

The Exhibition

The exhibition itinerary is designed with evocative light scenes that enhance the individual rooms and masterpieces of the collection in a theatrical way.

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[...] The visit develops along the eleven rooms in this museum-house, and also includes the museum services (reception, educational area, offices, café, bookshop, and storage). Included in the visit are the open spaces of the garden and the arcades. Today, the entire collection, which is made up, as we said before, of about eight hundred and fifty works, becomes a full-fledged museum, specifically a museum-house, which is conceived with a very specific goal: first, to preserve and valorize paintings, sculptures, furniture, applied art objects so that, seeing their artistic value, they will never be dispersed again, and also so that they will also bear witness to a specific contemporary collecting taste. The transformation of the domestic architecture into a museum institution also confers to the individual works as well as to their installation, among other things, a scientific hierarchy, one whose purpose is to identify and valorize the objects.

Originating from the art market, the paintings, sculptures, furnishings, and applied arts in the Zani collection are on display in a museum layout that casts light first of all on the collector's desire to converse with the art on an everyday basis, without display cases or other obstacles, making it possible to fully enjoy each piece.

The admissions area as well, designed down to the smallest detail by Zani, but actually realized only after his passing, thrives on the same stylistic cipher as what is on

display.

Here the visitor is welcomed by some true masterpieces, such as the large canvas with a *Still Life, Historiated Vases, Squirrel and Parrot* (c. 1630), a mysterious and highly scenographic work, chosen by Zani exclusively for its outstanding pictorial quality, albeit devoid of a convincing attribution.

Also in the admissions area is an extraordinary example of a four-drawer commode, the work of the cabinet-maker Nicolas Sageot (1666-1731). Made around 1702, with intarsias in brass, tortoiseshell, and ebony, and gilt bronze (*ormolu*), it is one of the most elegant examples of how the technique of the French master André Charles Boulle (1642-1732) came to be affirmed, and served as a lesson to all of France in the eighteenth century.

It is within this stylistic and cultural climate that the path inside the first display room of the Casa Museo develops. Atop an important commode with ebony veneer and tortoiseshell and pewter intarsias against a copper background (attributed to André Charles Boulle, and hallmarked E. Levasseur and JME) Paolo Zani placed the aforementioned painting *An Allegory of Earth* by Boucher (c. 1741). Boucher's work is an ideal introduction to the Rococo atmosphere at Versailles. Thanks to the protection of King Louis XV's favorite, the Marquise of Pompadour, Boucher achieved the much-sought-after role of "first painter of the king." The ensemble is completed by two gilded bronze swans, part of a series of eight pieces made around 1755 to a design by Lazare Duvaux (1703-1758) for Madame de Pompadour herself. This first room also hosts two canvases by Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto.

The first of these, portraying the *Piazzetta in Venice*, acquired by Zani in 1997, belonged to the Weitzner collection in New York and, later, the Roman one of Roberto Tomasini, finally arriving at the Geneva home of Carlo Ponti and Sophia Loren. In 1969 the painting was chosen as the image on a postage stamp of the Emirate of Ajman

(United Arab Emirates) as an example of Italian art in the world.²⁵ The second Zani Canaletto is an oil on canvas portraying *The Molo, Seem from St. Mark's Basin*,²⁶ whose provenance, as we mentioned before, is the collection of the Persian Shah. This painting, which entered the Cellatica collection in 1998, originally came from the collection of Count Francesco Matarazzo (1854-1937) in São Paulo, Brazil, after which it ended up in the property of the last Shah of Persia, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919-1980).

Like the previous painting, the *Molo* was also classified by Constable as a pendant piece to another work by Canaletto, *The Grand Canal from the Campo San Vio*, now in a private collection in Madrid.

Also in this first room, hanging high above at the center of the small salon overlooking the garden, is a mosaic oval of the head of *St. Peter* after a drawing by the Lucchese painter Pompeo Batoni.

In the passageway leading to the following room, Zani created an installation, almost a unicum along the visit, artfully detached from all the rest. It is a niche deliberately created to host an extremely refined Roman chest of drawers, featuring light blue lacquer and gold and polychrome chinoiserie. The piece of furniture was arranged so that it could converse with a painted glass mirror and with a turquoise porcelain sculpture from the Kangxi period (1662-1772) from the collection of Baron Henri de Rothschild. On the wall is a famous canvas made in 1782 by Francesco Guardi entitled *Encounter Between Pope Pius VI and Doge Paolo Renier in San Giorgio in Alga*; the work is dominated by intense movement and the contrast between the black tones of the gondolas and the light blue ones of the sky and lagoon. Guardi's masterpiece was part of a series of four canvases executed at the behest of Pietro Edwards, inspector of the Republic's public festivities, on the occasion of the Pope's stay in Venice in May 1782. A preparatory ink drawing of the painting is currently housed in the Museo Correr.

The adjacent living room is dominated by two masterpieces by the cabinet-maker

Giuseppe Maggiolini (1738-1814), an outstanding pair of chests of drawers, a wedding gift for the Marchese Lodovico Busca Arconati and Luigia Serbelloni. The overall design is the work of Giocondo Albertolli (1742-1839), while the drawings of classical inspiration of the six tarsias are by Andrea Appiani (1754-1817), later reduced for the intaglio by Raffaele Albertolli (1770-1812), and currently divided between the Library of Brera Academy and the Bellinzona Archivio di Stato. In 1789, Maggiolini created these two pieces of furniture with extraordinary skill at wood-painting, masterfully combining different types of wood as if they were delicate brushstrokes of color. As previously mentioned, the arrival of two Late Baroque chests of drawers completely transformed the room, and as a result Paolo Zani commissioned a local artisan to make a boiserie inspired by the drawings that Appiani and Albertolli made for the decoration of Villa Reale in Monza.

The dining room leads to the next room along a passageway filled with several particularly refined objects, such as the pair of *Still Lifes* painted on slate by the Flemish painter Jan van Kessel (1626-1679) and the two ivory high-reliefs, also of Northern European production, from the early eighteenth century.

The collector devoted the Roman pool that follows to his stone pieces. The southern wall is distinguished by two Roman marble busts with at the center one of the masterpieces in the collection: the *Piano di tavolo a intarsio di marmi e pietre policrome* displayed by Zani on the wall, as if it were a painting. The rather large object is an example of late-sixteenth-century Roman manufacture, inlaid with precious and rare stones: from Persian lapis lazuli to seme santo marble and alabastro fiorito, corals, black Aquitania, Corsican jasper, Spanish broccatello, comprising the refined chromatic contrasts of the mosaic.

East of the room is a wall of sculptures dominated by bronzes with, on either end, two *Hercules* and at the center an Oriental stone statue from the second-third centuries. The room is completed, among other things, by an Apulian vase, more polychrome

marble sheets, and two Roman consoles dated to the eighteenth century from Palazzo Corsini in Rome.

From the Roman pool one can view the large central room, no doubt the place here with the most artistic, emotional, and theatrical atmosphere in its spatial conception, divided by two grooved columns in white and pink marble that introduce the visitor to the background scenery. Gathered in this space is all the taste of the collector, with works positioned like satellites that are either connected or perfectly independent.

Arranged specularly in relation to the Oriental background, in the northern wall of this domestic theater, to either side of the Venetian mirror, are four paintings with Venetian views. These are, respectively, to the left Francesco Guardi's *The Punta della Dogana* and *St. Mark's Square*, and to the right, by Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780), *The Grand Canal, St. Mark's Square and the Church of the Salute with San Giorgio Maggiore* and *Piazza St. Mark's Square, Seen from the Basilica*. On the wall overlooking the dining room, above the domed, blue-laquered *Cassettoncino* (little chest of drawers) also manufactured in Venice, is a painting representing *Bacchus and Ariadne* by Giovan Battista Tiepolo, another pre-eminent name in eighteenth-century Venetian painting. The work is inside an extraordinary carved and gilded Venetian frame from around 1770.

East of the views, on display atop the eighteenth-century commode made of ebony and Japanese black lacquer that once belonged to the Duke of Westminster, is the collection of corals made up of twenty-nine pieces, especially ones made in Trapani in the seventeenth century.

Opposite, at the center of this part of the room, the place of honor is reserved for a one-of-a-kind object in the production of stone intarsias: a *Table with Octagonal Top* in marble mosaic, one of the finest works ever produced in the Galleria dei Lavori di Firenze between the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries.

The work was acquired in London in 2005 by Paolo Zani, thus guaranteeing its return

to Italy, which it had almost certainly left by the end of the eighteenth century. From the Florentine collection of the nobleman Adriano Benotti, the table ended up in the collection of the Byng family of England; indeed, the table was registered in the inventory of the estate of Wentworth House (currently 5, St James's Square in London) in 1847, situated at the center of the Large Drawing Room, upon the death of George Byng (1764-1847). The work was then documented as being in one of the Byng residences as late as 2001, when it appeared in Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*, right behind Dame Maggie Smith, seated in the dining room at Wrotham Park, in Hertfordshire, north of London.

Serving as a backdrop to this extraordinary domestic theater, the heart of the room, is the southern wall covered by a lacquered and gilded folding screen of Chinese manufacture, with at the center another oil by François Boucher and his workshop depicting *Venus at Vulcan's Forge*. To either side, the scene is introduced by two gilded wooden sculptures with allegorical figures (*River* and *Abundance*), works by the Genoese artist Filippo Parodi from around 1666-70. To the far left of the backdrop is another painting by Giovan Battista Tiepolo, *Portrait of an Old Man* (1743-45), and a suite comprising four armchairs and a Louis XVI divan, from the Bruni Tedeschi collection.

Atop a phytomorphic console here is a particularly precious object: it is the *Carved Wedding Box* made of wood, ivory, and copper of German manufacture (c. 1560-70).

Above the fireplace is the last painting by Francesco Guardi to have joined the Zani collection. Truly a masterpiece you can almost hear the rustling of the silk stirred by a light breeze and the steps of the figures walking toward the Palladian villa on a sunny afternoon. In the past, *View of the Villa Loredan at Paese*, mentioned before in relation to the illustrious commission (John Strange), was exhibited in prestigious international venues, from the Royal Academy of London to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, all the way to the Frick Collection in New York, one of Paolo Zani's favorite

places.

In this room as well, continuing along from the other rooms, next to the high points of Western painting and sculpture, are Chinese porcelains with sinuous lines and exotic flavor that embellish the decor, once again bearing witness to that taste for the chinoiserie that dominated the principal European courts especially from the eighteenth century.

In the adjoining corridor leading to the more private part of the residence, hanging between a series of (*ventoline*) Venetian Rococo mirrors are two paintings on glass attributed to the Neapolitan artist Luca Giordano (1634-1705), representing the *Rape of Europa* and *Venus and Adonis*.

Also exhibited in this space is another compact group of works in the Zani collection, eight canvases by another leading name in Venetian painting, Pietro Longhi (1701-1785). An accurate overview of Venetian society in the mid-eighteenth century is offered to the visitor by this painter who, better than anyone else, manages to lay out scenes of the everyday life of the Venetian aristocracy as though they were theatrical *pièces*. These include *Peasants Dancing the Furlana*, *Card Game*, and *Reception Before a Wedding*, followed by other paintings by Longhi in the next room.

Before completing the series of Venetian paintings we must first cross the private bathroom and wardrobe, made with the lacquered Chinese folding screen panels from the mid-seventeenth century: pagodas, everyday scenes, and battle scenes, crowned with floral motifs, vases of flowers and elephants are the typical elements of this elegant manufacture. At the center of this suspended place is a nineteenth-century Chinese sculpture, an ivory Buddha painted in polychrome with gilded decorations and semi-precious stones.

The bathroom is accessed through a door created by Zani with two spectacular eighteenth-century gilded and intaglioed French mirrors. Two Rouleaux Vases from around 1820 particularly stand out here, important creations in crystal and gilded

bronze by Ivan Ivanov, director between 1815 and 1848 of the Imperial Glass Factory in Saint Petersburg.

The *incipit* to the bedroom area is through a Venetian door with two shutters. The visitor's attention is captured by the large-scale painting by Pietro Longhi portraying the *Ridotto*, one of his most famous compositions. Located near San Moisè, the *Ridotto* was the game room that was only opened during the Carnival period, and in Longhi's painting it is a mirror of the dissolute life of the Venetian aristocracy. Venice also dominates this room with the presence of two pink and yellow chests of drawers, two aqua-hued credenzas used by Zani with little fanfare as side-tables, lamps, and another pair of polychrome glass fire fans, with porcelain flowers and cut glass from the late eighteenth century. This last room leads directly to the garden, personally created by Zani as a path through sculptures, fountains, architectural elements in a dialogue with nature. A corner of the world where distant cultures are glimpsed, such as the ones represented by Egyptian papyrus, Lebanon cedars, the Japanese pagoda tree, the Chinese juniper, the careful selection of Agaves, and a scenographic selection of Bonsais. Among the rare arboreal species, trees pruned artfully and antique sculptures, paths unwind and lead to an evocate nymphaeum with putti and water features. Reflected here, with all its lightness, is a singular collection of water lilies and aquatic plants, brought to life by colorful Japanese carps (Koi). This was Paolo Zani's last intervention, fulfilling his personal vision of the house as a metaphor for the space of the soul in which treasures are protected, wisdom is safeguarded, beauty is cultivated, and, most importantly, art is inhabited.