

I TATTI

THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY CENTER
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FORTY YEARS WITH I TATTI

I Tatti's Council Chair reflects on four decades with the Harvard Center

MAPPING THE VENETIAN LAGOON

Stories of the Venetian Lagoon in a digital research infrastructure

FINDING INSPIRATION IN THE I TATTI GARDENS

A Harvard graduate student reflects on his Fellowship experience

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE, EXPANDING THE CANON

Exploring the relationship between the African continent and the Italian peninsula

A SCHOLAR'S PERSPECTIVE: LIFE UNDER LOCKDOWN

How the spirit of fellowship thrived at I Tatti during an unprecedented year



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19/20 VILLA I TATTI APPOINTEES

I Tatti Year Fellows

Antonino Antonazzo Inside Cristoforo Landino's Philosophical Laboratory **Alessandro Benassi** The Cynthia's Face on the Body of the Moon. The Poetic Imagination and the Scientific Discoveries **Brian Brege** The Global Merchants of Florence: Florentine Patrician Families and Early Modern Capitalism **James K. Coleman** Reading Archipelagos: Italian Humanism and Renaissance Books of Islands **Mary Doyno** Catherine's Daughters: Female Penitents, Thomas Caffarini, and the Creation of the Dominican Third Order **Peter Fane-Saunders** Ancient Greek Accounts of Lost Architecture and their Influence, from the Renaissance to the Romantic Age **Francesca Fantappiè** The Economics of "Meraviglia": Theatre, Music, and Money at the Medici court **Byron Hamann** A Native American Mediterranean: Three Intersecting Journeys, 1528-1530 **David Kim** Groundwork: Figure, Ground, and Pictorial Composition in the Renaissance Picture **Pauline Lafille** Battles as Soundscapes in the Arts of the Renaissance **Marco Lamanna** The Reception of Italian Renaissance Humanism in Protestant Metaphysics (Schulmetaphysik) between the XVI and XVII Centuries **Fabio Pagani** New Perspectives on Byzantine and Italian Platonism **John-Mark Philo** English and Scottish Scholars at Italian Libraries (1500-1700) **Katalin Prajda** Cultural Exchange in Early Renaissance Italy The Italian States and the Kingdom of Hungary from Louis I of Anjou through Matthias Corvinus **Selene Maria Vatteroni** Literary Forms of Spirituality in Cinquecento Florence

I Tatti Term Fellows

Giulia Accornero Buying Time, Marking Space: Algorism, Algebraic Objects and the Emergence of Mensural Notations **Stefano de Bosio** Patterns of Reversal: Negotiating Image Orientation in Printmaking and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Italy **Daniele Di Cola** Tradition, Modernity, and the "lois éternelles" of Style: Gustave Soulier's Definition of Renaissance Art, from "Tintoret" (1911) to "L'Inspiration et la technique de Michel-Ange" (1937) **Enrico Fantini** Smuggling Ariosto: the Renaissance in the Eyes of Italian Jews, Exiles and Anti-Fascists **Nicholas Herman** "Il surpasse aujourd'hui tous les citramontains": Jean Perréal and Franco-Italian rivalry at the turn of the sixteenth century **Ivan Lupić** The Illyrian Renaissance: Literature in the European Borderlands **Lavinia Maddaluno** Of Airs and Waters (and Rice and Cheese): Public Health, Economy, and the Environment in late Renaissance Milan (1576-1700) **César Manrique** The incidence of XVth and XVIth centuries Italian printed books in libraries of colonial Mexico. A case of international book circulation and trade **Stephen McCormick** Italian Epic and the Renaissance of Cartography **Scott Nethersole** Between Tuscany and Ethiopia: The Miracle of the Black Leg and the Perception of Christian Africa in Early Renaissance Italy **Maryam Patton** 'By the Declining Day': Time and Temporal Cultures of the Early Modern Mediterranean **Lucia Simonato** Terracotta between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: New Sculptural Practices and Fascination for the Renaissance **Lisa Tagliaferri** The Renaissance Afterlife of Catherine of Siena **Sezen Unluonen** Nineteenth-Century British Encounters with the Art Object **Joseph Vignone** Bodies of Knowledge: Medicine, Memory and Enhancement in Islam **Richard Wittman** From Universal Ideal to Local Tradition: The Architecture of the Renaissance in Papal Rome (1815-60)

Visiting Professors

Reuven Amitai Looking Again at Economic Developments in Late Medieval Syria, in Light of New Research on the Activities of Italian Merchants in the Mamluk Sultanate **Patricia Falguières** The Sublunar, Field of the Arts **Christine Göttler** Silver, salt, and ivory: A saltcellar for Peter Paul Rubens **Cecilie Hollberg** Who is Wearing Silk in Florentine Paintings (14th-16th centuries)? **Etienne Jollet** The Notion of "Ponderazione" in Italian Renaissance Art Theory **Pedro Memelsdorff** Music in the French Caribbean 1760-1800 **Felipe Pereda** Torrigiano, the Man Who Broke Michelangelo's Nose **Carlo Severi** "Parer Vivo" An Epistemology of the Semblance of Life in Renaissance Perspective **Jane Tylus** Saying Goodbye in the Renaissance: Meditations on Leavetaking **Juliane von Fircks** Textile Merchants as Patrons of Art in Florence, Genoa, Bologna and Venice

Research Associates

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a MESSAGE *from the* DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

So much has changed here in Florence and throughout the world since I last wrote in these pages, with 2020 seeing our Center's first extended period of closure in its near 60 year history.

When it arrived in March, **lockdown** in Italy was swift and total and our community—which since I Tatti's inception has depended on togetherness and collaborative fellowship—was thrust into an entirely unprecedented way of life. Nearly all of our Fellows and Visiting Professors remained in Florence and we were swift to adapt, determined to do all that we could to ensure that their fellowship experience would be safe but also meaningful, even under such testing circumstances. And thus, although we faced many challenges, the second semester of the 2019 / 2020 academic year was in many ways a productive time for our appointees, who suddenly had to identify new ways to collaborate and learn from each other. As Peter Fane-Saunders (VIT'20) discusses on page 4, for some of our scholars lockdown even meant that their work took on new meaning and moved in unexpected directions.

Our Fellows were able to continue their work thanks to the hard work and dedication of our team, including the Berenson Library staff who worked exceptionally hard to ensure that our Fellows would have access to the digital resources they required. In fact, our experience of scholarly life under lockdown has reinforced just how important digital resources continue to be for Renaissance scholars. Over the last few years I Tatti has committed to support meaningfully the ever-increasing number of scholars whose work involves a digital aspect. And it gives me great pleasure to announce that at the time of writing construction work has now concluded on our Granaio building, which has been transformed into a state-of-the-art **Digital Hub** for the many scholars like Ludovica Galeazzo (p.11) who employ digital technologies to facilitate and enhance their research.

Despite continuing challenges presented by Covid-19 we nevertheless did our utmost to welcome the 2020/21 cohort of scholars in September. Although there are no dining room lunches—now turned into paper-bag lunches either outside when the sun is shining, which has been almost daily until now, or in our vast and airy Limonaia and the newly-opened Café when it rains—one of the defining features of I Tatti as an intellectual community has been saved and still keeps us all interacting as a community.

Our kitchen and household staff has been marvelous at adapting to this new normal. Safety continues to be our first priority as we face an uncertain winter and for this reason, I Tatti is currently unable to welcome external scholars and visitors and will remain open only to our community for the time being. While this means that we are unable to host in-person workshops and conferences, it does not mean that work has drawn to a halt and in fact much is going on as we focus on long-term projects that are moving scholarship in new and exciting directions, and on the introduction of new fellowship opportunities. One such initiative is the introduction of a joint fellowship with the German Historical Institute in Rome for scholars in fields related to the study of pre-colonial and colonial **African history**, which Ingrid Greenfield and Carlo Taviani discuss on page 8.

At a moment when so many universities and cultural institutions are feeling the effects of the global pandemic and being forced to make difficult budgeting decisions, the generosity of our friends is ever more important to us. One of I Tatti's most loyal friends for over four decades is I Tatti Council Chair **Susan Mainwaring Roberts**, who talks (p. 14) about how Renaissance Studies and I Tatti's community have inspired her to support our Center for well over half a lifetime. On behalf of our community of scholars here in Florence, I offer sincerest thanks to our supporters from around the world who are helping us to withstand this most difficult of moments and sustain Renaissance scholarship at a time when the world needs to look to and understand its history more than ever.

Alina Payne
Paul E. Geier Director, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University
Center for Italian Renaissance Studies
Alexander P. Misheff Professor of History of Art and
Architecture, Harvard University



SCHOLARLY LIFE *under* LOCKDOWN: a FELLOW'S PERSPECTIVE

Peter Fane-Saunders was the 2019 / 2020 Rush H. Kress Fellow at I Tatti. He is an art historian whose work explores how classical descriptions of long-lost works of art and architecture influenced Renaissance thought and practice.

For Tattiani, this was a year like no other. While the staff and Fellows were, mercifully, spared the full effects of the pandemic that swept through Italy, our lives and research were irrevocably altered. What follows is very much a personal reflection, but it hopefully conveys some of our common experiences at a unique time.

When news of the outbreak first broke in mid-February, I had just returned from a trip with another Fellow to Cremona and Piacenza, two cities on the borders of what became the first 'zona rossa'. In fact, I had even changed trains at the epicentre, the village of Codogno. Entering self-isolation in my apartment was a novelty, but it was a prelude of things to come.

The wonderful rhythm of I Tatti continued for nearly a month: rich conversations over lunch, plentiful books, the changing moods and seasons of the gardens. Restrictions began slowly. When the axe finally came down and the Villa was closed, the Fellows were scattered. Some already lived near Ponte a Mensola in the Villa dependencies, but others found themselves stranded in Florence or farther afield. During lockdown, I was fortunate to be living in the Upper Mill (Molino di Sopra), just outside the garden gates and beneath the topiary trees. With neighbours on the floor below and across the way, there was always the sense of human activity even if the birdsong seemed louder than before. Then there would be chance encounters while shopping for food, brief chats mulling over the latest news. Life was solitary rather than lonely.

It was at this point that the Trecento poet and scholar Giovanni Boccaccio assumed a new significance for me. Before Christmas, I had often walked past his father's house in nearby Corbignano. Now, restricted to my apartment, I could see its rooftop amid the trees rising above the I Tatti farm. Boccaccio knew this landscape intimately and celebrated its charms in verse: the Mensola, the stream outside my window, he immortalised in his *Ninfale fiesolano*.



In 1348 he, too, sought refuge in the Tuscan *campagna* from pandemic disease, on that occasion the Black Death. And it was the Villa Palmieri in the neighbouring valley that likely provided the setting for the story-tellers of his *Decameron*, as they whiled away time waiting for the plague to abate. This was all Boccaccio country.

My work took on new resonance and meaning. In the days preceding lockdown, I had started researching an early printed book celebrated for its depiction of dreamscapes. Published in Venice in 1499, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Fra Francesco Colonna presents a world populated by outlandish and impossibly perfect buildings. Now, the more I thought about it, the more its place of publication gave me pause. Cutting across the whimsy of the book was a newfound appreciation of Venice as a city afflicted by plague. Islands in its archipelago served to quarantine those entering the lagoon by ship. Colonna himself survived multiple outbreaks, more than ten over the course of his life. Lockdown was rigorously enforced with fines. As the police presence increased on the streets, I moved to another topic that felt strangely appropriate: the philosopher Tommaso Campanella. A Dominican friar (like Colonna) whose writings attracted the ire of the Inquisition, Campanella was held in

a series of Neapolitan castles for over two and half decades. Trapped in cells with fiendish names such as 'Il coccodrillo' (the crocodile), he nevertheless wrote at a prodigious rate. Against this backdrop of privation and darkness emerged one of his masterpieces, *La Città del Sole* (1602), a vision of a Republic of Philosophers located on an island at the ends of the earth. Perhaps most remarkably, Campanella had little access to books and worked almost entirely from memory.

By good fortune, the Fellows at I Tatti had their memories taxed for nowhere near as long. The Villa reopened its gates in early May, after just seven weeks – a remarkable feat on the part of the Director. Lunches would no longer be held indoors. Instead, we ate beneath awnings on the garden terraces. Seminars were held virtually. New rules also came into force in the Library. Research could start again. With a fresh sense of purpose, my work on Campanella blossomed. Alongside another Fellow, I planned and submitted a proposal for a conference at the Villa on the exchange of Campanella's thought in and out of prison.

Confinement with no clear end in sight was a new and unsettling experience. It only increased my admiration for the subjects of my study – figures such as Boccaccio, Colonna and Campanella, who endured lasting hardship to create works that remain the cultural yardsticks of their time. What helped greatly were the many small acts of kindness from staff and Fellows. We may not have experienced the rigours of the Renaissance, but we banded together during our glimpses of a very different way of life.



- ▲ Peter Fane-Saunders
- ▶ Andrea del Castagno, Giovanni Boccaccio (detail), 1450
- ◀ The hamlet of Corbignano



AN ISLAMICIST *at* I TATTI

Joseph Leonardo Vignone is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. He was a Harvard Graduate Fellow at I Tatti during Fall 2019.

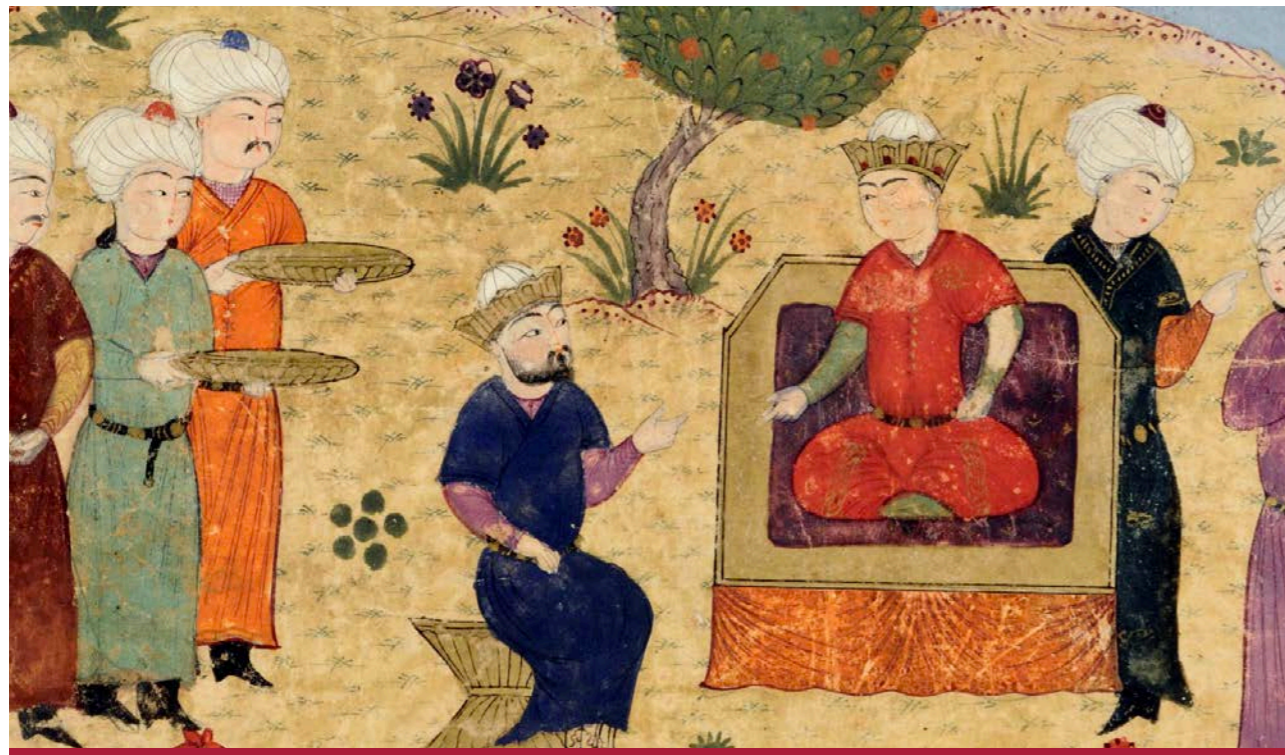
What brings more pleasure than pleasure can bring,
Conversation with friends, a garden in spring?

So find the wine bearer and ask why we wait,
Such joy, as it comes, is ours to partake.
—Hafez Shirazi (1315–1390 CE), *Divān* §45

To the medieval Islamic lyrical imagination there could be no finer arena for scholarly enterprise than the garden. More stimulating for the mind and bracing for the spirit than any madrasa building or mystic's lodge, gardens like those in the poetry of Hafez Shirazi offered sanctuary and sustenance to students of all disciplines. Those who pursued careers in theology and philosophy often cited the beauty of the garden as evidence for God's creative power. Physicians

and chemists cataloged the healing effects of its many plants, while jurists and traditionalists formed scholarly circles in its shelter for debating scripture. Far from austere moralists, medieval Islamic scholars enthusiastically paired these pursuits with the wine, food, and eclectic company of the garden. It was in this happy tradition of symposia that they brought their intellectual and religious commitments to the fruitful union that enabled the later triumphs of the European Renaissance.

I held Hafez's poetry in mind as I walked the gardens at Villa I Tatti last fall, where I was welcomed as a Graduate Fellow in Islamic Studies by colleagues and mentors drawn from across the globe. Surrounded by acres of productive land with a commanding view of the Tuscan countryside, the gardens of I Tatti have provided a rich backdrop to the scholarly lives led within its walls for six decades. Our founder, Bernard Berenson, famously envisioned the villa



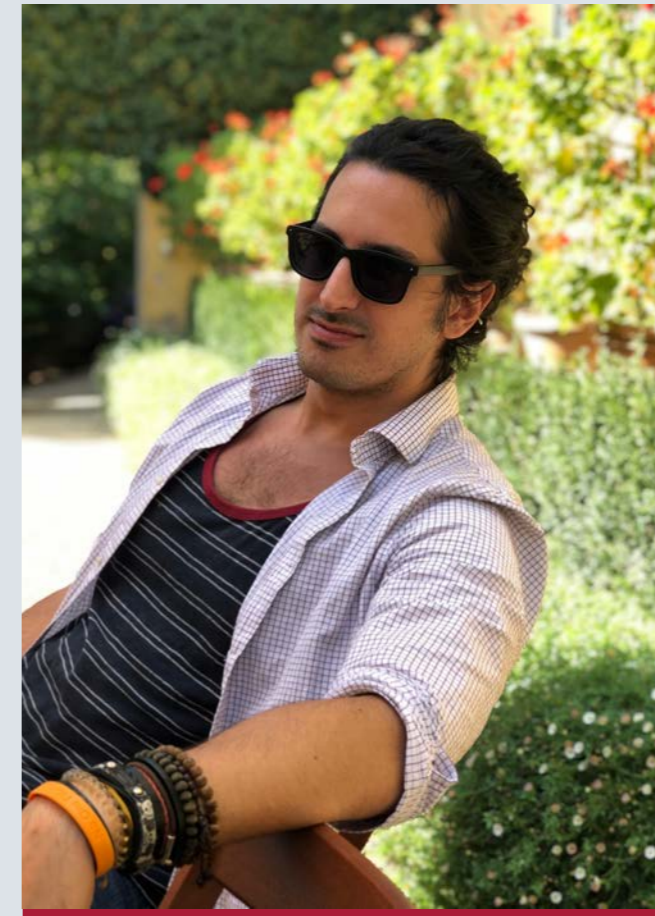
as a lay monastery, a space held apart from metropolitan Florence and dedicated to the study of the Renaissance. It is true that, as a historian of medieval Islamic medicine and devotion, I am not quite a scholar of the Renaissance. But as Berenson understood and his successors at I Tatti have carried forward, the same humanist spirit that brought renewal and rebirth to fifteenth-century Europe can be found in societies thriving beyond the Mediterranean. In addition to scholars of the Renaissance, each year I Tatti invites fellows committed to studying the arts, sciences, and political thought of all those peoples and places touched by that spirit. On any given morning you might walk into the Biblioteca Berenson and find fellows poring over medieval Arabic manuscripts, sixteenth-century maps of the Americas, and political manifestos written in protest of fascism. In the salon fellows are always grouped together to discuss their work with one another over aperitifs; on warm afternoons the villa's gardens bloom with conversations begun over lunch and extended long into the evening. **It is a kind of collegiality I have rarely experienced elsewhere in my academic career—one that often brought to mind Hafez's garden of scholarly paradise.**

Removed though it may be from Florence proper, I Tatti is part of vast network of archival and academic institutions spanning Italy and wider Europe. And as Harvard University's Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, it has direct access to the largest academic catalog in the world. No matter their area or method of study, upon arrival at the villa fellows have a comprehensive ocean of material immediately at their disposal. For scholars of Islam and the history of science like me, the Biblioteca Berenson holds precious treatises on medicine, physician handbooks, and

pharmacopoeias difficult to find at other premier research institutions. Florence's Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana boasts an Orientali Collection comprising numerous Arabic manuscripts on materia medica, toxicology, and general medicine from the medieval to early-modern periods. These include works by the famed Avicenna and Rhazes, Islamic theoreticians of medicine studied throughout the Renaissance era. European commentaries on their corpora are also easy to access at Florence's Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, affording students of Islamic medicine and ethics at I Tatti the important comparative perspective of Renaissance physicians.

As a Term Fellow at I Tatti I only began to tap these resources, whose impressive breadth and depth will surely inspire many pilgrimages back to Florence. The prospect is a happy one; it was Berenson who once said that if he had to choose between finding the truth and continuing the search for it, he would always opt for the latter. His sentiment was shared by medieval Islamic scholars, who quoted the Prophet Muhammad as requiring Muslims to travel widely in search of knowledge, even if it meant straying thousands of miles from home to find the answer to a single question. Though it

inspired fourteen hundred years of Islamic striving in the arts and sciences, scholars of all backgrounds and creeds certainly sense its allure. Those fortunate enough to find themselves at I Tatti get the happy chance to live its wisdom at one of the world's richest intellectual crossroads, where wayfarers from Boccaccio to Twain once passed. The villa remains today the joyful paradise Hafez imagined six centuries ago, a garden-hemmed home for scholars working to understand the global resonance of the European Renaissance. Much like Hafez himself, I and all those who walked those gardens last Fall dream of return.



▲ Joe Vignone in I Tatti's gardens, Fall 2019

◀ Kay Ka'us Crowns His Grandson, Kay Khusraw (detail), painting from a dispersed Turkman copy of Firdawsi's *Shāhnāma*, the Book of Kings, late fifteenth-century, Berenson Collection

AFRICA: CHANGING *the* NARRATIVE, EXPANDING *the* CANON

Exploring the Relationship Between the African Continent and the Italian Peninsula

I Tatti's multi-year project aims to bolster the visibility of Africa's historical significance in the early modern world and encourage new scholarship that puts the Italian peninsula into dialogue with the African continent.



With academic programing, publications, and fellowships dedicated to scholarship on transnational dialogues between Italy and other cultures during the Renaissance, I Tatti has been actively supporting research that explores the interconnected world of early modern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In 2016, I Tatti launched the “Crossroads Africa” initiative. Recognizing that the sub-Saharan African continent in particular has been anachronistically isolated from Renaissance studies, I Tatti’s project aims to bolster the visibility of Africa’s historical significance in the early modern world and encourage new scholarship that puts the Italian peninsula into dialogue with the African continent. Please read on for a brief update on how we’ve been engaging with the history of Africa at institutional and individual levels, and what we can look forward to in the future!

In 2016, I Tatti hosted the international conference “Gold: The Universal Equivalent of Global Dreams, Desires, Arts, and Values in Early Modern History” (organized by Thomas Cummins, Harvard), which brought together scholars from different disciplines to analyze the economic and artistic values of gold. An edited volume is forthcoming from the I Tatti Research Series. Before contact with the Americas, West Africa was one of Europe’s primary suppliers of gold, linked by a large-scale trade network which stretched across the Sahara, moving gold as well as salt, copper, glass beads, ivory, leather, textiles, and enslaved people on camel caravans over great distances to Mediterranean ports. In the mid-fifteenth century, desire for gold drove early European efforts to explore the African coastline and establish mutually beneficial relationships with local rulers. The history of gold cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries: from the mining of ore to the minting of coins and the production of

opulent objects, a material focus puts geology, archaeology, and environmental studies into dialogue with the histories of labor and economic institutions, science and technology, and art and culture. Framed within a larger context of global exchange, the scholarship presented at I Tatti and the ensuing conversations amongst the community play an important role in shifting attention to understudied topics, revealing cross-cultural entanglements, making room for new voices, and disrupting problematic narratives in Renaissance historiography.

A collaborative exploratory seminar in 2017, co-convened by Alina Payne, Suzanne Blier (Harvard), and Gerhard Wolf (Kunsthistorisches Institut–Florenz), concentrated on cultural exchange with and within the African continent. Scholars discussed ways to fashion a new historical narrative about these myriad connections, with presentation topics that included book circulation and the history of African libraries, architectural remnants of Portuguese presence in Atlantic Morocco, and the Swahili Coast’s participation in visual cultures of the Indian Ocean world. Building off the success of that workshop, we organized the international conference “Crossroads Africa: African Engagement in the Making of Early Modernity” in 2019. Focusing on a set of related geographies—West Africa, its Atlantic archipelagos, Ethiopia, and the Italian peninsula—papers explored the exchange of materials such as ivory; circulation of knowledge and technologies; enslavement and the formation of creolized communities and cultures; representation and perception of kingship, sovereignty, and territorial power; and the role of museums in prompting and disseminating new scholarship and promoting wider public appreciation of

historical African material and expressive cultures. An edited volume to be published by the I Tatti Research Series will highlight the spectrum of direct and indirect connections between ‘Italian’ and ‘African’ individuals, economic and religious institutions, art-making practices, and trade and exchange processes.

One significant location for trade encounters in the early modern Atlantic world was the archipelago of Cape Verde off the western coast of Africa, a site which took center stage in the 2019 conference “Cape Verde and the Atlantic: Crossroads of People, Goods and Capital Investments (1460–1610),” organized by I Tatti/DHI–Rom Research Associate Carlo Taviani. With support from I Tatti and the Forum Transregionale Studien, Taviani worked with the University of Cape Verde and the Associazione di amicizia Italia-Capo Verde Kriol-Ità to assemble a group of international scholars in Cidade Velha (formerly Ribeira Grande) on the island of Santiago, the first permanent European settlement in the tropics. By the sixteenth century, the Cape Verde islands had become one of the Portuguese empire’s major entrepôts, linking shipping routes between Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This conference, held in situ, included visits to local archaeological excavations, meetings with delegates from the university and the ministry of culture, and presentations highlighting Cape Verde’s role in the history of early modern commerce.

The first appointed governor of Cape Verde was António da Noli, a Genoese navigator who led exploratory voyages along the sub-Saharan African coast in the mid-fifteenth century on behalf of the Portuguese crown. In the



▲ Participants of the International Conference “Crossroads Africa” held at I Tatti in May 2019
◀ Illuminated Gospel (detail), late 14th–early 15th century, Amhara peoples, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

subsequent century, many Italians took part in maritime expeditions that would eventually circle the globe and create unprecedented intercontinental movement of raw materials, manmade objects, people, and information. In 1594, a Florentine named Francesco Carletti embarked on what would become an eight-year voyage around the world, traveling and trading in the West African islands, the Spanish Americas, the Philippines, Japan, and China. After a stop in the Canary Islands, Carletti docked in Cape Verde's port of Ribeira Grande with the express intention of purchasing enslaved African people to sell at great profit in Cartagena. He describes the brutal business of the slave trade and provides observations about Cape Verdean life in an account of his voyage, written upon his return to Florence and dedicated to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici. When academic programming resumes, we can look forward to an interdisciplinary Exploratory Seminar on Carletti, organized by Paula Findlen, Luca Molà (VIT '98-99), Giorgio Riello, and Brian Brege (VIT '19-20).

As expanding public access to scholarship on African history becomes a priority, past and present Tattiani have been participating locally in public discourse through Florentine organizations including the Black Archive Alliance and Black History Month Florence. In February 2020, Black History Month Florence and the Gallerie degli Uffizi collaborated to produce "On Being Present: Recovering Blackness in the Uffizi Galleries," an online exhibition and video series highlighting the histories and historical context of the Black African figures present in a range of paintings in the museum's collection. Essays accompanying the artworks were contributed by John K. Brackett (VIT '89-90), Bruce

Edelstein (VIT '01-02), Ingrid Greenfield (VIT current), Kate Lowe (VIT '96-97; '09-10), and Emily Wilbourne (VIT '17-18).

I Tatti is currently accepting fellowship applications for the 2021-22 academic year, and we are excited to introduce a new joint fellowship with the German Historical Institute in Rome (Deutsches Historisches Institut in Rom), designed for scholars in fields related to the study of precolonial and colonial African history c. 1250-1750, including art history, the history of expressive cultures, musicology, economic history, intellectual, political, and religious history, as well as literature and languages. We appreciate the urgency of supporting innovative historical work which will contribute to the dismantling of structural inequalities in academia; with this fellowship and the larger initiative of Crossroads Africa, I Tatti recognizes that research projects addressing the relationship between the African continent and the Mediterranean world during the early modern period are critical contributions to the growth and vitality of Renaissance studies.

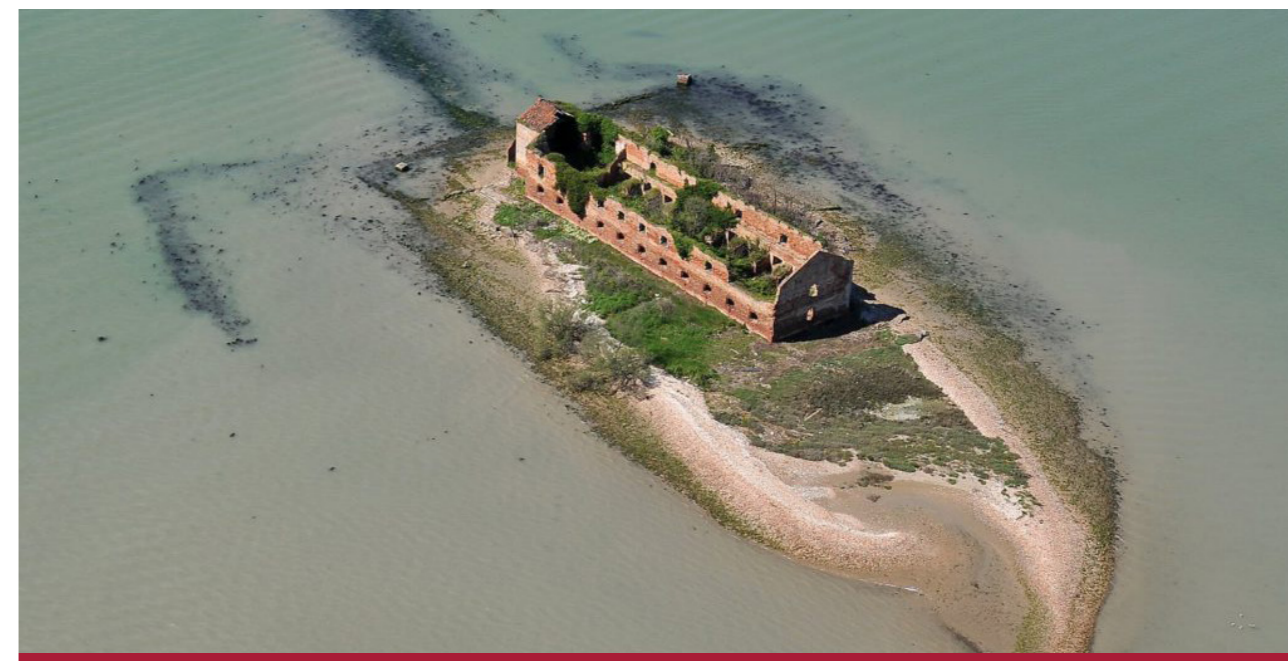
Ingrid Greenfield joined I Tatti as Post-Doctoral Fellow / Assistant to the Director (Academic Programs) in 2017. Her research interests include the visual and material cultures of early modern Italy and Africa, and of the history of collecting and display of African arts.

Carlo Taviani was an I Tatti Fellow in 2009/10 and an I Tatti Research Associate between 2017 and 2020. His work centers on Genoese merchant networks and the migration of economic institutions throughout the Mediterranean and Atlantic worlds.



DIGITAL TOOLS *for* CULTURAL HERITAGE

Stories of the Venetian Lagoon in an I Tatti Open-access Digital Research Infrastructure



Looking through real estate advertisements in Venice, you may find that with only 400,000 euros, you can acquire a two-square-mile island not far from the island of Burano. For the price of a luxury car, you won't have electricity or running water, nor a building equipped with a proper roof, but instead you will be the owner of a place that retraces an intriguing history spanning over a thousand years. This island of the Madonna del Monte, on the northern lagoon, with its imposing nineteenth-century gunpowder magazine, is just an emblem of the unfortunate history shared by many other water settlements of the Venetian lagoon. On the other side of this large body of brackish water, the island of Poveglia has – at least for now – been spared from sale. This place, whose unique shape alluringly reminds us of a woman wearing a wide dress, seems to have lived many lives. A prosperous village, in the eighteenth century Poveglia was transformed into a quarantine point for ships coming to Venice, and later, into an insane asylum, before being

abandoned in the 1960s. In 2014, a local group of activists, under the motto *Poveglia for Everyone*, defended the island and stopped a governmental 99-year lease by donating the symbolic sum of 99 euros each, one euro for every year of property. This initiative collected thousands of sympathizers and managed to gather a considerable sum of 450,000 euros, too low to win the only other contender's offer, but large enough to convince the State to call off the auction. In a nutshell, it took a citizens' crowdfunding effort to not sell off part of their public territory and a unique piece of our cultural heritage.

The project **Archipelago: Mapping the Islands of the Venetian Lagoon** stems from a surge of indignation in the face of a seemingly intractable problem: to leave many of the over sixty islands of Venice's lagoon to die a slow death, or to convert them for new uses at the high cost of making them inaccessible, thus losing their identity.

As historians and intellectuals, we most likely won't be able to tackle the intricate administrative and legal issues, but our response can still help to protect a common good. Our role – or perhaps obligation – is to bring to light the geographic, social, intellectual, and artistic culture of late medieval and early modern Venice in order to demonstrate the tight and enduring relationship that the capital city had with its unique aquascape. Even more importantly, **we should strive to get our message out to a broader audience by using all tools of communication available.**

Traditional methods – conferences, books, newspaper articles – are all powerful weapons in the fight against history's neglect. However, they inescapably tend to freeze a topic such as the historic city that is, on the contrary, a living organism. As the Italian architect and historian Bruno Zevi affirmed as early as 1948, urban places are not spaces merely shaped by buildings, streets, or landscapes, as if they were empty vessels existing prior to the matter that fills them. Urban settlements are constituted rather by people who share constantly changing relationships through social and political practices, as well as economic and labor exchanges. With this in mind, new methodologies generated by technology are becoming increasingly instrumental in promoting knowledge of a city as an evolving space in time. Given their compelling potential to synthesize knowledge, these technologies are emerging as important tools for collecting data, explaining complex historical processes, narrating interwoven stories, stimulating new research questions and, last but not least, offering new modes of reaching out to the public.

New methods generated by technology are becoming increasingly instrumental in promoting knowledge of a city as an evolving space in time.

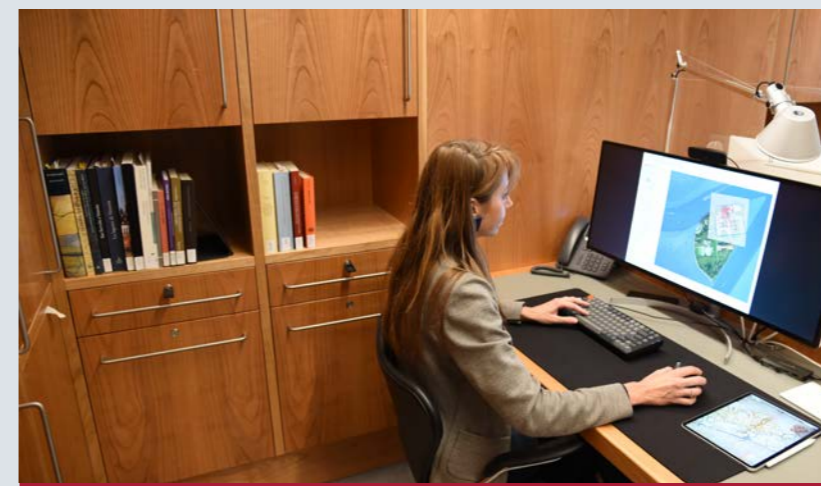
After having spent many years scrutinizing maps, drawings, Venetian offices' reports, inventories, travelers' descriptions, rental contracts, and so forth, the ties between Venice and the cluster of islands encircling its city center has become more and more evident to me. Like pieces on a skilled player's chessboard, at various moments these tiny settlements addressed the different needs of Venice's urban framework. They helped maintain its food supply by offering their orchards, vegetable gardens, and vineyards to a center that lacked any agricultural land. They also housed infrastructures and commodities that served the daily needs of the larger Venetian community, such as public boathouses, customs houses, and gunpowder depots. They hosted defense structures and hospitals, which protected the city in case of military or health emergencies. No less

important, Venice's unique aqueous environment was also a stage on which the Republic promoted its exceptional qualities, chief among which was the celebration of a city that seemed to miraculously float on water.

Driven by the desire to reconstitute the indissoluble bond that Renaissance Venice had with its surroundings, I began a systematic and geographic-based analysis of the history of the lagoon and its islands between the late fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Historical documents, archival and secondary sources related to the Venetian archipelago, but also the many stories of places, actors, and events were collected and mapped to a digitized geography of the ancient lagoon places. When I arrived at I Tatti at the beginning of 2019 as a Kress Fellow in the Digital Humanities, I was not completely unfamiliar with digital tools, namely with technologies such as geographic information system (GIS), geo-spatial techniques, and data management platforms to demonstrate the process of a city's change over time. They have been an integral part of my training since I studied architecture at Luav University in Venice, and continued work as a member of the international collaborative research group *Visualizing Venice/Visualizing Cities*. Equipped with this experience, I embarked on a new adventure at I Tatti eager to benefit from the high-profile environment of the research center and its vibrant community of scholars. What I did not expect was to find an equally vital center in the Digital Humanities. **Although relatively young, the Digital Humanities Lab has already positioned itself as a robust and cutting-edge research center in the field.**

The encounter with the laboratory's team of specialists profoundly changed how I envisioned not only my project, but also my use of digital tools. If at the outset these were useful only for structuring and answering my own historical questions, the main challenge soon became to build a digital research tool that could engage the larger community of scholars, but also any users interested in the history of the Venetian lagoon. We began to develop a digital infrastructure that allows for input of data, images, maps, and documents that can be seamlessly referenced, linked, and interwoven together. The whole platform is designed to be a research tool, allowing scholars to bring their studies together to interlink and augment one another's findings. It is also conceived to represent urban phenomena in their place and time by allowing users to explore documentary sources in relation to their corresponding geographical location.

The digital research infrastructure is an invitation to a virtual 'stroll' through space and time, allowing one to explore the long-term history of Venice's lagoon through both predefined narratives and spatially. While stories about food supply, public health, religious communities or ceremonies



and public events organized on the islands convey the idea of the Venetian archipelago as a web of interdependent human activities and exchanges, a time-dependent map allows users to gain visual access to what can no longer be seen today. Digital reconstructions of the islands' former shapes are superimposed on a current map of the lagoon. By moving across the decades and the different corners of the lagoon, the ancient urban settlements come to life in their physical appearance and social arrangement. References to archival and iconographic sources, bibliographic items, actors, and events help uncover the significance of these natural extensions of Venice's boundaries. Finally, this wealth of historical documentation is linked to the actual morphology of these once densely-populated and architecturally developed environments, and not to deserted islands now visited only by the gentle lapping of the lagoon waters.

The platform gives users the possibility to explore and interact with both the map and the historical data by fine-tuning visualization themselves, to create views and queries that can answer specific research questions as well as visualize links and relationships between places, events, and historical actors. This 'anatomical dissection' and reconstruction of the wide-ranging documentation is extremely meaningful for transforming historical data into dynamic tools for research and interpretation. Once the infrastructure is available, an international community of scholars will have free and open

access to historical resources generated over the past five centuries. These stories will contribute to a vibrant culture of open scholarship and collaboration among researchers, disrupting barriers posed by proprietary databases in which information is siloed. The digital infrastructure will also lend itself to more playful and serendipitous discovery, making it attractive and engaging to both citizens and scholars alike and, thus, it will help rehabilitate at least part of the forgotten organic perception of the lagoon's cultural heritage.

Ludovica Galeazzo is Digital Humanities Research Associate at I Tatti. She is an architectural and urban historian whose research focuses on Venetian architecture in the early modern period with a special interest in new technologies to demonstrate the process of how cities change over time.

Digital Humanities at I Tatti

Scholarship and digital resources are increasingly entwined, and I Tatti is developing to meet the requirements of our scholars, reach out to the worldwide academic community, and remain at the forefront of Italian Renaissance studies.

We ask you to support this work generously and help I Tatti as it takes the necessary steps toward a more digital future.

For more information and to donate, please visit itatti.harvard.edu/granaioproject

FORTY YEARS with I TATTI

Susan Mainwaring Roberts first become involved with I Tatti in 1979, when she opened the Center's first New York office. Since then, she has continued to be involved with I Tatti, most recently as Chair of the I Tatti Council. Here, she looks back on her years with the Harvard Center in Florence and reflects on why supporting scholars of Renaissance Studies is now more important than ever.

A couple of years ago The Cosmopolitan Club in New York City asked me to give a talk about my decades-long involvement with I Tatti. Inspired by Nicky Mariano's book *Forty Years with Berenson*, which my mother gave to me while I was in high school, I titled my talk *Forty Years with Villa I Tatti*. As I was working on the lecture, I asked my son, a communications consultant, to listen to what I'd written.

"Well, you tell some great stories," he said when I'd finished. "But the question is why, with all the calls on your time, are you still connected with this place? What's so important or relevant about I Tatti?"

Without a second's hesitation I answered with the words that concluded my talk:

For me, I Tatti is an ideal - a community where ideas are the currency.

Far more than a lovely furnished villa full of books, paintings, statuary, intriguing social history, and gorgeous arrangements from the garden, the place is an academic sanctuary, a think tank. Here there is time and space for both contemplation and conversation, where over the years a campus devoted to humanist studies has grown and flourished. Where theories are floated, discussed, generate excitement, and eventually make it into print or image or spoken word (or all three) and out into the larger world. If, as I believe, human consciousness is cumulative and additive, I also am convinced that the essential value of I Tatti lies in teasing out the individual stories that make up our shared body of knowledge, our common human history. Now that the world is suffering through a pandemic, it's useful, if not really comforting, to remember that humanity has



been through these crises before. It's an oversimplification to read (as I have recently) that the bubonic plague of the mid-1300s, the Black Death which killed more than 20 million people in Europe and wiped out half the population of Florence, "led directly" to the Italian Renaissance. That took roughly a century; time then was measured by the speed of a horse. Still, disruption can crack the carapace of established order, leading to questioning, innovation, and change. Doubts about the supremacy of the Church's view of the place of man, then, questioning of patriarchal, economic, and political values now.

"If, as I believe, human consciousness is cumulative and additive, I also am convinced that the essential value of I Tatti lies in teasing out the individual stories that make up our shared body of knowledge, our common human history".

Returning to the personal, what magic transported me in a decade's span from the pages of Nicky's memoir to the physical setting of her book? In between I had earned two degrees from Penn, a BA in Fine Arts, and a MA in the History of Art. My thesis had focused on Piero Torrigiani's magnificent Tudor tomb sculptures in Westminster Abbey. Torrigiani was a contemporary of Michelangelo, exiled from Florence by Lorenzo de' Medici for breaking the divine Michelangelo's nose in a fistfight – or so says Vasari.

Unlike my pal Piero, whose company I had kept for a couple of years in libraries and tomb enclosures, the wheels of fate were rolling me toward Florence. In 1979 an old friend who was consulting to Harvard's development department called

to ask if I'd ever heard of Villa I Tatti. I leapt to attention and within days had been interviewed by I Tatti's Director, Craig Hugh Smyth, discovering that he knew my thesis advisors. Both had been recent I Tatti Fellows. Within weeks, I was at I Tatti, but not before brushing up on my Berenson ("BB" by now) whose name was famous but whose books were considered out-of-date. I'd been surprised to read that at the time of his death in 1959 at age 94, BB was regarded as the most recognized art historian and connoisseur in the English-speaking world. I learned that his brilliance took him, the child of Jewish immigrants, through Boston Latin and a stint at Boston University, which BB left for Harvard since he couldn't find anyone to teach him Sanskrit. A new chapter in my education had opened. I was about to be drawn into what Kenneth Clark, in his introduction to Nicky Mariano's book, called "that curious microcosm of civilization which grew up around [Berenson] at I Tatti."

I was amused by my first reading of Berenson's seemingly antiquated observation, made in 1956 to urge his alma mater to accept the gift of I Tatti, its collections and libraries.

Our present western world is harassed, hustled, and driven. It excludes leisure, tranquility, permits no unexciting pursuits, no contemplation, no slow maturing of ideas....

Yet doesn't every age have its own version of harassment and hustle? Since our contemporary distractions unfold at speeds unimaginable to academics 100 years ago, it seems the need for a scholarly haven, an I Tatti, is more critical now than it was in Berenson's time!

Back in 1979 my first task as I Tatti's "New York Representative" – a combination of fund raiser and American presence – was to visit I Tatti. I arrived at the Harvard Center after a long and exhausting train trip from Rome. The service then was slow and undependable, so I walked into the fabled I Tatti *salone* almost oblivious to the famous Sassetta triptych which dominates the room. Professor Smyth and his wife Barbara offered me a restorative draft of something called "grappa," which I'd never tasted. It was just the three of us for dinner, so he was free to play one of his favorite records, the Beatles *White Album*, while refilling my glass. The room was spinning after just a few bars of *Why Don't We Do It in the Road?* (I learned later that Craig had been an accomplished saxophonist who had played his way through Princeton.) Of course, I later found my feet, was restored by a robust dinner from I Tatti's kitchen, and woke up the next day to the magnificent view of the Duomo in the distance.

Those ten days were my introduction to the mix that is I Tatti's oxygen. At night I read first editions of Edith Wharton's books which she had inscribed "To BB." I perused other volumes in the Big Library, recently beautifully restored and appointed as the Walter Kaiser Reading Room. By day I walked in Cecil Pinsent and Geoffrey Scott's beautiful – if slightly crumbling – parterre gardens (now in magnificent glory thanks to the generosity of Lila Acheson Wallace). I had tea and lunch with the Fellows, and met distinguished friends of I Tatti, many of whom had known Berenson personally, for dinners and more tea.

Several years passed since my first enchanted evening in the *salone* with the Beatles, and I quickly had become a part of



◀ Susan Mainwaring Roberts, October 2020
▲ The Salone Sassetta



▲ Susan Mainwaring Roberts (front left) with (l-r) Charlotte Fitzpatrick Cabot Brown, Gabriele Geier, Barbara Smyth, and Craig Hugh Smyth

the greater I Tatti family. While I was planning for one of life's biggest steps – marriage – I Tatti played an oblique but memorable role in the ceremony....

One of the Harvard Center's most outspoken scholars-in-residence during the '70s and '80s was Frate Salvatore Camporeale. He had lunch with the Fellows almost daily and we'd become friends. Campo, as we all called him, was a Dominican brother who lived in the monastery of Santa Maria Novella, preached there, but was also a distinguished theologian who taught at Johns Hopkins. He was a volatile Communist and a specialist in, of all subjects, "married love." A few months before my wedding, I met him for breakfast at the Harvard Club. Campo was more emotional than usual, since his flight had been diverted by a bomb scare, but he collected himself enough to present me with a little gift, a white handkerchief which had been embroidered by his great friends "the German nuns." He told me it was traditional in Italy for the bride to carry something white and handmade.

I was deeply touched and told him we had a similar custom in America. We talked a bit longer over our scrambled eggs, then he asked who was officiating at my wedding. I told him we were marrying each other at my parent's home in Pennsylvania, a Quaker-founded state where self-uniting marriages were allowed.

"YES!" exclaimed Campo, slamming the table, making the silverware and our neighboring diners jump.

"YES!! That's the way it was before the Council of Trent! A marriage is a covenant between two people and God and a priest has absolutely no business interfering with that sacrament! Just another way that the Church built up its bourgeois bureaucracy!"

In Campo's mind at that moment no time had elapsed between the Counter-Reformation power-grab and our conversation on West 44th Street.

By 1984 I was no longer I Tatti's development officer, but Craig Smyth had asked me to join the Council. I accepted with delight, and have been a member ever since of that informal but durable group. **Council members are committed to supporting the goals of the current Director and ensuring the Center's financial well-being.**

Under Lino Pertile, I Tatti's seventh director, I became Council Chair and continue to serve our current Director Alina Payne. Under a succession of distinguished and talented directors, the Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies has grown from the idea of one scholar into an international community, with more than a thousand Former Fellows scattered across the globe. From six original Fellows in 1961, the annual academic community is 50 strong, among them long and short-term Fellows, Visiting Professors, undergraduate readers and interns, Curatorial Fellows, and Visiting Lecturers. This year I Tatti is adding two artists to its community and we're looking forward to the extra zest they will bring to the daily life of the Center. The list of buildings and spaces newly renovated or in planning is impressive: Villa Linda, the Roberta Pellegrino Cortile, the Granaio, and the recent acquisition of two neighbouring villas. The goal of providing on-campus apartments for every member of the I Tatti academic community, only a dream eight years ago, is closer to becoming reality. Fortunately for us, Director Alina Payne is not only an art historian but an architect and knows buildings and renovation literally from the ground up.

Through its alumni, both Former Fellows and other appointees, I Tatti is represented in more than 25 countries. Since these academics teach, write, lecture, compose, perform, and/or mount exhibitions, it's safe to say no other institution devoted to the study of the Renaissance has such a global impact on the field.

When Alina Payne and I were talking recently, she remarked that the Italians of the 13th and 14th centuries saw remnants

of the great Roman civilization all around them; temples had been marble quarries, farmers found artifacts in their fields – but then some of the curious started to notice, not just see. Petrarch in the mid-1300s dusted off and mined manuscripts ignored for millennia and turned to what he called the "Inner World" where God existed as surely as in the outer rituals of the Church. Men and women of his era were caught in an unsettling tension between tradition and the beginnings of the modern era. In 14th century Florence commercial success created both wealth and the desire to display it. That rich culture also gave birth to the conflicts and change we wrestle with today: an explosion of new information, the ascendancy of banking, the sometimes unsettling discoveries of science, and – brought into sharper focus by the current COVID crisis – a questioning of the place of metaphysical values, the cultivation of our higher selves, in contemporary life.

I Tatti, and, for me, just the *thought* of I Tatti and the constellation of Tattiani folks who are the Center's community, is where looking deeply, *noticing*, connects inner and outer worlds.

So, sinking, swimming, or sailing in the sea of change, don't we need as many navigational tools and flotation devices as possible? The Renaissance was a time of dramatic, even drastic, change, and out of tension and conflict human invention prevailed. Great domes spanned immense spaces. Poetry moved the intellect and emotions. Frescoes broke flat walls open into vistas of paradise. Music filled the air. Ships sailed to the four corners of the world. Even the earth and sun seemed to change places.

Perhaps the fact that a place like I Tatti continues to flourish is not the answer to any particular question but rather is an expression of the durability of the human spirit. That is at least one theory, and one that has inspired me for well over half my life.



SUPPORT US

*Gifts from generous supporters allow us to sustain Renaissance scholarship even during the most difficult of times.
Please support our vital work by making a donation today.*

Last Spring a phrase began to circulate in Italy: *Ce La Faremo* or roughly translated, “we will make it through.” It became an un-official motto of these times, and in many ways expresses the spirit that pervades here at I Tatti.

Even in the face of an incredible challenge, I Tatti has continued to push through. Though travel is dangerous and being away from home anxiety-provoking, every single post-doctoral Fellow, University Professor and Senior Scholar appointed for the Fall 2020 term chose to come to I Tatti in person.

This academic year will see a community of nearly fifty scholars back at their desks, back in the Library and perhaps most important, back engaging in the kind

of meaningful conversations that lie at the heart of I Tatti. This is a testament to the vitality and importance of the community here. But the I Tatti community is not only those who are physically here, it includes all the appointees who have spent time here, and all our supporters who understand the significance of the work that is done here.

Keeping our community intact is critical to our mission, and we are committed to ensuring that our current Fellows and future generations of talented scholars can enjoy the many benefits of an I Tatti Fellowship here in Florence. With this in mind, we would like to ask all members of the I Tatti community to give generously this year and join us in saying *Ce La Faremo*.

WAYS OF GIVING

Unrestricted gifts to our General Fund are vital and support our areas of greatest need.

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Francesco Petrucci, Raffaello Petrucci
Veduta della Città (detail), 1887
Palazzo Vecchio Museum

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