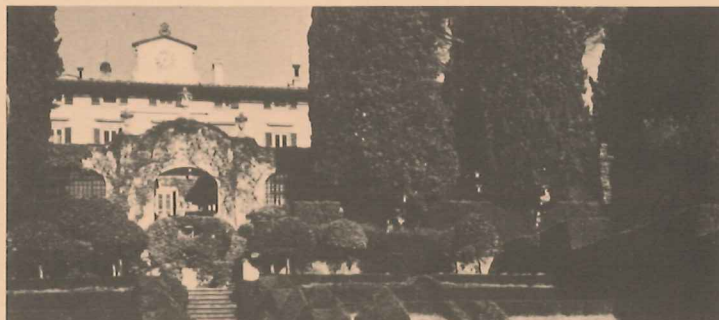
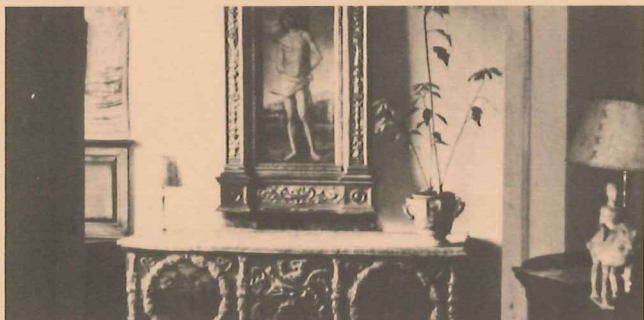


Villa I Tatti



The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies
Via di Vincigliata 26/50135 Florence, Italy

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The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies is the legacy of Bernard Berenson. In establishing the Center, Berenson put in Harvard's care not only his home, remarkable library and art collections, and **some endowment for the Center's work**; he also entrusted to Harvard his vision of an interdisciplinary scholarly center devoted to the Renaissance. He wrote, "Nothing opens mind and heart like free discussion between gifted maturing individuals coming together with their own national traditions and differing attitudes and approaches." This spring attention is refocussed on the life of BB thanks to a unique exhibit at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and Ernest Samuels' biography which has just been published.

Highlights of I Tatti Activities

PUBLIC LECTURE: On September 7, Dr. F.W. Kent of Monash University in Australia, a Fellow in 1977-78, gave a public lecture on "Giovanni Rucellai: 1403-81, The Making of a Renaissance Patron of the Arts." The lecture was followed by a reception for Prof. and Mrs. Dante Della Terza, who took over for Prof. and Mrs. Smyth on September 10 for the fall semester.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES: In October I Tatti and the Kunsthistorisches Institut were hosts to a two-week seminar organized by the Universities of Stockholm, Würzburg and Vienna dealing with several themes, including centralized buildings, facade decoration, Donatello, Brunelleschi, and Renaissance portraits. The seminar was led by Professors Erich Hubala, Götz Pochat and Artur Rosenauer, the latter two being former Fellows at I Tatti.

(Highlights continued, page 4)

"Berenson" at the National Gallery

The exhibit, "Berenson and the Connoisseurship of Italian Painting," opened January 21, 1979 in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art and will continue through May 13, 1979. In the words of J. Carter Brown, the Gallery's Director, the exhibit "... is unlike any previously held at the National Gallery of Art." Rather than being an exhibition strictly of paintings, it is, according to Mr. Brown, "... an attempt to display an intellectual process, as it (connoisseurship) was exemplified by Berenson." In his handbook introduction, David Alan Brown briefly defines the past and present role of the connoisseur:

Though works of art are seldom signed or documented, it is desirable for many reasons to know by whom they were made or to which school
(continued next page)

they belong. The connoisseur seeks to give such anonymous productions their place in the history of art by trying to establish their authorship on the basis of comparison with known works. Aside from attribution, the connoisseur is also concerned with the related question of authenticity, whether a work is original or a copy...

With this basic definition, we enter the realm of Bernard Berenson, who, as those familiar with Villa I Tatti and its history know, brought connoisseurship to life with his vigorous, dedicated, but often controversial pursuit of his chosen field.

Physically, the exhibition consists of some 20 Italian paintings from the National Gallery's collections combined with original photographs and letters of Bernard and Mary Berenson from Villa I Tatti's archives, and other documents including copies of Berenson's written works and enlargements of Dmitri Kessel's beautiful color photographs of I Tatti previously published by the Smithsonian Magazine in January, 1979. Strengthened by a running commentary -- excerpts from the companion handbook displayed on and above the visual information -- the exhibit demonstrates Berenson's significant influence over American collectors of Italian paintings during the first half of this century.

David Alan Brown, the Gallery's curator of early Italian paintings, organized the exhibit and wrote the handbook which is a complete, keyed reference. As acknowledged in the book's forward, "Berenson's choice and discernment were responsible for a great many of the Italian paintings in the National Gallery...", hence the natural predisposition of the Gallery administration to undertake this unusual project. David Brown's personal interest in Berenson and connoisseurship stems from his first visit to I Tatti in 1962 (while he was a Harvard undergraduate), shortly after Berenson's death, and he was further stimulated by his period of residence there as a Fellow (1969-71). In preparation for the

January 21 opening, Mr. Brown spent the summer months during the past three years at Villa I Tatti and used the interceding time for research and to interview persons in the United States who knew Bernard Berenson. One of these knowledgeable persons was Mrs. Fern Rusk Shapley, Berenson's former assistant and author of the catalogue to the Kress collection of Italian paintings, who provided David Brown with invaluable assistance.

Generally the exhibition is divided into three sections. The viewer begins with "Berenson's Contribution to Scholarship, Taste, and Collecting," where Berenson's personal history unfolds: here, the displays chronicle Berenson's presence at Harvard; his travels to the Continent and the subsequent writings that established him as an expert in the field of Italian painting; his collaboration with his wife, Mary; his beloved home, Villa I Tatti; and the important American collectors such as Joseph Widener and Samuel H. Kress, who sought Berenson's advice as gospel regarding their Italian acquisitions. A brief but significant area is devoted to Berenson's relationship with Duveen and other art dealers (through which Berenson made his healthy living and was able to prepare I Tatti for its important role as Harvard's Renaissance study center) and the subject which made him a most controversial figure in the art world, namely the reattributions he made to paintings which either heightened or detracted from their value (and the collector's resultant reputation).

"The Tradition of the Connoisseur" establishes the historical perspective through which Berenson's approach to connoisseurship emerged. This middle section of the exhibition examines the period from the Renaissance when Vasari wrote his Lives to that of Walter Pater and G. Morelli, Berenson's immediate 19th-century influences. As is evidenced by the careful attention devoted to this difficult subject, in both the visual displays and the handbook, this section is the crux of the exhibition. Depending on the viewer's depth of knowledge of art history and his or her desire to become

Berenson

and the Connoisseurship of Italian Painting



better acquainted with the subject, the handbook to the exhibition is probably more helpful in fully explaining the evolution, from the Renaissance to the present, of the scholarly approaches to the elusive problems of attribution.

In "Berenson's Method," the viewer sees the techniques Bernard and Mary Berenson employed in making attributions. These include the celebrated studies of ears, hands, and other anatomical details, and their pioneering use of photographs in documenting works of art. Finally, one enters a small audio-visual display room to see two Italian paintings, Botticelli's "Portrait of a Youth" and Antonello da Messina's "Madonna and Child" and to listen to Berenson's own appreciative comments of the paintings.

In retrospect, it is interesting to view Berenson, his contemporaries, and predecessors in their roles as connoisseurs and to follow the field of art history along its paths to the present. Museums have gradually taken on the role of the great private collectors as guardians of the world's historic treasures; and curators, trained in the well-established academic discipline of art history, are now our connoisseurs. Over the years the attitude of the field itself has changed from one of profit in which connoisseurs like Berenson sold their expert opinions through art dealers to that of non-profit. This has come about, David Brown says, because "... works of art have a significance transcending, but not inseparable from, their commercial value." However, while approaches and attitudes will continue to evolve, the basic problems and controversies surrounding attributions, stated earlier, are likely to remain the same.

-- Suzanne Shapiro (with thanks to
Barbara Murek, David A. Brown's
assistant, for her help)

Highlights . . .

(cont. from page 1)

-- On October 20, I Tatti was also host to the international conference on Lorenzo Ghiberti, which took place in Florence to celebrate the 600th anniversary of Ghiberti's birth.

I TATTI COMMUNITY: Throughout the fall there were talks and round-table discussions. Among them: Norman Muller (Conservator, Worcester Art Museum), "Pietro Lorenzetti's workshop: A Technical Investigation;" Prof. Giorgio Spini (University of Florence), "I Medici granduchi costruttori di nuove città"; Prof. Charles Dempsey (Bryn Mawr, former Fellow of I Tatti), "Gentile Bellini and the hieroglyphic lore of the Renaissance"; Prof. Cesare Vasoli (University of Florence), "Il De Etruria di Guillaume Postel"; Giuseppe Velli (University of Venice), "Com'è strutturato l'Arcadia del Seminario Prof. Alberto Varvaro (University of Naples), "Vocabolario Etimologico Siciliano: esperienze del redattore"; Prof. Antonio Rotondo (University of Florence, former I Tatti Fellow), "Figurazioni e variazioni dell'immagine del Anticristo nella prima metà del Cinquecento."

Biblioteca Berenson: The I Tatti Library

For Renaissance historians especially, the Library at I Tatti is fast becoming a life line in Florence. The crowded National Library now limits users to a very few books a day; the library of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Florence is beset by difficulties. I Tatti's library remains a fundamental source available, not only to the members of the Harvard Center, but to scholars resident in Florence or visiting from whatever country. Following is a brief history of the Biblioteca Berenson together with a reminder of the remarkable holdings it has, including its great collection of photographs.

Berenson called his library the only achievement of his career that gave him



Last September 6, the two volumes of "Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore" by former Fellows and Associates of I Tatti were formally presented at a ceremony in the Auditorium of La Nuova Italia Editrice. Prof. Nino Pirrotta (right) of the University of Rome (formerly of Harvard) and Marco Chiarini (left), Director of the Pitti Gallery, spoke about the articles published in the volumes. I Tatti Director Craig Smyth spoke about Prof. Gilmore (center). Prof. and Mrs. Gilmore attended the ceremony in Florence, and they were greeted upon this occasion by many of their Florentine friends. The I Tatti community is happy and grateful that Myron Gilmore was so honored during his lifetime. Great generosity has been shown by friends of Myron and Sheila Gilmore; they have added over \$25,000 to the Myron and Sheila Gilmore Publication Fund since Professor Gilmore's death in October.

complete satisfaction. At the time of his death, he had accumulated about 50,000 volumes including periodicals. Under Harvard the Library had been growing recently at the rate of 1,500 to 1,800 volumes a year, until inflation took effect. It now contains 73,421 books and pamphlets; 8,171 periodical volumes; and a collection of about 5,400 sales catalogues -- amounting

in all to nearly 87,000 items. The Library of Roberto Papini, recently left to I Tatti at Mrs. Papini's death, adds approximately 4,000 more volumes.

Berenson stocked his library particularly with books on the history and culture of the Mediterranean world, emphasizing the Renaissance. It is known that "he regarded the library as illustrating the cultural evolution of the Mediterranean world beginning with the legacies of Israel, Greece and Rome and continuing in the Middle Ages with Byzantium, the Arab world, and Western Christianity." He made the section on classical archaeology very strong, made an Ancient Near Eastern and Islamic section which has many rarities, and even established a remarkably rich section on the Far East. Although the Center has not had funds to devote to these last three sections, they still stand out as probably the best collections in this region of Italy for the subjects concerned.

Berenson gave special emphasis to Italian painting from 1300 to 1600, the area of his own research. He had also a considerable number of volumes on architecture, sculpture and illuminated manuscripts. Because of his interest in literature and philosophy, there are large sections of standard works in these areas, including the chief works of modern literature in English, French, German, and Italian. His collection of biographies and memoirs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is very full. Regarding periodicals, he collected more complete files in a variety of subjects than can be found probably anywhere else in Italy.

The Center's policy for the Library implies a steady, well-considered expansion of the collection, to the extent funds are available, and continuous efforts to keep up with basic current publications in the Renaissance field. In buying for the library, Harvard has several aims and has been largely successful in them so far: to retain all the periodicals to which the library previously subscribed and add others; to keep the

collection on the Italian schools of painting as complete as possible, as befits the heart of the original collection, and complement this with some strength in the field of northern painting as well; to meet special needs of individual Fellows, whatever their field of Renaissance study; to provide Renaissance scholars in all areas with the indispensable reference works and the best recent publications -- the works scholars are apt to go to first and use most often even if rare and expensive; and to buy scholarly works in English on the Renaissance that Florentine libraries are apt to lack. In such fields as Renaissance economic history or science I Tatti does not hope to compete with the great collections of Florence available to the Fellows. On the other hand, thanks to the generosity and interest of Harvard alumnus F. Gordon Morrill and his wife, The Morrill Music Library has become the best resource in the region for Renaissance music. Prof. Myron Gilmore built up the Library's holdings in Renaissance history so well that they now constitute an admirable resource for historians. Holdings for the study of Renaissance literature are now growing. Something has been done, too, about adding outstanding works in other areas where the library has been strong; for example, English and American literature and criticism.

The Berenson archive of photographs is part of the Biblioteca Berenson. When Berenson left it to Harvard, it was uniquely important for the study of Florentine and Sienese painting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It was strong in respect to other Italian schools as well, and had a small but fairly good section on manuscript illumination. The Center has been buying steadily for the archive with the aim of keeping it strong where it was strong before. It now numbers about 217,000 items.

To save money and space, we expect in the future to rely increasingly on microfiche, especially for out-of-print, expensive, or many-volumed reference works (like Migne, recently acquired in microfiche)

in fields other than the history of art, for which microfiche is still less satisfactory because illustrations suffer. It is I Tatti's good fortune to have the advice of Douglas Bryant, Director of the Harvard Libraries, in planning the use of microfiche.

It is also I Tatti's good fortune to have now the help of Father Salvatore Camporeale in choosing acquisitions for the library. A Dominican at Santa Maria Novella and a Renaissance scholar, he has recently become both a Research Associate of the Center and Bibliographer for the Library, working with Anna Terni, Amanda George and the Director in planning the best use of our limited funds for library acquisitions.

Presently I Tatti has the funds to meet its minimum obligations satisfactorily except sufficient acquisition for the library. The library, as the core of the Center, is paramount now in the effort to find endowment.

-- Craig Hugh Smyth

Valuable Sassetta Panels Restored

In addition to the Biblioteca Berenson, the Harvard Center inherited BB's remarkable personal collection of art. I Tatti naturally strives to preserve this valuable art heritage. With inflation taking its toll on resources for I Tatti's normal expenses, conservation is undertaken only in emergency situations.

Two conservators from the Art Conservation Laboratory in Raymond, N.H. have been spending time at I Tatti to restore a triptych from the Berenson collection, "St. Francis in Ecstasy with St. John the Baptist and the Blessed Ranieri Rasini." The panels, part of a larger altarpiece commissioned by the Franciscan community for the church of San Francesco at Borgo San Sepolcro, were executed between 1437 and 1444 by the important Sienese painter Sassetta. At some point in their history, the surface of the three Berenson panels were coated with a thick layer of glue, probably as a protective measure. The coating ultimately



Sassetta, "St. Francis in Ecstasy,"
Berenson Collection, after treatment,
8/78. Photo courtesy Art Conservation
Laboratory, Raymond, NH.

proved harmful, for its contractile force was pulling the tempera paint layers away from their gesso ground.

I Tatti undertakes treatment for conservation only if urgently needed. Craig Smyth, Director, emphasizes this point: "At I Tatti our urgent responsibility is to conserve, not restore. In this situation, the glue coating was pulling the paint off its support. It had to be removed. Nothing below it was touched, including old varnish. We were fortunate that we were able to meet the emergency through the generous support of Mr. Edwin Weisl, Jr., and we are extremely grateful to him."

Mary Lou White, Conservator, explained that the problem facing her and her associate, Barbara Beardsley, was to soften and remove the glue without disturbing the underlying damaged paint layers. Miss White further supplied this description of the actual restoration process:

"Once the grime and glue were removed, the paint layer was gently readhered. The work was most painstaking. Once the technique for removing the glue was found, we then began the laborious task of reattaching the flaking paint. This was accomplished by gently warming the cleaned area with a small iron until the paint layer once again had the smooth surface that is characteristic of a tempera panel. Wherever there were paint losses, they were integrated into the picture in such a way that they were not visually disturbing from a normal viewing distance. Up close, however, the losses are readily discernible since there is no question as to what is by Sassetta himself and those parts which are (cont. next page)



Sassetta, "St. Francis in Ecstasy," Berenson Collection; details of right hand. (above) during treatment, under raking light, 1978. (below) after treatment, 1978. Photos courtesy of Art Conservation Laboratory, Raymond, NH.



later compensations for losses. A final surface coating of a water clear, non-yellowing synthetic copolymer was brushed onto the panels as a microthin protective layer."

Miss White and Mrs. Beardsley have thus far spent two years on-site at I Tatti applying these time-consuming methods to the Sassetta panels. They began the work during the summer of 1977 when they spent 6 weeks restoring one of the smaller panels in the tryptych. In 1978, they made two separate trips to I Tatti, totalling 2 1/2 months, to complete the central panel "St. Francis in Ecstasy" (p. 7). Miss White hopes they will complete the remaining panel, which she expects will require an additional 6 weeks, during this coming summer (1979).

The original San Sepolcro altarpiece was a polyptych of which Mr. Berenson's tryptych was a part. Eight flanking panels depicting scenes from the life of St. Francis were also part of the altarpiece. Sir John Pope-Hennessy recounts the history of the altarpiece in his 1939 work, Sassetta, long considered the standard reference on the painter. The painting was in place in the church for 308 years; it was dismantled in 1752. It passed in its entirety, through the years, to various Italian collectors until it was purchased by a Florentine art dealer in 1823. After this time, it is not clear how the altarpiece came to be split up. In his ten-year report on Villa I Tatti as the Harvard Renaissance Studies Center, Myron P. Gilmore says that Berenson acquired his tryptych in 1900 in the shop of a "carpenter-antiquary." Many more parts of the altarpiece have been identified in other private collections and museums; of the eight described above, seven panels are presently in the National Gallery in London, and the eighth is in the Musée Condé at Chantilly in France.

-- Suzanne Shapiro

The campaign for funds to match the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's appropriation for I Tatti passed the \$1,000,000 mark in January. The full appropriation is \$1,500,000. The Foundation has extended the deadline for matching the full amount until December 31, 1979. The year 1979 will therefore be devoted to raising the remaining \$500,000 which will bring the final \$500,000 in matching funds from the Foundation. I Tatti's future greatly depends on the success of this effort. Gifts to I Tatti may be sent to the office of the Recording Secretary, Harvard University, Holyoke Center, Cambridge, MA 02138.



Throughout the countryside, Tuscan cypresses have been seriously afflicted by cypress disease and pests. Everything is being done to save I Tatti's cypresses from the blight, and so far these lovely trees are holding their own.

Announcement of Fellowships, 1980-81

The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies at Villa I Tatti awards stipendiary fellowships for independent study on any aspect of the Italian Renaissance for the academic year. Stipends are given according to individual needs and the availability of funds. The maximum grant for 1979/80 will be no higher than \$16,000; most are considerably less. A limited number of non-stipendiary fellowships are also available for scholars working in Florence on Renaissance subjects with support from other sources; they are offered the same privileges at the Center as scholars with stipendiary fellowships.

The fellowship program is presently made possible by the Lawrence Berenson Fellowship Fund, the Francesco E. de Dombrowski Bequest, the Rush H. Kress Fellowship for Art History at I Tatti, the Robert Lehman Fellowship, a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for fellowships to support advanced study in the humanities, the Hanna Kiel Fellowship given by friends of Hanna Kiel, and the fellowship fund from the Committee to Rescue Italian Art for American conservators and art historians.

Applications are encouraged from scholars of any nationality; normally scholars are postdoctoral and in the earlier stages of their careers. Persons interested in fellowships for the 1980-81 academic year (July 1, 1980 - June 30, 1981) should forward their curriculum vitae, project proposal, and recommendations from 3 senior scholars before November 1, 1979 to:

Professor Craig Hugh Smyth
Villa I Tatti
Via di Vincigliata 26
50135 Florence
Italy

A duplicate of all application materials should also be sent to:

Professor Walter Kaiser
401 Boylston Hall
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
U.S.A.

For further information regarding I Tatti fellowships, please contact either source.

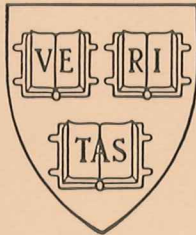
Publications

I Tatti, together with the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, the Renaissance Society of America, the Warburg Institute, and the University of London, is a sponsor of the publication of the letters of Lorenzo il Magnifico. This publication of Lorenzo's letters in a fully annotated edition has been long

awaited as a landmark in Renaissance studies. The first three volumes are now available: Volumes 1 and 2 are by Professor Riccardo Fubini (University of Florence and former Fellow at I Tatti), and Volume 3 is by Professor Nicolai Rubinstein (University of London), who is also the editor of the series. Giunti-Barbera is the publisher.

Harvard University Press has just published BERNARD BERENSON The Making of a Connoisseur, a biography of Berenson and his remarkable career, by Professor Ernest Samuels. Professor Samuels was

awarded a Pulitzer Prize, a Parkman Prize, and a Bancroft Prize for his previous biography of Henry Adams. He is Professor of English, Emeritus, at Northwestern University.



I Tatti Newsletter
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