Dear Friend and Supporter,

As the new Chairman of the Venice in Peril Fund, I am delighted to introduce the first of our new style newsletters highlighting our current conservation projects in Venice.

This is a busy time for Venice in Peril, with a major appeal for the Canova Monument in the Frari church, restoration projects in progress at San Zaccaria – on which we are joining forces with other private committees, a doorway from the Archivio di Stato into one of the Frari cloisters, relics in a chapel of the basilica of San Marco and a new conservation initiative involving the refurbishment of Canova's plaster lions, which will eventually be installed in the new Canova room at the Accademia. These last three projects have been most generously funded by individual supporters. You will find stories about all of them and an update on the Armstrong Mitchell Crane, which dominates the skyline of the Arsenale, by opening up this newsletter.

We were delighted to welcome Jonathan Marsden, Director of the Royal Collection, as our lecturer at the Royal Geographical Society in April. His fascinating account of Antonio Canova's work in England for George IV and others launched our Canova Monument Appeal in fine style. It showed how important a figure Canova is for the history of British collecting. Even in recent years Canova has been at the forefront of public consciousness especially when his most famous work, The Three Graces, was saved for the nation in 1994 after a successful fundraising campaign enabled the V&A Museum and the National Galleries of Scotland jointly to buy it.

The Venice in Peril Fund has already paid for investigative study of the problems facing Canova's Memorial, which was built by his pupils following their master's design. Core samples have been taken for analysis of the moisture and mineral salts seeping into its marble cladding and statuary. Complex conservation is required to resolve the humidity of the monument and desalinate and isolate it from rising damp. For all of this essential work we need to raise £300,000.

As with all our projects the work will be carried out within the framework of the UNESCO-Private Committees programme, which provides our supporters with the reassurance that the money is being spent wisely and the conservation work, overseen by the Superintendency for Architectural and Monumental Heritage, is done to the highest standard. We will provide updates as we get them.

We have been very encouraged by the generous response to the Appeal but there is still some way to go. If you are in any doubt as to the merit of the Canova Monument you might like to read what David Watkin, renowned scholar of neoclassicism has said about it on the facing page.

An A5 card showing all our past projects marked on a map of Venice has just been printed. New Friends will receive one when they sign up. Current members may email info@veniceinperil.org for a free copy.

At a critical moment in the fortunes of Venice, the Venice in Peril Fund continues to play a key role in the conservation and survival of its built environment. I am proud to have become Chairman of the Fund and I much look forward to meeting you soon. Thank you so much for your valuable and continuing support. I hope you enjoy our newsletter.

Jonathan Keates
Canova Monument Appeal

David Watkin reflects on the significance of the memorial to Antonio Canova in the Church of the Frari

This beautiful, moving and alarming celebration of death, commemorating the greatest classical artist of his day, can be seen appropriately as the realisation of the visionary neo-classical architects of the eighteenth century. These range from unexecuted projects such as the megalomaniac pyramidal cenotaphs of Boulée in the 1780s and Brongniart's design for the cemetery of Père Lachaise in Paris of c.1812, dominated by a hill-top pyramid, to what for me is the closest parallel to Canova's monument, the scene which Schinkel provided in 1816 for the production in Berlin of Mozart's The Magic Flute, where a pyramid rises from the light of the sun behind a giant shadowy statue of Osiris. Schinkel's theatrical vision becomes real and permanent with Canova's white marble pyramid, placed in dramatic contrast against the pink diapered brickwork of the greatest Gothic church in Venice. Animation is provided by the lively grace of the varied mourning figures whom we are tempted to join as they approach the half inviting, half terrifying, open door, for, unlike the pyramids of Egypt, which we feel belong to another world from ours, this one is not sealed but provokes thoughts of our own future. Its preservation is a cultural imperative.

DAVID WATKIN is Emeritus Professor of the History of Architecture at the University of Cambridge

WE ARE RAISING £300,000 to save the Canova Monument. You can donate online at www.veniceinperil.org or by sending a cheque made out to Venice in Peril Fund to Hurlingham Studios, Ranelagh Gardens, London SW6 3PA.

AUTUMN LECTURES

14 October 2013 Giles Waterfield, curator and novelist, 'Venice and the 19th century Art Museum in Britain', £15 for members £18 for non-members.

11 November 2013 Jonathan Keates, chairman of the Venice in Peril Fund, Ashley Clarke Memorial Lecture, £25 for members, £30 for non-members to include reception.

Both lectures are at the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House, London WC1. Doors open 6.30 lecture begins 7pm. Tickets available by email or online – see details on back of newsletter.
Church of San Zaccaria: Two joint projects

The Venice in Peril Fund was last involved at San Zaccaria when in 2005 Martin Randall Travel funded the restoration of an altar panel painting attributed to Palma Vecchio. San Zaccaria is a Gothic-Renaissance church off the Riva degli Schiavoni with a very distinctive tiered facade. Reviving the idea of joint funding of special projects, it was proposed last year by the Dutch Committee, who have long been involved with the church, that members of the Association of Private Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice (of which there are 22 and of which Venice in Peril Fund is one), should jointly undertake to fund the conservation of an important 15th-century wooden painted Crucifix.

It hangs very high up on the wall above the main altar and has never been studied or published. The Venice in Peril Fund agreed to contribute €5000 towards the estimated €50,000. Now in a very delicate operation the Crucifix is being brought down, packed and taken by boat to the Superintendency’s Laboratory at the former monastery of the Misericordia in Cannaregio. Here it will undergo analysis to establish what needs to be done.

In the last few weeks another joint project for the same church has been proposed. A polyptych showing the life of St Sabina of 1443 by Antonio Vivarini in the chapel of San Tarasio is suffering from damp. A former conservator with the Venice Superintendency, who is now Professor at the Istituto Centrale del Restauro in Rome, will be working on the panel painting within the framework of the course she teaches. By contributing a relatively small amount of money to the costs of transporting the work to Rome and back, the Association could provide an opportunity for trainee conservators as well as facilitating the restoration of the polyptych.

Canova Rezzonico Lions: Restoration of plaster casts

Currently in storage at the Gallerie dell’Accademia are two plaster casts, which Antonio Canova made some time after 1792 from the two crouching lions made of polished travertine for the tomb of Pope Clement XIII (1693–1769) in St Peter’s in Rome. Venetian by birth, Clement XIII was born Carlo Rezzonico. The Vatican guide to St Peter’s describes them as “two superb lions, among the most beautiful creations by Canova ... The one awake, on the left, represents the energetic work of the Pope while the one asleep, on the right, symbolizes his moderation” (see front page).

Canova gave the casts to his studio assistant Antonio d’Este, whose son donated them to the Accademia delle Belle Arti in 1840 and they were used there as models for the students until relatively recently.

Restoration work will involve making good untreated breakages, one in particular affecting a rear paw of one of the lions, the renewal of old repairs, the renovation/replacement of the internal wood and metal framework and the cleaning and reconditioning of the gesso surfaces. The lions’ wooden pedestals will also be restored.

Like the group of preparatory models by Canova, whose restoration was financed by Venice in Peril in 2012, the lions will go on show in the Canova Room at the Grande Accademia when it opens in 2014.

The project will be directed by Dr Matteo Ceriana, the Director of the Accademia, and the work carried out by Daniele Angellotto, who restored the Canova bozzetti for Venice in Peril last year and has recently restored the gesso preparatory panels Canova made for the metopes on the temple at Possagno. The entire cost of the operation will be covered by a generous donation from Trustee Marina Morrisson Atwater.
Cappella Zen: Conservation of three reliefs

A project to clean and conserve three Byzantine reliefs in the Cappella Zen at the south east corner of the Basilica di San Marco is currently under way. It is part of a wider programme of restoration of the whole of the chapel and the Baptistery being undertaken by the Basilica’s conservation department, in preparation for re-opening to the public after many years’ closure.

Unlike a conventional side chapel, the Cappella Zen is in fact a 1521 conversion of an entrance from the Piazzetta into the Narthex and the Baptistery.

Work on one relief showing the Archangel has been completed as has the scene in two registers showing the Nativity and the Flight into Egypt. The 12th-century Madonna and Child will now be removed from its Renaissance altar frame for cleaning and desalination before being put back over a new lead lining to prevent further transmission of salt-laden moisture from the wall behind.

Like the other two reliefs it was brought to Venice following the siege and capture of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. A French pilgrim, Jean de Tournai, visiting the Basilica in 1487, wrote “Under the portal of this Church there is an image of Notre Dame, which is made and sculpted from the stone which Moses struck with his rod in the desert, from which water issued miraculously”.

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Zen died in 1501 leaving a great deal of money to the Republic with the stipulation that his tomb with a bronze effigy of himself should be placed in the Basilica itself. The proposal was met with implacable opposition as there was no tradition of burials – not even of Doges – inside San Marco. Eventually a compromise was found whereby a funerary chapel was accommodated just outside the Basilica proper in the Narthex – the covered entrance gallery that runs the width of the Basilica.

Restoration of the three reliefs is being carried out by Martina Serafin and her firm Seres, which previously worked with the Venice in Peril Fund on the altar in the Church of the Carmini and for the Austrian Committee on the monument to Titian, opposite the Canova cenotaph in the Frari. It has been funded by Venice in Peril Trustee Marina Morrison Atwater.
The State Archives, founded in 1815 to bring together the official papers produced in the Serenissima’s 1000-year history, occupy much of what previously formed the Franciscan monastery of the Frari. Between the Cloister of the Florentines and the much larger Cloister of the Trinity there is an Istrian stone gateway with what appears to be the side of a sarcophagus between the architrave and the pediment.

The carved marble panel features two angels supporting an enthroned Christ with one hand raised in blessing and the other holding an open book; it probably came from one of several 13th- to 15th-century sarcophagi belonging to prominent Venetian families that were removed from the wall of the Cloister of the Trinity following a serious collapse in 1779.

Both sides of the stone gate frame, the marble panel and the iron gate itself are all in need of urgent attention including cleaning, consolidation, replacement of old iron cramps and reconditioning of the gate.

Work started in April 2013 and is likely to take at least three months. The restorer carrying out the work is Andrea Libralesso, who specializes in stone and paint surfaces and has been engaged on several other Venice in Peril projects, including the restoration of paintings by Sebastiano Ricci in the Church of the Carmini and of external frescoes of Torcello cathedral.

The project designer and director is Grazia Fumo of the Superintendency of the Architectural Heritage. She too has often worked with Venice in Peril; her investigations of the problems afflicting the Canova cenotaph in the Church of the Frari have recently led to full-scale plans for the restoration work required.

The project is being financed by the Fondation Jean-Barthélémy whose long-standing support for Venice in Peril has led to the completion of many important and interesting projects, the most recent of which include the protiro of the Church of the Carmini, and a 16th-century wooden crucifix from the Church of San Fantin.
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THE ARMSTRONG MITCHELL HYDRAULIC CRANE, the only one of its kind left in the world, identified by its unique no. 2919, is a spectacular sculptural piece of engineering which visitors to the Biennale will see as they attend exhibitions in the Arsenale. Venice in Peril has been involved since 2003 with preventative measures to stop further decay of the crane, which dates from 1883 and was built by the Newcastle firm Armstrong Mitchell. This year €15,000 was needed and given, to reinforce the straps that hold the ballast container together and to update the report on its condition.

The work – completed just ahead of the opening of the Biennale – has been carried out under the supervision of Alberto Lionello, the Superintendency’s specialist engineer in charge of its conservation. A mechanical hoist mounted on a pontoon was used to access the crane and the operation was carried out by the firm Salmistrari. This is a holding operation because restoration of the crane will cost around €2,000,000. As a landmark in British engineering history it would make a wonderful project if an individual or a group of people with an interest in British Industrial Archaeology or the world-beating achievements of 19th-century British industry were to step forward to fund it.

Panels describing how Venice in Peril’s money has been spent are shown at the foot of the crane.

Until this year the Arsenale, which covers 110 acres/45 hectares (about 15% of the total area of Venice) and dates back to the beginning of the 12th century, was the property of the Italian state, but it has just been transferred to the city authorities, whose plans for its future are eagerly awaited.
Stop Press: The Venice in Peril Fund contributes to purchase of Vasari ceiling painting

A CEILING made up of nine panel paintings by Giorgio Vasari for the Palazzo Corner on the Grand Canal can now be reassembled almost in its entirety following the purchase by private treaty from the collection of Lord and Lady Kennet of Avon of the third of the panels showing the figure of Faith – La Fede. The Venice in Peril Fund contributed €30,000 to the total cost, which has also been funded by the Italian state and other organisations. The painting is now on its way to Venice, where it will undergo treatment by conservators currently working on its sister paintings. It will eventually be reunited, in the Museo di Palazzo Grimani, following the original scheme, with the other panels showing Justice and Patience around the central painting of Charity with three of the four putti corner panels. The fourth putti panel has been given up for lost.

Giorgio Vasari – artist and author of the ground-breaking Lives of the Artists – came from central Italy and spent thirteen months in Venice in 1541–42 during which time he completed the panels for the ceiling of the Palazzo Corner. At a later date the ceiling was dismembered and dispersed throughout European collections.

*Faith*, one of four Virtues by Giorgio Vasari, oil on canvas, 1541–42

If you would like to know more about our projects or how you can donate please contact us at

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Photographs by John Millerchip / Procuratoria di San Marco / Superintendency for State Museums in Venice