiate the four parts of the world, which are personified here by girls of different races. This subject was frequent in patrician residences because it was considered auspicious, alluding to the radiant future awaiting the palace owner. And it is the Rezzonico family itself which welcomes us into the ballroom, with their grandiose gigantic coat-of-arms on the wall in front of the door.

The room is a heraldic and allegorical exaltation of the owners; the two-headed eagles of their coat-of-arms is repeated on all the column capitals. Rarely however has painting celebrated itself and its illusionist potential as it does here. The visitor is transported into a magical, fairytale atmosphere within the walls of a family home.

The only pieces of the original furnishings remaining are the two majestic wooden chandeliers with floral patterns in gilded metal. Along the walls we find lavish ornamental furnishings in ebony and boxwood by Andrea Brustolon, one of the greatest Baroque sculptors of wood, christened by Honoré de Balzac "le Michel Ange du bois".

There are 40 or so pieces, some of which are displayed in the room specifically dedicated to Brustolon. The series was originally created for palazzo Venier at San Vio, and includes chairs, vase-bearing statues and ornamental figures of Ethiopian slaves and warriors. The sculptor's imagination has transformed the various elements of the furnishings into an opulent triumph of intertwined branches and actual fully-formed sculptures. The frames of the 12 monumental chairs are in the same materials. Not one of these chairs is the same as any other. Here Brustolon's imagination had a field day, inventing different legs and armrests which reproduced tree branches supported by telamons, and with little fauns and exotic cupids peeping through them. It is probably the most sumptuous group of Venetian furnishings which has come down to us, and it reveals the exuberant decorative taste of Venetian Baroque.

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Nuptial allegory room

In the winter of 1757, the wedding between Ludovico Rezzonico and Faustina Savorgnan took place. For the occasion, the row of rooms along the san Barnaba canal, intended as the spouses' reception apartment, was frescoed. In this circumstance, Giambattista Tiepolo was also present. Helped once more by Girolamo Mengozzi, he painted the *Nuptial allegory* on the ceiling of this room in just 12 days. Pairs of satyrs painted by Tiepolo's son Giandomenico are leaning against a fake ochre and green marble parapet, and beyond this is an architectural structure, ending a balustrade which opens onto the sky. The two spouses are presented to the viewer riding on Apollo's chariot; they are preceded by the blindfolded *Cupid*, while some allegorical figures surround the main group. Among these we can recognise: *Fame*, blowing her trumpet; the *Graces* sitting on a cloud just under the wedding chariot; Truth with the sun in her hand; and *Merit*, a bearded old man crowned with laurels with St. Mark's lion at his feet and holding a banner with the coats-of-arms of the wedding couple's families. Varying the points of view for the arrangement of the figures, the painter creates a dynamic, plausible image where even the paradoxical appears as concrete. Only Giambattista Tiepolo's imagination and skill would have been able to imagine the couple's arrival directly on the chariot of the sun, and to render it credible at the same time.

This room also contains the *Portrait of Carlo Rezzonico*, son of Giambattista, the first owner of the palace, and the uncle of Ludovico, who became pope in 1758 with the name of Clement XIII. The painting is by Anton Raphael Mengs, the philosopher painter who was the friend of Winckelmann and the first protagonist of Neoclassical painting.

Reportedly, the painting was originally intended to be displayed in the family palace in Venice, but shortly after its execution it was moved to Rome, where the Pope's nephew, Cardinal Abbondio Rezzonico, had taken up residence.

On the right wall is the small chapel built in the second half of the 18th century. Framed by an elegant rococo decoration with gilded stuccowork against a white background, the painting of the *Madonna and Saints* is by Francesco Zugno, a pupil of Giambattista Tiepolo. The glass cases lining the walls of the room display porcelain from different European manufactories from the collection of Marino Nani Mocenigo.

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Pastel room

Besides Giambattista Tiepolo, other important Venetian fresco painters participated in the decoration of the wedding apartment. This room was decorated by Gaspare Diziani, one of the most active mid-18th century artists in this field. On the ceiling he painted a theme which was particularly dear to Venetian nobility, the *Triumph of the Arts over Ignorance*. Diziani presents us with a swarm of allegorical figures, each one holding the tools of his particular art and painted in the warm, bright colours learnt from his master Sebastiano Ricci. On the walls are a collection of portraits in pastels, a technique which originated in France in the Renaissance but which reached its peak during the 18th century. The particular features of pastels, applied to a paper or cardboard support, are their softness, rapid use and the possibility of overlapping various layers of colour. This allows perfect reproduction of texture, and particularly of human skin, which caused it to become the favourite technique for portraits.

Although the pastel technique originated and flourished in France, it was the Venetian woman artist Rosalba Carriera who exploited it to its utmost, and gave it a more modern, striking texture. The work of Rosalba Carriera, the most famous Italian woman artist in Europe for the whole of the 18th century, is exemplified in the portrait to the left of the door you came in by, *Portrait of gentleman in red*, where she captures the main features of the subject's personality, depicting his fleshy, wilful mouth and penetrating gaze. The scintillating tones of the pastels light up the whole picture and the impact of the image is increased through the contrast of the vermillion jacket and the luminous face.

On the wall to your right, past the door which leads onto the *Portego* (large central hall), another two of her masterpieces

are displayed: the *Portrait of Sister Maria Caterina* and *Portrait of the contralto Faustina Bordoni Hasse*. Comparing the two, we can perceive Rosalba's mastery of differing emotional registers, her exceptional skill in interpreting the human soul. We see the benevolent spirituality of the nun, who died in the odour of sanctity in 1734, contrasted with the energetic, shrewd expression of the singer, who was a real primadonna, a protagonist of 18th-century opera.

The fine portrait in the middle of the following wall is by Lorenzo Tiepolo. It shows his mother Cecilia Guardi Tiepolo, the wife of Giambattista Tiepolo and the sister of Antonio and Francesco Guardi. Notice in particular the delicate tones and the nuances of colour which make this painting, done when Lorenzo was only 21 years old, a work of refined quality.

The four small display cases along the walls contain porcelain from the collection of Marino Nani Mocenigo. Particularly noteworthy are the pieces belonging to a Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate set with bird and rock décor in gold on a blue background, also known as *Hausmaler*, from the Meissen manufactory.

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Tapestry room

The ceiling of this room is decorated with a complex allegorical painting also done in the winter of 1757/58 by Jacopo Guarana, one of the most prolific fresco painters in the Venetian palaces, who carried on Tiepolo's work after this artist's departure for Spain. In the composition we can recognize *Fortitude* with the helmet, and *Temperance*; then, higher up, *Marital Harmony* and *Valour* with the lion. On the left are *Justice* and *Prudence*; higher up *Eternity* with the sun and moon, *Abundance*, and *Glory*. In the corners are the theological Virtues. The rich decorative frescoed cornice surrounding the central scene is the work of the *quadratura* or architectural *trompe-l'oeil* painter Piero Visconti, who collaborated with Guarana in other circumstances too. Guarana, who here was just beginning his career, immediately revealed a stylistic and cultural orientation which were very different from Tiepolo's. He abandoned bold perspectives, presenting a composition which stretched over a single visual plane, the figures being arranged in coy poses and described with careful, meticulous brushstrokes. Guarana's colour scheme consists of delicate half-tones, very different from his master's dazzling palette. The room takes its name from three 18th-century Flemish wall-tapestries with scenes from the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Like the magnificent furniture in this room, the tapestries come from palazzo Balbi Valier at Santa Maria Formosa. The refined workmanship of the tables with their green marble tops, the armchairs, the rare three-seater sofa, the two *gheridòns* (or three-legged tables), the curtain-holders (called *buonegrazie* in Venetian), make this one of the most remarkable suites of furniture in the Venetian *Rococo* style to have survived intact. The sinuosity of the legs of the furniture, and the delicate ornamentation of the surfaces,

which imitates the asymmetries of sea foam and broken shells, are typical of mid-18th century late Rococo; they also demonstrate the change in taste as compared with the furniture made by Brustolon fifty years previously, as regards both form and materials.

In this room we find the sole surviving element of the original furnishings, that is to say the lacquered door decorated with oriental patterns, a testimony to the great 18th-century passion for *chinoiserie*. This very rare example is datable around 1760; some scholars have suggested that it may have been based on drawings by Giambattista or Giandomenico Tiepolo, at the time working on the frescoes of the palace's rooms.

On the shorter walls, above the two chest of drawers, two wooden sculptures by Andrea Brustolon representing the *Penitent Magdalene* and the *Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius*, are displayed.

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6 | Throne room

The decoration of the wedding couple's apartment ends with the ceiling of this last room, again frescoed by Giambattista Tiepolo with the collaboration of Girolamo Mengozzi Colonna. It shows *Merit* as a bearded old man crowned with laurels rising to the Temple of Immortal Glory accompanied by *Nobility* (the winged figure holding a spear) and *Virtue* (the richly-dressed figure to the right of the old man). Other allegorical figures and cherubs crown the scene. One of these, beneath the figure of *Merit*, is holding the Golden Book of the Venetian Nobility where the names of patrician families were registered, including that of the Rezzonico family from 1687 onward.

This room, lined in red velvet, takes its name from the gilded wooden throne decorated with cherubs, sea-nymphs and sea-horses. This was used by Pius VI on 10th March 1782, when he stayed in Chioggia as a guest of the Grassi family. It was however made considerably before that date, in the first decades of the 18th century, and it shows the quality and exuberance of Brustolon's carving, updated to suit a less pompous, less showy taste. Less austere gilding were now preferred to the dark, glossy late 17th-century materials, and they helped to refine the ornamentation which was still quite massy.

The rich furniture of the room is in the same taste. This includes the imposing frame on the wall to the left of the entrance door with its rich allegorical decoration celebrating the moral virtues of the patrician Pietro Barbarigo, the subject of the portrait. Starting from the Barbarigo coat-of-arms at the top and proceeding clockwise, we see in order: *Patriotism*, *Charity*, *Constancy*, *Magnanimity*, *Prudence*, *Justice* and *Faith*. The remaining part of the furniture includes an elaborate console,

and four armchairs so finely carved that they were at one time attributed to the sculptor Antonio Corradini; this artist however actually never made any works in wood.

This suite of furniture combines Baroque ornamental motifs, such as the full-relief figurative elements, with a new lighter, more graceful kind of workmanship (for example, elimination of linking elements on the armchair legs). This approach eventually led to the more slender shapes and smaller proportions which we saw in the furniture of the previous room.

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Tiepolo Room

In this room you can admire the third of Giambattista Tiepolo's four ceilings in Ca' Rezzonico. This modelled canvas shows *Nobility and Virtue defeating Wickedness*. Unlike the frescoes in the other rooms of the lower *piano nobile*, this work was not painted for the palace, but was created between 1744 and 1745 for Pietro Barbarigo for his palace in Santa Maria del Giglio. Later it was removed by his heirs and purchased in 1934 by the Venice Town Council to be exhibited in this room. In this work, Tiepolo goes back to an allegorical theme he had already used various times for his noble patrons. This time he adds the figure of the elegant page bearing the train of *Nobility*, who is perhaps the portrait of his son Giuseppe Maria. The splendid figures of the allegories stand out from a sky of crystalline luminosity. The painting has a consistently light colour scheme with grey/silvery overtones which emphasise the iridescent orange of *Virtue*. In this case too Tiepolo was evidently greatly inspired by Paolo Veronese's use of bright colours, but the pungent sensuality of the figures and the free, flowing application of the paint is wholly 18th-century in character.

An important painting in this room, high up on the wall to the left of the entrance, is the *Portrait of the Architect Bartolomeo Ferracina*, by Alessandro Longhi, the son of Pietro Longhi and the most famous late 18th-century Venetian portrait painter. The furniture in this room is of different origins and high artistic value. The imposing walnut *bureau-trumeau* is unique for its size, workmanship and state of conservation, and was perhaps original to the palace. It is datable to the mid-18th century.

The large eight-legged billiard table with its green felt-covered top in the middle of the room is particularly interesting. It is

a fine example of Venetian Baroque furniture, and its massy, monumental forms and lion-paw feet suggest that it was probably made in the late 17th or the early 18th century.

The eight carved boxwood armchairs formerly belonged to the Correr family and were traditionally attributed to Andrea Brustolon, but considering the inferior quality of the carving are more likely to be the work of his workshop or of a contemporary imitator.

The door between the bureau-trumeau and the fireplace leads to a narrow passageway displaying white porcelain groups produced by the Venetian manufactory of Geminiano Cozzi and the one operated by Pasquale Antonibon in Nove.

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Some examples from the workshop store of the sculptor Giovanni Maria Morlàiter have recently been placed in the four late 17th-century walnut cupboards. These include terracotta and rammed earth casts and models. The workshop store, which remained intact after the sculptor's death, was sold to the heirs of the patrician Marcantonio Michièl, then passed into the Donà delle Rose collection, from which it was purchased by the Town Council of Venice in 1935.

Altogether it consists of a hundred or so pieces, and is an extraordinary testimony to the creative methods of an 18th-century sculptor, that is to say to the moment when the artist models the clay according to his first ideas which will then be transferred into the finished marble work. Alongside these preparatory studies, some beautifully-finished complete models have survived; these the sculptor presented to his clients for the final approval of the work. The examples displayed here reveal all Morlàiter's artistic qualities. He was the sculptor most able to transfer the vibrant light effects of contemporary painting into the three-dimensional form; so much so that he was often compared for the freshness of his execution to Sebastiano Ricci, who was in fact his close friend. In this selection we can admire the preparatory models for works made for churches, but also models for garden statues and portraits and a splendid model for a processional sign. There is also a complete study for an altar relief, while the delightful little rammed earth cherubs in the showcase on the right were probably designed to be made in porcelain. The mask of a bearded man is the model for the arch keystone which can be seen in the courtyard of Ca'Rezzonico near the water entrance.

In his workshop store Morlaiter also kept models by other sculptors. This is the case of the four busts and the pair of cherubs on the top shelves of the cupboards: these are the work of Enrico Merengo, Morlaiter's master. Two rare models (only four are known of) showing a Ceres for a garden statue, and a preparatory Angel for the altar of the church of Santa Maria della Salute are instead by the sculptor Giusto Le Court, the so-called "Adriatic Bernini", who introduced the forms of Roman Baroque to Venice.

A shaped canvas in a special stucco frame has been adapted for the ceiling. The painting, *The Allegory of Merit* is by a Rovigo artist, Mattia Bortoloni, a pupil of Antonio Balestra and prolific fresco painter in Venice, the Veneto, Lombardy and Piedmont.

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Lazzarini Room

In this room there are three Baroque paintings of imposing size. They are so big they practically cover the whole of the walls. Antonio Molinari is the author of the work on the wall in front of you, *The Battle between Centaurs and Lapiths*.

The painting *Hercules and Omphalus* to the right of the entrance door is by Antonio Bellucci, while *Orpheus Torn to Pieces by the Bacchantes* on the left is by Gregorio Lazzarini. These are three complex, elaborate narrative scenes painted by the major 'experts' of this field of Venetian art; they were already considered by their contemporaries to be the most famous painters working in Venice. The works thus show late 17th-century Venetian painting at its best, and although the names of their authors are now familiar only to specialists, in their time they were internationally famous. The paintings were commissioned by the procurator Vettore Correr, who intended to place them in the so-called 'Camaròn', the main reception room of the palace. The themes as a whole illustrated the soul of Man devastated by passions and excesses. They may have been intended as an original, ambiguous, invitation to temperance for those banqueting in that room, where the heroes of mythology showed their least heroic side.

The ceiling is made up of five ovals inside gilded frames which stand out from the dark blue background. Again, this series of ceiling paintings was not originally part of the original furnishings of Ca' Rezzonico, but was transferred into the Museum in 1936 from Palazzo Nani on the Cannarégio canal, along with the series now in the Brustolòn room. Decoration of ceilings with canvases set into exuberant wooden frames was typical of the late 17th century and preceded the widespread popularity of the fresco in the following century. In the centre we see *Prometheus with the mirror* given to him by Minerva,

and the eagle. This is surrounded by other scenes showing *Daedalus and Icarus*, *Prometheus released by Hercules*, *Perseus showing Atlas the head of Medusa*, and *Andromeda bound to the rock*. The five ovals are the work of the Vicenza painter Francesco Maffei and are an excellent example of his exuberant, unconventional style, so different from the more composed, formal one of the paintings on the walls by his younger colleagues.

In the centre of the room stands a splendid writing-desk veneered in precious woods, with carved ivory inlays and gilded bronze rods. This is the work of the famous Turin cabinet-maker Pietro Piffetti, signed and dated 1741.

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Brustolon Room

As we have seen in the ballroom, the 'decorative furniture' carved by Andrea Brustolon for the Venier family is considered the greatest masterpiece of early 18th-century Venetian carving. The most famous piece is certainly the console-cum-vase-stand on the right wall of this room, at the bottom of which we see Hercules, the vanquisher of the Lernian Hydra, with Cerberus at his feet. On its shoulders Cerberus bears the upper surface, which is worked like a rough tree trunk, and shows three ebony blackamoors in chains holding up a large vase. At the two sides lie two bearded old men, each holding another two vases.

An identical, exceptional skilful inventiveness also appears in the splendid series of vase-stands with the allegories of the *Four Seasons*, the *Four elements* and *Apollo* symbolising the light.

The extraordinary care which went into the making of these furnishings reveals the high consideration and above all the value of the series of oriental (Chinese and Japanese) vases in Pietro Venier's collection. It was for these that these precious, original stands were designed.

The ceiling decoration consists of eleven canvases of different shapes and sizes which come, like the five now in the previous room, from Palazzo Nani at Cannaregio, and are again the work of Francesco Maffei. In this case, identification of the extremely heterogeneous subjects is complex and inevitably to a certain extent unreliable. In the centre is the oval with Jove; around him, starting with the naked figure with a bunch of flowers representing *The Sense of Smell* and moving clockwise we see: *Mercury*, *Apollo*, *Saturn*, *The Sense of Touch*, *Mars*, *Diana*. Near the walls on the long sides are: *The Sense of Hearing* and *Minerva* as Divine Wisdom. The four

monochrome tondos in the corners of the ceiling showing the *Four Continents* are by a different artist. They too come from a ceiling in Palazzo Nani but were painted over a century later by Francesco Polazzo.

In the centre of the room hangs the superb crystal glass chandelier with its two rows of 20 candle-holders and brightly-coloured glass paste flowers. This was produced towards the mid-18th century by the Murano factory of Giuseppe Briati, and is certainly the most extraordinary example of its kind to have come down to us intact.

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11 | Portego

In the traditional structure of the Venetian palace the *portego*, or connecting hall, was the largest area in the building, and it played the role of reception room. In Longhena's project which was then revised by Massari, this role has been taken over by the main central room, a type of room imported to Venice from the architecture of the Roman palaces. Thus the *portego* became simply a connecting element between the rooms and the staircase leading to the other floors. This area was once decorated by four canvases with religious subjects by Luca Giordano, which were then sold during the 19th century. Now it contains 18th-century marble busts inside niches or on brackets showing portraits and allegorical figures, while the walls are lined in pink *marmorino* polished plaster. Sofas of refined *rocaille* taste, carved walnut trestle tables and an elegant gilded sedan chair upholstered in red silk complete the furnishings.

Among the ornamental sculptures to the right of the sedan chair, is a remarkable bust of *Envy*, the work of Giusto Le Cour. The author shows with highly convincing naturalism the allegory described by Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* as an "old, ugly, and pale woman, her body is lean and wasted, with malevolent eyes and dishevelled hair, and snakes swarm from her head". Quite different is instead the carnal and languid *Lucretia* visible against the same wall on the left, by Filippo Parodi, a Genoese sculptor also active in Venice.

On either side of the doorway, which is almost a triumphal arch dominated by the Rezzonico coat-of-arms, are two sculptures by Alessandro Vittoria, originally two telamons holding up the hood of the imposing late 16th-century fireplace.

The two large console tables against the wall feature two superb hard stone inlaid tops by Benedetto Corberelli, a

member of a Florentine family active in northern Italy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, specialized in the production of this kind of artefacts.

Created for Bishop Francesco Pisani, the two table tops show a rich decoration with floral spirals and interlaced branches that surround a central medallion depicting *Orpheus* and the *Phoenix* respectively. Animals and colourful birds peep out from among the branches, while episodes from Aesop's fables can be recognized in the corners.

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Picture gallery portego

In the second-floor portego some of the most important paintings in the museum are displayed. These provide excellent examples of the various painting genres of 18th-century Venetian art: the *veduta* (or “view”), the landscape, the *capriccio*, the portrait and the figure painting.

The *Dutch Diplomatic Meeting* by Francesco Guardi, a work which refers to a precise historical event, the trading agreement signed in The Hague on 27th August 1753 between the Kingdom of Naples and Holland. The painting was commissioned by Count Finocchiatti, the representative of the Bourbon sovereign, who immediately after the event came to Venice and commissioned the work. Together with the other works by Francesco Guardi in Ca' Rezzonico such as the *Foyer*, the *Parlatory of the Nuns*, the *Signboard of the Guild of the Coroneri* (or rosary-makers), it forms the most important group of interiors by this artist present in a public collection.

On the opposite wall is the large canvas of the *Death of Darius*, painted in about 1746 by Giambattista Piazzetta for the portego of Palazzo Pisani Moretta at San Polo, where it was paired with a painting by Paolo Veronese showing *Alexander and Darius' Family*, later sold by the owners to the National Gallery of London. The *Death of Darius* is one of the great master's most important works. All the particular features of his style, so different from that of his contemporary and rival Tiepolo, can be recognised in it. The atmosphere is gloomy and dramatic, an effect which has been emphasised by alterations in the colours which have occurred due to the priming with Armenian bole. Over the centuries this priming has absorbed and cancelled some hues, such as the pinks and light blues. Piazzetta's rendering of faces and gestures is the result of careful meditation, in contrast to Tiepolo's quick, free brush strokes. Piazzetta also impeccably defines the anatomy of the nude, as can be observed in the extraordinary image of the Persian king's outstretched body.

A stucco frame surrounds a painting by Gian Antonio Pellegrini showing *Mutius Scaevola Standing before Porsenna*. This is a fine example of the late work of this major exponent of international rococo, which was wholly concentrated on painting techniques. He uses a rapid, loose application of contrasting, clashing colours.

The next part of the wall is dedicated to the display of the two early masterpieces by Canaletto, *View of the Grand Canal from Ca' Balbi towards Rialto*, and *Rio dei Mendicanti* (the Beggars' Canal). These are the only two views by the master which can be seen in the public collections of Venice. These paintings were originally part of a series of four, belonging to the Princes of Liechtenstein. The other two are today in the Thyssen-Bornemisza museum of Madrid). In the first painting Canaletto exalts the particular nature of Venice as a "city of water", expanding the true width of the Grand Canal. Sunlight breaks in from the right, illuminating even the smallest element of the composition, and making even the most distant buildings distinctly perceptible. Within the perspective structure Canaletto builds up a stupefying realism which is obtained through an extraordinary use of light. Nor does he hide the signs of the pictorial operation; indeed he exhibits them bared-facedly: loaded, frayed brush strokes which offer the viewer a more 'realistic', more lively, interpretation of the town. Canaletto adds views which had formerly been ignored to the standard repertoire, which concentrated on the area around St. Mark's Square. These included both the Grand Canal and little-known corners of Venice, one of which was this *Rio dei mendicanti*, in which the artist depicts a popular district and describes it in all its plebeian beauty.

The opposite wall features *The Feast of St. Martha* by Gaspare Diziani. The large painting depicts the feast, or eve, of St. Martha's Day, a popular festival that was celebrated the night before the anniversary of the saint in front of the eponymous church located at the westernmost end of Zattere. It is a unique example in the production of Gaspare Diziani, whose work can be admired in the palace also in the frescoed ceiling of the Pastel Room on the first floor. In this painting he managed to capture a striking picture of Venetian life. In using a nocturnal setting and a vivid description of the revellers, from all different social classes and caught in a private moment of merriment, Diziani offers us one of the most convincing examples of his prolific activity while making us relive the atmosphere of eighteenth century Venice.

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Giandomenico Tiepolo in Zianigo

In these rooms you can admire the frescoes painted by Giandomenico Tiepolo in the family villa in Zianigo. Stripped in 1906 for sale abroad, they were purchased by the town of Venice and transferred in 1936 to Ca'Rezzonico. Here they were hung in small rooms which wherever possible reproduce their original location. The paintings were completed over a fairly long period, between 1759 and 1797, and undoubtedly constitute one of the most fascinating, singular bodies of work in the whole of Venetian painting. They are works painted not for a client but for the artist and his family's own pleasure, in the private context of their home. This very circumstance freed the painter from thematic and figurative conventions and allowed him to follow his own intimate nature, a propensity to sarcastic description of the world around him.

The first work in front of the door shows a scene from Torquato Tasso's poem *Jerusalem Delivered*. It shows *Rinaldo Abandoning the Garden of Armida*, and was formerly on the ground floor of the villa of Zianigo. We are still in a figurative dimension, where both style and theme are closely linked to Giandomenico's father's world. The subject is connected to the grand Baroque tradition of historical painting; Giandomenico however interprets it with an ungrammatical expressiveness which corrodes its solemn, sophisticated effect. His particular nature is fully expressed on the left of the back wall, in the snapshot-like image of the *Hawk Swooping onto the Flock of Sparrows in Flight*. This was originally a ceiling and, instead of his father's mythologies, Giandomenico painted a theme of limpid, natural simplicity. It is impossible not to see in this painting an allusion to the empirical culture of the Enlightenment, where the sky is the space of birds and not the home of ancient divinities.

The frescoes in the next room repropose themes already painted by Giandomenico Tiepolo in his youth in the guest quarters of the villa Valmarana. After many years he gave them a new monumental form and reinterpreted them with a more mature eye which scrutinised his contemporaries with ruthless irony. The *New World* shows a crowd of people thronging around the huckster in his booth with the magic lantern, called in fact "New World" for the images of exotic places shown inside it. This amusement attracted not only children as was traditional, but the whole of society: common people, peasants, the middle classes; here they are all depicted lifesize from the rear in a single great anti-portrait. In this fresco, Giandomenico overturns the classic conception of representation; the scene does not present itself to the viewer but paradoxically denies itself to our scrutiny, hiding that very show which had drawn the crowd. We are not looking at a scene, rather at someone who in turn is watching what is happening. In the two minor scenes, the painter presents another theme which is particularly dear to him, that of the promenade and the dance. Here they lose that chivalrous, fashionable context typical of Giandomenico's early small pictures. The *Promenade in the villa* conveys an involuntarily comic effect: the

sophisticated elegance of the clothes strikes a false note when they are seen on the skinny, scraggy limbs of personages who again turn their backs on us, making a stage exit.

The frescoes decorating the small chapel were probably the first ones painted in the villa by Giandomenico Tiepolo. The chapel was in fact dedicated in 1758 to the blessed Jerome Miani, the founder of the order of the Somaschi to which the painter's younger brother, Giuseppe Maria, belonged. Besides the altarpiece with the *Madonna and Child adored by St. Jerome Miani and St. James the Apostle*, Giandomenico painted two monochromes of the saint's life at either side. Following his propensity for concreteness and close observation of reality, Giandomenico interpreted the two miraculous events as moments in the life of a seminary, a life veiled with melancholic squalor, spare and frugal, where there is no space for miracles.

The Punchinello (or Punch) Room, which is actually a proper bed-chamber, was the last one to be painted by Giandomenico Tiepolo, and it is perhaps the most famous of the whole cycle. In contrast with the show which is denied to the viewer in the *New World*, a swarming multitude of figures is offered up to us here. The main character is Punchinello, the *Commedia dell'Arte* character who embodies the popular soul in an eternal parody of Man and his weaknesses. In the last years of his life, Giandomenico was literally obsessed by this figure, whom he painted on the walls of his house and in dozens of drawings which were then collected in an album. This album has since been dismantled and its single sheets have been scattered over various public and private collections. In this *Commedia dell'Arte* character the artist found the perfect incarnation of that irreverent, sarcastic spirit which was his own natural disposition. In the frescoes in this room, innumerable Punchinellos have suddenly emerged from the entrails of the earth up a ladder. They perform the same actions as the nobility, or mimic the protagonists of the fairytales and mythologies described by Giambattista Tiepolo. They have fun on the swing, flirt with the women during carnival, watch the tumblers' shows, carouse and get drunk, join the promenade; in one of the monochromes they even chase away a fashionably-dressed young lady. The future imagined by the painter is tragic-comic, terrifying and topical in its pessimism. He contrasts the fatuous New World with another brand-new world, a world populated with irreverent, rough people, a world of free, equal individuals. Here Giandomenico appears to allude to the revolutionary message then arriving from France. It may be a coincidence, but the date of the completion of the frescoes was 1797, the fatal year of the fall of the Venetian Republic.

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Harpsichord room

The room takes name from the harpsichord (dated to the third quarter of the Seventeenth Century), probably made in Urbino, which was subsequently mounted on anachronistic legs. The decoration on the sides is in *lacca povera*, which consists of printed cut-outs glued on then coated with a layer of protective transparent varnish. In this specific case, it shows hunting scenes, landscapes and trysts. The drop-leaf chest of drawers against the wall is decorated with the same technique.

In three modern glass display cases along the wall, there is an important selection of porcelain objects that provide an overview of some of the most important of the Eighteenth-Century European production, including extremely famous pieces from Meissen, Sèvres and Wien.

The most significant group was produced locally, and specifically in Venice (by Vezzi and Cozzi) and Nove, near Bassano (by Antonibon). The earliest manufactory in Venice was that of Giovanni Vezzi, who was the first to bring to Venice the chemical formula for porcelain, originally discovered in 1710 by Johann Friedrich Böttger, an alchemist at the royal Court at Dresden.

Vezzi's porcelain production began in 1720 and had already ceased by 1727. Now this objects are very rare. All made of a characteristically hard, translucent porcelain that was very similar to the porcelain produced in Meissen. Amongst the pieces on display, there is a remarkable series of elegant bell-shaped cups with iron red, blue and gold decorations and mythological scenes depicted by Ludovico Ortolani.

Other significant examples were produced by Geminiano Cozzi porcelain manufactory from 1764 to the early 19th

Century. Cozzi's production was typified by his continually modernised forms and decorations which changed according to fashion and tastes. The marvellous tea and coffee service donated to Ca' Rezzonico by Prince Umberto of Savoy with red monochrome decorations of landscapes and country scenes is one of the Cozzi's earliest production and one of his masterpieces.

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Room of the Parlatory

This room contains two of the most famous paintings by Francesco Guardi, showing on the left the *Parlatory of the Nuns of San Zaccaria* and on the right the *Foyer of palazzo Dandolo at San Moisè*.

Thus two “interior views”, which in a certain sense anticipate the town views which Francesco began to paint only in the second half of the century. Notice the quality of the lively figures, which have the same freshness of touch and delicacy of colour as those which were to people his innumerable outside views.

The *Foyer* shows the large main room of the gaming house of palazzo Dandolo in San Moisè, whose walls were lined with “cuoridoro” before 1768, when the interior of the old palace was restructured in Neoclassical style according to a project by Bernardino Maccaruzzi.

The Ridotto, or *Foyer*, was operated directly by the State and remained open during the months of the endless Venetian carnival, lasting from December 26th to Ash Wednesday. Anyone visiting the premises was required to wear a mask, with the exception of the noblemen who ran the gambling tables, who were chosen from the least prosperous families, the so-called Barnabotti class of impoverished nobility. Frequented by pimps, prostitutes and usurers, it was closed for reasons of public order in 1774. Guardi’s painting is certainly the most interesting depiction of this space, visited by all travellers spending any time in the city.

The *Parlatory* instead shows the visiting-room of the convent of San Zaccaria, one of the most important in Venice, where descendants of the noble Venetian families were sent to become nuns. Here, relatives and friends could converse with

the nuns and during these meetings puppet shows were also put on for any small guests.

A fresco stripped from a reception room of Palazzo Nani in Cannaregio has been fitted to the ceiling. It shows *Conjugal harmony crowned by Virtue in the presence of Justice, Prudence, Temperance, Fame, Abundance*, and is the work of Costantini Cedini, a late pupil of Giambattista Tiepolo.

The decorative frame surrounding the central scene was painted about a century earlier by the *trompe l'oeil* painter Antonio Felice Ferrari.

The greenish-yellow lacquer suite of furniture with floral decorations is of notable quality; it comes from Palazzo Calbo Crotta at Gli Scalzi. Particularly fine is the large curving chest of drawers with the marble top, surmounted by the imposing but slender mirror with its lovely gilded crest; and the two twin bedside tables with their similar *rocaille* lines, again repeated in the ten elegant armchairs, whose upholstery is however modern. The frame which fixes the wall covering is also from the same period.

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Longhi Room

The painting on the ceiling with *Zephyr and Flora* is the last painting by Giambattista Tiepolo present in the palace, although it was the first to be painted. It comes in fact from the rooms of Ca' Pesaro and was done on the occasion of the marriage between Antonio Pesaro and Caterina Sagredo, celebrated in 1732. The subject, which was frequent in the Baroque era, alludes to the reawakening of nature (Flora) with the coming of spring, which is announced by a light, warm breeze (Zephyr). It augurs fecundity for the newlyweds. The colours are transparent and bright; *virtuoso* pieces like Flora's iridescent drape or the crystalline texture of Zephyr's wings alternate with sensuous flesh tones.

In contrast to Tiepolo's imaginative art, along the walls you can view the whole of Pietro Longhi's original production, which takes us into the daily life of 18th-century Venice, both the festive life of the carnival and the reserved life of the nobility who, for the first time here, open the doors of their palaces to indiscrete scrutiny, at least in a virtual sense. Pietro Longhi's artistic career was long and complex and covered numerous artistic genres. After a not very brilliant career as an historical painter he converted to genre painting, more precisely to the painting of pastoral scenes. First he painted isolated figures of shepherds and peasant women, then he transferred them into rustic country interiors, where they are seen in attitudes of tender, joyful complicity, as in the painting called *Polenta* or the one called *Furlana*, a folk dance.

After these works dedicated to a merry Italian Arcadia, towards the mid-18th century Longhi's investigative eye turned to the town, and he changed subject and style. It was in this field that he made his name. His new subjects were the members of Venetian patrician society, no longer shown in formal portraits like those on the lower floor, but portrayed as they went about their daily business: the *Barber*, the *Morning Chocolate*, or the *Visit of the bauta* (*bauta* is a masked carnival character) or *The Moor's Letter*. It was the first time that the Venetian aristocracy had been shown, so to speak, in their dressing gowns, busy at their various pastimes. In describing this private world Pietro Longhi uses an extremely delicate technique based on soft colours and continuous tiny brushstrokes which enhance the effect of the elaborate fabrics. The painter also follows the aristocratic couple outside their homes, where they are going not to take part in public ceremonies but to have fun at the Carnival. The places they stop at are the huckster's or hawkers' stands. Longhi portrays the noble Venetians with their faces masked so as to remain anonymous, just as Venetian Republican laws demanded. The attractions of the Carnival, which lasted all of three months, included exotic animals like lions, elephants and, in this case, a *Rhinoceros*. These were real curiosities

for those times, and it was the patricians themselves who asked Longhi to immortalise them in paint.

The yellow lacquer furniture decorated with floral motifs and red curls was originally in a drawing-room in Palazzo Calbo Crotta. The rare tub sofa is particularly curious.

The Rhinoceros

Throughout the Venetian carnival, which lasted a full three months, the various booths set up in the St. Mark's area kept coming curious and various vendors: puppeteers, magicians, astrologers, charlatans, depicted by Pietro Longhi in many of the paintings on display here. Among the major attractions there were also exotic animals such as lions, elephants and, in this case, the Rhinoceros. For the carnival of 1751, after a highly successful European tour, there arrived in Venice a female Indian rhinoceros named Clara. The owner, Douwe Mout van der Meer, a captain of the Dutch East India Company, had brought her with him from Bengal, soon turning her into an attraction that toured all the major European cities up to 1758, the year of her death.

As stated in the notice painted in *trompe l'oeil* to the right of the painting, this portrait of the rhinoceros was commissioned to the artist by Giovanni Grimaldi, who had a private menagerie with many exotic animals in his villa on the mainland. Longhi made a second painting nearly identical to Grimani's for Girolamo Mocenigo, now in the National Gallery in London. It is undoubtedly one of Pietro Longhi's masterpieces, who succeeded in documenting the curiosity awakened by this unusual arrival in the city, magically combining intimate and the mundane aspects by placing the animal in the fascinating atmosphere of the Venetian carnival, to which it adds a fresh touch of historical truth. At the center of the pyramidal composition, we find the commissioner of the painting himself (who was 23 years old at the time) next to his beautiful and unfortunate bride, Caterina Contarini, who was to die shortly after giving birth to their only daughter.

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Green lacquer Room

The room known as the Green Lacquer Room is one of the most enchanting rooms in the palace. It takes its name from the emerald green lacquered furniture from Palazzo Calbo Crotta at Canneregio, with its decorative elements in gilded *pastiglia* (that is, a kind of stucco made with plaster and marble dust). Over the centuries, the fanciful accounts of travellers had caused a decidedly unreal view of China and more generally of the whole orient to be spread over Europe; it was seen as an imaginary land populated by inhabitants with improbable customs. In the figurative arts, interest in the marvellous Cathay had already materialised in the 17th century at the court of Louis XIV, but it was in the following century that it became a real fad infecting all aspects of the figurative arts. In fact there are many elements of far eastern art which coincide with *rococo* art: asymmetry, lightness, absence of shading and perspective. Eastern and European motifs thus merged to form an independent new style which, it should be specified, was wholly western: this style was known as *chinoiserie*. Decorative motifs from oriental prototypes were applied to western forms and types, as in the furniture here. Its exquisite, sinuous Louis XV forms are however decorated with narrative scenes full of exotic motifs. Pagodas, umbrellas, willows, cherry-trees and gold oriental figurines flutter along the green lacquer background, framed within *rococo* ornamental motifs. The small Chinese polychrome figures in terracotta with moving heads are in fact original oriental pieces.

On the ceiling is the fine *Triumph of Diana* by Antonio Guardi, coming from Palazzo Barbarigo Dabalà and datable to the 1760s. Diana, seated on a cloud and surrounded by cherubs, is holding a spear in her right hand, while two cupids are

playing with a dog at her feet. Unlike his younger brother Francesco, Antonio Guardi never ventured into view painting, but remained a prolific figure painter throughout his not very successful career. In his latest works, which include the frescoes in this and the next room, he showed himself to be one of the most lyrical exponents of Venetian *rococo*, creating compositions with a vibrant interplay of loose, frayed brushstrokes, and transforming the figures into diaphanous silhouettes which dissolve into the light.

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Antonio Guardi Room

The frescoes in this room were commissioned from Antonio Guardi by Maria Barbarigo Savorgnàn and, like the one in the previous room, were painted over during the 19th century and uncovered during a restoration of Palazzo Barbarigo Dabalà in 1936. Stripped from their original location, they were transferred to Ca'Rezzonico in that same year.

On the entrance wall we find *Venus and Cupid* depicted in front of Vulcan's forge, while Apollo occupies the wall in front of the fireplace. He is crowned with laurels and a cherub is handing him his quiver. Minerva, on the next wall, is seated among the clouds with a helmet and a spear. Although they are in a precarious state of conservation, these works, the only frescoes by Antonio Guardi known today, still clearly show the painter's skill in decoration. There is a festive, light effect obtained by the use of soft colours which almost resemble pastels, and by the typical use of open strokes in the outlines, leaving the forms unenclosed.

The splendid marble bust of a *Veiled Woman* is the work of the Venetian sculptor Antonio Corradini and probably represents the *allegory of Purity*. He was one of the most renowned sculptors of the eighteenth century and it is no coincidence that, in addition to contributing projects for the decoration of the last Bucintoro, he worked for many European and Italian courts. He ended his life in Naples where he had been called to decorate the famous Cappella Sansevero on commission from the whimsically eclectic Prince alchemist Raimondo di Sangro. The motif of the face covered with a dampened veil is recurrent in this sculptor, who was famous among his contemporaries for his extraordinary virtuoso technique. Instead of concealing the figure, the flimsy veil accentuates the woman's sensuality and adds a note of intriguing mystery.

The nine armchairs with their curved arms, backs and legs, and the two small chests of drawers with their elegant rounded shape are in green lacquer and decorated with polychrome flowers.

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In this room, an 18th-century bedchamber has been reconstructed, with its dressing rooms, wardrobe room and boudoir. The alcove comes from Palazzo Carminati at San Stae, and dates from the second half of the 18th century. The bed is enclosed in carved wooden framework painted ivory white. The wooden headboard is painted in tempera with in the centre a *Holy family with Saint Anne and young St. John*. Above the bed is a pastel *Madonna* by Rosalba Carriera, datable to the second half of the 1720s.

Outside the alcove the furnishings consist of a walnut, inlaid chest with lid (bureau trumeau), probably of Lombard origin, and a green lacquered cradle with polychrome flowers. The walls are covered in 18th-century wallpaper decorated with small rural landscapes and ruins, over which figures have been moulded then painted.

On the right of the bed, a display case contains a toiletry set formerly belonging to the Pisani Moretta family. The set was made in 1752 for Cattaruzza Grimani on the occasion of her marriage to Pietro Vettor Pisani. The twinned crests of the two families appear on the lid of the coffer. Consisting of 58 pieces in gilded silver and green onyx, it is the work of a silversmith from Augsburg. All a lady could need is included: a large table mirror and a shell-shaped repoussee washbowl, a jewellery case, a powder bellows, candle holders and bottles for fragrances and perfumes, and even writing tools and cutlery. Go through the door to the left of the alcove into the boudoir which was transferred here from palazzo Calbo Crotta. The walls still have the original 18th-century stucco work, while the paintings are by Costantini Cedini.

We wish to remind you that you can also go up to the third and fourth floors of the palazzo and visit the Martini picture

gallery, which contains three hundred paintings by the most important 17th-and 18th-century Venetian artists, as well as the pharmacy 'Ai do San Marchi'.

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The “Ai Do San Marchi” Pharmacy

The «Ai Do San Marchi» pharmacy was located in Campo San Stin in Venice on the corner of Calle Donà. The earliest records of its existence date back to the second half of the seventeenth century: we know that in 1679 it was owned by Orazio Moscatello. Around mid-eighteenth century the owner was Bernardo Saletti who was responsible for the complete refurbishing of the premises and its furnishings. Datable to that period are in fact the furniture, most of the majolica vases, and the objects in the finest Murano glass which are now at Ca' Rezzonico. In 1908 the widow of the last owner, Anna Mazzoni Costa, decided to sell the furnishings, which were subsequently purchased by the Parisian antiques dealer Raoul Heilbronneur, who, unable to transfer the entire acquisition to France, at the suggestion of the Venetian sculptor Antonio Dal Zotto, preferred to donate it to the Musei Civici di Venezia.

The pharmacy consists of three intercommunicating rooms. The first, the shop itself, is fitted with elegant furnishings in dark burl walnut; the decorated majolica vases on the shelves designed to contain the spices and the materials needed for the preparation of medications, are the work of the Cozzi manufacture in Venice. The two largest two-handled vessels, placed symmetrically in the corners of the far wall, bear the emblem of the pharmacy: two facing lions holding the open Gospel, the symbol of the protector of Venice, the evangelist Mark. Also noteworthy is the stylish desk with its refined convex lines.

The second room is occupied by the workshop, with a fireplace and a stove, as well as alembics in the most diverse forms, in the thinnest glass from the Murano furnaces.

The third room is the back room of the pharmacy. Here the walls are completely covered with panelling in painted pine

wood, enriched with carved capitals and rococo decorative elements. The shelves are filled with other white majolica vases decorated with blue markings, evidently part of the furnishings of the previous pharmacy before the renovations carried out by Saletti, and additional Murano glass jars. Also interesting are the two large mortars, used to grind the raw materials.

On the Browning landing you can see the Mestrovich Donation, which consists of thirty or so works from the 15th century to the 20th century.

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Egidio Martini pictures gallery

Egidio Martini's donation is the most important that has been made to the city of Venice since the beginning of the 20th century, for the number of works, their high quality and their philological and historical importance.

It is a collection of paintings, almost all of the Venetian school, ranging from the 15th century to the beginning of the 20th. It includes works by important masters as well as paintings by artists who owe their place in the history of Venetian art to the studies of Martini himself.

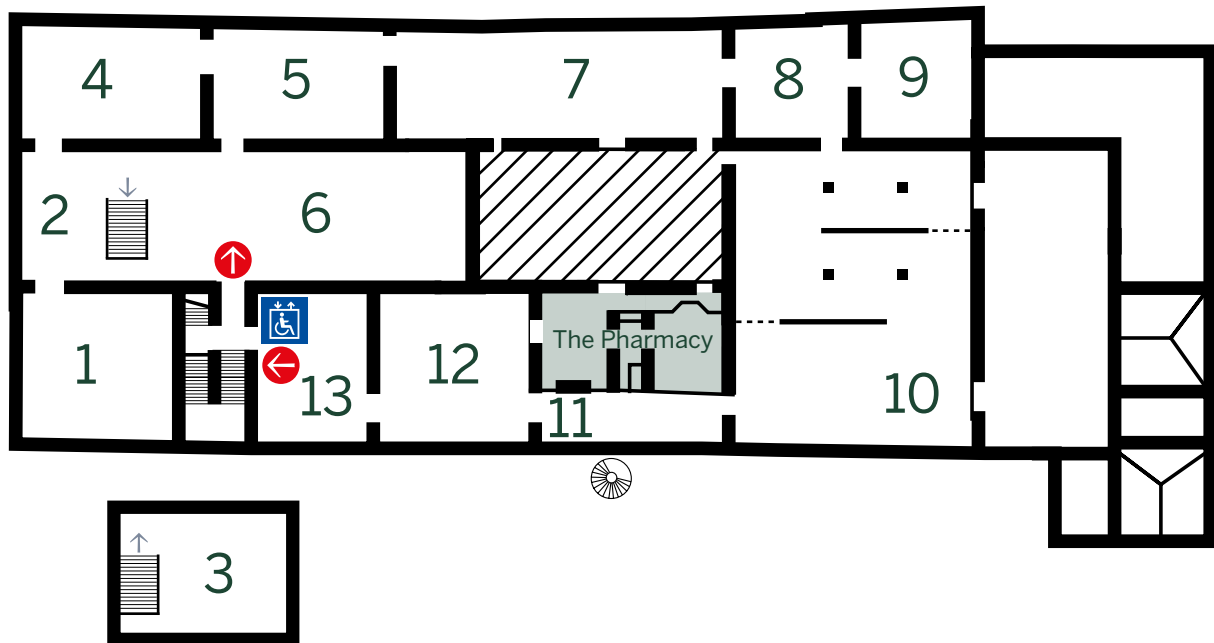
Egidio Martini, an eclectic scholar, began his activity of restoring ancient paintings in the 1940s. He discovered works by artists not fully appreciated by the critics or by the market, identifying and re-evaluating their role. At the same time, with great acumen and many personal sacrifices, he began to assemble a collection of works which made a major contribution to our understanding of 17th- and 18th-century painting in the Veneto.

His gallery faithfully reflects his work as a critic. It throws an entirely new light on many aspects, episodes and protagonists of Venetian art. The range of works is very wide - genre-scenes, mythological works, marine landscapes, portraits, religious subjects and allegories - and it includes a number of highly significant masterpieces.

The names represent the very best of Venetian art over a prolific period, which starts well before the 17th century and concludes long afterwards. They include Cima da Conegliano, Alvise Vivarini, Bonifacio de' Pitati; Tintoretto, Schiavone, Bassano, Paolo Fiammingo, Sustris; Padovanino and Carpioni, Pietra Vecchia and Giovanni Segala, Palma il Giovane, Bernardo Strozzi, Francesco Maffei, Langetti, Pietro Liberi; Balestra, Niccolò Bambini and on up to Piazzetta, Nicola Grassi, the Tiepolo family, Longhi, Rosalba, Sebastiano and Marco Ricci, Pellegrini, Amigoni, Diziani, Antonio Marini, Zuccarelli and Zais. After the 18th century we come to Giuseppe Bernardino Bison, Natale Schiavoni, Ippolito Caffi, Mancini, Emma Ciardi: but this is only a partial list of the artists represented in the gallery.

The collection had become an important reference-point for scholars when Martini conceived the idea of donating it to the city.

The Picture Gallery, thanks to this enlightened and generous gesture, is now open to the public and offers a fascinating itinerary to round off the panorama of Veneto painting offered by the other museums in the city.



1. From the 15th to the 16th century, an anthology

2. Between the 16th and 17th century

3. The great canvases

4. Il Padovanino and Giulio Carpioni

5. Pietro Vecchia and Giovanni Segala

6. Major artists of the second half of the 17th century

7. The Rococo masters

8. Marco Ricci

9. Ippolito Caffi, the Ciardi family and Antonio Mancini

10. Painters of the mid-18th century

11. Pharmacy Corridor

12. Landscape-Painters of the 18th century

13. Painters of the early 19th century

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