# 

THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR ITALIAN RENAISSANCE STUDIES

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#### LEE BOUVIER RADZIWILL'S ENDURING LEGACY

Honoring a special friendship and mentorship

FOUND IN TRANSLATION Language and science in the Renaissance

CURATING BERENSON'S COLLECTION Art and conservation at I Tatti

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IRAN IN TUSCANY Exploring the entangled histories of the Early Modern World



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#### Artists in Residence

Benjamin Appl, Carola Bauckholt, Thomas Dunford, Nurit Stark, Johanna Weis

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**Luciane Beduschi** Floreat musica: Florentine Renaissance Music and its Sources, 1300-1700 **Ludovica Galeazzo** Archipelago: Mapping the Islands of the Venetian Lagoon **Remo Grillo** Digital Research Infrastructure for the Humanities **Gianmarco Spinaci** Digital Research Infrastructure for the Humanities

**a MESSAGE** from the **DIRECTOR** 

#### Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, we were finally able to celebrate sixty years (plus one!) of the Harvard University Center in Florence, after a series of delays due to the Covid pandemic. Our festivities took place in the company of special friends from around the world, and it felt very fitting to celebrate together with many of those who have helped I Tatti become the Center it is today.

While the anniversary of I Tatti's first six decades provides a meaningful opportunity to reflect on our past, it is even more important that we look to the future of our unique center and envision how I Tatti can evolve to remain at the forefront of Italian Renaissance Studies. Certainly, this means future-proofing our facilities and academic programming and embracing new technologies that allow scholars to address their research in novel and valuable ways.

One way we have been preparing for our future while celebrating our past is in the reimagining of our **Granaio Building, which I am delighted to announce will soon be renamed in honor of Princess Lee Bouvier Radziwill**. This building, completely renovated in recent years to provide cutting-edge facilities for the growing number of scholars whose projects involve the Digital Humanities, houses both a Digital Lab and a beautiful ground floor café area where our community can come together. As discussed on page 8, the naming of the building in honor of Princess Radziwill is also a celebration of I Tatti's history, given that Bernard Berenson was a guiding light in the life of the young, intellectually curious Lee Bouvier as she was then known.

Another way we have been looking to the future over the last few years has focused on our art collection. Several years ago, I Tatti was able to begin much needed conservation work on a series of its artworks, thanks to generous donations to the Art Conservation Fund in Honor of Lino Pertile and Anna Bensted. Former Curator of the Berenson Art Collection, Giovanni Pagliarulo, who retired earlier this year, reflects on some of the recent restoration projects on page 14, and on why the Berenson collection is not only a thing of beauty for the enjoyment of Fellows and visitors, but also "a rich resource for further research."

Opening new avenues for research has certainly been a priority in recent years and will continue to be so as our

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▲ Alina Payne with friends of I Tatti during the 60th anniversary celebrations, June 2022.

community expands. The 2021/22 community comprised sixty-eight appointees including interns, while we will welcome seventy-one scholars during academic year 2022/23. We have placed particular focus on facilitating scholars exploring the far geographical boundaries of the Renaissance, including young scholars like Graduate Fellow Amy Chang, who works on the reception of Andalusian and Philippine Islamic architecture within the Hapsburg Empire and who found great inspiration in our intellectual community's broad outlook (page 6). Others, like our first I Tatti/DHI Rom Joint Fellow for African Studies, Jacques Aymeric Nsangou, are working on projects that put the Italian peninsula into dialogue with the African continent. During their time in Florence, appointees can take advantage of being part of a multicultural and interdisciplinary community while enjoying access to our unique library and archives. 2021/22 Fellow Gaston Javier Basile, a historian of science from Argentina working on the theory and practice of translation in the Italian Quattrocento with a special focus on scientific texts, found that I Tatti provided fertile terrain for his research into translations of botanical texts (page 4).

At a time when the humanities are in crisis, it is more important than ever that we think about how we can support not only our current appointees, but also the scholars who will walk through our doors years from now. We can celebrate our illustrious history while striving to reaffirm the vital role of the humanities, and I am proud that I Tatti is playing such an active role in the evolution of the field.

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

### FOUND in TRANSLATION: Language, Science and Cultural Crossroads in the Italian Renaissance

**Gaston Javier Basile** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Classics at the University of Buenos Aires and was 2021 / 2022 Andrew W Mellon Fellow at I Tatti. He has conducted postdoctoral research on topics related to the genesis of Greek scientific discourse, the Italian humanists' intellectual engagement with Greek and Latin texts and, most recently, on the theory and practice of translation in the Italian Quattrocento with a special focus on scientific texts.

hen I set off across the sea to work on humanist translations I could hardly foresee how translation would be so intimately bound up with the experience that lay ahead. From afar, the Harvard Center, soaring among the olive groves, vineyards and terraced gardens, seemed a secluded intellectual haven for scholars of the Renaissance. As the feeling of awe grew with the vibrant academic life of the Villa, I discovered where the hidden treasure lay. Whether over lunch or tea, in the Berenson library, the granaio or the *limonaia*, I Tatti was the crossroads for scholars from all fields and cultural backgrounds. It was in this act of translating ourselves to the others that the fellowship was built, and would continue to bear fruit over time. Translation was indeed a form of cultural exchange and knowledge making.

The idea that translation mattered for the history of science is what inspired my research at I Tatti. This idea, I later found out, also had its roots in the humanist tradition. Writing in 1603, John Florio, the translator of Montaigne's Essayes into English, evoked the words of his old fellow Giordano Bruno who had declared that "from translation all Science had it's of-spring." Unlike his contemporaries, Bruno viewed translation not as a pure matter of rhetoric but as a cultural act of displacement, appropriation and transformation. Sadly, Giordano Bruno's realization that translation is a form of cultural transfer and a breeding ground for science would hover in the background for well too long. Only recently did it take center stage with the abandonment of the idea that translation is a purely linguistic matter, and the awareness of the intercultural implications of transferring texts, or whole bodies of literature, from one culture to another across space and time. Much progress has been made over the last decades in filling this gap, and the stigma attached to translation as a derivative phenomenon of marginal interest to intellectual historians has significantly receded. Yet scientific literature is still lagging well behind in this process of rediscovery.



"Translation has always been associated with the idea of loss. The transfer from one language to another is believed to entail some form of inevitable failure, in spite of the translator's attempt to stumble upon a more or less acceptable equivalent to the original text. Yet, as I myself discovered at I Tatti, much can be found in translation."

During my fellowship at I Tatti, I began to address some of the challenges the Italian humanists faced when translating Greek scientific literature, and their reflection on language and the natural world. Why, I wondered, did scholars embark on such a venture of repurposing much of the scientific legacy into a new Latin? And what were its consequences? Spurred by the reintroduction of Greek to the West by émigrés from Byzantium and the retrieval of new manuscripts, the Italian humanists reshaped the canon of medical and natural science works, not only by adding new texts or authors to the medieval stock, like Hippocrates of Kos and Theophrastus, but also by re-translating wellknown works by Galen, Dioscorides and Aristotle. This zeal for translation was hitherto unheard-of. It resulted in the publication of the first editions of classical authors, and paved the way for new commentaries and translations into the vernaculars. The humanist enterprise, however, was far more than a philological, linguistic and editorial accomplishment. The art of translation confronted these bold intellectuals with unforeseen difficulties, which entailed broader epistemological consequences.

Translation has always been associated with the idea of loss. The transfer from one language to another is believed to entail some form of inevitable failure, in spite of the translator's attempt to stumble upon a more or less acceptable equivalent to the original text. Yet, as I myself discovered at I Tatti, much can be found in translation. Even in cases where the final output falls short of the mark, the process of translation as such always generates new insights. While rendering the poets, orators or historians of the past, the humanists reflected primarily on questions of style and rhetoric, as famously predicated by Leonardo Bruni. Wrestling with science, however, was a bird of another feather. It soon became apparent that philological expertise was a necessary but insufficient attribute to understand medical, botanical, zoological or mathematical texts. Technical words in particular were at the root of the humanists' predicaments. Sometimes, the wrong word could even become a matter of life or death. As medical humanists like Niccolò Leoniceno forewarned, misnaming or misidentifying herbs and simples, for example, could take its toll on people's lives. In this unwieldy struggle, many errors were made, but also new discoveries. Translation, most crucially, became the via regia for scientific knowledge transfer in the early Renaissance, and would continue to thrive as the transatlantic trade expanded the boundaries of the Old World to the new flora, fauna and medical traditions of the East and West Indies.





"By amplifying the voices, promoting dialogue, and launching initiatives that go above and beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries of early modern Europe, I Tatti is also leading the way in de-centering the Renaissance, and exploring the margins of a cultural revolution that irradiated its lights and shadows across the globe."

As a form of knowledge transfer and cultural exchange, translation was an integral part of the I Tatti community this year. The Babel of tongues echoing through the Villa's grapevine was only the outward expression of our attempts to translate our diverse intellectual backgrounds and experiences into an intelligible common language. I was welcomed into a fellowship of outstanding scholars that was truly multicultural and interdisciplinary. It was an exceptional opportunity for intellectual and personal growth. By amplifying the voices, promoting dialogue, and launching initiatives that go above and beyond the geographical and temporal boundaries of early modern Europe, I Tatti is also leading the way in de-centering the Renaissance, and exploring the margins of a cultural revolution that irradiated its lights and shadows across the globe. If translation breeds new knowledge, as Giordano Bruno believed, then translation matters. If translation is a form of dialogue with the other, much is to be found rather than lost.

# a LUNCH PANEGYRIC:

### From the Mediterranean to the Sulu Sea

H ave you ever walked into a room where you didn't know anybody and felt nervous about introducing yourself? What about walking into a room where you were nervous because you knew almost everybody—but in the sense of sapere rather than conoscere?

That's how I felt for a good number of my first days at I Tatti, and probably quite a few weeks after if I am being honest. As a graduate student at the start of my academic trajectory, the list of names collected in-residence included many that I had been reading for years, and the prospect of getting to meet them all in person was both exciting and intimidating, so I was doubly grateful to have my friend Hollie as a Fellow with me.

How that initial fear melted away into dinner invitations, multi-hour conversations, weekend wanderings along the Arno and through museum galleries, personal phone calls at 4am over airport taxi emergencies, offers to read and comment on recent drafts, meeting family members, invitations to homes and artist studios, the bestowing of sage pre-interview advice, and celebrating each other's newest triumphs and life milestones, is a long story.

It is probably the story of the best and least quantifiable part of I Tatti: the magic and spontaneity that come from placing scholars from all over the world and at all different professional stages together and giving them the extraordinary gift of time, a paradisical library, and the occasion to pause every day and meet over lunch, tea, and walks in the garden.

As someone with a project that stretches from the Mediterranean to the Sulu Sea, a most precious part of my



experience at I Tatti was being consistently seated next to the leading and rising names in research on both ends of this geography, and far beyond. It allowed me to ask for opinions and advice from major scholars on Ming China, Jesuit missions in East Asia, Spanish and Italian art and architectural theory, the Medici Oriental Press, medieval Sicily, and 19th cen. France all in the same week. I cannot tell you how much it has improved my understanding of the global interconnectedness of Spanish and Italian Renaissance and Baroque art history—but I will try.

One example might be found in *I tre martiri di Nagasaki*, a painting that hangs in the Museo Civico di Castel Nuovo, Naples. It is one of many artworks that I was only able to see for the first time on weekend travels thanks to my residence at I Tatti, and one that I wouldn't have been able to approach without the generous guidance shared with me over lunch.

Hailing from the Neapolitan period of German painter Johann Heinrich Schönfeld, who lived in Italy from 1633-1651, it portrays a famed episode in early modern church history in which 26 newly converted Japanese Christians and their Italian, Iberian, and Indigenous American Catholic missionary ministers were crucified. However, nothing about the men or the setting in this painting looks particularly Japanese. Instead, an aggressor enacting the crucifixion is shown wearing Ottoman headgear. At first, the casting of the villains in this scene as Ottoman might seem to be a straightforward example of visually phrasing a foreign culture in familiar terms. However, a more complicated possibility arises if we consider a Jesuit connection running from Naples to Nagasaki. In 1637, the Neapolitan Jesuit missionary Marcello Mastrilli traveled to Japan, and promptly met his martyrdom. However, as Jorge Mojarro has shown, an official account printed at the time said that Mastrilli had only been inspired to give up his life for Christ after witnessing an Augustinian Recollect die in his arms on the frontlines of a battle with native Muslims in the Philippines.

For before colonization, many Philippine polities were Islamic, and in the first years of Spanish colonization, the Ottoman Empire was also expanding in archipelagic Southeast Asia and making vassals of local sultans. News of this expanse of oceanic Islam was often enfolded into missionary accounts of work in Japan and the Philippines. The fact that this painting specifically represents three martyrs, leads me to believe that the emphasis was intended to be on the three native Japanese Jesuits who died among the 26; and the fact of its timing soon after Mastrilli's martyrdom, leads me to wonder if it deliberately referenced the real Ottoman and native Muslim opponents encountered by Jesuits in the East.

For a junior scholar, getting to sit among exceptional people from so many countries and concentrations allows for an incredible transfer of knowledge and awareness.

Questions such as these help to explain why I came to I Tatti with a project examining 16th-17th cen. interpretations of Spanish-Islamic architectural inheritance in Andalusia, Italy, and the Philippines, and why I Tatti and in the Laurentian



▲ Amy Chang (I) at I Tatti with fellow Graduate Fellow Hollie Buttery, Spring 2022

▲ 2021/22 I Tatti appointees at drinks in the Salone Sassetta before Thanskgiving lunch, November 2021

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Medici Library were ideal places to pursue my research. For this was not an outlying example, but part of a wider entanglement of imaginaries including the transposition of the Spanish Reconquista in Andalusia onto the conquest of the Muslim Philippines; and the importation of engineers and architectures from Southern Italy into the new Hapsburg-Ottoman frontier of Southeast Asia.

Part of what makes I Tatti such an exceptional place, is that it not only houses a collection reflecting Berenson's own interests in Italian Renaissance and Asian Art, but that it welcomes a range of scholarship as diverse as the founder's interests. For a junior scholar, getting to sit among exceptional people from so many countries and concentrations allows for an incredible transfer of knowledge and awareness. The fortune of proximity caused so much unexpected friendship and mentorship to flow towards me that it was hard to keep track of all at once, but the most incredible thing, is that I have gotten to take it all with me. In the ties that I have cultivated, and the ideas, questions, and recommendations that I am now writing into my work, I can still hear all my I Tatti colleagues speaking. So it might be silly to write a panegyric about lunch-but that's where the most tentative and casual conversations slowly grew into the treasured relationships that I am still fostering.

Amy Y.T. Chang is a Harvard Ph.D student working on Renaissance and Baroque architectural and linguistic theory and the way it affects the interpretation of Spanish-Islamic architecture in 16th & 17th c. Andalusia, Italy, and the Philippines. She was a Harvard Graduate Fellow at I Tatti in Spring 2022.

ng 2022 kgiving lunch, November 2021

I TATTI Newsletter

## LEE BOUVIER RADZIWILL'S **ENDURING LEGACY** at I TATTI

The Renaming of I Tatti's Granaio Building Honors a Special Friendship and Mentorship

I Tatti's Granaio Building was reinvented in recent years as a Digital Hub, fully equipped to support the ever-growing number of appointees whose projects involve the Digital Humanities to some extent. Now, thanks to a generous donation, the building will be renamed in honor of Princess Lee Bouvier Radziwill, a lifelong admirer of Bernard Berenson.



L hroughout her life, Lee Bouvier Radziwill considered Bernard Berenson as one of her guiding lights. Now, through the generosity of her dear friend, Hamilton South, a building at I Tatti will bear her name, and the Archive of her papers and photographs will become a permanent part of the Bernard Berenson Library.

In 1951, at age 18, Lee Bouvier made a pilgrimage of sorts to come to I Tatti and meet Berenson in person for the first time, though he had occupied her thoughts for years before.

She describes her first 'encounter' with Berenson as the moment she entered the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, as part of a high-school art class. She observed, "Berenson had chosen all the most important paintings Isabella should buy" and through his artistic choices, she experienced a profound epiphany. She characterizes the experience as

nothing less than transformative: "I had another life open." This revelation at the Gardner Museum so affected her that while still a high-school student she began a correspondence with the world renowned connoisseur, 68 years her senior. Eventually, there was an answer:

"I wrote to Berenson at I Tatti, several letters; then out of the blue, he replied, asking me to come and see him if I ever came to Italy. Well, that was it. I thought of nothing else...Florence and Berenson and I Tatti! Imagine!"

In the summer of 1951 Lee joined her sister Jackie who had been living in France and the two took him up on his invitation to visit. According to a journal of the trip kept jointly by the sisters, the encounter affected them greatly and gave Lee a sort of blueprint of the way she was to live her life and give it meaning. "He set a spark burning. It was the difference between living and existing that he had spoken of and both of us [sisters] had simply been existing far too long."

Berenson and Lee had formed an immediate connection and he became both friend and mentor. His influence on her grew and shaped her education and her philosophy. "He took me under his wing, read to me, encouraged me to write." Lee recalled, "Any artistic intellect I possess is due to that time." As a longtime friend Hamilton South often heard Lee summarize Berenson's effect on her in a single sentence, "He gave me permission to love beauty."

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Though she lived 60 years beyond Berenson's death, he continued to inspire her throughout her life. When asked by a reporter in her final interview "who was a person who had a big influence on you?" her answer was "The great Renaissance art historian Bernard Berenson, whom I met when I was 18. He created the terms 'life-enhancing' and 'life-diminishing' to describe people. It's so true - people are either one or the other."

Using these categories, and other pieces of wisdom garnered from Berenson, Lee went on to lead a life of extraordinary taste and in turn became "life-enhancing" to a remarkable range of artists and writers. Her spirit infused the work of some of the most important creators of the 20th century; the art of Andy Warhol and Peter Beard, the literature of Truman Capote, the fashion design of Marc Jacobs and Giorgio Armani, the lush and cerebral interiors of Lorenzo Mongiardino, and even the soaring dance of Rudolph Nureyev.

Her colorful life brought her into the unique orbits of presidents and princes, tycoons, artists, and an entire universe of creative and compelling people. Even given all of this, she said of Berenson, quite simply, "He was one of the most fascinating men I ever knew."

So it seems entirely fitting that when her friend Hamilton South sought to honor her after her death in 2019, his thoughts turned to Berenson and I Tatti.

Hamilton has made a significant pledge to I Tatti in memory of his friend, and in return we are honored to name the

Bernard Berenson around the time of Lee and Jaqueline's 1951 visit to I Tatti Lee Radziwill in Venice (from the Bernard and Mary Berenson Papers)

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I TATTI Newsletter

Granaio at the center of the campus the Lee Bouvier Radziwill Granaio.

The newly renovated building is a dynamic combination of old and new and has recently been transformed into a collaborative workspace. Upstairs, it houses I Tatti's stateof-the-art Digital Humanities Lab, and downstairs there are light and airy rooms which open onto I Tatti's central Roberta Pellegrino Cortile. Both inside and out are chairs and tables for scholars to meet, or to share a coffee. The building has become one of the central gathering points at I Tatti. Each day the community congregates informally here to write and work, discuss their projects and exchange ideas.

In addition to his generous donation, Hamilton has given I Tatti something perhaps even more valuable - the gift of the Radziwill Archive - a collection of letters, photographs, journals and more. The documentation of Lee's extraordinary life. Though it will remain closed for the time being, it will no doubt provide future scholars with a wealth of information which might otherwise have remained in private hands.

Hamilton explains his motivation in entrusting the Radziwill Archive to I Tatti:

"Lee always believed in Bernard Berenson's idea that certain works of art, places and people were life enhancing. Her list was not a long one but throughout her life I Tatti was at the top of it. Gifting her papers and naming this building seemed to me to be a way of bringing her back to that idea and that place once aaain."

It would seem that he has done exactly that - and returned her permanently to a place she continued to love and admire through the years, throughout all its dynamic expansion and recent growth.

When she visited I Tatti for the final time at age 79, the place she finds is no longer inhabited by her old friends but is still uncannily recognizable for all of those who know it today:

"I went back to I Tatti last summer. Though there was no B.B., and no Nicky Mariano, the atmosphere is still the same, though now there are maybe a hundred people there, great scholars of Renaissance art studying, learning, in those almost monk-like surroundings, eating at a beautiful long oak table."

Now, through the thoughtfulness of her friend Hamilton South, Lee's spirit will always remain a presence at I Tatti.







 Lee as a young woman, in a photograph with a note added by Bernard Berenson ▲ The Granaio Building past and present

### **IRAN** in **TUSCANY**: Giovanni Battista Raimondi and Medici Archives in Florence

Kishwar Rizvi is Robert Lehman Professor in the History of Art and Architecture at Yale University, and was Visiting Professor at I Tatti in February 2022. Her fieldwork includes research in several parts of the Middle East, including Turkey, Saudi Arabia. Iran. and the United Arab Emirates.

he turn of the seventeenth century was defined by exchange between powerful empires and the immense commercial and intellectual networks along which information, ideas, and objects circulated. The competition was not simply for goods, but also for legitimacy to command diverse religious and political systems. The mobility of works of art across the globe, from London to Isfahan to Beijing, may be studied by connecting early modern empires through concepts of kingship, spiritual authority, and an emerging public sphere. One may also interrogate the agents, from traders transporting porcelains and textile, to missionaries - Muslim, Hindu, and Christian, among others - seeking to transform society. We may ask, how did early modern subjects, be they rulers, artists, or diplomats, imagine their place within an interconnected economy of exchange? For the modern scholar attempting to understand the complex mobilities of this period, fieldwork too must take place across multiple geographical locations.

My appointment at I Tatti in February 2022 allowed me to study the correspondence and gifts exchanged between Shah 'Abbas (d. 1629) of Iran and the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Ferdinando de Medici (d. 1609), both ambitious leaders positioning their authority within a global frame. My aim was to better understand the ways in which diplomacy and works of art intersected, and to identify the agents involved in the movement of ideas and objects between Isfahan





and its Italian counterparts. As with such explorations, the archives I consulted in Florence and Venice contained much more material than I had anticipated (much of it not even fully cataloged) and involved a cast of characters, from mercenaries to patriarchs, and a polyphony of languages, including Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Hebrew, and Persian.

The State Archives in Florence have several Safavid farmans (imperial orders), four of which were sent by Shah 'Abbas to Grand Duke Ferdinando and his successor, Cosimo II, and introduce the Iranian embassies and invite diplomatic and economic relations with the Medici court. The archives also include a wide variety of textual sources that range from coded espionage to inventories of Persian and Arabic books that were commissioned for the Medici Oriental Press (established in 1584) by its director, the renowned scholar, Giovanni Battista Raimondi (d. 1614). The goal of the Press was to translate and illustrate the Gospels for the purpose of evangelizing and disseminating the true Christian faith.

The imperial correspondence of Shah 'Abbas requires serious interrogation, both as historical documents as well as deluxe material objects to be studied on their own terms. Among the most interesting are two letters of introduction for the Englishman Robert Sherley and are dated 1608 and 1609. In them, the Shah praises Ferdinando de Medici and offers friendship along with silk concessions. Sherley is introduced as an ambassador, ilchī, and the duke is asked to give him safe passage and protection. He was accompanied by Ali Quli Beg, and was received at several European courts, including that of King James in London, to negotiate trade options. However, there was another goal for Shah 'Abbas' envoys to secure naval support against the Portuguese-controlled island of Hormuz and its eponymous Strait in the Persian Gulf.

As with such explorations, the archives I consulted in Florence and Venice contained much more material than I had anticipated...and involved a cast of characters, from mercenaries to patriarchs, and a polyphony of languages, including Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, Latin, Hebrew, and Persian.

The Miscellanea Medicea, the collection which includes the imperial orders, is a valuable resource for studying the political and religious motivations behind Ferdinando's engagement with Iran; they are also important for understanding Raimondi's project of collecting, transcribing, and translating books from across the Holy Land. His papers give us insights into the mind and, I would suggest, eyes and hands, of a fascinating early modern subject. Amid the correspondence with book sellers are, for example, his transcriptions of the Arabic alphabet, meticulously and repetitively copied from dictionaries and learned no doubt from local interlocutors. Although Raimondi was one of the most influential figures of the early modern period, we have scant representations of him - either visual or textual. What we have are his signatures in the books that he owned and the written exercises that helped him learn Arabic and Persian.

Raimondi himself moved primarily between Florence and Rome, overseeing the printing of multiple renditions of the Bible, but his agents scoured the world looking for medieval manuscripts that would reveal historical and philosophical sources, from the fantastical 'Ajāib al makhlūgāt ("Wonders of Creation") of Qazwini to Ibn Sina's Qanun fi al-Tibb ("Canon of Medicine"). While this attention to classical thought is well-known in secondary scholarship, less



A Persian alphabet and grammar exercises. Miscellanea Medicea – State Archives of Florence ▶ Portrait of the Safavid Shah Isma'il by Cristofano dell'Altissimo in the Uffizi Gallery



attention has been paid to Raimondi's interest in Persian poetry, as evinced in the inventories of several copies of the Bustan ("Garden") of Sadi and the Shāhnāma ("Book of Kings") of Firdawsi. Several of his books are in the Laurentian Library, many of them brought to Florence by the Vecchietti brothers. A fascinating example is a bound copy with two texts, the first an exegesis by the renowned tenth-century philosopher and jurist, al-Farabi, and the second the story of Rustam and Suhrab from the Shāhnāma. Both sections end with a poetic colophon signed by the copyist, Muhammad al-Husayni. The second is of particular interest, as it gives both the date when the text was copied, but also its location. "The story of Rustam and Suhrab was completed on Saturday, the twentieth of Jumad al-Thani, in the year 975 Hijri (December 31, 1567) by the lowly servant, the mendicant, in need of the Prophet's blessings, Muhammad al-Husayni al-Isfahani."

Reading this signature, in a book that had travelled across the seas, perhaps from a small workshop in Isfahan, to a monastery in Florence, I was reminded of the entangled histories of the early modern world; of the displacements of people, be they slaves or poets, and multiple migrations of objects and images across the globe. The Miscellanea Medicea, mediated through the Raimondi papers, is an important resource for understanding the ways in which alliances were forged across the oceans, but also how the world was imagined through a singular life. For myself, what had begun as a straightforward research trip to study the letters of Shah 'Abbas, has expanded into a fascination with Raimondi and his encounters with Persian art and literature.

I TATTI Newsletter

## **CURATING BERENSON'S LEGACY:** Art and Conservation at | Tatti

Giovanni Pagliarulo retired from I Tatti in summer 2022, after a career spanning more than thirty years. Here, he reflects on the evolution of the collection since the early days of the Harvard Center, and on how a recent conservation campaign has given new life to many of I Tatti's artworks.

After 34 years at I Tatti, I retired from my position as Agnes Mongan Curator of the Fototeca Berenson and Berenson Art Collection this summer. Over the course of several decades, I was able to watch and participate in the transformation of the Harvard Center in Florence from a relatively small research center in the late eighties into a world-leading intellectual hub, with an evolving mission and broadening range of academic programs. The art collection too, although ostensibly unchanged since Berenson's day, has in fact evolved considerably, most recently due to a dedicated conservation campaign.

At the end of the 1980s, I Tatti truly felt like a familyrun place, with generations of several families having been involved in the estate since Berenson's day. I think first and foremost of Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi, who was my predecessor as curator of the Fototeca, Archive and Collection. Born at I Tatti, Fiorella was the daughter of Berenson's estate manager and was-and still is-a precious witness and fount of knowledge of the history of this place. I had the privilege of working side by side with Fiorella for twenty years before she retired and remember those as some of the best and most inspiring years of my life.







The art collection has always been close to the hearts of I Tatti's directors. This can be seen in the establishment of an important agreement between I Tatti and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in 2008 and then, in 2015, with the founding of the Art Conservation Fund in Honor of Lino Pertile and Anna Bensted. It was thanks to this fund-named in honor of I Tatti's seventh Director and his wife-that I Tatti was finally able to launch a much-needed restoration campaign, which continues to this day. Organizing and supervising the restoration of many of I Tatti's important works of art was perhaps the most challenging task of my career, but also the most rewarding. Each restoration provided an extraordinary adventure and a fundamental opportunity to learn more about a work of art-not only in terms of its production and conservation history, but also in terms of its intrinsic qualities.

The first project that marked the beginning of the conservation phase was that involving the spalliera fragment by Francesco di Giorgio, as the result of a collaboration

▲ The San Sebastiano by Cima da Conegliano before and after the removal of the yellowed varnish



between I Tatti and the Museo Stibbert in Florence, which owns another fragment from the same spalliera. Thanks to this project, it was possible to ascertain that the subject of the Berenson fragmentary painting is the Rape of Helen of Troy. Interesting and unexpected details can often emerge during the restoration of an artwork, and this was indeed the case here. A careful cleaning of I Tatti's panel revealed that what had been originally interpreted as the billowing sleeve of a girl's dress was rather a detail of the rich architectural decoration of a column of the temple, carefully executed by the painter who had also been a well-known architect.

The art collection too, although ostensibly unchanged since Berenson's day, has in fact evolved considerably...

Another particularly important restoration of recent years was that of the Saint Sebastian by Cima da Conegliano, one of the Collection's masterpieces. Once the old, yellowed

<sup>◀</sup> Giovanni Pagliarulo examining objects in the Collection



varnish had been removed, details such as the subtle modeling of the nude figure, the whiteness of the loincloth, the clarity of the blue sky, and the sharpness of the Venetian landscape in the distance could reappear.

Restorations often shed light on the technical aspects of the making of the artwork. This was the case during the restoration of the Ming-Qing dynasty Chinese bronze vase, decorated with inlays of malachite and another hitherto unknown material, which turned out to be a very thinly coiled copper wire.

I Tatti's Art Collection...has great potential for further study. In recent years, two catalogues detailing the Villa's collection have been published, with another one due for publication soon.

And I am particularly proud of the conservation campaign involving the Villa's rug collection, the jewel of which is a rare early 16th century Mamluk carpet. The rug was likely already damaged when Berenson bought it and we know, from Fiorella's reports, that it used to be kept folded and displayed on the railing of the stairs, aggravating the damage. A careful restoration has once again made it



possible to appreciate the minute detail of this extraordinary rug's decorative pattern, which has since been hung in the Entrance Hall.

I Tatti's Art Collection offers not only a source of inspiration for I Tatti's visitors (and many illustrious visitors have toured the collection over the years, including Steven Spielberg!) and Fellows, but it has also inspired many scholars and has great potential for further study. In recent years, two catalogues detailing the Villa's collection have been published, with another one due for publication soon.

The objects contained in this historical house with its rich history all have their own little stories to tell. I remember, for example, the day when I entered the salottino of the so-called "Ritz" and my gaze fell on a glass ashtray, which through years of use was now covered in a dark patina of cigarette ash. I felt compelled to take a closer look and in fact, beneath the grime I could just make out some letters incised in the glass: "B da C G". Of course, the name of "Belle da Costa Green" immediately came to my mind. The Morgan Library in New York, where Belle had played such an important role, could not provide any feedback about this object which aroused their keen interest. It is likely, therefore, that this ashtray was a private and exclusive object specifically meant for Berenson. It could have been a gift from Belle to him, and a tangible witness to their relationship.

But I must confess that among my many memories, for me the most unforgettable one involves the Madonna by Domenico Veneziano. The display of this masterpiece at I Tatti has never changed and it has always been displayed with natural light arriving from the left. The light imagined by the painter, however, strikes the Madonna and Child from the right. Only when the panel was moved from the wall to carry out diagnostic analysis was it possible to turn it so that it could receive sunlight from the right. Suddenly, the gold lit up with a new glow, and the figures of the Madonna and Child came alive with the natural light highlighting the modeling. It truly was an extraordinary moment to witness.

I Tatti is an important and unique example of a historic house. After Berenson's death, however, some changes to the installation were unfortunately made, and I was always relieved when it was possible to return artworks to their original setting. This was the case of the small Saint Sebastian by Vincenzo Foppa, which Berenson had appropriately hung next to the bigger Saint Sebastian by



Associate of Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, Saint Lucy (r), and Saint Catherine after restoration ▲ A detail of Francesco di Giorgio Martini's Abduction of Helen after restoration

Cima; and the Rest on the flight to Egypt by Paris Bordon which has been put back over the French Library door. It is also true of the large Islamic Persian bronze urn which has been repositioned over the bookshelves of the Central Library (now the Walter Kaiser Reading Room). Of course, much more could be done to recover the original installation of Berenson's time, and I hope that this will be pursued in the future.

It was really a special experience for me to work at I Tatti and to have had the privilege of spending many years in proximity to great works of art. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with some highly competent conservators, and the great help and daily collaboration that I received from my colleagues was unparalleled. During my years as Curator of the Art Collection, the artworks seemed to me to be fragile creatures, struggling against the onset of time. I have done my best to guarantee them a longer future life as unique witnesses of the human artistic expression as represented by the Bernard and Mary Berenson Collection, and I am encouraged that the ongoing restoration of the art collection will remain a top priority for I Tatti in the years ahead.

### SUPPORT US

I Tatti is a financially independent institution and relies on generous contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations in order to carry out its important work.

I Tatti has been taking important steps to prepare for the next sixty years of the Harvard Center in Florence. As our community of scholars grows, I Tatti has also been expanding and ensuring that we can provide them with the tools and facilities to carry out their research.

In recent years, we have completely renovated our Granaio building as a Digital Hub at the heart of our center (soon to be renamed the Lee Bouvier Radziwill Granaio), and purchased and renovated a neighbouring property (Villa Linda) that has become a lively location to accommodate visiting scholars and interns and host workshops and intimate concerts.

Work is underway on a neighbouring Villa, known as Tartaro, which will soon become a majestic extension to our world-

leading library and a precious resource for the hundreds of scholars who make use of the Biblioteca Berenson's holdings - from near or far - each year.

The Bernard Berenson Art Collection too is being protected, restored and maintained, so that it can be enjoyed by generations of future scholars who both appreciate its beauty and choose to study its rich history.

I Tatti is taking these steps to look to the future and ensure that the coming decades are even brighter than those that came before. With your help, we can accommodate and support scholars now, and in the years ahead.



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

I Tatti gratefully accepts special gifts such as those made through income-paying trusts, and bequests.

Where appropriate, gifts of books and objects are gratefully accepted.

The Art Conservation Fund in Honor of Lino Pertile and Anna Bensted

In recent years, I Tatti has been able to carry out a considerable amount of conservation work on its collection, thanks to donations to the Art Conservation Fund in honor of Lino Pertile and Anna Bensted. Much remains to be done, and with your help, we can move forward with much-needed conservation work on a new series of paintings, rugs, and objects in the Berenson Collection.

for more information, please visit itatti.harvard.edu/support-us



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