



Venice, Island of San Giorgio Maggiore

Experimenting with new ways of ‘exhibiting’

by Renata Codello* and Massimo Checchetto**

The partnership between the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and the Fondazione Teatro La Fenice on a cultural project finds interesting resonance with Erik Möller’s reflections on the access to, use of and sharing of a work as an “expression that can be freely studied, used, copied and/or modified by anyone for any purpose.” The open-source technologist acknowledges in the free circulation of content the driving force of cultural and scientific progress, and it is within this dynamism – this contemplation and encouragement of openness to new contributions, interweaving various forms and products of knowledge and creativity – that the *Casanova and Europe* project takes shape.

Founded in 1951 by Vittorio Cini, the Fondazione Giorgio Cini is a major cultural institution whose mission revolves around the activities of its research institutes and study centres, established in the years immediately following its creation. Since their inception, these centres have housed art collections, documentary and photographic archives as well as valuable collections of rare and antique books – materials that are, above all, the subject of investigation and research through methods that transcend the dualism between science and the humanities, thereby acknowledging their deep and fruitful interconnections.

What particularly distinguishes this vast heritage is the fact that, while some groups of works are genuine collections – coherently conceived and preserved as such – there has also been a constant effort to acquire new materials in various fields of study, configuring them as open systems. They reflect the personalities and culture of their donors, the historical periods and circumstances in which they reached the Foundation – from Italy and from abroad – and the ideals that link the founder’s great vision with all the humanistic disciplines of both past and present.

It is within this singular ‘system’, marked by uniqueness and originality, that the multifaceted figure of Giacomo Casanova – three hundred years after his birth – emerges as a source of particularly fertile themes, new interpretative keys and fresh readings capable of generating new forms of creativity projected toward the future. Herein lies the dialogue and collaboration with the Fondazione Teatro La Fenice for the conception, detailed design and implementation of the exhibition displays, which aim to explore new or alternative ways of showcasing, examining the affinities between displaying and staging: combining the static exhibition of works and documents designed to be observed with more scenic contexts that, through the adoption of unexpected perspectives, set these works in motion and trigger their interpretation.

The themes and their novel expressions and resonances multiply and reflect one another like a game of mirrors – polymorphic objects that do not change yet which



possess the power to transform, expand and endlessly repeat. The perfectly smooth and flat mirror, offering clear and luminous yet elusive and intangible images, was patented in Venice in 1540 by Vincenzo Redor. It soon became the coveted symbol of Venetian craftsmanship and of a city that itself seems to be a reflection and a duplication. Likewise, Casanova's own personality appears to be manifold, specular, contrasting, distorted, lucid, opaque, virtual and real – ever full of life and on the move. His elusiveness, the impossible task of confining his life to conventional interpretive boundaries, made him a legend of himself even while alive, sustained by his eccentric behaviour across his many roles: diplomat, musician, man of the theatre, writer, philosopher and entrepreneur.

A Venetian, an Italian and a European – he seems intent on constructing new forms of freedom, fragile and undefined in outline yet pursued with superb determination. Therefore, rather than attempting to capture and isolate the fragments of his kaleidoscopic life, the stages of his innumerable travels through Italy and Europe, or to assign fixed meanings to his varied interests, it is more stimulating – and more promising in terms of new forms and methods of research and interpretation – to consider his experiments in music, literature, games, esotericism and magic as interwoven nodes of a single network.

Casanova and Europe. An Opera in Several Acts seeks to grasp and represent this network of connections through extensive research conducted by the Institutes and Centres of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in their archival collections, along with a selection of engravings, writings, books and theatrical settings – many displayed for the first time – from the Foundation's holdings. The ambitious goal, which we believe may open up new paths for research, is to develop and construct – through innovative and experimental approaches – new creative forms that enhance, disseminate and make accessible the intellectual, documentary and artistic heritage we are entrusted with preserving.

Through the visual narration of episodes and events from Casanova's exuberant life, visitors will gain access to that system of relationships and cultures that his biography only partially reveals, of which he was a restless witness, forerunner and protagonist. Within the evocative exhibition spaces of the Sala Carnelutti on the Island of San Giorgio, we hope new research themes and investigative pathways will emerge – avenues that scholars, fellows and future generations will be able to identify and pursue, confident that the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, by making its rich study materials available in digital form as well, will be ready to welcome and support them.

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