Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore

Fondazione Giorgio Cini   
A History of Humanism and Science

***The origins: humanistic thought to accompany the reconstruction process***

The Foundation was first established in 1951. The founder, Vittorio Cini, was aware that in the aftermath of WWII, a phase of reconstruction and development was opening that would necessarily be based on the primacy of the economy, technology and industry. This impetus, the founder sensed, had to be coupled with a humanistic outlook, and a cultural infrastructure had to be built that was up to the challenge.

For this reason, he deployed several plans simultaneously:

- he began the recovery of the island’s monumental heritage, which was in a serious state of deterioration and neglect;

- drawing on the Anglo-Saxon tradition, he introduced the formula of the *International Advanced Culture* *Courses* (which since 2004 have been known as *I Dialoghi* *di San Giorgio*), which bring together the world’s finest thinkers on a range of different issues;

- he started to host seminars, congresses and symposia, of both a cultural and scientific nature, as well as exploring economics, law and the hard sciences.

***A hybrid vocation, a testbed of the contemporary***

This hybrid vocation, both cultural and scientific, has accompanied the entire life of the Foundation, marking (and anticipating) an approach to the complexity of the contemporary as it appears urgent and necessary to adopt today. The Foundation became a genuine testbed of the contemporary.

***The scientific events hosted***

From the archives, we can reconstruct how at least 170 scientific events, including symposia, congresses and conferences, have been held since 1954, of which 65 were of a medical nature and/or medical research events.

***The International Advanced Culture Courses***

In the long cycle of *International Advanced Culture* *Courses* promoted by the Foundation, which began in 1954, some stand out for their ability to combine the scientific and cultural spheres. Evidence of this are the *Quaderni di San Giorgio*, a summary of conference proceedings published in an original, almost unedited form, to respect the flow of conversations between participating intellectuals.

In particular:

- 1959, *Causalità e finalità*, a meeting between physicists, biologists, doctors, philosophers, historians, led by Marino Gentile;

- 1959, *Arte e scienza*, led by Augusto Guzzo;

- 1963, *Spazio e cielo*; led by Vittorio Mathieu;

- 1973, *L’uomo e il suo ambie*nte, in which the urgency of ecological issues was already being questioned, led by Stefano Rosso-Mazzinghi.

***The Future of Science***

In this context of scientific debate, it is worth mentioning the long cycle of annual meetings *The* *Future of Science*, jointly promoted by the Fondazione Umberto Veronesi, the Fondazione Silvio Tronchetti Provera and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Every year, from 2005 to 2017, the Island of San Giorgio hosted thirteen editions of a two-day international symposium in September with a view to “examining the importance of scientific development as a means of improving our quality of life and outlining a new role for science in the society of the third millennium. Internationally renowned experts from a range of fields and disciplines were invited to give their views on these issues – crucial to the destiny of our society – addressing an audience of scientists, philosophers, theologians, industrialists, politicians, economists, journalists, students and others interested in the social, economic and political consequences of ongoing scientific development.”

***Reimagine***

*Reimagine: la ricerca si racconta. Il valore della scienza nella comunicazione verso la società* (‘Reimagine: research is told. The value of science and how it is communicated to society’) was an international event hosted in 2021 by the Foundation and promoted by Novartis Scienza da vivere, dedicated to scientific literacy.

***Digital Centre, the digital frontier and AI***

In the face of this series of hosted or co-hosted events, the Foundation itself has measured up against the **new frontiers of technology, the digital sphere and AI**. In 2018, together with the Factum Foundation for Digital Technology in Conservation and the Digital Humanities Laboratory of the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL-DHLAB), the Foundation launched the *ARCHiVe* project *– Analysis and Recording of Cultural Heritage in Venice*, with the support of the Helen Hamlyn Trust.

**It is a leading centre for technological research into the digital conservation of cultural heritage and archives,** on which it has built an extensive network of partnerships with cultural and academic institutions all around the world.

The Digital Centre is in the process of scanning, digitising, archiving and publishing a large number of documents, archives and works, including the scanning of the entire island of San Giorgio, in an operation which constitutes a worldwide first. Among the Centre’s activities, its research into data reuse with AI systems for heritage dissemination stands out.

Since 2020, it has promoted ***AOA – ARCHiVe Online Academy*:** a free, public training programme which to date has held 40 appointments (courses, workshops, seminars, lectures) for a total of 223 hours.

Finally, in the wake of this experience, the ***Venice Long Data* project**, in partnership with the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, was launched. The project, which involves data scientists, physicists, archaeologists, palaeographers and scholars from both the sciences and humanities, transforms available databases (starting with archives) into multilevel descriptions of cultural heritage and hypertextual processing, thanks to AI and machine-learning applications.