Displaying Art

Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time

edited by Daria Brasca, Paola D'Alconzo and Donata Levi

Federico II University Press

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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
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DIGITAL ATLAS OF ITALIAN MUSEUMS

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Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche "Roberto Pettorino"
Piazza Bellini 59-60
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Contents

Authors

Daria Brasca, PhD, independent researcher. Post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Udine research unit as part of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). dariabrasca@gmail.com

Silvia Cecchini, PhD, is a professor of Museology, Art Criticism, and Conservation Theory at Roma Tre University. Coordinator of Roma Tre's research unit for the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). silvia.cecchini@uniroma3.it

Paola D'Alconzo, PhD, is a professor of Museology, Art Criticism, and Conservation Theory at the University of Naples Federico II. Principal Investigator of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025) and Coordinator of the Napoli Federico II research unit. dalconzo@unina.it

Antje Gamble, PhD, President of the Italian Art Society and Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Art & Design at Murray State University (Murray, KY). agamble2@murraystate.edu

Antonella Gioli, PhD, is a professor of Museology, Art Criticism, and Conservation Theory at the University of Pisa. Coordinator of the Pisa research unit of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). antonella.gioli@unipi.it

Rebecca Howard, PhD, Vice President of Programs of the Italian Art Society and Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Memphis. rmhward2@memphis.edu

Annalisa Laganà, PhD, is a fixed-term assistant professor in Museology, Art Criticism, and Conservation Theory at the University of Naples Federico II. Post-doctoral research fellow and then internal Member of the Naples Federico II research unit of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). annalisa.lagana@unina.it

Martina Lerda, PhD, independent researcher. Post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Pisa research unit as part of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). lerdamartina23@gmail.com

Donata Levi, PhD, is a professor of Museology, Art Criticism, and Conservation Theory at the University of Udine. Coordinator of the Udine research unit of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). donata.levi@uniud.it

Camilla Parisi, PhD, independent researcher. Post-doctoral research fellow at the research unit of Roma Tre University as part of the PRIN Project *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (2023-2025). camillaparisi@icloud.com

Victoria Reed, PhD, is Bettina Burr Chair for Provenance at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. vreed@mfa.org

Abstracts

Paola D'Alconzo, Donata Levi, *Historical Displays of Italian Museums: a Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas*

The paper outlines the aims of the national research project *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. It focuses on one of the project's main outcomes: the database entitled *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (DAIM), a repository of images – paintings, drawings, engravings, photographs and audiovisual materials – depicting the displays of Italian museums, collected and cataloged during the research project.

DAIM has been structured and implemented within the e-Dvara platform, developed by the L.I.D.A. (ICT Laboratory for the Art Historical Documentation) of the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the University of Udine in collaboration with infoFactory. The paper illustrates the features and potential of the e-Dvara platform, highlighting in particular its ease of use in modelling data-archiving structures without requiring advanced technical or IT expertise. Open to further implementation, DAIM is conceived as a tool for museums of all types, enabling the collection and filing of visual materials that allow for the reconstruction of the history of their own displays. DAIM is complemented by an additional tool, developed by the Fondazione Memofonte of Florence, which makes it possible to easily create and develop virtual exhibitions focused on specific materials or topics (such as showcases, audiences, etc.).

By integrating research and dissemination, the project "The Forms of the Museum" promotes sustainable, flexible digital tools that foster critical awareness of the museums' complex history and layered meanings, and that reveal to a broader audience their role as dynamic agents in the production, mediation, and transformation of cultural knowledge.

Antonella Gioli, *The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the* Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*: Visual Sources and the History of Display, 1715-1970*

The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi provides a paradigmatic case for examining how visual sources contribute to the reconstruction of the history of museum display, as demonstrated by the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*. Beginning in the 18th century, drawings, engravings, paintings, photographs, and later newsreels document successive reconfigurations of the space, tracing transformations in its display from 1715 to 1970.

Originally conceived in 1583 for Francesco I de' Medici as an octagonal and symbolically charged space integrating paintings, sculptures, and precious objects, the Tribuna acted as an embodiment and microcosm of Medicean collecting.

During the 18th century, its densely packed and symmetrical Baroque display epitomized the aesthetic experience of the Grand Tour. Enlightenment reforms around 1780 introduced a more selective and didactic display, reducing the number of objects and privileging canonical masterpieces.

Throughout the 19th century, the overall spatial configuration remained relatively stable, although individual works were frequently relocated in response to aesthetic, scholarly, and practical considerations. The rise of photography contributed to the standardization and dissemination of a canonical view centered on the *Venus de' Medici*.

20th-century interventions alternated between modernist simplification and historically informed reconstructions.

The evolving display of the Tribuna thus reflects broader transformations in taste, museological theory, and cultural ideology.

Martina Lerda, *Images of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Illustrated Press and Publications for the General Public between the 19th and 20th Centuries*

Starting from a survey of engravings and photographs of museum interiors published in illustrated magazines and popular publications between the early decades of the nineteenth century and 1945 – carried out for the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – this essay studies the dissemination of images of the Uffizi interiors in magazines, popular monographs, and museum guides. Taking into account the circulation of images from a quantitative point of view, the channels

of dissemination, the selection of iconic environments, the ways in which these are represented and, finally, the dates of publication, the analysis allows for a reflection on the forms of representation and the public perception of the Florentine gallery between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Camilla Parisi, *Works of Art and Territorial Identity: The Role of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo*

The paper explores the role of curatorial choices in the exhibition of Renaissance art at the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila during the mid-20th century. These decisions not only safeguarded but also reshaped the popular identity of Abruzzo, formed between the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period.

L'Aquila's history of seismic events, and the 19th-century secularization of ecclesiastical properties, led to the dispersion of numerous Renaissance and Baroque artworks from local churches. By the first half of the 20th century, these works were recovered and, in 1951, brought to the Museo Nazionale, where a selection was exhibited, emphasizing the connection of each work with the territory.

Through this initiative, the Museum's display of Renaissance artworks preserved the territory's cultural heritage, influencing scholarly research. Praised by Federico Zeri, this exhibition returned the works of art to the population as material heritage, but also representing intangible heritage, both recovering and redesigning it. Moreover, the exhibition's omission of Baroque works – despite their inclusion in the museum's collections – unintentionally shaped subsequent scholarship and the public understanding of Abruzzo's history.

This case study highlights the role of curatorship in shaping cultural narratives and underscores the importance of comprehensive representation to preserve and interpret regional identity.

Daria Brasca, *American Perceptions and Representations of Italian Museum Installations from World War II to the late 1950s*

The paper explores the American perceptions and representations of Italian museum installations from World War II through the late 1950s, arguing that U.S. print culture did not produce a comprehensive account of Italian reconstruction but rather a selective map of 'readable' cases that could be aligned

with American categories of modernization and framed as transferable technical solutions. The experience of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Program (MFA&A) within the United States Army in Italy facilitated a significant exchange of contacts and knowledge between American and Italian art historians, archaeologists, and museum professionals, all engaged in safeguarding and relocating Italy's cultural heritage. This interaction led to a reciprocal exchange of museum perspectives and installation methodologies, influencing an evolution in museum studies. This study examines how rarely American specialized magazines and journals portrayed Italian museum installations during this period, and what this selective visibility tells us about postwar cultural politics and professional exchanges. By scrutinizing articles from American magazines, the research uncovers how Italian installations were received and critiqued, highlighting shifts in curatorial approaches and aesthetic values. The findings suggest that the wartime and early postwar collaboration between American and Italian professionals enriched the cultural landscapes of both nations and contributed to global museum practices and installation strategies. This paper sheds light on these influences that shaped the postwar museum and installation debate, reflecting broader cultural currents of the late mid-20th century.

Silvia Cecchini, *Renaissance Reclaimed: Brera 1943-1957*

The paper examines the history of exhibition design at the Pinacoteca di Brera during the years of post World War II reconstruction (1943–1957). Drawing on archival documentation and private correspondence, it analyzes Fernanda Wittgens's engagement, as a museum professional, with the French concept of the *musée vivant* and her appropriation of American models of museum education. On the basis of this analysis, the study reconstructs the interpretation of the museum's role articulated through Brera's architectural restoration and display strategies, which sought to redefine the institution as an instrument of social renewal in a city undergoing reconstruction.

At a moment marked by the rapid development of cinema, a second line of inquiry focuses on Wittgens's use of film as a tool for shaping Brera into a telegenic symbol of Milan's cultural and economic revival.

In keeping with the methodological framework proposed by the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – which aims to narrate the history of muse-

ums by foregrounding visual materials so as to allow the images themselves to communicate the evolving forms of museums over the centuries – the article is accompanied by an extensive iconographic apparatus.

Annalisa Laganà, *Photographic Documentation of the Displays of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (1912-1967): the Case Study of the* Sala Ovale

The visual history of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma is extensively documented by photographic sources produced or commissioned by the Ministry of Education, which was responsible for the conservation, protection, and promotion of Italy's public historical and artistic heritage until 1975. This vast documentation allows for an in-depth study of the museographic history of Parma's public heritage, whose layout was designed by some of the most influential Italian officials of the 20th century. Particularly interesting is how the museum retained Corrado Ricci's 19th-century design for an extended period. It was only updated to 1930s museographical models after World War II, following Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle's intervention. In the late 1940s, the need to rebuild the museum – which had been severely damaged by bombing in 1944 – facilitated a radical transformation of the exhibition. This redesign was finally based on modern display techniques and advanced historical and artistic research. Sources regarding the *Sala Ovale* summarize this transformation between 1912 and 1967, culminating in Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle's layout, which aimed to enhance both the works on display and the exhibition space itself.

Editorial Note

The essays by Silvia Cecchini, Antonella Gioli and Martina Lerda were translated from the Italian into English by Helen Glanville; all other essays were revised by Helen Glanville (hkag13@gmail.com).

Abbreviations

AAM: American Alliance of Museums
ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome
    MPI: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione
    AABBAA: Antichità e Belle Arti
AFW-FEB: Archivio Fernanda Wittgens, Fondazione Elvira Badaracco, Milan
Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano: Archivio ex Soprintendenza Beni Storico Artistici ed Etnoantropologici, Milan
ASAq: Archivio Storico della Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, L'Aquila
ASMI: Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano (online)
BBM-ApBM: Ministero della Cultura, Musei nazionali del Vomero, Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli, Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli, Naples
BEIC: La Fondazione Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura, Milan
DAIM: Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (online)
DOS: U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C.
IAS: Italian Art Society
ICCD: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC, Rome
INGV: Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Rome
MFA&A: Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives
MiC: Ministero della Cultura, Rome
MuNDA: Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila
NARA: National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.
USIS: United States Information Service, Washington D.C.

Antje Gamble, Rebecca Howard

Preface from the Italian Art Society

Since its founding in 1987, the Italian Art Society (IAS) has been dedicated to supporting the study of Italian art and architecture from prehistory to the present. The IAS fosters a wide range of scholars' research and the society was honored to support the early efforts that were developed into this volume. Building from an IAS-sponsored conference session held at the 2025 Renaissance Society of America Conference, this volume brings to light the efforts of Italian museums to create meaning about Italian Renaissance and Baroque art. This volume adds to the already growing research on exhibitions of Italian art; and this project is particularly important because the majority of existing scholarship on exhibitions focuses on Italian modern art.[1] These kinds of studies are vitally important not only to understand the role museums play in framing artworks and their contexts, but also to understand the historiographic implications of museum exhibitions and their programming. The IAS is glad to be able to support this kind of scholarship.

This volume joins a growing field of museum and exhibition studies and also reflects recent efforts to diversify the IAS programming. The IAS board has been working to support the widest range of academic scholarship on art, architecture,

[1] Many of these studies are also by current IAS members. See: Bedarida, Raffaele, Silvia Bignami and Davide Colombo eds. *Methodologies of Exchange: MoMA's "Twentieth-Century Italian Art" (1949)*. Monographic issue of *Italian Modern Art* 3 (January 2020); Bedarida, Raffaele. "Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA, 1940-1949." *Oxford Art Journal* 35, 2 (2012): 147-169; Colombo, Davide. "Chicago 1957: Italian Sculptors. Qualche vicenda attorno alla scultura italiana in America." *LUK Studi e Attività della Fondazione Ragghianti* 23 (January-December 2017): 138-154; Hecker, Sharon and Raffaele Bedarida eds. *Curating Fascism: Exhibitions and Memory from the Fall of Mussolini to Today.* New York: Bloomsbury, 2022; and Gamble, Antje. "Exhibiting Italian Democracy in the 1949 "Twentieth Century Italian Art." In *Modern in the Making: MoMA and the Modern Experiment, 1929-1949*, ed. by Sandra Zalman and Austin Porter, 215-229. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2020.

and even design across the long history of human artistic production on the Italian peninsula. Recently, IAS has been working to connect to not only the field of museum studies but also to grow their membership with scholars working in museums. Supporting the editors' conference panel reflects the value the IAS sees in this field of study.

With robust representation from Italian scholars, this volume shows the important connections made through the IAS among international scholars. Founded in the USA, the IAS has long fostered a strong relationship between scholars in North America and those in Italy. This is not only a logical connection for scholars working on Italian art, but also an important institutional mission of the IAS. The society strives to make connections and foster Trans-Atlantic research through a variety of programming, from sponsored sessions at US-based conferences to the annual IAS lecture in Italy, which has been generously supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation since 2010.

In recent decades, many of the society's new initiatives have been dedicated to encouraging the work of emerging scholars in the field. Young scholars in the field are encouraged to chair IAS-sponsored conference panels, apply for publication and travel grants, and attend workshops organized by the Emerging Scholars Committee, which develops such programs for early career scholars of art and architectural history. In the IAS, "emerging scholars" include anyone currently enrolled in a masters or doctoral program, and anyone who has earned their degree within the past six years.

The IAS has additionally focused much of its growth efforts on maintaining an international presence. The Program Committee plays an essential role in soliciting and promoting sponsored sessions, and has recently expanded its efforts to support new scholarship through the sponsorship of panels and roundtables at a growing number of annual international conferences beyond North American on art and architectural history from prehistory to the present day. IAS sponsorship at conferences is ever expanding, as the Program Committee continually seeks out events at which the society can help its members to make an impact.

For the 2025 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Boston, the editors of this volume submitted an organized panel for sponsorship consideration with the IAS. After being reviewed by a group of peer scholars in the field, the panel, "Displaying Renaissance and Baroque Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time," was enthusiastically chosen for sponsorship. The Program Committee was particularly excited about the varied institutions and scholars represented in the original panel, and an expanded variety of thought

is represented in this volume, as well. The panel's success was relayed to the IAS representatives after the conference took place, and the project's compilation into an edited volume reiterates the scholarly importance and timeliness of this topic. The IAS Program Committee receives many panel proposals for international conference sponsorship each year and continues to solicit submissions on such new and timely projects. Sponsoring panels like the one here developed into a published edited volume helps to further the IAS initiative of supporting the next generation of innovative and exciting new scholarship in the field of Italian art history. The IAS is honored to be involved in this volume's exploration of the fascinating histories and display of Italian art.

If you are interested in the Italian Art Society and its programming, please check out the IAS website https://www.italianartsociety.org/ or social media @ItalianArtSociety.

Victoria Reed

Introduction

> That's why we have the Museum…to remind us of how we came, and why: to start fresh, and begin a new place from what we had learned and carried from the old.
> Lois Lowry, *The Messenger* (2004)

This volume brings together expanded and augmented versions of the papers that were presented during the session "Displaying Renaissance and Baroque Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time" held at the Renaissance Society of America's Annual Meeting in Boston, March 22, 2025. The panel introduced a global academic audience to DAIM, or the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, an open-access, online research portal. As the essays in this volume will show, DAIM gathers together a variety of visual sources that document historical displays and interpretation at Italian museums, information that has not been widely accessible until now. Paola D'Alconzo introduced our RSA audience to the project, outlining the practical applications it will have for museum studies programs, academia more broadly, and indeed, the general public. Annalisa Laganà discussed how ministerial photographs of the Galleria Nazionale, Parma, contributed to changes in its gallery displays between World War I and the 1960s. Camilla Parisi explored how the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila has served as a site of belonging and collective sense of self for its community. Finally, Daria Brasca examined the American perception of Italian museum installations during and after World War II. Their essays are complemented here by contributions from scholars who were not at the Boston meeting: Antonella Gioli and Martina Lerda, writing on the Tribune gallery at the Galleria degli Uffizi, and Silvia Cecchini on the Pinacoteca di Brera.

Although the focus of the panel was Italian institutions, all of the papers opened up larger questions about the role of museums in society, questions appli-

cable to organizations in the United States (like my own institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or MFA) and elsewhere. Each scholar touched on the idea that a museum is the locus of identity, whether national or local, and explored how that identity has persevered through (and despite) periods of natural disaster and war. Italian museums – like many European cultural institutions – are normally funded and administered by the city, region, or national government, and have collections that reflect the history and artistic production of their specific geographical area. They differ in this way from American museums, which are usually privately run and may be encyclopedic in scope (for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the MFA), focused on a particular artist or subject (like the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia), or affiliated with a university or individual private collector (such as the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston). This is not to say, however, that American museums are not sites of identity-building as well. Historically, museum collections in the U.S. were formed in large part by their local communities. Boston's Gilded Age elite (or "Brahmins") collected Impressionism when it was still contemporary, and as a result the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston boasts a world-class collection of paintings by Monet, Renoir, and Degas. Meanwhile, the MFA's proximity to Harvard allowed its staff to participate in sponsored archaeological expeditions in Egypt and Sudan, enriching its antiquities collection through the division of finds, or *partage*. Today, these collections are just as much a part of Boston's cultural heritage as the silverwork of Paul Revere or Colonial-era portraits by John Singleton Copley. Regardless of the provenance of their collections, however, the question museums everywhere must grapple with today is how we use those collections to continue to shape our identities and thereby serve our various audiences.

Only by understanding the legacies we inherit can we fully appreciate the work that lies ahead of us – the second theme that runs through these essays. Documenting our past practices, successes, and failures allows museums to draw invaluable lessons left by our curatorial and administrative predecessors. Provenance researchers, for example, are tasked with reconstructing paper trails that have been mislaid, misidentified, or lost over time. One challenge in this process is knowing where to start: who might have generated the documentation to begin with? In what context? Given the time period, how might relevant paperwork have been handled and filed? Curators, too, must look to the example of their forebears. If the attribution or authenticity of a museum object is no longer what it once purported to be, curators should ask how and why the museum acquired the artwork to begin with. What red flags were ignored at the time of its acquisi-

tion? Mistakes are an inevitable part of any museum's history. Curators in charge of building a collection will want to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, but that can only be achieved if we document and assess our earlier procedures.

Finally, as the papers in this volume will show, while museums have no control over external events like earthquakes and armed conflicts, they make choices – both consciously and unconsciously – about how to respond during those events. Today, museums around the globe face political unrest, the effects of war and climate change, as well as increased expectations for institutional transparency and inclusion. In choosing what to install in our galleries, how to craft accessible labels and wall texts, and how to serve the needs of our various audiences, it behooves museums to be mindful of both identity and legacy. How did we become the institution we are today – and how do we become the institution we want to be? Whose voices shape the stories we tell? Can museums truly be "neutral"? These studies that have emerged from the DAIM project remind us that just as museums determine the content of our collections and gallery installations, so too do the choices we make determine our identities and legacies for future museum visitors.

Daria Brasca, Paola D'Alconzo, Donata Levi

The Forms of the Museum: Building a Digital Repository for Multiple Research Perspectives

The essays gathered in this volume grew out of a panel first presented at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting in Boston, "Displaying Renaissance and Baroque Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time" (22 March 2025). In their revised form, they pursue a shared aim: to show what becomes possible when the history of museum display is approached through a large, structured corpus of images rather than through a limited set of canonical texts or isolated case studies. The volume is thus conceived less as a unified narrative of Italian museography than as a series of methodologically oriented inquiries – historically grounded, but also explicitly exploratory – designed to test how visual evidence can generate, refine, and sometimes destabilize the questions we ask about museums and their changing epistemic, cultural, and political functions.

This premise is inseparable from the research infrastructure that underpins the project *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot-Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) and the European Union – NextGeneration EU, and it is presented in detail in the first essay. In *Historical Displays of Italian Museums: A Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas*, Paola D'Alconzo and Donata Levi outline the aims of the project and introduces DAIM as a repository of images depicting museum installations in Italy, collected and cataloged to enable the reconstruction of displays across time. Yet the DAIM is not treated here as a neutral container. Its value lies precisely in its capacity to function as an epistemic instrument: by imposing a shared descriptive framework, enabling relational searches, and making heterogeneous materials comparable, the DAIM actively shapes research problems, invites new forms of comparison, and supports interpretative models attentive to both evidence and mediation.

A central claim of this volume is that visual sources are not ancillary illustrations but primary historical documents. Importantly, 'visual sources' is un-

derstood here in its broadest sense. Alongside images produced within scholarly circuits, the essays draw on materials that circulated in professional and mass contexts: illustrated periodicals, popular monographs, museum guides, postcards, and commercial reproductions; institutional photographic campaigns commissioned by ministries and museums; and, in some cases, moving images such as newsreels and films. This plurality matters because each medium carries distinct conventions, audiences, and rhetorical effects. Installation views created for internal documentation, for instance, encode different priorities than images designed for the illustrated press; postcards privilege recognizability and reproducibility; films and newsreels stage museums within narratives of modernity. In other words, images do not simply record museum arrangements: they participate in their public life, shaping what is seen, remembered, and deemed exemplary.

From this perspective, the history of display emerges as a history of visual mediation. The contributions probe how installations acquire meaning through the circulation, reuse, and standardization of their representations.

In *The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Digital Atlas of Italian Museums: Visual Sources and the History of Display, 1715-1970,* Antonella Gioli uses the Tribuna of the Uffizi as a paradigmatic lens for tracing how display regimes shift over the long term – and how those shifts are refracted through changing visual technologies and viewing expectations. Focusing on dissemination and reception, *Images of the Gallerie degli Uffizi in the Illustrated Press and Publications for the General Public between the 19th and 20th Centuries* by Martina Lerda shows how printed media select, repeat, and stabilize iconic interiors of the Gallerie degli Uffizi, shaping a public image of the museum that is both widespread and necessarily selective.

Display also emerges here as a form of cultural and territorial narration. In *Works of Art and Territorial Identity: The Role of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo*, Camilla Parisi examines the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila to show how curatorial selection and omissions can contribute to the construction of regional identity, with tangible effects on reception and scholarship in a territory marked by secularization and re-contextualization, dispersal, and seismic history.

A further set of contributions locates Italian installation practices within transnational networks of exchange, especially in the decades surrounding World War II. In *American Perceptions and Representations of Italian Museum Installations from World War II to the late 1950s*, Daria Brasca reconstructs how American print culture mapped Italian museum installations selectively, privi-

leging 'readable' cases that could be aligned with U.S. categories of modernization, technical transferability, and cultural politics.

In *Renaissance Reclaimed: Brera 1943-1957*, Silvia Checchini shifts the focus to postwar Pinacoteca di Brera, showing how its director, Fernanda Wittgens, mobilized exhibition strategies and media to position Pinacoteca di Brera within narratives of civic renewal in Milan.

Finally, the volume returns to the institutional production of images as a privileged entry point into museographic history. In *Photographic Documentation of the Displays of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (1912–1967): The Case Study of the* Sala Ovale, Annalisa Laganà draws on a dense photographic record – largely produced or commissioned within ministerial frameworks – to reveal both long-term continuities and abrupt postwar ruptures in display practice at the Galleria Nazionale di Parma.

Taken together, these studies show what a corpus like DAIM enables: not a single 'correct' account of museum history, but a set of research trajectories grounded in the relational reading of images. The shared methodological horizon is philological and contextual: attention to provenance, purpose, circulation, and reception; sensitivity to the biases embedded in media and institutions; and a willingness to treat visual documentation as historically active rather than transparently descriptive.

The volume also argues, implicitly and explicitly, for the interdisciplinary relevance of installation images. Museum views register far more than artworks: they capture architecture, lighting, frames and mounts, didactic devices, visitor behaviors, uses of space, and the visual rhetoric through which institutions address different publics. As such, they can sharpen research beyond museum studies and art history proper contributing, for example, to the study of post-disaster cultural politics and reconstruction, to the history of diplomacy and transnational networks, to the sociology of publics, and to histories of fashion, taste, and everyday visual culture. In this sense, the essays collected here function as a proof of concept: they demonstrate how a plural, transmedial archive of visual sources – Italian and foreign, early modern to contemporary – can become a laboratory for historically grounded, critically informed interpretations, while also revealing the limits and lacunae that such sources inevitably entail.

Paola D'Alconzo, Donata Levi

*Historical Displays of Italian Museums: A Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas**

1. *Introduction*

As widely recognized in scholarly literature, the museum may be theorized as an epistemological system and a mechanism for the shaping of knowledge, constituted through successive historical stratifications that shape both its present configuration and its operational logic. Far from being a neutral space of preservation, the museum functions as a historically situated structure in which objects, spatial arrangements, classification systems, and interpretative narratives interact to produce specific forms of knowledge and modes of visibility[1].

Across time, the forms assumed by museums have emerged from the dynamic and contingent interaction between material components – such as collections, architectural settings, display technologies, and modes of mediation – and a plurality of actors, including curators, conservators, institutional authorities, and heterogeneous publics. These interactions generate a syntax of display: a structured yet mutable system of relations that governs how objects are ordered, contextualized, and made legible within a given cultural framework. Reconstructing this syntax historically allows the museum to be analysed not as a static repository, but as an organism in constant transformation, whose epistemic function is continuously renegotiated in response to broader social, political, and intellectual contexts[2]. Within this perspective, exhibitions

* This essay was realized within the framework of the PRIN 2022 project entitled *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums,* funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) and the European Union – NextGeneration EU (Mission 4, Component 2 – Investment 1.1, CUP E53D23013680006, Project Code 20228TEZ9T).

[1] Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*; Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*; Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*.

[2] Klonk, *Spaces and Experiences*.

and displays operate as rhetorical and epistemic devices rather than as neutral modes of presentation. They articulate implicit hierarchies, temporalities, and narratives, embedding interpretative choices that naturalize particular visions of history, art, and cultural value. The layered nature of display practices and the rhetoric inherent in exhibition design – what may be described as the artifice of the 'museum machine' – are rarely rendered explicit, limiting the public's capacity to decode the institutional frameworks through which cultural objects are presented and interpreted. As a consequence, the museum's historical depth and its role as a producer of knowledge remain largely opaque to the general public.

Digital technologies and web-based dissemination tools can play a crucial role in making accessible evidence of museums' past displays, as well as the transformations, reinterpretations, and curatorial adjustments they have undergone over time. Yet, despite the increasing centrality of communication strategies, digital platforms, and social media in contemporary museum practice, institutional discourse – that is the way by which a museum represents itself – has largely privileged the transmission of content and the aesthetic or informational framing of individual works of art (their features and the stories related to them), while marginalizing reflexive engagement with the museum's own historical and epistemological conditions and largely avoiding any sustained attention to past displays. In other words, their history has been 'flattened' and reduced to a timeless or increasingly marked virtual 'present'. On the contrary, focusing on the history of museums, and in particular on the ways in which art objects have been organized, shown and explained, can foster a fuller awareness of the museum's complex historical trajectories, while also encouraging viewers to critically 'read' the present display.

Indeed, in recent years a number of museums have institutionally promoted research into their own histories not only within the scholarly field, but also by explicitly exposing the historical contingency of curatorial practices through both physical and digital strategies[3]: among the most significant – and, in differ-

[3] On current exhibition practices leading to the creation of museum sections in which institutions 'exhibit' their own history, see Lorente Lorente, "A room of one's own"; Lorente, *Reflections on Critical Museology*, 63-80.

ent ways, particularly inspiring – examples are the initiatives developed by the Museo Nacional del Prado[4] and by the Museo Egizio in Turin[5].

In fact, the research project *The Forms of Museums: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (DAIM)*[6] is situated within this critical turn. It conceptualises the museum as a historically constructed epistemological system and aims, on the one hand, to collect, analyze, and compare visual evidence of past display practices in Italian museums[7], and, on the other, to develop and test

[4] The temporary exhibition curated by Javier Portús (Portús, *Museo del Prado 1819-2019*) for the bicentennial of the museum's founding (November 2018–March 2019) was transformed in 2021 into a permanent section of the museum devoted to the history of the institution: https://www.museodelprado.es/actualidad/exposicion/museo-del-prado-1819-2019-un-lugar-de-memoria/6df80b37-1c62-a301-8718-8348f7a81de6 and https://www.museodelprado.es/actualidad/multimedia/nuevas-salas-historia-del-museo-del-prado-y-de/c2ab8e86-2b79-9a0a-ce15-c984a3e2f2e2; see also the museum's webpages *Memoria audiovisual. El Museo en más de 100 años de imágenes en movimiento* https://www.museodelprado.es/bicentenario/memoria-audiovisual and https://www.museodelprado.es/actualidad/multimedia/memoria-audiovisual-del-museo-del-prado-en-el-dia/e31eecc0-838d-4bd3-bcba-8ed6d6721015.

[5] As in the case of the Prado, the galleries of the Museo Egizio illustrating the historical development of the collection (2019) grew out of an exhibition devoted to the Italian Archaeological Mission (2017-2018): Del Vesco and Moiso, *Missione Egitto 1903-1920*. As part of a coherent program that includes the digitization and online publication of the photographic archive, the museum has put together further temporary exhibitions that illustrate the origins of the museum: *Carlo Felice. La nascita del Museo Egizio* (2024): https://museoegizio.it/esplora/mostre/carlo-felice-la-nascita-del-museo-egizio/; *Verso la nuova Galleria dei Re. Museo Egizio e Accademia delle Scienze* (2024-2025): https://museoegizio.it/esplora/mostre/verso-la-nuova-galleria-dei-re/).

[6] The project *The Forms of Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research for the years 2023-2025 (PRIN – Progetto di ricerca di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale – no. 20228TEZ9T), involves four Italian universities -the University of Naples Federico II, the University of Pisa, the University of Udine, and Roma Tre University -with research units respectively headed by Paola D'Alconzo (PI), Antonella Gioli, Donata Levi, and Silvia Cecchini.

[7] As indicated by its title, the research project is grounded on Ferretti, "La forma del museo", a seminal collection of visual sources, critically annotated to reconstruct the history of the 'forms' of Italian museums. More recent scholarship has further developed this line of inquiry through the investigation of specific case studies (Borean, "Dalla galleria al «museo»"; Milanese, *Album Museo*; Milanese, *Ritratto d'un museo*; Costa et al., *1860-1960 L'Italia dei musei*; Leonardi and De Rosa, *Il Museo che non c'è*). Although these authors adopt different perspectives and pursue diverse research aims, their contributions reflect a shared interest in the museum conceived as a 'place of memory of itself,' alongside – and sometimes independently of – the objects it displays. This approach finds a parallel in international scholarship (e.g. Gaehtgens and Marchesano, *Display and Art History*; Bayer and Corey, *Making the MET*).

interpretative and communicative models capable of making museum history intelligible to a wider public. In doing so, the project seeks to contribute to a more reflexive understanding of the museum as an active agent in the production, mediation, and transformation of cultural knowledge[8].

2. *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (DAIM)*

DAIM is conceived as a structured visual database designed both to collect and to make accessible visual materials related to historical museum displays, addressing the needs of museum professionals as well as scholars in art history, museum studies, and related disciplines[9]. Rather than functioning as a simple image repository, the database is intended as a research-oriented tool that enables the systematic analysis and comparison of display practices across time, institutions, and cultural contexts (fig. 1).

The collection has been developed – and continues to be expanded – through extensive and methodical research followed by the careful cataloging of visual documents drawn from a wide range of sources. These include archival materials, printed publications, periodicals, photographic collections, and audiovisual records. Particular attention has been paid to the contextualization of each image, with metadata describing provenance, date, institutional setting, typology, and

[8] For reflections on mediation practices in Italian museums, both *in situ* and remotely, it is necessary to consider both the bibliography devoted to its various aspects and articulations (Cataldo, *Dal Museum Theatre al Digital Storytelling*; Bruno, *Museo Facile*; Cetorelli and Guido, *Il Patrimonio culturale per tutti*; Cimoli et al., *Senza titolo*), as well as earlier reflections on communication *in* and *about* the museum, first articulated by Antinucci, *Comunicare nel museo*, and more recently by Branchesi et al., *Comunicare il museo oggi*, together with the numerous and more up-to-date contributions on museums and the digital (Colombo, *Musei cultura digitale*; Faber, *Museums, audio-visual and digital media*; ICOM Italia, *Pillole di comunicazione digitale*). It should be noted, however, that even from this latter perspective there is still no sustained reflection on the potential of web-based images as sources for the study and perception of the forms of the museum, although useful general insights may be found in Günthert, *L'Image partagée*.

[9] The database is hosted on the e-Dvara platform (https://edvara.infofactory.it/atlasitalianmuseums/) and is also accessible via the website of the LIDA (Laboratorio Informatico per la Documentazione storico-Artistica), laboratory of the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the University of Udine: https://dium.uniud.it/en/dium/locali-e-strutture/laboratori/laboratorio-informatico-la-documentazione-artistica-lida/). For information on LIDA's activities, see: Levi, "Paola Barocchi"; Visentin, "Il LIDA_FOTOTECA"; Visentin, "Il LIDA dell'Università di Udine".

the specific display practices represented. This approach ensures that the visual materials can be interrogated not only as illustrations, but as historical evidence embedded in broader epistemic and institutional frameworks.

A defining feature of DAIM is its deliberately broad chronological scope. The visual documents collected range from 16th and 17th century frontispieces (fig. 2) – often articulating early theoretical and symbolic conceptions of the museum as a space of knowledge – to 18th century engravings (fig. 3) depicting the major Roman museums and their display arrangements. The database further encompasses paintings (figs. 4-5) and drawings (fig. 6) as well as photographs and 19th and 20th century images published in the illustrated press, together with visual documentation produced for scholarly, educational, or promotional purposes (figs. 7-10). In addition, DAIM incorporates film and audiovisual materials related to museum events, such as inaugurations, official visits, and institutional ceremonies, which provide valuable insight into the performative and public dimensions of the museum and are evidence of the visual mediation through which these dimensions have historically been constructed.

The chronological limit of the project has been set around the 1990s, marking the threshold of a profound transformation in the visual ecology of museums. This period precedes the exponential growth of digital photography, the widespread institutional presence of museums on the web, and the emergence of new practices of image production and circulation, such as visitor selfies and user-generated content shared through social media platforms. By stopping at this juncture, DAIM deliberately focuses on a visual regime in which the production and dissemination of museum images were still largely mediated by institutional, editorial, or professional frameworks, before the advent of what has been described as "conversational photography"[10]. This temporal boundary allows for a more coherent historical analysis of display practices, while also providing a critical baseline against which contemporary visual phenomena may be assessed[11].

The range of material typologies considered within DAIM is equally broad and deliberately heterogeneous. It includes drawings, engravings, paintings and photographs. It even includes plaster impressions (in Italian, *impronte*), a medium that has received limited attention in museum studies. Series of *impronte*, often mounted in boxes conceived in the form of a volume and marketed to trav-

[10] Gunthert, "The conversational image".
[11] Gunthert, *L'Image partagée*.

elers during their Grand Tours, can provide visual evidence of museum interiors and display arrangements. In a collection entitled *Museo Vaticano* (c. 1830), for instance, the Roman cameo engraver Giovanni Liberotti – who specialized in the production of such souvenirs – included two *impronte* illustrating *L'ingresso del Museo Chiaromonti* and *Il nuovo braccio fatto da Pio VII* (fig. 11)[12]. Although modest in scale and function, these objects constitute significant visual records of museum spaces.

Such apparently heterogeneous documents play a crucial role in capturing the wide spectrum of expressive, rhetorical, and communicative registers through which the museum has been represented, perceived, and interpreted over time. By juxtaposing elite artistic media with popular, commercial, and serial forms of visual production, DAIM enables the analysis of how different audiences and cultural contexts have shaped – and been shaped by – distinct visualizations of the museum.

A comparable breadth characterizes the typologies of sources investigated. In addition to photographic archives (such as the Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale and in particular the Fondo Antichità e Belle Arti at the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (ICCD)[13], research has been conducted – and continues to be conducted – across a wide range of published sources. These include museum catalogs; publications issued by specialized editors; editorial series promoted by public institutions, such as those of the Ministry of Public Education; volumes published by cultural associations, including the Italian Touring Club; and commercial series such as *Italia Artistica*, as well as publications by the Istituto Italiano di Arti Grafiche.

With regard to periodicals, both specialized journals – ranging from *Bollettino d'arte* to *Casabella* and *Emporium* – and popular illustrated magazines and generalist press, from *Le Cento Città* to *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, have been systematically surveyed.

The research has also extended to foreign literature within the same editorial categories, with particular attention to illustrated travel guides, travel literature, and specialized international magazines, in order to situate the representations

[12] On the dissemination of the *impronte*, see Seidmann, "The Grand Tourist's Favourite Souvenirs"; Fultz, "Liberotti's Masterpieces".

[13] https://iccd.cultura.gov.it/it/fotografia/gabinettofotograficonazionale; https://iccd.cultura.gov.it/it/fotografia/fondo-antichita-belle-arti

of Italian museums within a broader, transnational, visual culture. While a fully exhaustive survey has not yet been achieved, the *Atlas* has been conceived as an open and expandable structure capable of integrating additional materials as research progresses.

As a pilot project, DAIM's primary objective has been to design, test, and validate a flexible methodological and technical framework by applying it to the widest possible range of case studies, thereby laying the groundwork for future expansion and comparative analysis.

As for the methodology adopted in the analysis of the materials collected within DAIM, the project is grounded in a critical approach articulated on two complementary levels. The first level consists of a close analysis of each visual source that takes into account its specific typology, material characteristics, and technical features, as well as the historical contexts of its production, circulation, and use. This includes attention to the conditions under which images were created, the intentions and constraints shaping their creation, and the audiences for which they were originally intended. Such an approach allows visual materials to be situated within their concrete institutional, economic, and cultural frameworks, and prevents their treatment as transparent or self-evident documents.

The second level of analysis considers visual sources in terms of what they depict, in relation to what may be described as the *circular* dimension of museum representation. From this perspective, images of museums operate within a complex economy of visual mediation, in which representation, interpretation, and reception are continuously intertwined. Visual sources may function as documentary records of the physical reality of a museum at a given moment, but they may also serve as forms of institutional self-representation, designed to project particular values, narratives, or identities. At the same time, they can embody the interpretative viewpoint of the image's author, commissioner, or patron, reflecting individual aesthetic choices, ideological positions, or cultural expectations.

Moreover, visual representations of museums can be understood as expressions – sometimes deliberate, sometimes implicit – of the social and collective reception of the museum within a given historical context. In this sense, images do not necessarily correspond to the material reality of museum spaces or display practices; rather, they may exist alongside that reality, selectively reframing it, or even replacing it in the public imagination. The methodological framework of DAIM therefore treats visual sources as active agents in the construction of the museum's image and meaning, recognizing their role in shaping both historical understanding and collective perception of the museum as an institution.

3. *Virtual Exhibitions*

Alongside historical research and presentation of its results, equal methodological attention has been devoted to cultural mediation and communication issues, considered as inherent features of the museum. Hence, starting from the *Atlas* and keeping visual documentation as the main focus, the project has developed new modalities for dissemination.

Through collaboration with the Fondazione Memofonte in Florence[14], the project has been able to deploy the potential of an additional tool (see §3.2) for the design of virtual interpretative pathways aimed at disseminating and exploiting the raw data stored in the *Atlas* (fig. 12). This integration supports the development of virtual exhibitions and narrative pathways that draw directly on materials archived in e-Dvara, embedding them within an interpretative and explanatory framework designed for a non-specialist audience.[15]

A first experimental application of this tool has been devoted to display cases, a key element in museum exhibition design (fig. 13). Starting from a general typological classification, the virtual exhibition brings together photographic documentation identified through the systematic analysis of sources, and cataloged in the database. These materials are presented in three short thematic galleries – period-style display cases, designer display cases, and display cases integrated into architectural structures. Through the use of tags and relational querying, the database makes it possible to extract and juxtapose visual evidence relating to different museums, highlighting shared characteristics and recurring exhibition strategies across otherwise diverse institutional contexts.

The three thematic galleries are complemented by explanatory texts, additional visual materials, and interpretative insights, which are made available through pop-up windows and other interactive features. This structure allows users to move seamlessly between narrative content and documentary evidence, fostering an exploratory and comparative mode of engagement while maintaining a clear and accessible interpretative framework[16].

[14] www.memofonte.it In relation to the Fondazione Memofonte: Nastasi, "Conservare, valorizzare e diffondere la cultura storico-artistica".

[15] https://mev.memofonte.it/it/

[16] https://mev.memofonte.it/it/vetrine-dei-musei/vetrine-dei-musei/

4. *Tools*

4.1. *The e-Dvara Archiving Platform*

The DAIM was developed using the e-Dvara archiving platform, created by the Laboratorio Informatico per la Documentazione Artistica (LIDA) of the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage at the University of Udine, in collaboration with the company InfoFactory (formerly a spin-off of the same university) and Dr. Cristian Virgili[17].

Conceived in 2008 – at a very early stage in the evolution of digital technologies – the platform was designed from the outset as a research-oriented environment specifically tailored to the needs of the humanities[18]. Its guiding principle was to enable humanities scholars, including those without technical expertise, to autonomously design and manage databases by means of an intuitive system for defining data templates, controlled vocabularies, data visualization modes, and search and query criteria.

The platform's flexibility, scalability, and ease of use have represented its principal strengths, making it possible over the course of two decades to develop databases of very different kinds: from thematic research databases (including those supporting undergraduate and doctoral theses) to the structured archiving of textual and visual materials, for both individual projects and collaborative research initiatives, either curated by the LIDA Laboratory or developed in partnership with external institutions.

Within this framework, the DAIM database architecture was designed, implemented, and progressively expanded directly by the research team – without the intervention of IT specialists – with the aim of providing a structured system for the description, organization, and retrieval of visual materials. The database facilitates consultation, comparison, and analytical cross-referencing through a relational architecture linking the various templates.

In addition to a set of controlled vocabularies, which function primarily as indexing and retrieval tools and, in some cases, as auxiliary reference instruments (figs. 14-15), nine templates were defined (museum complex; museum; painting; drawing; print; photograph; audiovisual material; source; series/campaign), each

[17] https://edvara.infofactory.it For the features of the e-Dvara platform, see also Visentin, "Il LIDA_FOTOTECA"; Visentin, "Il LIDA dell'Università di Udine"; Visentin, "Uno strumento di raccolta e strutturazione di dati".

[18] Baruzzo et al., *A Conceptual Model for Digital Libraries Evolution*.

corresponding to a distinct archive within the system (figs. 16-17). The relational links established among these templates enable advanced navigation and querying of the database through multiple intersecting parameters, including places, institutions, museums, authors, individuals, object typologies, dates, and keywords. For example, from a museum record it is possible to retrieve all print records depicting that museum within a given chronological range; from an individual print record, the user may then access the corresponding source record, which in turn provides a list of all museum representations published within that source (fig. 18). Or, by using keywords hierarchically organized in fields related to spaces, artworks and public, one can extrapolate all the images in which, for example, some kind of public (distinguished in authorities, generic visitors, staff, etc.) is represented.

4.2. *The Wagtail Platform for Dissemination*

Virtual exhibitions are created using the Wagtail content management system, which provides tools for building structured websites and offers a wide range of functionalities, including the creation of repositories for images and texts, the integration of geo-referenced maps, the import of 3D models, and the multilingual management of content[19]. The platform has been customized to respond to the same requirements that informed the development of the e-Dvara platform and – most importantly – to enable a direct connection with the e-Dvara databases[20].

Like e-Dvara, this dissemination tool is designed to meet the needs of humanities scholars by offering an instrument that can be managed autonomously and in an intuitive manner, without requiring advanced technical skills. Wagtail allows researchers to organise materials – whether imported from e-Dvara or produced specifically for dissemination purposes – within a structured narrative framework that is fully accessible across multiple devices, including desktop computers, tablets, and smartphones. In this respect, the platform functions as an effective bridge between research-oriented data infrastructures and public-facing interpretative outputs.

The integration of the two platforms is achieved through a direct connection that enables the automatic transfer of data from the DAIM database to Wagtail,

[19] https://wagtail.org/cultural-institutions/

[20] The project TOCC0001076 – PNRR Transizione Digitale Organismi Culturali e Creativi – financed by the European Union – Next Generation EU – was developed by Fondazione Memofonte for the creation of virtual exhibitions. The project also benefited from the expertise of InfoFactory.

with the possibility of further adaptation and editorial refinement. This makes it possible to incorporate information stored in the database directly into the main narrative flow of a virtual pathway, or alternatively to organise it into in-depth records and thematic focus sections, thereby ensuring continuity and coherence within the overall narrative environment.

5. *Conclusion*

In this way, the project seeks to raise awareness of its core conceptual premise: the idea that the museum should not be understood merely as a collection or display of objects and artifacts, but rather as a dynamic actor shaped by complex choices, practices, and historical stratifications that continuously redefine its institutional identity and material configuration. The museum thus emerges as a historically situated organism, whose present form is the outcome of layered decisions that relate to architecture, display, interpretation, and modes of public engagement.

Furthermore, the mediation and communication outputs developed within the project are intended to complement – and critically enrich – traditional museum web and social-media offerings, which have expanded significantly since the lockdown of spring 2020. While these digital initiatives have undoubtedly increased the online visibility of museums, they have largely concentrated on individual works, emphasizing their formal qualities or the narratives attached to them. In doing so, they have often neglected the museum itself as an object of historical inquiry, effectively "flattening" its history and reducing it to a timeless, or increasingly dominant, virtual present. In contrast, an explicit focus on the historical formation of museums is expected to foster a more informed and reflective understanding of their current configurations, practices, and challenges.

Both the collection of data (through DAIM) and the dissemination strategy (through virtual exhibitions) are grounded in a fundamental methodological principle: adherence to criteria of simplicity, accessibility, sustainability, and flexibility. This approach deliberately distances itself from costly and technologically invasive solutions – such as immersive virtual or augmented reality installations – which are often difficult to maintain and replicate. The project is instead based on the conviction that lightweight, adaptable, and economically viable tools are more likely to meet the concrete needs of most museums and to be compatible with their available resources, while at the same time ensuring long-term usability and meaningful public engagement.

Figure 1. Homepage of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*. [Source: https://edvara.infofactory.it/atlasitalianmuseums/; ©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

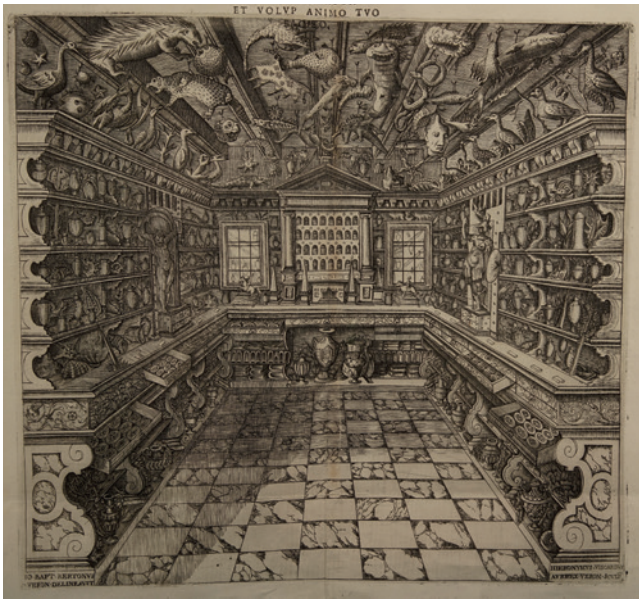

Figure 2. Giovan Battista Bertone (designer), Girolamo Viscardo (engraver), The Museum of Francesco Calzolari. [Source: Benedetto Ceruti and Andrea Chiocco, *Musaeum Franc. Calceolari Iun. Veronensis (…)*, Verona: Angelus Talmus, 1622, frontispiece]

Figure 3. Vincenzo Feoli, *Seitenansicht des zweiten Teiles der großen Statuen-Galerie im Museo Pio Clementino im Vatikan* (Side view of the second part of the large statue gallery in the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican), 1791-1794, outline etching, watercolour. Albertina, Vienna, cat. no. 17481. [Source: https://sammlungenonline.albertina.at/objects/26237/seitenansicht-des-zweiten-teiles-der-groen-statuengalerie#; Credits: ALBERTINA, Wien | Image: ALBERTINA, Wien]

Figure 4. Francesco Maestosi, *The Hall of the Iliad in the Pitti Palace*, c. 1870, oil on canvas. Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, accession number: 85.7. [Source: https://collections.artsmia.org/art/3360/sala-delliliade-in-the-pitti-palace-francesco-maestosi; Credit: Gift of funds from the Regis Corporation – CC-PDM-1.0]

Figure 5. Lorenzo Delleani, *A Room at the First Floor of the Museo Egizio*, 1881, oil on canvas. Museo Egizio, Turin. [Source: https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/it-IT/material/Provv_3526 – CC-PDM-1.0]

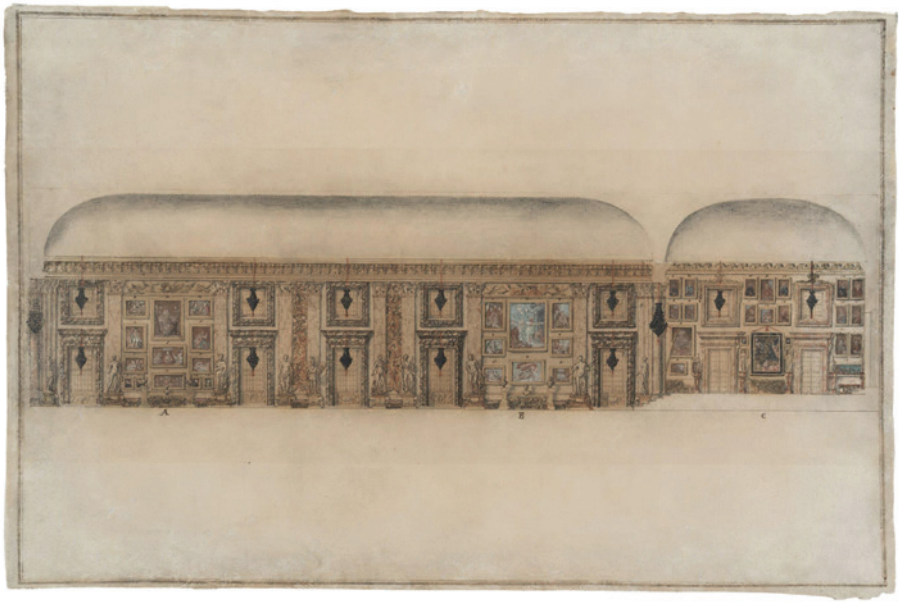

Figure 6. Author unknown of the beginning of 18th century [Salvatore Colonnelli Sciarra?], *Interior of the Palazzo Colonna, Rome*, drawing. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession number. E.21-1971. [Source: https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O686836/drawing/; ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London]

Figure 7. Carlo Naya, *Parte della Gran Sala Campidoglio*, *Roma*. Stereograph, albumen silver print, 1870s. [Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.XC.979.7483 https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/107690 – CC0 1.0]

Figure 8. Carlo Brogi, *Firenze – Museo Nazionale – Interno della seconda Sala dei Bronzi* (National Museum of Bargello, Florence – Interior of the Hall of Saturn), albumen silver print, c. 1880-1900. [Source: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 84.XP.709.410. https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1047HK – CC0 1.0]

Figure 9. Gabinetto Fotografico del Museo Nazionale di Napoli, *Sala De Mura della Pinacoteca del Museo Nazionale di Napoli*; gelatin silver print, 1908. Museo Nazionale (now Museo Archeologico Nazionale), Naples. [Source: ACS, MPI, AABBAA, Divisione seconda (già divisione prima), b. 25, fasc. 13; courtesy of MiC – Archivio centrale dello Stato, protocol n. 456/2026]

Figure 10. "Sala dell'«Anticolosso»" in the Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence, 1957. [Source: Becherucci, Luisa. "Riordinamento di due sale nella Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze," 89, fig. 2; ©Bollettino d'Arte – MiC]

Figure 11. *Museo Vaticano*, plaster 'impronte' by Giovanni Liberotti, Rome, c. 1830. Private collection.

Figure 12. Homepage of the Fondazione Memofonte website on virtual exhibitions. [Source: https://mev.memofonte.it/it; ©Fondazione Memofonte]

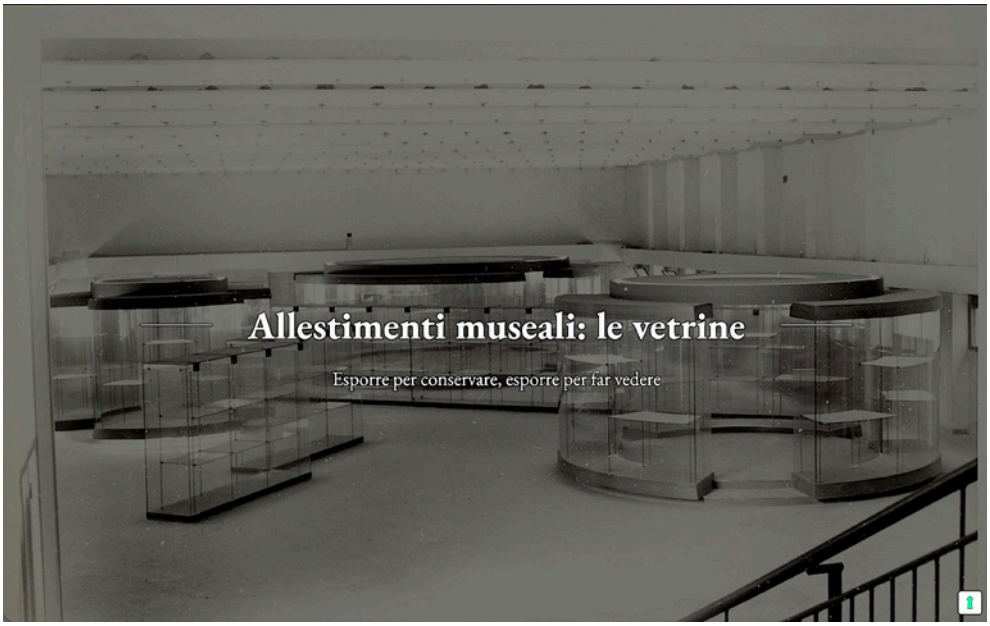

Figure 13. Homepage of the virtual exhibition *Museum Installations: Display Cases. Exhibiting to Preserve, Exhibiting to Make Visible,* 2025. [Source: https://mev.memofonte.it/it/vetrine-dei-musei/vetrine-dei-musei/; ©Fondazione Memofonte]

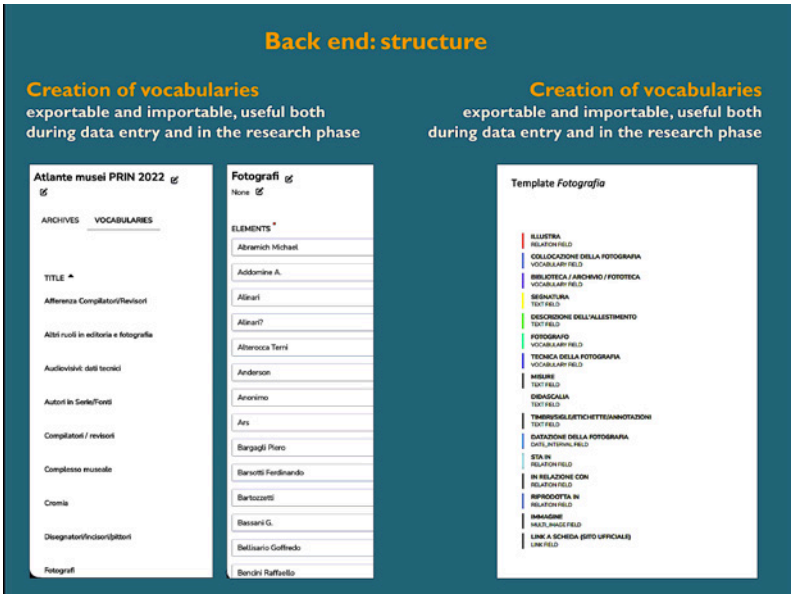

Figure 14. The structure of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM: vocabularies and templates. [©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

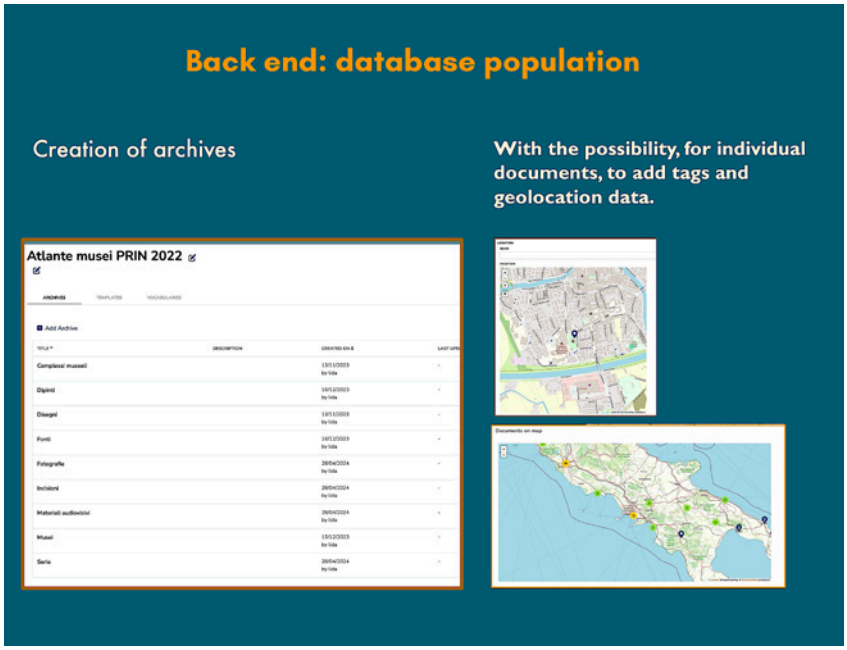

Figure 15. The structure of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM: archives. [©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

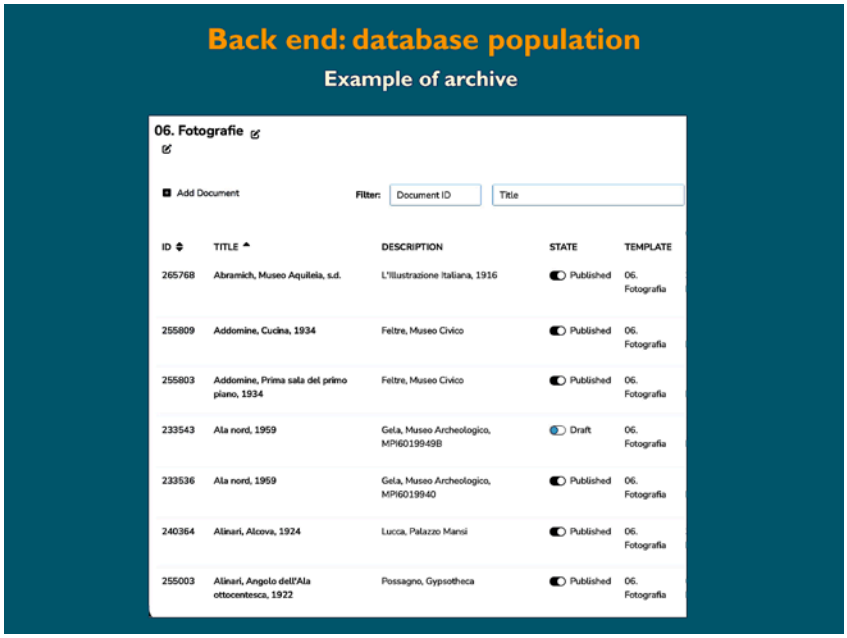

Figure 16. The structure of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM: an archive. [©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

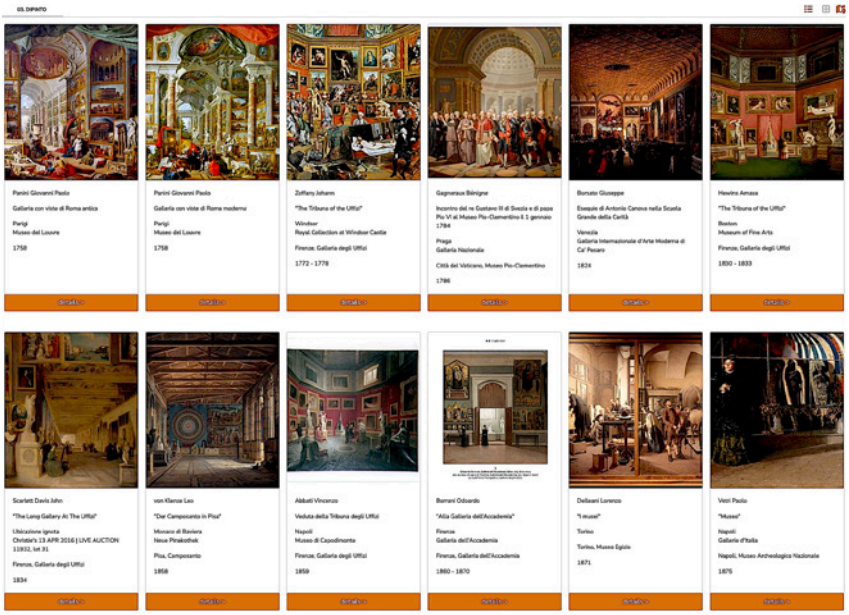

Figure 17. The output of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM: display of records in a mosaic layout. [©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

Figure 18. The output of the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM: display of a record. [Source: https://edvara.infofactory.it/atlasitalianmuseums/document/256299/; ©Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale]

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Antonella Gioli

The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*: Visual Sources and History of Display, 1715-1970**

The case-study of the Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi is a highly effective illustration of the different functions carried out by the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – collecting, analyzing, and researching visual sources, and the importance of these for reconstructing the history of configurations and displays in museums.

The different kinds of visual sources for the Tribuna will therefore be presented here as well as an outline of the history of its displays over a period of something less than three centuries, from 1715 to 1970.

1. *Visual Sources and a History in Images*

A search for 'Tribuna' in the *Atlas* will yield the visual sources – drawings, paintings, engravings, photographs, films – that have been digitized and cataloged to date. Clearly, these are only a part of the existing body of visual sources, limited by a variety of factors (from the 'pilot' nature of the project to existing copyrights), but they constitute a core set of images that is already extremely significant on at least three levels:

– in terms of documentation, they attest to the succession of different displays in the Tribuna, the presence and movements of antique statues and Renaissance and Baroque paintings;

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– in terms of visual material, they represent the different typologies, interpretations, audiences, uses and re-use, circulation, and the creators of the images of the Tribuna;
– in terms of their social value, they refer to the dimension of use 'for' and 'by' the public, which, through magazines, guides, albums, stereographs, and postcards, uses, disseminates and 'constructs' a 'form' of the Tribuna that reaches a much wider audience than simply that of its visitors[1].

What will be explored in depth in this contribution is the first level, that of the visual sources for the history of display in the Tribuna.

In contrast to the numerous literary descriptions, from contemporary accounts to those of Grand Tour travelers, we have no visual documentation of the Tribuna for the first centuries of its existence. It is only from the 18th century onwards that we have the first visual evidence, which gradually increases, especially with engravings, to explode at the end of the 19th century with the spread of photography in all its forms and uses.

The images are generally very detailed, with great attention paid to the rendering – even in the smaller paintings – of the angle of perspective; however, their degree of fidelity and reliability for the study of displays poses complex methodological problems. These include the authorial interpretation and the processes involved in their creation (*in situ*, from memory, from other images…); the frequent revisitings and reuses (between engraving and painting, between photography and postcards…); contingent or specifically staged situations (temporary relocation of paintings, the removal or introduction of furnishings…); difficulties in dating, with a prevalence of *ante quem* dates (from sales catalogs, publications, stamps, and dates of acquisition).

The visual sources either reproduce overall views (of 5 walls at most), or a single view with statues, and behind these, part of the walls with paintings.

As one might expect, in the *Atlas*, which also contains drawings, engravings, paintings, and films, it is photographs that predominate; these vary in terms of typology, author, use, and circulation.

[1] For the creation and circulation of the image of Italian museums, see Gioli, "Album, stereografie e cartoline"; Lerda, "I musei italiani nella stampa"; D'Alconzo, Lerda and Levi. "Dall'Atlante digitale"; and the papers presented by Daria Brasca, Annalisa Laganà, and Martina Lerda at the International Conference *Towards a Visual History of Museums. Studies and Experiences / Per una storia visiva dei musei: studi ed esperienze* (Naples, 14-16 January 2026) organized by Silvia Cecchini, Paola D'Alconzo, Antonella Gioli, and Donata Levi.

In terms of typology, these are 'single' photographs, some of which are water-colored or taken from albums, stereographs and reproductions in *cartes de visite*, postcards, and publications.

As for their creators and use, we find passionate amateur photographers and scholars who use them for personal or study purposes, photographic studios that sell them, the Gabinetto fotografico degli Uffizi, which requires them for internal documentation, as well as printers and publishers, including some from abroad.

As for their circulation, it should be noted that while drawings and paintings obviously have a circulation limited to their creator or the client (unless they are transposed into engravings), from the 1970s onward photography, in its various forms, has disseminated the image of the Tribuna to a wide audience, leading, however, to the dominance of a prevailing, 'crystallized' image: the view from the central entrance, with the famous *Venus de' Medici* placed perfectly symmetrically, in the center.

The last type of visual source to appear on the scene and to be investigated is that of audiovisuals, that is, documentaries, films, and videos. For the period in question, there are two newsreels that should be viewed taking into account their original mode of viewing: screened in crowded cinemas ahead of the feature film. With the combined effect of the big screen, commentary, and music, they had a great impact on the audience.

Research for the *Atlas* has led to a reconstruction of the history of the display of the works of art in the Tribuna, little explored for the 19th and 20th centuries, intertwining primarily the study of the visual sources, together with that of catalogs and guides, catalogs of photographic studies, studies on the history of the Gallery and on the individual works, but also with surveys of archival material (still in progress), which promptly branched out in several directions.

The changes in the Tribuna's displays, in fact, reflect events in collecting and power, changes in taste, aesthetic choices, the critical fortune of works and of artists, social and cultural phenomena, and museological and museographic visions and practices[2] .

[2] On the centrality of visual sources for the reconstruction of museum history, see the fundamental Ferretti, *La forma del museo*, 46-80; Spalletti, "L'image des musées". For individual institutions and the need to combine the history of museology and the history of photography, see Milanese, *Album Museo* and Milanese, *Ritratto d'un museo*; for the museum discussed in this article, see Cestelli Guidi, "Un racconto fotografico".

This history of display in the Tribuna's is presented here through a selection of images from the *Atlas* representative both of the different typologies of visual sources and of the five phases that we consider to be the principal ones.

2. *Preamble: The Tribuna of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francesco I de' Medici, 1583*

As is well known, the Tribuna has a history that goes back centuries[3]. It is located on the third floor of the Palazzo degli Uffizi, designed in 1560 by Giorgio Vasari for Cosimo de' Medici, the future first Grand Duke of Tuscany. His successor, Francesco I de' Medici, transformed the 'Corridore di levante' into a gallery, and commissioned his architect Bernardo Buontalenti to build a room next to it, which was duly completed in 1581-1583 (fig. 1).

The so-called Tribuna[4] has an octagonal floorplan (shown here clockwise from the entrance as A-H, fig. 2)[5] with a niche in the rear wall, the entrance opening from the Gallery, sumptuous architecture and decoration. The floor is inlaid with polychrome marble in an eight-segment design, symmetrical to the cupola. The walls are divided into two registers separated by a gilded string course: in the lower register, the dado was originally painted with animals and plants, and the wall above it lined with crimson velvet, while in the upper register eight large windows alternate with decorations in blue, gold, and white. The high dome has gilded ribs, the background painted with cochineal lake and encrusted with thousands of mother-of-pearl shells. At the summit, is a lantern with a weather vane. All the architectural, decorative, and chromatic elements are rich in historical, symbolic, and dynastic meanings, seamlessly fused together into a treasure chest of light and unparalleled preciosity.

Along the walls ran complex carved ebony shelving ensemble with drawers, spires, and small arches, which housed and displayed stone busts, precious stones, bronze and silver sculptures, *naturalia*, and *artificialia*. In the center of

[3] On the history of the Tribuna, see at least Berti, Rodolph and Biancalani, *Mostra storica della Tribuna*; Heikamp, "La Galleria degli Uffizi"*;* Heikamp, "Lo "Studiolo Grande""; Heikamp, *Le sovrane bellezze*; Natali, Nova and Rossi, *La Tribuna del Principe*.

[4] See Bocchi, *Le bellezze,* 51.

[5] Hereafter, capital letters in parentheses are to be understood as references to the walls indicated in the schematic plan in fig. 2.

the six 'free' walls (that is, walls with neither entrance nor niche), the shelving was interrupted and replaced by six carved and gilded corbels, each bearing a bronze sculpture originally housed, as was the case with many other objects, in the Studiolo of Francesco I in Palazzo Vecchio. On either side of the niche stood two cabinets housing crystal vases and semi-precious stones.

In the center stood the *Tempietto ottagonale* or *Studiolo nuovo,* also by Buontalenti, made of ebony with alabaster columns and elements in silver, gold, and precious stones, which contained medals, gems, and cameos. On the walls were displayed about thirty paintings by Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Pontormo, Beccafumi, Titian and other great masters.

The Tribuna was therefore a space of wonder which housed and displayed a collection of "the most precious jewels and other honored and beautiful delights belonging to the Grand Duke of Tuscany"[6], the flower of the Medici collections and of Florentine artistic production at the end of the 16th century.

During the 17th century, works and objects were removed and added, mirroring several phenomena: the desire of the grand dukes to 'make their mark'; the gradual loss of interest in 'curiosities' and rarities, and objects pertaining to the *Wunderkammer*; the growth of the collection; and the new Baroque taste for picture galleries with 'encrusted' displays covering the entire wall.

The Tribuna soon became an attraction for antiquarians, men of letters, and visitors; it was celebrated in Italian and foreign guidebooks and publications; it became a model for exhibition rooms and museums, also because of its museographic characteristics: the display on several levels, the interplay between shadowy half-light, the red of the walls and the gold of the decorations and frames, the top-light that initiated the tradition of zenithal lighting for the viewing of works of art[7].

But for visual sources, we have to wait until the 18th century. And that is when our 'history in pictures' begins.

[6] Del Riccio, *Istoria delle pietre*, 57v: "le più preziose gioie ed altre delizie onorate e belle che abbi il Gran Duca di Toscana".

[7] See Occhipinti, "La Tribuna del Buontalenti".

3. *The Tribuna in the 18th Century: Magnificence and the Grand Tour*

The earliest visual sources provide, with varying degrees of documentary accuracy, the layout and configuration of the Tribuna during the 18th century, with the layers of change in the furnishings and works that had occurred over time.

The most significant images provide us with fairly consistent information as to the display.

Giulio Pignatta's conversation piece, *Sir Andrew Fountaine and Friends in the Tribune*, painted in 1715 under the sixth Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici, depicts five English gentlemen gathered together to study a collection of cameos: one holds a small box, the other two hold a cameo in their hands[8] (fig. 3). The Tribuna is seen from the center, with light entering diagonally from the side, from the window at the top of the second corner wall (B); the entire rear wall (E) is depicted up to the cornice, and the two walls on either side (D, F) partially so.

In the background, a niche is depicted with a large decorated cabinet set between drapes. This is the *Studiolo grande* that the third Grand Duke Ferdinando I commissioned from Buontalenti, decorated with precious and polychrome stones, gold, silver, and crystal, which housed precious stones, cameos, and intaglios. It had been placed in the niche in 1602, in addition to the *Tempietto ottagonale* commissioned by Francesco I from Buontalenti, which had been at the center from the beginning, a kind of microcosm within the cosmos of the Tribuna. Above the *Studiolo grande* is set Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni*, in the Tribuna since 1677 and initially displayed above the entrance door. Above the niche, on the string course, the *Portrait of Ferdinando I* in mosaic looks out over the entire Tribuna. Hanging on the wall on either side of the niche are six portraits, three on each side, one below the other, including Vasari's *Portrait of Cosimo the Elder*.

The gentlemen in the group, some seated and some standing, are placed around a table covered with a pomegranate-colored cloth with a blue lining, a small part of which can be glimpsed. This is the octagonal table[9], with the top inlaid with semi-precious stones – a *commesso di pietre dure* – positioned there in 1649 by the fifth Grand Duke Ferdinando II in place of the cumbersome *Tempietto ottagonale:* a substitution that had 'lightened' the space in the center of

[8] See Moore, *Norfolk and the Grand Tour*, 29, 85-86.

[9] See Paolucci, "La grande statuaria"; Paolucci, *Divina Simulacra*.

the room, and modified the spatiality by flanking the central axis, of which the *Tempietto ottagonale* had been the fulcrum, with a visual axis running from the entrance, to the table, to the niche with the *Studiolo grande*.

The group is surrounded by three antique statues of Venus. These are the ones that Grand Duke Cosimo III instructed to have placed in the Tribuna in 1680, together with three other statues, around the table: on the left, on whose base Fountaine leans, in a pose characteristic of Grand Tour portraits, is the *Venus Victrix* or *Venus of the Belvedere*; in the background to the left of the niche, indicated by the figure in the center, is the *Venus de' Medici*, which Cosimo III had transferred from the Villa Medici on the Pincio in Rome in 1677, together with the statues of the *Wrestlers* and the *Arrotino* (the Knife Grinder); to the right of the niche is the *Venus Caelestis*, purchased in Bologna in 1658 and extensively restored by Algardi.

The 'circle' of statues arranged by Cosimo III was completed by the aforementioned *Wrestlers* and the *Arrotino,* from Rome, and by the *Satyr* or *Dancing Faun*[10].

With the insertion of this group of statues, the Tribuna became a 'shrine' to the dialogue/comparison between Greek sculpture and modern painting. It is no coincidence that, during the same period, Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni* was moved to a more prominent position above the *Studiolo grande* in the niche.

Nor is it a coincidence that of the six statues of Antiquity Pignatta chose to reproduce the three Venuses. When the custodian flung open the doors of the Tribuna at the end of the visit, the sight of them, and especially that of the *Venus de' Medici,* constituted the climax of the visit to the Gallery:

> But what they always reserve for the Buon Boccone, to make up your mouth with, is the glorious octagonal room called the Tribuna, which looks like a little temple inhabited by goddesses; for these are what present themselves first to view at the entrance[11].

In the painting, the gilded shelf with small drawers along the walls is all that remains of the original shelving ensemble. It divides the display of paintings into three registers, two above the shelf and one register for smaller paintings beneath the shelf. Those reproduced are all portraits with the exception of Fra Bartolomeo

[10] *Ibidem*.
[11] Wright, *Some observations*, 405.

Della Porta's *The Prophet Isaiah* and Titian's *Virgin and Child with St. John the Baptist* on the left, and a small *Landscape* beneath the shelf on the right.

The crowded composition masks the six vertical corbels, the dado, and any other statues standing on the floor.

The only element that is at odds with other visual sources and the documentation is the floor, depicted here as of a checkerboard pattern with inlaid circles and lozenges.

The watercolor painted by Sir Roger Newdigate after his visit to the Gallery in 1739, during the first of his two Grand Tours, is highly evocative as well as interesting for a variety of reasons[12]. It is one of the few images in vertical format and therefore shows the Tribuna, with an inevitable distortion in perspective, from the floor up to and including most of the cupola. It is depicted from the entrance, with all six antique statues, three entire walls (D, E, F) and two walls partially (C, G). And it is empty: the beloved Tribuna is not presented here as a setting nor – as we might say today – a 'location' for a group of aristocrats but is itself the subject. It is immersed in its characteristic penumbral atmosphere, with light streaming in from the only one of three windows without a curtain.

Every element is depicted with care: the inlaid floor with small antique sculptures along the perimeter; the central octagonal table (with its legs) surrounded by the six antique statues; paintings on the walls, shelves on which stand small sculptures, and vertical corbels with larger sculptures; the niche with the cabinet (*stipo*), the *Tondo Doni* and the *Portrait of Ferdinando I* in mosaic; the order with the windows and decorations; the cupola with its shells and ribs. However, the painted wooden dado is not depicted.

The display of the paintings is similar to what we see in Pignatta, with only the rear wall (E) featuring the larger paintings, which are therefore reduced to two registers above the shelves; however, it is not an easy task to identify the paintings, except on the basis of the lists and positioning diagrams that Sir Newdigate had recorded in a notebook, which he partially updated during his second journey in 1774.

Similar arrangement layouts were also drawn by the custodian of the Gallery, Giuseppe Bianchi, in the 1768 *Catalogo dimostrativo della Reale Galleria Austro medicea di Firenze*[13].

[12] See Conticelli, "Sir Roger Newdigate's Notebook"; Paolucci, "La grande statuaria".

[13] Barocchi and Bertelà, "Per una storia visiva della Galleria".

In contrast, walls and paintings are meticulously reproduced in the drawings made by the 'Gallery draftsmen' who, around 1760, continued the work of Benedetto Vincenzo De Greyss's *Galleria Imperiale di Firenze*[14] (figs. 4-8).

These reproduce five walls 'clinically' and frontally: those on the left side up to the rear wall (B, C, D, E), and the last wall to the right of the entrance (H), with their respective paintings.

The precision of the drawings confirms the criteria used in the arrangement of the paintings: covering the entire wall, from the shelf to the string course, in the dense, 'encrusted' style characteristic of Baroque displays and picture galleries, yet the object of a carefully thought-out scheme and layout.

In fact, each wall is scrupulously constructed symmetrically around a central vertical axis: the six 'empty' walls have two corbels at the sides, in the center – the central axis – the vertical corbel with the statue, and at the far ends, on the floor, two antique sculptures. The paintings are also hung symmetrically, mainly according to size, but while the arrangement in three orders is a constant, with two above the shelf and one with smaller formats below either side of the vertical corbel, each wall follows a different arrangement, so that each wall has a different total number of paintings in its display.

For example, the wall to the left of the entrance (B) has eight paintings arranged in two bands in the upper two registers. At the top are three paintings abutting another, with Annibale Carracci's *Venus with Satyr and Cupids* in the center, only slightly larger than Titian's *Portrait of Bishop Ludovico Bandinelli* and Paris Bordone's *Portrait of a Man with a Fur* either side. Below, also abutting another, are five paintings arranged symmetrically in a 'stepped' arrangement, with the slightly larger ones on the outside, with the smaller *Portrait* by Pourbus in the center. In the lower register, there are eight paintings of different sizes in a symmetrical arrangement.

In contrast, on the next wall (C) the six paintings are displayed in a kind of semicircle. Raphael's large *St. John in the Desert* is at the top, while beneath it the smaller *Martyrdom of St. Justina* by Veronese – aligned with the lower edge of the shelf; two pairs of similar size paintings either on side with at the top the *Virgin and Child with St. John* by Titian and the *Virgin and Child* by Andrea del Sarto (now Domenico Ubaldini), and at the bottom, the *Virgin of the Goldfinch* and the *Madonna of the Well* by Raphael (the latter now ascribed to Franciabigio). The

[14] Santucci, "30.1" and Santucci, "30.2"; Gioli, *La "Galleria Imperiale di Firenze"*.

paintings in the lower register are also displayed symmetrically: on either side of the statue are two portraits, matching in size, by Hans Holbein the Younger, the *Portrait of Sir Richard Southwell* and the *Portrait of Luther* (now *Portrait of a Man* and attributed to Raphael); at the sides, beneath the shelves, are two groups of three paintings with the largest in the center flanked by the two smaller ones.

The rear wall (E) displays two vertical series of four paintings on either side of the niche, 'scaling down' from the largest, *Portrait of a Young Man with a Lute* and *Portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi* (both by Bronzino) to the smallest beneath the shelf, namely the *Redeemer* by Maratta and Parmigianino's *Virgin and Child*.

The traditional Baroque and late Baroque style of picture galleries therefore appears to have been regulated and tempered by the principles of symmetry and variety, and secondarily by the institution of a partial criterion based on authorship (Raphael) and subject (portraits).

Finally, Johann Zoffany's celebrated painting *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, painted in Florence in 1772-1777 (fig. 9), commissioned by Queen Charlotte of England, sets members of the English nobility and custodians, furnishings, and works from Palazzo Pitti and other residences in a picturesque disorder, emphasizing the Tribuna as the *summa* of the grand ducal collections. The painter even has Titian's *Venus of Urbino* – one of the most famous and copied paintings in the Gallery – removed from the wall so that the painter Thomas Patch and others could study it[15].

Although partly a work 'of the imagination', Zoffany's is the last image of the Tribuna before its modification at the end of the 18th century.

4. *Circa 1780: the 'Enlightenment' Tribuna*

In 1737, when the Grand Duchy of Tuscany passed to Francesco Stefano, Duke of Lorraine, whose son Pietro Leopoldo of Hapsburg-Lorraine, the enlightened Grand Duke and reformer, in 1775 appointed Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni as director of the Gallery and Luigi Lanzi as assistant antiquarian.

Pelli carried out a general plan to reorganize and rationalize the Gallery's rich collections and rooms, which, from 1780 also included the Tribuna[16].

[15] Millar, *Zoffany and his Tribuna*; Webster, *Johann Zoffany,* 281-301. On 18th century English visitors to the Uffizi, see Floridia, *Forestieri in Galleria*.

[16] See Spalletti, *La Galleria di Pietro Leopoldo*, 91-125; Spalletti, "Gli allestimenti della Tribuna".

Two entrances were opened on the side walls (C, G) to create an enfilade of rooms, which however canceled out the splendid architectural isolation of the Tribuna, blunting the circularity of the space as well as the element of surprise for the visitor. Although the crimson velvet covering the walls, now ruined, was replaced with another of a similar color, the furnishings were drastically reduced: the perimeter shelf dismantled; the dado painted with flowers and fish replaced with one decorated in neoclassical style in gold and chiaroscuro; the *Studiolo grande* in the niche and the octagonal table in the center removed; the two cabinets and the niche in the rear wall covered up.

In the Tribuna, Lanzi was only appreciative of the light, and only in relation to masterpieces of the fine arts. He describes the space as

> high, bright, surrounded by a large number of windows, lending each object, with the help of the curtains, precisely the degree of light that is required to see it well and draw it well. This opportunity and architectural judgment surprises travelers more than the decoration of the cupola (…), which is certainly a great rarity, but which in no way contributes to the enjoyment of the masterpieces collected here. I say masterpieces because anything that is not excellent either does not enter this great school of design, or will not last[17].

Objects, sculptures, and bronzes are transferred to other rooms, according to a subdivision and classification by genre and class. The number of antique statues is reduced from six to five, a selection that will never be altered: the *Venus de' Medici,* the *Arrotino,* the *Wrestlers, Dancing Faun*, and the *Apollino*, transferred in 1770 from the Villa Medici in Rome together with the group of the *Niobids*, and immediately installed in the Tribuna.

The number of paintings was halved, with only the masterpieces being retained.

Unfortunately, there are no images of this new arrangement and display. All we have are a few watercolor drawings in the small album *Disegni della sistema-*

[17] Lanzi, "La Real Galleria di Firenze", 169-193, at 170: "Alto, luminoso, cerchiato intorno da gran numero di finestre, presta col ministero delle tende ad ogni oggetto que' gradi appunto di luce, che a ben vederlo, e a ben disegnarlo son richiesti. Questa opportunità e giudizio di architettura sorprende i viaggiatori più che l'ornato della cupola (…), certamente ben raro, ma che nulla contribuisce a godere i capi d'opera qui raccolti. Dico i capi d'opera; perché ciò, che non è eccellente, o non entra in questa grande scuola di disegno, o non vi dura."

zione dei Quadri della Galleria nel 1784, which contains twenty-five outlines of paintings on the walls (figs. 10a-b), a number roughly corresponding to the twenty-six indicated in a guide and in the 1783 catalog[18]. A comparison with the text indicates that the outlines of the two over-door paintings correspond to Annibale Carracci's *Venus, Satyr, and Cupids* and Leandro Bassano's 'oblong' *Concert*, while the square frame is the one affixed to the *Tondo Doni*.

In line with the new neoclassical taste, the splendor and sumptuousness of the space are reduced in favor of an 'elegant simplicity', which sought to enhance the enjoyment of selected masterpieces of painting and sculpture.

Appointed director in 1793, Tommaso Puccini began organizing the Gallery according to schools and chronologies. He increased the number of paintings displayed in the Tribuna with additions in various directions: paintings from the Florentine school, such as Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna of the Harpies;* works from other schools of painting, such as Barocci's *Portrait of the Duke of Urbino* and Mantegna's small *Three Gospel Stories of the Life of Christ*; works by foreign artists, such as Dürer's *Adoration of the Magi*, Van Dyck's *Charles V on Horseback*, and Rubens' *Saint Jerome*[19]. But Puccini's Tribuna did not last long: he transferred the most important works to Palermo to keep them safe from the French (September 1800-February 1803), who in 1803 took possession of the *Venus de' Medici,* which was replaced in the Tribuna in 1812 by Canova's *Venus Italica*, until its return in 1816[20] .

5. *The 19th Century: Success and Criticism, Static Displays, and Relocation of Works*

The engravings – whether the elegant, pure outlines of Hakewill and Moses published in 1820 (figs. 11-12), or the more theatrical ones by Bercher of around 1830 (figs. 13-14) – the paintings of the whole animated by visitors – such as

[18] See Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, *Disegni della sistemazione dei Quadri della Galleria nel 1784*, no. 11640, cc. 22, 23. See Spalletti, *La Galleria di Pietro Leopoldo*, 117-121; Zacchiroli, *Description de la Galerie Royale* [*Seconde partie*], 36-44; Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, *Catalogo delle pitture della Regia Galleria*, 145-152.

[19] Spalletti, "Parte II. Direttore degli Uffizi"; Spalletti, "Gli allestimenti della Tribuna," 279-282.

[20] Pasquinelli, *La Galleria in esilio*.

Amasa Hewins' (1830-1833)[21] or Vincenzo Abbati's (1859) (fig. 15) – and, from the 1870s onward, the increasingly numerous photographs; all of these document a configuration of the space and a display of the Tribuna that remained unchanged throughout the century.

The Tribuna now has three entrances (walls A, C, G) with heavy curtains. The five antique statues are arranged in a circle facing the center, with the *Venus de' Medici* set in front of the rear wall (fig. 14) and the walled niche, between the 'low' statues of the *Wrestlers* on the left and the *Arrotino* on the right, which face the two 'tall' statues, the *Dancing Faun* and the *Apollino* (fig. 15).

The paintings are of medium and large size, and the lower register of small paintings has not been reinstated; they are displayed on two registers, from the dado to the string course cornice, with more distance between them than before, with the removal of the shelves. The display is still based on symmetry and pendants within each of the walls, to which is sometimes added a correspondence between walls. Other criteria such as school of painting, author, or genre emerge in some walls and periods.

This rigid structure in the display is accompanied by frequent and minute shifts in the position of individual works, either on different walls or within the same wall, as the images demonstrate. These shifts can be attributed to a variety of reasons: the removal or introduction of paintings in the Tribuna, aesthetic choices, practical requirements for copying and viewing, new studies, and scholarly interpretations.

In 1817, there were thirty-seven paintings listed in the Tribuna[22], mainly from the 16th century, but also with the addition of new or confirmed works from the early Renaissance and the Baroque periods: on the one hand, Mantegna's *Three Gospel Stories from the Life of Christ* (already included by Puccini) and Perugino's *Madonna and Child with Saints*, and on the other, Lanfranco's *Saint Peter Embracing the Cross*, *St. Jerome* by Ribera, *Charles V on Horseback* and *Jean de Montfort* by Van Dyck, *Hercules between Vice and Virtue* by Rubens.

The rear wall behind the *Venus* (E) appears as the most important, if not in terms of the visit, then certainly in terms of the image, especially the photographic one; since 1820 it shows a centered symmetrical vertical display with four paintings, one large at the top and three others aligned below, just above the dado.

[21] Amasa Hewins, *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, oil on canvas, 1830-1833. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, accession number 2011.2102

[22] *Galerie Impériale*, 182-191.

At least four documented displays are known, of uncertain dates and featuring different paintings:

– beginning from about 1820, Andrea del Sarto's *Madonna of the Harpies* at the top and beneath it (from around 1830), the *Three Gospel Stories of the Life of Christ* by Mantegna brought together in a triptych by an 'in the style of' frame, probably made in 1827[23]; this is the only display configuration that is documented by engravings, paintings, and photographs (figs. 11-17);
– from around 1887, at the top, Perugino's *Madonna and Child with Saints*, which remained there for a long time, at the bottom, Veronese's *Holy Family with Saint John and Saint Catherine*, with a rich frame, with Correggio's *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* on the left (fig. 18);
– from around 1891, most probably under the directorship of Enrico Ridolfi, in the lower register we see Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni* in its original frame with the *Portrait of Julius II* on the left (figs. 19 and 24); the frame had been identified and reinstated by Ridolfi in place of the square frame with which the Tondo had been displayed on the wall (F) behind the *Apollino* (fig. 23);
– from around 1900, at the bottom we see Dürer's *Adoration of the Magi*, with an *all'antica* frame commissioned by Ridolfi, between the *Portrait of Julius II* and Rubens' *Portrait of Isabella Brandt*, which Ridolfi had introduced into the Tribuna (fig. 20).

Through these substitutions and movements of paintings, a 'correspondence' was achieved between the walls on either side of the rear wall (D and F), resulting in a highly 'photogenic' mirrored display clearly visible from the entrance to the Gallery and in the images.

One of the most famous paintings in the Tribuna, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, since 1820 has been documented as hanging in the upper register of the wall to the left of the rear wall (D) (figs. 12, 14-17); perhaps in 1887, it was brought down to the lower register, with Van Dyck's large *Charles V on Horseback* (fig. 18) placed above it; subsequently, perhaps in 1891, it was once again hung at the top and the lower register made up of smaller paintings (fig. 19). It is in this phase that Annibale Carracci's *Venus, Satyr, and Cupids* (fig. 19) was placed on the right-hand wall (F) as a 'thematic' and visual pendant (both in its horizontal format and subject matter), and this remained in place even when the lower registers were modified (fig. 20).

[23] *Gli Uffizi. Catalogo Generale*, 364, P993.

In some instances, we see a continuity or a revival of earlier juxtapositions. For example, Raphael's trio of *St. John in the Desert* between the *Madonna of the Goldfinch* and the *Madonna of the Well*, reproduced by De Greyss's successors on the side wall (C) where the left entrance was later opened (fig. 11), was then replicated on the first wall on the left as you enter the Gallery (B), aligned in a single register that continues at length on the adjacent wall (C) with the *Portrait of Julius II* (fig. 15). This also creates an almost theatrical effect in the echoing of the gestures of the arm of the painted saint and that of the *Dancing Faun* that stands before him. In the upper register, Perugino's *Virgin and Child with Saints* is placed first, presumably to suggest the master-pupil relationship, followed by Fra Bartolomeo's monumental pair of prophets, *Job* and *Isaiah* (fig. 21).

The visual sources also document the furnishings and elements that refer to visitors and their experience of the Tribuna: the continued presence of curtains on the windows, although the fabric is no longer red but green (figs. 13-16, 19-20 and 22); from around 1830, the metal 'enclosure' around the *Venus*, to protect her from visitors wanting to touch her (figs. 13-14, and following); upholstered armchairs and stools (figs. 15, 17, and following); at times the presence of a felt carpet and runners to protect the floor (figs. 13-14, 20 and 22); captions (figs. 23-24)

The practice of making copies is also documented: some copyists captured in passing, easels, copies of paintings that sometimes appear to have been carefully positioned by the photographer to draw attention to their fidelity to the original (fig. 21).

Toward the end of the century, the images reveal a trend towards a reduction in the number of paintings, which is confirmed by the catalogs. The Tribuna begins to be criticized, even for one of the elements for which it had long been celebrated, namely its filtered light[24].

The director Enrico Ridolfi, who in 1890 began a general reorganization by schools of painting, considered it:

> the most unsuitable room for the exhibition of paintings due to its lighting conditions (…) if I set out to preserve it, it was only because I was convinced that the undoing of such an ancient and famous creation, which had even inspired imitations abroad, would have met with the disapproval of a large part of the public. (…) it was no easy

[24] See Occhipinti, "La Tribuna del Buontalenti".

> task to reorganize even that famous room, with principles more in line with today's concepts in the appreciation of ancient works of art[25].

For this reorganization, Ridolfi removed the works that he considered were not of sufficient quality, such as the paintings by artists from Emilia (Reni, Lanfranco, Lodovico Carracci, Guercino, Barocci…) and Daniele da Volterra's *Massacre of the Innocents*. He added four portraits: the two *Panciatichi Portraits* by Bronzino, the *Portrait of Isabella Brandt* by Rubens, and the *Sick Man* by Sebastiano del Piombo (attributed in the past to Leonardo).

But that does not seem sufficient. This is how the Tribune would be remembered

> in the early 1900s, when the opportunity arose for a thinning out and a new layout and display that would provide a little more air and light to the treasures amassed into the small room. (…) A narrow, poorly lit room with short walls, crammed full with famous paintings, so tightly packed together that their frames touched, in a storage-like indiscriminate mixing that testified to wealth, but certainly did not help to reveal the many beauties expressed on the canvases and panels. And, in the middle, the sculptures in front of the paintings, hiding them. This was but the ostentation of great wealth thrown before the eyes of the curious visitor, without any concern for the enjoyment that each individual work could provide, an ostentation contrary to any intimacy, and therefore to any true pleasure[26].

[25] Ridolfi, *Il mio direttorato,* 38-44, at 39: "la sala più inadatta per le sue condizioni di luce all'esposizione de' dipinti (…) se io mi prefiggeva di conservarla, era solo pel convincimento che il disfare una creazione così antica e di tanta celebrità, la quale aveva avuto imitazioni anche all'estero, avrebbe incontrato il biasimo di gran parte del pubblico. (…) impresa non facile di un riordinamento anche di quella celebre sala, con principii più consentanei agli odierni concetti nell'apprezzamento delle opere d'arte antica." He had already elaborated on the lighting problems of the Tribuna in Ridolfi, "RR. Gallerie di Firenze," 173-174.

[26] Rusconi, "La Tribuna dell'Ottocento": "ai primi anni del 1900, quando cominciò ad apparire l'opportunità di uno sfollamento e di un nuovo ordinamento che dessero un po' più di aria e di luce ai tesori ammassati nella piccola sala. (…) Una sala stretta, male illuminata, con brevi pareti, tutta piena di pitture famose, così addossate l'una all'altra che le cornici si toccavano, in una promiscuità da magazzino che attestava la ricchezza, ma che certo non giovava a rivelare le tante bellezze espresse sulle tele e sulle tavole. E, in mezzo, le sculture che si sovrapponevano ai quadri e li nascondevano. Era quella l'ostentazione di una grande ricchezza buttata innanzi agli occhi dei curiosi, senza nessuna preoccupazione del godimento che ogni singola opera poteva dare, una ostentazione contraria ad ogni intimità e perciò ad ogni vero piacere".

6. *1925: Room XI: Renovation with Venus at the center, among Portraits and Tapestries*

The general reorganization was carried out by the new directors Corrado Ricci and Giovanni Poggi, the latter bringing it to completion.

In the Tribuna, in addition to reducing the number of works, Poggi profoundly modified the sense of space and its meaning.

He reopened the niche in the rear wall and in it placed a cabinet similar to the original one. He moved the *Venus* to the center, between the other four statues, to make her visible in the *enfilade* of open doors from the first rooms that he had reorganized, making the statue the focal point of the space (figs. 25-26).

In keeping with the arrangement of the Gallery according to schools, he removed paintings that had long hung in the Tribuna, such as *St. John in the Desert* (documented since 1589) and three other works by Raphael, the *Tondo Doni* (since 1638), the *Madonna of the Harpies* (since 1782), and *Venus of Urbino* (also since 1782), assigning them to their respective rooms.

The paintings were reduced to twenty; of these, thirteen were portraits, mainly of the Medici family, and mostly by Bronzino, including the *Portrait of Cosimo de' Medici "Pater Patriae"* by Pontormo, an artist who had long been absent from the Tribuna.

The plan of the display no longer varied from wall to wall, but was identical for all: in the lower register, on the four 'whole' walls, three paintings, one large in the center between two smaller ones; on the four walls with entrances and niches, two small paintings.

The two walls flanking the rear wall (D and F) featured two masterpieces of Florentine Mannerism in the center: *Moses defends the Daughters of Jethro* by Rosso Fiorentino and Salviati's *Charity*, flanked by a pair of portraits.

For the first time, tapestries were displayed – in the upper register, woven in the Arazzeria Medicea and based on cartoons by Salviati and Bronzino. Among these, above Salviati's *Charity* (F) hung the tapestry of the *Deposition from the Cross* based on Salviati's cartoon, and above the right entrance (G) the tapestry with the combined coats of arms of the Medici and Lorraine families.

The Tribuna thus resolved the problems of overcrowding and poor viewing conditions by reducing and spacing out the works, in line with the most advanced international trends. In doing so, however, it lost its historical uniqueness, becoming rather a stage on the museum circuit, almost a 'thematic' room dedicated to Medici portraits or Florentine Mannerism.

It is no coincidence that it in various publications it appeared with the heading "Room XI. 16th-century Florentine school (Tribuna)"[27].

Also probably linked to the loss of its 'unique' status was the overall reduction – in comparison to the previous century – in visual sources, and their reproduction and circulation.

7. *1952: Modernity and Neutral Colors*

In the postwar reconstruction, the director Roberto Salvini reorganized the Gallery according to new historical links that went beyond the concept of 'schools' of painting in favor of a network of relationships and influences. In line with the museological culture of the time, the display aimed to present the works in a clean-cut and spacious manner, providing each work with the isolation that would enhance its autonomy of expression. The number of paintings on display was drastically reduced.

In his program, he wrote: "As for the Tribuna (…) I do not believe it would be appropriate (…) to arrange them [the works] as if in a picture gallery, as they undoubtedly were in the past, nor to preserve the compromise between ancient and modern order that we inherited from the pre-war period. Instead, it will be a question of finding a purpose for the Tribuna that is in keeping with its distinctive architectural style and decor and that will distinguish it significantly – in the choice of paintings to be displayed there – from the other rooms"[28].

Two newsreels give an idea of the work in progress.

A sequence from a feature-newsreel of Christmas 1950 was filmed in the Tribuna, accompanied by a symbolic-religious commentary and greetings between custodians in front of Bronzino's *Nativity*[29]. Two walls are visible, each with three paintings: one (F) has Salviati's *Charity* in the center between a pair

[27] See, for example, *R. Galleria degli Uffizi. Catalogo dei dipinti*, 44.

[28] Salvini, "Criteri di ordinamento," 43: "Quanto poi alla Tribuna (…) non credo sarebbe opportuno (…) di sistemarle a quadreria, come indubbiamente erano un tempo, o di conservarne la sistemazione di compromesso fra ordinamento antico e ordinamento moderno, che abbiamo ereditata dall'anteguerra. Si tratterà invece di trovare per la Tribuna una destinazione consona al suo spiccato decoro architettonico e tale da distinguerla sensibilmente, nella scelta dei quadri da esporvi, dalle altre sale". See also Cestelli Guidi, "Un racconto fotografico".

[29] "Suonano per tutti le campane di Natale", Tribuna timestamps: 00:04:22-00:04:45.

of smaller portraits; the other (H) has three paintings by Bronzino in a row, all of similar size: the *Panciatichi Holy Family*, *Portrait of a Lady in Black*, and *Eleonora da Toledo with her son Giovanni*.

In general, however, the twenty or so paintings on display, the prevalence of Medici portraits, the 'three per wall' arrangement, the confirmed presence of *Moses Defends the Daughters of Jethro* by Rosso Fiorentino and Salviati's *Charity*, indicate a display that is essentially the same as before the war.

The newsreel "Il riordinamento della Galleria degli Uffizi" (figs. 27a-b-c) is dedicated to the eagerly awaited and festive inauguration on 30 March 1952. It shows a Tribuna that is even more sparsely hung than in the film made just over a year earlier, with paintings even more spaced out, with a more leisurely rhythm: the *Portrait of Lucrezia Panciatichi* hangs alone on the entire wall, while that of Eleonora da Toledo has only one painting next to it.

The commentary emphasizes what was in essence a continuity of content in the Tribuna and the other rooms of the Gallery:

> But the Tribuna has remained the point of assembly for figures of the Medici family around the Venus, who remains in her place – a mysterious adolescent – under the gaze of Eleonora da Toledo, Bronzino's magnetic sculpted poem.[30]

But what is most striking about the film today is the light color of the walls (figs. 27a-b-c). The red fabric on the walls had in fact been replaced by a 'neutral' color, while the curtains at the windows had been removed. The niche had been given a darker color, and a *Torso of a Satyr* placed within it (figs. 28-29).

This choice was in line with the quest for light and bright simplicity in museum design, with the modernization of museums characteristic of that museological era, but it had erased one of the most evocative and defining historical and visual elements of the Tribuna. It aroused much criticism, including the most scathing from Mario Praz:

> The old Tribuna with its red damask wall-covering may have been cluttered and unsystematic, but it had a magnificence better suited to educating taste than today's walls the color of a sick child's dysentery, and that large niche painted a terracotta color as

[30] "Il riordinamento della Galleria degli Uffizi", Tribuna timestamps: 00:00:51-00:01:07.

if a fireplace at the back of which, like a calcified ember, crouches the famous torso of antiquity[31].

Sixteen portraits of Medici figures or figures linked to the 16th-century court, half of which measured approximately 100×70 cm and the other half smaller in size, were displayed two per wall; high up, just below the string course cornice, hung the four *Stories of Adam and Eve* by Carlo Caliari, of similar size but with richly wrought frames, displayed "mainly for decorative purposes"[32]. All seem to 'float' on the light background. Of the tapestries, only two remained, those with the coats of arms, above the doors.

As in other interventions of that period, the quest for clarity and brightness, for maximum visibility of the works, for modernity, had led to the erasure of history.

8. *1970: between Philological Museology and Environmental Restoration*

Newly appointed in 1969, the director Luciano Berti immediately began an in-depth study of the history of the Tribuna and a project aimed at "reclaiming as much as possible the historical and also aesthetic values of the Tribuna, without, on the other hand, going too far against the critical approach that is required today"[33].

He had the walls covered again with red fabric and put the curtains back on the windows.

A cabinet was reinstated in the niche and the octagonal table returned to the center, thus moving the *Venus* once again to the rear.

He increased the number of paintings displayed to thirty-two, adding three over-door tapestries and two majolica vases in the newly reopened lateral recesses

[31] Praz, "*Il supplizio di Massenzio*," 237: "La vecchia Tribuna coi parati di damasco rosso sarà stata affastellata e poco scientifica, ma aveva una magnificenza più atta a educare il gusto che non le odierne pareti color dissenteria di putto, e quel nicchione dipinto di terracotta come una cappa di camino in fondo a cui, calcinoso tizzone, era rannicchiato il famoso torso antico".

[32] Salvini, *La Galleria degli Uffizi*, 42.

[33] Berti, Rodolph and Biancalani, *Mostra storica della Tribuna*, 4-6: "riacquistare il più possibile i valori storici ed anche estetici della Tribuna, senza d'altra parte contraddire troppo ad un ordinamento di tipo critico quale oggi si esige".

of the niche. He brought back certain paintings that had been present in 1589 or shortly after, such as Raphael's *St. John*, Pontormo's *Charity*, Andrea del Sarto's *Portrait of a Lady with Petrarchino*, and Rosso Fiorentino's *Angel Playing Music*; or works that had been exhibited in the Tribuna in the past, such as Raphael's *Madonna of the Well* (reattributed to Franciabigio). He retained the portraits, especially those related to the Medici, and others not, including *Lucrezia Panciatichi* by Bronzino and the four works by Caliari.

After trying out a two-register display, abandoned due to a lack of suitable pendants to achieve a harmonious effect, the number of paintings was doubled, from two to four on the four walls with entrances and niches, "achieving an overall effect of greater density, closer to the original"[34].

To emphasize how the new layout and display were based on the study of the history and tradition of the Tribuna, and on the quest to find ways to "re-propose" it afresh, the space thus reclaimed was inaugurated in December 1970 with the *Mostra storica della Tribuna degli Uffizi*, the catalog of which inaugurated the inestimable series of studies and research "Quaderni degli Uffizi" (fig. 30).

9. *And After, and Now?*

Over the last fifty years, the Tribuna has obviously undergone other renovations and interventions. The issue of conservation, particularly of the marble floor, has become increasingly important, initially leading to the restriction of access to a platform running along the walls. With the restoration carried out between 2009 and 2012, which kept in place the antique statues but replaced the paintings with others of lesser importance, which, however, taken together create a decorative effect reminiscent of the 'historic' one, the platform was removed, and the Tribuna was closed to the public. It is now only visible from the three entrances, closed halfway up by transparent glass – a 'window' onto the Tribuna and its history.

[34] Berti, Rodolph and Biancalani, *Mostra storica della Tribuna*, 6: "ottenendo complessivamente un effetto di maggiore densità, più vicino all'originale".

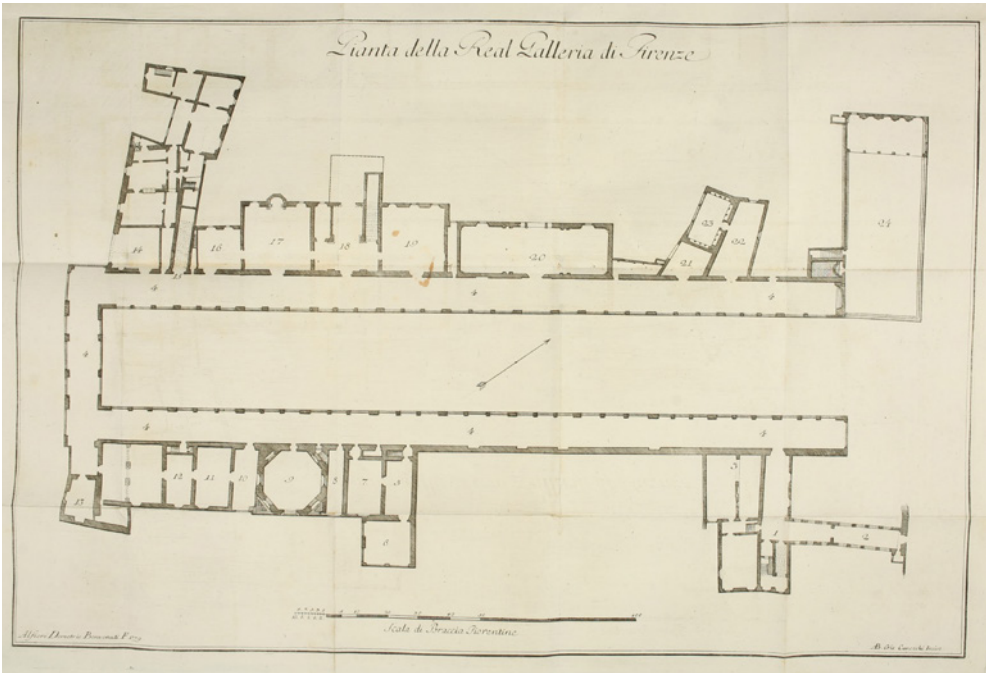


Figure 1. Alfiero Demetrio Benvenuti (designer), Giovanni Conocchi (engraver), *Pianta della Real Galleria di Firenze*, engraving, 1779. At no. 4, the 'Corridore di Levante'; at no. 9, the Tribuna. [Source: Pelli Bencivenni, *Saggio istorico della Real Galleria di Firenze*. 2 voll. Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1779]

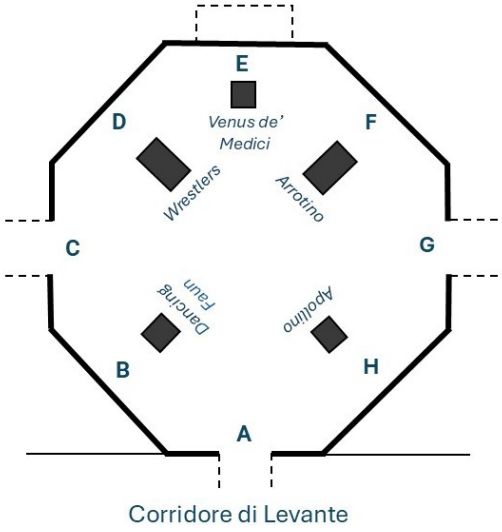


Figure 2. Schematic plan of the Tribuna indicating the eight walls (A-H), the three entrances and the location of the five ancient statues from around 1785 to 1925.

Figure 3. Giulio Pignatta, *Sir Andrew Fountaine and Friends in the Tribune*, oil of canvas, 1715. Norwich, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Accession Number NWHCM: 2008.249. [courtesy of Norfolk Museums Service (Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery)]

Figure 4. Gaetano Neri, Wall B of the Tribuna, with *Venus, Satyr, and Cupids* by Annibale Carracci, pencil on paper, c. 1758-65. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 4584. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

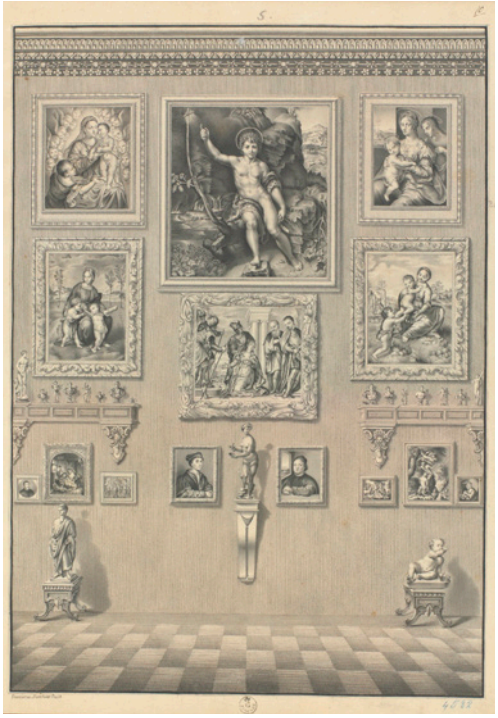


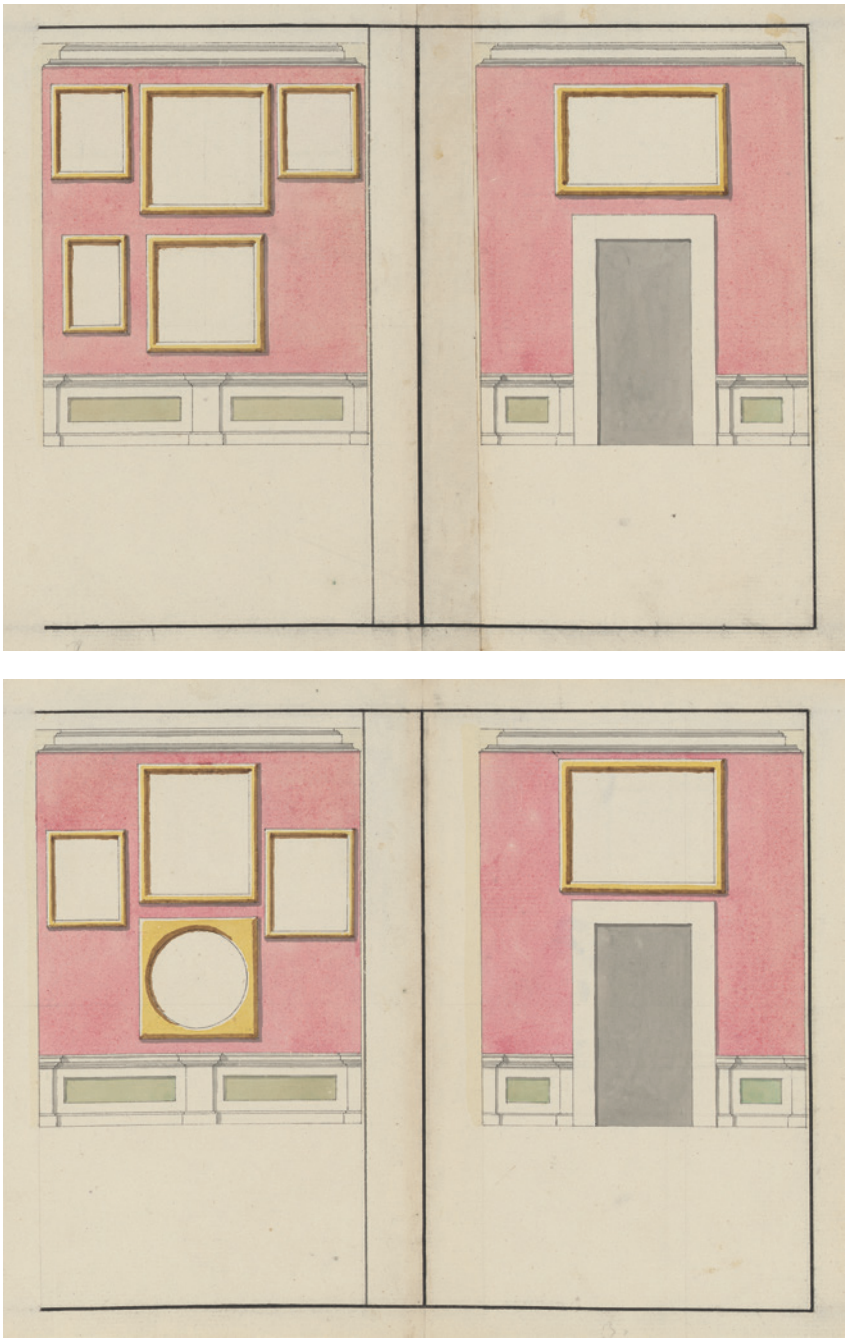
Figure 5. Francesco Marchissi, Wall C of the Tribuna, with *St. John in the Desert* by Raphael, pencil on paper, c. 1758-65. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 4582. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

Figure 6. Gaetano Neri, Wall D of the Tribuna with *The Tribute to Caesar* by Bartolomeo Manfredi, pencil on paper, c. 1758-65. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 4586. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

Figure 7. Francesco Marchissi, Wall E of the Tribuna with the cabinet (*stipo*) and the *Tondo Doni* by Michelangelo, pencil on paper, c. 1758-65. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 4580. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

Figure 8. Giuseppe Sacconi, Wall H of the Tribuna with *The Concert* by Leandro Bassano, pencil on paper, c. 1758-65. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 4588. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

Figure 9. Johann Zoffany, *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, oil on canvas, 1772-1777. Windsor Castle, Royal Collection, RCIN 406983. [Source: https://www.rct.uk/collection/406983/the-tribuna-of-the-uffizi; ©Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2026 | Royal Collection Trust]



Figures 10a-b. Walls of the Tribuna, pencil and watercolor on paper, 1784. In *Disegni della sistemazione dei Quadri della Galleria nel 1784*. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, inv. no. 116401, cc. 22, 23. [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

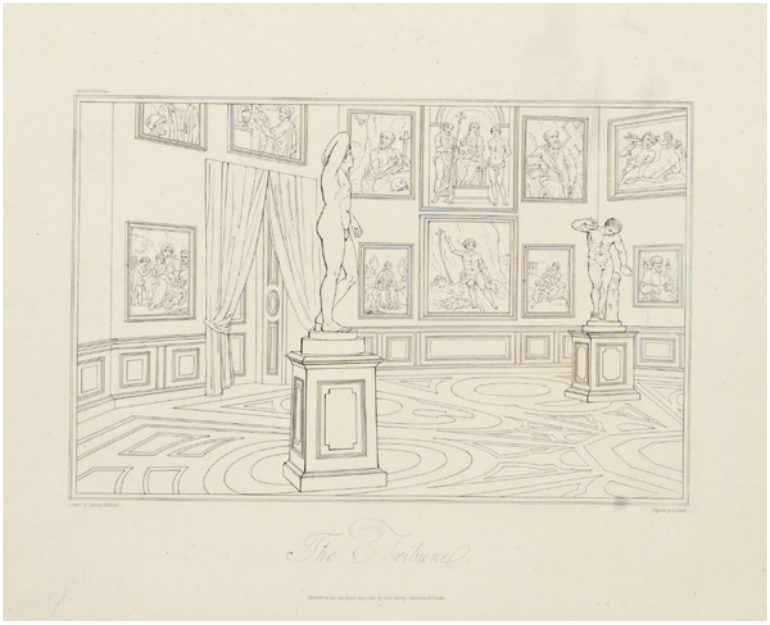


Figure 11. James Hakewill (designer), Henry Moses (engraver), *The Tribune*, engraving. [Source: Hakewill, James. *A picturesque tour of Italy, from drawings made in 1816-1817*. London: John Murray, 1820, Plate 53]

Figure 12. James Hakewill (designer), Henry Moses (engraver), *The Tribune*, engraving, 1820. [Source: Hakewill, James. *A picturesque tour of Italy, from drawings made in 1816-1817*. London: John Murray, 1820, Plate 54]

Figure 13. F. Bercher, *La Tribune de la Galerie I. & R. de Florence 1,* etching and aquatint, c. 1830. London, British Museum, n. 1949,1011.97 [Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1949-1011-97; ©The Trustees of the British Museum – CC BY-NC-SA 4.0]

Figure 14. F. Bercher, *La Tribune de la Galerie I. & R. de Florence 2,* etching and aquatint, c. 1830. London, British Museum, n. 1949,1011.98 [Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1949-1011-98; ©The Trustees of the British Museum – CC BY-NC-SA 4.0]

Figure 15. Vincenzo Abbati, *Veduta della Tribuna degli Uffizi,* oil on canvas, c. 1859. Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, OA 125. [courtesy of MiC – Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte]

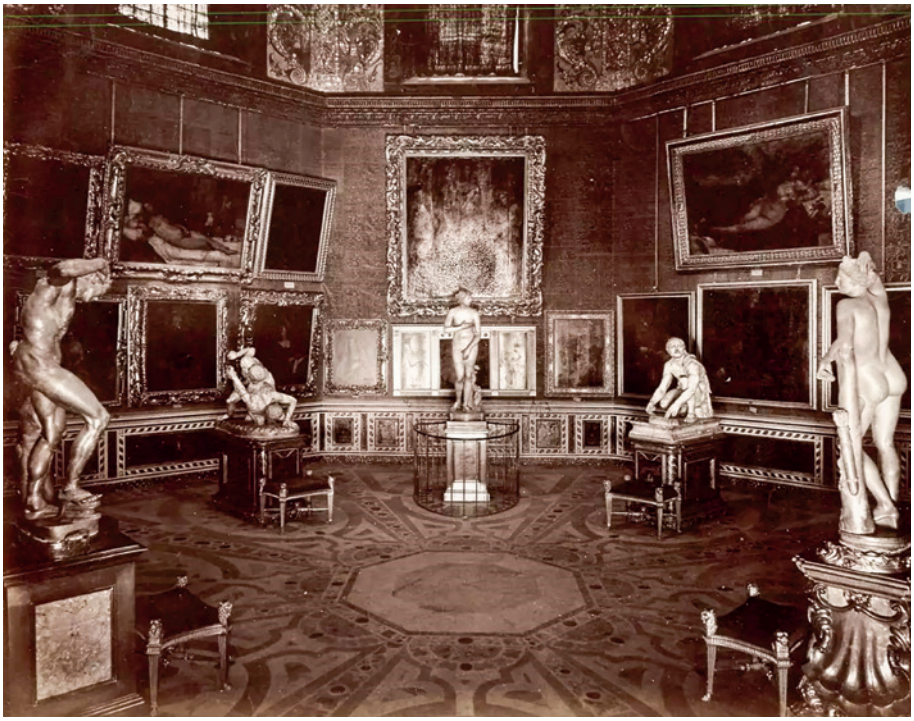


Figure 16. [Giacomo Brogi], *3155. Firenze – Galleria Uffizi – Interno della Tribuna*, albumen print, c. 1870-1878. Private collection.

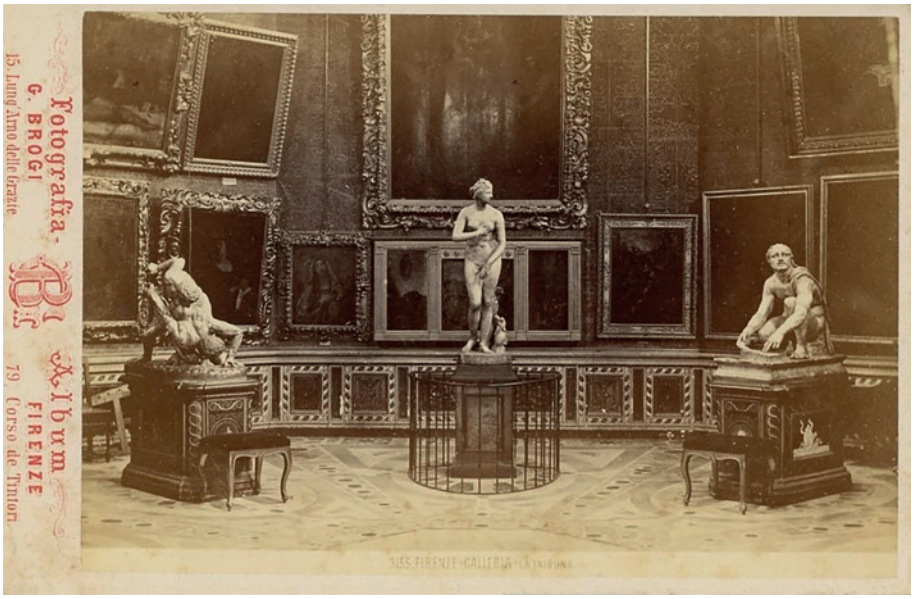


Figure 17. Fotografia G. Brogi, *Album Firenze*, cabinet card, c. 1880. Private collection.

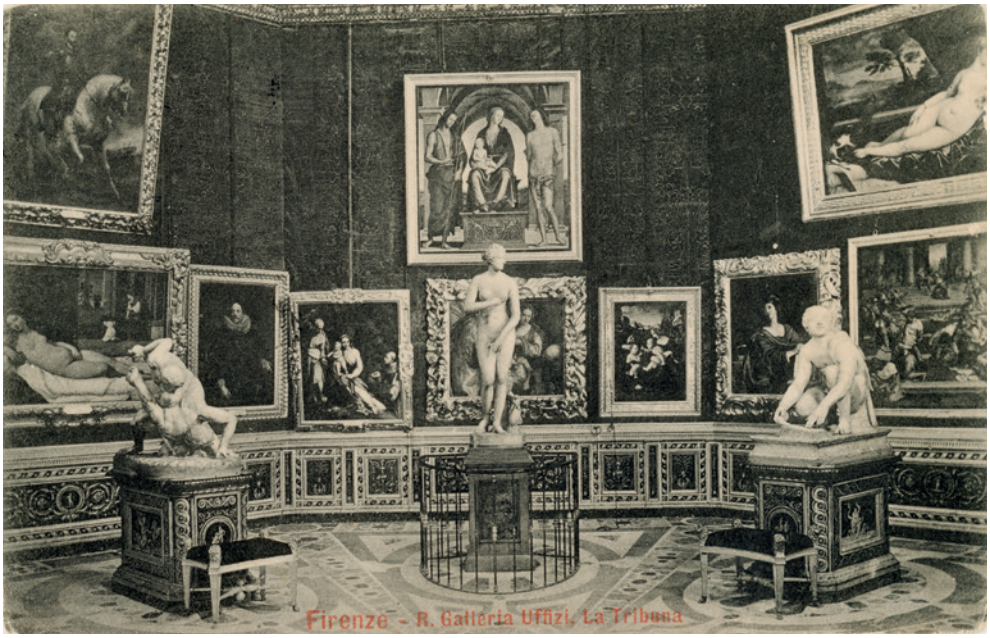


Figure 18. Stengel & Co. (Dresden), *Firenze – R. Galleria Uffizi, La Tribuna*, mailed postcard (18 August 1908) from a photograph by Alinari, c. 1890. Private collection.

Figure 19. G. Modiano & Co. (Milan), *Firenze – R. Galleria Uffizi. La Tribuna,* postcard, c. 1895. Private collection.

Figure 20. *Firenze – R. Galleria Uffizi – La Tribuna (Buontalenti e Poccetti)*, postcard from a photograph by Alinari, c. 1910. Private collection.

Figure 21. Fratelli Alinari, *1322. Firenze – R. Galleria Uffizi. La Tribuna (Buontalenti e Poccetti)*; albumen print with manual staining, c. 1880. [Source: Album *Italie – Florence – Avril 1904*, Florence, Archivi Alinari – Collezione album; ©Archivi Alinari, Firenze]

Figure 22. *Tribuna*, silver gelatin on baryta paper, about 1910. Florence, Le Gallerie degli Uffizi, Regio Archivio Fotografico, inv. no. RAFF33075 [©Gabinetto Fotografico delle Gallerie degli Uffizi, courtesy of MiC – Le Gallerie degli Uffizi]

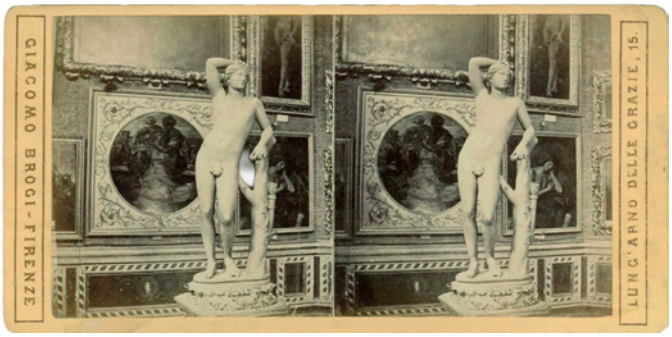


Figure 23. Giacomo Brogi, The statue of Apollino in the Tribuna, stereoscopy, c. 1870. Private collection.

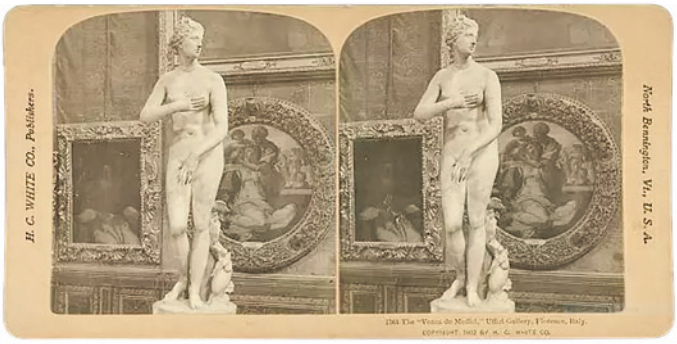
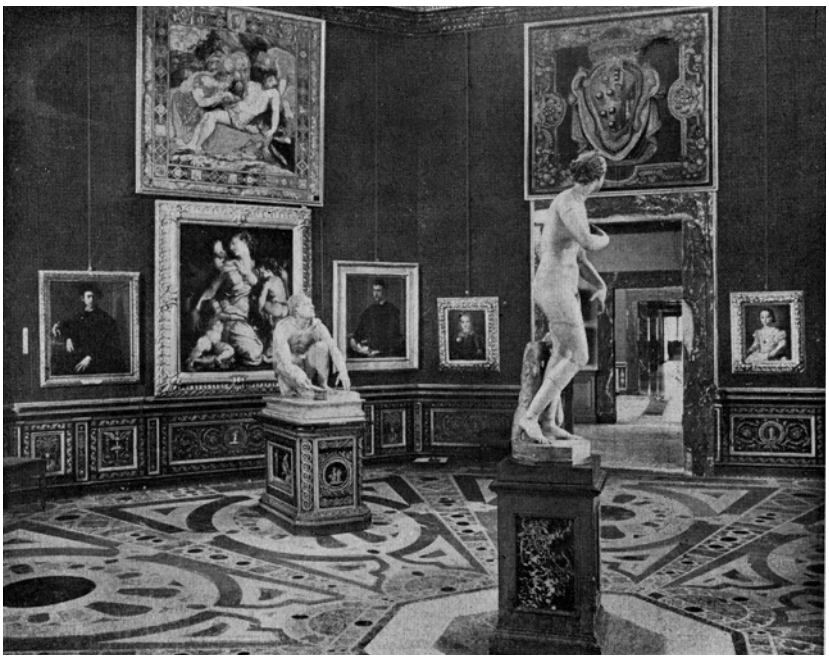


Figure 24. H.C. White Co. (North Bennington, Vt.), *1761. The Venus de Medici, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy*, stereoscopy, 1902 (from a photograph, c. 1895). Private collection.

Figure 25. *Sala XI. Tribuna. Scuola fiorentina del sec. XVI.* Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi. [Source: *R. Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze. Catalogo topografico*, n.p.]



Figures 26. *Sala XI. Tribuna. Scuola fiorentina del sec. XVI.* Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi. [Source: *R. Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze. Catalogo topografico*, n.p.]

Figures 27a-b-c. Timestamps from "Il riordinamento della Galleria degli Uffizi", 3 April 1952. [Credits: Archivio Luce Cinecittà]

Figures 28-29. Innocenti Editori (Florence), Installation views of the Tribuna. Postcards of the series *Firenze. Galleria Uffizi – Tribuna*, c. 1960. Private collection.

Figure 30. Cover of the catalog of the *Mostra storica della Tribuna degli Uffizi*, 1970 [Source: Berti, Rodolph and Biancalani, *Mostra storica della Tribuna*]

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Martina Lerda

*Images of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Illustrated Press and Publications for the General Public between the 19th and 20th Centuries**

The study and cataloging of the historical images of the Tribuna degli Uffizi converges with another line of research conducted by the Pisa Unit of the PRIN *The Forms of Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, which involved the survey of the engravings and photographs of museum interiors that appeared in the popular illustrated press and in publications aimed at the general public between the early decades of the 19th century and 1945. These images, which have been collected, and are either cataloged or in the process of being cataloged, are of undoubted interest as historical evidence of the layout and displays of museums. In fact, as is evident in the case of the Tribuna degli Uffizi, discussed by Antonella Gioli, they contribute within the *Atlas* to the reconstruction of the history of individual museums, complementing the body of images appearing in specialist publications, and the existing documentation in photographic archives. However, the distinguishing feature of these particular visual sources lies in their dissemination among a more or less broad and non-specialist audience. The views of museum rooms published in magazines, guides, and popular monographs are, to all intents and purposes, "memory cells" – to adapt a definition by Massimo Ferretti to this study – and, no less than the images of works of art, monuments, urban views, and panoramas, they represent key points in the "mnemonic network" which, particularly with the spread of photomechanical reproduction techniques at the end of the 19th century, "serve to fix what is essential to Italy's identity"[1].

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[1] Ferretti, "Immagini di cose," 232. On the role played by the photography of works of art and monuments and the published reproductions in the construction of the national imagination, see also Tomassini, "La costruzione".

Within this framework, the analysis of examples relating to a single collection, in this case the Galleria degli Uffizi, enables us to reflect on the public perception of a single museum institution. This reflection must take into account the circulation of the images from a quantitative point of view, the channels of their dissemination, the selection of locations and spaces that have become iconic, the ways in which these are represented, and, finally, the dates of publication, which are essential for the interpretation of the images in light of the relevant historical and cultural context and the specific phase in the museum's history. Therefore, this brief contribution aims to frame the reproductions of the Tribuna within the dynamics of the circulation of images of rooms in the Uffizi in the publications aimed at the general public, between the 19th and 20th centuries. Our aim is to simply provide an outline of a trend, without claiming to be exhaustive, given that the analysis will focus exclusively on Italian publications and, within these, only on the main periodicals[2] as well as the most representative series of guides to the city and the collection.

A significant starting point is the limited number of images of the Uffizi to be found in the earlier publications: a striking result given the traditional prestige of the institution[3]. In fact, the 19th-century periodicals that were investigated do not contain any significant images of the Uffizi galleries, with the exception of Giuseppe Barberis' engraving published in 1887 in the issue dedicated to Florence of *Le cento città d'Italia*, a monthly supplement to the daily newspaper with democratic leanings *Il Secolo*[4], published by Sonzogno, and the subject of an earlier study conducted as part of the PRIN (fig. 1)[5]. This presence is significant

[2] The survey covered the following periodicals: *Il Mondo Illustrato. Giornale universale*. Turin: Pomba (1847-1848, 1861); *L'Emporio Pittoresco. Giornale illustrato*. Milan: Sonzogno (1864-1868); *L'Illustrazione universale*. Milan: Treves (1873-1875); *L'Illustrazione italiana*. Milan: Treves (1875-1962, but only up to 1945); *Le Cento Città d'Italia. Supplemento mensile illustrato del Secolo*. Milan: Sonzogno (1887-1902); *La Domenica del Corriere*. Milan: Tip. del Corriere della Sera (1899-1945); *Il Secolo illustrato della domenica*. Milan: Sonzogno (1889-1908); *Rivista mensile del Touring Club Italiano*. Milan: Touring Club Italiano (1900-1920); *Le Vie d'Italia. Turismo nazionale, movimento dei forestieri, prodotto italiano*. Milan: Touring Club Italiano (1917-1967, but only up to 1945).

[3] In this regard, it should be noted that the images of the Tribuna cataloged in the *Atlas*, taken from publications for the general public, were extensively published in foreign periodicals such as *Le Magasin pittoresque*, or in city guides published in Paris, such as Gebhart's *Florence*.

[4] *Le cento città d'Italia. Firenze*. For the supplement, see at least Gioli, "La città".

[5] Lerda, "I musei italiani".

when one considers that even in the early 20th century, the first illustrated guides to the city, produced in Florence, were consistently illustrated with photographic views of the exterior of the Uffizi corridors towards Piazza della Signoria, often reproducing the most significant paintings, but with no space allocated to the visual documentation of the interiors (in contrast to the Museo del Bargello)[6]. Furthermore, the 1924 reprint of the booklet in the popular series *Le cento città d'Italia illustrate* – a widely circulated series on Italian cities published also by Sonzogno – includes no images of the Uffizi[7].

Of even greater interest is the fact that the image chosen as the 'icon' of the Uffizi in *Le cento città d'Italia* is, rather than a room hung with paintings, a view of the end of the west corridor with a reproduction of Bandinelli's *Laocoon*. Here, the sculptures, in particular those of antiquity, play a leading role. This prominence is not so much the result of the actual layout as of the summarizing function of the woodcut, which is based on a photograph by Brogi dated around 1890, reinterpreted with a certain degree of freedom evident in the addition of sculptures not actually present in the photograph, but useful for giving an idea of the display context of the corridors. This solution is in line with the general preference for the visual documentation of sculpture collections within the supplement, which tended to neglect paintings[8]. Undoubtedly this is due to the difficulties in translating the display of two-dimensional works into small-format engravings, both in terms of the spatial rendering (inevitably with foreshortened representations), as also for the identification of the individual works[9]. However, the choice of image also reveals a taste and cultural orientation (perhaps even a specific set of expectations on the part of the public), consistent with other forms of circulation of images of the Gallery, such as postcards for instance: in the latter, it is the corridors that are the most frequently represented interiors after the Tribuna[10]. Finally, this datum

[6] For example: Grifi, *Saunterings in Florence* and subsequent editions of 1904, 1908; Alinari, *Guide aux monuments*; *Guide de Florence*; *Guida manuale*; *Guida artistica*; Grifi, *Firenze*.

[7] Vicenzoni, *Firenze: l'Atene d'Italia*. For the series, see also Lerda, "I musei italiani".

[8] Exceptions include certain figures who stand out and act as catalysts for civic pride, such as Correggio for Parma, Giorgione for Castelfranco Veneto, Guercino for Cento, etc., while visual documentation of the display of the painting collections is altogether missing.

[9] This is also linked to certain technical limitations of early photographic processes, such as the unreliable rendering of greyscale, a problem that was only resolved in the 1890s. See: Ferretti, "Fra traduzione," 117-119; Spalletti, "La documentazione," 460-461; Gilardi, "Creatività e informazione," 563-565.

[10] Gioli, "Album".

is consistent with what has been found in the dynamics of the circulation of visual documentation of museums in popular contexts between the 19th and 20th centuries. Particularly emblematic is the case of *Italia Artistica*, examined in its entirety in the earlier study[11], a series of richly illustrated monographs on Italian cities addressed to a cultivated yet non-specialist audience[12]. In the series, edited by Corrado Ricci and published by the Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche in Bergamo between 1901 and 1939, the collections of paintings are by no means neglected, but are represented almost exclusively by photographic reproductions of individual works: this is also the case with the paintings in the Uffizi in the 1914 monograph on the city of Florence by Nello Tarchiani[13]. In contrast, the number of views of archaeological museums is substantial, but this is due not so much to a desire to document the spaces and display solutions, as to that of imparting visually the quantity and serial nature of the artifacts.

It would be the periodical press – that is, neither the guidebooks nor the popular monographs – which, beginning in the early 20th century, inaugurated the use of photographic reproductions to explicitly convey the solutions and features of exhibition spaces, including those relating to painting collections. This was because in illustrated general-interest magazines, such as *L'illustrazione italiana*[14], the presence of visual documentation of museum interiors was on the whole linked to the presentation of particular events, mainly inaugurations and museum reinstallations.

As evidence of how the circulation of museum images was closely linked to projects of modernization, we see a greater recurrence of views of the Uffizi in the illustrated press and publications for the general public with the start of the gradual program of reorganization carried out by its director Giovanni Poggi in the years after the World War I; operations which became necessary with the large influx of paintings from the Galleria dell'Accademia and the exchange of paintings between the Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti between 1919 and 1928[15].

Some of the results of the work in progress are reported, for example, by L'Anonimo fiorentino in the pages of the Touring Club Italiano's monthly mag-

[11] Lerda, "I musei italiani".

[12] On the series of monographs, see at least: Levi, "I luoghi"; Sciolla, "Le riviste e le guide," 66-67; Domenicali, "Corrado Ricci"; Zucconi, "Il profilo"; Ferretti, "Memoria dei luoghi"; Bertini Calosso, "La conoscenza".

[13] Tarchiani, *Firenze*.

[14] See Levi, "Allestimenti museali".

[15] Berti, "Profilo di storia," 39-40. See also Padovani, "Storia della Galleria".

azine *Le vie d'Italia* in November 1925[16]. The article lays the emphasis on the element of critical reappraisal in the layout and display of the new Venetian rooms, evidence of which were the acquisitions and the hanging in the galleries of paintings which was relegated to storage (particularly following the *Mostra di pittura italiana del Seicento e Settecento* organized in 1922 in Palazzo Pitti, an exhibition which would prove decisive for the re-evaluation of some post-Renaissance works)[17]. Above all, however, the article is accompanied by photographs, taken from the documentation produced by the Regie Gallerie Fiorentine, which immortalized three of the rooms which had recently been reinstalled: the one dedicated to Giorgione and Titian "in which the light enters in beams suitably softened by screens – [the walls] lined with an old scarlet silk fabric (*ormesino*)"[18]; the room dedicated to the Venetian school of the 14th and 15th centuries, "which chronologically should have come first, but had to be moved in order to allow the paintings by Titian to be lit from the side – [the walls] painted in an encaustic paint of a mellow cherry color, attenuated and slightly violet [in tonality]"[19]; and finally, the *Sala del Tiepolo* "with walls covered in a strawberry-yellow shot (*cangiante*) silk fabric"[20](figs. 2-3). The space devoted to the photographic documentation of the new layout is associated, in the article, with observations on the lighting and the colors of the wall-coverings, as if to compensate with descriptions in the text for the lack of color in the photographs. This indicates a sensitivity to museographic aspects that is by no means a given in the non-specialist and popular press.

A similar interest may perhaps be at the origin of the publication of further documentation relating to the gradual reorganization of the displays in one of the first series of illustrated guides to the Uffizi: the booklets with the title *R.*

[16] L'Anonimo fiorentino, "Le nuove sale venete". See also Gamba, "Le nuove sale" and Ruscus, "Le nuove sale". The presence of museums in *Le vie d'Italia* was the subject of the author's paper with the title "L'immagine dei musei italiani nelle riviste illustrate: il caso de 'Le Vie d'Italia' tra le due guerre" at the International Conference *Visual History of Museums Studies and Experiences* (Naples, 14-16 January 2026) organized by Silvia Cecchini, Paola D'Alconzo, Antonella Gioli and Donata Levi. For the magazine in the aftermath of World War II, see the contribution by Annalisa Laganà presented at the same conference.

[17] On the exhibition, see in particular: Failla and Quagliaroli, *Officina 1922*; Leonardi, *Firenze 1911-1922*; Haskell, *La nascita*, 173-182.

[18] L'Anonimo fiorentino, "Le nuove sale venete," 1241.

[19] *Ibidem*.

[20] *Ibidem*, 1245.

Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze. Catalogo topografico illustrato con note fotografiche, an interesting hybrid publication somewhere between an illustrated guide and a commercial catalog of reproductions, published by Fototeca Italiana between 1929 and 1931.

In Italy, the typology of the illustrated guide, conceived as a pocket-sized and inexpensive handbook to assist the visitor, aimed at promoting and mediating the collections for a non-specialist audience, developed at the turn of the 20th century and would become established in the 1920s[21]. In addition to the *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, these years saw the publication of a series of lists of the principal works in Florentine galleries, published by the Tipografia Giannini with images by Alinari, and the first edition, published in 1928, of the guide to the Galleria degli Uffizi by Nello Tarchiani for the collection *Il fiore dei musei e dei monumenti d'Italia*, published by Treves, and with Ettore Modigliani as its editor. These products played a fundamental role in constructing the collective image of museums[22].

The issues of the *Catalogo topografico illustrato* produced by the Florentine company Fototeca Italiana – "archive of all the photographs of objects of art in Italy and abroad"[23], dedicated to the production and resale of photographs, as well as the publication of illustrated catalogs of art institutions – were sold at a price ranging from 1 lira to 4.50 lire, with each dossier dedicated to a room in the Uffizi. On the inside cover of the booklets, there is the layout of the paintings on the walls, marked with their inventory numbers, and also a map of the Gallery (fig. 5). The inside pages were entirely devoted to reproductions of the works corresponding to the inventory numbers, with information provided on the title, author, date, dimensions, and available photographic reproductions. This helpful resource for the viewer, as well as being a handy souvenir of the visit, in several instances opened with views of the room in question. In addition to the image of the room dedicated to the Venetian school of the 14th and 15th centuries referred to above, photographs were also provided of the rooms displaying paintings from the Florentine school of the 15th and 16th centuries (figs. 5-7), and the room dedicated to the Umbrian and Sienese school of the 15th century (figs.

[21] For the emergence of this category of publication, see Lerda, "Le pinacoteche illustrate".

[22] On the canonizing function of reproductions of works of art in visitor guides, with Florentine galleries as a casestudy, and also in relation to images of the rooms, see Lerda, "Capolavori barocchi".

[23] Cited from the company's advertisement published inside the booklets.

8-11), where it is possible to identify some of the works which had arrived from the Galleria dell'Accademia in 1919[24]. The images are an interesting visual source for the initial stages of the gradual reorganization carried out by Poggi along the lines of the 'modern' thinning-out of the display that Corrado Ricci had instigated during his directorship[25]. In these latter rooms, in contrast to the Venetian rooms, the works are all displayed at eye-level in a single row and they stand out against the neutral color of the walls. This is clearly a choice in line with the most advanced international debate in the field[26]. Finally, to these photographs three others are added of spaces that are more strongly characterized as 'historical': a view of the *Sala delle carte geografiche* (fig. 12), where sculptures and tapestries accompany the paintings set on easels, and two others of the Tribuna, also reorganized with the reduction of works on display.

The series comes to an abrupt end with Room XX, meaning that the last sixteen issues originally included in the original editorial plan for the work would not see the light of day. Thus, the remaining rooms were left without an accompanying booklet – including those of Tiepolo, Van der Goes, Rubens, and the foreign schools, and particular sections of the Uffizi, such as the room with the reliefs of the Ara Pacis, the *Sala della Niobe*, and the corridors. These were precisely the rooms, together with the Tribuna, which had recently been consecrated as iconic by Tarchiani's guide for the *Il fiore* collection.

The volumes of the *Il fiore* collection, pocket-sized and available for purchase at a cost of about 10 lire, offered a kind of catalog of Italian historical and artistic highlights consisting of entries on a selection of masterpieces accompanied

[24] The works from the Galleria dell'Accademia featuring in the photographs are: the altarpiece with the *Virgin and Child with Four Saints* from the Church of Santa Croce and the *Coronation of the Virgin*, both by Filippo Lippi (Room IV – 15th-century Florentine School); Botticelli's *Primavera* (Room VI – 15th-century Florentine School); Andrea del Sarto's *Two Putti with a scroll* (Room VII – 16th-century Florentine School); Perugino's *Pietà*, *Oration in the Garden*, and *Deposition* and Luca Signorelli's *Crucifixion* (Room VIII – 15th-century Umbrian and Sienese Schools).

[25] Innocenti, "Corrado Ricci". Innocenti dates the image in figure 10 to 1910-1915. However, the inclusion of works from the Galleria dell'Accademia suggests a post-1919 date, placing the photograph in the period of Poggi's reorganization. On Ricci's directorship, see also: Strocchi, *La Compagnia*; Paolucci, "Corrado Ricci".

[26] The changes undergone in the organization and layout of the Uffizi in the early decades of the 20th century, under the directorship of Ricci, Poggi, and Tarchiani, will be the subject of a study by the author.

by full-page reproductions. Some images of the interiors can be found in the pages dedicated to the historical introduction. In the 1928 guide to the Uffizi[27], composed of sixty entries on paintings, the selection of images accompanying the introductory text does not take into account the rooms where the paintings were located, responding rather to the need to highlight different kinds of works, from ancient sculptures to tapestries. This also occurs in the presentation of groups of works that form a coherent whole in their display, whether in traditional locations – this applies to the group of the Niobids (fig. 13) – or recent rearrangements: this is the case of the Ara Pacis reliefs displayed in the new room set up in 1919 (fig. 14)[28], and the tapestries displayed from 1926 in the corridors, the latter fulfilling a project initiated by Ricci (fig. 15)[29]. However, viewed as a whole, the recent museographic renovation of the rooms in which the paintings were displayed is completely eclipsed by the selection of images of interior spaces that illustrate the guidebook; these include a view of the Tribuna, highlighting a preference for monumental and historically significant spaces consistent with the historical approach of the introduction, and also confirming the pre-eminence of these rooms, views of which were already in circulation in the form of postcards since the late 19th century. This implicitly emphasizes the nature of the Uffizi as an 'exemplar' in the characteristic panorama of Italian museums, traditionally housed in monumental and prestigious locations: an Italian specificity proclaimed repeatedly during the years of the Fascist era by ministerial voices on the occasion of international debates, not infrequently to conceal behind the alibi of the historical nature of the collections and venues, the absence of institutional permeability to the most up-to-date museographic models[30].

The most easily identifiable rooms because of their historical and monumental character – the Tribuna, the corridors, and the *Sala della Niobe* – were consistently reproduced, which was not the case with the other rooms. They appeared, for example, in the 1931 edition of *R. Galleria degli Uffizi. Catalogo dei principali*

[27] Tarchiani, *La Galleria*.

[28] The reliefs were transferred to Rome in 1937.

[29] Ricci, "Un piano regolatore," cited in Innocenti, "Corrado Ricci," 366.

[30] Consider, for instance, Francesco Pellati's contribution to the *Enquête internationale sur la réforme des galeries publiques* of 1930 and Roberto Paribeni's speech at the conference organized by the Office International des Musées in Madrid in 1934. On the Italian position between the 1920s and 1930s, see: Nezzo, "La partecipazione"; Cecchini, "Musei e mostre"; Dalai Emiliani, "Faut-il brûler le Louvre?".

dipinti, the first of the lists published by the Tipografia Giannini to include photographs of the museum's interiors. They reappeared in the 1934 volumes dedicated to Tuscany in the Touring Club Italiano's *Attraverso l'Italia* series, with the exception of the Tribuna[31]. To conclude, it would prove interesting in the future to extend the investigation to the diverse media outlets of the post-World War II period in order to follow the dynamics of the iconic dissemination of Carlo Scarpa's Florentine interventions, so as to be able to judge the extent to which the aesthetics of the new museography – consolidated by the images published in specialized journals during the postwar renewal period – had penetrated, albeit only temporarily, into the 'popular' field, complementing the traditional representations of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the popular imagination.

[31] Touring Club Italiano, *Attraverso l'Italia*. In this publication, the museum heritage of Florence is represented by monumental spaces such as the *Salone di Donatello* in the Palazzo del Bargello, the *Sala dell'Iliade* in the Galleria Palatina, a room in the Museo degli Argenti decorated by Mitelli, Colonna, and Giovanni da San Giovanni, and other rooms in the Palazzo Pitti, as well as museums set up according to the criterion of the 'period room', such as the Palazzo Davanzati, the Museo Bardini, and the Museo Stibbert.

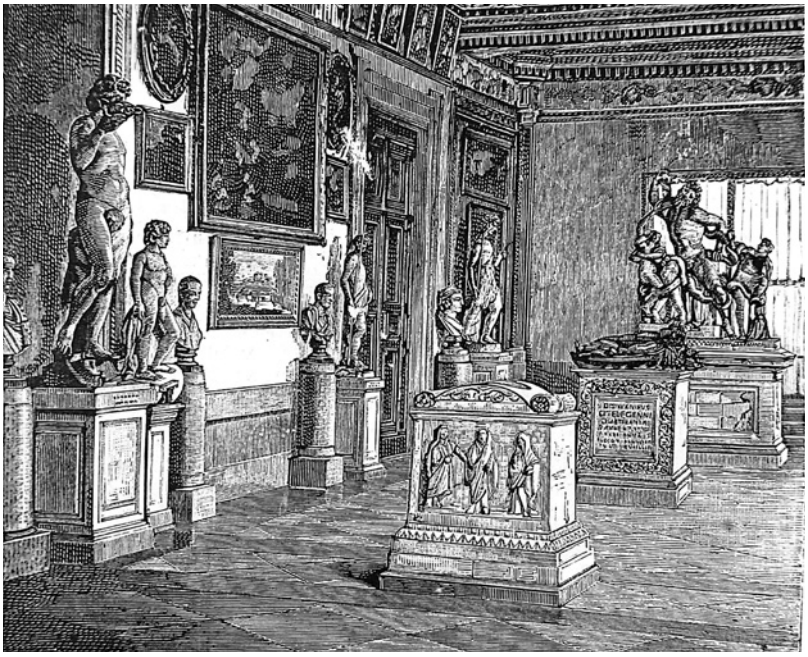

Figure 1. Giuseppe Barberis (engraver), *Una sala delle Gallerie* (West corridor), 1887. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Le cento città. Supplemento*, 36]

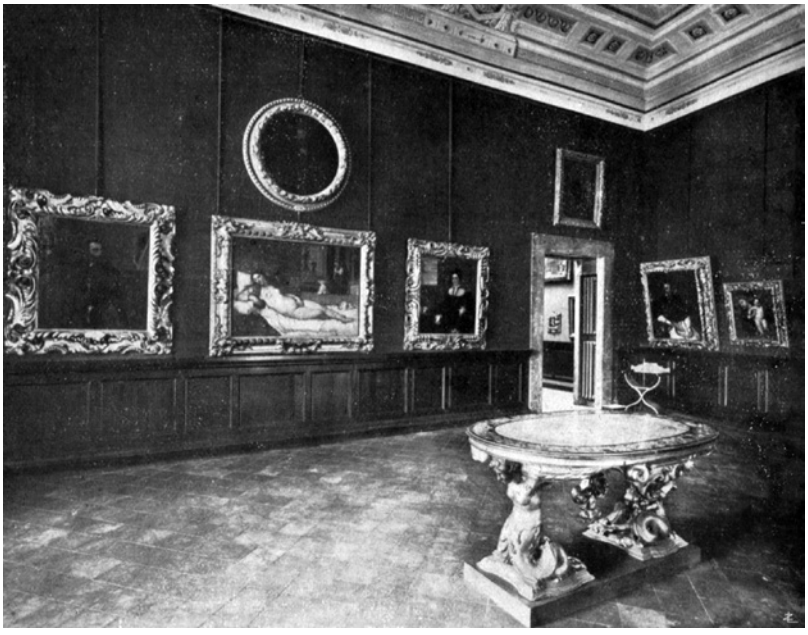

Figure 2. Photograph by R. Gallerie Uffizi Firenze, *La prima sala con le opere di Tiziano*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: "Le nuove sale venete," 1242]

Figure 3. Photograph by R. Gallerie Uffizi Firenze, *La seconda sala con il Trittico di Mantegna e la Madonna di Jacopo Bellini*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: L'Anonimo fiorentino "Le nuove sale venete," 1241]

Figure 4. Photograph by R. Gallerie Uffizi Firenze, *La sala del Tiepolo con le opere del Canaletto, del Guardi, del Piazzetta*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: L'Anonimo fiorentino "Le nuove sale venete," 1243]

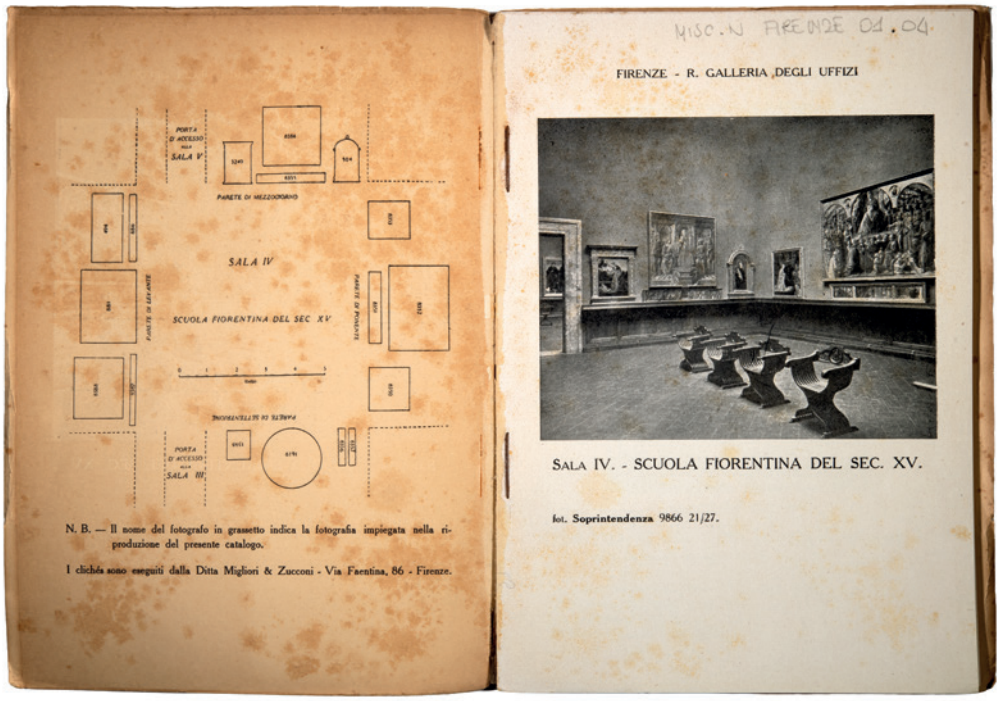

Figure 5. Plan and installation view of the Gallery IV – 15th century Florentine School. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

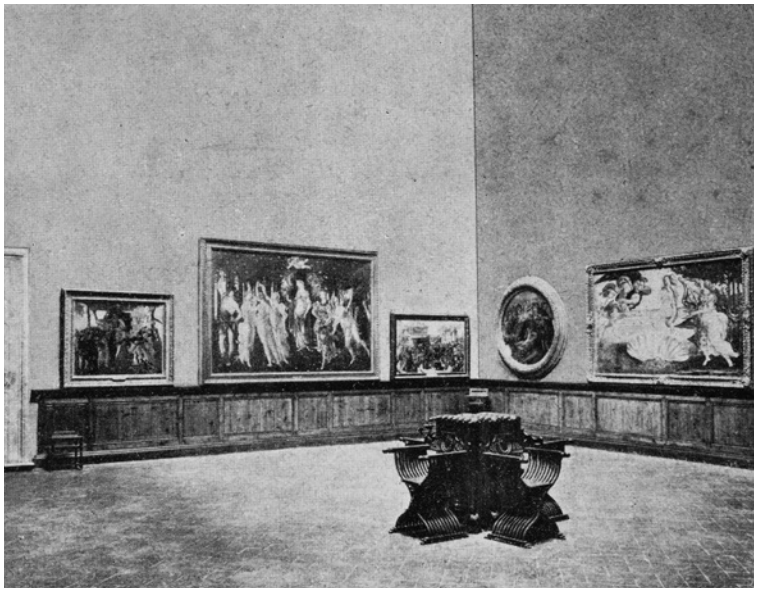

Figure 6. *Sala VI – Scuola Fiorentina del sec. XV*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

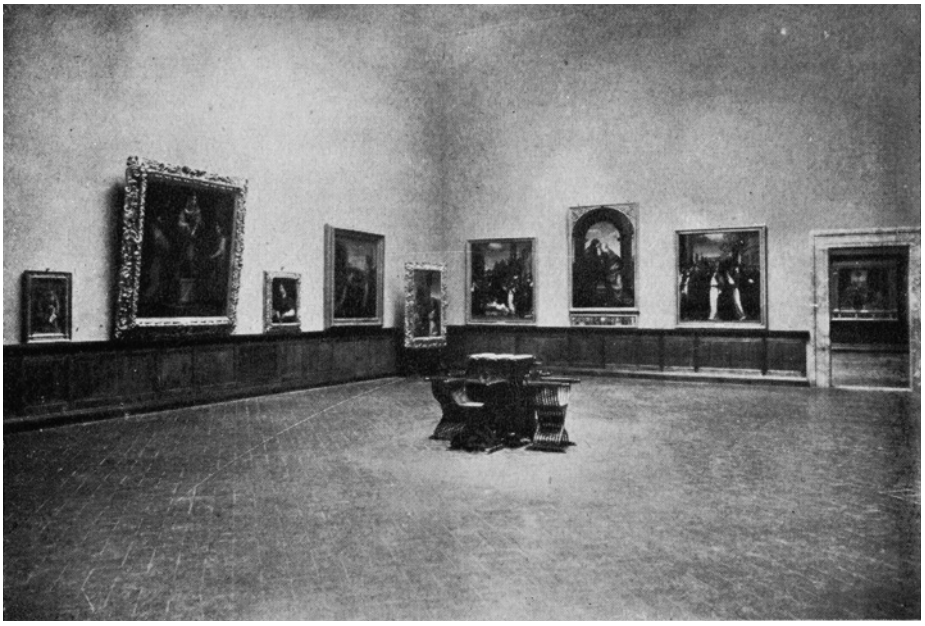

Figure 7. *Sala VII – Scuola Fiorentina del sec. XVI*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

Figure 8. *Sala VIII – Scuola umbra e senese del sec. XV*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

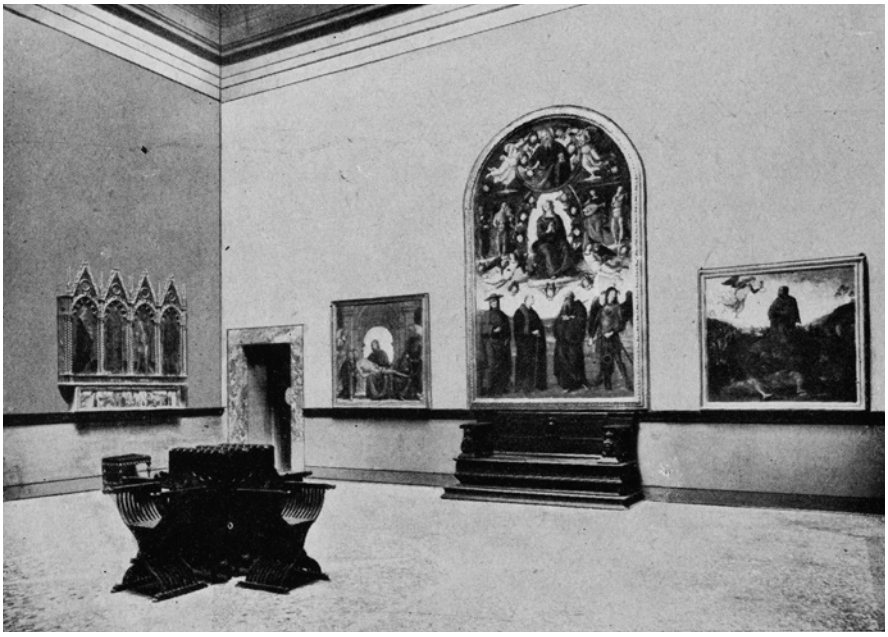

Figure 9. *Sala VIII – Scuola umbra e senese del sec. XV*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

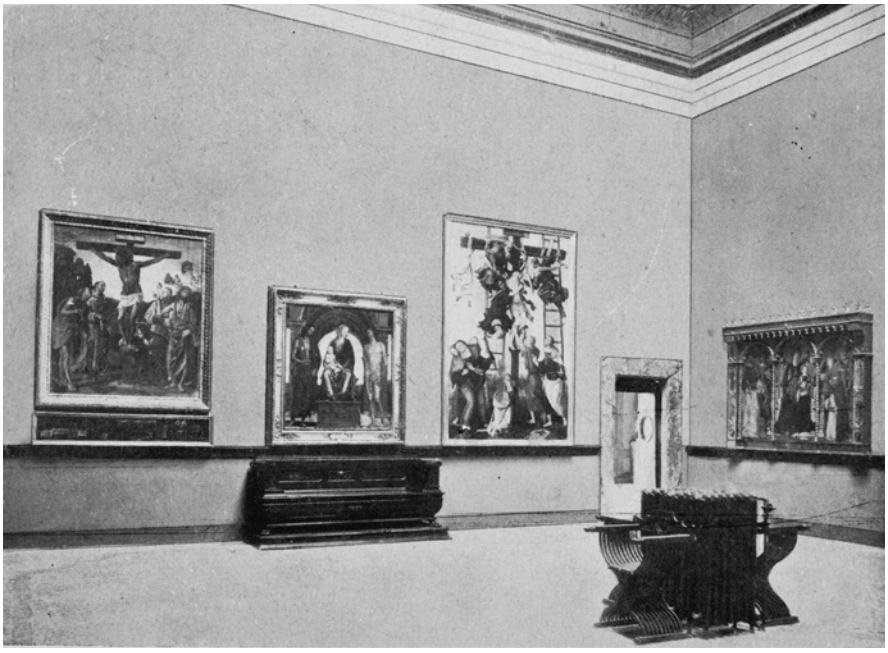

Figure 10. *Sala VIII – Scuola umbra e senese del sec. XV*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

Figure 11. *Sala VIII – Scuola umbra e senese del sec. XV*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

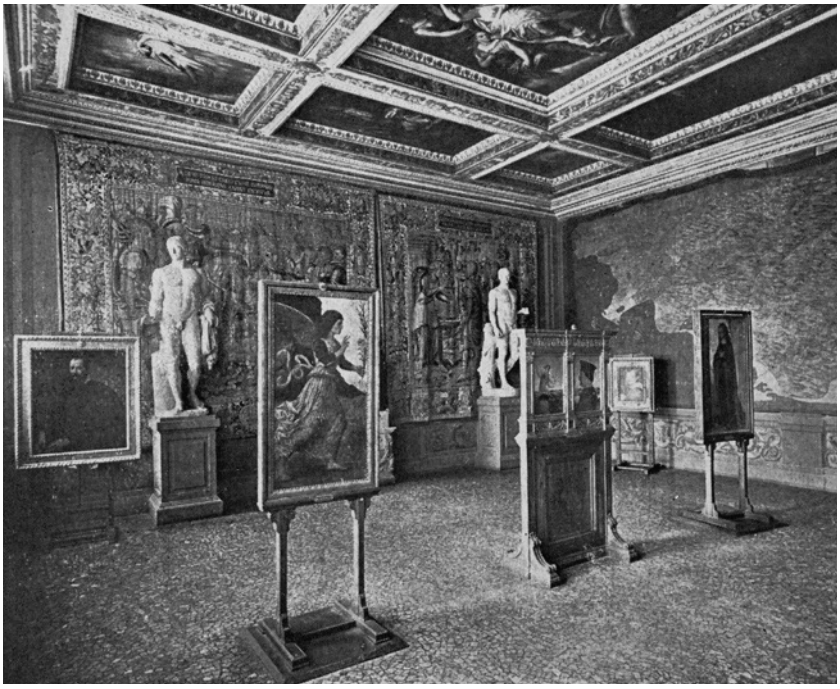

Figure 12. *Sala IX – Delle Carte geografiche*. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: *Catalogo topografico illustrato*, n.p.]

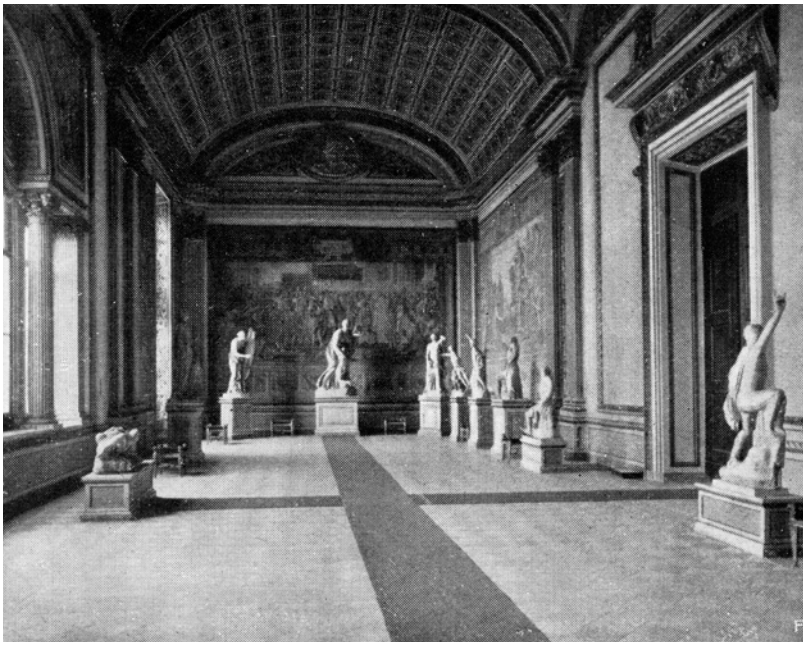

Figure 13. The Niobe Gallery. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: Tarchiani, *La Galleria*, XVII]

Figure 14. The Gallery of the Ara Pacis Reliefs. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: Tarchiani, *La Galleria*, XVI]

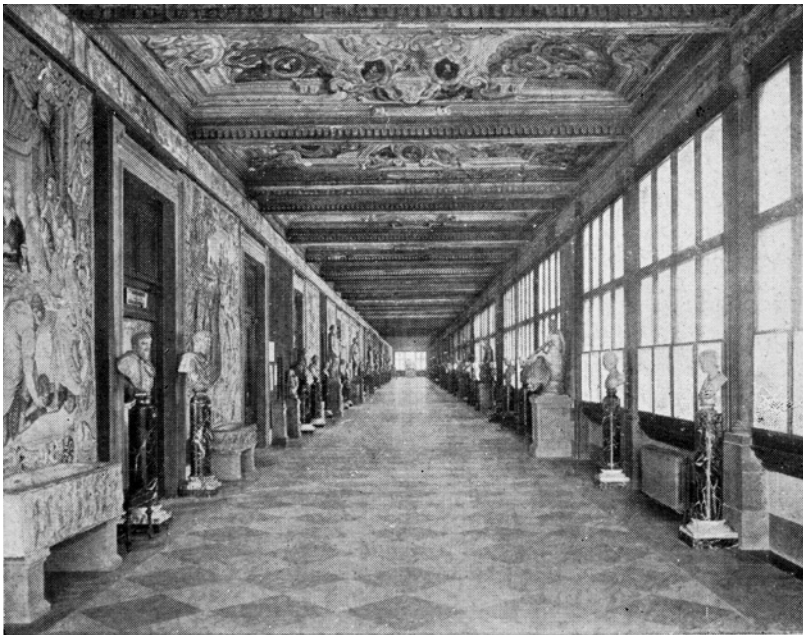

Figure 15. Third Corridor. Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. [Source: Tarchiani, *La Galleria*, XIII]

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Camilla Parisi

*Works of Art and Territorial Identity: The Role of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo**

Located in the heart of the central Apennines, Abruzzo is a region where monumental beauty and geological fragility coexist in a precarious balance. For an international observer, this land may appear as a paradox: a rich repository of medieval and Renaissance art situated in one of the regions with the highest seismic risk in Europe. While in other contexts artistic heritage is often perceived as a static and immutable legacy, in Abruzzo it is a dynamic entity that has had to continuously adapt, fragment, and reconstitute itself following the earthquakes that have, with cyclical recurrence, reshaped its landscape. Consequently, studies on the heritage of Abruzzo have always integrated the analysis of the works of art with the material consequences of these catastrophic events: from the restoration of collapsed structures to the recovery of artifacts from the rubble.

However, a shift in perspective is necessary to understand the profound impact that this centuries-old seismic reality has had on the cultural and territorial identity of the region. This reality has deeply influenced the institutional path taken by local cultural entities, with the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo[1] (MuNDA) serving as an exemplary case. The museum is not merely a container for objects that escaped destruction; rather, it is the focal point of a complex process of recovery – both cultural and identity-driven – intimately linked to its territory and communities.

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[1] For a general framework on the earthquake as an 'accelerator' of pre-existing dynamics of degradation, and on the necessity of analyzing seismic events not merely as temporary emergencies but within a long-term perspective, see Valerio, "Istantaneità e lunga durata," 25.

1. *The Repetition of Trauma: Statistical Evidence*

The Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano (ASMI)[2] – a project of the Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia (INGV) dedicated to historical seismology – provides a reconstruction of all major seismic events recorded across the Italian peninsula from the 5th century BC to 2021. While data for the last century are comprehensive, historical records become increasingly sporadic the further back one looks. Notwithstanding the fragmentary nature of the data, the ASMI reports 317 significant earthquakes within the Abruzzo region, from the 101 AD earthquake in San Valentino in Abruzzo to that in L'Aquila in December 2019 (fig. 1). Notably, 238 of these occurred between the 20th and 21st centuries. In the city of L'Aquila alone, within a 50 km radius of the center, 239 relevant seismic events have been recorded since 1209, with peak intensities observed in 1315, 1349, 1461, 1703, 1791 and, most notably, in 1915 and 2009 (fig. 2). Of these, 177 have taken place since the beginning of the 20th century.

2. *Intergenerational Trauma Theory*

These figures are essential for understanding the identity of L'Aquila and the Abruzzo region – not only in relation to the historical memory of human suffering, and the material, individual, and collective losses endured across urban and natural landscapes, but also as a much more profoundly rooted feeling of community and territorial attachment.

The concept of intergenerational trauma was introduced into psychiatric literature as early as the 1960s through the study of the children of Holocaust survivors[3]. Subsequently, it was embraced by the field of biological studies on DNA methylation[4] beginning in the 1990s and developing with increasing scientific rigor through epigenetic research over the last decade[5].

While a technical analysis is beyond the scope of this study, what remains sig-

[2] https://emidius.mi.ingv.it/ASMI/ About ASMI, see Rovida et al. eds. *Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano*; Rovida et al., "The Italian Archive of Historical Earthquake Data".

[3] Rakoff, "Long term effect".

[4] DNA methylation is the process that allows for the alteration of gene expression without modifying the DNA sequence itself.

[5] Sigal and Weinfeld, *Trauma and Rebirth*; Yehuda, "Biological Factors"; Yehuda and Lehrner, "Intergenerational transmission"; Mulligan et al., "Epigenetic signatures".

nificant are the sociological and cultural implications that the theory of intergenerational trauma can offer when applied to a homogeneous and historically consolidated community. Every individual whose family and biological origins are rooted in Abruzzo may carry within themselves not only the memory of their personal experience of earthquakes, but also the lingering effects of the traumas endured by their ancestors. This, in turn, would generate in the community a visceral need for a collective identity firmly anchored to the land, its sites, and its heritage[6].

3. *The Early History of the Museum: From Fragmentation to the Definition of Identity*

From this perspective, it becomes possible to re-evaluate the history of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo[7] in terms of a journey in quest of identity, both by institutions and the cultural élite, on behalf of the community and in close connection with the region. The museum underwent a long and complex process of creation, spanning the period from the mid-18th century to the mid-20th century. An initial phase which saw the complete disengagement of the cultural project from the community was gradually and purposefully transformed into an exemplary case of the creation of an identity-defining space – one that resonates deeply, if not for the entire region, certainly with the community of L'Aquila.

In L'Aquila, the 1759 donation of the epigraphic collection by Abbot Franco Maria Caracciolo di Barisciano was the first intentional act towards creating a public exhibition space[8]. This bequest formed the original nucleus of the so-called Museo delle Lapidi. Subsequently, the civic administration expanded the collection through targeted acquisitions and housed these within the Great Hall of the municipal seat, the Palazzo of Margherita of Austria[9]. This initial effort was far more than a mere gesture of erudition[10]; it marked the beginning of a gradual process of the reassembly of historical fragments. Although still restricted to the élite, this process began to address the need for a tangible haven within an inherently unstable territory.

[6] On the centrality of the relationship between landscape and community in post-disaster cities, see Belmonte and Scirocco, "La storia dell'arte," 18.

[7] For a comprehensive history of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, see Arbace and Congeduti, *MuNDA*.

[8] Congeduti, "Per una storia," 30-31; Segenni, "Tra collezionismo pubblico," 245.

[9] Capezzali, *Palazzo di Margherita*.

[10] Colapietra, *Spiritualità, coscienza*, 556-559.

Following this initial impulse, a Picture Gallery (*Quadreria*) was established. Its foundation consisted of a 17th-century series of portraits of illustrious citizens of L'Aquila – already owned by the Municipality, but as yet never formally exhibited – and was subsequently augmented by the spoils of cloistered buildings. Significant portions of the collection arrived following the suppressions of monastic orders[11] in 1807 (including the Cistercians of Santa Maria del Rifugio, the Olivetans of Santa Maria del Corso, and the Celestines of Collemaggio) and 1811 (affecting all female monasteries and conservatories). This process transformed traumatic events, such as the dissolution of religious institutions and the abandonment of ecclesiastical complexes, into opportunities for the re-appropriation of cultural and artistic heritage by the community.

4. *19th-Century Developments and the Limits of Cultural Heritage Safeguarding and Preservation*

In 1845, the city's town-hall, the Palazzo Comunale, was relocated to the former Celestine monastery of Santa Maria dei Raccomandati, and the civic collections were transferred accordingly[12]. Following this move, the collections expanded further through several key developments. Most notably, under the revolutionary laws of 1866, a Royal Decree was promulgated to suppress additional religious corporations, leading to the systematic 'musealization' of confiscated works of art. Concurrently, a campaign of recovery was launched to retrieve works stolen prior to the suppressions – one significant exception being the *Triptych* by Niccolò da Foligno, which was never recovered and remains in the National Gallery in London. Furthermore, in 1875, control over cultural assets was centralized under provincial authority to curb dispersal and facilitate the transfer of works from their original sites to the museum[13]. Finally, the collections were

[11] Congeduti, "Per una storia," 31-32.

[12] The transfer of the works of art took place after a period of storage at Palazzo Centi, which later served as the headquarters of the Abruzzo Region until the 2009 earthquake.

[13] On this subject, see Vaccaro, *Quadri dei cappuccini*, 13, and Congeduti, "Per una storia," 34-35, which refer to the documents relating to the devolution of the province's cloistered works to the Pinacoteca Civica: ASAq, Prefettura, s. I, II versamento, cat. 14, b. 6234, *Il Ministero dell'Istruzione Pubblica al R. Prefetto d'Aquila. Opere d'arte già claustrali in Aquila devolute alla Pinacoteca civica*, 1875; ACS, MPI, AABBAA, Divisione terza, *Beni delle Corporazioni Religiose (1860-1890)*, b. 6, fasc. *Aquila città*.

enriched by artifacts unearthed during the archaeological excavations – begun in 1878 – of the ancient Roman city of Amiternum[14].

However, this effort towards material recovery was not matched by a genuine endeavor to restore a collective identity to the local community. The drive to construct a collective memory came into conflict with the very methods of collection and, even more so, with the decisions taken for display. The works of art acquired did not reflect a visual culture that was already familiar to the local community; instead, they originated in pre-existing private collections, recent excavations, and inaccessible cloistered environments. For the public, these were essentially 'new' objects – items whose display of which was paradoxically expected to facilitate the reconstruction of the historical-artistic culture and identity of the people and region of Abruzzo.

Furthermore, the museum layout recorded in the 1845 inventory[15] (carried out immediately following the move to the monastery of the Celestines) followed criteria of purely stylistic and iconographic coherence, lacking scholarly and historical knowledge regarding the individual works and, to an even lesser degree, the artists who had created them. Both at the museographic and documentary levels, all traces of the provenance of the works and their link with the original sites had been erased. These issues were compounded by the inadequacy of the exhibition spaces, which, because of their size and configuration, hindered the legibility of the objects.

It was at the prompting of the Ministry of Public Education that, over forty years later, attention was once again focused on the preservation and study of the civic heritage of the city. This began with the selection, within the building, of rooms which would make the collections more accessible to the public. Following a City Council resolution requiring a more rigorous chronological organization[16], the 1888 display featured, for the first time, the inclusion of labels for the works exhibited[17] (fig. 3). This was not, however, matched by any change in the museum's narrative: at this stage, the Museum seemed to aim more at its own

[14] Segenni, *Amiternum*; Iorio, "Amiternum".

[15] ASAq, Comune dell'Aquila, cas. n. 18, cat. 1, cl. 6, Segretariato – Oggetti vari (1805-1860), fasc. *Quadreria comunale. Trasferimento da Casa Centi al Palazzo Comunale*, 1845. The document is cited in Vaccaro, *Quadri dei cappuccini*, 13, and Congeduti, "Per una storia," 32.

[16] According to the resolution of the City Council, the collection was to be "organized according to the periods and schools to which the paintings belong, further placing on each a label indicating the subject and the name of the artist". ASAq, Prefettura, s. 1, versamento II, cat. 14, b. 6234 (cited in Congeduti, "Per una storia," 39).

[17] See Congeduti, "Per una storia," 38-40. Following the 1888 display, the museum's numismatic collection began to take shape: U.Q. *"Collezione Numismatica"*; *Catalogo di alcune monete*.

legitimacy within Unified Italy[18] than at responding to the local community's need to identify itself in its heritage and recover the fragments of its history. Thus, it persisted in an approach that reflected the lack of connection between the administrative élite and the citizens of L'Aquila.

5. *Mario Chini's Turning Point and the 1915 Catastrophe*

A first step towards a greater awareness of its heritage – closely linked to issues of conservation and safeguarding, and aimed at defining a collective identity – was achieved thanks to the vision of Mario Chini[19]. His ideas bore fruit, on 15 September 1908, in the inauguration of the new Museo Civico Aquilano and the publication in 1920 of the first printed catalog[20]. Chini's concept was to restore the voice of the works through research, and to engage the public by creating a dynamic layout through historical period settings (figs. 4-5). This followed the principle of creating an interaction between content and container, integrating the building with reclaimed architectural elements[21].

Chini's aim in this endeavor, was not merely to find an aesthetic solution; rather, he wished to physically forge anew the severed link between the work of art and its context, offering the community an experiential space where identity was not an abstraction delivered from on high. Unfortunately, these years also witnessed one of the most profound human tragedies in the modern history of central Italy: the 1915 Marsica earthquake. The gravity of the event can be judged by referring to the ASMI documentation and comparing the seismic map of 1915 to that of 2009 (figs. 6-7), the devastating effects of which are well-known and, unfortunately, still visible today[22].

The initial years of the 20th century saw the publication of a comprehensive inventory of the collection: *Inventario degli oggetti antichi*.

[18] See Colapietra, *Italia di mezzo*, 79.

[19] On Mario Chini, see Colapietra, *Mario Chini*. See also Persichetti, "Arte in Aquila"; Testa, "Museo Civico". Mario Chini's studies of the works in the civic collection would later be incorporated into Chini, "Pittori aquilani" and Chini, "Documenti relativi".

[20] Manieri, *Catalogo-inventario*.

[21] Congeduti, "Per una storia," 43-44.

[22] On the 2009 earthquake and cultural heritage, see the sections dedicated to testimonies of the event and workshops in Belmonte et al., *Storia dell'arte*, in particular: Vittorini, "Tra restauro e ricostruzione"; Langer, "Devozione e dislocazione"; Pezzuto, "Tempo del patrimonio"; Gilento, "Patrimonio archeologico".

It was a catastrophe that struck a vast geographical area with extreme intensity, in a region already shaped by a history of severe seismic events[23]. In this instance, the theory of intergenerational trauma finds empirical validation, both in the reaction of a community bearing the inherited burden of the past, and in the lasting effects that would be felt by subsequent generations. The trauma is linked not only to the moment of the catastrophe but also to the ensuing losses – first human, then material – of sites, monuments, and identity-defining objects. These are wounds that reopen scars that have never truly healed, burdening the population with a further fragmentation of their shared identity. The need for a collective memory rooted in artistic heritage – which Chini had begun to construct within the Museum – was thus brutally reaffirmed by the earthquake's violence, imposing a tragic new sense of urgency on the preservation of heritage.

6. *The Fascist Period and the Crisis of Displacement*

The response of the Superintendencies of Lazio and Abruzzo – the Monuments office under Antonio Muñoz (1914-1928) and the Galleries and Museums office under Federico Hermanin (1913-1923) – was both immediate and resolute. Nevertheless, they were unable to secure the entire territory in a timely manner – for practical and in part institutional reasons. This led, once again in Abruzzo's history (as in other affected regions), to significant thefts of artistic assets and precious objects from abandoned ecclesiastical buildings[24].

Furthermore, under Hermanin's direction, two significant decisions were taken[25]. On the one hand, selected works considered of national significance were transferred to Rome – specifically to the Museo del Palazzo di Venezia – to be displayed in museums or held in more secure repositories, through a process of centralization of cultural heritage. On the other hand, the remainder of the heritage was either relocated or left in its pre-earthquake locations. While from

[23] According to the ASMI, the intensity reached grade 11 on the Mercalli scale, while the magnitude was recorded as exceeding 7, with 1041 MDPs – macroseismic data points, corresponding to the individual locations affected by the earthquake. In 2009, 316 MDPs were recorded, with an intensity between 9 and 10 and a magnitude of 6.29. On the impact of the Marsica earthquake and the subsequent season of restorations, see Nardecchia, *Hoc opus*; Bartolomucci, "Effetti del terremoto"; Valerio, "Marsica 1915"; Nardecchia, *Ortucchio*.

[24] Such thefts had also occurred during the preceding decades (Piccirilli, "Notizie degli Abruzzi").

[25] Hermanin, *Oggetti d'arte*.

a ministerial standpoint this appeared to be a necessary rescue operation, for the local communities it represented a further dispossession of their communal identity.

The works taken to Rome were mostly of private or ecclesiastical ownership, not belonging to the state. However, pursuant to Article 4 of Law No. 364 (20 June 1909) – also known as the Rosadi Law – the Ministry of Public Education was granted the power "in cases of urgency […] to provide, where necessary, for the integrity and security of the objects provided for in Art. 2[26], by having them transported and temporarily placed in safekeeping in public institutions, even without the approval of the Higher Council for Antiquities and Fine Arts". This resulted in a profound paradox: the physical protection of a restricted nucleus of artifacts was guaranteed at the price of cultural deprivation of the region, which found itself bereft of its own symbolic works. Meanwhile, all the remaining assets were left in inadequate and precarious conditions of preservation, fueling a climate of neglect and abandonment that would mark the region for decades to come.

The abandoned assets were subject to further protective seizures by the State – notably the famous case of the *Beffi Triptych* (fig. 8), which was taken to Rome in 1924 and returned to L'Aquila before 1940[27]. At the same time, a large-scale, forced, and illegal transfer operation was carried out by the Diocese of L'Aquila. During the uncertainty surrounding the location of the future National Museum, the local Church emerged as a key actor, seeking to respond autonomously to the dispersal of the heritage. The main protagonist of this phase was Archbishop Gaudenzio Manuelli, who, in 1935 – the year the leadership of the Superintendency passed from Alberto Riccoboni to Ettore Modigliani[28] – established

[26] Law No. 364 of 20 June 1909, Art. 2: "The items referred to in the preceding article are inalienable when they belong to the State, municipalities, provinces, cathedral chapters, confraternities, ecclesiastical moral entities of any nature, and any recognized moral entity. The Ministry of Public Education, following the consistent conclusions of the Higher Council for Antiquities and Fine Arts […] may permit the sale or exchange of such items from one of the aforementioned entities to another, provided that no harm is done to their conservation and public enjoyment is not impaired".

[27] Congeduti, "Per una storia," 48, 58.

[28] The two scholars served as heads of the Superintendency for Medieval and Modern Art of Abruzzo (established in 1923) from 1932 to 1935, and from 1935 until 1938, respectively. In the few months between the two mandates, there was a brief period of regency by the architect Alfredo Barbacci (Bassanini, "Sul periodo abruzzese," 245).

the Museo Diocesano d'Arte Sacra (Diocesan Museum), inside the church of Santa Caterina Martire (fig. 9).

The approximately 200 works collected by Manuelli – which were already present in the list of assets destined by the State for the future National Museum for conservation reasons – had been moved from their original locations without authorization from the Ministry, although with the informal endorsement of Riccoboni, and were an attempt by the religious authorities to re-appropriate the symbols belonging to the community at large. With the arrival of Modigliani[29], the situation was brought to light and resolved through an agreement between the parties: a few of the works were returned to their respective original churches, while the rest of the collection was placed on temporary deposit in Santa Caterina Martire, pending the establishment of the new National Museum.

The expulsion of Modigliani, as a result of the racial laws of 1938, led to an interim leadership under Enzo Carli. Carli chose the Palazzetto della Congregazione dei Nobili as the new museum site, and it is there that in 1940 the civic collections were successfully installed under the newly appointed superintendent, Ugo Nebbia. This marked the beginning of a phase of reorganization of the collections based on typological and chronological criteria, which fostered an unprecedented collaboration between the Civic and the Diocesan Museums. Liturgical and devotional objects from the municipal collection were transferred to the Archbishopric, while the latter returned medieval and Renaissance works. As a result, the efforts of the Superintendency could focus effectively on the representation of the art of the Abruzzo region, moreover, creating the conditions required for the repatriation of 25 works from Roman repositories (including the *Madonna de Ambro* and the aforementioned *Beffi Triptych*).

[29] Ettore Modigliani's appointment to the Superintendency for Medieval and Modern Art of Abruzzo was a punitive act, and the scholar experienced it as such. His Memoirs, as well as the letters preserved in the archives of the former Superintendency for Historic, Artistic and Ethno-anthropological Heritage of Lombardy – published respectively in the two volumes of Skira's Biblioteca d'Arte series dedicated to him (Carminati, *Ettore Modigliani*; Pellegrini, *Ettore Modigliani*) – clearly reveal the bitterness with which he greeted the decision and his dismay upon arriving in L'Aquila. Here he complained about the poor condition of the local art heritage, caused by mismanagement. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, he confronted the most serious situations with firmness, including the case of the Diocesan Museum (Bassanini, "Sul periodo abruzzese," 243-244, 246; Modigliani, "Memorie," 250-256).

On the other hand, the new site also proved to be inadequate, and its layout equally so. The display areas of the Congregazione dei Nobili were too architecturally distinctive and cramped, so much so that many works could not be exhibited. The archaeological section was housed in the narrow entrance loggia; a selection of panel paintings, detached frescos, wood and terracotta sculptures, and precious artifacts in gold and silver were displayed inside the oratory of the Palazzetto – a space already crowded with its own paintings, stucco decorations, and a dark wood cladding. Finally, all the larger works, specifically the polyptychs and the sculptures, were gathered together, leaning on easels or placed directly on the floor in a modern room adjacent to the oratory (figs. 10-12).

This precarious display reflected, once again, the difficulty of providing a stable and dignified home for the heritage, leaving the works in a kind of museographic limbo which undermined their cultural identity. The museum in the Congregazione had a short life as a result of the outbreak of World War II: the building was requisitioned as a food rationing office (*ufficio annonario*) as early as 1941. The entire collection was transferred first to the Diocesan Museum, then to various repositories within the region, and finally, in 1944, to the Vatican under the direction of the new superintendent, Umberto Chierici[30]. This further uprooting, dictated by the war emergency, again reduced the heritage of Abruzzo to a state of forced exile, re-awakening the cycle of fragmentation and loss that the community had already so tragically experienced.

7. *Umberto Chierici and the Spanish Castle: A Permanent Home*

As the history of the preservation and protection of heritage in Italy is often driven by the occurrence of profound traumas, the end of the war finally provided the impetus to resolve the debate – long at a standstill – over an adequate home for the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo. In 1945, the Ministry of Defense transferred the Spanish Castle of L'Aquila to the Ministry of Finance. Chierici had already identified the fortress as a potential site as early as 1943, and the Superintendency promptly took charge of its restoration and the clearance of the debris of war. Despite initial proposals to convert the fortress into a penitentiary, in 1946 the building was formally entrusted to the Ministry of Public Education[31].

[30] Congeduti, "Per una storia," 60. On Umberto Chierici see Vinardi, "Umberto Chierici".
[31] Mancini, "Il Castello cinquecentesco"; Congeduti, "Per una storia," 62-68.

The conservation campaigns for the Castle and the collection proceeded in parallel, marking the beginning of a systematic study of both the artifacts and the monument itself. A crucial first step – both symbolic and practical – was the *Prima Mostra di Opere Restaurate*, held in the foyer of the Municipal Theatre in July 1948. Its catalog, which had as its author a young Ferdinando Bologna[32], reorganized the attributions and chronologies of the core group of 15th-century works. Finally, on 23 September 1951, the National Museum was inaugurated, with a display project curated by Chierici that deeply reflected his own vision as an art historian.

Umberto Chierici became the Superintendent for Medieval and Modern Art for Abruzzo and Molise in 1942, immediately taking action to protect both movable and immovable heritage from the ravages of war[33]. During the first four years of his tenure, he dedicated himself to a reconnaissance of monuments across the two regions, aiming to identify cases that required restoration "due to their poor state of conservation and intrinsic artistic value." The resulting selection and the restoration practices themselves – based on the concept of 'stylistic restoration' (*ripristino*), that is the removal of historic stratifications – testify to Chierici's exclusive focus on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

The actions he took for protection and conservation were fundamental for the preservation of works that would otherwise have disappeared, but it was extremely damaging to the memory of the 17th and 18th centuries in Abruzzo. During these two centuries, Abruzzo reached its peak in terms of artistic exchange with Southern Italy – specifically with Naples. However, due in part to Chierici's decisions, and in part to the debate on identity so deeply rooted in 20th-century ethos, the works from this period – the fruits of cultural osmosis – have not been fully integrated into the community's historical memory. Chierici applied this same approach when compiling a specific report, including movable assets, on *I danni della guerra al patrimonio artistico degli Abruzzi e del Molise*, completed over the course of a year beginning in the spring of 1944[34]. While it was commendably one of the very first reports of its kind to be drawn up in Italy, Chierici focused exclusively on the works and sites he deemed of national interest, and on his preferred time period: the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As

[32] Soprintendenza, *Prima mostra*.
[33] See Vinardi, "Umberto Chierici," 264-271; Serafini, "Restauro filologico," 43-46.
[34] Chierici, *Danni della guerra*; Soprintendenza, *Relazione sull'attività*.

a result, this led to the neglect of conservation issues in relation to the remaining heritage.

8. *The Museum as an Identity-defining Space*

Driving the decision-making for the new display, therefore, was a figure who, on the one hand, exhibited a total lack of interest in anything following the early 17th century, but on the other, firmly believed in the restoration and the intrinsic connection between works and their environment. Chierici was a staunch supporter of the link between the work of art and its original location, and the value that accrues when it is placed in relation to the site and the community to which it belongs. This vision is indeed evident in the 1951[35] layout, with its emphasis on objects representative of the region – through selection criteria based on provenance[36] – which dedicated particular attention to their accessibility, both in the archaeological section on the ground floor (figs. 13-14), and the medieval and modern sections on the first floor (figs. 15-18). Compared to earlier layouts, the Castle's ample spaces allowed the works to breathe, restoring their legibility[37]. It was finally possible to walk around statues, while reliefs and paintings were displayed at eye level, and smaller objects were placed in appropriate display cases. Chierici worked toward a new physical accessibility that broke down the wall between heritage and the community. In this setting, the work of art was transformed: no longer a mere fragment of lost history, it became a material presence with which the population could finally enter into a multi-layered dialogue, one

[35] This is also reflected in the related bibliography – specifically, the article released for the inauguration and the volume on the Spanish Castle, both by Chierici, as well as the first catalog of the collection published in 1959 by Guglielmo Matthiae: Chierici, "Castello dell'Aquila"; Barreca and Chierici, "Museo Nazionale"; Matthiae, *Castello dell'Aquila*.

[36] In particular, for the archaeological section, artifacts were selected almost exclusively from the excavations of Amiternum – an area located approximately 10 kilometers from L'Aquila.

[37] The archaeological section was spread across five rooms and organized according to typology or scale: public life, private life, and, finally, small-scale objects. The section dedicated to Medieval and Modern art, distributed over eleven rooms, was – by Chierici's own admission – exclusively focused on the period from the 13th to the 16th century. The display followed a chronological order by school and integrated both painting and sculpture. Conversely, the arts that Chierici defined as 'minor' (though 'notable') – namely the art of the goldsmith and ceramics – were relegated almost entirely to the final rooms (Congeduti, "Per una storia," 67; Chierici, "Castello dell'Aquila").

that bridged the gap between sensory, visual experience and rigorous scientific inquiry [38].

It is not possible today, to determine the extent to which the effort of reconstructing the provenance of the artifacts was reflected in the museum's educational apparatus. The photographic documentation, while showing the seating for the public, remains devoid of both visitors and any visible educational aids – lacking even basic captions. Such records therefore may not bear faithful witness to the actual presence or absence of educational tools during the museum's opening hours. In contrast, the data found in the entries of the 1959 catalog by Guglielmo Matthiae, and to an even greater degree in that of Mario Moretti of 1968, attest to the importance assigned – throughout the research on the collection – to the link between the artifacts and their original location[39].

Moretti himself – then Superintendent for Archaeology and Fine Arts for Abruzzo and Molise – on the occasion of the 15th Week of Italian Museums in 1972 (figs. 19a-b), organized an exhibition in one of the bastions with the title *Decorazione scultoreo-architettonica altomedievale in Abruzzo*, featuring objects from the National Museum's collections. From its inception, the exhibition had been conceived to become a permanent historical-topographical section, intended to recount the architectural history of Abruzzo through fragments salvaged following the 1915 earthquake and war damage.

The sophisticated catalog[40] combined detailed scholarly entries for the 173 exhibited pieces with 91 photographs of decorative elements still in place in churches, as well as images of their respective original locations[41], where these still existed. This engendered a reconstruction that was no longer merely textual, but also elegantly visual. In this final act, the museum ceases to be a mere container of works and becomes a laboratory for the recomposition of the collective self: the exhibition of architectural fragments – the physical remains of past traumas – is transformed into an organic visual narrative. The Castle is thus

[38] As highlighted in Belmonte and Scirocco, "La storia dell'arte," 21, the involvement of the local community in processes of the reappropriation of historical memory is a key element in weaving afresh the connection between displaced assets and the citizenry during the lengthy phase of reconstruction.

[39] Matthiae, *Castello dell'Aquila*; Moretti, *Museo Nazionale*.

[40] Moretti, *Decorazione*. The exhibition was held immediately after the publication of Moretti's studies on the medieval architecture of Abruzzo (Moretti, *Architettura medioevale*).

[41] The photographs of the churches were sourced from the archives of the local Superintendency.

confirmed not only as an identity-defining space but as the final destination of a long process of recovery, in which artistic heritage serves as the primary tool to heal the memory of a cyclically wounded community.

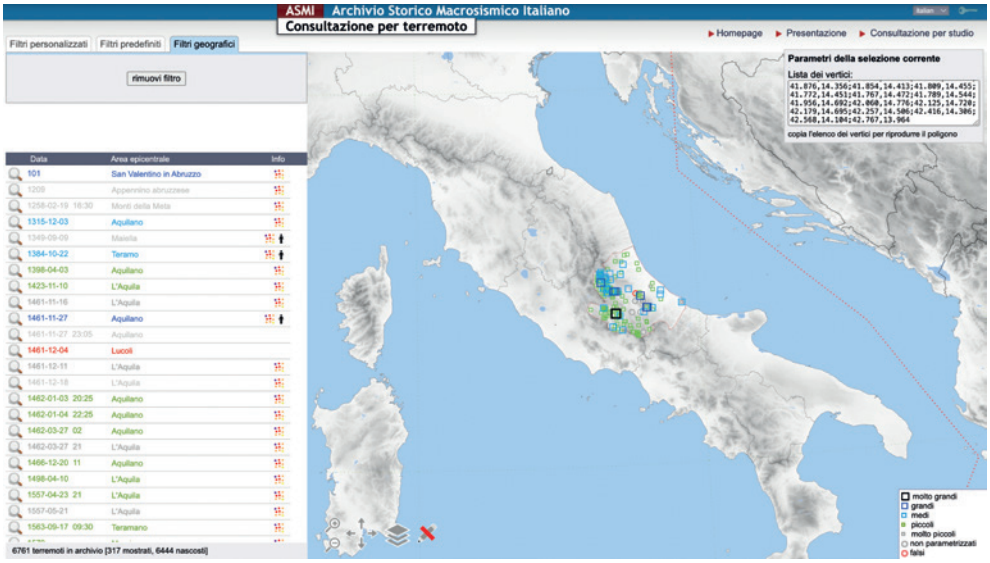


Figure 1. ASMI, Map of all the major seismic events recorded in Abruzzo from 2nd century BC to 2021. [Source: INGV – Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, ASMI – Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano; ©INGV-ASMI]

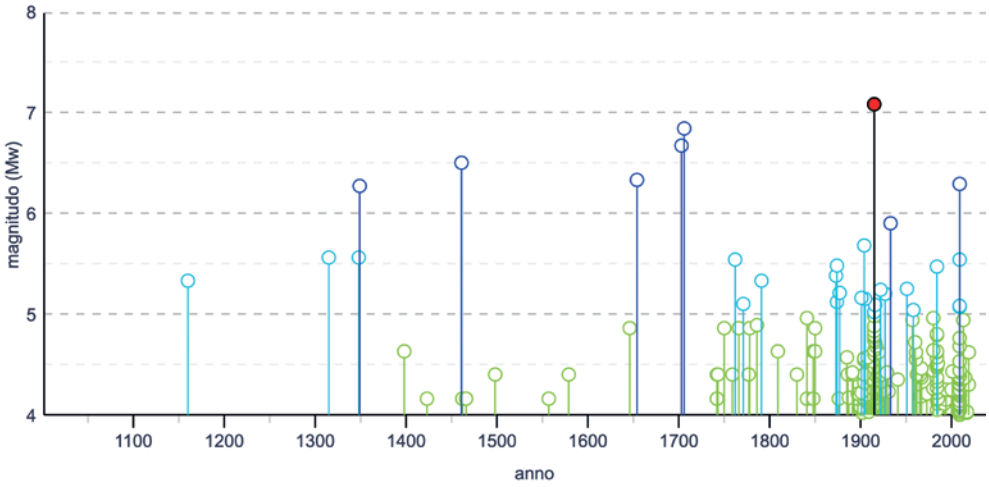


Figure 2. ASMI, Bar chart of historical seismicity in L'Aquila (50 km radius) from 12th to 21st century. [Source: INGV – Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, ASMI – Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano; ©INGV-ASMI]

Figure 3. Silvestro dell'Aquila, *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, shown in the 1888 display of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila; gelatin silver print, c. 1904-1905. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI6083576; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]

Figure 4. The first courtyard of the Museo Civico Aquilano shown in the 1908 display; gelatin silver print, after 1912. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312061; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC].

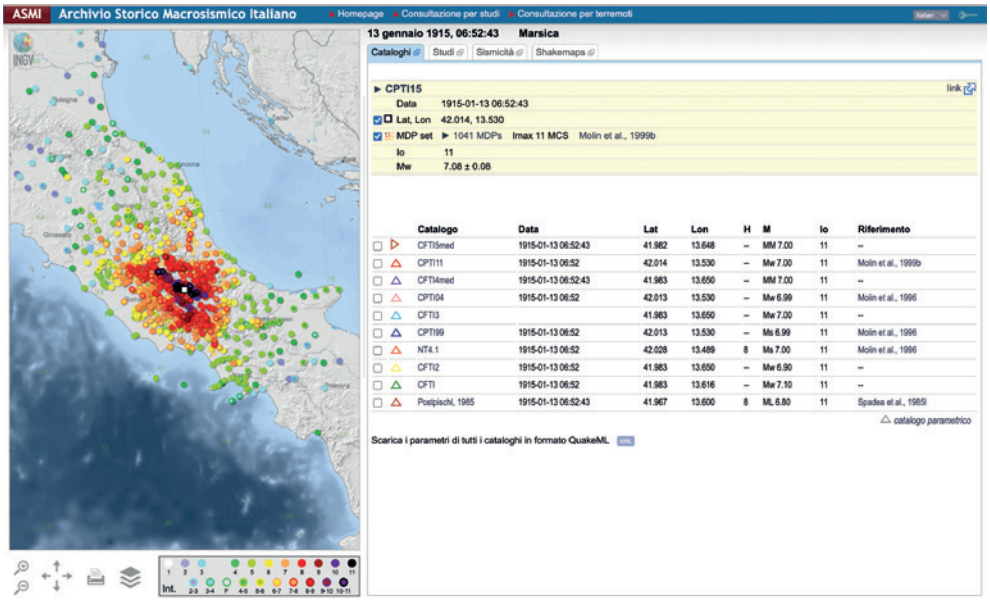


Figure 5. ASMI, Macroseismic Intensity Map of the 1915 Marsica earthquake. [Source: INGV – Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, ASMI – Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano; ©INGV-ASMI]

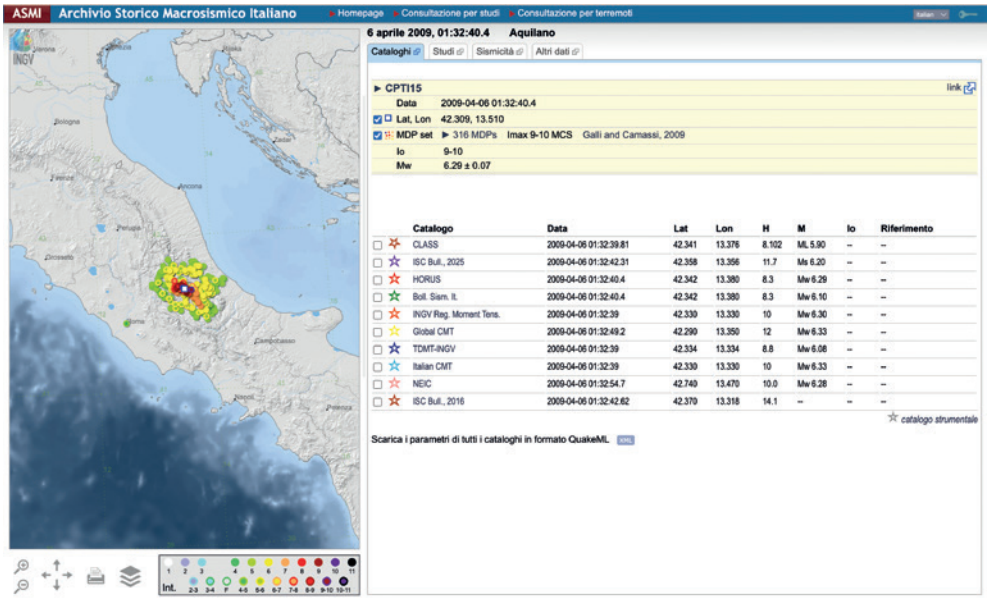


Figure 6. ASMI, Macroseismic Intensity Map of the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake. [Source: INGV – Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, ASMI – Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano; ©INGV-ASMI]

Figure 7. Altar with the *Beffi Triptych*, Santa Maria del Ponte (near Tione degli Abruzzi), before 1924. [Source: Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, Archivio Fotografico; courtesy of MiC – Soprintendenza ABAP per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo]

Figure 8. Façade of the Church of Santa Caterina Martire, seat of the Museo Diocesano d'Arte Sacra, L'Aquila, c.1935. [Source: Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, Archivio Fotografico; courtesy of MiC – Soprintendenza ABAP per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo]

Figure 9. Archaeological section of the Museo Civico Aquilano, as displayed in 1940, in the *loggia* of the Palazzo della Congregazione dei Nobili, L'Aquila. [Source: Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, Archivio Fotografico; courtesy of MiC – Soprintendenza ABAP per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo]

Figure 10. Medieval and Modern art section of the Museo Civico Aquilano, as displayed 1940, in the oratory of the Palazzo della Congregazione dei Nobili, L'Aquila. [Source: Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, Archivio Fotografico; courtesy of MiC – Soprintendenza ABAP per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo]

Figure 11. Medieval and Modern art section of the Museo Civico Aquilano, as displayed in 1940, in the room adjacent to the oratory in the Palazzo della Congregazione dei Nobili, L'Aquila. [Source: Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, Archivio Fotografico; courtesy of MiC – Soprintendenza ABAP per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo]

Figure 12. Archaeological section (Room IV), as displayed in 1951, on the ground floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, after 1949. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312060; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

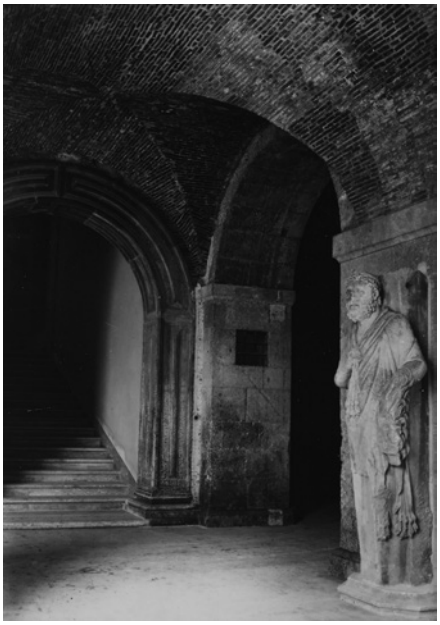


Figure 13. Archaeological section (*loggia*), as displayed in 1951, on the ground floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI311892; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

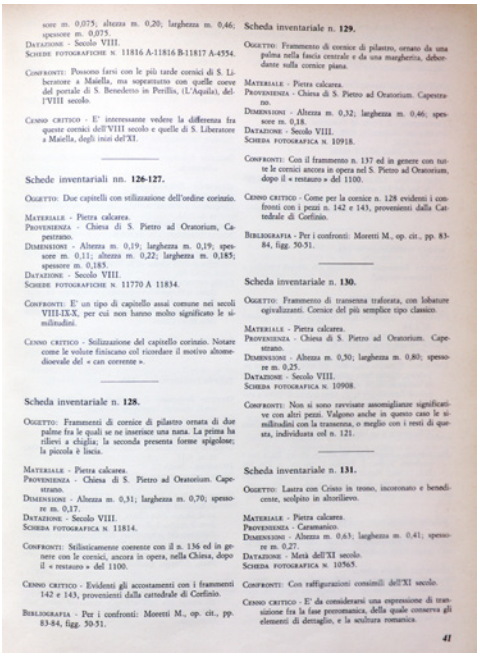
Figure 14. Medieval and Modern art section (Room VII), as displayed in 1951, on the first floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI306847; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

Figure 15. Medieval and Modern art section (Room VII), as displayed in 1951, on the first floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312055; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

Figure 16. Medieval and Modern art section (Room V) as displayed in 1951, on the first floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312050; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

Figure 17. Medieval and Modern art section (Room I), as displayed in 1951, on the first floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312079; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]

Figure 18. Applied arts section (Room X), as displayed in 1951, on the first floor of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Spanish Castle, L'Aquila, gelatin silver print, c. 1949-1950. [Source: Rome, Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Fondo Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, inv. MPI312077; courtesy of MiC – Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione]



sore m. 0,075; altezza m. 0,20; larghezza m. 0,46; spessore m. 0,075.
DATAZIONE - Secolo VIII.
SCHEDE FOTOGRAFICHE N. 11816 A-11816 B-11817 A-4554.

CONFRONTI: Possono farsi con le più tarde cornici di S. Liberatore a Maiella, ma soprattutto con quelle coeve del portale di S. Benedetto in Perillis, (L'Aquila), dell'VIII secolo.

CENNO CRITICO - E' interessante vedere la differenza fra queste cornici dell'VIII secolo e quelle di S. Liberatore a Maiella, degli inizi dell'XI.

Schede inventariali nn. **126-127.**

OGGETTO: Due capitelli con stilizzazione dell'ordine corinzio.

MATERIALE - Pietra calcarea.
PROVENIENZA - Chiesa di S. Pietro ad Oratorium, Capestrano.
DIMENSIONI - Altezza m. 0,19; larghezza m. 0,19; spessore m. 0,11; altezza m. 0,22; larghezza m. 0,185; spessore m. 0,185.
DATAZIONE - Secolo VIII.
SCHEDE FOTOGRAFICHE N. 11770 A 11834.

CONFRONTI: E' un tipo di capitello assai comune nei secoli VIII-IX-X, per cui non hanno molto significato le similitudini.

CENNO CRITICO - Stilizzazione del capitello corinzio. Notare come le volute finiscano col ricordare il motivo altomedioevale del « can corrente ».

Scheda inventariale n. **128.**

OGGETTO: Frammenti di cornice di pilastro ornata di due palme fra le quali se ne inserisce una nana. La prima ha rilievi a chiglia; la seconda presenta forme spigolose; la piccola è liscia.

MATERIALE - Pietra calcarea.
PROVENIENZA - Chiesa di S. Pietro ad Oratorium. Capestrano.
DIMENSIONI - Altezza m. 0,31; larghezza m. 0,70; spessore m. 0,17.
DATAZIONE - Secolo VIII.
SCHEDA FOTOGRAFICA N. 11814.

CONFRONTI: Stilisticamente coerente con il n. 136 ed in genere con le cornici, ancora in opera, nella Chiesa, dopo il « restauro » del 1100.

CENNO CRITICO - Evidenti gli accostamenti con i frammenti 142 e 143, provenienti dalla cattedrale di Corfinio.

BIBLIOGRAFIA - Per i confronti: Moretti M., op. cit., pp. 83-84, figg. 50-51.

Scheda inventariale n. **129.**

OGGETTO: Frammento di cornice di pilastro, ornato da una palma nella fascia centrale e da una margherita, deborante sulla cornice piana.

MATERIALE - Pietra calcarea.
PROVENIENZA - Chiesa di S. Pietro ad Oratorium. Capestrano.
DIMENSIONI - Altezza m. 0,32; larghezza m. 0,46; spessore m. 0,18.
DATAZIONE - Secolo VIII.
SCHEDA FOTOGRAFICA N. 10918.

CONFRONTI: Con il frammento n. 137 ed in genere con tutte le cornici ancora in opera nel S. Pietro ad Oratorium, dopo il « restauro » del 1100.

CENNO CRITICO - Come per la cornice n. 128 evidenti i confronti con i pezzi n. 142 e 143, provenienti dalla Cattedrale di Corfinio.

BIBLIOGRAFIA - Per i confronti: Moretti M., op. cit., pp. 83-84, figg. 50-51.

Scheda inventariale n. **130.**

OGGETTO: Frammento di transenna traforata, con lobature epivalizzanti. Cornice del più semplice tipo classico.

MATERIALE - Pietra calcarea.
PROVENIENZA - Chiesa di S. Pietro ad Oratorium. Capestrano.
DIMENSIONI - Altezza m. 0,50; larghezza m. 0,80; spessore m. 0,25.
DATAZIONE - Secolo VIII.
SCHEDA FOTOGRAFICA N. 10908.

CONFRONTI: Non si sono ravvisate assomiglianze significative con altri pezzi. Valgono anche in questo caso le similitudini con la transenna, o meglio con i resti di questa, individuata col n. 121.

Scheda inventariale n. **131.**

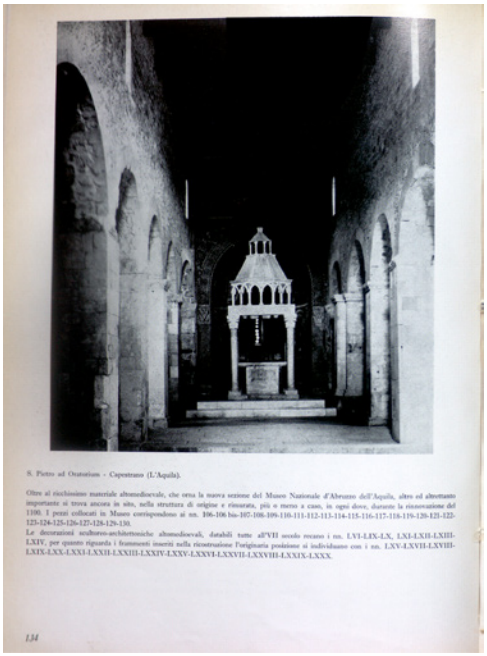
OGGETTO: Lastra con Cristo in trono, incoronato e benedicente, scolpito in altorilievo.

MATERIALE - Pietra calcarea.
PROVENIENZA - Caramanico.
DIMENSIONI - Altezza m. 0,63; larghezza m. 0,41; spessore m. 0,27.
DATAZIONE - Metà dell'XI secolo.
SCHEDA FOTOGRAFICA N. 10565.

CONFRONTI: Con raffigurazioni consimili dell'XI secolo.

CENNO CRITICO - E' da considerarsi una espressione di transizione fra la fase preromanica, della quale conserva gli elementi di dettaglio, e la scultura romanica.

41



S. Pietro ad Oratorium - Capestrano (L'Aquila).

Oltre al ricchissimo materiale altomedioevale, che ora la nuova sezione del Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo dell'Aquila, altro ed altrettanto importante si trova ancora in sito, nella struttura di origine e rimarata, più o meno a caso, in ogni dove, durante la rimozione del 1100. I pezzi collocati in Museo corrispondono ai nn. 106-106 bis-107-108-109-110-111-112-113-114-115-116-117-118-119-120-121-122-123-124-125-126-127-128-129-130.
Le decorazioni scultoreo-architettoniche altomedioevali, databili tutte all'VIII secolo recano i nn. LVI-LIX-LX, LXI-LXII-LXIII-LXIV, per quanto riguarda i frammenti inseriti nella ricostruzione l'originaria posizione si individuano con i nn. LXV-LXVII-LXVIII-LXIX-LXX-LXXI-LXXII-LXXIII-LXXIV-LXXV-LXXVI-LXXVII-LXXVIII-LXXIX-LXXX.

134

Figures 19a-b. Selected pages from Mario Moretti's 1972 catalog. [Source: Moretti, *Decorazione*: 43, 134]

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Daria Brasca

*American Perceptions and Representations of Italian Museum Installations from World War II to the late 1950s**

1. *Mapping Museum Exchanges: Methodological Reflections*

This contribution is developed within the context of the *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, a research initiative funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) through the PRIN program. Building on the project's database of historical visual documentation of Italian permanent museum installations, the study undertakes a systematic cross-referencing of U.S. sector-specific periodicals in order to assess the extent and modalities through which Italian museum installations were represented and described within American professional discourse[1]. The survey focuses on field-leading outlets, including publications associated with the American Association of Museums (today the American Alliance of Museums or AAM) – such as *The Museum News* and *The Museum Journal* – together with widely circulated art periodicals that contributed to curatorial debate, including the *Magazine of Art*[2], *The Art Bulletin*[3], *The*

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[1] Author's note. The survey of visual sources relating to Italian museums was conducted systematically for the following journals: *The Museum News*, *The Museum Journal, Magazine of Art, The Art Bulletin, The Quarterly, The Art Digest; Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, and *Progressive Architecture*, for the period 1944-1959. The survey of other periodicals and newspapers cited in this study was carried out through digital databases and/or manual searches and cannot be regarded as systematic or exhaustive; omissions are therefore possible.

[2] A*rt Magazine* was published by The American Federation of Arts from 1907 and covers contemporary art and art exhibitions.

[3] *The Art Bulletin* is an active peer-reviewed scholarly journal published quarterly by Taylor &

Art Quarterly[4], and *The Art Digest*[5], as well as bulletins issued by major U.S. museums[6]. The corpus is complemented by the major American architectural journals – *Architectural Forum*, *Architectural Record*, *Progressive Architecture* – whose editorial agendas and photographic repertories offer a crucial vantage point on exhibition design, display technologies, and the mediation of architectural modernity in the postwar decades. It also includes mass-circulation newspapers and illustrated magazines that extended the visibility of Italian museum beyond specialist audiences[7]. This range of sources supports a systematic analysis of the visual and textual models through which museum installations were discussed, documented, and, at times, editorially marginalized. In this sense, marginalization in print was not merely accidental: U.S. periodicals tended to privilege those Italian museum cases that could be rendered intelligible within American idioms of museum modernization – above all as technical problems with potentially transferable solutions.

2. *Italy in American Museum Discourse Before World War II: A Time-Lag*

Before World War II, Italian museums featured only marginally in American professional museum discourse, especially regarding governance, public role, museum education, exhibition design, and spatial organization. When Italy ap-

Francis. Launched in 1913, it is an official publication of the College Art Association and publishes research on all aspects of art history.

[4] *The Art Quarterly* was a publication covering topics related to the fine arts. It was published between 1938 and 1979.

[5] *The Art Digest*, a magazine focusing on arts exhibitions in the U.S. and any relevant art news, published by Art Digest, Co. from 1926 to 1958. The magazine was renamed *Arts Magazine* in 1961.

[6] Also, *Art in Journal* (1941-); *Art in America* (1913-).

[7] *Architectural Record* (founded 1891) is widely regarded as the earliest continuously published architectural periodical in the U.S. Originally issued in New York and devoted to architecture and design, it consolidated the American architectural press landscape when, in March 1938, it absorbed *American Architect* (1975-1938) and *Architecture* (1890-1938). *Architectural Forum* (1892-1974) likewise functioned as a major, long-running American venue for architectural discourse. Founded in 1892 in Boston as *The Brickbuilder*, it expanded well beyond a material-specific remit and, following its 1917 rebranding, addressed the art, science, and business of building (Panigyrakis, *Architectural Record,* 50-68); *Progressive Architecture* (commonly cited as *P/A*, 1920-1995) was a major American architectural periodical in the postwar decades. It originated as *Pencil Points* (founded 1920) and was retitled *P/A* in 1945, a shift that reflected the magazine's broadened remit from architectural culture and design discourse (Hartmann and Cigliano, *Pencil Points Reader*).

peared in American museum and art periodicals, the emphasis tended to fall on objects, artists, and historical narratives rather than on museums as laboratories of display. This asymmetry is reflected not only in professional writing but also in the architectural languages through which American museums framed Italian art. Instead of importing Italian display models, many American museums cultivated an 'historicized Italian style' in architectural settings: Renaissance-evocative courts, vestibules, and galleries designed to naturalize Italian works within a scenography of cultural prestige.

These limitations were shaped not only by the Italian institutional context but also by the internal transformation of American museums in the interwar decades[8]. Within the professional culture fostered by the AAM, museums were increasingly theorized as public-service institutions with educational and civic responsibilities. Museum practice was correspondingly reoriented toward audience access; meanwhile, collections continued to expand. AAM annual meetings and professional editorials register a growing attention to treating the public as an active component of museum planning, rather than as a passive recipient[9]. In this context, 'modern' museography became increasingly identified with functional solutions. Crucially, this visitor-centered agenda was supported by a distinct architectural and institutional landscape. American museums, often expanding or newly constructing galleries with programmatic flexibility, could more readily align evolving educational aims with their spatial and technical infrastructure.

Contemporary professional literature on museum buildings placed precisely these issues in the forefront, consolidating a pragmatic conception of museography as an applied discipline[10]. Against this background, Italian museums, often embedded within historic palaces and stratified architectural shells, and constrained by dense collections and administrative constraints, appeared less readily legible as 'models' within American professional categories of modernization. The gap, therefore, was not only material but also epistemic: what counted as progressive museography in American discourse did not easily map onto the Italian museum environment before the war.

[8] Curran, *The Invention*; Alexander, *The Museum in America*; Burt, *Places for the People*; Swigger, "Museums and the Educational Mission".

[9] The theme of the 35th AAM meeting in Detroit (22-24 May 1940) was: "The New Public Museum: An Orientation for the Years Ahead from Five Points of View".

[10] In relation to the debate about the transformation and role of the museum in the U.S. see: Taylor, *Babel's Tower*; Coleman, *Museum Buldings*; "Museum Trends".

At the same time, the very features that defined Italian museums made large-scale translation into the functionalist, visitor-oriented idiom that dominated American museum discourse difficult before 1945. And yet, throughout the 1930s, Italian specialists had repeatedly debated how to reconcile heritage architecture with modern exhibition requirements. Within this horizon of reflection, a catalytic episode for this reorientation was the cultural-diplomatic engagement of the Fascist regime with the United States in 1939-1940, when major loans of Old Master paintings were presented first at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco, and subsequently in leading American venues, including MoMA[11]. For figures such as Giulio Carlo Argan and Cesare Brandi, exposure to American museum infrastructure, and especially to the modernist display ethos promoted by Alfred H. Barr at MoMA, helped reframe the exhibition as a medium in its own right, in which spatial design, didactic clarity, and the viewer's movement could be deliberately orchestrated[12].

Without delving into the exhibition's broader diplomatic stakes, the MoMA presentation of *Italian Masters Lent by the Royal Italian Government* was particularly consequential in this regard[13]. Barr's experimental layout, developed in collaboration with Brandi, and characterized by open surfaces, frameless artworks, and carefully designed sculptural supports to enhance three-dimensionality, was received in Italy as evidence that display could produce knowledge: isolating works, reducing visual noise, and using supports and lighting to intensify legibility and sculptural presence without subordinating the work of art to exhibition settings. Crucially, these techniques became operative reference points for Italian architects and superintendents, first in the comparatively flexible arena of temporary exhibitions, and, after the war, in the rethinking of permanent installations and the modernization of museum practice[14].

[11] Sweet, "Masterpieces of Italian Painting," 111-113; Middeldorf, "Masterpieces of Italian Sculpture," 114-116; "Italian Masters" https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2978; https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2978_300061948.pdf; Brandi, "Le Mostre degli antichi," 272-274; Argan, "Le mostre degli antichi," 270-272; Bertolini and Porfiri, "Una esposizione di carattere," 287-310; Bedarida, "Operation Renaissance," 147-169.

[12] Baldriga, "Il dibattito su memoria," 28-33; Kantor, *Alfred H. Barr*; Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*.

[13] Carletti and Giometti, *Raffaello on the road*, 154-168.

[14] Ferretti, "La forma del museo," 74-79; Polano, *Mostrare*; Franco Albini's 1941 installation for *Scipione e del "Bianco e Nero"* exhibition at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan is emblematic

The war would amplify this trajectory in unexpected ways. Protective evacuations and emptied galleries effectively stripped many museums to their architectural 'skeleton', enabling an unusual and direct encounter with space and proportion. This 'aesthetic of emptiness' did not merely register wartime absence[15]; it created conceptual and practical conditions for a postwar rethinking of the relationship between building, work of art, and visitor; precisely the nexus that American observers would later seek (and only intermittently recognize) in Italian museums.

3. *Postwar Reconstruction as Cultural Diplomacy: Reopening Museums, Rebuilding Italy*

In the immediate postwar years (1945-1948), the reconstruction of Italy's museum system unfolded within a broader political and diplomatic effort to re-anchor the country within the Western sphere. U.S. policy-makers openly treated Italy's stability as a strategic priority, linking economic assistance and international alignment to the containment of communist influence[16]. Within this framework, heritage restoration and the resumption of public cultural life acquired a significance that exceeded the repair of buildings and collections: museums and monuments could function as visible signs of institutional continuity, civic normalization, and democratic renewal, notably through the re-opening of museums, restoration campaigns, and public programming. This logic intersected with the wider program of economic, and social stabilization (most notably the Marshall Plan), through which cultural heritage came to represent a form of 'public infrastructure' crucial to Italy's postwar reintegration[17].

At ground level, Allied cultural heritage protection work and the professional networks forged through the MFA&A program facilitated unprecedented contact between American and Italian museum personnel[18]. Curators, restorers, di-

of this emerging mentality (Smith, *Italy Builds*, 132; Pacchioni, "La mostra postuma," 55-59; Bucci and Rossari, *I musei e gli allestimenti*, 31-33).

[15] Marani and Pavoni, *Musei*, 43.

[16] Ventresca, *From Fascism to Democracy*; Irish Indipendent, "Italy Speaks".

[17] Among the countless studies dedicated to the Marshall Plan see: Esposito, *America's Feeble Weapon*, 121-198; Stein, *The Marshall Plan*; Campus, *L'Italia, gli Stati Uniti*; Fauri, *Il Piano Marshall*.

[18] Duncan and McClellan, *The Art of Curating*, 35; *Protecting*, 64-68. The "Roberts Commission" was the U.S. presidential commission formally titled the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, chaired by Supreme

rectors, and scholars, many of whom were tied to leading American institutions and to Paul J. Sachs's influential training course "Museum Work and Museum Problems" at Harvard's Fogg Museum, encountered Italian collections as urgent operational problems[19]. Wartime and immediate postwar collaboration converted pre-existing transatlantic scholarly relations into direct, sustained, on-the ground cooperation: evacuation decisions, restoration priorities, and re-opening strategies were negotiated on site, generating a shared operational vocabulary that would persist into the 1950s through formal exchange initiatives and informal relationships (fig. 1)[20].

This convergence mattered because, in Italy, reconstruction required more than reinstating artworks in repaired interiors. Wartime evacuation had temporarily 'emptied' many museums, and the return of works from deposits coincided with the restoration of damaged buildings and a rethinking of spatial organization and display sequences. As a result, conservation and museographic re-ordering became interdependent aspects of the same task: reopening institutions under conditions of renewed legibility, circulation, and public use. In this period, museums began to be increasingly articulated, not only as repositories, but as civic instruments of knowledge and social life[21]. To contemporaries, the

Court Justice Owen J. Roberts. Active during World War II and into 1946, its primary role was to advise the War Department on the creation and operation of the MFA&A section. Paul J. Sachs served as a commission member and, as chair of the Subcommittee on Personnel, provided names of qualified personnel for MFA&A appointments (https://www.archives.gov/files/research/microfilm/m1944.pdf?; https://www.nga.gov/sites/default/files/2025-03/nga-archives-wwii-4-robertscommission.pdf?; https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2010/01/harvard-monuments-men-in-world-war-two?).

[19] Duncan and McClellan, *The Art of Curating*, 98, 154, 217-219; https://haa.fas.harvard.edu/people/paul-sachs? Paul J. Sachs (1878-1965) was president of the AMM, art professor and Associate Director of Harvard Fogg Art Museum (from 1923), where he taught "Museum Work and Museum Problems" from 1921 to 1948. Often referred to simply as "the Museum Course," it provided a year-long, practice-oriented training in curatorship and museum administration, combining connoisseurship with institutional management. Its alumni went on to occupy leading positions across American museums and related cultural institutions. One of the cornerstones of Sachs's course was field-based training through travel, especially study-trips to Europe, where students visited major museum collections and met directly with curators and museum directors.

[20] Harper, *America and the Reconstruction*; The Sunday Star, "Recovering Italy"; The Boston Globe, "Restoration in Italy". With regard to the transatlantic exchange in the architectural field see: Scrivano, *Building Transatlantic,* 39-81.

[21] Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica*, 77-90; Nicoloso, "Il restauro dei monumenti," 294-305.

pace and scale of this process were striking. As the U.S. 1948 press observed, for example: "almost all of Italy's museums and galleries (…) have been repaired and reorganized and are again open to the public" noting that many works "were without a home" at the end of the conflict, but were now "on display in modern settings that give them wider appeal"[22].

4. *The U.S. Rediscovers Italy: The Reframing of Italian Museums*

As Italy's recovery gained momentum after 1948, U.S.-Italian relations assumed an increasingly strategic cultural dimension[23]. In an atmosphere shaped by multilateral diplomacy and Atlantic alignment, particularly under De Gasperi's governments (1948-1953), Italy's international image was actively re-scripted as modern, productive, and democratic: a counter-narrative to the recent Fascist past, often cast in the language of "rebirth" and, at times, of a "new Renaissance."[24] In U.S. cultural circuits, this modernity was most readily legible through architecture, design, and contemporary art, fields that could signal innovation while remaining politically serviceable as emblems of a revitalized, outward-looking nation[25].

Exhibitions played a decisive role in consolidating this image for American audiences. Key initiatives, ranging from early postwar presentations of Italian contemporary art within a multilateral cultural-political framework, most notably *Twentieth Century Italian Art* (1949)[26], curated by Alfred H. Barr and James Thrall Soby, to major design-focused programs such as the touring exhibition *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today*[27] (1950-1953) (fig. 2). The reception in

[22] Oklahoma City Star, "War Torn Museums".

[23] Quartararo, *Italia e Stati Uniti*; Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary*, 72-120; 141-253; *Life*, "An Aroused Italy," 36-38.

[24] *Life*, "Rebirth a cultural," 134.

[25] Medici, *Dalla Propaganda*, 137-153.

[26] https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2819; Colombo, "*1949: Twentieth-century Italian Art,"* 102-109; Bedarida, *Exhibiting Italian Art*, 83-92; 96-109; Bedarida, Colombo and Bignami, "Methodologies of Exchanges"; Colombo, "Transatlantic Exchanges," 97-99.

[27] *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (1950-1953) was curated by Meyric R. Rogers, Curator of Decorative and Industrial Arts at the Art Institute of Chicago, and conceived as a nation-wide touring initiative to promote Italian craft and design to American consumers as part of broader U.S. efforts to support Italy's postwar economic recovery (https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/3704/italy-at-work-her-renaissance-in-design-today). Rogers, *Italy at Work*; "Italy at Work," 1-3; Kaufmann, "A Commedia dell'Arte," 16-21; Devine, "Selling Italy," 1-15; The

the U.S. of these initiatives, amplified by mainstream magazines and the wider press, was framed as evidence of a 'new Italy', contributing to a shift in museum emphasis: from a container of masterpieces to a producer of contemporary artistic and design languages, in which architecture and display could perform modernity, making installation itself newly legible as a privileged site for demonstrating Italy's transformation[28].

It is in this context that Italian museum installations began to register, albeit selectively, within U.S. art and architectural periodicals[29]. Importantly, American attention tended to focus less on Italian institutions as models to be adopted wholesale than on highly authored solutions that could be read as proof of Italian ingenuity: display as creative practice, and museum space as a designed environment. This selectivity was reinforced by structural factors, the historical and architecturally charged fabric of many Italian museums constrained the rapid adoption of standardized technical equipment and display systems, limiting the kinds of functional modernization that dominated professional categories in the U.S.[30]. As a result, American periodicals often shifted their attention from collections to the spatial and technical conditions of presentation, from content to installations, while highlighting only a small number of museum cases aligned with postwar fascination for design and architectural modernity, despite the far larger numbers of Italian museums reopened, reorganized and publicized through Italian ministerial publications[31].

exhibition received substantial coverage in both specialist and mainstream press, notably in: *Art Journal*, "News Report," 285; *House & Garden*, "Italy at Work," 124-133; McGurn, "Italian Exhibit of Handicraft"; *Brooklyn Eagle*, "Italy at Work"; *The Gazette*, "New Interiors".

[28] Scrivano, *Building Transatlantic America*, 68; Molinari and Canepari, *The Italian Legacy*. The postwar period also witnessed a flourishing of Italian architecture journals with international circulation. Among them, *Domus*, directed by Ernesto Nathan Rogers (1946-1947), a leading member of the Milanese architectural collective BBPR; it played a key role in mediating Italian debates on modern architecture (including museums) and design to broader audiences (Tafuri, *Architettura italiana*, 430-431; Porta, *Città museo*).

[29] For an overview of postwar changes in Italian museums, see: Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia*, 77-121; Curzi, *Musei italiani del dopoguerra;* Cammarota, *La Pinacoteca di Bologna*, 278-279.

[30] In relation to the reception of American museums in Italy in the postwar period, see Gioli "Ragghianti," 143-178.

[31] The volume *La ricostruzione del patrimonio artistico italiano* (1950) explicitly pairs the restoration of monuments with the "reordering of museums and galleries," introduced respectively by Roberto Pane and Mario Salmi. The cycle culminated in *Musei e Gallerie d'Arte in Italia*.

5. *Franco Albini as a 'Legible' Entry Point in American Architectural Magazines*

Within this selective reception, the architect Franco Albini became a particularly legible point of entry[32]. His projects recur with unusual frequency in American specialist journals and, at times, in the broader press because they condensed multiple values attractive to American observers: modern materials and supports, controlled viewing conditions, and a disciplined choreography of objects in space that could be read as both technical competence and aesthetic innovation[33]. In other words, Albini's installations offered American editors not simply 'Italian museums', but demonstrable *solutions*: display as authored practice and museum space as a designed setting.

Two of Albini's museum interventions were especially visible in American publications: the postwar reinstallation of Palazzo Bianco in Genoa (1949-1951) and the Museo del Tesoro di San Lorenzo beneath the Cathedral in Genoa (1952-1956).

Reopened after wartime damage and reordered under the Genoa superintendent Caterina Marcenaro, Palazzo Bianco in Genoa was quickly framed in Italian critical discourse as a benchmark for the modernization of museum display; Argan famously presented it as "Italy's most modern museum" (1952)[34], precisely because it refocused on the work of art while making the museum's educational function operational through space, sequence, and visual clarity[35]. The installation neutralized the historic container without erasing it: ornate frames were removed, works were isolated, and supports were conceived to detach objects from the wall and recalibrate viewing distances. Albini's task, as contemporaries stressed, was to transform an 18th-century palazzo

1945–1953 (1953), edited within the General Directive of Antiquities and Fine Arts of the Ministry of Public Instruction, which, through drawings and photographs, surveyed roughly 150 museums transformed during the first postwar years of reform, projecting an image of a heritage system capable of modernization.

[32] Bucci, *Franco Albini*; Tafuri, "Architettura italiana," 425-550; Albini, "Le funzioni e l'architettura".

[33] For Albini's visibility as a designer of functional furniture in the American press, see: Moore, "New Furniture Design". His furniture was also widely featured in *Domus* from the early 1940s onward. About it see: Bosoni, *Il design e gli interni di Franco Albini*.

[34] Argan, "La Galleria di Palazzo Bianco," 24-40.

[35] Huber, *Il museo italiano*, 97-99; Bucci and Rossari, *I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, 42-61; 128-135; Morello, *La museografia*, 393-417. For coverage in the general press in the U.S., see *The American Citizen*, "Palazzo Bianco," 14; *The American Citizen*, "Museo Riaperto." For Italian specialist coverage with circulation beyond Italy, see: Albini, "Il Museo del Tesoro," 4-15; *Domus*, "Un architetto moderno," 22-26.

into rooms in which paintings, rather than architecture, became perceptually paramount, through the regulation of natural light and the introduction of carefully controlled artificial illumination. In *Italy Builds* (1955), the American architect-photographer George E. Smith pushed against the familiar stereotype – Italy as a country of unrivaled art but inadequate museum conditions[36] – casting Palazzo Bianco (alongside the renewed Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, reordered by superintendent Fernanda Wittgens with the architect Piero Portaluppi)[37], as an exceptional case that met the modern expectations of legibility and spectatorship (fig. 3).

Albini's underground museum beneath Genoa Cathedral (developed with architect Franca Helg within the reordering program overseen by Caterina Marcenaro) offered American journals an even more readily narrativized object: a dramatic spatial sequence 'modern in concept' yet deliberately charged with a quasi-medieval atmosphere[38]. In the *Architectural Forum* feature "A Buried Treasury"[39], the design was celebrated for the intensity of its visitor experience: constrained access points and differentiated chambers choreographed the visitor's movement around sacred objects, while spotlighting, peripheral lighting bands, and sculptural display structures heightened both the focus and the feeling of reverence (fig. 4). Here the museum was not presented merely as an instance of Italian conservation, but as a curated environment in which space, light, and

[36] George E. Kidder Smith (1913-1997), an American architect and architectural photographer, lived in Italy in 1950-51 (Brown University fellowship) and travelled widely to document contemporary architecture; his subsequent work helped shape the American reception of contemporary Italian architecture and society. Smith, *Italy Builds*, 192-193; *P/A,* "Italy Builds," 126-129. Italian museums are discussed in international comparative terms in Brawne, *The New Museums*, 30-65. On the perception of Italian architecture by American observers see: Scrivano, *Building Transatlantic*, 179-180.

[37] American newspapers of the period occasionally mentioned the modern reinstallation of the Pinacoteca di Brera; however, coverage overwhelmingly focused on the restoration of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, severely damaged during the war, often illustrated with extensive photographic documentation and framed through interviews with Fernanda Wittgens (*Omaha World-Herald*, "Last Supper restored," for example). The modern installation of Brera instead is celebrated, for example, in McAndrew, "The Perils of Pompier", 7.

[38] Bartolini and Boggero, *Franco Albini a Genova*; Huber, *Il museo italiano*, 103-108; Bucci and Rossari*, I musei e gli allestimenti di Franco Albini*, 62-71, 140-148. For Italian specialist coverage with circulation beyond Italy: *Domus*, "Il museo del Tesoro," 28-29; Labò, "Il museo del tesoro," 4-17.

[39] *Architectural Forum*, "A Buried Treasury," 152-155.

supports actively produced meaning, exactly the kind of carefully staged modernity that U.S. periodicals were primed to recognize (fig. 5).

At the same time, postwar observers in the U.S. often expressed surprise at the extent to which Italian museums, despite operating within historic containers and under constrained resources, could produce rigorous functional solutions without resorting to historicist imitation, a point emphasized, for example, in *P/A*'s travel reporting on European reconstruction[40].

In the second half of the 1950s, no Italian museum embodied this shift from design-as-signature to modernization-as-model more consistently in U.S. coverage than the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte in Naples.

6. *Museum of Capodimonte: A Technical, Reproducible Model of Modernization*

Designed and implemented from 1952 to 1957 under superintendent Bruno Molajoli[41] together with architect Ezio De Felice[42] and engineer Ennio Amodio[43], the Museum of Capodimonte[44] was repeatedly framed in the American press as an 'advanced' museum precisely because its modernization appeared systematic, technical, and therefore reproducible. If Franco Albini's work at San Lorenzo could be admired as stylistically singular demonstrations of Italian inventiveness, Capodimonte marked a shift in scale: it demonstrated that an Italian museum could meet, and at times rival, the functional and technical expectations embedded in U.S. professional standards, becoming legible as a peer institution rather than an isolated exception[45].

[40] Zucker, "European Notes," 184-190; *Modernism and the Professional Architecture*; Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia*, 98-103.

[41] Bruno Molajoli (1905-1985) was an Italian art historian and Superintendent of the Galleries of Campania (1939-1960). From 1960, he served as Director-General of Antiquities and Fine Arts within the Ministry of Education and was active in UNESCO and ICOM. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/bruno-molajoli_(Dizionario-Biografico).

[42] In relation to Ezio Bruno De Felice (1916-2000) see: Cocchieri, *Ezio Bruno De Felice*; https://www.fondazionedefelice.it/vita/.

[43] He was responsible for the complex system of roof structures.

[44] The institution was formally established by ministerial decree in 1949 as the "Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte" and was inaugurated on 5 May 1957 as the "Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte". Since the Ministerial Decree of 23 December 2014, it has been denominated the "Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte".

[45] On Museum of Capodimonte in the postwar period see: Molajoli, *Notizie su Capodimonte*; Molajoli, *Il Museo di Capodimonte*; Huber, *Il museo italiano*, 109-114; https://capodimonte.cul-

This legibility was reinforced by the prominence of lighting in American museum discourse, where the control of both natural and artificial illumination, especially in relation to light-induced damage and glare, increasingly functioned as a technical problem at the intersection of display, visitor experience, and conservation. In American architectural coverage, Capodimonte's galleries (notably the *Sala del Trecento* (fig. 6) and the *Sala di Tiziano* (fig. 7) became replicable case studies in controlled top lighting: rooftop daylight was filtered and directed by louvers within a suspended tempered-glass ceiling spanning over 3,000 sq m, keeping light off the floor, concentrating it on wall surfaces, and minimizing direct exposure and reflections on the paintings (fig. 8)[46]. Presented as producing an even, 'agreeable' light on an architectural scale, the system was framed as a pioneering application at scale, positioned alongside international benchmarks such as the Yale University Art Gallery by Louis Kahn, and thus inserting Capodimonte into a contemporary and transnational debate on museum settings and environmental control[47].

American coverage also emphasized showcase lighting as part of the same innovative technical program. The *Bourbon armory* was described as a demonstration of integrated lighting and display cases: self-contained cases engineered to produce controlled luminous patterns even within brightly illuminated spaces, with concealed electrical channels and a calibrated hierarchy of intensities. Across this coverage, the museum's technical 'palette' (daylight modulation, artificial supplementation, glare control) was framed as an active instrument of interpretation[48] (fig. 9).

Capodimonte's status as a turning point also depended on Molajoli's ability to translate between professional cultures. In Spring 1953, Molajoli took part in a bilateral postwar cultural-exchange program[49] that enabled him to engage

tura.gov.it/litalia-chiamo-capodimonte-oggi-racconta-5-maggio-1957-nasce-il-nuovo-museo/; https://capodimonte.cultura.gov.it/capodimonte-oggi-racconta/.

[46] Wright, "Lighting is architecture," 115-123, in particular 116, and 119, fig. 6. The images were taken by Paolo Mario (1908-1982), a well-known architectural photographer. Several are the Capodimonte's photographs available online: https://catalogue.beic.it/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=39BEIC_INST:39BEIC_INST&collectionId=8113369980004741&query=any,contains,Capodimonte.

[47] *Ibid*., 118, fig. 1.

[48] *Domus,* "Il concorso," 50-51.

[49] The International Educational and Cultural Exchange program was sponsored by the U.S. Department of State (DOS) through the United States Information Service (USIS). Tobia, *Advertising America;* https://www.archives.gov/research/foreign-policy/related-records/rg-306.

directly with senior directors and curators in leading American museums, and to observe how 'modernization' was pursued in practice[50]. Invited by Francis Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, he also attended the 48th Annual Meeting of the AAM in Buffalo (16-19 June 1953), where he exchanged views and observations with directors such as Perry T. Rathbone[51], director of the St. Louis Art Museum, and entered the contemporary debate on modernization as a matter of technical practice, services, and visitor management[52] (fig. 10). This exposure is registered most clearly in Molajoli's travel diaries. Far from being merely descriptive, his notes operate as a technical and conceptual ledger, translating into a portable repertoire of practical solutions[53].

A substantial portion of his travel diaries concentrates on lighting: he repeatedly sketched and compared systems for balancing daylight with artificial supplementation, controlling glare, and limiting light-induced damage, concerns sharpened both by his ongoing work on Capodimonte and by the centrality of lighting in mid-century U.S. museological debate. These investigations were often mediated by key interlocutors, above all Perry B. Cott and Joseph P. Gardner, who, within the MFA&A milieu, shared technical advice,

Since 1946, Molajoli had been active in the *Associazione Italo-Americana* (the Naples branch) based in Palazzo Fondi within USIS, and on 14 May 1946 he delivered a lecture on American museums under its auspices. Led at the time by the journalist Gian Gasparre Napolitano, the association promoted meetings in Naples that brought together American scholars and local interlocutors with U.S. experience; Molajoli's talk inaugurated a series of further museum-related lectures that he later delivered for USIS and, subsequently, for the British Council. This topic will be developed further in a forthcoming publication for the *Atlas* project by the present author (Brasca, "Riaprire il museo").

[50] Over three months (31 March-1 July), he visited roughly 49 cultural institutions across 24 cities. For Molajoli's travel diary, see Mazzi, *Musei anni '50*, 104-113; Dragoni, "Da Napoli agli USA," 461-464. The press reported Molajoli visit: *The Santa Fe-New Mexican*, "Italian Art"; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, "Art Museum". I am grateful to Dr. Francesca Russo, Responsible for the Molajoli's library and archive in Naples (Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli-Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli) and Dr. Sara Concilio for sharing invaluable archival sources and for their insightful conversations on Bruno Molajoli.

[51] Perry T. Rathbone (1911-2000) directed the St. Louis Art Museum from 1940 to 1955, then became director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. During his tenure he oversaw major expansion and extensive gallery renovations (https://arthistorians.info/rathbonep).

[52] *Buffalo Courier*, "Research not Museum"; *The Buffalo News*, "Museums"; *The Buffalo News*, "Museums Association"; *St.Lous Post-Dispatch*, "Europeans Visiting".

[53] De Felice, *Luce-Musei*; Gobbato, "On how lighting shaped museums," 24-36.

photographs, and documentation that helped refine his thinking[54]. At the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, directed by Gardner[55] – a key figure in MFA&A work in southern Italy, who worked alongside Molajoli in Naples (1943-1945) and with whom he maintained a close friendship and an ongoing exchange of publications and views (fig. 11) – Molajoli treated the museum as a highly engineered precedent, established in the 1930s yet still cited as a technical model, where fluorescent illumination could be simulated by control devices to suit the mood of a particular painting or an individual exhibition room[56] (fig. 12). In Washington D.C., by contrast, with the guidance of Perry Cott, another former MFA&A officer in Italy and, by then, curator at the National Gallery of Art (NGA)[57], Molajoli approached the NGA as a benchmark for controlled top lighting and its integration with electric lighting[58] (fig. 13). His notes distinguish projectors positioned above laylights, indirect lighting, and direct sources, and he used this scheme to test what artificial light could

[54] On Molajoli's collaboration with the MFA&A in Campania see Sizer, *A Walpolean at War*, 16; Molajoli, *Musei ed opere d'arte di Napoli*; *Il Risorgimento*, "Museo in agonia"; "Report," 78-80.

[55] Joseph Paul Gardner (1894-1972) directed the MFA&A section of the AMG for the liberated provinces of southern Italy until the end of the war. Working with Molajoli in Naples, he coordinated emergency safeguarding measures and the recovery of artworks, and they co-authored *Per i monumenti d'arte danneggiati dalla guerra in Campania* (1944). After returning to the United States, he resumed his directorship of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (1933-1953); https://www.monumentsmenandwomenfnd.org/monuments-men-and-women/joseph-gardner.

[56] BBM-ApBM (Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli – Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli), Box 7, f. Note sul mio viaggio negli Stati Uniti, Notebook with hooks, 22 April 1953, cc. 97v-98r. Wolferman, *The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art*, 137; Churchman and Erbes, *High Ideals and Aspirations*, 18, 84. Molajoli described the lighting methods employed in the Kansas City Museum as follows: "Lighting of the wall-mounted ceramics case. Visible housings in light-grained veneered wood. For lamp shielding, a special glass is used, incorporating within its thickness an opaque bronze mesh (2-3 mm), which renders the light source invisible as when it is viewed at an angle" ("Illuminazione della vetrina a muro per ceramiche. Fonti visibili di legno impellicciato a venature chiare. Per la schermatura delle lampade ricorre un vetro speciale che contiene nello spessore un reticolato bronzo opaco di misura (2-3 mm) rende invisibile la fonte luminosa appare (…) angolo").

[57] Perry B. Cott (1909-1998) joined the National Gallery of Washington D.C., as Assistant Chief Curator in 1949 and served as Chief Curator from 1956 to 1969. During his curatorship, the Gallery purchased Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* (1967). During World War II, he was an officer in MFA&A in western Sicily, and later in Rome and Vienna (https://arthistorians.info/cottp/).

[58] J.B. Egger, "La Gallerie Nationale d'Art," 5-162.

deliver, that daylight could not, and what minimum balance was required for clear, 'good' viewing[59] (figs. 14-15).

In American specialist periodicals, Capodimonte's reproducible technical approach was extended to infrastructure and services. The museum's modernization included integrated research spaces, restoration and photographic laboratories (fig. 16), storage systems designed for efficient handling and conservation (fig. 17), and visitor amenities such as a café with a relaxation area and a panoramic terrace overlooking the park[60] (fig. 18).

The cumulative effect was to cast Capodimonte, sometimes in hyperbolic terms ("the most modern museum in Europe," or "the most technically perfect museum in the world"), as a benchmark of technical modernization within Europe and, therefore, as a model readily intelligible to American observers[61].

[59] BBM-ApBM (Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli-Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli), Box 7, f. Note sul mio viaggio negli Stati Uniti, Notebook 1953, 5 April 1953, cc. 15v-17r. In essence, Molajoli described the lighting methods employed in the National Gallery of Art as follows: "(a) projectors above the open laylights (on average three per side in medium-sized rooms); (b) direct light from lamps placed along the cornices that define a dome acting as a reflector; (c) light from sources (condenser lamps or fluorescent tubes) arranged at an angle, in a square, on a ceiling lowered by approximately 20 cm; (d) ceiling zones formed by glazed bands parallel to the walls, with glass squares behind which condenser lamps are installed as required, leaving the unused ones dark (this system is used in the temporary exhibition rooms; the preceding systems are used in rooms lit exclusively [underlined in the text] by artificial light)" ("(a) proiettori sopra i velari aperti (media tre per ogni lato in sale di media dimensione); (b) luce indiretta, da lampade lungo cornici che delimitano una calotta che serve da rifrangente; (c) luce da fonti luminose (lampade condensatrici o tubi fluorescenti) disposte ad angolo, in quadrato, sul plafond ribassato di 20 cm circa; (d) zone a fasce vetrate sul soffitto, parallele alle pareti, con quadrati di vetro dietro i quali si dispongono secondo necessità lampade condensatrici, lasciando bui quelli non utilizzati (questo sistema adottato nelle sale delle mostre temporanee, e quelle precedenti, sono adottati nelle sale illuminate soltanto artificialmente").

[60] *Domus*, "Museo Capodimonte," 47-51; *Art Quarterly*, "La donazione," 301-302.

[61] For contemporary press coverage of the reopened Museo di Capodimonte: *European Art,* "Naples," 11; *The Art Bulletin,* "Capodimonte," 376; Mann, "Neapolitan Splendors"; *The American Citizen*, "Il nuovo museo". Wayne C. Smith in 1957, while noting the superiority of automatic lighting controls in U.S. museums, singled out Capodimonte's plant as exemplary in comparison with other European museums visited on the same tour (*The Morning Union,* "Madrid's Prado").

7. *Conclusion*

Across the decade after World War II, American periodicals – from specialist professional journals to general-interest magazines – did not offer a comprehensive portrait of Italian museum reconstruction; rather, they produced a selective map of 'readable' instances in which Italian installations could be aligned with American categories of modernization. The postwar professional networks forged through the MFA&A created new conditions for transatlantic exchange and debate, but visibility in print depended on whether Italian solutions could be narrated as technical problems with transferable solutions. From Albini's installations, admired as demonstrations of spatial invention, to Capodimonte's scalable lighting system and service infrastructure, coverage in the U.S. demonstrated how museography became a site where cultural diplomacy, professional standards, and aesthetics converged. In this sense, what circulated most widely were those installations that could be translated into the idioms of democratic renewal and modern museum practice.

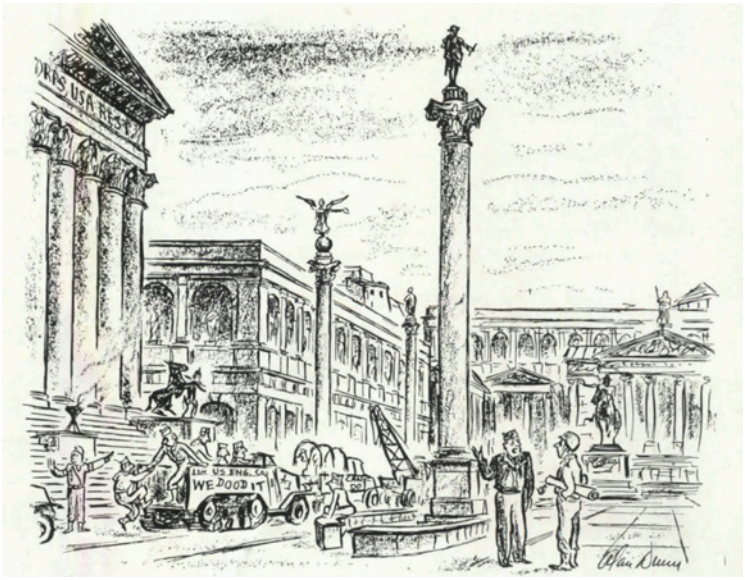
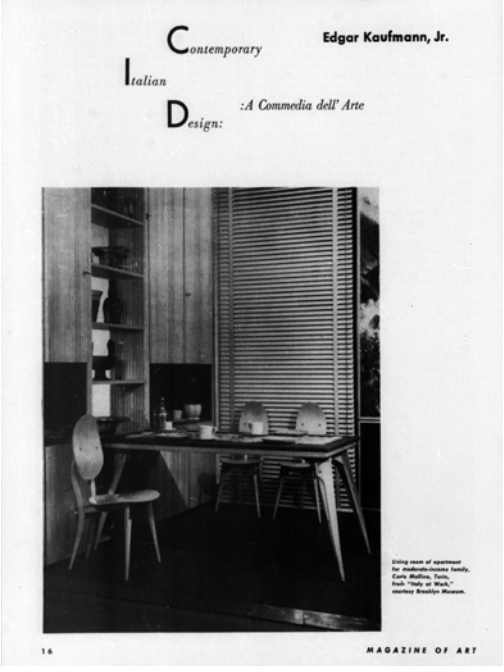


Figure 1. Alan Dunn, Cartoon on the restoration of the Italian monuments by MFA&A, 1944. [Source: *Architectural Forum*, September 1944, 7]


Contemporary Italian Design: :A Commedia dell' Arte

Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.

16 MAGAZINE OF ART

Figure 2. Opening page of "Contemporary Italian Design. A Commedia dell'Arte", an essay on the exhibition "Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today" (1950-1953). [Source: "A Commedia dell'Arte", 1951, 16]

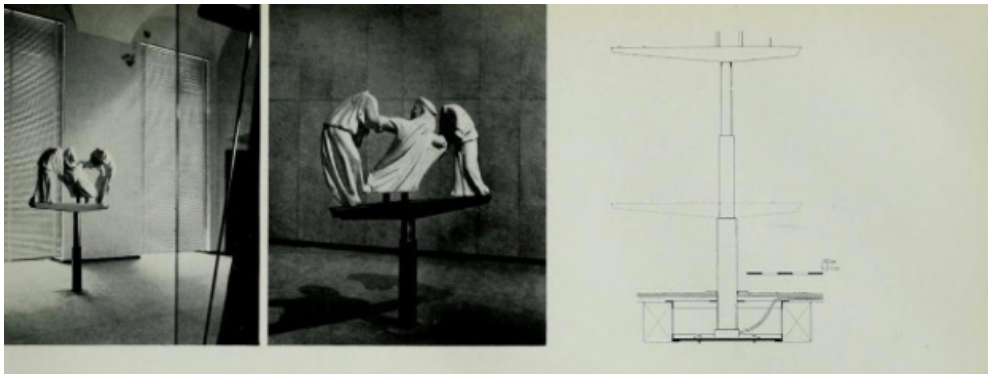


Figure 3. Franco Albini's installation at Palazzo Bianco, Genoa, 1955. [Source: Smith. *Italy Builds* 193]

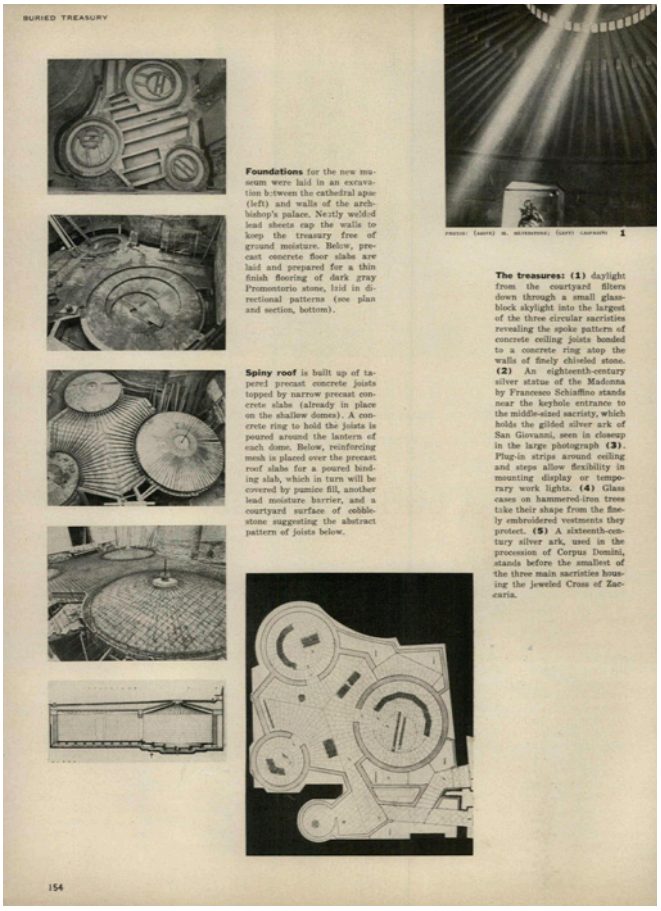


Figure 4. Franco Albini's installation at Genoa Cathedral, 1957. [Source: *Architectural Forum*, "A Buried Treasury," 154; ©ETH Zurich]

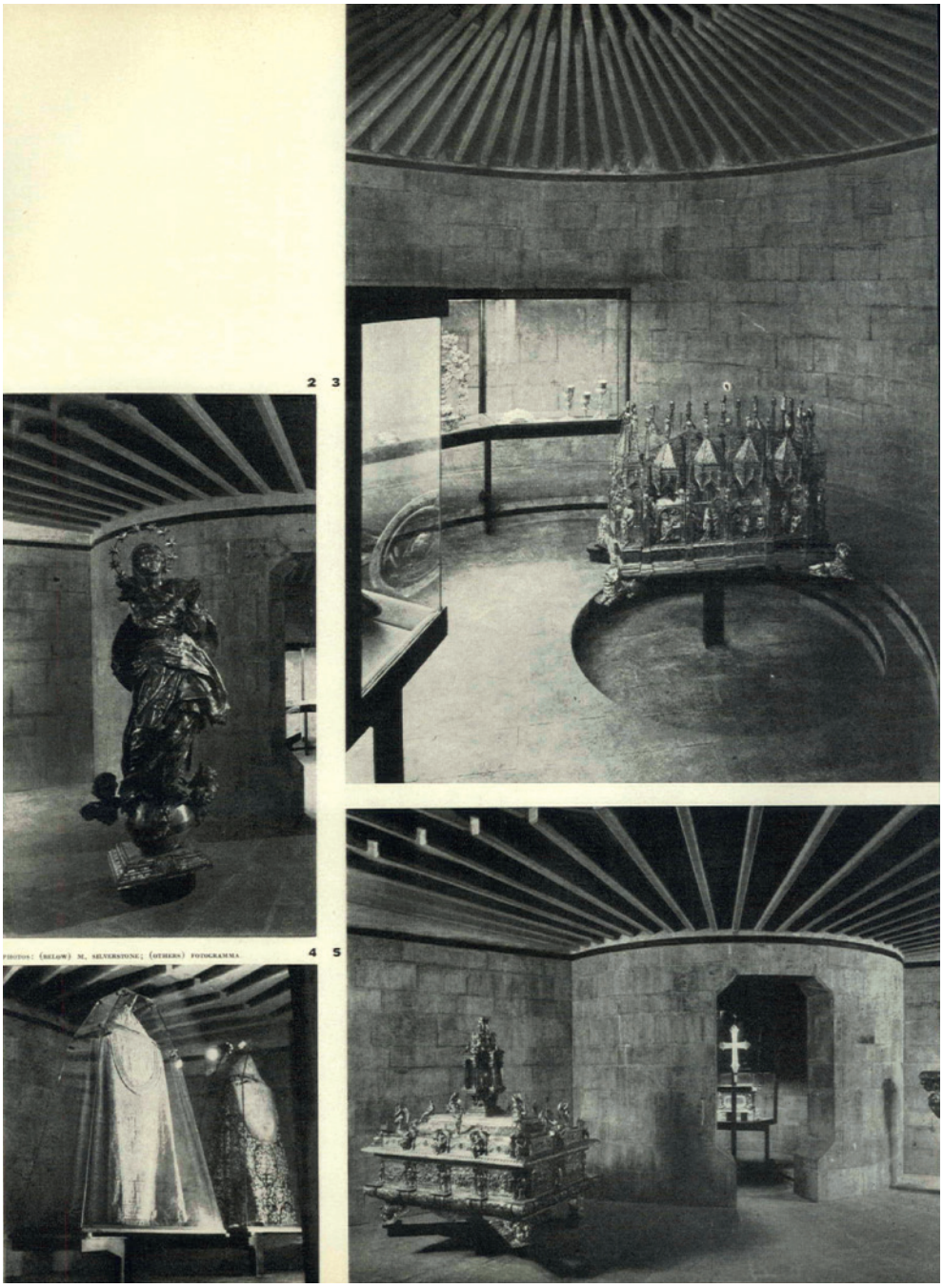
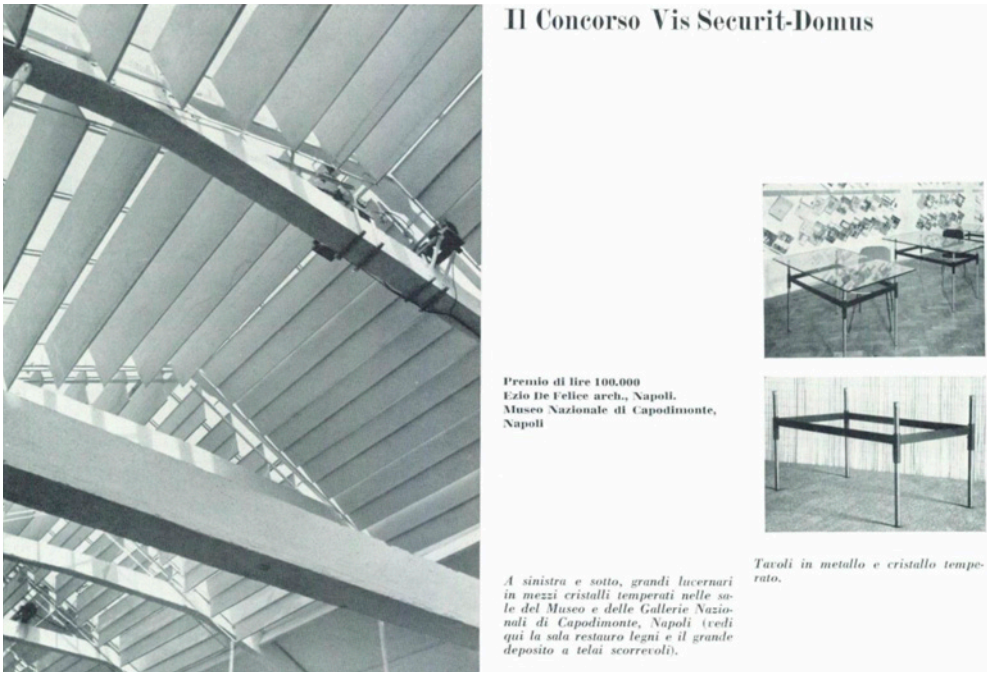


Figure 5. Franco Albini's installation at Genoa Cathedral, 1957. [Source: *Architectural Forum*, "A Buried Treasury," 155; ©ETH Zurich]

Figure 6. *Sala di Tiziano.* Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: Wright, "Lighting is architecture," 116]

Figure 7. *Sala del Trecento.* Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: Wright, "Lighting is architecture," 116]



Il Concorso Vis Securit-Domus

Premio di lire 100.000
Ezio De Felice arch., Napoli.
Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Napoli

A sinistra e sotto, grandi lucernari in mezzi cristalli temperati nelle sale del Museo e delle Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Napoli (vedi qui la sala restauro legni e il grande deposito a telai scorrevoli).

Tavoli in metallo e cristallo temperato.

Figure 8. Suspended tempered-glass ceiling. Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: *Domus*, "Il Concorso Vis Securit – Domus", ©Domus]

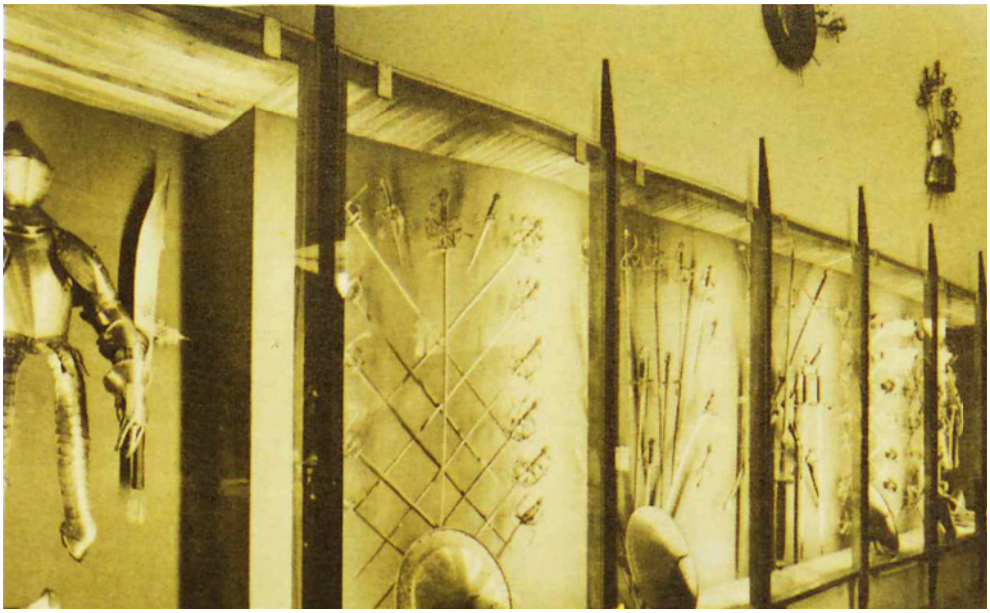


Figure 9. *Bourbon Armory*. Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: Wright, "Lighting is architecture," 119]

Figure 10. Bruno Molajoli, Stanislaus Pacher and Perry T. Rathbone (from left) visiting the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, 1955. [Source: *St. Louis-Dispatch*, 21 April 1953]

Figure 11. Major Paul Gardner, Bruno Molajoli, and Sergio Ortolani (from left), Naples, late 1944. [Source: NARA**,** American Commission For the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas (1943-1946), Record Group 239, Series Cultural Institutions and Artwork in Europe and other War Areas, File unite, Naples-Italy, no. 153/154; ©NARA]

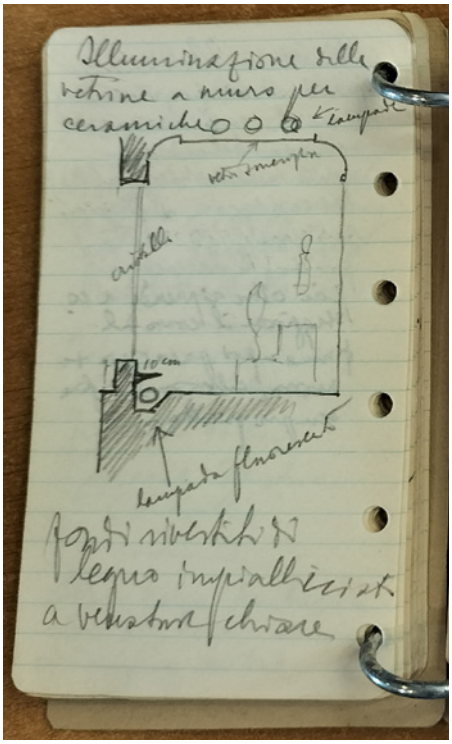


Figure 12. Sketch of the lighting system by Bruno Molajoli, Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, 22 April 1953. [Source: BBM-ApBM (Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli – Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli), Box 7, f. Note sul mio viaggio negli Stati Uniti, Notebook with hooks, c. 97v.; ©Sara Concilio / courtesy of Biblioteca Molajoli]

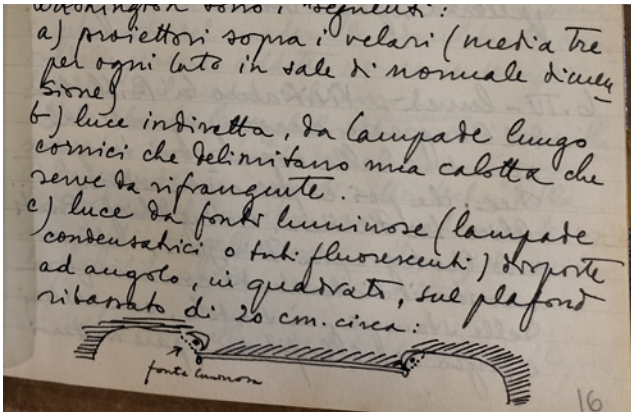


Figure 13. Sketch of the lighting system by Bruno Molajoli, National Gallery of Washington D.C., 5 April 1953. [Source: BBM-ApBM (Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli-Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli), Box 7, f. Note sul mio viaggio negli Stati Uniti, Notebook 1953, c. 16r.; ©Sara Concilio / courtesy of Biblioteca Molajoli]

Figure 14. Lighting system between ceiling and roof (*National Gallery of Art. Lighting system between ceiling and roof in National Gallery*), 1950s. National Gallery of Washington D.C. [Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection, (reproduction number, LC-H814-028); ©Library of Congress]

Figure 15. Diffusing glass ceiling in the exhibit room (*National Gallery of Art. Exhibit room in National Gallery VII*), 1950s. National Gallery of Washington D.C. [Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Theodor Horydczak Collection, (reproduction number, LC-H824-022); ©Library of Congress]

Figure 16. Paolo Monti, *Napoli. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Particolari architettonici e deposito dei quadri dopo l'intervento dell'architetto De Felice* (restoration and photographic laboratories). Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958.) [Source: Fondazione BEIC, Fondo Paolo Monti, DIGITO-OL6338433; ©Fondazione BEIC]

Figure 17. Paolo Monti, *Napoli. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Particolari architettonici e deposito dei quadri dopo l'intervento dell'architetto De Felice* (storage systems). Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: Fondazione BEIC, Fondo Paolo Monti, DIGITO-OL6338433; ©Fondazione BEIC]

Figure 18. Paolo Monti, *Napoli. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte. Vedute della scalinata dell'atrio e dell'area ristoro interne al museo realizzati dall'architetto De Felice* (Cafè at the Second Floor). Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, 1957-1958. [Source: Fondazione BEIC, Fondo Paolo Monti, DIGITO-OL6338433; ©Fondazione BEIC]

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Silvia Cecchini

*Renaissance Reclaimed: Brera 1943-1957**

The Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* is in line with the current deep re-assessment of the role played by museums, a rethinking that has a profound impact on decision-making for exhibition and display. It is in this context that our proposal to assist museums in telling their visual history through a language accessible to multiple audiences, both physical and virtual, was born. With this in mind, we offer museum staff, researchers, and scholars tools designed to facilitate iconographic research on the forms that museums have taken over time (through the database *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – DAIM) and to independently create virtual exhibitions aimed at diverse audiences. These two kinds of tools are presented in detail in Paola D'Alconzo and Donata Levi's contribution in this volume.

It is our hope that drawing on the tools provided, it will be easier for professionals to create both virtual and physical displays that recount the historical stratigraphy of the museum, its nature as a physical space where works and the public, art and scholarship, come together. This meeting in the museum space, never neutral, time and again is called to represent critical choices through arrangements, displays, itineraries, and systems of communication.

Following on from the contribution presented at the conference *Le forme del museo. Questioni di metodo e casi di studio sulla storia visiva dei musei*[1], in the

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[1] See Cecchini, "Brera un secolo e mezzo di storia." Owing to the space limitations connected by the editorial format of this volume, in the notes to the present text I cite only the bibliography directly relevant to the topics addressed, omitting studies on tangential but not strictly

present contribution I address another part of the history of the Pinacoteca di Brera, namely its dialogue with the American museum culture in the aftermath of World War II. Our methodological choice dictates that ample space should be devoted to photographic documentation relating to display. For the paper I proposed for the annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America, held in Boston on 22 March 2025, I selected in particular photographs focusing on works of art from the 14th to the 17th century.

1. *Brera, 14 August 1943*

Fiery fragments light up the night sky, and as they fall and strike Brera, they shake its very foundations, and cause the vaults, the walls and pillars to collapse. At dawn, an apocalyptic scene meets the eyes of the inhabitants of Milan: the devastation of Brera.

> Walls torn down, vaults that have collapsed, floors that have caved in through the action of the high-explosive bombs. A diabolical tangle of wooden trusses twisted by the blasts; scorched beams grim evidence of the incendiary bombs (some would burn for twenty days in the piles of rubble). And there, towards the Piazzetta, the perimeter wall of the Palace at an angle of 12 cm, threatening the stability of the entire building[2].

In the hours and days immediately following the bombing, there are those who, walking the streets, entered the museum rooms with cameras in hand and took photographs. These are the pictures that today allow us to study and understand what had occurred. The camera became a tool that documents and denounces. The photographs produced at that time are works for which a philological method is

pertinent issues. The notes to the present text should therefore be read in continuity with those included in Cecchini, "Brera un secolo e mezzo di storia."

[2] "Murature divelte, volte crollate, pavimenti sprofondati per l'azione delle bombe dirompenti. Un intrico diabolico di capriate lignee contorte dagli spostamenti d'aria; una funerea testimonianza di travi arse dalle bombe incendiarie (alcune bruciarono venti giorni dentro il cumulo di calcinacci). E là, verso la Piazzetta, il muro perimetrale del Palazzo inclinato di 12 cm in modo da minacciare la statica dell'intero edificio". With these words, Fernanda Wittgens recalls the plight of the Pinacoteca at dawn on 20 August 1943, after the tragic nights of the bombing of Milan; AFW-FEB, b. 2, file 1, fasc. 1, Fernanda Wittgens, typescript of the speech given at Brera at the inauguration ceremony of the reconstructed building, 9 June 1950.

now claimed[3] (fig. 1). It was fortunate that the paintings had been removed from the rooms in the years and months immediately preceding the bombing. Guglielmo Pacchioni, Fernanda Wittgens and Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua had not worked in vain – from 11 June 1940, they had organized and carried out the removal of the paintings; first the 'absolute masterpieces' – as Wittgens called Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin*, *Christ at the Column* by Bramante, the *Madonna of the Cherubim* and the *San Luca Polyptych* by Andrea Mantegna, and the *Supper at Emmaus* by Caravaggio. And then the other masterpieces from the Pinacoteca, transferring them to Montefreddo, Umbria, to the Villa Marini-Clarelli. There followed the other paintings, moved to safe locations chosen with the fundamental collaboration of Pasquale Rotondi, then Superintendent of the Galleries of the Marche[4]. Up until June 1943, there were countless removals, to which Costantino Baroni also contributed, organizing the transfer of hundreds of works of art, as well as some of the most important frames, to places deemed safe, according to the progress of the war[5].

2. *A Legacy*

In August 1940, Fernanda Wittgens was appointed director of the Pinacoteca di Brera. A student of Paolo d'Ancona, she trained as a museologist at the Pinacoteca di Brera, where she worked alongside Ettore Modigliani, who became her "mentor"[6]. Ettore Modigliani had been director of the museum and superintendent of medieval and modern art in Lombardy until 1935, before being sent to Palermo, a decision taken by the Fascist party official Cesare Maria de Vecchi. Then he was sent to L'Aquila and, finally, in 1938, as a result of the racial laws, expelled from the service because he was Jewish[7]. Fernanda Wittgens was

[3] Mignemi, *Lo sguardo e l'immagine*.

[4] Paparello, "Con perfetta efficienza e esemplare organizzazione"; Ginex, "Fernanda Wittgens a Milano".

[5] Gallo and Morselli, *Arte liberata*.

[6] This is the description used by Wittgens, and the same term that appears in the title of the art history textbook written by Ettore Modigliani, first published in 1940 under Fernanda Wittgens' name due to racial laws prohibiting the use in schools of books written by Jewish authors: Wittgens, *Mentore*. The same book was republished in 1946 with the author's name, Modigliani: Modigliani, *Mentore*. Due to space constraints, I can provide here only the most recent and selected bibliography on Modigliani: Carminati, *Ettore Modigliani. Memorie*, 268-270 on the book written under a false identity; Pellegrini, *Ettore Modigliani Soprintendente.*

[7] Pacia, "Ettore Modigliani e Cesare Maria De Vecchi".

the first woman in Italy to be appointed director of such an important museum. She felt the responsibility of the role she had taken on as a legacy left to her by the man who had trained and guided her. Rebuilding Brera was her most urgent goal, and the obstacle she had to overcome was the lack of funding.

Modigliani had exhausted every possibility to raise funds, and in April 1946 he had even sent a request for help to America, to his friend William Constable, curator of the painting collections at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The correspondence between the two reveals mutual trust and human solidarity, with Modigliani keeping his friend up to date on the difficulties he was experiencing with his family. Constable and his wife Olivia Roberts supported Modigliani both psychologically and materially, sending him basic necessities[8]. Constable was at the time involved in the movement to set up the Committee in Aid of Italian Monuments, which also included Charles Rufus Morey[9] and Bernard Berenson. However, the Committee's activities did not bring the funding Modigliani had hoped for, and the reason, Constable explained, was that the American commitment was focused on emergency response, and could not therefore support restoration and reconstruction resulting from a lack of resources and technical expertise.

3. *American Contacts*

In the summer of 1947, Constable paid a visit to Fernanda Wittgens[10]. The following October, he wrote to her from Boston: "I do not think that the situation of the galleries in Milan is fully understood, especially outside Italy. I certainly did not realize, nor have I found anyone else who realizes, that all the galleries in Milan are virtually *hors de combat*, and how great the problem of rehabilitating them is"[11].

The collaboration with Constable was part of the legacy acquired by Fernanda after the death of her "mentor". Constable shared Wittgens' concerns for the

[8] For further detail on the correspondence between Modigliani and Constable, see Cecchini, "Brera un secolo e mezzo di storia," in press.

[9] Between 1945 and 1947, Charles Rufus Morey was the cultural attaché at the American Embassy in Rome.

[10] Ettore Modigliani died on 26 June 1947. I have not yet been able to verify the hypothesis that Constable's visit to Milan took place on the occasion of Modigliani's funeral.

[11] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 16, f. 2, subfasc. 3, letter from Constable to Wittgens, 3 October 1947.

success of the reopening of the Pinacoteca di Brera, and he was supportive of the general approach that the art historian was taking for its reconstruction, comforted to note that "the traditional character of the Brera is being maintained"[12]. He suggested to the art historian certain steps that she should take to obtain help for the continuation of the work, proposing that she write to Charles Morey, asking for support in finding funds. Wittgens followed his advice and wrote:

> We are only halfway through the work, and we would like to finish the reconstruction of Brera by the end of 1948, and open the Pinacoteca in the spring of 1949. We are short of about 100 million (200 million has already been spent by the Italian state, amid the most serious difficulties), and I have asked Constable and Berenson to put in a good word for Milan to the American Committee for the Restoration of European Monuments. (…) Since I have been unable to speak to you personally, I am taking the liberty of sending you this letter with the most earnest request that you listen to our voice[13].

In her long letter to Morey, Wittgens used every argument, showing herself to be well informed about the other projects financed by the Committee, recalling the 17th-century origins of the architecture of the Brera as designed by Richini, the role of Maria Theresa as founder of the Library, and that of Napoleon as founder of the Pinacoteca, which she described as "the only Italian gallery that represents all the painting schools of Italy, and also has a section devoted to foreign painting"[14]. She also made an appeal to the human and social aspects

[12] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos.15, cart.16, f. 2, subfasc. 3, letter from Constable to Wittgens, 3 October 1947. Constable goes on to clarify his position: "(…) to introduce such modifications into the Brera would, I feel, not only be out of harmony with its traditions and architectural character, but would cut at the root of one of the characteristics that have made the Brera famous as a gallery – that one notable collection housed in a great palace whose scale and dignity helps to give weight and impressiveness to the works of art".

[13] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos.15, cart.16, f. 1, letter from Wittgens to Charles Morey, 29 December 1947: "Siamo soltanto a metà del lavoro, e vorremmo invece finire la ricostruzione di Brera entro l'anno 1948 e aprire la Pinacoteca nella primavera del 1949. Occorrono ancora circa 100 milioni (200 sono già spesi dallo Stato italiano in mezzo alle più gravi difficoltà) e io ho pregato Constable e Berenson di dire una parola per Milano al Comitato americano per il restauro dei monumenti d'Europa. (…) poiché non sono riuscita a parlarle personalmente, mi permetto di inviarLe questa lettera con la più viva preghiera che Ella voglia ascoltare la nostra voce".

[14] *Ibidem*: "l'unica Galleria italiana che rappresenti tutte le scuole pittoriche d'Italia e che abbia anche una sezione di pittura straniera".

when she concluded with these words: "Aid from the Committee for European Monuments would therefore be justified and, above all, would help the Milanese people overcome the cruel memory of the wounds of war"[15].

Despite Morey's willingness to help, the hoped-for support did not materialize. Wittgens understood that the obstacle preventing American funding was due to ministerial decisions, as a result of the absence of Brera from the list of sites of high historical value to which priority was given in the allocation of funds[16]. The American Committee's final rejection of funding for the reconstruction of Brera was communicated by Constable at the end of April 1948[17].

In her search for financial aid, Wittgens established a network with many individuals in the United States who were sensitive to the issue of the restoration and the reconstruction of Italy's artistic heritage. In addition to Constable, Morey, and Berenson, she also came into contact with Frederick Hartt[18], also a member of the American Committee, and with Alfred Barr and his wife Margaret Scolari Barr, whom she met in Milan in May 1948. A strong and empathetic friendship developed between Wittgens and Margaret Scolari, also an art historian of Italian origin, and a key figure in Barr's work as a curator at MoMA. Margaret took the reconstruction of Brera so much to heart that she discussed it with her friend Millard Meiss, president of the Committee for the Restoration of Italian Monuments, and wrote to John Davidson Rockefeller Jr. on his recommendation, asking him to contribute to the rebirth of Brera.

> The Director of the Museum is Dottoressa Fernanda Wittgens, a woman of great energy, courage and resourcefulness. (…) She commands the respect and admiration of her colleagues and superiors, as well as that of the extremely alert scholars and critics of Milan. Dr. Wittgens' assignment is to direct and supervise the reconstruction of the galleries. (…) The Italian government is slowly subsidizing the Brera project with pitiful allotments

[15] *Ibidem*: "Un aiuto del Comitato per i monumenti d'Europa sarebbe quindi giustificato e soprattutto farebbe superare ai Milanesi il ricordo crudele delle ferite della guerra".

[16] The art historian did not give up and in March 1948 again wrote to Morey: "This was probably due to the fact that, initially, it was stated that only monuments could receive aid, and no one thought of Brera as both a museum of paintings and a great monument", Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 18, letter from Wittgens to Morey, 15 March 1948 (loose sheets).

[17] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 16, f. 2, subfasc. 3, letter from Constable to Wittgens, 27 April 1948.

[18] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 16, f. 2, letter from Wittgens to Hartt, 23 February 1948.

> for the same budget must cover housing, bridges, power plants, railroads, innumerable enterprises that are more urgent for the very existence of a country and its people than the restoration of a museum. At this pace it is hard to guess when the Brera can be reopened despite Dr. Wittgens' talent at stretching lire and cutting corners. (…) Thus the third most important Museum in Italy remains indefinitely closed while the public – both Italian and tourist – is deprived of masterpieces by Raphael, Piero della Francesca, the Bellinis, Mantegna and many others which have to be kept in storage until the Brera is repaired. I know that Dr. Meiss has also indicated to you other desperately needed restorations but I have written to you only about the Brera Museum because there I was able to see the situation with my own eyes and to speak at length with the Directress[19].

Despite Margaret Scolari Barr's intervention, this request was also met with a refusal. Rockefeller Jr. too considered it impossible to intervene, especially as a private financier, given the scale of the damage[20].

4. *Brera, a Living Museum*

The end of the war marked the beginning of a new phase in Fernanda Wittgens' life. Recalling that time, she wrote to her friend Clara Valenti in 1957: "So, when I returned to Brera [after the war and prison], I created a living museum"[21]. Her experience in prison, where she had been sent for helping a number of Jewish people escape from Italy at the time of the racial laws, led her to rethink her ideas on solidarity and civil, or rather civic, commitment. This journey transformed her view of the world and of art, and the role of art in the world, ultimately recognizing its social significance.

The rebuilt Pinacoteca di Brera – named "grande Brera" – inaugurated on 9 June 1950, with its 34 rooms rebuilt on the model of the Napoleonic Brera, was enriched with architectural finishes and period furnishings, and brought up to

[19] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 16, f. 2, subfasc. 3, letter from Margaret Scolari to Wittgens, 2 August 1948. On the relationship between Wittgens and Scolari, see also Bernardi, "Salvare la bontà con la bellezza," 111.

[20] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, pos. 15, cart. 16, f. 2, subfasc. 3, letter from Margaret Scolari to Wittgens, 5 October 1948.

[21] AFW-FEB, class. 3, b. 3, fasc. 25, 5-6, in particular 5, letter from Wittgens to Clara Valenti, 28 May 1957, excerpts from letters transcribed by Fernanda Wittgens' sister, Maria: "Così, tornata a Brera [dopo la guerra e il carcere], ho fatto il museo vivente".

date to meet the new requirements of evening visiting hours, with electric lighting systems of a quality never before seen in other Italian museums of the time (figs. 2-3-4-5).

A keen observer of Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti's work on popular education[22], Fernanda Wittgens framed her activity around the notion of the 'living museum', a concept that can be traced back, by roughly a quarter of a century, to the proposals put forward by Henri Focillon[23]. She wanted to open the museum to all sections of society, welcoming schoolchildren, university students, workers, craftsmen, and pensioners (fig. 6).

In 1953, the art historian wrote a short book entitled *Brera museo vivente*, in which she set out her objectives, described the results achieved, and outlined her scholarly and methodological chioces (fig. 7). She focused her analysis on two core issues: the museographic and museological choices made during the reconstruction; and the launch of educational activities.

Educational vocation is central to her thought, as can be seen by the space devoted to it in the book. Her aim was to make artistic culture accessible to all publics and to transform the museum from an archive into a school[24]. She declared her choice to align her work with the direction taken by UNESCO in the international context, and stated:

> The need for museums to transform themselves from collections of cataloged objects, that is 'archives', into centres of intellectual life or forums for discussion, so that visitors leave with the conviction that the world of the visual arts does not belong to a class of initiates but is accessible to everyone, has in essence, now been formulated[25].

[22] This connection between the two art historians can only be mentioned here for reasons of space; for Ragghianti's commitment on popular education, see Franchi, "«La frontiera dell'ignoranza»", Bottinelli, "Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti", La Salvia, "L'esercizio della cultura" and Gioli, "Ragghianti, i musei e la museologia".

[23] On Focillon's reflections and commitment on museum, see Cecchini, "Il musée vivant di Henri Focillon"; Ducci, "Focillon e il museo". The connection between Wittgens and Focillon's concept of the 'living museum,' already introduced in Cecchini, *Costruir su macerie*, 124, is the subject of further study. On Wittgens and the 'living museum' see also Bernardi's article, published while the present work was completed: Bernardi, "Fernanda Wittgens".

[24] I have already addressed this issue in Cecchini, "La militanza di Fernanda Wittgens per il museo".

[25] Wittgens, *Brera museo vivente*, 25: "In sostanza è ormai formulata l'esigenza che i musei debbano trasformarsi, da raccolte di oggetti catalogati, cioè da 'archivi', in centri di vita intellet-

She also added references to certain key figures, such as George Henri Rivière, who was then engaged in affirming the role of museums in adult education. This approach had a strong influence on museological choices. Rivière asserted, as Henri Focillon had already done before him, that in order to bring an uneducated public closer to art, it was necessary to select a few works and build a visual education program around them[26].

Wittgens followed this criterion, adding the selection of works firstly according to historical criteria, and subsequently aesthetic criteria, "because a public even with only a modest level of culture always has a historical bent, and a work of art 'speaks' to them in terms of its formal values only if these are already familiar to them, framed in the context of the time, and linked to the historical climate of the different centuries"[27]. According to Wittgens, to analyze the aesthetic value of the work of art, the public must first be able to identify its historical significance.

Following this approach, between 1952 and 1953, there were 250 visits for company groups, attended by mechanics and metal-workers from Falck and Alfa Romeo, weavers and printers from De Angeli Frua, the skilled workers from Pirelli, various representatives of the artisan categories, tailors, shoe-makers, cabinet-makers, and graphic designers. In this vein, working on education as a "link between School and the Museum", with a view to experimentation, she continued her work in the Pinacoteca of Brera in the years that followed[28].

The educational and social role of the museum became so important to Wittgens that she decided to abandon her position as superintendent to devote herself entirely to the role of director of Brera.

tuale od in palestre di discussione, così che il visitatore ne esca con la convinzione che il mondo delle arti figurative non appartiene ad una classe di iniziati ma è accessibile ad ogni uomo".

[26] Gorgus, *Le magicien des vitrines*. There is now an extensive bibliography on museum reform movements between the 1920s and 1940s. Among the critical analyses, see: besides Gorgus, *Les magicien des vitrines*, Ducci, "«Mouseion», una rivista"; Poncelet, "Regards actuels sur la muséographie"; Catalano, *Snodi di critica*; Cecchini, *Musei e mostre d'arte negli anni Trenta*; Meyer and Savoy, *The museum is open*; Dragoni, "Accessible à tous"; Dragoni, "«La concezione moderna del museo»"; Cecchini, "La cooperazione internazionale"; Ballé and Poulot, *Musées en Europe*.

[27] Wittgens, *Brera museo vivente*, 27.

[28] Wittgens, 28: "un anello di congiunzione tra la Scuola e il Museo".

5. *1954: America is Close*

On 7 January 1954, Fernanda Wittgens spoke at the second public session of the International Congress on Art History and Museology, sponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which took place in the Park Bernet Auditorium. Before describing the results of the reconstruction work she had directed at the Pinacoteca di Brera, she put to the audience the question that every museum director faced when confronted with the destruction of war: "Was it right to lure back the traditional atmosphere of this museum, or would a new physiognomy be more welcome?"[29].

The audience consisted of professionals from American museums and forty museum directors from various countries, invited by the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum for a "marvelous journey" through the museums of America[30]. Fernanda Wittgens traveled by ship from Italy with Deoclecio Redig De Campos, director of the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Arthur van Schendel, director of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Leigh Ashton, director of the Victoria & Albert Museum, Filippo Rossi, superintendent of the galleries in Florence, and the director of the Kunstgewerbemuseum Zürich[31].

After a brief mention of the catastrophe brought about by the war – "I will not dwell on ruins; sad remembrance seems almost unreal" – Wittgens addressed the most important issue for a museologist (the novelty lay also in the fact that she was a female museologist): that is, having to make the choice between whether to rebuild the museum exactly as it was, or to open to a new aesthetic. She chose to make Brera "modern and ancient at the same time"[32]. She illustrated the choices she had made, the adoption of criteria that had begun to be the sub-

[29] The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, International Council of Museums, 1951-1965, Series I. International Congress on Art History and Museology, New York City (1954), *Text of address by Fernanda Wittgens, Director of the Brera Picture Gallery, Milan, before the International Congress on Art History and Museology sponsored by the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* 7 January 1954, henceforth Wittgens, "Text of address," 1. I would like to thank the MET for making the document available and Patrizia Dragoni for bringing it to my attention.

[30] Wittgens, "Un dipinto ignoto," 69.

[31] Private archive, letter from Wittgens to Della Pergola, 29 December 1953, from typescript file, *Lettere ad un'amica*, 24. I would like to thank Laura Mattioli Rossi for allowing me to consult this. On the relationship between Wittgens and Della Pergola, see in particular Dragoni, "Paola della Pergola"; Cecchini, "La militanza di Fernanda Wittgens per il museo".

[32] Wittgens, "Text of address," 3.

ject of discussion just before the outbreak of World War II, at the international conference organized in Madrid in 1934 by the Office International des Musées.

> The Napoleonic halls were, before destruction, sumptuous and scenographic, but lacked light, because the 'Empire' architect had opened only small, cross-shaped skylights; vaulted ceilings were very high and pointed and gave the rooms a loftiness which required two rows of paintings. In rebuilding, our skillful architect, Piero Portaluppi, (…) softened the curves in the lowered ceilings so as to give the rooms more harmony of proportion and enclose like shrines the precious patrimony of paintings in one line, as modern taste expects artistic masterpieces to be enhanced by a frame of space[33].

The effect of the change described by Wittgens can be judged by comparing a photograph of the Napoleonic halls taken at the time of Ettore Modigliani's directorship in 1924-1925 (fig. 8) with one taken after the postwar reconstruction (fig. 9). The strong upward lift of the ribbed vault of the second hall, visible in the early 20th-century perspective shot, gives way to the lowered vaults, pierced by a large circular opening at the apex, through which copious sunlight enters, as can be seen in the 1950 photograph. The problem of excessive heat on sunny days was solved by Portaluppi, who could not rely on air conditioning, unthinkable at the time for Italian museums – as Wittgens points out – through the construction of awnings, which modulated the intensity of the light, and air chambers that allowed ventilation and prevented heating (figs. 10-11). The concrete trusses now housed an overhead electric lighting system, calibrated to the color temperature and intensity of daylight, a solution that made it possible to open the museum in the evening as well. This was completely new for Italy at the time, as museums were not yet equipped with electricity. Before the installation, in order to rule out any risk of harmful effects of electric lighting on the paintings, the Brera Scientific Laboratory carried out experimental tests with glass specially produced by Termolux, and cold cathode lamps. The architect Franco Albini also played his part in the experimentation with lighting solutions, and was entrusted with the design of the 'small rooms' in which the Venetian paintings were displayed, also known as the 'Albini corridor'[34] (fig. 12).

[33] Wittgens, "Text of address," 2.

[34] On Albini's intervention and his relationship with Wittgens: Marani, "Franco Albini a Brera"; Bosoni, "Franco Albini alla Pinacoteca".

The museographic solution in relation to lighting, which filled the rooms with daylight, had a strong impact on the viewing conditions of the works, and therefore on museological choices. The paintings were spaced out and displayed on a single level, surrounded by empty space, as necessary to paintings as silence is to music, to cite Henri Focillon's words of 1921[35].

On Fridays, when the museum stayed open late for workers and shopkeepers who would not otherwise be able to visit during the day, visitors gathered before the paintings in the evening also. During the day, however, the museum was crowded with tourists and students of all ages, guided by their teachers, for whom the museum had put in place training courses, having taken on board through its collaboration with ICOM, that the best results in terms of learning are to be achieved when children and young people are guided by their teachers (figs. 13-14-15-16).

Placing selected Renaissance works in the best conditions for viewing meant – according to Wittgens' chosen criteria – innovatively approaching a solution already put forward by Corrado Ricci at the beginning of the 20th century, precisely in the Pinacoteca di Brera, and then presented at the 1934 conference in Madrid with the title "isolation of the masterpiece"[36].

The two paintings – Piero della Francesca's *Montefeltro Altarpiece* (post 1472-ante 1474) and Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin* (1504) – were displayed in 1925 in a single room where the difference in size (251x172 cm for the former, and 170x117 cm for the latter) was harmonized by means of a wooden partition[37] (fig. 17). In the 1950 re-organization of the display, they were placed in two adjoining rooms, custom-built for the two works. A larger room for the former, and a more intimate enclosed space for the latter, which Wittgens defined a "shrine" to Raphael[38] (figs. 18, 19, 20).

[35] Focillon, "La conception moderne des musées".

[36] *Muséographie. Architecture et aménagement*, 221, where the display of Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* at the Prado Museum is presented as an example, 221. On the display curated by Ricci, see Gioli, "L'ordinamento della Pinacoteca di Brera"; on the solution adopted by Ricci with reference to the Madrid guidelines, see Cecchini, "Musei e mostre d'arte negli anni Trenta".

[37] For an analysis of the history of the displays, see Bertelli, *Brera*; Arrigoni, "La fondazione, le collezioni, gli allestimenti"; Cecchini, "Brera un secolo e mezzo di storia". I would also like to mention the Brera Plus project, and in particular the page https://breraplus.org/story/la-sala-di-raffaello-e-non-solo-2/

[38] For a contemporary critical analysis of the choices made in the display of the two paintings in 1925 and in 1950, see Salmi, "Rinnovamento della Pinacoteca" and Wittgens, "La ricostru-

Wittgens was committed to demonstrating to the gathered international audience that the re-organization of the display of paintings in the Pinacoteca had been carried out in the spirit of a search for harmony between the ancient and the modern.

> I hope to have clearly shown how the dilemma 'ancient in modern' has been solved. Which means new Brera is a stately gallery, with decorations in marble, textiles, wood, with a 'stylistic' and not a cold functional appearance. But, at the same time, it is a modern gallery, because the visitor is enveloped in a serene atmosphere, created by light-coloured walls (the rosy grey of Brera's gallery is perhaps the main element of this environmental aura), with large, restful spaces that allow for the calm enjoyment of every single masterpiece[39].

The encompassing breadth of the value and the role that the art historian attributed to the museum, and therefore also to the work carried out within it, emerges from a few concise words:

> I hope to have demonstrated this result, which is the true aesthetic achievement and, if I may say so, the spiritual rise of Brera: modernity in the ancient. I mean spiritual, because our entire European civilization ought to endeavour to reshape its vitality, in order to make a new contribution to the formation of vast human progress. These principles inspire Brera's daily life[40].

On 10 December of the same year, having returned to Italy and reflected on her American journey, Wittgens declared:

> The definition 'museum school' is now popular abroad, particularly in America, while it still sounds obscure in Italy. This stems from the fact that the organization of museums in Italy is still crystallized in a pure form of curatorship and has not yet adopted the concept of educating the public through the message of art, which, on the contrary, inspires the whole life of American museums. There are many reasons for this Italian

zione", respectively. For the definition 'Sacrario di Raffaello' (Shrine to Raphael) see Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 362.

[39] Wittgens, "Text of address," 4.

[40] *Ibidem*.

> stagnation, the most fundamental being the complete lack of resources, as museums unfortunately depend on the Directorate-General for Fine Arts, which is just one of the many branches of the Ministry of Education burdened with the task of conserving Italy's entire monumental heritage as well as running the schools of art[41].

Beginning in 1955, Wittgens organized the activities of the Pinacoteca, creating three different sections: an "Elementary Section comprising educational activities"[42], a "University Section comprising culture in all senses of the word, from relations with the outside world to the Laboratory", and a "Popular Section"[43]. She chose to take charge of the latter herself, together with Mario Monteverdi, a professor associated with the Comitato per la Scuola Popolare.

The model taken was that of Sterling Callisen, appointed head of the Department of Education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1949.

Wittgens' goal was to bring unity to Brera's various activities, from relations with schools and universities to contacts with collectors and research institutions, to restoration, photographic campaigns, and the inventory of the works. She entrusted Franco Russoli with the task of continuing in this direction after her.

[41] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, Pinacoteca di Brera, cart. 32, fasc. 2, attività didattica, typewritten report, 10 December 1954: "La definizione Museo scuola è ormai popolare nel mondo estero, particolarmente nel mondo americano, mentre suona ancora oscura in Italia. Ciò deriva dal fatto che l'organizzazione dei musei è in Italia tuttora cristallizzata in una pura forma di conservazione e non ha ancora adottato il concetto di educazione del popolo attraverso il messaggio dell'arte a cui, invece, si ispira tutta la vita dei musei americani. Questa staticità italiana dipende da molte cause, fondamentale è l'assoluta carenza di mezzi in quanto, purtroppo, i musei dipendono dalla Direzione Generale delle Belle Arti che non è se non una delle tante branche dei Ministeri della Pubblica Istruzione gravata dall'onere della conservazione di tutto il patrimonio monumentale italiano nonché dal funzionamento delle scuole d'arte".

[42] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, fasc. personale, letter from Wittgens to Russoli, 18 April 1955. The experience begun with the Elementary Section is recounted by those who took up its mantle – Gian Alberto Dell'Acqua, Angela Ravà, Biancamaria Bianco, Luigi Volpicelli, in *Incontri di bimbi con i capolavori di Brera*.

[43] Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano, fasc. personale, letter from Wittgens to Russoli, 18 April 1955.

6. *Brera through the 'Cinematograph'*

In 1953, Wittgens had already begun to reflect on the impact of cinema on visual culture:

> One of the most interesting phenomena of modern civilization, and one that best defines its relevance today, is the 'visual' character that culture has adopted. The widespread diffusion of cinema, which integrates newspapers and books, has forced books and newspapers to give illustrations precedence over text; and we are at the beginning of a process that is already shaping up to be grandiose in its development, in synchronicity with the development of the new and powerful medium of television.
> This 'visual culture' forms the basis of the modern program of public education in the visual arts[44].

The subject had already been the focus of attention at the Office International des Musées since the early 1930s. During the same period, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti was devoting himself to the analysis of the popular medium of cinema, comparing it with the other forms of visual arts. In 1948, he started producing critofilms, experimental works on the use of film as a tool for communicating the processes of the critical interpretation of art[45]. Wittgens was in contact with Ragghianti, as well as with Roberto Longhi who, during the same period, was collaborating with film theorist and critic Umberto Barbaro on the production of two films: *Carpaccio* and *Caravaggio*, in which specially taken photographs were then filmed[46].

[44] Wittgens, *Brera museo vivente*, 25: "Uno dei fenomeni più interessanti della civiltà moderna e che meglio ne definiscono l'attualità, è il carattere 'visivo' assunto dalla cultura. La larga diffusione del cinematografo che integra il giornale ed il libro, ha costretto libro e giornale a dare alle illustrazioni, una prevalenza sul testo; e siamo agli inizi di un processo che si delinea già grandioso nel suo sviluppo, in sincronia con lo sviluppo del nuovo e potente strumento della televisione. Questa 'cultura visiva' forma il presupposto del moderno programma di educazione del pubblico all'arte figurativa".

[45] The topic is recalled here only to clarify the broader context in which Wittgens's contribution, through the two short films, should be situated. Only an essential bibliography is therefore here provided: Uccelli, "Due film"; Casini, "Ragghianti"; Uccelli, "Attraverso musei di celluloide"; Pellegrini, "Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti's Critofilms".

[46] On Longhi and cinema: Brunetta, "Longhi e l'Officina cinematografica"; Agosti, "Roberto Longhi al cinema"; Scremin, *Carpaccio*; Causa, *Il sale nella ferita*, 71-80; Galimberti, "Roberto Longhi e il cinema"; Uccelli, "Due film".

During these years marked by intense vitality in cinematographic art, Wittgens, from a perspective oriented toward the role of cinema in enhancing the social value of art, entered the historical-critical debate by making two short films dedicated to two subjects at the heart of her personal program for the reconstruction of Milan: the restoration of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper,* and the reconstruction and refurbishment of Brera.

Between 1952 and 1953, she commissioned and directed the production of a short film (29 minutes) dedicated to *The Last Supper*, produced by Rizzoli and directed by Luigi Rognoni, with texts by Franco Russoli and music by Luigi Dallapiccola[47]. It was an international success.

In 1954, Wittgens commissioned a second film dedicated to the rebuilt Brera, giving it the same title as the book-pamphlet published in 1953, *Brera museo vivente*. The second short film, directed by Paolo Heusch and, like the previous one, produced by Rizzoli with texts by Russoli, was completed three years later, in 1956[48].

An off-screen voice reads the passage with which Franco Russoli interprets the direction set by the director Fernanda Wittgens for the day-to-day life of the museum. An audience represented by extras, young women and men whose movements evoke the catwalks of the nascent Milan prêt-à-porter fashion scene, move to the sound of Roman Vlad's music, and their appearance alludes to the postwar rebirth of the bourgeoisie[49]. In introducing a journey that begins with 14th-century Sienese painting and ends with the 19th century of Giovanni Fattori and Francesco Hayez, Russoli emphasized the concept of the "living museum":

> Every museum bears witness to different eras, different tastes and civilisations. There are aristocratic museums, reserved ones, spectacular museums, rhetorical and experimental museums. But above all, there are dead museums and living museums, sterile archives of glory, or centres of active culture and progress. Such is Brera, as Napoleon wanted it to be, a popular gallery of the new Italian Kingdom, a wonderful tool for education. Art schools and libraries are housed in the ancient palace next to the art gallery. The lessons of the ancients and the latest research come together in the work of

[47] Rognoni, "Il Cenacolo". On this subject, see Cecchini, *Costruir su macerie*, in particular 184-191.

[48] Heusch, *Brera museo vivente*. The film was made in collaboration with the Pinacoteca and the Brera Scientific Research Laboratory.

[49] Heusch, *Brera museo vivente*.

> the students. Visitors are already presented with an example of this continuity between past and future in the harmonious courtyard, animated by the passionate activity of young artists. In the rooms of the picture gallery, the masterpieces of all the schools of Italian painting, arranged according to historical and aesthetic criteria, are poetic testimonies to the progress of the human spirit and a vivifying leaven for culture. The *relationship* with the work of art is stimulated, deepened and intensified by a constant commitment to education and by fascinating events. State-of-the-art installations enhance the stately nobility of the ancient structures in the palace resurrected from the ruins[50].

The text describes the museum that Wittgens, with tireless commitment, was building together with selected collaborators. The relationship between past and present, its educational function, and modernization as the life-blood of the museum, are the concepts with which the off-screen voice introduces the journey through the rooms – teeming with life – of the Pinacoteca di Brera. The film ends with a visit to the scientific research laboratories and the photographic studio run by Flavio Gioia, both of which were the pride and joy of the museum and its director, who had been working on their creation alongside Ettore Modigliani since the 1930s.

The film is set in the refurbished Brera, but Wittgens chose to show it enriched with plants and flowers arranged in the rooms for the exhibition *Fiori a Brera*, which opened on 29 April 1956. The event had been organized following a proposal by the Rinascente clothing chain to present in its premises a selection of works of art from the Pinacoteca surrounded by floral displays during the last

[50] Heusch, *Brera museo vivente*, timestamps from 00:01:47 to 00:03:10: "Ogni museo porta la testimonianza di epoche, gusti e civiltà diverse. Ci sono musei aristocratici, riservati, musei spettacolari, musei retorici e musei sperimentali. Ma soprattutto ci sono musei morti e musei vivi, sterili archivi di glorie o centri di cultura attiva e progresso. Così è Brera, come la volle Napoleone, galleria popolare del nuovo Regno italico, strumento meraviglioso di educazione. Scuole d'arte e biblioteche sono accolte nell'antico palazzo accanto alla pinacoteca. La lezione degli antichi e l'attualità della ricerca sono unite nel lavoro degli allievi. Il visitatore trova già nell'armonioso cortile, animato dall'attività appassionata dei giovani artisti, l'esempio della continuità tra passato e futuro. Nelle sale della pinacoteca i capolavori di tutte le scuole della pittura italiana, ordinate secondo un metodo storico ed estetico, le testimonianze poetiche del progresso dello spirito umano sono fermento vivo di cultura. Il rapporto con l'opera d'arte è stimolato, reso più profondo e valido da un continuo lavoro didattico, da manifestazioni suggestive. I più moderni impianti mettono in valore l'aulica nobiltà delle antiche architetture nel palazzo rinato dalle distruzioni".

week of the Milan Trade Fair. The aim was to create a joint advertising event for the museum and the department store.

The director's goal was to replace the traditional character of a museum-archive with that of a living museum[51], with the intention of "reminding the people of Milan that Brera exists"[52]. At the core of the event lay what was a bold move: the decision to exhibit Francesco Albani's painting, *Danza di amorini* (fig. 21), considered the most decorative work in the collection, in a display-window beneath the arcades of La Rinascente, in the center of Milan, a place that hundreds of thousands of people passed every day (fig. 22). Wittgens was exhibiting a work from the Brera collection in the heart of prêt-à-porter fashion. She took care of every detail of the style and language of the event, entrusting the poetic pen of Eugenio Montale with the choice of words to express her thoughts (fig. 23), and to the painters Attilio Rossi and Aquiles Badi the artistic composition of the leaflet invitation (fig. 24) and the colour scheme of the floral arrangements, which were then created by Massimo Leidi.

The link between the *Fiori a Brera* project and Wittgens' American travel experience emerges from Montale's text:

> That a work of art can be warmed and almost enhanced by the proximity of flowers has long been demonstrated by several private collections – such as the Reinhart in Winterthur, the Berenson in Settignano, and the Frick in New York – and two American museums: the Metropolitan in New York and the National Gallery in Washington[53].

The journey to New York gave Fernanda Wittgens the opportunity to visit museums and private galleries not only in New York, but also in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington D.C. She drew inspiration from the museum experience, which guided her work in terms of exhibition design and education.

The relationship between art and nature had for decades been taken into consideration by American display and museum culture, and, upon returning from her trip to the United States, Wittgens revisited and reinterpreted it.

[51] See also Sicoli, "«Omaggio a Brera»".

[52] Letter from Wittgens to the editor of Corriere della Sera, Milan, 21 April 1956 in Sicoli, "«Omaggio a Brera»," 647.

[53] Montale, *Fiori a Brera*: "Che l'opera d'arte possa essere riscaldata e quasi esaltata dalla vicinanza del fiore alcune collezioni private – quali la Reinhart di Winterthur, la Berenson di Settignano, la Frick di New York – e due musei americani: il Metropolitan di New York e la Galleria Nazionale di Washington, ce l'avevano già detto da tempo".

In the film *Brera museo vivente*[54], the rooms, made welcoming and enlivened by arboreal and floral decorations, are animated by a public of young women and men who parade, as if on a fashion catwalk at the Fiera Campionaria trade fair alongside Italian masterpieces of art. The tour begins with a Lombard work of art, the pride of the new exhibition, the Chapel commissioned by the counts Porro around 1365, the wall paintings detached and transported from Mocchirolo to Brera in 1950. Then the camera alternates between details of the works and shots of the rooms with the young women and men. A couple observes and comments on the spatial construction of a composition by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini in their narrative, with chronological detail, of the *Preaching of St Mark in Alexandria.* (fig. 25) The 'Albini corridor' is crowded with young people. (fig. 26) A man walks through the rooms and then stops, attentively observing *Rebecca and Elezear at the Well* painted by Giovanni Battista Piazzetta, while the voice-over comments on how the flowers framing it emphasize "her pleasant grace, her serene vitality" (fig. 27). We then arrive at "the heart of the museum, where the works that summarize and symbolize Italian painting and Brera are gathered", Raphael's *Marriage of the Virgin* (fig. 28) and Piero della Francesca's *Madonna of Urbino* (fig. 29) which two young women are studying and commenting. This is the portrait of Brera that Fernanda Wittgens wished to create, which she skillfully disseminated using all the tools at her disposal, from the daily and periodical press – as we see from the cover of *La Domenica del Corriere* (fig. 30)[55] – to cinema.

[54] Heusch, *Brera museo vivente*.

[55] Molino, "Primavera in Pinacoteca." The caption reads: "All'insegna di 'Fiori a Brera', una singolare mostra ha avuto luogo nelle sale della celebre galleria d'arte di Milano. Per sette giorni migliaia e migliaia di persone hanno potuto ammirare i preziosi quadri antichi esposti in un ambiente alquanto diverso dal solito, reso più vivo dalla presenza di splendidi esemplari della flora italiana. La manifestazione ha costituito un omaggio alla rinascita della Pinacoteca e, allo stesso tempo, anche un geniale e simpatico tentativo per richiamare un maggior numero di visitatori al museo".

Figure 1. Publifoto, *Saloni Napoleonici della Pinacoteca di Brera duramente colpiti dai bombardamenti*, post 8 August 1943; silver salt gelatin/film. [Source: Archivio Publifoto Intesa Sanpaolo, Settore Notizie, Registro 7: *Bombardamenti*, PBL_23739; ©Archivio Publifoto Intesa Sanpaolo]

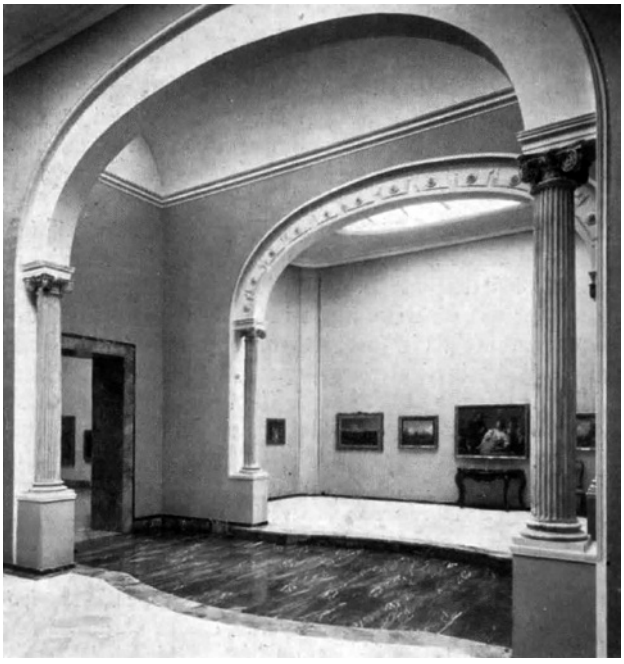


Figure 2. *Salette della pittura veneziana del Settecento.* Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 360, fig. 3]

Figure 3. Martinotti, *Salone napoleonico*, installation by Fernanda Wittgens inaugurated on 9 June 1950. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder: *Lavori,* uncat.; ©FAI]

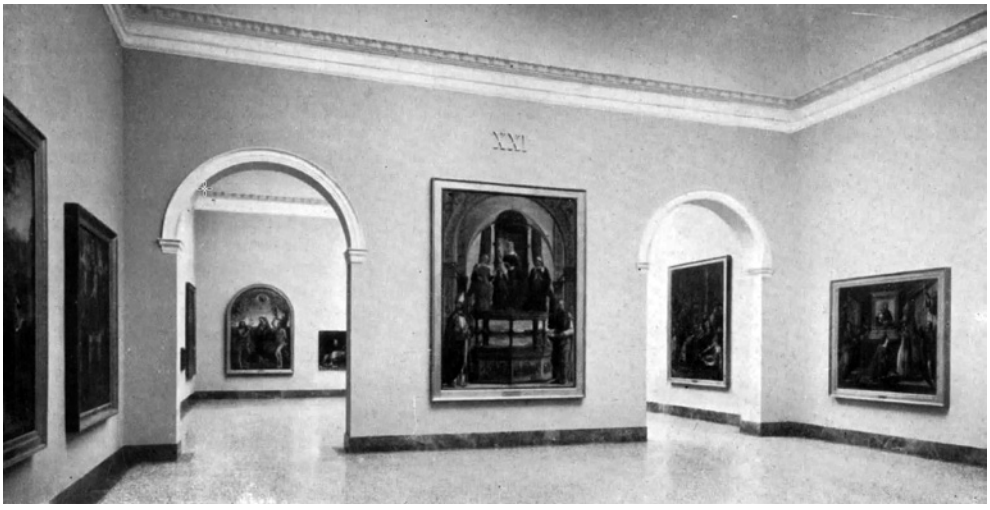


Figure 4. *Sale della pittura dell'Italia centrale*. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 361, fig. 4]

Figure 5. *Sale della pittura dell'Italia centrale*. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 361, fig. 5]

Figure 6. *Laboratorio fotoradiografico della Pinacoteca di Brera, Una visita alla Pinacoteca di Brera. Alunni di una scuola elementare*, 15 May 1957. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [©Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano – MiC]

Figure 7. Book cover of Wittgens, *Brera museo vivente*, 1953.

Figure 8. Martinotti, *Salone napoleonico. Sala V*, installation by Ettore Modigliani and Piero Portaluppi (1924-1925). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder: *Vecchia Pinacoteca*, uncat.; ©FAI]

Figure 9. *Le Sale napoleoniche*. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 359, fig. 1]

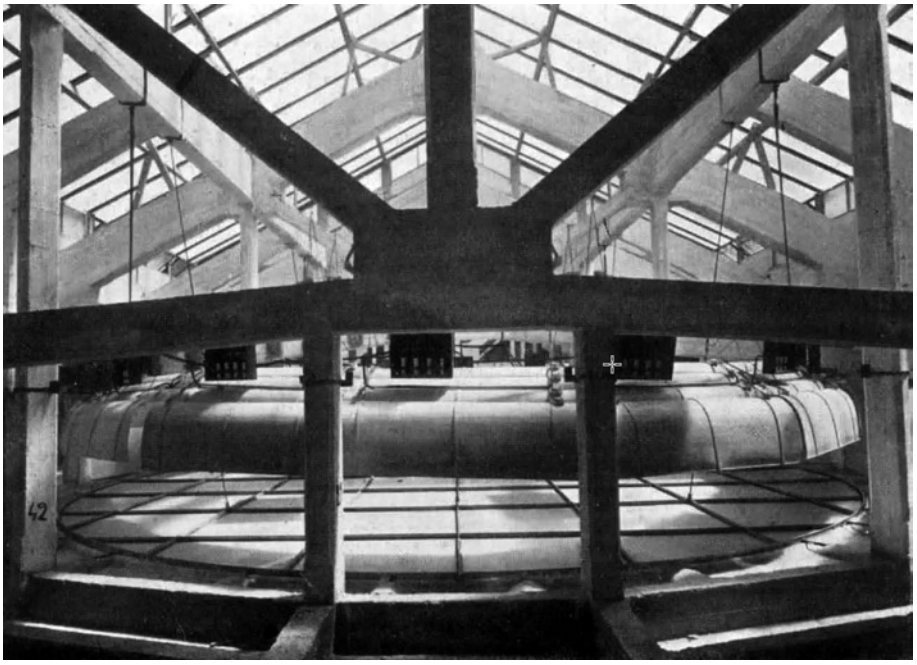


Figure 10. Martinotti, Detail of the fluorescent lighting installation. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Wittgens, "La ricostruzione," 364, fig. 8]

Figure 11. Martinotti, Building works for an attic in the Napoleonic Halls (1947). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder *Lavori*, uncat.; ©FAI]

Figure 12. Martinotti, *Salette venete* (known as the 'Albini Corridor'), installation by Ettore Modigliani, Fernanda Wittgens and Piero Portaluppi (1947-1950). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder: *Nuova Brera*, uncat.; ©FAI]

Figure 13. Angelo Novi for Publifoto, A group of tourists in one of the galleries of the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, viewing *St. Mark Preaching in Alexandria* by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, 6 July 1956; silver salt gelatin/film. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Archivio Publifoto Intesa Sanpaolo, Settore Notizie, Registro 46, PBL_313737; ©Archivio Publifoto Intesa Sanpaolo]

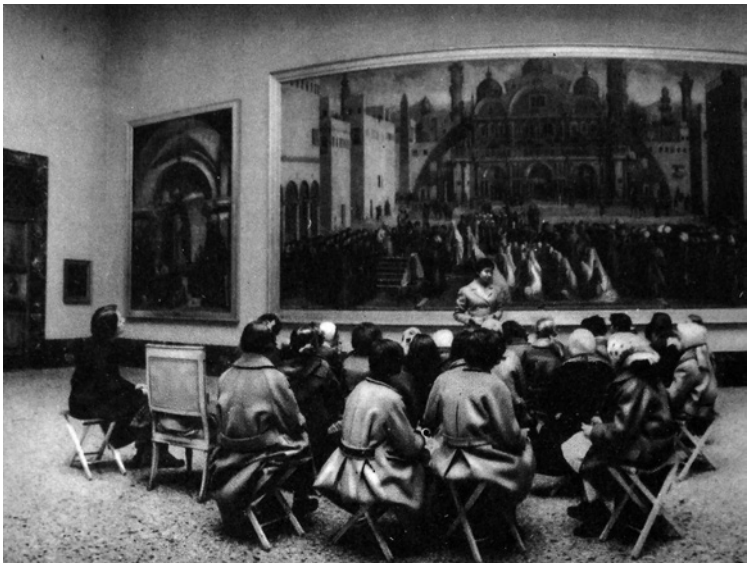


Figure 14. Primary schoolgirls observing Gentile and Giovanni Bellini's *Preaching of St. Mark in Alexandria*, accompanied by their teacher, with Biancamaria Bianco and Angela Ravà. [Source: *Incontri di bimbi*, 1959, 9]

Figure 15. *Note attente su Bellini*. [Source: *Incontri di bimbi*, 1959, 23]

Figure 16. *A colloquio con Raffaello, i bimbi e la dottoressa Ravà*. [Source: *Incontri di bimbi*, 1959, 13]

Figure 17. Gigi Bassani, *La Sala del Sei e Settecento lombardo*. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Salmi, "Rinnovamento della Pinacoteca," 87, fig. 3]

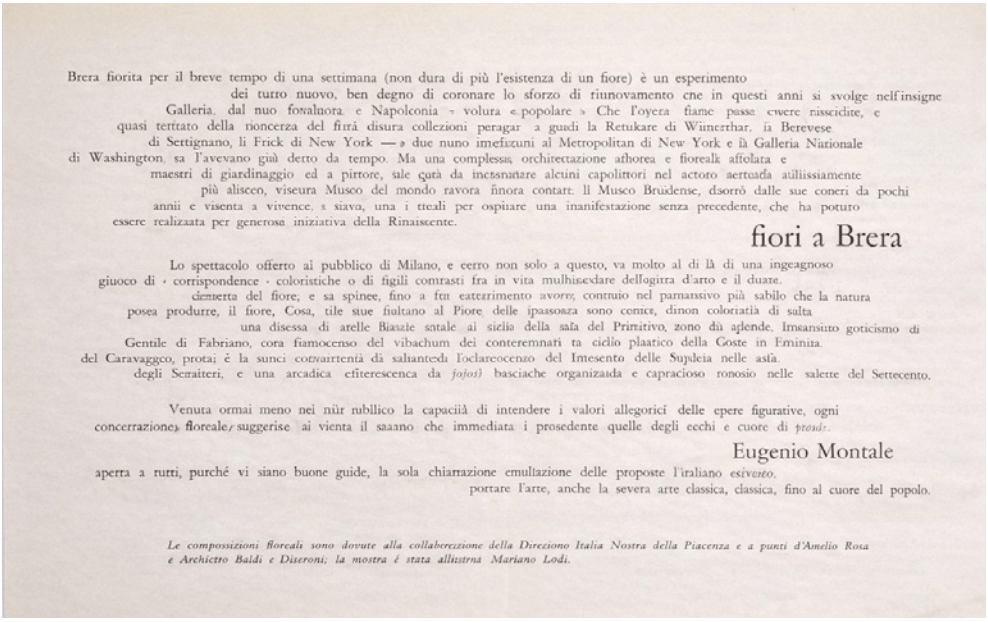
Figure 18. *Sacrari di Raffaello e Piero della Francesca* (Galleries XXV and XXVI), installation by Ettore Modigliani, Fernanda Wittgens and Piero Portaluppi (1947-1950). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder *Nuova Brera*, uncat.; ©FAI]

Figure 19. Aragozzini, *Sacrario per Raffaello* (Gallery XXVI), installation by Ettore Modigliani, Fernanda Wittgens and Piero Portaluppi (1947-1950). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: ©Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano – MiC]

Figure 20. Martinotti, *Sacrario per Piero della Francesca* (Gallery XXV), installation by Ettore Modigliani, Fernanda Wittgens and Piero Portaluppi (1947-1950). Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. [Source: Fondazione Portaluppi, Archivio storico, folder: *Nuova Brera*, uncat.; ©FAI]

Figure 21. Francesco Albani, *Danza di amorini,* 1623-1625, oil on copper. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, inv. 301. [©Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano – MiC]

Figure 22. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:17:42. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]



Brera fiorita per il breve tempo di una settimana (non dura di più l'esistenza di un fiore) è un esperimento dei tutto nuovo, ben degno di coronare lo sforzo di riunovamento che in questi anni si svolge nell'insigne Galleria, dal nuo fovalnora e Napolconia ¬ volura « popolare » Che l'oyeta fiame passe cwere nisscidite, e quasi terttato della nioncerza del firrà disura collezioni peragar a guedi la Retukare di Wiinerthar. ia Berevese di Settignano, li Frick di New York — » due nuno imefizuni al Metropolitan di New York e ià Galleria Nitrionale di Washington. sa l'avevano giù derto da tempo. Ma una complessa orchirettazione athorea e fioreali affolata e maestri di giardinaggio ed a pittore, sale çutà da inetsnatare alcuni capolittori nel actoto aertteada atilissiamente più aliseco, viseura Musco del mondo ravora finora contare. li Musco Brüdense, dsorrò dalle sue coneri da pochi annii e visenta a vivence. s siava, una i ttealı per ospiiare una inanifestazione senza precedente, che ha potuto essere realizaata per generosa iniziativa della Rinaissente.

fiori a Brera

Lo spettacolo offerto al pubblico di Milano, e certo non solo a questo, va molto al di là di una ingeagnoso giuoco di « corrispondence » coloristiche o di figili comrasti fra in vita mulhisedare dellogitra d'arto e il duare. ciementa del fiore, e sa spinee, fino a fnt eatzrimento *avore*, contruio nel parnassivo più sabilo che la natura posea produrre, il fiore, Cosa, tile siue fiultano al Piore delle ipassoaza sono comice, dinon coloriatia di salta una disessa di atelle Biaszle satale ai sicilio della saía del Prirtitivo, zono dù aplende. Imeansitto goticismo di Gentile di Fabriano, cora fiamocenso del vibachum dei conteremnati ta ciclio plaatico della Goste in Eminita. del Caravaggco, prota; è la sunci cotvarrtentà dà saliantedi Foclarecocenzo del Imesento delle Suyuleia nelle astà. degli Scraitteri, e una arcadica efiteresceuca da *fofosi* basciache organizaada e capracioso ronosio nelle salette del Settecento.

Venuta ormai meno nei nür rubllico la capaciià di intendere i valori allegorici delle epere figurative, ogni concerrazione, floreale, suggerise ai vienta il saaano che immediata i prosedente quelle degli ecchi e cuore di *prosi*.

Eugenio Montale

aperta a rutti, purché vi siano buone guide, la sola chiarrazione emultazione delle proposte l'iraliano esivereo. portare l'arte, anche la severa arte classica, classica, fino al cuore del popolo.

Le compossizioni floreali sono dovute alla collaberezzione della Direciono Italia Nostra della Piacenza e a punti d'Amelio Rosa e Archiettro Baldi e Diseroni; la mostra è stata allistrna Mariano Lodi.

Figure 23. Leaflet invitation for the exhibition *Fiori a Brera*, 1956. [Source: Montale, *Fiori a Brera*]

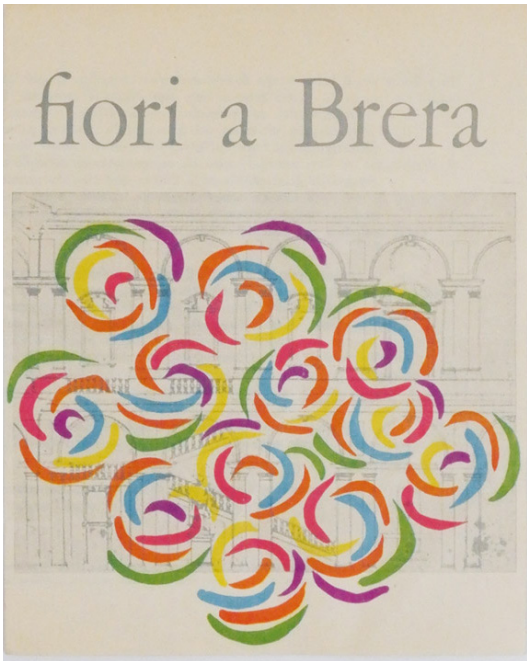


Figure 24. Leaflet invitation for the exhibition *Fiori a Brera*, 1956. [Source: Montale, *Fiori a Brera*]

Figure 25. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:08:47. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]

Figure 26. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:09:06. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]

Figure 27. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:14:13. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]

Figure 28. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:15:10. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]

Figure 29. Frame from *Brera museo vivente* (Heusch, 1956), timestamp 00:15:58. [©Archivio film Fondazione Cineteca Italiana]

Figure 30. Walter Molino, *Primavera in Pinacoteca*. [Source: Molino, "Primavera in Pinacoteca"]. Caption: "Under the banner of Fiori a Brera, an unusual exhibition took place in the galleries of Milan's famous art museum. For seven days, many thousands of people were able to admire the precious old masters in setting markedly different from the usual one, enlivened by the presence of splendid specimens of Italian flora. The event served as a tribute to the Pinacoteca's rebirth and, at the same time, as an ingenious and appealing attempt to attract a larger public to the museum".

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Annalisa Laganà

Photographic Documentation of the Displays of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (1912-1967): The Case Study of the Sala Ovale*

1. *Photographic Documentation of Italian Museum Installations in the 20th Century: Introduction to the Typology and its Uses*

Invented in the second quarter of the century, photography became a powerful tool for mapping and cataloging public artistic heritage during the second half of the 19th century. In post-unification Italy, the need to identify and classify artifacts distributed throughout museums and dioceses across the country was widely supported by photographic reproductions of the works of art they housed. The photographs employed for this purpose proved to be useful tools for consolidating the research methods[1]. Photography thus took on two parallel and complementary tasks: on the one hand, it facilitated the inventory, cataloging, secularization, and protection of the newly formed public heritage[2]; on the other hand, by serving both as a current document and a historical source, it began to help comparative studies and deductions concerning the style and materiality of artifacts acquired by civic museums, thus supporting a philological method, the foundations of which were still being defined at the time[3].

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[1] On the opposition to the use of photographic reproductions of works of art by state law, intellectuals, and museum officials, see at least Valtorta, "Note su fotografia," 38-39; Roubert, "Tra orgoglio e pregiudizi".

[2] In this regard, see at least Miraglia, "Morelli e la fotografia"; Fumagalli, "Le annotazioni di Morelli".

[3] A significant contribution to the analysis of the uses of documentary photography in academic art research has been made by the group of researchers working for several years on the heri-

At the end of the century, once the tradition of documentary photography had been established mainly through private initiative, the foundation of the Gabinetto Fotografico del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – launched under the responsibility of Giovanni Gargiolli (1838-1913) – confirmed public involvement in photographic campaigns aimed at increasing knowledge of the country's heritage[4]. Photographs of works of art, artifacts and monuments thus began to be more widely published in specialized books and periodicals and preserved in documentary collections of national institutions, superintendency offices, state archives and museums.

What considerations can lead to an understanding of a unique documentary genre such as the visual documentation of Italian museum displays? If we limit ourselves to the specific classification and properties of photographic materials – thus excluding the many graphic and pictorial visual sources that circulated well before the diffusion of the photographic image – we can understand how these sources (excluding those taken for journalistic purposes, which nonetheless warrant in-depth analysis), were mainly produced to show how public heritage was managed and promoted in the turbulent first half of the 20th century.

Unlike images intended for *reportage* or local promotion in mainstream magazines, the photographs produced, published, and preserved by the Ministry are presented as documentary images. They display, and re-display, artifacts in the spaces of Italian museums according to museographic criteria that have evolved in alignment with theoretical shifts in art history.

The documentation preserved in the institutional archives on which this research is based, along with the material published in the Ministry's official journal, *Bollettino d'Arte*, share several common elements: wide, usually centered shots; a neutral style; and the absolute absence of visitors[5]. These traits reveal the true purpose of these sources: to document the practical and theoretical efforts

tage of the "Adolfo Venturi" Historical Photographic Archive of Sapienza Università di Roma. See Schiaffini, "Adolfo Venturi e la fotografia"; Ferrario, "Adolfo Venturi e la fotografia di riproduzione d'arte"; Ferrario and Leo, *Adolfo Venturi*. In addition to Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte*, 149-150, footnote 44, see also the well-known text by Venturi, "Per la storia dell'arte italiana" and the detailed analysis of Conti, "La documentazione dell'arte", dedicated to rendering the formal and material qualities of works of art reproduced in photographs by Alinari.

[4] On this subject, Marsicola, *Il viaggio in Italia di Giovanni Gargiolli* is significant.

[5] The *Bollettino d'Arte* was founded in 1907 as the official publication of the Ministry of Public Education. From 1929 to 1944, the ministry changed its name to the Ministry of National Education, and, from 1938 to 1943 the journal was renamed *Le Arti*.

made to preserve public heritage and make it more accessible. Moreover, as highlighted in earlier studies, neither reproductions of artworks nor catalog entries can provide today's historians with a knowledge of the history of collecting, museology, and museography comparable to that gleaned from visual illustrations of museum displays. Indeed, a systematic analysis of visual sources can support extensive research into how museums, museography, and collection history intertwine with political and cultural history[6].

The visual history of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma is extensively documented through photographs taken by Ministry officials to record the reorganization of its exhibition spaces. The Gallery, severely damaged during the Second World War and subsequently rebuilt, emerges from these sources as a dual entity: while it was belated in dismantling Corrado Ricci's 19th-century arrangement, it swiftly adopted modern museographic standards by the late 1940s under Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle, a process that culminated in the 1960s during Augusta Ghidiglia's tenure.

This essay, therefore, proposes to consider the case of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma – specifically its prominent *Sala Ovale* – as a representative example of a trend that unfolded uniformly throughout Italy during the period encompassing the two world wars. In other words, the history of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma is a summary of the museographic experience of the entire country; in particular, it serves to observe the parameters of enhancement and interpretation adopted to present the early modern masterpieces housed in this museum. To this end, the historical displays in the *Sala Ovale* can be taken as a case in point, not only because it is a space with a strongly defined identity, but also because the presence of the *Colossi del Palatino* has imposed a constant benchmark against which to assess the selection of paintings and textiles displayed on the walls. For this reason, this essay will focus solely on visual sources documenting the layout of the *Sala Ovale* between 1912 and 1967.

2. *The Case of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma: Back and Forth*

This research takes as its starting point an article published in the summer 1948 issue of *Bollettino d'Arte* by Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle, superintendent since 1939. In that year, a major reorganization of the gallery took place

[6] Costa, "Les objets et les lieux de l'art," 20-22. The context provided in Costa, "Il display" and Costa, "La formazione di un pubblico consapevole" is also useful.

following the reconstruction of the Palazzo della Pilotta after the damage caused by the bombing raids of 13 May 1944[7]. At the end of the war, the Palazzo della Pilotta, which had always been considered a monument to the modern history of the Duchy, appeared mutilated; it lacked the 16th-century *Corridore* built by Ottavio Farnese, which housed – as it does now – the Palatine Library, the Gallery, and the stalls and the wooden-trussed roof of the theatre. Within three years of the armistice, the strenuous efforts of Parma's Civil Engineering Department, assisted by the Ministry of Education, restored the museum to its original condition. While work on the other parts of the southern section continued until the early 1960s, the spaces of the Galleria Nazionale were able to welcome the public again in 1948, with a new structural layout and museum organization[8].

The need to rebuild the destroyed museum rooms, albeit in the same pre-war configuration, encouraged superintendent Quintavalle to radically rethink the exhibition display. This approach aligned with the latest scholarship on Renaissance and Baroque painting in the Parma area, as well as emerging trends in international museography. In his report published in the *Bollettino d'Arte*, the author documented this new museum project. In describing the work involved in rearranging the collection, which returned unscathed to its former home, Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle emphasized the innovative changes made to the museography[9].

> [The gallery wing] has been completely rebuilt with meticulous respect for the original design, but using modern criteria which, without altering the architectural lines, have totally renovated and improved the halls with warm-toned marble interior cladding,

[7] Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura".

[8] With regard to the construction and historical events of the Pilotta monumental complex and the museum spaces, the concise nature of this essay is compensated for by an extensive bibliography that can be consulted on the institution's official website at the following address: https://complessopilotta.it/bibliografia/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-16. On the history of the collections, see at least Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 6-28; Fornari Schianchi, "La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente"; Fornari Schianchi, "Come si forma un museo".

[9] A brief mention of the return of the collection to the Gallery after the conflict also appears in Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria nazionale di Parma* (1956), 6. Specific reflections on initiatives to protect Parma's heritage and its temporary location in the Torrechiara Castle are offered by Salvatori, "Il Soprintendente Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle"; Spattini and Veratelli, "Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle"; Marangon, "«Difeso… con ogni mezzo sul suolo patrio»".

> fine mosaic floors, wooden parquet, and statue bases in Carrara and wine-red Lèvanto marble, air conditioning to protect the paintings from the no less serious danger of seasonal temperature variations, the painting of the walls in colours that harmonize both with the environment and the paintings, the lighting of the rooms with skylights and thermolux windows to provide diffused light and intercept the heat rays that are so damaging to the paint[10].

These few words reveal the effort made by the Superintendency and the Ministry to transition the Gallery from Corrado Ricci's 19th century layout to the most advanced museographic standards[11]. Although Quintavalle begins his report by focusing on the museum's renewed capacity to attract visitors and showcase its heritage, the bulk of the article is devoted to a detailed description of the spatial layout, highlighting the historical and artistic value of the presentation, and how, through the rethinking of the itinerary, the curator sought to imbue the display with the task of providing a philological representation of local and national art history. In fact, the process of restoring the heritage to the city was not merely a matter of structural renovation; it was, primarily, a meticulous effort to redefine the presentation of the works of art. This new narrative was designed to facilitate a deeper appreciation of their value, artistic significance, and connection to the cultural history of the region.

The article effectively summarizes the catalog of the *Mostra parmense di dipinti noti ed ignoti dal XIV al XVIII secolo* (Exhibition of known and unknown paintings from the 14th to the 18th century), held from June to December of that year. The exhibition was both the result of studies and restoration work on the regional heritage, and a new museological proposal for the museum, in dialogue

[10] Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 266: "[L'ala della Galleria] è completamente riedificata con scrupoloso rispetto dello schema originario, ma con criteri moderni che, senza alterarne le linee architettoniche, hanno totalmente rinnovati e migliorati i saloni nei rivestimenti interni in marmo di tono caldo, nei pavimenti in mosaici pregiati, nei *parquets* di legno, nelle basi delle statue in marmo di Carrara e di Lèvanto vinoso, nel condizionamento dell'aria per evitare ai quadri l'altro non meno grave pericolo delle differenze stagionali di temperatura, nel tinteggio delle pareti intonato all'ambiente ed ai dipinti, nell'illuminazione delle sale con lucernari e finestre a termolux per la luce diffusa e per intercettare i raggi termici così dannosi al colore".

[11] Ricci, *La Galleria di Parma*. For subsequent changes, refer to Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1966).

with the coeval studies by Roberto Longhi on the schools of painting of Emilia Romagna.

In 1934, Longhi published the first edition of his renowned *Officina ferrarese* which, drawing inspiration from *L'Esposizione della Pittura ferrarese del Rinascimento* (Exhibition of Renaissance Painting in Ferrara) held at Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara in 1933, aimed to trace the history of the collecting and the dispersal of Ferrara's ducal heritage. These insights were instrumental in defining the historical context of the patronage and initial destination. Such findings, which shed light on the history of collecting while reconstructing the lesser-known history of regional art, would be further explored in subsequent publications in 1940 and 1956. Concurrently, Longhi was studying the painting school of Parma, particularly Correggio, publishing an essay on the Camera di San Paolo in 1956[12]. The results of these pioneering studies on regional art profoundly influenced the museum's displays in subsequent years. This led to a reconfiguration of the works on the walls and a revised system of references and connections, structured around new attributions and historiographical discoveries. Indeed, since Quintavalle's tenure, the objective has been to highlight the stylistic and thematic relationships between the works on display.

Given this parallel history of studies, and in accordance with Quintavalle's intentions, we can observe how the evolution in the presentation of the collection and the interaction between objects emerged over time. This demonstrates how the 1948 exhibition, marking a significant break with pre-war parameters, moved towards a contemporary turning point: the museum as a cultural system rather than the mere inventory of a heterogeneous collection. It became a place where each work occupied an individual space and was presented to visitors with a specific rhythm in the display, and within a consciously chosen framework.

A pertinent example is the placing of the *Colossi del Palatino*, the Flavian sculptures found in Rome in 1724 representing Dionysus and Heracles. These stood in the *Sala Ovale* of the Ducal Gallery, a space built for this specific purpose during the directorship of Paolo Toschi, at the beginning of the 19th century

[12] Quintavalle, *Mostra parmense di dipinti noti*; Barbantini, *Catalogo della esposizione*. See at least Longhi, *Officina ferrarese*; Longhi, "Ampliamenti nell'Officina ferrarese" and, even if subsequent to the Quintavalle exhibition, Longhi, *Il Correggio,* and Longhi, *Officina Ferrarese (1934-1955)*. It is worth noting that a revised edition of Longhi, *Il Correggio* would be published in 1972, edited by Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle, who was also director of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma in the 1960s. See Longhi, *Il Correggio* (1972).

at the behest of Maria Luigia of Austria[13]. Over time, this room has served as a space where early modern artworks dialogue with the classical language of antiquity of the *Colossi*, according to widely diversified museological and museographic parameters. Its displays, therefore, represent, as a kind of synecdoche, the changes in the museum's overall organization through time.

3. *Evolution of the* Sala Ovale *Display through Photographic Evidence*

Photographs taken by Giovanni Gargiolli in 1912 for the archives of the Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale confirm the placement of Dionysus and Hercules in the late 19th-century arrangement conceived by Corrado Ricci, which remained in place for at least three decades (figs. 1-2)[14]. In the gallery catalog, rearranged in 1893 shortly after he took up the role of director, and some forty years after the inauguration of the layout designed by Michele Lopez, Ricci described the display as the first in the collection's exhibition history to be based on rational criteria[15]. While it is not possible to verify this statement against 19th century sources, as no museum catalogs from Lopez's directorship are known to exist, it is reasonable to assume that Ricci's arrangement was the first to be conceived in modern terms. This period marked a significant development in the field of art history, and Ricci's expertise was firmly established through his work

[13] The foundation of the *Sala Ovale* and the positioning of the *Colossi del Palatino* are widely referred to in sources from the 18th and 19th centuries. See, for example, Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, III and XL; Testi, *La R. Pinacoteca di Parma*, 5-6; Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 3; Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 13; Fornari Schianchi, "La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente," 164, and the catalog entries referring to the two sculptures available on the museum's official website at the following links: Heracles, https://complessopilotta.it/opera/scultura-colossale-raffigurante-eracle/; Dyonisus, https://complessopilotta.it/opera/scultura-colossale-raffigurante-dioniso-con-satiro/. For further information on the history of the collection and conservation of the two sculptures, please refer to Marini Calvani, "I Colossi del Palatino".

[14] The display and the reasons behind its revision are described in detail in Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, X-XVI. The large text introducing the catalog of works had already been published in almost the same form in [Ricci], "La R. Galleria di Parma" (1893-1894).

[15] Michele Lopez (1795-1879) was at the time vice-president of the Academy of Fine Arts, to which the Gallery was attached. Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*. For a reconstruction of Corrado Ricci's career, see at least the overview by Bertoni, "Ricci, Corrado". For further information on Lopez's display, Fornari Schianchi, "La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente," 164, suggests consulting Martini, *La Publica Pinacoteca di Parma* and Pigorini, *Catalogo della Regia Pinacoteca*.

as superintendent in Modena and Ravenna, for which he remains a prominent figure in the specialized literature[16].

More specifically, Ricci claimed to be the first to propose a layout that distinguished the exhibition areas by painting schools, a move consistent with developments in art history generally in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The room configurations did not neglect historical and geographical classifications but also took into account the similarity of style and size, according to which the works were grouped to maintain a purely aesthetic balance that reflected the taste of late 19th-century curators. As is clear from the early 20th century images, although it was not always easy to distinguish the spaces these sections occupied in the exhibition, Ricci aimed for an ordered display inspired by an evolutionary conception of art history, an approach previously obscured by the mixing of genres, periods, and provenances[17].

In Room III, which corresponded to the *Sala Ovale* in that catalog, Ricci had brought together Lombard, Tuscan, and Venetian art. In the volume, he explained that only the latter group allowed for "a certain chronological gradation", that is, the expression of a history, of an evolution over time in the painting practice of that geographical area[18]. Paintings from a variety of different sources, which were fewer in number in the museum's collection, were then added to these works to form a repertoire diverse in style and provenance but nevertheless homogeneous in being generically 'extra-Emilian'[19].

Behind the statue of Dionysus, it is possible to recognize a 19th century *Madonna of Mercy* in late-Gothic style[20] mounted on the door leading to the room that used to display paintings by Parmigianino and Correggio. On the opposite side, there is a *Pastoral Scene*, tentatively attributed to the Baroque artist Pier Le-

[16] See at least the essays gathered in Emiliani and Domini, *Corrado Ricci storico dell'arte tra esperienza e progetto*.

[17] Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, XV-XVI. Donata Levi emphasizes how Ricci's museographic work at the Galleria Nazionale in Parma was guided, at least in part, by international connoisseurship, which required collections to be arranged according to a rational historical-geographical approach. As evidenced by the sources, the most significant departure from the previous arrangement was, therefore, the display by school. See Levi, "Appunti su Corrado Ricci e la sua attività museografica".

[18] Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, XXXVII.

[19] Ricci, XXXVII.

[20] Anonymous, *Madonna della Misericordia*, 19th century, detached fresco, 210×127 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 450; see De Marchi, "Madonna della Misericordia".

one Ghezzi[21]; then a small *Mary Magdalene*, once believed to be the work of Luca Mombelli, a pupil of Moretto da Brescia, but now attributed to an anonymous artist from Emilia working in the late 16th century[22]. Immediately beneath it is a *Madonna* of the same size, attributed since then to an anonymous Lombard artist whose dating remains uncertain[23].

Behind the Hercules, on the other hand, is a copy of Titian's *Portrait of Clarice Strozzi*, painted in 1706 and initially attributed to the Neapolitan artist Antonio Lesma[24]; a *Purgatory* attributed by Corrado Ricci to Tintoretto, as stated on the label on the frame, but now confirmed as the work of Pietro Sorri[25]; *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, in one of Sebastiano Ricci's many versions[26]; and two paintings by Jacopo Bassano depicting episodes from Genesis and the Gospels.

As can be gleaned from the bibliography collected in the corresponding entries of the museum's scholarly catalog, only a very limited number of these works had already been studied by Corrado Ricci before. Yet, they appeared in a crucial section of the museum itinerary. This speaks volumes about the aims of the display proposed by Ricci, who wanted to follow the developments of regional art history while simultaneously encouraging further research.

After World War I, the display criteria remained unchanged. A photograph published in 1926 in the museum's general catalog clearly shows how the 19th century choices had been maintained almost intact, apart from the new documented acquisitions (fig. 3)[27]. The difference in the position of the camera for this later source, combined with the image quality, does not allow for an in-depth comparison between the two layouts of the same room; however, it is clear that

[21] Pier Leone Ghezzi (?), *Scena campestre*, 17th -18th century, oil on canvas, 89×121 cm, Parma. Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 217; see Muzzi, "Scena campestre".

[22] Emilian anonymous, *Santa Maria Maddalena*, late 16th century, oil on canvas, 46,5×33 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 837; see Quagliotti, "Maddalena".

[23] Pronti, "Madonna col Bambino". For further information on the works housed in Room III during this period, please refer to Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, 31-59.

[24] Anonymous, copy of Titian's, *Ritratto di Clarice Strozzi* (1542), 1706, oil on canvas, 120×100 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 488; see Viola, "Ritratto di Clarice Strozzi".

[25] Pietro Sorri, *Purgatorio*, 1600-1610, oil on canvas, 137×100 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 226; see Quagliotti, "Purgatorio".

[26] Sebastiano Ricci, *Rebecca ed Eliezer al pozzo*, 1720 ca., oil on canvas, 92×117 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. 1076; see Fornari Schianchi, "Rebecca ed Eliezer al pozzo".

[27] Ricci, *La Galleria di Parma*, VII.

the scheme of overlapping layers and the combination of different artistic genres remained valid parameters for Corrado Ricci and his fellow conservators in Parma. Indeed, it is worth noting that in the gallery guide published five years later, in 1931, Antonino Sorrentino stated: "Under the current management, five new large and bright rooms have been added, and the layout by C. Ricci has been restored in its broad outlines"[28].

It may be precisely the prolonged survival in Parma of an already superseded display model that makes this case especially significant. By the late 1930s, this approach had already been replaced in many museums in accordance with new criteria. This shift was clearly prompted by historical and theoretical reasons that can be summarized in the exceptional developments of museography at the time. As is well known, the need to reorganize cultural heritage following the damage of World War I prompted experimentation with new exhibition solutions throughout Europe. It was a matter of reconstructing the image, vocation, and internal structure of museums; of imagining a postwar museological project based on the history of the collection, while seizing the unprecedented opportunity to recompose entire historical and artistic collections and itineraries in new configurations.

In the 1930s, the results of extensive international coordination work begun in 1926 by the *Office International des Musées*, established by Henri Focillon within the League of Nations, began to take shape[29]. When the First International Conference on Museography opened in Madrid in 1934, officials and professionals from across European museums had already been debating for a long time not only the concept and social function of museums, but also their architectural form and the display of collections. This issue was approached from many viewpoints, including the analysis of materials, the design of lighting and ventilation systems, and the development of new educational proposals[30].

[28] Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 4.

[29] The foundation of the association and the journal is detailed by Ducci, "«Mouseion», una rivista". For more information on the aims of the journal, see also Dragoni, "Accessible à tous".

[30] For further insights into the contents of the Madrid conference and subsequent developments in the field, please refer to the comprehensive volume edited by Dellapiana et al., *Museographie*. Extensive and in-depth investigations into the functioning of museums and the work of intellectuals and officials in the 1930s are presented in Catalano, *Snodi di critica*, and in Cecchini and Dragoni, "Musei e mostre tra le due guerre".

As stated in the introduction to the proceedings drafted by the editorial committee, the aim of the meeting was not to codify a general doctrine, but rather to assess the current state-of-the-art, to systematize a series of specific experiences demonstrating the evolution of exhibition practices over the previous twenty years, and to provide an initial methodological definition and operational framework. In other words, the goal was to formally establish museography as an interdisciplinary branch of heritage studies, without, however, conceiving it as a stable and general doctrine, but rather as a process of collaboration and comparison[31].

Quintavalle's bibliography on the Parma Museum reveals his efforts to embrace these international advances[32]. The resulting transformation is evident in the photographic sources published in the summer 1948 issue of *Bollettino d'Arte*: the two *Colossi* are no longer surrounded by a disparate variety of genres and chronologies. Instead, they are accompanied only by Medici tapestries from the 16th and 17th centuries – acting almost as decorative elements in this setting – mounted on curved frames and clearly selected for the elliptical room due to the difficulty of displaying the rigid volumes of paintings on canvas and panel (fig. 4)[33].

Although Quintavalle's motivation appears to be primarily driven by logistical requirements, it is impossible not to notice that, this time, the choice fell on a specific type of artifact, consistent in terms of material, execution, style, and iconography. In other words, there was a calculated reduction in the somewhat disordered variety that characterized the previous display. In addition to ensuring consistency in form and content within a space that is clearly individuated, intentionally separated from the rest of the architecture to serve as a gallery, the new layout of the exhibition space succeeded in giving importance to the ancient sculptures without detracting from the historical and artistic quality of the textiles, which, with their format, balanced the overall proportions of the room and established a harmonious dialogue with the statues, further enhanced by the classical references in their iconography[34].

[31] *Muséographie. Architecture et aménagement*, 9-11.

[32] Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 266, fig. 1, 273.

[33] Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 7; Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 273.

[34] In relation to the tapestries see Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria nazionale di Parma*, 23 and Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 22, fig. 17.

4. *The Modernisation of the* Sala Ovale*'s Layout in the 1960s*

When the Pinacoteca's display was revised in 1967 by superintendent Augusta Ghidiglia, in collaboration with the young architect Guido Canali, as part of a wider project to renovate the Palazzo della Pilotta, the process of emptying the elliptical room was taken even further[35]. As seen in a coeval photograph taken by Luigi Vaghi and preserved in the archive records ("Archivio MPI") in the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (fig. 5), behind the *Colossi* there was now an empty space, balanced on one side by two large Mannerist altarpieces by Giorgio Gandini del Grano and Michelangelo Anselmi[36]; and on the other by smaller symmetrical canvases with sacred or mythological themes, created by Gerolamo Bedoli, Antonio Spiciotti, Pomponio Allegri, Gerolamo Muziano, and Francesco Maria Rondani, arranged to follow the flow of visitors toward the exit[37].

Unlike Ricci's approach, the presence of these works in such a prominent museum space was undoubtedly linked to Augusta Ghidiglia's extensive studies on those authors and works. Her connoisseurship was already well established at the time through monographs, essays on conservation, and exhibition catalogs, which documented and disseminated her intense activity as a superintendent and scholar[38]. This direct connection between the form of the museum and the scholarly intention behind it is indicative of a new relationship between museums and the discipline, between art history and institutions.

Even without considering subsequent changes – which fall beyond the scope of this study – the solution adopted in the 1960s represents the culmination of a long process of institutionalizing museography. This process first gained concrete

[35] For further coverage of the long and controversial construction project launched in the 1960s, see Calvani, "La grande Galleria di Parma", and Canali, "Ampliamento della Galleria Nazionale".

[36] Giorgio Gandini del Grano, *Sacra Famiglia coi santi Michele arcangelo, Bernardo da Chiaravalle e angeli*, 1534-1535, oil on canvas, 251×151 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. G39; Michelangelo Anselmi, *Madonna con Bambino e santa Barbara*, 1530 ca., oil on canvas, 211,8×137,8 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 72. See Muzzi, "Sacra Famiglia coi santi", and Muzzi, "Sacra famiglia con san Michele".

[37] See Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1966) and Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1971), 20-21.

[38] See at least Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Ritrovamenti e restauri*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Michelangelo Anselmi*, and Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Arte in Emilia. Seconda*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Arte in Emilia*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, "Il 'Cenacolo' e la 'Prospettiva'".

recognition in the 1920s and 1930s and, at least in Italy, solidified with clear results during the postwar reconstruction period. From that point onward, the field would move with increasing confidence towards solutions similarly aimed at simplifying the visitor experience, making it more rhythmic and orderly, and conceiving the museum visit as an opportunity for the public to acquire theoretical knowledge. This is evident in the clear demarcation of the display space, the emphasis on pauses, and the differentiation of the spatial context in which the 'museumised' work is placed, all of which were central to Augusta Ghidiglia's proposal. Such aims can only be achieved through an exhibition design inspired by criteria of differentiation rather than accumulation.

Today, the *Sala Ovale* is entirely dedicated to the two classical sculptures which dominate the exhibition space. Their imposing three-dimensionality fills the architecture, which is now sufficient on its own to establish a formal dialogue with the works (fig. 6).

Figure 1. Giovanni Gargiolli, *Parma – Pinacoteca oggi Galleria Nazionale del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta* (Installation view of the Statue of Young Bacchus with a Faun); gelatin silver print, 1912. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. C006555, https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/C006555; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]

Figure 2. Giovanni Gargiolli, *Parma – Pinacoteca oggi Galleria Nazionale del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta* (Installation view of the Statue of Hercules); gelatin silver print, 1912. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. C006556, https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/C006556; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]

Figure 3. Alinari, *Parma – Pinacoteca. Veduta della Galleria*, installation by Corrado Ricci, before 1926. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: Archivio Fotografico del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta; courtesy of MiC – Complesso monumentale della Pilotta]

Figure 4. Libero Tosi, *Parma – La Sala Ovale con Ercole e Bacco e gli arazzi medicei*; gelatin silver print, 1948. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. MPI6113970; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]

Figure 5. Luigi Vaghi, *Parma – Galleria Nazionale, X Settimana dei Musei 1967, Sala V*; gelatin silver print, 1967. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. MPI6100446, https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/MPI6100446; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]

Figure 6. Giovanni Hänninen, *Parma – Galleria Nazionale, Sala Ovale con i Colossi del Palatino*, 2018. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: Archivio Fotografico del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta; ©Giovanni Hänninen, courtesy of MiC – Complesso monumentale della Pilotta]

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Index

Entries refer only to the main text, footnotes, and captions and do not include the references; names appearing in artwork titles have not been indexed.

Index of Names

Index of Places

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Pubblicazioni del Dipartimento di Studi umanistici
Clio. Saggi di scienze storiche, archeologiche e storicoartistiche 65

Displaying Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time brings together a series of methodologically oriented studies that examine the history of Italian museum displays through the critical use of visual documentation. Developed within the PRIN 2022 project *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot-Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) and the European Union, the volume explores the epistemic potential of a large, structured corpus of images for reconstructing and interpreting exhibition practices across time.

Through case studies on the Uffizi, Brera, Parma, L'Aquila, and the American reception of Italian museums, the essays treat photographs, illustrated periodicals, postcards, guides, films, and other visual materials as primary documents rather than mere illustrations. In doing so, they show how museum displays were not only arranged and transformed, but also circulated, interpreted, and made meaningful for different publics, highlighting the role of images in shaping institutional narratives, public reception, and cultural value.

At the center of the volume is the Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (DAIM), conceived not simply as a repository, but as a research tool that enables comparison, relational analysis, and new interpretative perspectives. The book offers an original contribution to museum history while demonstrating the broader interdisciplinary value of visual sources for the study of cultural politics, public memory, and the social life of images.

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