



Venice, Palazzo Cini. La Galleria
September 27, 2025 – March 2, 2026

Casanova and Venice: at Palazzo Cini, the first chapter of a two-part exhibition project celebrating the 300th anniversary of the famous Venetian.

From 27 September 2025 to 2 March 2026, the Venetian eighteenth century – that of Casanova – will take centre stage at Palazzo Cini, with nearly one hundred works from the collections of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini as well as loans from major museums and private collections.

Venice and Europe are the lenses through which the Fondazione Giorgio Cini has chosen to observe and explore the figure of Giacomo Casanova on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of his birth. **A rich programme of conferences, concerts and seminars** organised by all the Foundation's Institutes and Research Centres will accompany the celebration. Venice and Europe are also the two focal points of the dual exhibition project held at **Palazzo Cini in San Vio** (from 27 September 2025 to 2 March 2026) and on the **Island of San Giorgio Maggiore** (from 17 October 2025 to 2 March 2026).

Gianfelice Rocca, President of the Foundation, explains:

“The process initiated for the celebrations has allowed the Foundation to bring to light the vast and valuable wealth of documents and collections it preserves. This heritage stems above all from the tireless commitment of Vittorio Cini as a collector – a man who was able to recognise, trace, and assemble an extraordinary body of paintings, correspondences, drawings, furnishings and archives, guided by the finest art historians of his time. Thanks to the prestige of his collections, he was later able to attract major bequests and donations, which the Foundation continues to safeguard today. **This exhibition can therefore be seen as Vittorio Cini's own gaze upon Casanova's century – presented here, in the palazzo that was once his residence.**”

Daniele Franco, Scientific Director, adds:

“Fondazione Giorgio Cini previously turned its attention to Casanova in 1998. To mark the bicentenary of his death, it organised a conference that acknowledged him as an ‘explorer of his time, curious and unprejudiced.’ That conference laid the scholarly and critical groundwork on which the Foundation has now built the initiatives celebrating 300 years since his birth. On that occasion, an assessment was made of Casanova's cultural contribution, stripped of the mythical and legendary aura surrounding him. **The 2025 initiative aims to unite these two dimensions – the historical figure and the myth.**”

Casanova and Venice is thus the first chapter in the dual exhibition project.



Curated by the Institute of Art History, with the participation of the Institute for Theatre and Melodrama, the exhibition at Palazzo Cini **retraces the multifaceted figure of Casanova** – man of letters, memoirist, philosopher, alchemist, traveller and diplomat – across the restless eighteenth century that culminated in the fall of the Serenissima.

The exhibition examines the life story of Casanova by **reconstructing the Venetian context** and its rich cultural and artistic ferment. In the Gallery of Palazzo Cini, **ninety-seven works are on display, thirty-one of which come from the holdings of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini**, alongside loans from various Venetian, national and international collections and museums.

Luca Massimo Barbero, Director of the Institute of Art History, emphasises:

“The backdrop of the exhibition is, first and foremost, the city of St Mark at the time of the young Casanova: dazzling and full of life, cosmopolitan by definition and a major hub of cultural dissemination. It was in this city that one of the most refined artistic civilisations of all time was born. **Venice – capital of the arts, theatre and music** – is the city where Casanova became the extraordinary figure history has handed down to us. Of that Venice, the passionate collector Vittorio Cini here serves as the ‘off-stage voice’ of the story told through the exhibition.”

A significant set of the works indeed come from the holdings and collections of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and from the collecting legacy of its founder. It is very much through the eyes of Vittorio Cini that visitors can experience the exhibition set in the rooms of his own ‘town palazzo’.

Zanetti’s Album: A Theatrical Era

At the heart of this exhibition is the renowned *Album of Caricatures* by **Anton Maria Zanetti the Elder**, acquired by Vittorio Cini in 1969. A ‘twin’ album, once owned by Joseph Smith, the English consul to Venice, is preserved in the British Royal Collections at Windsor Castle, while a replica formerly belonging to Francesco Algarotti is now housed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

A selection of thirty-nine sheets is displayed in the central hall and along the exhibition path, offering a **playful counterpoint to the paintings** on view. With its 350 caricatures, Zanetti’s collection vividly and wittily captures **the social and cultural life of Venice from the early-eighteenth century** up to the years when the young Casanova first entered that world. Zanetti’s pencil portrays abbots, priests and *nonzoli*, artists, masters and servants, Venetians and foreigners – but above all, **‘theatre folk’**: singers, dancers, actors, musicians, impresarios, copyists, prompters, composers and music teachers.

The theatre played a central role in Casanova’s life and imagination, as **Maria Ida Biggi**, director of the Institute for Theatre and Melodrama and professor at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, explains:

“His life was steeped in theatre, so much so that it might almost be seen as an ongoing comedy. He was a musician, actor, playwright, impresario, translator and adaptor of



theatrical texts. Both his parents were actors, and his mother, Giovanna Farussi – known as Zanetta – enjoyed considerable success in Northern Europe. Moreover, **the eighteenth century was a period in which theatre permeated every aspect of life.** It was not only a space for entertainment but also a meeting point for social and political events, where citizens could see themselves reflected and experience the social dimension of the era.”

This theatrical spirit is further reflected in **the Foundation’s collections of stage scenery designs**, in Pietro Longhi’s paintings where the eternal ‘theatrical’ merges with Venetian interiors, and in Francesco Guardi’s Procession of Triumphal Cars in the Piazza San Marco, Venice, Celebrating the Visit of the Conti del Nord.

Travelling Artists and a Tribute to the City

The exhibition presents some of the most precious pieces from Vittorio Cini’s collection, rarely shown to the public: the pair of *Vedute* devised by the young **Canaletto** (1721–22), the result of a creative freedom nurtured in the world of theatrical scenography; **Francesco Guardi**’s remarkable canvas depicting the *Genealogical Tree of the Giovanelli Family* expanding across a view of the Basin of St Mark; and the cycle of paintings featuring *Cybele*, *Vulcan* and *Neptune* from the ceiling of Palazzo Zulian – a tribute to the myth of Venice and a masterpiece of **Antonio Guardi**’s later career.

These works, once part of Vittorio Cini’s collection, return to the palace together with other masterpieces loaned for the occasion, created by the same artists – such as Canaletto’s *Grand Canal from Palazzo Balbi toward Rialto* and Francesco Guardi’s *Basin of San Marco with the Island of San Giorgio and the Giudecca*.

The artists featured at Palazzo Cini are united by their **passion for travel** – a central theme of Casanova’s eighteenth century. Above all, Canaletto stands as an ideal ambassador of Venice in England; **Rosalba Carriera**, the ‘first female painter in Europe’, who in 1720 set out for Paris with her sister Giovanna and her brother-in-law, the Venetian painter **Giovanni Antonio Pellegrini** (also represented in the exhibition), was celebrated there; and **the Tiepolos** – Giambattista, the greatest painter of the European eighteenth century, and his sons Giandomenico and Lorenzo – who were active at the court of Madrid.

Among other works, visitors can admire Rosalba Carriera’s *Portrait of Antoine Watteau*, Canaletto’s *Prato della Valle* and Giandomenico Tiepolo’s *Burchiello* – **an exceptional loan from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna**. These works evoke Casanova’s first journey: at the age of nine, he travelled to Padua to study grammar, sailing along the Brenta in a *burchiello* accompanied by the poet Giorgio Baffo. Also on view is **Bartolomeo Nazari**’s *Portrait of Farinelli*, on loan **from the Royal College of Music Museum in London**.

Providing a mystical and religious counterpoint to Casanova’s ‘world-as-a-stage’ Venice, the exhibition concludes with two canvases from the Scuola Grande di San Rocco – *Abraham and the Angels* and *Hagar and Ishmael*, masterpieces of **Giambattista Tiepolo**’s early maturity – and *The Crucifixion* by **Giovanni Battista**



Piazzetta, from the Gallerie dell'Accademia. Together, they form a lyrical tribute to the artistic civilisation of the lagoon, a sign of the celestial glory that forms the backdrop to the splendours of the century.

Casanova and Venice

27 September 2015 – 2 March 2026
Palazzo Cini, San Vio, Dorsoduro 864

curated by the Institute of Art History
with the Institute for Theatre and Melodrama
Fondazione Giorgio Cini

Lending institutions

Ca' Rezzonico Museum of 18th-Century Venice
Nicolò Visentini Collection, Venice
Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice
Galerie Neuse, Brema
Galleria Giorgio Franchetti – Ca' d'Oro, Venice
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna
Musei Civici Treviso
Museo Correr, Venice
Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan
Scuola Grande di San Rocco, Venice
The Royal College of Music Museum, London

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The exhibition is open every day (except Tuesdays) from 10 am to 6 pm.