



# NEWSLETTER

Summer 2019



VENICE IN  
PERIL



## DEAR FRIEND AND SUPPORTER

Welcome to the Venice in Peril Summer Newsletter. In this issue we introduce two new projects and ask for your support to fund them. For the Nativity Triptych in the Accademia we need to raise £55,000 to fund conservation which it is hoped will yield new information about the Bellini workshop, while the treatment to repair and conserve twenty 18th-century marionettes from the Casa Goldoni will cost £10,000. Both initiatives are opportunities to learn more about two distinctively Venetian stories.

Following the generous response to the Torcello Iconostasis Appeal, in memory of John Julius Norwich,

the work has now started and we thank everyone who contributed to this and other recent projects.

We would also like to thank our wonderful lecturers who give their time and expertise to the cause of Venice. Over the last year they have all spoken to capacity audiences, with Edmund de Waal filling the Royal Geographical Society auditorium in May, and we are very grateful to them. Be sure to book early for the Autumn Series details of which you can find on the back page.

Jonathan Keates  
Chairman

## NEW PROJECT

*Conservation of 18th-century marionettes at Casa Goldoni*

In the world history of drama Venice plays a major role. With its own vibrant style of Commedia dell'Arte (the popular Italian street theatre) the city was also the place where opera first took off as a sophisticated entertainment form.

Many of Italy's greatest actors learned their craft here in Venetian repertory companies and some would argue that today's annual film festival is, in its way, a descendant of this great stage tradition. A much-loved theatrical genre among Venetians was the marionette theatre, in which puppets, manipulated with astounding skill, acted out every kind of drama, including opera, on miniature stages complete with expensive costumes and complicated scene changes. By the early 18th century the marionettes were so popular that several patrician families built special theatres for such performances.

Among those captivated by this world in miniature was the fabulously versatile

and prolific Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793) whose comedies capture the essence of Venetian life in ways transcending their era. His birthplace, the medieval Palazzo Centanni, in S. Polo, is now a museum dedicated to the playwright. Many of its outstanding collection of historic marionettes are on display, complete with their Rococo stage. Some, however, are in serious need of conservation, so Venice in Peril has adopted 20 puppets in the hope that you, our supporters will want to contribute to the project. This is the first such project the Fund has undertaken and we're delighted to become involved with such a fascinating aspect of Venetian culture from La Serenissima's closing decades. *For more on Museo di Carlo Goldoni see [www.visitmuve.it](http://www.visitmuve.it)*

Jonathan Keates

Please contact us if you would like to make a donation to this project which will cost £10,000.



### *How they were made*

Under their colourful costumes the puppets' torsos were simply carved wooden shapes (although some female characters were given a modelled décolletage) to which articulated legs were attached with the visible lower half more finely carved. Softer wadding was used for the arms and glass eyes and either cotton thread or real human hair was used for the heads. Sometimes the neck or jaw is hinged, so that expressions could be manipulated by twitching the strings.

To make the puppet 'walk' convincingly one leg was made shorter than the other and the feet and hands were moulded in lead to give a plausible weight to movement. The variety of costumes reflects the range of characters, with lots of detail, mixtures of fabric weights, coloured linings, ruffs, piping and embroidery. Conservation will involve repair and careful cleaning as well as dyeing of matching textiles where necessary.

*Photo Above & Cover: Fondazione Musei Civici/Museo di Carlo Goldoni*



## NATIVITY TRIPTYCH APPEAL

*Conservation may reveal more about the early work of Giovanni Bellini*

**With the National Gallery's recent Mantegna and Bellini exhibition still fresh in the memory Venice in Peril is launching a new appeal for £55,000 for the conservation of the Nativity Triptych in the Accademia Galleries.**

This triptych was painted for a chapel in the church of Santa Maria della Carità which is now occupied by the Accademia Galleries.

The chapel was built before 1462 and funded by Andrea Molin who in October that year also agreed to have an altarpiece made for it. The Nativity triptych was one of four of a similar size with three vertical panels below a lunette painted in tempera on wood and they are all now in the Accademia Galleries. The others are named after their central figures: San Sebastiano, San Lorenzo and the Madonna.

There is no documentation as to who painted them, but scholars from the time of Bernard Berenson onwards have agreed that the artists were from the Bellini family - Jacopo and his sons Gentile and Giovanni. Earlier scholars had attributed them to the Vivarini family.

However recent studies have tended to support the idea that Giovanni, who by 1459 was documented as living independently, and so presumably capable of taking on his own commissions, may have had a major role in painting these triptychs, particularly since they seem to develop earlier prototypes from his father's workshop with a new monumentality of form and expression, influenced by Donatello's bronze sculptures in Padova. Despite the uniformity of the triptychs, scholars have also continued to point out clear differences in the style and quality

of painting, suggesting that other artists were involved and may include Gentile Bellini, Lazzaro Bastiani and the young Alvise Vivarini.

In the case of the Nativity Triptych it is thought the central panel is by Giovanni Bellini as is the figure of San Domenico in the lunette, while the figure of San Francesco could be by Alvise Vivarini.

In 1797, following Napoleonic decree, many Venetian churches and convents were closed and their works of art moved to the new Accademia delle Belle Arti. The four triptychs were dismantled and any architectural framing elements they had were lost. Although it is not known how they would have looked in the church their shape and proportions indicate that these altarpieces represent a move away from Venetian Gothic towards Tuscan Renaissance.

Conservation was last carried out on the wooden supports in 2000. This project will include: fixing areas of lifting, cleaning, photographic documentation to identify anomalies in the layers of paint and gilding; removal of discoloured varnishes, retouched areas and old gesso infills; monitoring and recalibrating of the transverse supports added in 2000; the application of a protective layer, repair of deep losses and woodworm holes; infilling of paint losses with pure and stable colours.

A series of non-invasive imaging and spectroscopic investigations will also be carried out and the data gathered from this project and a parallel project on another triptych should yield new information on the Bellini workshop.

**With thanks to Roberta Battaglia,  
Accademia Galleries**

Giovanni Bellini is the most invisible of all major Renaissance artists. We don't know when he was born, and we know practically no details about the course of his life. This makes his paintings almost the only source for his activity. It's thanks to them, for instance, that we know he must have visited Padua repeatedly in the 1450s. We are particularly poorly informed about Bellini's artistic development as a young man. This makes the Nativity Triptych even more fascinating and important. I look forward to following this conservation treatment, and the technical study which will inform it.

**Caroline Campbell**

*Director of Collections and Research, The National Gallery*



*Photo: Archivio Fotografico G.A.V.E., by kind permission MiBAC*



## CURRENT PROJECT

*The Torcello Iconostasis Appeal in memory of John Julius Norwich (1929-2018), which was launched in November 2018, reached its £100,000 target this May and work has now begun.*

This project is divided into two distinct parts, one covering the treatment of the 11th-century stone structure and the other, the conservation of the early 15th-century panel paintings of apostles attributed to Zanino di Pietro. The first task was to dismantle the iconostasis and remove the thirteen panel paintings to the conservation studio in Venice.

The panels, which are over a metre tall, are held top and bottom by an L-shaped support with carved ornament. It is clear that the arched frame and supports of the panels date from the end of the 19th century and it is very possible that an original more elaborate structure with gilded pinnacles and colonnettes was removed at this time to make the work lighter. The paintings have suffered very badly from damp in the church (since the last conservation in 1889) and it is difficult to identify all the apostles. They are painted in egg tempera using earth colours typical of the time including ochre, cinnabar, copper green and ultramarine blue. It is anticipated that investigation in the studio will reveal much more about these paintings commissioned from Zanino di Pietro around 1420-30.

Meanwhile the earlier stonework elements of the iconostasis showing slabs with carved peacocks and lions are not in such a grave state and will remain on Torcello to be treated. They are made of Greek marble with breccia corallina framing elements. The plutei, columns and pierced Corinthian capitals are now being treated in tanks of deionised water to flush out damaging salts. Dismantling

will also allow for investigations into the methods used for fixing rods, which may be of bone, wood or lead and analysis of mortars and other pastes used for repairs in the past.

Two Venetian firms, MAUVE srl and Seres have been engaged to carry out the conservation work, which is estimated to take between a year and eighteen months.

*This project was funded thanks to the generosity of nearly 200 donors and a donor list appears at the back of this Newsletter.*

### ARTEMIS COOPER REMEMBERS HER FIRST VISIT TO TORCELLO WITH HER FATHER JOHN JULIUS NORWICH

The first time John Julius took me to the Torcello basilica, he urged me to keep my eyes on the floor till he gave the word; and so, staring hard at my feet, I walked up the nave and through the iconostasis which is now being restored in his honour. 'Now look up...' Our eyes rose to where the Virgin stood in the golden dome of the apse, alone in all her sadness and glory. 'That', he whispered, 'is one of the greatest works of Byzantine art.' John Julius knew and loved every inch of Venice, knew all its stories and secrets. But the island of Torcello, with the Locanda Cipriani nestling so close to that beautiful building, seems to me a microcosm of everything he loved best in this world.

## CURRENT PROJECT

*Canton Synagogue – windows, shutters and terrazzo floor*

The oldest Ghetto in the world became home to Jewish communities from all over Europe and the Mediterranean from the early 16th century. Its five synagogues and museum share this rich history which is the subject of a major project planned by the Comunità Ebraica Venezia to revive the heart of the Ghetto.

In Spring 2019 Venice in Peril contributed with a small project repairing windows and shutters to enable access around the Canton Synagogue ahead of Edmund de Waal's exhibition *psalm* which runs until 29 September.

A second project to repair the traditional terrazzo floor of the Sukkah, where the Feast of the Tabernacles is celebrated, will start soon.

The method and materials used for terrazzo or cocciopesto floors give them the necessary pliability to accommodate the movement in Venetian buildings.

The project involves cutting out old repairs and cracks before laying and integrating a base layer with an upper layer, matching the old terrazzo with a traditional mix of Istrian stone, brick chips and dust bound with lime mortar. Once tamped down a blend of cooked linseed oil, plaster dust and terracotta powder is applied before the floor is sanded and polished with beeswax.

*For more on the Ghetto and Jewish Venetian history, festivals, food and language see [www.museoebraico.it](http://www.museoebraico.it) and for psalm see [www.edmunddewaal.com](http://www.edmunddewaal.com)*



*Above: Shutters and terrazzo floor, Photo: by Comunità Ebraica*



## VENICE IN PERIL INTERNSHIPS IN VENICE AND THE UK

*Two grants in support of the architects and conservators of the future*

Federica Martinelli has been selected as the second recipient of the GeM Award. Her thesis, a proposal for the restoration of the Gamerra, a Napoleonic barracks built in 1812 in Palmanova in Friuli, impressed the GeM panel and was based on careful analysis of the construction methods, materials employed and the types of decay that have developed over time in this neglected building.

The GeM Award was set up by Peregrine Bryant Architects in memory of Gloria Trevisan and Marco Gottardi two young Italian architects who lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower Fire in 2017. Federica, who graduated from the IUAV Conservation Master's Programme in 2018, will attend accredited UK conservation courses and shadow a variety of conservation practitioners. She is particularly interested in the UK approach to repairs of stone facades and historic roof structures and to exploring adaptive reuse of buildings from the time of the Industrial Revolution.

This is the second year that Venice in Peril Fund has contributed to the GeM Fund for future awards.

The Venice in Peril Fund Bursary funded by Trustee Marina Morrisson Atwater for two Conservation BA graduates from the City and Guilds of London Art School has been awarded to Jonida Mecani and Miyuki Kajiwara

who will spend three months at the Abbey of San Giorgio in Venice undertaking a conservation project and conservation maintenance. This is the tenth year of the Bursary.

*If you would like to support similar projects*

## BECOME A FRIEND OF VENICE IN PERIL

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	ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP	STANDING ORDER
FRIEND	£60	£50
JOINT*	£100	£80

*\*Two adults at one address*

## COMPLETED PROJECTS

*Renaissance Maiolica at the Museo Correr*

Thanks to the generosity of Venice in Peril donors, conservation costing £18,000 has now completed. Most of the pieces will be included in the permanent display and an exhibition is planned for 2021. A catalogue, edited by Caterina Marcantoni with an introduction by Timothy Wilson, will be published later this year by the Fondazione Musei Civici.

*For a film of the conservation see  
[www.micfaenza.org](http://www.micfaenza.org)*



*Photo: Fondazione Musei Civici/Museo Correr*

*Despatches of the Venetian commander,  
Francesco Morosini, 1619-1699*

Fifteen volumes of Despatches, bound in the distinctive parchment covers of the Venetian Republic's Archive, have been conserved by the Benedictine nuns at Rosano near Florence and are exhibited as part of the Morosini 400th Anniversary. This joint project was funded by Venice in Peril and the Swiss and Austrian committees for Venice.

*For details of the Morosini exhibition  
programme see [www.francescomorosini.it](http://www.francescomorosini.it)*



*Photo by John Millerchip*

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## TORCELLO APPEAL DONORS

*We wish to thank all those who donated to the Torcello Iconostasis Appeal in memory of John Julius Norwich (1929-2018), much-loved Chairman of Venice in Peril and celebrated historian and writer.*

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Pizza Express and the Veneziana Fund  
*And those who wish to remain anonymous*



AUTUMN 2019

*Event series*

23 SEPTEMBER

**Screens, mosaics and meanings in Torcello and San Marco**

*Antony Eastmond*

As the Torcello project gets under way, Antony Eastmond, AG Leventis Professor of Byzantine Art History at The Courtauld Institute of Art, will talk about the screen and mosaics at Torcello, comparing them to the apse mosaics in the Basilica di San Marco, made a generation later and proposing that we can see in them the birth of Venetian art, as distinct from that of Rome or Constantinople.

21 OCTOBER

**Accademia – recent acquisitions and the ‘Grandi Gallerie’ Project**

*Paola Marini*

As Director of the Accademia between 2015-2018, Paola Marini oversaw a major programme of exhibitions, conservation and remodelling of the galleries. Setting this work in context she will offer a preview of the new Cinquecento Rooms in the light of recent acquisitions and conservation, before reflecting on her new role as Chairman of the Association of Private Committees for Venice.

11 NOVEMBER

**‘Glorious Things’: John Ruskin’s Daguerreotype Photographs of Venice  
Ashley Clarke Memorial Lecture**

*Sarah Quill*

During his 1845 visit to Venice, Ruskin became aware of the power of the recently invented daguerreotype camera to make accurate records of endangered buildings. To mark the 200th anniversary of his birth Sarah Quill, a Trustee of Venice in Peril, will look at Ruskin’s involvement with photography during his researches for *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*.

At the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, Piccadilly W1J 0BE

Doors open 6.30 for 6.45pm

23 September and 21 October: £18 Friends, £20 Others - to include a glass of wine

11 November: £35 Friends, £40 Others – to include reception afterwards

*To buy tickets, become a Friend, donate to a project or for more information:*  
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