

NEWSLETTER
Summer 2020



VENICE IN
PERIL

DEAR FRIEND AND SUPPORTER

The double catastrophe of the November flood and the Coronavirus pandemic made it seem initially as though La Serenissima had been brought to her knees. What warfare, plague, siege and alien occupation could not achieve in previous centuries was poised to become a reality during our own, with Venice in peril twice over. As it turns out however, the city's habitual resilience has reasserted itself in a number of surprising ways. Water damage to the core fabric of buildings both sacred and secular was generally less drastic than feared. Your very generous response to the Acqua Alta 2019 Appeal (which raised over £150,000), enabled us to move quickly to secure two vulnerable earlier projects, the church of San Nicolò dei Mendicoli and Palladio's Tablino room in the Accademia gallery, with a view to protective measures being carried out on each.

During Italy's lockdown meanwhile, our friends living in Venice have been posting some wondrous images of empty *calli* and *campi* and glassy-smooth canals. A chance for the city

to take stock of exactly what sort of community it wants to become once the pandemic has abated may seem all too brief, but the recent AGM of the Association of Private Committees (on Zoom of course) at least included an item on a new 'Charter for Venice', due to be discussed in greater detail at a conference this coming October.

In London our plans for next year's 50th anniversary celebrations may need some careful adjustment, but a happy coincidence aligns them with commemoration of Venice's legendary founding, 1,600 years ago, in 421 AD. In Venice itself meanwhile, our work resumes. Conservators are busy once again, on everything from a Bellini altarpiece to Rococo marionettes, while operations have started at long last on the Canova monument in the Frari. We have jobs to do and a mission to pursue - enabled, as always, by your help, dedication and love.

Jonathan Keates
Chairman

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Cover photo: the deserted south portico of the Ducal Palace taken during lockdown on 10 March 2020 by ©Sarah Quill

WORK FINALLY STARTS ON THE CANOVA MONUMENT

Erected in the church of the Frari in 1827, by his pupils, with funds raised from across Europe

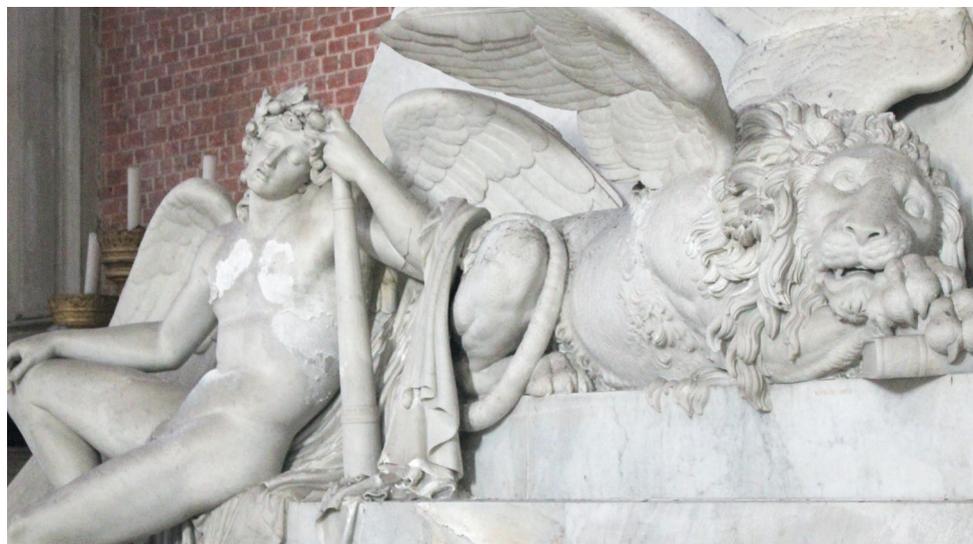
For many years Venice in Peril Fund has been preparing and fundraising for the conservation of the badly degraded pyramidal monument to the sculptor Antonio Canova in the Frari. Everyone, but especially the parish priest, Padre Lino, has watched its deterioration with great sadness. The project has been dogged by delays of many kinds but we can now announce that work began on 2 July.

Visitors to the Frari in the last 10 years cannot have failed to notice the worsening staining and the strangely localised flaking on some of the sculpted figures. The winged Genius figure has an ugly spreading patch on his youthful chest but next to him the lion of St Mark appears unscathed. This presents the conservators with a challenge. How is the moisture migrating to the external

cladding and statues? Core samples were taken in 2012 but newer methods and recent experience make up to date investigation and analysis vital so that the right course of action can be planned. Accordingly with the scaffolding now up around the monument, the firm of Nonfarmale will start by sending samples to Proarte Labs to try and find the answer to the mystery of the patchy blistering and the best conservation methodology. We will share the progress of the project as it moves forward.

'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.'

David Watkin



VENICE UNDER LOCKDOWN

Images of a deserted Venice were among the most eloquent of the COVID pandemic

An account written in 1576 of the plague then afflicting Venice describes a city invaded and overwhelmed by an 'invisible spirit': deserted streets and squares, barriers erected against movement except of those carrying permits, the poor forced to isolate at home, the rich fleeing to second homes. The parallels are striking.

On 22 February 2020 the first person in Italy to die of Covid-19 was from Vò, a small town in the Veneto. The next day the national government roadblocked Vò and ten other virus hotspots. It takes 50 minutes to drive from Vò to Venice's historic centre, 40% of whose population are aged 60 or over.

By then Italy had confirmed 130 cases of the virus, mostly in the northern regions, especially Lombardy but also the Veneto. Large-group institutions and events were closing down as a precaution, including universities, theatres, and spectator sports. In Venice the last two days of Carnival, 24 and 25 February, were abandoned, as was the much-anticipated filming of Mission Impossible 7. Tourists were fleeing.

On 28 February Luca Zaia, the Veneto's governor, ordered the testing of all 3,300 of Vò's inhabitants; 70 cases were confirmed. It was for Italy an unprecedented and remarkably foresighted move. But with the stock market wobbling, prime minister Giuseppe Conte blamed such overzealous testing, especially testing people who had no symptoms, for

causing alarm. Italy, he said, was safe. Echoing this optimism the municipality of Venice supported a campaign advertised on 3 March by the cafés and restaurants of Piazza San Marco: it invited Venetians and tourists to throw caution to the winds, gather in the city's *salotto buono*, and enjoy buy-one-get-one-free aperitifs throughout the month.

The glass soon looked half-empty. By 8 March 7,375 Italians had tested positive and 366 had died. To anybody reading Italian news reports it was becoming clear that the disease was shockingly contagious and lethal. The next day Conte locked down most of the north, and the day after that, with Covid-related deaths now numbering 463, the whole country. In an exceptionally emotional press conference on 11 March, Zaia repeatedly urged the Veneto people to STAY AT HOME! *Restate a casa!* And so we all did, with few exceptions. Ten weeks passed before we could we leave home without a self-certified form stating the permitted reason and destination.

The typical Venetian experience of the lockdown was probably similar to that elsewhere in the world: a hallucinatory mix of disrupted habits, unexpected obligations and pleasures, vague fear and, for an unfortunate few, tragedy. Speaking personally, we shopped once a week, mostly at Rialto market, wearing face masks as soon as they became available, chatted on Zoom with friends abroad at inconvenient times, and



exchanged lockdown jokes with rowing club colleagues on WhatsApp until the novelty faded.

All lockdown cities go quiet. But the peace in our liquid city seemed especially magical. We live by a canal which, pre-lockdown, teemed with barges, taxis and motorboats of all kinds surging past, belching fumes and continually churning the water. But then, day by day, traffic diminished, air became Alpine, and canals, undisturbed, gained transparency and often a mirror-like stillness. Sometimes church bells chimed, gulls squabbled, swifts whistled past. Otherwise, not a sound, not even of lapping water.

Mothballed gondolas, swaddled in canvas, stayed moored in long rows. Shoals of fish appeared, a duck family swam in the Grand Canal, a large octopus dropped by the Piazzale Roma supermarket, and dolphins were reported in the *Bacino*. Paradise

regained! As soon as it was permitted, we rowed our *sanpierota* up and down an almost unruffled and deserted Grand Canal.

We had maintained daily statistical spreadsheets. The peak of current infections in the Veneto, around 10,800, was in mid-April. By 22 May, three months after the first quarantine in Vò, they had fallen to around 3,000. Veneto deaths had totalled about 1,900 (0.04% of its population), compared with 15,900 (0.16%) in Lombardy. On 4 May a stepwise release from lockdown began. On 18 May Italians could move outside their regions, so a few tourists were spotted in the *calli* and *campi*. On 3 June, unless the virus kicks back, most of Italy will open unconditionally to Schengen citizens and Britons. We welcome and regret the prospect.

Gillian Crampton-Smith
and Philip Tabor



Martina Serafin, Paolo Roma and Annamaria D'Ottavi of MAUVE in their workshop



CONSERVATION NOW

No shortage of work but not enough young conservators in Venice

As Shakespeare reminds us, ‘When Sorrows come they come not single-spired but in battalions’ and recent events in Venice are a clear example of their combined actions. If the devastating high waters of 2019 were not enough, COVID-19 has struck hard at a city whose economy depends almost exclusively, nowadays, on the mobility of people. It is well known that the tourism industry has been severely affected but there have also been major consequences for other vital sectors of Venetian life, including conservation. So for this Summer 2020 Newsletter we asked some of those who are professionally involved in Venetian *restauri* to reflect on the double impact of the exceptional *acque alte* and COVID-19 on their work and about the implications for the future of conservation in Venice. In particular we were interested to learn whether there will now be a severe backlog of work, whether social distancing regulations will be a problem on conservation sites and more generally whether there is a shortage of conservators in Venice, or of particular skills?

Michele Gottardi is the Director of the Università Internazionale d’Arte Venezia (The University of Art Restoration in Venice – UIA), one of the two specialised conservation schools in Venice, the other being the Istituto Veneto per i Beni Culturali (IVBC). As an educational institution rather than a commercial conservation

studio, it has suffered a particular blow, because rather than resulting in increased workflow, the 2019 high waters have created direct challenges (including the collapse of its garden wall under the pressure of the waves), while the rules of social distancing have resulted in fewer students being able to work together on conservation sites. And while experienced conservators can work alone, for students, working together under the guidance of a teacher, remains essential. UIA is currently running two projects: one of them, the façade of the church of the Tolentini, did not pose a problem, since workers can spread out on different levels, but at San Giorgio Maggiore, a creative solution had to be devised in order to allow the students to continue on site which involved extending the area where they were working to include part of a cloister and a well curb.

According to Andrea Cherido, of LARES, one of the largest conservation firms in Venice, the hope is that recent events will highlight the need for scheduled maintenance. A much smaller but regular programme of investment in maintenance, particularly after a major conservation project, would allow, in the long run, for a substantial reduction in conservation costs, avoiding multiple emergency interventions and bloated costs.

Milena Dean, of the state-owned Laboratori di restauro della Misericordia, where the Accademia Gallerie’s pictures are conserved, agrees

with Andrea Cherido on stressing the importance of ordinary and scheduled conservation in Venice, especially after recent flooding. In her view, these have been extremely difficult months: by January 2020 most of the damage caused by the November *acque alte* had been mapped, and a minimal amount of post-emergency conservation work had already begun. Unfortunately, COVID-19 halted everything, both emergency and planned interventions. The lack of monitoring in museums and historic buildings also resulted in damage caused by very dry weather between March and May 2020. Now though, despite the interruption caused by COVID-19, all conservation studios have successfully managed to adapt their working practices to allow for social distancing and have put in place a series of daily sanitisation measures covering the use of tools,

changing-rooms and toilets. The only major drawback is the extended duration of conservation projects. However one question remains: without specific protocols to cover exceptional situations like this sudden and prolonged pause in all conservation works, are we better prepared, should it happen again?

Annamaria D'Ottavi, Paolo Roma and Martina Serafin who set up MAUVE, a young but very active and dedicated conservation partnership, have been on the front line, together with other firms, in the post-*acque alte* conservation interventions collaborating closely to achieve the rapid and immediate removal of salt residues using deionised water, particularly from church floors. Martina Serafin praised the crucial role that the advanced conservation courses organised by ICCROM

played in her training. ICCROM, the UNESCO-inspired intergovernmental organisation, promotes conservation of cultural heritage worldwide and their courses were hosted by the Laboratori di restauro della Misericordia, but she regrets the fact that more recently it has not been possible to organise them in Venice, and that the lab's staff, which in the 1990s included over a dozen specialist conservators, is now much reduced. Annamaria D'Ottavi and Paolo Roma also both teach at the IVBC, and this ensures that there is a healthy flow of students from the school who do training stages with MAUVE.

When asked about particular skillsets that may be missing among Venetian conservators, there seems to be a general consensus that there could be more paper conservators. It seems that paintings and decorated surfaces too could do with more conservators, but Paolo Roma, of MAUVE, suggests that the shortage may in itself be a consequence of a shortage of funding for painting restoration, as opposed to buildings. In fact the same may be true for paper, both media being considered less essential than architectural conservation. This brings us back to conservation schools in Venice, and, to an extent, to an evident Italian paradox: although in Venice there is clearly no shortage of work, Gottardi reported that one of UIA's ongoing challenges is attracting enough candidates to their courses. In other words, despite the almost certain promise of employment afterwards, few are choosing this professional path. Interestingly, two of MAUVE's four employees were not born in Italy: one is of Polish and the other of Russian origin, raising the wider question of why it is that

native Italians seem to be turning away from the country's strong traditions of craftsmanship and the opportunities that these traditions offer.

Whatever the answer, it is clear that Venice's unique circumstances call for a unique approach to conservation: first, there needs to be a further strengthening of the connection and communication between conservation schools, conservation firms, Italian institutions and funding bodies. Second, the message which all conservators agree on, may well be the simplest: these combined threats and the extensive damage they have caused, should at least be taken as an opportunity to update Venice's conservation model, from one based on emergency interventions to one governed by ordinary, and, most importantly, programmed conservation.

Geri Della Rocca de Candal



*Michele Gottardi director of the Venice University of Art Restoration based at Villa Heriot on the Giudecca
Andrea Cherido of LARES one of the largest conservation firms in Venice.*

ACQUA ALTA '19 PROJECT

Building new flood defences at San Nicolò dei Mendicoli

Venice has had an enduring relationship with its lagoon, but high water is a relatively recent phenomenon. Becoming increasingly damaging in its effects in the course of the 20th century and aggravated by climate changes over recent years, the *acque alte* last November were newly characterised by the repeated return of high levels of flooding over a few weeks. Besides the disastrous social impact there have been crucial consequences for the health and conservation of buildings.

The church of San Nicolò dei Mendicoli presents one such case. It is one of the oldest and most historically atmospheric churches in Venice and at the same time it is also one of the most affected by the *acqua alta* phenomenon.

San Nicolò was the subject of major interventions by Venice in Peril Fund in partnership with the Italian state in the early 1970s and later in the early 2000s, by the Diocese of Venice. In addition to restoration and conservation, the objective has always been to protect it from high water. However, some of the building's historic characteristics left it vulnerable to worsening conditions and with last year's more forceful and frequent flooding the church's defences need to be improved.

Now, with funds raised by supporters of Venice in Peril Fund and in particular the Headley Trust and the Veneziana Fund, a new project will

be focussed on increasing protection by revisiting the earlier interventions and working with what is there to expand its scope and effects. The goal is to prevent saltwater from getting into the church either up through the floor or through the doors.

The options are limited. In the 1970s the aim was to create a waterproof barrier below the pavement, but remains of the earlier church structure meant it could never be watertight.

One idea is to attempt to drain the water before it reaches the level of the floor and this is what is now being explored with an underground drainage system connected to a system of underwater pumps. This technical intervention will require very close evaluation.

In November last year the water flooded in over the top of the door barriers so the second line of defence will be four new higher barriers that can be assembled by a single person or a retractable sluice gate in the floor, controlled by an automatic hydraulic system.

The complexity of this intervention and the need to assess its effectiveness and make adjustments under real conditions means that this project will continue into the next season of *acque alte*, but while that means the church may flood again, it should ultimately produce the best solution for the safeguarding of this ancient place of worship.

Marco Zordan



The nave of San Nicolò dei Mendicoli

ACQUA ALTA '19 PROJECT

Palladio's Tablino in the Accademia Galleries – new pumps and repairs

Among the many buildings that were flooded in the weeks of extreme *acque alte* in November and December 2019 was Palladio's Roman-inspired Tablino in the Accademia Galleries – an interior which is the star of a suite of rooms exploring the international influence of Venetian art in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Here the casts of some of Canova's most famous works are displayed, together with the remarkable Venetian 'Empire' furniture made for the Accademia's President, Leopoldo Cicognara, Canova's biographer and champion. The chair and table designed by Giuseppe Borsato using construction techniques that may owe as much to boat-building as cabinet-making, were conserved by Venice in Peril in 2015.

The floodwaters reached almost to the top of the platform bases on which

casts and furniture are mounted but did not touch the objects themselves. The Accademia's underground tanks or *vasche* that capture floodwater were installed in 1984 and these are designed to stop water coming up through the floor, but in November the water found its way in.

Diagnosing the points of entry of the water has been very challenging and shows how complex both the problems and solutions are, but a pump system will now be installed using some of the funds raised in London at the Italian Embassy in January. Additionally the *marmorino* wall surfaces and terracotta floor of the Tablino, which were washed with fresh water early on, will now be given a deeper desalination treatment and cleaned to remove staining, while disintegrated tiles will be mended and the floor sanded.



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A NEW CHARTER FOR VENICE

This is a project by the Association of the International Private Committees for the Safeguarding of Venice, inspired by an idea of Leo Schubert, architect and Swiss Honorary Consul in Venice, with the collaboration of the Deutsches Studienzentrum Venedig.

It takes its cue from the 1964 Venice Charter - a blueprint for architectural heritage conservation in Italy. A new text will now be drafted to include a series of both warnings and proposals aimed at improving and enhancing life in historic city centres - not just Venice - in an age of climate change, depopulation and unregulated mass tourism.

Making cultural and economic diversity and the wellbeing of communities its focus, the charter will also emphasise

the importance of safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage for the continuation of an authentic cultural life.

In 2018, in the European Year of Cultural heritage the Swiss and EU Ministers of Culture signed the Davos Declaration committing to support quality Baukultur in Europe whereby heritage plays a central role in contemporary purpose.

This principle will inform the New Charter of Venice making it a useful tool in the debate about the long-term safeguarding of cultural heritage and the preparation of legislative proposals for Europe's historic city centres.

It will be presented at the 2021 Architecture Biennale.

VENICE IN PERIL FUND BECOMES A CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION

Venice in Peril Fund (Registered Charity No. 262146) intends shortly to change its charity structure, becoming Venice in Peril Fund CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) No. 1186770. Our mission and work will remain the same. All assets and liabilities of Venice in Peril Fund will transfer to the successor charity. This process is sometimes called "incorporating the charity".

The change will not affect you as a donor, Friend or supporter of Venice in Peril Fund but if you have any queries please be in touch with us.

If you have generously made Venice in Peril a beneficiary of your will or are planning to do so, the bequest should now be made in the name of Venice in Peril Fund CIO (Registered No. 1186770).

The CIO is a relatively new legal form for a charity, drawn up by the Charity Commission, and now widely adopted, to provide some of the benefits and protections of being a company but without some of the burdens. CIO status is given by registration with the Charity Commission.

ACQUA ALTA 2019 APPEAL

Thank you to everyone who donated so generously to the Acqua Alta 2019 Appeal, with particular thanks to HE Raffaele Trombetta, the Italian Ambassador and the Italian Embassy in London, and those listed here:

Peter and Rosemary Andreae
Ariane Bankes
Sir Nicholas and Lady Baring
Serena Barrow
Sarah Baxter
Sir Anthony Beevor and Artemis Cooper
Matthew Bennett
Robin Berkeley
Sarah Biffen
George and Jane Blunden
Bruce Boucher
Jeremy Brown
Lord Browne of Madingley
Peregrine Bryant
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Harold Clarke
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Giuseppe Cosulich and Gaia Penteriani
Charles Cozens
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Nan and Robert Mabon
Dr Helen McAllister
McCorquodale Charitable Trust
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Julia Shaw
Elspeth Thomas
Sanderson Foundation
H M Sassoon Charitable Trust
Toby Simon
Peter Smallpeice
Mr and Mrs Max Ulfane
Veneziana Fund
Viewforth Trust
Axel Whitney

THANK YOU

to the donors to other recent projects and ongoing work especially over the last few difficult months.

Christine Bayliss
T B H Brunner
Harriet Cullen
Anne Dewe
The Drapers Company
Favini Papers
Hugh Geddes
Nicholas and Judith Goodison
Roger and Meg Hepher
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Veneziana Fund
Jonathan Radford
Jon and Carol Rayman
Alex Scott-Barrett
The George and Margaret Trotter Charitable Trust
Lord True
Axel Whitney

And those who wish to remain anonymous

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- Twice-yearly Venice in Peril printed Newsletter covering conservation stories.
- Regular e-newsletters with conservation updates.
- A membership network of those who share your love of Venice.

	ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP	STANDING ORDER
FRIEND	£60	£50
JOINT* <i>(*two adults at one address)</i>	£100	£80

AUTUMN 2020

Event series

As a result of the COVID pandemic we are holding our first two Autumn lectures online via Zoom, following the success of the June lockdown talks. The best way to keep abreast of online events is to sign up for e-news at www.veniceinperil.org

When you join an event please make a donation in lieu of tickets. In this way, as you discover more about Venice, you will also be funding its conservation.

21 SEPTEMBER

Hospitality Beyond Measure: the visit of Crown Prince Friedrich-Christian of Saxony to Venice, 1739-40

Maureen Cassidy-Geiger

During a six-month stay at Ca'Foscari, a regatta and a bull-fight were held in his honour and the young heir to Augustus III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, attended Carnival, operas and sittings for Rosalba Carriera, while also studying and following an intense devotional programme. Maureen Cassidy-Geiger, curator and specialist in Dresden court culture, introduces us to Venetian society as seen through his travel diaries and other eyewitness accounts.

20 OCTOBER

Venice's Secret Service – the world's earliest centrally-organised state intelligence service

Ioanna Iordanou

Venice's 'Secret Service' played a pivotal role in the defence of the Venetian empire. The Council of Ten were Venice's spy chiefs, running intelligence and covert operations, deploying analysis, cryptography and steganography, cryptanalysis, and even developing lethal substances. Ioanna Iordanou's acclaimed history *Venice's Secret Service*, draws on archival documents in Venice, Rome, Simancas and London.

A decision will be made on 1 October as to whether the following lecture will be live or online.

9 NOVEMBER

Titian, Sex, Love and Violence at the Fitzwilliam Museum Ashley Clarke Memorial Lecture

Luke Syson

Titian was one of the great painters of love, but, as he entered the last stage of his long career, his imagery became darker. What was he trying to say? Luke Syson, fourteenth Director of the Fitzwilliam looks closely at each of the three late works in the museum, hoping to understand better, and explain, Titian's attitudes to love, sex and violence, and his manner of painting each.

This lecture was originally planned as the 2020 Venice in Peril Fund Kirker Lecture.

To find out more about our projects and how you can donate please contact Venice in Peril Fund, Hurlingham Studios, Ranelagh Gardens, London SW6 3PA

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