

# MASTERPIECES

DIANNE DWYER MODESTINI

# MASTERPIECES

*Based on a manuscript by*  
MARIO MODESTINI





Dwyer Modestini, Dianne  
Masterpieces : based on a manuscript by Mario Modestini / Dianne Dwyer Modestini  
Fiesole (Firenze) : Cadmo, 2018.  
524 pages : illustrations (chiefly color) ; 23 cm  
ISBN (hardcover) 978-88-7923-450-4

DDC 702.88092  
LCC N8563.M63 D89 2018

Modestini, Mario, 1907-2006  
Art restorers—Italy—Biography  
Art—Conservation and restoration—Italy—History—20th century

ISBN (ebook) 978-88-7923-451-1



The electronic version is available on the Torrossa.com full text platform  
at the permalink <http://digital.casalini.it/9788879234511>

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in the text in future reprints or online and print editions of this book. For copyright acknowledgements and picture credits please refer to pages 517-522.

First edition, January 2018  
Second revised edition, September 2018

Cadmo is a publishing division of Casalini Libri  
Copyright © by Casalini Libri, 2018  
[www.casalini.it](http://www.casalini.it)  
[www.cadmo.com](http://www.cadmo.com)

Copyediting and proofreading by Eve Leckey  
Typeset by Giampiero Marzi

All papers used are acid-free and the manufacturing processes conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

Printed in Italy by Cappelli Arti Grafiche, Sesto Fiorentino (Firenze)

*for Mario*

# Contents

*Introduction* 15

*Preface* 19

## PART ONE: THE MAKING OF A RESTORER

### CHAPTER 1: Early Years 31

The Spanish Flu 32

The Rome of Mario's Childhood 35

The Rise of Fascism 37

Via Margutta 40

### CHAPTER 2: From Art Student to Art Restorer 47

Art School 47

Political Changes and Becoming a Restorer 51

The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 55

Fascism and the Arts 57

CHAPTER 3: The Rospigliosi Collection	67
The Rospigliosi Sales (1931 and 1932)	67
CHAPTER 4: Caveat Emptor	77
Icilio Federico Joni	77
Giuseppe Latini	82
Teodoro Riccardi	84
Elena Gobbi's <i>Diana</i>	86
The Getty Kouros and Armando Pacifici	90
An Accidental Forgery	92
Giosi, Pulvirenti and the Musketeer	95
Pietro Toesca, Forgeries, and Expertises	96
CHAPTER 5: The Istituto Centrale per il Restauro	99
Cesare Brandi and Mauro Pelliccioli	100
A Brief History of Italian Restoration	104
CHAPTER 6: War: Rome, Open City	108
Via del Babuino	108
The Bombing of Rome	110
The German Occupation	113
The Roman Jews	115
A Narrow Escape	118
CHAPTER 7: After the War: Transitions	125
Pietro Maria Bardi and the Studio d'Arte Palma	125
Palma Bucarelli	129
Riccardo Gualino	133
London, 1945	135
Contemporary Art at the ' <i>Palma</i> '	136
Cesare Zavattini	141
Ischia	144
CHAPTER 8: The Florentine Connection	146
Gualtiero Volterra	146
Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi	147

Sandrino Contini Bonacossi 151

Roberto Longhi 153

Bernard Berenson 157

CHAPTER 9: Barone Michele Lazzaroni 161

Giuliano de' Medici 165

CHAPTER 10: Assis Chateaubriand and São Paulo 170

São Paulo 172

Acquisitions for Brazil 174

PART TWO: NEW YORK AND THE SAMUEL H. KRESS FOUNDATION

CHAPTER 11: Welcome to America 183

Samuel Henry Kress 183

The Restorer and the Count 187

Samuel Kress's Decline and Pichetto's Sudden Death 196

CHAPTER 12: Carnegie Hall and Huckleberry Hill 202

Renzo Ravà 204

Carnegie Hall 205

Huckleberry Hill 208

CHAPTER 13: New York, New York 214

Federico Zeri 214

The Fire in the Studio 220

CHAPTER 14: Samuel Kress and the National Gallery of Art 224

Andrew Mellon: The Philanthropist 224

David Finley: The Director 226

John Walker: The Curator 228

CHAPTER 15: The Regional Gallery Program 239

The Philadelphia Gift and Alfred Frankfurter 242

Masterworks for the Regional Galleries 247

Framing the Kress Collection 251

The Scientist and the Restorer 252

CHAPTER 16: The Art of Acquisition 256

The Early Fifties 256

Count Vittorio Cini 258

French & Company 261

Carpe diem: Grünewald and Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon in His Study* 263

Serendipity and Chance: *Marchesa Doria Spinola, Doge Andrea Gritti* and Nino Pisano 265

CHAPTER 17: The Last Picture Sale 274

Sandrino's Disappearance 279

The Death of Sandrino 281

CHAPTER 18: Missed Opportunities 284

The Ruspoli Goyas 284

Goya's Painting Technique 289

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio: *Saint John the Baptist* 291

*The Cardsharps* 294

The Barberini Tapestries and Bernini 299

CHAPTER 19: Endings 303

The National Gallery Opening and the End of Kress's Original Mission 304

PART THREE: TALES AND TECHNIQUES OF A GREAT RESTORER

CHAPTER 20: New Clients and Friends 315

Mario's Studio 315

William Suhr 318

Rudolf Heinemann and Baron Heinrich von Thyssen 319

Geoffrey Agnew 322

Eugene V. Thaw and Giovanni di Paolo 323

Frederick Mont and *The Burning of the Heretic* 325

Julius Weitzner and Canaletto 327

Harold Wethey 328

John Brealey and the Metropolitan Museum	330
Mario's Revenge	334
CHAPTER 21: Notable Restorations	336
Giorgione	336
El Greco's <i>Vision of Saint John</i>	338
Antonello da Messina	341
The Kress Ghirlandaio	342
Rubens's Self-Portrait	344
CHAPTER 22: A Few More Forgeries	349
CHAPTER 23: Misattributions, Studio Replicas, and Repainted Originals	354
Unrecognized Originals: A Claude Lorrain and Others	355
Optimistic Attributions: Raphael's <i>Portrait of a Woman</i>	358
Primary Versions and Studio Replicas: Lorenzo Lotto	361
Repainted Originals: A Lazzaroni Botticelli	363
Norton Simon's Botticelli	366
Reflections on the Art of Restoration	369
Retouching Controversies: Alfio Del Serra	371
CHAPTER 24: Cleaning and Controversies	375
The National Gallery of Art	379
The Sistine Chapel	389
CHAPTER 25: Please Do Not Varnish This Painting	396
"Crimes Against the Cubists"	396
Van Gogh's <i>Iris</i>	398
<i>Au Lapin Agile</i>	401
CHAPTER 26: Retirement	404
Troghi	406
"Senza Fine"	409
New York	410
EPILOGUE: The <i>Salvator Mundi</i>	411

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: Technical Matters and Essential Principles 427

Tempera Painting 427

Oil Painting 434

### APPENDIX II: Restoration Practices 439

Varnishes 439

Cradling 440

Transfer 441

Additional Notes on Cleaning 442

*Plates* 445

*Notes* 471

*Index of Names* 495

*Bibliography* 509

*Illustration Credits* 517

*Acknowledgements* 523



There is so little to remember of anyone—an anecdote, a conversation at table. But every memory is turned over and over, every word, however chance, written in the heart in the hope that memory will fulfill itself and become flesh, and that the wanderers will find a way home, and the perished, whose lack we always feel, will step through the door finally and stroke our hair with dreaming, habitual fondness, not having meant to keep us waiting long.

Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*.  
London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1981

## Introduction

THIS BOOK IS, in part, based on a memoir that my husband, Mario Modestini, began to write in the early 1990s at our farmhouse in Troghi, not far from Florence. Mario had a long and illustrious career as one of the twentieth century's finest restorers and connoisseurs of Italian painting, and he liked to tell his younger colleagues stories about people and events that had occurred long before they were born. These tales enthralled his listeners, who urged him to record them. Mario rarely put pen to paper, so I was surprised to find him one morning in the library writing, filling whole legal pads with stories from his life in his neat script.

I transcribed the original Italian text and gave the pages to Mario to revise and correct. The episodes he described were not necessarily in chronological order, and I tried to organize them in a logical sequence. Eventually, I translated the text into English. Mario corrected the English translation, and we spoke often about

## INTRODUCTION

the shape of the manuscript and what more might be included, but he had already set down everything he felt was important.

The memoir concentrated on two periods in Mario's life: his years in Rome up until 1949 when he moved to New York; and events that occurred during the years he was involved with the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, from 1949 until 1961.<sup>1</sup> Although these two accounts were fairly complete, his recollections about his life after the 1961 dispersal of the Kress Collection when he worked as a private restorer were limited to only a few episodes.

Eventually we became distracted by other things and put the memoirs aside. Much later Mario wrote some additional pages, sporadic thoughts about particular paintings or topics that he felt important to record. I was not aware of this material until I came across some random sheets when I began working on the book in earnest after Mario's death. Nonetheless, there were still huge gaps in the memoir after 1961.

To turn the fragmentary manuscript into a complete account of Mario's life, I drew on many sources: research in archives, libraries and on the internet; material from Mario's files; information from Mario's friends and family members; above all, my recollections of the conversations in which Mario and I engaged for twenty-three years about works of art and the restoration of paintings. As I worked, I began to remember, and would find information that corroborated or expanded upon things that Mario had written. Often this happened quite by chance, but the frequency of these inadvertent discoveries made me feel at times that Mario was an invisible collaborator.

A recurring theme in the book is the notable restorations that Mario carried out in the course of his long career and some of the problems they presented. For the benefit of readers who might not be knowledgeable about the materials and techniques of old master paintings, I have appended some basic information about their manufacture and the degradation caused by chemical reactions within the complex matrices of pigments, mediums, adhesives, and varnishes of which they are composed. Often these individual

## INTRODUCTION

components change over the centuries in different ways in relation to one another, making it difficult, and, at times, impossible, for the viewer to perceive the artist's original intent.

Artists were often aware that the initial appearance, and thus the full meaning, of their work would not endure. In a famous, oft-quoted passage, the eighteenth-century English painter William Hogarth (1697–1764) lamented the effects that time would have on his paintings:

Let us now see in what manner time operates ... in order to discover if any changes ... can give a picture more union and harmony than has been in the power of a skillful master, with all his rules of art to do. When colours change at all it must be somewhat in the manner following, for as they are made some



1. William Hogarth, *Time Smoking a Picture*, ca. 1761, etching and aquatint, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 23.5 × 18.4 cm.

## INTRODUCTION

of metal, some of earth, some of stone and others of more perishable materials, time cannot operate on them otherwise than as by daily experience we find it doth, which is, that one changes darker, another lighter, one quite to a different colour, whilst another, as ultramarine, will keep its natural brightness ... Therefore how is it possible that such different materials, ever variously changing ... should accidentally coincide with the artist's intention?<sup>2</sup>

Unlike most of the other arts, music for example, which can be performed many times in different ways without damaging the original score, the figurative arts are permanently changed, not only by materials that age, but also by the interpretation created by restoration, which endures for many years and sometimes forever. While music critics abound, very little critical assessment of restoration is available to the public.

The effect of restorers' interventions, however well intentioned, on these distorted expressions of a painter's genius was a subject of paramount interest to Mario and often the cause of distress. One of my objectives in this book is to provide non-specialists with a few tools to help them understand what they are seeing when they look at a painting.

## Preface

ON JANUARY 28, 2006, my husband, Mario Modestini, passed away two months before his ninety-ninth birthday. Ninety-eight is a great age, and he lived a remarkable life, yet I never thought that day would come—or rather, I thought that when it did come (at some indefinite future date), I would be prepared to meet it. Although I was thirty-nine years his junior, Mario and I had a great deal in common. He often said that he wished he could make a deal with the devil to turn back the years so that we could have more time together.

I met him at a gallery opening in New York in the early 1980s. The room was crowded, and suddenly my closest friend materialized before me, saying, “Dianne, I’d like to introduce you to Mario Modestini.” She stepped aside, and I looked into the kind, sensitive, intelligent face, and the startlingly blue eyes, of the most famous restorer in New York. Mario smiled at me and said with great warmth, “Hello,” with the emphasis on the last

## PREFACE

syllable. He was swiftly swept away by his companion, an attractive older woman with blond hair in a stylish French twist. At that time, I was a restorer in the paintings conservation department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and although I had heard of Mario Modestini when I first became interested in conservation as a college senior, the notion I had of him was a bit different from the man I met that evening. My boss at the Met, John Brealey, had described him as sophisticated, shrewd, and “a very dangerous man.” In the light of that portrayal, I imagined Mario as a slim, suave figure in a pinstriped suit with greased, marcelled hair and a thin mustache, like a villain in a silent movie.

I didn't give the brief encounter at the opening any further thought until a couple of years later when the director of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Marilyn Perry, engaged me to survey the paintings that formerly belonged to the foundation, now located in eighteen Regional Museums. After Marilyn and I returned from our first inspection tour, she told me that Mario, who had been the conservator and curator of the Kress Foundation, was anxious to hear about the condition of the paintings we had seen because there were rumors that many of the pictures were in poor state. (Mario told me, much later, that after he met me at that gallery opening, he wanted to contact me but hadn't and so he was very pleased to realize that I was the restorer hired by Marilyn to survey the Kress paintings.)

And so, one Sunday in December 1983, I loitered outside Mario's apartment building on East 52nd Street, wearing my best clothes. I was early and very nervous. At exactly five minutes before the appointed time, I entered the lobby, the doorman rang up, and I took the elevator to the top floor. With great trepidation, I rang the bell, and a few minutes later, Mario opened his apartment door. He was wearing a blue-plaid flannel shirt and green corduroy trousers. He gave me a strange look, which I later realized was because I had recently gotten what I considered a very chic haircut—extremely short on one side, long on the other, and shingled in the back although I had decided against the purple rinse the stylist

## PREFACE

suggested. From the landing, a flight of stairs led down to Mario's double-height studio. One wall was covered from floor to ceiling with books. In front of the tall, north-facing windows were two easels, a small tabouret, and a photographer's lamp. The wide windowsills held an array of jars containing solvents, varnishes, and brushes, as well as pots of flourishing African violets.

To my relief, Marilyn Perry had already arrived. After the usual pleasantries, Mario sat down next to me on the sofa and picked up the loose-leaf binders with my notes. Turning the pages, he asked about each painting, every one of which he remembered in detail after twenty-five years, while I strained to recall them, craning my neck to try to read what I had written. Mario made short work of the reports and invited Marilyn and me to lunch at Gino's. A watering hole for Italian expats and journalists, this popular restaurant had opened in the 1950s when there were no genuine Italian restaurants on the East Side, and it was memorable not only for the food, but also for its red wallpaper decorated with yellow zebras. Over a glass of wine, I began to relax. Though Mario spoke impeccable English, he and Marilyn preferred to speak in Italian, and I found I could still garble a few of the phrases I had learned as a student in Florence. After lunch, Marilyn left for another appointment, and Mario asked if I would like to come back to his studio to look at the pictures he was working on, an invitation I gratefully accepted. I had worked at the Metropolitan for ten years and, although it wasn't easy to identify the painters, my training served me well in the ensuing discussion. Over tea, Mario and I talked for hours about paintings, approaches to restoration, and the cleaning of the Sistine chapel ceiling, which we had both visited.

The next evening around six o'clock, my direct line at the museum rang. It was Mario, inviting me to dinner. *Oh dear*, I thought. *What have I gotten myself into? This is a lonely old man who needs company.* But I accepted his invitation anyway and met him at an Italian restaurant in Midtown, where we had good, simple food and again we found that we had a great deal to talk about. It was apparent that Mario was hardly a lonely old man. He led an active



## PREFACE

social life, considerably livelier than my own. The reason he was free that evening, I later learned, was that his companion—the blonde with the French twist—had stayed on at her house in Mount Kisco, where they usually spent the weekend.

Over the next year, Mario called periodically to invite me for lunch or dinner. I knew that he was attracted to me, and we had many things in common, but there were thirty-nine years between us. Not to mention the long-time companion. Just the same, during the following summer when my phone rang often it would be Mario, calling from some part of the world, and chatting with him always put me in a good humor. When we saw each other again in the autumn we both decided to take a chance on this unconventional relationship.

Mario was seventy-five when we met but he had the energy and optimism of a much younger man, which he retained into his nineties. During the last several years of his life, Mario suffered from heart failure. At one point, he decided that he would rather stay at home than struggle with shortness of breath. Nothing would induce him to go out. He didn't want to be seen using a walker or in a wheelchair. So, I bought him Sulka dressing gowns and he looked, as he always had, relaxed and distinguished in every situation. He received friends and visitors and continued to work on the memoir that he had begun to write a decade earlier.

The origin and heart of this book are Mario's own words. One of the highlights of his wondrous career was his role in the acquisition of Leonardo da Vinci's *Ginevra de' Benci* for the National Gallery in Washington DC, from the Prince of Liechtenstein. It was a great coup, carried out in perfect secrecy. This is what he wrote:

*Toward the end of 1965, John Walker [director of the National Gallery of Art] telephoned and asked me if I would come to Washington to discuss a matter that was highly confidential and sensitive. With great secrecy and reserve, he said that Mr. Paul Mellon would like me to go to Vaduz, in Liechtenstein, to examine a painting that was considered to be by Leonardo da Vinci. It was a portrait of a young woman, Ginevra*

## PREFACE

*de' Benci, and dated from the last years of Leonardo's sojourn in Florence [before he left for Milan in 1482]. He told me that Carter Brown, the gallery's chief curator, would accompany me, as it was official government business. The importance of this acquisition could hardly be overstated. If the painting were genuine, it was the last Leonardo in the world that might conceivably be for sale. [There is another Leonardo in the private collection of the Princes Czartoryski in Krakow, *The Lady with the Ermine*, but it is considered a national treasure, and would never be allowed to leave Poland.] If the gallery were successful, it would possess the only painting by Leonardo in America. Before my trip, elaborate plans were made. For example, when we spoke by phone, we would never refer to the painting by name, but instead, use the code name "the bird."*

*In the past, some critics had attributed the painting to Lorenzo di Credi, and, although most experts thought it was by Leonardo, there was still a slight question. Before leaving, I put together a file of photographs of all the known paintings and some drawings by Leonardo, to compare with *Ginevra*. When I arrived in Vaduz with Carter, the Princess received us graciously, but also with a certain coldness. Understandably, the family was loath to part with the masterpiece of their collection, but needed to raise money. The next morning, the painting was brought up from the wine cellar to the apartment of the Prince's secretary, so that I could study it at close range. It did not take long for me to be convinced that it was by Leonardo. Comparing the painting with the various photographic details, I rapidly concluded that the painting was by the same hand as the artist who made the beautiful drawings of the eddies of water, which were exactly like the curls of *Ginevra's* hair. It was also in excellent condition, except for a small damage to the bridge of the nose. Unfortunately, it had been cut down along the bottom. The reverse was also painted with a design featuring two encircled branches of juniper and laurel in the center of the panel, and from this design it was possible to determine that the painting had lost approximately two inches at the bottom.*

*After examining the painting, I called John Walker, who was anxiously awaiting the verdict. I said, according to the code we had established, "the bird is 100 percent okay," meaning that the gallery could proceed with the \$5 million acquisition. When we returned to Washington, I discussed my conclusions about the attribution and the condition of the painting with Walker and Mr. Mellon.*

*About a month later, I left again for Vaduz, this time accompanied by the treasurer of the gallery, Ernest Fiedler, to take possession of the painting. In the*



2. Mario Modestini in Vaduz examining Leonardo da Vinci's *Ginevra de' Benci*.

*meantime, technicians at the gallery had modified an ordinary Samsonite Tourist suitcase into a unique container for the panel. The conditions of temperature and humidity of the Vaduz wine cellar were reproduced inside the suitcase and could be maintained for the entire eight-hour journey. In the gallery, a room had been prepared with the same climatic conditions to receive the painting upon its arrival. The suitcase traveled with us in the first-class cabin in its own seat under the name "Mrs. Modestini." The curiosity of the other passengers was indescribable. A whole first-class seat for a Samsonite suitcase! What could possibly be inside? Whenever Ernie or I had to get up to use the bathroom, the other would take the seat next to the Samsonite case. It was snowing when we arrived in New York and the flight was delayed. No sooner had the plane landed and come to a stop than the doors opened and two FBI agents entered asking for Mr. Modestini. They identified themselves, grabbed the suitcase, and said, "Follow us." Mr. Mellon's private plane was waiting on the tarmac nearby to whisk us off to National Airport, where a private car took us directly to the gallery. By this time, it was nearly midnight.*

*A table had been prepared in the climate-controlled room. In front of the assembled staff, I opened the suitcase and removed the famous portrait. The painting is rather small and, when I took it out, it seemed to me that there was less excitement*

## PREFACE

*than there might have been about the arrival of this much-desired object. Perhaps, after all, everyone was slightly disappointed to see this small panel of a modest young girl. However, by the next morning, the press had been informed and was in full cry. For days, nobody talked about anything except the Leonardo that had come to America. Time magazine wrote a detailed story, describing the clandestine security arrangements and code words.<sup>1</sup> I found an appropriate frame for the Ginevra, and she was hung on the walls of the National Gallery. Visitors stood in long lines to catch a glimpse of her, as they had several years earlier for the Mona Lisa, which had been loaned to Washington at the express wish of Jacqueline Kennedy. Naturally the two paintings cannot be compared, but Ginevra is the only painting by Leonardo that will ever belong to an American museum.*

It is my hope that this book will inform and entertain the reader with Mario's engaging stories of people and events, add to the historical record, and shed some light on the complexities created by the many vicissitudes in the life of old master paintings that are often revealed during their restoration, refracted through the life and career of one of the world's greatest practitioners of that art.

PART ONE

# The Making of a Restorer

Gone are the models from Ciociaria, gathered among the flower vendors on the steps of Trinità dei Monti, and the malarial and melancholy bogus herdsmen from the Roman countryside; the last bohemian flowing locks of hair and goatee beards have been cut off and the broad brims of the hats have shrunk considerably. The beautiful Roman street with its spacious, welcoming studios is now inhabited largely by gilded youth, scions of noble or wealthy families, expert daubers in their bachelor pads, who have substituted elegant silk dressing gowns from Via Condotti for the honest canvas duster spattered with multicolored paint. Enormous shiny cars belonging to the Diplomatic Corps block the famous road, while elegant figures with a furtive air come and go. The old Via Margutta is gone and there is no one left to lament its passing.

Giuliano Briganti, *Cosmopolita*, March 1, 1945

## CHAPTER I

# Early Years

MARIO MODESTINI WAS born in Rome on April 11, 1907. His parents, Enrica Lattanzi (1868–1943) and Antonio Modestini (1865–1924), were from Umbria. Antonio's father was a gilder, who had worked in the Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi, and Antonio moved to Rome when he was fifteen to follow his father's trade. After spending several years working for different employers, he opened his own *bottega* at Via Margutta 50, specializing in gilding, frame making, and the restoration of polychromed and gilded decorative surfaces. Mario recalled visiting his father while Antonio was engaged in the restoration of the great fifteenth-century coffered ceiling of the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore; it was a massive undertaking and his father accomplished it single-handedly, working on a moveable scaffold tower.

Mario's mother, Enrica Lattanzi, originally came from Foligno, not far from Assisi, where her father was a jeweler and watchmaker. He had married Judith Faller from Mannheim in Germany, whom

he had met when she came into his shop to have her watch repaired. I believe that Mario inherited from his German grandmother several attributes of character—he was precise and well-organized, and always kept a cool head. Mario was the youngest of Antonio and Enrica’s three children; Luigi was born in 1898, and Concetta, in 1902. Mario said that he passed his early childhood in his mother’s kitchen. She was a traditional housewife, who spent all day cooking, preparing meals from excellent seasonal ingredients, and took no shortcuts. Her cooking combined Umbrian dishes with German specialties, such as strudel, which Mario remembered lovingly. His father was a gourmand, so Enrica’s efforts did not go unappreciated. The family lived in a commodious apartment in a neighborhood of late nineteenth-century buildings, not far from the old central train station.

Modestini is not a common surname. Mario suggested it was probably Roman in origin, with Assisi and its surrounding area as its locus. Men called “Modestus” figure regularly in accounts from Roman history; one was a famous lawmaker, and his statue, which Mario often pointed out when we drove past it, stands in front of the Palazzo di Giustizia in Rome. A more recent ancestor, Beato Lucio Modestini, a merchant of Cannara (a hamlet in the plain below Assisi), appears in early histories of the Franciscan order; he was the first man to be invested into the Third Order of Franciscans, by St. Francis himself, in the year 1221. A plaque in Cannara commemorates the event. In 1816, Don Pasquale Modestini founded an institute for the education of disadvantaged boys and there is a statue of him in a church in Cannara. However, neither Mario nor his immediate family inherited this religious bent.

### ❧ The Spanish Flu ❧

Mario’s memoirs begin with events in 1918, toward the end of the First World War, when the *Influenza Spagnola*, the Spanish flu, arrived in Italy. He wrote:



## EARLY YEARS

*During the First World War, around 1918, there was a terrible epidemic called the Spanish flu. Hundreds of thousands died. In my family, which consisted of my father, my mother, my sister, and a brother—at that time in the army, at the front—everyone was bedridden with this influenza. I was eleven years old and seemed to be immune to the disease; therefore, I was the only one in the family still able to look after all the invalids. This meant not only taking care of them and giving them medicine, but also grocery shopping, preparing meals, and feeding everyone. During the war there was rationing, so coupons were needed to buy anything and everything, and you had to stand in line for hours, even for coal. From seven in the morning, when I rose, until eleven or eleven-thirty, there were endless queues of people waiting to buy food. Often, after having stood in line for hours, there was nothing left, and you had to return home empty-handed. My mother's sister, together with her husband, both died of the disease within a few days. They lived near us, and I tried to help them as well, but there was nothing that could be done.*

*One morning, while I was waiting on line for something or other, a truck loaded with sacks went by. One of the sacks fell off. Many of us went to see what was inside, hoping that it perhaps contained food, but horrified, we all drew back, repelled by a fetid odor. Inside, there was the body of a dead soldier. The supplies of coffins having been exhausted, bodies were put into sacks to bring them to the cemetery.*

*No sooner had my mother and father passed the critical phase of the disease when news arrived that my brother was dying in the military hospital in Turin; though still feverish, they got out of their sickbeds and immediately left for the north, where they found Luigi in desperate condition. He had already been moved into the ward of hopeless cases. They began to apply mustard plasters, which they had brought with them, to his back and chest. He had developed not only pneumonia but pleurisy as well. With their care and medications, they managed to save his life.*

The influenza virus responsible for the pandemic appears to have originated in military training camps in the United States during the spring of 1918 and spread quickly around the globe. It was nicknamed the Spanish flu because Spanish newspapers were the first to report the outbreak in Europe. In Italy, it made its appearance in May and, at first, seemed to be no worse than the usual seasonal cold. One of its many appellations was “summer fever” or “three-day fever,” because the symptoms lasted for three or

## CHAPTER I

four days. In July, sufferers began to exhibit more acute symptoms, with severe congestion accompanied by bacterial infections, and the mortality rate began to rise. The disease disappeared in late summer only to return with devastating ferocity in October. This pattern occurred in both Europe and America. Most of the victims were in the prime of life, between fifteen and forty years old. Medical experts disagreed about the cause. At first, some thought it was the return of the Black Death, because many of the afflicted turned purple from hemorrhagic fever before dying. Worried about civilian morale, which, as the war entered its fourth year, was already at a low, the Italian government imposed censorship on the press as well as on all correspondence leaving the country. Nonetheless, rumors spread, exaggerated by the absence of facts. Most of the nation's resources were concentrated on the front lines



3. Mario, approximately age ten.

at the Piave river, very close to Venice, where the military was locked in a bitterly contested stalemate with the Austro-Hungarians. The Italians finally won a decisive victory at the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, which took place at the end of October 1918 and coincided with the worst of the outbreak.

In the cities, there were so many dead that they could no longer be buried properly. Funerals were forbidden, along with the tolling of bells, and bodies were brought to a collection depot, many transported in bags due to a shortage of coffins. Army trucks and soldiers brought them to cemeteries, where the macabre sacks piled up. Relatives were denied access. The disease was highly contagious, and it was rapidly transmitted through the crowds that filled the churches to pray and stood in line for rationed food and fuel. The widespread habit of spitting in the street also spread the deadly virus. In the countryside, entire villages were abandoned; orphaned and hungry children wandered the streets.<sup>1</sup> Mario recalled that the situation was so dire that it seemed like the Apocalypse.

It is estimated that 400,000 Italians died of the flu between 1918 and 1920.<sup>2</sup> Exhausted and malnourished soldiers on the front were particularly vulnerable to the disease, which somehow afflicted three times as many German and Austro-Hungarian troops as their adversaries and was thus a factor in the outcome of the war. Worldwide, the virus killed fifty million people before disappearing in 1920.

### ☞ The Rome of Mario's Childhood ☞

After the flu had disappeared—and following his heroic efforts to care for his family—Mario was able once more to enjoy life as a child. Of this period, he wrote:

*Finally, the war ended and I could return to school, which had been closed during the epidemic. I was thus reunited with a little friend of my age, for whom I felt more than friendship. Her name was Wanda; her grandfather was a designer, painter, and*

*decorator called Cantalamessa. Among other things, he designed a five-hundred-lire note for the State Treasury, which had great success and was one of the most beautiful bank notes that has ever been printed. He also painted the entrance hall of the Palazzo Simonetti on Via Vittoria Colonna. Every time I passed this building, I stopped to admire his work. It was a trompe l'oeil done in grisaille that was so amazingly executed that it created an illusion of three-dimensional space that would have fooled anybody. To my surprise and dismay [when I visited the location many years later] the hall had been painted white. In Rome, I have seen many wonderful things of this sort obliterated.*

Another of Mario's favorite places was the Cinema Corso in Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina, built in 1918. When I first went to Rome with Mario, he was thrilled to take me there. By then the walls were covered with fake red damask wallpaper, and I could see that Mario was disappointed and upset. He explained to me that the interior, when it was first built, was the most innovative architectural project in the city. The architect, Marcello Piacentini (1881–1960), later became the master builder for the Fascist regime. The official style he developed, which can still be seen all over Rome, is ponderous and massive. However, as a young man, Piacentini was adventurous and readily absorbed the influence of the new styles, represented by the Bauhaus and such innovative architects as Le Corbusier and Josef Hoffmann and, with the Cinema Corso, he designed something so avant-garde that it caused public outcry. He was ordered by the court to modify the façade of the cinema at his own expense. However, it was the interior that presented a radical departure from traditional theaters; built entirely of reinforced concrete, the second and third balconies floated in space without support columns. The decorative scheme was influenced by the Vienna Secession and there were bas-reliefs and mosaics by two of the most important art-deco sculptors of the era, the animaliers Alfredo Biagini and Arturo Dazzi.

Mario was terribly downcast by the destruction of the Cinema Corso and incredulous that the authorities had allowed such a thing to happen. He was so disgusted that we didn't stay to see the

movie but went to dinner instead to console ourselves with good food and wine. Today, only the façade remains, the interior having been converted into a Louis Vuitton store.

### ☞ The Rise of Fascism ☞

In Italy, the period following the First World War was a time of great social unrest and economic distress. Italy had fought hard against the Austrians and was ultimately successful. Of the 5.5 million men deployed, there were more than 2 million injuries, and 655,000 lives were lost. At the peace conference in Versailles, where the victors divided the spoils, Italy was disappointed to receive only the formerly Austrian area of the Tyrol. Though ambitions to acquire colonies in East Africa may have been unrealistic, the failure to gain the Italian-speaking peninsula of Istria was bitterly received, not least because the citizens of Istria had voted in favor of Italian rule, particularly those of Fiume in Croatia, an important deep-water port on the Adriatic. The settlement was called the *vittoria mutilata* (the mutilated victory) by some of the veterans of the Alpine campaign. Gabriele D'Annunzio, who in addition to being a famous journalist, novelist, playwright, and poet was also a highly-decorated soldier and had served as an airman in the war, became a hero for the disenchanted veterans known as the *Arditi*, the shock troops who had fought most aggressively in the Alps. In 1915, D'Annunzio had been a passionate *interventista*, advocating for Italy's entrance into the war, and now he felt that his country, after all its sacrifices, had been betrayed. He and his followers, many wearing black shirts or sweaters that had been part of their military uniforms, marched on Fiume in September 1919, occupying the city until Italian government troops ousted them a year later in December 1920.

This episode made an impression on the ex-Socialist war hero, journalist, orator, and publisher of the Milan-based right-wing newspaper *Popolo d'Italia*, Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). Meanwhile,

on the left, the Socialists and Marxists, who had opposed Italy's participation in the war, mounted daily demonstrations, occupations, and strikes. Between June 1919 and October 1922, the office of the prime minister changed four times. In October 1919, the government passed a bill authorizing the formation of an extra-military force of forty thousand troops, the *Guardia Regia*, to quell the demonstrations in the streets. Mario vividly recalled the traumatic outcome of one of these demonstrations:

*One day, I found myself in the middle of a leftist demonstration with a school friend, Nino Longobardi. We were on a street that intersected with a square in which a large political assembly was being held. As we neared the square, my friend leaned around the corner of a building to see what was happening. At that instant, a group of Guardia Regia fired a volley at the crowd, and he was hit in the head by a bullet that killed him on the spot. I leaned over his lifeless body and realized there was nothing that could be done. Unfortunately, there were others killed and wounded in that demonstration, and they were not the last. Things continued in this way for a long time, the situation growing worse and worse. One government succeeded another without effecting any improvement in the situation, until finally, with the permission of the monarchy, Mussolini and his Fascist Party took over and ultimately destroyed the nation.*

During the civil conflict, three thousand civilians died. The economy was in a disastrous state, with high inflation, unemployment, and rampant hunger. From the wings, Mussolini maneuvered to take advantage of the situation. Failing to gain more than a handful of votes in the election of 1919, he organized the disparate squads of veterans fighting the Socialists into a group he called *Fasci di Combattimento* [Fighting Units]. They wore the black shirts of D'Annunzio's *Arditi* as a uniform. The leaders in each province, the *ras*,<sup>3</sup> gradually came under his control as well. There were fierce clashes between the Fascists and Socialists.

During one summer night in 1922, the Blackshirts burned Socialist and Communist homes and headquarters in the provinces of Ravenna, Forlì, and Ferrara, and not long afterward, northern

## EARLY YEARS

Italy was entirely in their hands. Mussolini's strategy was to further destabilize the government through this violence. Eventually, he united the various Fascist squadrons under the umbrella of a new national party, the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF). Deftly sidestepping D'Annunzio, Mussolini announced that his followers would march on Rome. The fragile liberal government crumbled, and on October 28, 1922, King Vittorio Emanuele III succumbed to the widespread fear of a Bolshevik-style revolution and asked Mussolini to form a new government.



4. Benito Mussolini, ca. 1925.

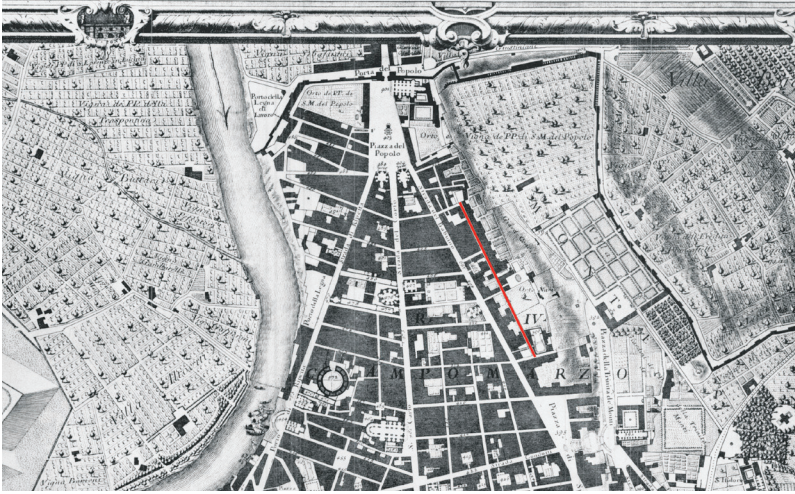
☞ Via Margutta ☞

This was part of the backdrop to Mario's young life. In 1922, he was fifteen years old and apprenticed to his father. He had finished middle school at fourteen and was determined to become a painter, despite pressure from his father to continue his studies and become a doctor of medicine like his uncle, Guglielmo. Mario begged to be allowed to work in his father's shop on Via Margutta, the street of artists. His father tried to dissuade his son from the profession by giving him the most tedious and unenjoyable tasks, one of which was to prepare the gilder's whiting, *gesso di Bologna*, which came in little cakes. First, it had to be shaved into flakes, then ground with water on a slab of marble using a glass muller. His father's assistants told Mario that he would know when the gesso was ground finely enough when it started to smell of garlic. So, he ground diligently, eventually noticing that all the men were laughing, and he finally got the joke. He was also the delivery boy and rode his bicycle all over Rome, carrying his father's frames. Antonio Modestini loved good food and wine, and Mario inherited these tastes. Every day, just before lunchtime, Mario would bicycle home, collect the proper three-course meal his mother had prepared, and bring it to his father at his shop. Today, it would take a long time to cover that same distance, but in those days, the streets were empty and the traffic consisted mainly of bicycles and horse-drawn vehicles, including trams, with very few automobiles.

Via Margutta was an enchanting place and was originally settled by painters from northern Europe in the seventeenth century. Its real heyday, however, was during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when painters from all over Europe flocked to Rome. This retardataire world continued into the early twentieth century when Mario was a boy, and was the scene of some of his fondest memories.

Although I had spent a good deal of time in Rome, I was not familiar with the tucked-away Via Margutta until I met Mario. As





5. Detail of a map of Rome in 1748, by Giuseppe Nolli.  
Via Margutta is indicated in red.

there were no important churches or works of art to visit, I never had reason to pass that way. For Mario, however, the street was a magnet, and as soon as we arrived in the city, he led us there. As we happily explored the neighborhood hand in hand, Mario told me of the area's history and his life there in the 1920s and 1930s. The gate of 51A, the Studi Rasinelli, one of the many places on the Via Margutta where Mario had lived, was usually open, and he would stop by and chat with its residents, some of whom Mario had known since his youth, such as the sculptor Pericle Fazzini (1913–1987), whose enormous studio was on the right as one entered. Fazzini adopted a modernist style in his youth and is best known for his extensive work in the Vatican.<sup>4</sup> He died not long after I first met him, but his wife, Anita, kept the studio for some time.

Mario was well-known and liked in Via Margutta and the surrounding streets, and he was always greeted enthusiastically. The fact that he had gone to America and become a great success was a source of pride among his former neighbors. He showed me where his father's *bottega* had been, at number 50, and the sites of

## CHAPTER I

the *Accademia Inglese* and the *Scuola Libera del Nudo*, where he was finally able to work from live models rather than plaster casts. I tried to imagine the street as it was then, and Mario as an aspiring painter, working in his garret, fooling around with his friends, playing jokes on each other, dressing up for *Carnevale*, and competing in spaghetti-eating contests.

Mario said that when he was working for his father, there were art studios, art dealers, and artisans of every sort on the Via Margutta: bronze casters, model makers, frame makers, carpenters, potters, printers, and specialists in every branch of the decorative arts. It was an artists' colony—some might have called it an independent nation—right in the center of Rome between the Piazza del Popolo and the Spanish Steps. Here, everyone knew everyone else and what they were up to, both professionally and personally. People gathered in small groups outside the studio



6. Via Margutta, looking towards Piazza del Popolo.

entrances, busily gossiping about their colleagues and spreading the latest news. Mario described how, in between jobs, models would stroll about in their traditional Ciociarian folk costumes—Ciociaria being the barren, mountainous district south of Rome, to which Sophia Loren fled in the film *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*). Their attire, familiar from countless nineteenth-century paintings, consisted of a low-cut bodice under which they wore a high-necked blouse made of thin, white linen with large, puffy sleeves. Across these were bands of drawn-work. They also wore a sort of apron made from colorful pieces of heavy fabric worked in imitation of brocade. A lace scarf was tied around the neck, and on their heads, they wore a cloth of white material which, folded in various ways, helped to balance the articles they carried there. Both men and women wore primitive shoes made of thick leather and fixed with laces, *ciociari*, that criss-crossed the leg.

Mario recalled that the Ciociarians were exceptionally handsome and gracious people. By the end of the nineteenth century, they were popular subjects, indispensable for certain kinds of paintings, and a few became celebrities and muses for the artists for whom they posed. In the early morning, they would gather in Piazza di Spagna, at the foot of the steps, and wait to be hired by painters from the nearby Via Margutta. To pass the time, they would play pipes and horns and dance the *saltarello*.<sup>5</sup> Mario was utterly fascinated by them and could still recall their names and histories later in life.

The world of professional models underlines the degree to which painting in early twentieth-century Rome was notably static, a trend that persisted into the 1920s and '30s, in comparison with the artistic revolution taking place elsewhere. Sentimental subjects, such as cardinals and musketeers, painted in oil or watercolor, were popular with tourists, as were conventional landscapes, animal paintings, and of course, portraiture. Many of the artists of the day were excellent painters, but their work was out of fashion even at the time they were making it, and today most of their names have been forgotten except by a few experts. Among the most highly



7. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *Italian Girl*, 1872, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 65.2 × 55.1 cm.

regarded were Gerolamo Induno (1827-1890), Mariano Fortuny (1871-1949), Giorgio Szoldaticz (1873-1955), Enrico Coleman (1846-1911), and Giulio Aristide Sartorio (1860-1932).

The conventional buildings on the Via del Babuino side of the Via Margutta contained apartments with rooms improvised for painters to work. On the other (Pincio) side, there were large



## EARLY YEARS

complexes of purpose-built art studios. The sculpture studios were on the street level, with forty-foot ceilings and enormous windows set high in the walls, while those for painters were, for the most part, top-lit, and some even had mezzanines with miniscule living quarters. Some of them were very grand and filled with exotic objects to be used as props in the paintings: oriental carpets, easels, couches, and heavy antique furniture. Framed paintings hung floor to ceiling on walls. Other spaces, such as some of those in which Mario lived, were just cubbyholes and garrets. The Studi Rasinelli, Via Margutta 51A, is the largest of these establishments, with studios that go all the way to the top of the Pincian Hill along a series of winding paths and stairs. Highly evocative, it was here that Gregory Peck lived in the film *Roman Holiday*.



8. Giuseppe Signorini (1857–1932), a successful Orientalist painter, in his Paris studio (Frick Photoarchive); his studio on Via Margutta would have been very similar.

## CHAPTER I

Via Margutta is still suffused with magic, and although it is no longer exclusively the domain of painters and sculptors, many artists and art galleries remain. After the war, the neighborhood became popular in the film world. Federico Fellini and Marcello Mastroianni lived there. Today, it remains a tight-knit community with an active street life—it is closed to traffic—and everyone still seems to know each other.

Mario's enchantment with the life of Via Margutta influenced him for the rest of his life. Its painters were his heroes, romantic figures whom he strived to emulate. Because of them, he clung to his passion for art despite his father's opposition and, through a series of unforeseen events, launched his career as a restorer of paintings.

## CHAPTER 2

# From Art Student to Art Restorer

### ☞ Art School ☞

WHILE MARIO WAS falling in love with the picturesque world of the Via Margutta, he was also acquiring the fundamentals of traditional painting at the Scuola Preparatoria alle Arti Ornamentali (Preparatory School for the Decorative Arts), a well-known local art school. Mario enrolled in the three-year course in 1921 and excelled in the traditional draftsmanship taught there, a talent that would serve him well in his future career as a restorer.

The art school was situated near Via Margutta on Via San Giacomo. It had originally been known as Via degli Incurabili, named for the ancient hospital for incurable diseases that had once stood there. Naturally, the boys preferred the original street name that gave the school its nickname and took to calling themselves ‘the incurables.’ Classes were held in the evenings from seven until ten. Two courses of study were offered: industrial design and

pictorial decoration. Mario chose the latter. He wrote of his time there:

*The director was a restorer, Venturini Papari (terrible restorer!), who also taught various painting techniques such as encaustic, claiming to know the secret ingredients of this famous medium used by the ancient Romans. For the first two years, the teacher was Professor Mezzana who was a painter of modest abilities. Among my schoolmates were a few boys my age who are today considered important artists such as Scipione, Zivieri and Mafai, the founder of the so-called Scuola Romana. Among the students there was one who became a lifelong friend, Amleto De Santis. We worked together for many years and his death in 1980 was a terrible loss. He was gifted and showed great talent as a painter. In fact, I considered him superior to Mafai, who later became famous. Another friend was Angelo Della Torre, about two years older than we, who was also gifted but, in time, lost his way and today is unknown.*

*[There was another boy in my class] whom we called the Messiah. The reason for this nickname was due to the fact that, as he came from a rich Roman family, he always had money in his pockets. I think his father was a developer. When school let out in the evening we used to go to a bar on Via del Traforo that, after ten in the evening, sold the day's pastries for half price (two soldi) and he would buy three or four for each of us and naturally the group grew because other students heard about this largesse.*

*The Messiah's father had a black Chrysler New Yorker. Sometimes our rich friend would pick us up from school and five or six of us would drive around Rome in this fantastic automobile. At that time, there were many ladies of the night in the center of Rome near Piazza di Spagna, especially along Via Babuino and Via Condotti. As we passed them we would slow down and when they saw this big shiny car they all came around to inspect the occupants. When they saw that we were just a bunch of kids, they would move off again, disappointed. Often, especially when the moon was full, we gathered in the squares of ancient Rome and marveled at the beauties of the city.*

*During the four years that I attended school, I always won first prize in the final examinations. This consisted of one hundred lire. I guess this was because my way of drawing and painting was realistic and academic and I could draw quickly and correctly. In fact, when an exercise had been set, I always completed it before anyone else, no matter what the medium. Zivieri would always ask me, sotto voce, if I would come and finish his study before the professor came back.*



The Scuola Romana was a modern school of figurative painting that enjoyed considerable success in Italy although the movement did not have an international impact. Mario was always a bit skeptical about Mafai and Scipione, and I had the distinct impression that he felt they had turned to modern art simply because they were not able to master traditional academic technique. He didn't think much of popular painters such as Mario Sironi (1885–1961) or Filippo De Pisis (1896–1956) and regarded the work of the highly-fêted Renato Guttuso (1912–1987) with complete disgust. Guttuso was a Fascist out of convenience, who became a Communist after 1943, and Mario considered him to be an utter sham, politically and artistically.

In 1923, during his third and final year at the 'Incurabili', Mario studied under Antonino Calcagnadoro (1876–1935). Calcagnadoro worked on public projects, such as the lunettes in the monument to Vittorio Emanuele II, and Mario adored him. The students worked in both charcoal and glue tempera painting on paper, both of which required good draftsmanship and an understanding of the chiaroscuro techniques employed in creating illusionistic trompe l'oeil decorative paintings. Calcagnadoro was exacting and insisted that his pupils work within the method he was teaching. He wanted nothing to do with modernism. Mario loved to tell the story of the time Calcagnadoro threw Mario Mafai out of the class in a rage. To my surprise, I came across Mafai's version of the incident in the catalogue of an exhibition in Rieti in honor of Calcagnadoro, a native son. Mafai wrote:

I have no recollection of how I ended up in that industrial school of the 'Incurables' ... The teacher was an old-school decorative painter with a changeable temperament, at times good-natured and at other times in a black mood ... He taught his system conscientiously and with dedication ... On large sheets of thick gray paper that the custodian had fixed onto stretchers, we copied casts of figures, baroque fruit, and classical fragments, against backgrounds of beautifully colored

## CHAPTER 2

drapes to which were added objects such as fruit, musical instruments or stuffed birds. The exercise required filling up the entire sheet with exactitude, rendering all the relationships correctly, using gesso and charcoal to make a perfect copy so that there were no distortions or interpretations of any sort. When this was finished, the drawing was fixed to the wall and filled in with color. One used so-called pastels: taking brown, and adding more or less white lead to obtain a certain number of gradations. We ground them in water on a slate palette with a little jar of glue on the side. . . . One evening, in front of a lovely plaster cast, dusted with the reflections of warm, provocative tones from the colorful drapery, I broke the rules. The jars full of beautiful cadmiums, red lead, and ultramarine tempted me. Instead of grinding up the usual tones of brown I made myself a nice palette of forbidden color. . . . That was my last evening because I never had the courage to present myself again to Calcagnadoro.<sup>1</sup>



9. Mario at around age 20.

These relatively carefree days ended abruptly in September 1924, with both the building turmoil in Italy's political and economic fortunes and his father Antonio's sudden and shattering death. Antonio died after a brief illness not long after Mario had completed his course. Only seventeen, he had to take over the *bottega*, where he was responsible for several employees, as well as assume the support of his mother and sister. His brother, Luigi, was married and had his own responsibilities.

For a time, Mario tried to keep the business going and took on some painting projects, assisted by his father's workmen. For example, he painted the still-extant decorations in the dining room of the Albergo Roma (now the Grand Hotel Plaza) on the Corso. He described how boring and uncomfortable it was to stand for hours on the scaffold, paint dripping down his arm. As a source of amusement on this project, the men would paint the shoes of the person standing above them. Eventually, however, Mario lost the business, and it was a period he never discussed. He would later remind his children that he'd had to become a man by the time he was seventeen. During that difficult period, he spent a lost year at the billiard parlor in Via del Babuino, where he specialized in *Parigina*, a version of the game that is played with three balls on a table without pockets, using only the right hand. Evidently, he was a bit of a hustler and earned money from people placing bets on him. He also boxed for a time, until he got his nose broken. His friends called him Lionello d'Este, after the famous portrait by Pisanello, which Mario might well have resembled at that age.

### ✿ Political Changes and Becoming a Restorer ✿

The year 1924 was significant for Mario not only because of his father's death, but also because of the change in the political climate. In June of 1924, Giacomo Matteotti, a deputy in the parliament and a leading Socialist intellectual, was assassinated by Fascist thugs. His body was found two months later, not far

from Rome. During the ensuing uproar, the Fascists (PNF) faced expulsion from the coalition government. Mussolini succeeded not only in salvaging his party but also used the opportunity to crack down on the free press, and thus the real dictatorship began. It was then that he became known as *Il Duce*.

Mario had Socialist leanings, and besides, he was not disposed to joining organizations, so he never enrolled in the PNF. After 1925, it became nearly impossible to work without a party card. Most Italians chose to sign an oath of allegiance to *Il Duce* rather than risk their jobs, but since Mario didn't work for an official employer,



10. Mario and friends in Rome, ca. 1930, perhaps making preparations for *Carnevale*. Back row, from left: Alberto Rosati, painter; Ezio Chirici, painter; Mario Modestini. Front row, from left: Alberto Montori, architect; Vincenzo Fiordigiglio, sculptor; Arnaldo Foresti, painter.

his circumstances weren't really affected by the new regulations. However, he found himself barred from most opportunities for professional advancement. Fortunately, the anarchic traditions of the colony of artists on the Via Margutta enabled him to earn a living working for private clients without having to deal with the regime.

Mario had easily passed the entrance exams for the Scuola Libera del Nudo and the British Academy of Arts, known as the Accademia Inglese to Italians, when both were still located on Via Margutta. These memberships gave him a foothold into the world of professional artists and must have distracted him from his many problems during this period. He found friends among a group of somewhat older artists he met in the drawing schools and the studios of the Via Margutta.

Alberto Rosati (1893–1971) was one of the painting teachers at the Accademia Inglese. He and Mario became friends. Mario's written memories of him evoke the hardship of those times:

*[Rosati] was about ten years older than I was, but at eighteen, I seemed at least five years older than my chronological age, perhaps because of the responsibilities I had assumed. He was a true Bohemian. He lived in a studio at 51 Via Margutta and was a passionate devotee of classical music. He knew all the musicians and could recognize the composer of any piece of music from the first note. He was a good painter, very poetic, in the way Morandi's work is poetic. He rarely was able to sell a painting. He was terribly poor; in the winter, his studio was freezing and his meals were frugal, generally consisting of a tomato and a piece of bread. This was his lunch. A few times I invited him to the local restaurant, Trattoria del Lupone, on the Vicolo del Babuino, and how we celebrated! Eventually he met a Dutch girl whom he married, and they moved to Florence.*

Mario always had many girlfriends and was attracted to the models he met in the drawing classes. In his book about the Via Margutta, Augusto Jandolo, a famous denizen of the street during the time Mario lived there, commemorates some of the most famous models of the era.<sup>2</sup> Mario treasured this record of

the painters, models, and studios he knew, and he penciled in many annotations in his copy. Under the photograph of one of the models, he noted in red pencil, “Vanda! 1927–28. Fiordigiglio played an incredible trick on us!” I was very curious about this trick, but he absolutely did not want to tell me the story. Mario’s friends, it seems, were always teasing him about women. Almost all Italian artists have nicknames, for example Sandro Filipepi, known in art as Botticelli (little barrels); Mario was known as *Il Gattaccio*, the alley cat. He didn’t wish to elaborate on the reasons for that but, shrugging, he did admit that once two girls got into a fight over him in front of his father’s shop.

Not long after his father’s death, Mario had his first experience with the restoration of antique paintings. His client was Kurt Cassirer (1883-1975), a member of the distinguished German Jewish family that included the Berlin art dealer, Paul Cassirer, who was among the early supporters of both Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh. Kurt Cassirer was a scholar of French and Italian baroque architecture<sup>3</sup> and travelled extensively in Italy. One day, he brought Mario a small gold-ground painting, Tuscan school, dated in the early 1400s. The gold background was ruined, and Cassirer wanted Mario, with his training in gilding, to recreate it and put the painting in order. Mario was intrigued by this idea. There were no schools of restoration at that time, and the skills required were generally learned through an apprenticeship with an experienced restorer. Mario’s passion for antique paintings had inspired him to study all of the great works in Rome and other Italian art centers. In our discussions, he was critical of many of the successful restorers of those days, and he told me he would not have wanted to work for them. “Dogs!” he would exclaim, and point out examples of paintings in the Vatican or some other museum in Rome that they had ruined.

So, bringing all his sensitivity and intelligence to the task, he decided to teach himself how to restore old master paintings. He borrowed a book from his friend, Alberto Rosati, the manual by Count Giovanni Secco Suardo (1798–1873), *Il restauratore dei dipinti*,<sup>4</sup>

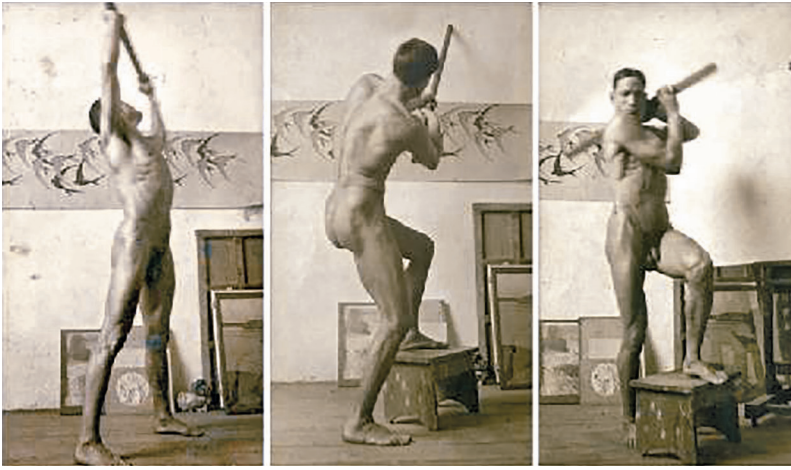
which contained detailed descriptions, as well as illustrations of materials and procedures. This book, together with the many things he had learned from his father about gilding and polychrome sculpture, as well as his own study and practice in drawing and painting, formed the basis of his knowledge. Cassirer was pleased with the result of the restoration of his little painting, and Mario embarked on this new career path.

### ✿ The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna ✿

Mario also continued his father's work as a frame restorer for the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Valle Giulia, which at that time showcased nineteenth-century Italian works by many of the painters he most admired. This museum was one of the first places Mario wanted to take me in Rome and, as I had heard so much about it, we were both eagerly looking forward to our visit. However, when we arrived, we were shocked to see only a handful of nineteenth-century paintings installed in a poorly lit space, not even a proper gallery. Elsewhere, post-war works dominated. Mario was furious. It was the first time I would hear him cynically refer to the triumvirate he called, “burro, manzo, e pomodoro”—literally “butter, beef, and tomatoes”—a reference to three famous Italian modern artists: Alberto Burri (1915–1995), Piero Manzoni (1933–1963), and Arnaldo Pomodoro (b. 1926).

The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna was founded in 1883 and was initially housed in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni. In 1911, a dedicated building was constructed on the Valle Giulia. The National Gallery had a history of distinguished directors; the first was the history painter Francesco Jacovacci (1838–1908), an esteemed figure of the period. He was succeeded by Ugo Fleres (1858–1939) who came from an aristocratic Sicilian family and had innate fine taste and sophistication. His salon in Rome included fellow Sicilian realists Luigi Pirandello and Giovanni Verga, all opponents of the florid decadence of Gabriele D'Annunzio.





11. A model striking the heroic poses popular with the Fascist regime in a Roman studio in the late 1920s or early 1930s. I came across this image entirely by chance on the website of Anticoli Corrado, a town from which many models hailed. Mario often talked about a frieze of swallows he painted for the officer's club of the *Aeronautica* (Air Force) during the period when he shared a studio with the sculptor, Vincenzo Fiordigiglio. Improbable as it seems, this could be their studio.

His interests led him to become a prolific critic of both literature and art, the latter associated particularly with the studios in and around Via Margutta.

His hanging of the galleries, arranged chronologically and by school, was, in Mario's opinion, exemplary and in impeccable taste. During the 1920s the gallery did not have a restorer and, recognizing Mario's skills and potential, Fleres proposed that he should work on the collection. Thus, a workspace was created on the ground floor, where there was good natural light, and Mario, cautious because of his limited experience, began to work on some paintings.

After Fleres retired, Roberto Papini (1883–1957), professor of the history of architecture at the University of Florence, was appointed to the role in 1933. Papini wanted to get to know the staff, and he became interested in Mario's work:



*Although I was much younger than he was, a friendship soon grew between us. He often visited the gallery with groups of art history students, who were very interested in restoration. At that time, unlike today, there were no specialized courses in restoration. Papini was married to a Hungarian sculptress, Livia De Kuzmik, much younger than he, a beautiful woman who was also charming. She managed to communicate well in her not very good Italian and we also became friends. It was she who introduced me to one of her model makers, Vincenzo Fiordigiglio, himself a sculptor, and we too became friends. In fact, his studio was at number 51 Via Margutta so we saw each other often. He was not a gifted sculptor but he was an excellent craftsman, which made up for his artistic deficiencies. I began to spend much of my time with him and he encouraged me to continue to paint, which is what I had always really wanted to do. We worked together, he on his sculptures while I painted nudes or still lifes. As a result, I neglected my father's business and one day I decided to close the shop and spend all my time painting in Vincenzo's studio.*

Many people were kind to Mario at this time, and I believe this was not only because of his tough circumstances. He attracted people throughout his life with his intelligence, innate courtesy, discretion, and that special Italian distinction of being 'simpatico'.

### ☞ Fascism and the Arts ☞

While Mario and his friends remained marginally employed throughout the thirties, Rome was buzzing with artistic activity. As a young man, Mussolini had been instructed in the arts by his mistress and patron, Margherita Sarfatti, an independently wealthy Jewish Socialist and art critic who wrote widely about contemporary art and had an active salon in Milan that Mussolini frequented. The two fell passionately in love and had a close relationship for many years. Mussolini was convinced that the new, contemporary styles were well-suited to expressing the dynamism of the Fascist Party. In fact, Italian Futurism, which exalted speed, the machine age, masculinity, war, and violence, was also a proto-Fascist political movement.

Truth be told, art seems to have bored Mussolini, but he found it useful in the creation of Fascist propaganda and ritual. There is no question that on the face of it the regime was very good for the arts—at least, in so far as it created employment opportunities, though most of the content was pure propaganda. Making art to celebrate the heroic new spirit of Fascist Italy became a small industry, employing hundreds, if not thousands, of painters, sculptors, architects, and craftsmen of all sorts. Artists and architects produced settings for Fascist pomp and festivals, and constructed and decorated thousands of new buildings, sports complexes, monuments, even entire towns that were being erected all over Italy, as well as in the African colonies. There was so much work that some crumbs fell even to artists who were not members of the party. Rome was at the center of this frenzy, and it was filled with contemporary art galleries to satisfy the desires of the innumerable collectors flocking to the capital.

The new architecture was eclectic, and many cutting-edge examples of modernism were produced. These have only recently



12. Petrol station in Asmara, Eritrea, by Giuseppe Pettazzi.

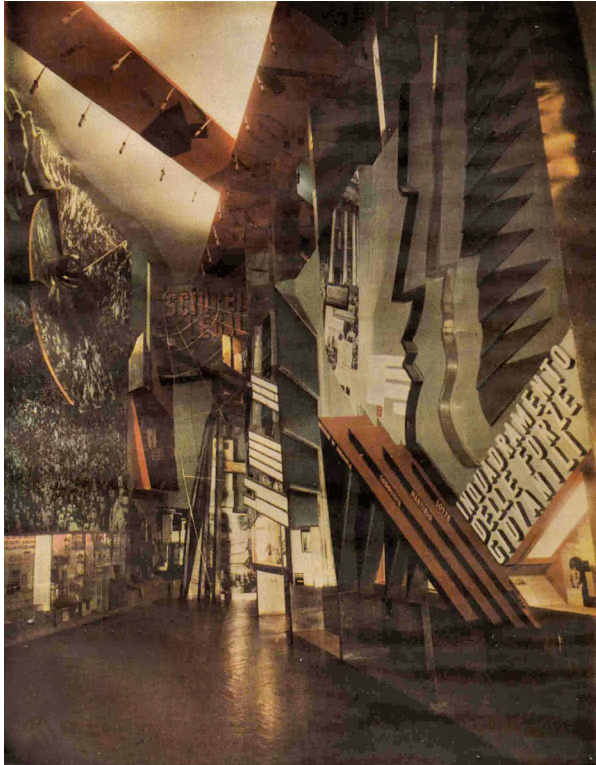
begun to be differentiated from the overwhelming number of tedious buildings typically associated with Imperial Fascism and produced under the direction of the formerly avant-garde architect of the Cinema Corso, Marcello Piacentini. The city of Asmara in Eritrea, an Italian colony until 1947, became a laboratory for cutting-edge design and has recently been listed as a UNESCO world heritage site.

The exhibition held in 1932 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome (Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista), was an extraordinary manifestation of modern art in the service of the regime. Giuseppe Terragni and Adalberto Libera, both protagonists in the innovative Rational Architecture Movement, transformed the old-fashioned Palazzo delle Esposizioni into an immense red cube with giant, stylized fasces and axes protruding from the facade. Inside, huge panels quoted the many ridiculous slogans of the Duce that had become part of daily life—such as “*Meglio vivere un giorno da leone, che cento anni da pecora*” (“Better to live one day as a lion than one hundred years as a sheep”) and the ubiquitous “*Mussolini ha sempre ragione*” or “Mussolini is always right.” It amused Mario to make fun of these mottoes, and he would sometimes tease me when I made a suggestion saying, “*Baby ha sempre ragione.*” Apart from the propaganda purpose of the enterprise, the installations must have been visually compelling, at least to the degree that they can be judged by the poor illustrations available. Most rooms contained massive cubist panoramas, innovative in their design, each with a different, grandiose theme. One by Adalberto Libera called the *Sacrarium*, a shrine to Fascist “martyrs”—that is, the thugs who were killed during the civil disturbances of the period post World War I—brings to mind a neo-conceptual style, similar to the work of Jenny Holzer, *avant la lettre*. Artists rarely have the luxury of choosing their patrons.

The exhibition remained open for two years and, boosted by government subsidies, was widely attended. Mussolini was enthusiastic about it, which is somewhat surprising given that other totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century were uncomfortable

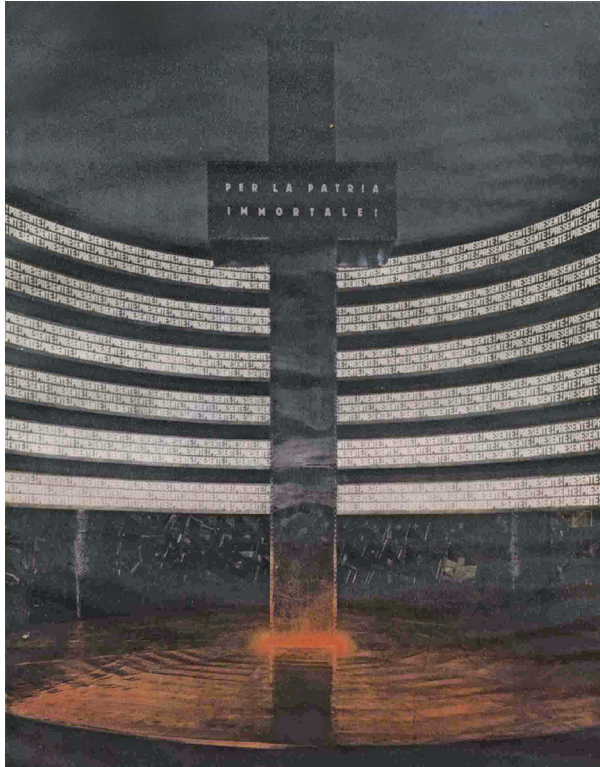
with radical contemporary art. Lenin crushed the Russian avant-garde shortly after he came into power, and Hitler's hatred of "degenerate" art is well-known.

Many of the artists themselves were far from being convinced Fascists. There is an inherent contradiction in this situation, which has made it difficult to judge Italian modernism between the wars. Some of the finest public buildings and spaces associated with the regime have deteriorated due to neglect. Italians have largely ignored much of the architectural legacy of Fascism, not wanting any reminders of the period they refer to simply as the *ventennio* or two decades.



13. *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, 1932, Giuseppe Terragni, Sala "O", an interpretation of events between January and October 1922.

In this period, Mario made the acquaintance of Prince Piero Colonna (1891–1939), a scion of one of the greatest Roman families, when the prince commissioned a sculpture from Vincenzo Fiordigiglio. Don Piero, as he was known, was an ardent Fascist and one of the earliest members of the PNF. He wanted his office in the headquarters of the provincial government, Palazzo Valentini, to have an appropriately Fascist theme, and asked Fiordigiglio to create a decorative scheme for the vast room. Fiordigiglio brought Mario into the project to design maps of Rome during its various historical periods for the walls, and the requisite symbols of fasci, laurel wreaths, and profiles of Mussolini for the ceiling coffers.<sup>5</sup>



14. *Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista*, 1932, Adalberto Libera, The “Sacarium”, dedicated to Fascist martyrs.



## CHAPTER 2

Such things were, of course, destroyed after Rome was liberated from the Nazis in 1944, although there were many that could not be removed because they were part of the architecture itself. Fascist images and inscriptions can still be seen all around Rome. If you look carefully, you can even spot *Il Duce's* helmeted head and unmistakable profile.

While Mario's views on contemporary art were mixed, he was unequivocally critical of Mussolini's aspirations to turn Rome into a world capital through the destruction of many of the old neighborhoods. Mussolini effectively changed the face of Rome with his projects. For instance, he created wide avenues that highlighted the ruins of classical antiquity at the cost of the *sventramento* (or "the gutting") of the historic center. He tore down



15. Marcello Piacentini striding through Rome, pulling out its guts, in a print by Mino Maccari, *Mors tua vita mea*. Cover of *Il Selvaggio*, March 15, 1942.

the medieval and Renaissance quarters, and while they may have reeked of squalor by modern standards (as Mussolini never failed to point out), they contained many important buildings, the loss of which was lamented even at the time.

Of all these “urban renewal” projects, what upset Mario most was the loss of the Augusteo Theater, where he had gone to hear music since he was a child. His father took him to the Augusteo to see his first opera, which became a lifelong passion. Mario said, and many critics agree, that the acoustics of the Augusteo were perfect. It had been erected on the site of the great circular tomb Emperor Augustus built in 29 BC for himself and his family. With the exception of Nero, all the Roman emperors until Nerva (96–98 AD) were buried in this mausoleum. The masonry was massive and, even after it was sacked by the Goths in the seventh century, enough of it still stood to serve as a fortress for the Colonna family. After that clan was expelled in 1241 AD, Pope Gregory IX stripped the site of all useable materials. It then went through a series of owners and transformations until the city of Rome built an auditorium of circular shape on top of the original foundations of the mausoleum. Mario recalled that everyone went to the Augusteo. The cheapest tickets cost twenty-five centesimi, which practically anyone could afford, and, in fact, these were the most exciting seats, because here there were boos and whistles, as well as cheers and calls for encores.

Mario never ceased to mourn the Augusteo’s destruction and, whenever he recollected his childhood there, his anger against Mussolini surfaced and raged all over again. The last performance was on May 13, 1936. Mussolini’s intention was to excavate the imperial tombs, liberate a zone for traffic, and, as he put it, create hygiene. This project led to the sacrifice of 120 medieval and Renaissance buildings which were replaced by the particularly ugly buildings of the newly created Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where, ironically, Mario would later have a studio.

As much as Mario disdained certain modern artists, there were others that he worshipped. He loved Giorgio Morandi as well as

Umberto Boccioni, a great painter and sculptor who worked with the Futurists and died tragically young during the First World War. When Mario had a chance to work with one of Boccioni's friends, the painter Emilio Notte, he was ecstatic:

*The treasurer of the Gallery of Modern Art, Commendatore Alberto Rosa, was a bon vivant, he loved food, wine, and, above all, women. His wife, a wonderful woman and an excellent cook, was ugly, fat and had a lot of facial hair. He was a Fascist, the podestà [chief official] of San Polo dei Cavalieri, a small town near Tivoli. He was also the treasurer and curator of Villa d'Este. In the villa, there is a small collection of paintings and I began to restore some of these. While I was working there I got to know the painter Emilio Notte who had been engaged by Commendatore Rosa to paint a frieze in one of the rooms. He was a wonderful painter, a friend and admirer of Boccioni; in fact, Calvesi mistakenly published one of his paintings as a Boccioni. Emilio Notte asked me to help him knowing that I was studying painting. My 'help' consisted of pricking the paper designs for transfer to the wall and grinding colors but I admired Notte enormously and loved being with him, watching him work. We often had lunch together.*

*One day in early October some of the guards invited us for lunch in a country restaurant. They all were natives of Tivoli and had small vineyards. After lunch, they invited us to visit the cantinas and taste their wines. We began to make the rounds. At each cantina, we tasted various wines made from the new harvest. After the third or fourth cantina, we were no longer thinking very clearly. There was one cantina left to visit, where, as I recall, we had to go down a steep stair. The owner insisted that we taste the various wines so we continued drinking. Finally, we decided to re-ascend the stairs. As soon as we got into the open air my legs collapsed under me and I lost consciousness. I had to be carried back to the villa and they put me to bed where I remained for many hours. Emilio Notte, who was about sixteen years older than I, was accustomed to these midday libations, and, after a short nap, he went back to work. I was under the weather for a couple of days.*

*One morning Emilio asked me if I knew a certain model, rather famous, a Sicilian called Iside Corsetti. In fact, the painter, Antonio Guarino, had introduced me to her only a short time before. She was a beautiful girl about twenty-seven years old. I asked her if she might like to come to Tivoli to work for Emilio Notte and she agreed. Notte was completely taken by her Rubensian figure; she was just his type.*



*He made a lot of drawings of her and finally she was immortalized in fresco in the frieze of the room at Villa d'Este. Notte introduced the young Iside to his great friend, Amleto De Santis, my classmate in school and at the painting academy who shared his taste for women on a large scale. He too painted various nudes of her, one of which is in the collection of the Gallery of Modern Art. Some years later poor Iside lost her mind and we never heard anything more about her.*

Mario recalled having a number of different studios in the Via Margutta: number 50; number 51A; number 33, where he is listed as a resident in records from 1940. For a time, he lived in 2A, a broken-down structure at the end of the street near the Piazza del Popolo, where the great painter, Antonio Mancini, one of Mario's idols, spent his last years.<sup>6</sup> Living conditions were primitive, with only an iron stove that served for both heating and cooking, not unlike the opening scene of *La bohème*, coincidentally Mario's favorite opera. He was very poor in the late twenties and early thirties, when the effects of the Wall Street crash began to ripple towards Italy. In Jandolo's book about Via Margutta, Mario made a note that he had slept for many months in a cupboard under the stairs—a *sottoscala*—at number 48. This impoverished arrangement must have represented a low point in his already precarious circumstances after the death of his father.

In 1931, Mario married Fernanda De Mutiis, who worked as a model at the stylish fashion house, Le Sorelle Fontana, in Piazza di Spagna. They managed to make ends meet until Mario fell seriously ill. Mario had an adored cocker spaniel named Lila, who sat at his feet while he worked at his easel. One day, she fell ill, writhing and foaming at the mouth, and died. Mario was heartbroken. The doctors were concerned that she might have been rabid, so they gave Mario a precautionary injection. After some weeks had passed, he felt tired and weak, and a friend pointed out that his eyeballs had turned yellow. Mario had contracted hepatitis C from the rabies shot. Unable to work and having already sold or pawned everything of value, he was in desperate circumstances. An older friend came to visit and evidently wanted to help but was afraid

## CHAPTER 2

of offending Mario with an offer of a handout. While seated at his bedside, this friend noticed a model ship and asked, “Mario, how much do you want for that beautiful ship?” They agreed on a price and he paid immediately, which kept the wolf from the door that month. Mario never forgot his generosity. However, Mario’s fortunes were soon to improve, when he was hired to work on the Rospigliosi Collection.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Rospigliosi Collection

### ❧ The Rospigliosi Sales (1931 and 1932) ❧

**I**N THE LATE 1920s, Mario forged one of his most important associations. It was with the three Sestieri brothers, who were key players in Rome's art market. Two were dealers, and the third, Dr. Ettore Sestieri, was a prominent art historian, at that time involved with the sale of the property of Prince Girolamo Rospigliosi (1907–1959). The prince's apartment occupied several floors of the vast Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi on the Quirinal Hill. Knowing that Mario did decorative painting, Sestieri asked him to continue an existing frieze on either side of a new dividing wall in one of the rooms. Mario painted the frieze in tempera on canvas, which he then applied to the two new walls. It must have looked convincing because Sestieri was satisfied with the result. Over the course of this project, Sestieri came several times to Mario's studio where he noticed his work on a painting by Solimena. So

impressed was he, that he asked Mario if he would undertake the restoration of the Rospigliosi Collection, which included not only the paintings in the palace itself, but many others from the family's country estates of Palestrina and Zagarolo.

The Rospigliosi title was bestowed by Pope Clement IX (1667–69), formerly Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, who, before ascending to the Papacy, was a noted intellectual, poet, librettist and art connoisseur. He had close ties to the Barberini family and was a patron of Bernini and Poussin, from whom he commissioned a number of paintings including *The Arcadian Shepherds*, now in the Louvre, and *A Dance to the Music of Time* in the Wallace Collection for which he also devised the iconography. The family fortune increased when Giambattista Rospigliosi, the nephew of Clement IX, married Camilla Pallavicini, the last member of the wealthy Genoese family. The Rospigliosi princes acquired the titles of the duchy of Zagarolo, the principalities of Castiglione and Gallicano, and the marquisate of Colonna, among others, thus attaining one of the highest ranks among the Roman nobility in prestige, power, and riches.<sup>1</sup>

In 1930 Prince Rospigliosi was a young man—the same age as Mario—and was heavily in debt to a certain Commendatore Ferraguti, to whom he had pledged his property and belongings as a guarantee against his loans. Mario supposed the prince had gambling debts, but his obligations may have been due to the expenses incurred during the many years he and his mother lived in an apartment in Paris's Plaza Athénée (an entire floor, according to Mario), or possibly to losses in the New York stock market crash of 1929. The prince's mother, the former Mary Jennings Reid Parkhurst (1870–1930), was a beautiful American divorcée, who was ostentatiously snubbed by Roman society after her marriage to Prince Giuseppe Rospigliosi (1848–1913), the head of the family. Prince Giuseppe was much older than his bride and, unlike many Italian nobles, also possessed a great fortune. The couple's many failed efforts to convince the Holy See to recognize their marriage were widely reported in the international society

pages. Prince Giuseppe died in 1913, when his son and sole heir was only six years old.

At the time the sale was being organized, in November 1931, Prince Girolamo eloped with a pretty nineteen-year-old American society girl, Marian Snowden, a Standard Oil heiress. Newspapers reported that the girl's mother tried to have the marriage annulled and that the prince's creditors sought \$500,000 dollars from the Snowden family, whom the press estimated to be worth \$4 million.<sup>2</sup>

The Rospigliosi owned the right wing of the vast palace, while the left wing belonged to another branch of the family: the Princes Pallavicini-Rospigliosi. They were not affected by the financial debacle and have retained their part of the collection and the palace, which incorporates the earlier pavilion built by Scipione



16. Prince Girolamo Rospigliosi, ca. 1930, looking debauched at age twenty-three.

Borghese known as the Casino dell’Aurora with its great ceiling fresco by Guido Reni. Mario and I once went to a dinner there, and we explored the adjacent rooms, which were hung with paintings in a similar taste and condition to those of the collection he had worked on sixty years earlier.

The restoration commission was offered to Mario at a critical time when money was tight and work was scarce, and it provided him with the first real financial security he’d ever had. The salary was three hundred lire a week, an enormous sum at the time. When Mario told me this, he would sing bits of a popular song of the era, which began, “*Se potessi avere, mille lire al mese...*” (“If only I had a thousand lire a month...” which was perhaps equivalent to the \$10,000 a year that Americans aspired to in the early 1950s).

Mario organized a studio in the attic, where the Rospigliosi family archive was housed in eighteenth-century cabinets with wire mesh doors painted pale blue with gold leaf. According to Mario, the archive was in disarray, with inventories, correspondence, and receipts scattered everywhere.

Mario wrote of living in the palace so that he could work more efficiently against the tight deadline:

*Ferraguti gave me the use of the apartment of the Prince, who was living in Paris at that time. Thus, for a year I slept in the magnificent bedroom of Don Girolamo which contained an enormous seventeenth-century bed, gilded Roman baroque. The walls were covered with eighteenth-century red silk damask. All the furniture was seventeenth- and eighteenth-century and the walls were hung with paintings of the same period. It was a truly regal room. The only problem was that there were many mice that, during the night, raced back and forth across the wood flooring, often awakening me with their noisy scampering. It was difficult to go back to sleep. Stories of the past came back to me, about the palace and the princes that a former Russian ballerina had told me. This ballerina had once been a great love of the Prince and had stayed with him in Paris in better days. The Prince, Don Girolamo, had allowed the ballerina to stay on as his guest in the palace in Rome living in one of the rooms that formerly were used by the servants. When I knew the ballerina, she was about forty years old, but it was obvious that she had been a great beauty. She walked with*

*ethereal lightness, as if she were dancing. She had an extraordinary imagination. She told me that she was the descendent of Russian princes. I had some doubts about her noble lineage since at that time every white Russian refugee claimed to be of blue blood.*

The collection had, at one time, consisted of over seven hundred paintings, acquired in the course of three centuries by purchase or inheritance, including works from the Colonna family which came to the Rospigliosi through the marriage in 1803 of Margarita Colonna Gioeni to Giulio Cesare Rospigliosi. The collection had subsequently been divided between two branches of the family: the Rospigliosi and the Pallavicini-Rospigliosi.<sup>3</sup> Most of the paintings were typical of Roman princely taste with many examples of works by eighteenth-century painters that were considered of little importance at the time of the sale: paintings by the Van Bloemen brothers, Andrea Locatelli, Adrien Manglard, Paolo Anesi, Pompeo Batoni, and Vanvitelli. Some earlier works considered of greater interest were notified by the Italian state such as the sensitive portrait by Baciccio of Clement IX, Pinturicchio's *Saint Francis*, two allegories by Salvator Rosa, and the late seventeenth-century Rospigliosi spinet, painted by Ludovico Gimignani, one of the finest examples in existence of that instrument.<sup>4</sup>

Two sales were held. There were over 1,300 lots in all. The first took place from April 23–March 5, 1931, at the Tavazzi auction house. The second, more important, sale was held between December 12 and December 24, 1932, in the rooms of the Palazzo Rospigliosi itself. All the possessions of the Rospigliosi princes were on the auction block, from table lamps and pieces of old lace to important paintings and eighteenth-century furniture.<sup>5</sup>

Mario recalled:

*[The sale was] a great success, not from the financial point of view since it took place in the terrible period following the Wall Street crash of '29, but socially the auctions were a smash hit. The entire Roman bourgeoisie was present, all trying to acquire some piece, whether object or paintings, which had belonged to the great princely family. The*

nobility of Rome and every other Italian city came to see and be seen. The views and the sales were always mobbed with people; the ladies wore their most elegant clothes and splendid jewels sparkled everywhere. The atmosphere was so sophisticated that it seemed the clock had been momentarily turned back to the grand occasions that had once taken place in those splendid rooms.

Art dealers came from all over Europe for this important sale but were not willing to pay high prices. It was a difficult moment to sell anything and the prices fetched were very low. Paintings, for example, went for anywhere from one thousand to ten thousand lire. I advised a sculptor friend to buy a painting by Santi di Tito for fifteen hundred lire.<sup>6</sup> Works by Vanvitelli, Locatelli, the Van Bloemens were all sold for around two or three thousand lire. I remember that the father of Amadore Porcella attended the sales every day and always acquired something for a very low price. Most of the fortunate buyers were private collectors of decorative paintings who got great bargains at the sale. Later I overheard an angry discussion between Sestieri and Ferraguti, both of whom were very disappointed with the results.

About a year after the sale Commendatore Ferraguti was installed in Prince Girolamo's apartment. He had spent a fortune redecorating the great rooms and decided to give a party to which he invited all the Roman nobility. Not one of them attended. Everyone knew how the apartment had fallen into Ferraguti's hands and he was snubbed by one and all. He died of cancer of the liver only a few years after he moved into the Palazzo Rospigliosi.

Prince Girolamo moved to the United States, where his young wife soon divorced him, and he found a job in the wine industry. He eventually remarried and lived in Palm Beach until his death in 1959 at the comparatively young age of fifty-two. Mario, meanwhile, was on his way to a successful career, having done an excellent job and made many important contacts.

Of all the people he met during the Rospigliosi sales, the one who made the greatest impression on Mario was Roberto Longhi (1890–1970), the most important Italian art historian of the twentieth century. He was a tall man with piercing eyes and a fine head that Mario said looked like the portrait by El Greco of his brother, Manusso Theotokopoulos, in the Norton Simon Collection. His exceptional visual memory, scholarship, intelligence, and sensitivity



to painting allowed him to make attributions that Bernard Berenson (1865–1959), the famous and influential American connoisseur of Italian Renaissance paintings, could only have envied.

As well as art historians, Mario also got to know a number of restorers:

*Among the restorers I met at that time were such well-known figures as Mauro Pellicoli from Bergamo, Vito Mameli, Lorenzo Cecconi, Chiesarotti, Giannino Marchig, Goffredo Pavia, Luigi Grassi [uncle of Marco Grassi who became a restorer and dealer in New York], Mario Matteucci who worked for the Galleria Borghese, Giuseppe Latini who later dedicated himself to turning out fake Guardis, Passacantando, who, in his spare time, made fake drawings by Piazzetta some of which found their way into famous American collections, Amadio, who specialized in false El Grecos, and his brother who was a reliner. To the latter, I once gave an unlined painting by Coccorante to be relined. A few months passed and I asked him if the lining was finished. He put me off for a while and finally confessed, "The painting's gone". "What do you mean, it's gone?". It turned out that he had virtually destroyed it in the relining.*

There were approximately two hundred paintings in the Rospigliosi sales, so Mario had a great deal to accomplish in a limited amount of time. He learned many things about the restoration of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings on canvas. Among them the cleaning of seventeenth-century paintings on dark grounds, whether this involved the removal of discolored resinous coatings, or saturating the blanched and desiccated surfaces of paintings that had never been varnished. Many of the latter had to be relined—that is, backed with new canvas using glue paste adhesive—which fixed the flaking paint and reinforced the brittle linen canvases and broken tacking edges. In the process, he learned that unlined paintings could react strongly to the moisture in the glue and shrink. To prevent this, it was necessary to coat the back with shellac or varnish.

Ideally, to make sure a painting will not shrink during relining, part of the tacking edge is tested with damp cotton because, if

things go wrong, the paint will suddenly rise up in jagged peaks as the fabric contracts and there is no longer enough room for it. If a restorer panics and begins smashing the brittle paint and ground layers down with an iron, ugly scars will result. Applying tension to the canvas in slow stages can coax it to expand again so the paint can be set down safely, but this requires a great deal of time and patience and the result is rarely perfect.

The painting Mario's reliner lost was a minor work, but other mishaps have had more serious consequences. Jonathan Harr's book, *The Lost Painting*,<sup>7</sup> recounts the fantastic detective story behind the 1990 discovery of a great painting by Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, which was hiding in plain sight in a Jesuit convent in Dublin. Known through copies, it was recognized as the original by Sergio Benedetti, a restorer on the staff of the National Gallery of Ireland. Naturally, Mario and I had heard of this important discovery soon after it was made and published in the *Burlington Magazine*. Our first opportunity to see it came a few years later at an exhibition in the Palazzo Barberini, which brought together paintings from the dispersed collections of the Roman bankers, Asdrubale and his brother Ciriaco Mattei, who commissioned the painting directly from Caravaggio in 1602. When we got to the exhibition we went straight to the Dublin painting and, as we stuck our noses on it, as restorers do, we saw hundreds of fine cracks along which the paint overlapped. It was obvious that the canvas had shrunk and the lifted paint had been crushed. The damage seemed to be recent. None of the many experts who had been to Dublin, including some close friends, had mentioned this, and they presented a wall of silence when we asked what had happened.

A few years later, Harr's book confirmed our suspicions: the disaster had, in fact, occurred during the relining. A colleague of Sergio Benedetti, Andrew O'Connor, had been in the studio while the painting was being restored and, evidently having little love for his secretive colleague, told the author what had happened. Benedetti, he said, was impatient to line the painting. Normally, he used an open-weave hemp canvas for relining, a traditional Roman



17. Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, 1602, oil on canvas, on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 133,5 × 169,5 cm.

method; however, the studio was out of it, and it would take at least two weeks for a new supply to arrive from Italy. He did not want to wait. The available canvas was a thick, closely woven Irish linen with which he had no experience. According to O'Connor, unfamiliar with the properties of the fabric, Benedetti miscalculated how much time was needed to iron the reverse of the lining canvas in order to make sure that the glue paste adhesive was sufficiently dry. The lining canvas still contained too much moisture when he restretched the painting, put it on an easel, and went home. When he came into the studio the next morning, he found the entire surface shattered by a web of sharp cracks. Benedetti quickly did his best to lay down the paint that had lifted and the lining was done over again, but the damage caused when he pressed the fractured paint down is still obvious.

### CHAPTER 3

Harr goes on to recount a sequel to this horror story. Many months later, after the painting had been published and was hanging on the walls at the National Gallery of Ireland, on loan from the Jesuits, a security guard happened to notice maggots squirming on the floor beneath it. Insects had been feeding on the rich material of the lining adhesive and laying their eggs. The lining had to be replaced.

## CHAPTER 4

# Caveat Emptor

MARIO WAS ALWAYS fascinated by forgers. Though as a young man he was an outsider in the official art establishment, he had an inside track on the shadowy world of the forgers flourishing in Italy at the time.

### ✎ Icilio Federico Joni ✎

The most prominent among the forgers who featured in Mario's stories was the Sienese restorer and gilder Icilio Federico Joni (1866–1946). In the early part of the twentieth century, Joni successfully hoodwinked many of the most eminent experts in the field of early Italian painting. In 1932, his memoir, *Memorie di un pittore di quadri antichi*, was published and it has subsequently been reprinted several times. A bowdlerized English edition entitled *Affairs of a Painter* appeared in 1936 and quickly sold out, though it was said

that the edition was bought up by art dealers, primarily the famous Sir Joseph Duveen (1869–1939), who did not wish to be publicly embarrassed by Joni’s revelations.

After the Second World War, Joni was nearly forgotten. His rediscovery in recent years was due in part to Mario’s identification, in the early 1950s, of several of his forgeries in American museums and to the research done by Sieneese art historian Gianni Mazzoni, who spent years documenting Joni’s activities. Mazzoni’s work culminated in an exhibition in 2004 in Siena called *Falsi d’autore*,<sup>1</sup> a phrase used to describe paintings that were honest reproductions in the style of the master and not intended to deceive. Joni liked to claim, disingenuously, that he made his paintings ‘in the style of’ for his own gratification and did not try to pass them off as originals.

A small man with a large ego and a prickly nature, Joni came into frequent conflict with the art historians of his day, notably Bernard Berenson, on whose word American collectors relied. Berenson and his wife and fellow critic, Mary (1864–1945), lived in a villa in the Florentine hills, I Tatti, in sumptuous style financed by the profits they made from advising such collectors as Isabella Stewart Gardner, and from providing expertises on paintings submitted for their review. The Berensons had bought a number of paintings by Sieneese and Umbrian masters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at a very good price and later discovered that they were forgeries. After realizing their mistake and hearing that the pieces originated with Joni, they set off to Siena to find him. Mary Berenson took it in good humor and in her diary entry of October 4, 1899, wrote:

We have run our forger to earth—but a very easy matter it was—for “he” is a rollicking band of young men, cousins and friends, who turn out these works in cooperation, one drawing, one laying in the color, another putting on the dirt, another making the frames... Their chief is Federigo Ioni [sic], a rakish-looking man of 30, very free and easy—a good fellow. They hide nothing.<sup>2</sup>

Mario's meeting with Joni occurred about thirty years after Mary Berenson's. Here is how Mario remembered the events that led him to the forger:

*One of my clients and friends in the early 1930s was a dealer by the name of Armando Sabatello.<sup>3</sup> He was Jewish, like many of the dealers, and nicknamed the 'Prince of the Israelites' by his colleagues because of his sophistication and dandified manner; he was tall, cultivated, elegant, everything that at that time distinguished a*



18. Federico Icilio Joni, *Madonna and Child with Saints Mary Magdalen and Sebastian*, 1913, tempera on panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 109.2 × 72.3 cm. One of the most successful forgeries by Joni, it was catalogued as a work by Neroccio de' Landi until 1980. See also Plate 1.



## CHAPTER 4

man of the world. He often asked my advice and opinion about paintings that he was buying or selling. One day he telephoned to say that he had seen a painting by Neruccio de' Landi (1447–1500), a Madonna and Child, in a convent on Monte Mario in Rome. [Neruccio is one of the most highly regarded Siennese painters of the fifteenth century, and his work was much sought after at the time.] He asked if I would accompany him to look at the painting to make sure it was in good state and that the attribution was correct. We went to the convent and, through a slot in the door, asked to see the Mother Superior. After a while, a revolving barrel turned bearing a small painting that I picked up and began to examine.

The painting was on panel, with a gold ground, well preserved, and from the technical point of view it was perfect: the cracks, the gold, the punch work, the patina, the enamel-like quality of the paint was all that one would expect from a painting of the period. It looked antique. However, the artistic and the painterly aspects were somehow not convincing. The Child's head made him look like a tiny old man, and the hands of the Madonna were disproportionately small in comparison to her head. Armando asked me what I thought, and I told him that I was not convinced of its authenticity. To which he replied that I was crazy. For him, the provenance of the painting was its own guaranty and from this point of view it was difficult to disagree, since it came from a cloistered nun. I said, "Listen, if you want to buy it, go ahead, but I'm doubtful." In the end, he decided not to buy it. After I left the convent and said good-bye to Armando, I wondered how the painting had been faked, because technically it was so perfect. As a restorer, I knew the tricks of the forger, and I had never seen anything like this painting.

Some months passed, and one morning Sabatello called me: "You know something, Mario? You were right about that Neruccio. It's a fake." The painting had been bought from the nun by the Roman dealer, Augusto Jandolo, and had eventually ended up in the hands of Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, an important dealer. Contini showed it to his expert, the great connoisseur Roberto Longhi, who promptly pronounced it a forgery. When the count went to the mother superior to ask for his money back, she told him that the painting belonged to her nephew, who had got it from a certain person in Siena. The affair ended up in a messy lawsuit.<sup>4</sup>

Impressed by the extraordinary material and technical properties of this forgery, Mario became determined to meet Joni. He continued his story:



*After this interesting phone call from Armando, who had learned the name of the forger, I was determined to meet this person who had succeeded in creating material that was so convincing as fifteenth-century paint, so I went to Siena, looked up the address, and knocked on Joni's door without an introduction or preliminaries of any sort. Joni lived in one of the tower houses around the Piazza del Campo of Siena, where the famous horse race, the Palio, is run. He answered the door himself. He was a small man of about sixty-five with a very intelligent face. He asked me what I wanted; I explained to him who I was and that I had come to Siena just to meet him. He was flattered by this and allowed me to come inside. He asked me a lot of questions about paintings that I had restored and what sort of pictures I preferred. We talked for about an hour until it was finally past noon, and I asked him if he would join me for lunch. He accepted and led me to a restaurant called 'da Guido', where the specialty of the house was bollito misto (mixed boiled meats), which we ordered after the exquisite pasta course.*

*As we imbibed the local wine, the conversation became quite friendly, and I noticed that Joni had a great sense of humor, sharp and biting. He told me that he himself never sold his fakes, that he made them on order for various dealers. After lunch, we went back to his house, and I asked him if he would allow me to come and take some lessons from him about some of the technical aspects of making forgeries. He said no, it was not possible, because his position as restorer of the Pinacoteca of Siena left him with little time at his disposal. He added that, if I wished, I could come and watch him work while I was in Siena, an offer that overjoyed me and that I quickly accepted. I visited Joni's studio for a few weeks and saw first-hand how he made his false paintings. He painted in egg tempera, just as was done in the past. When possible, he used an original painting of the period, some mediocre work from which he had removed the paint, leaving the gesso—that is, the original preparation of gypsum and glue that preserved all the original craquelure. On this preparation, he painted his picture and, when he had finished, put it out on the terrace of his tower house, leaving it there day and night for months until finally the craquelure of the gesso appeared. Then he would patinate and distress the surface by wearing away the paint here and there. Finally, he poured boiling linseed oil over it and left it to age again in the sun of his terrace.*

*After I had got to know Joni, a client of mine, Borghesani, brought me a small Sienese school crucifixion. It was a minor master but the curious thing was that the background had never been gilded, there was just the original gesso. We took it to Joni*

## CHAPTER 4

to ask him if he would gild the background, but he refused. He explained to me that it wasn't possible to get a good result by gilding over the original *mestica* and that, when he made a fake, either he used a genuine gold ground [see above] and reworked the painted passages or he began from scratch. [For the latter] he first would prepare an old piece of poplar with a ground made from lime casein. Over this *caseato di calcio*, he put a thin layer of regular gesso, made of whiting and rabbit skin glue, followed by the bole preparation, the gold ground, and the painting itself, which was also done with casein. The panel, again, was left out on the roof where the hot sun of the day and the cool air of the night made the new preparation develop a convincing craquelure.

Many years later, when I was working in Washington for the Kress Foundation, the director of the National Gallery, David Finley, told me a story that had happened to him on a trip to Siena. He had heard about this forger from an art dealer and Finley was curious to meet him. He was with his wife and a few friends. They rang the doorbell of the tower house and there was no answer. The door was open and they decided to go in. They went up the stairs; there was no sign of life in the entire house. They continued up until they got to the terrace where they were amazed to see gold ground paintings lying all over the floor: works by Duccio, Simone Martini, Lorenzetti and so on. While they were gazing at these paintings Joni suddenly appeared from nowhere as if by magic. He had been napping, as all Italians do after lunch in the summer. He was furious and began screaming like a madman. They naturally didn't understand a word he was saying and tried to explain how it was that they were on the terrace, but Joni didn't understand a word of English and continued to yell loudly, "get out of here, get out of here" until they realized that it was useless to try to explain why they were there and left. Knowing the man well, I was terribly amused by this story and I told Finley of my experiences with Joni.

### ☞ Giuseppe Latini ☞

The demand of the market for early Italian and Renaissance paintings was so great that the forgeries by Joni and his fellow Sienese, Umberto Giunti (1886–1970, see Plate II), a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Siena, found ready buyers. The business was so lucrative that several other forgers followed their lead, and Siena was not the only place where fakes were made.

Mario wrote:

*Another forger I came to know well was Giuseppe Latini (1903–1972), known as Beppe, who came from Ascoli Piceno and specialized in fake Guardis [Francesco Guardi (1712–1793) was, with Canaletto (1697–1768), the most highly regarded of the artists known for their views of Venice]. I met him while I was working on the Rospigliosi Collection. He was a tall, slender man who worked as a sort of dealer. Very gifted, he could make all sorts of fakes, not only Guardis. He was able to produce certain kinds of paintings very quickly; for example, in one night he would paint a big decorative landscape in tempera that was supposed to be eighteenth-century. You could see that it was modern, partly because he used a flat brush. [Brushes with metal ferrules that held the bristles flat weren't invented until the nineteenth century. Before that all brushes were round and tied by hand.]*

*Once we [Latini and Mario] decided to make a trip to Siena to see if we could find something interesting to sell. The road at that time was a disaster, full of big stones. At Radicofani, the oil pan broke, and we were stuck until five in the morning when a cart came by, hauled by two white Chianti bulls. We asked the driver if he would take us to Siena, and that's how we arrived there, with the bulls! We first went to Joni and then to Umberto Giunti, who was a professor of drawing and painting at the Academy. Like Joni, he was initially trained as a gilder in the neighborhood around the Porta Camollia. He was a good painter, which Joni was not. Joni was better at imitating antique material, but Giunti was a better faker.*

One of the most amusing anecdotes about Latini's inventiveness in procuring art for his dealership involves a sculpture, rather than a painting. As Mario remembered it:

*Once, Latini was arrested because he was caught trying to substitute a plaster sculpture for an antique polychrome wooden one in a church in the Marche. He had paid the priest to look the other way and commissioned a mold maker to go into the church one night, take the mold, and then make a plaster cast in his studio in Rome. Beppe himself did all the polychromy and gilding. One night he made the switch, and everything went well. Unfortunately, the sacristan didn't know about the agreement between Latini and the priest. He was used to hanging his coat on a nail that protruded from the back of the original sculpture. When he came the next morning,*

he couldn't find the nail, and then he noticed that the sculpture was gesso and began screaming, "Thief! Thief!" When the police came, the priest pretended not to know anything about it.

Latini loved fast cars and drove a Bugatti. One morning [in 1972], I opened the newspaper and there was a photograph of a wrecked car. He had driven into a tunnel at high speed and hit a slow-moving truck. He died instantly.

### ☞ Teodoro Riccardi ☞

There were many other types of forgers who faked ancient and medieval art: jewelry, ivories, terracotta objects of all sorts, and even large pieces of marble sculpture. Fiano Romano, just north of Rome and situated in an area of numerous Etruscan tombs, was the center of a brisk forgery trade, as was Orvieto.

Mario knew one of these forgers quite well:

*One who had a studio at 17 Via Margutta was Teodoro Riccardi. Today he is nearly forgotten but he was one of the greatest forgers of Greek and Roman gold jewelry. He came from Orvieto from a large family of antique dealers, forgers and tomb robbers. He was quite short and rotund and completely bald with strongly delineated features that gave him the appearance of an ancient Roman consul. He lived with a woman who was nearly twice his height and they made a comical couple. I will never forget a morning when he stopped by my studio and said, "Mario, a terrible thing has happened." In fact, he seemed very upset and I asked him what was wrong. He was holding a sheet of the 24-carat gold foil with which he worked and on which he had designed an Etruscan bas-relief. It was an exceptional piece. He said, "This morning I started out to make a small object that I could sell for a few thousand lire and instead, look what happened! I ended up making this, which should be valued at a million lire, and now I can't sell it!" He said this in strict Orvietan dialect that made his despair really humorous.*

The Riccardis became famous in the world of antiquities because of three important 'Etruscan' sculptures acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art between 1915 and 1921. Two were standing warriors and

the third was a colossal head measuring more than four feet high, made from polychromed terracotta in a remarkable state of preservation. They were among the most popular objects in the museum and much admired by its curator of ancient art, Gisela Richter (1882–1972), who released a publication about them in 1937,<sup>5</sup> despite the doubts experts in Europe had raised about their authenticity.

Mario knew these sculptures were the work of Teodoro Riccardi, his brother Amedeo, and their cousin, Alfredo Fioravanti (1886–1963),<sup>6</sup> and thus he was greatly surprised to see they were still on display when he arrived in New York in 1949. Finally, in 1958, Harold Parsons, a buying agent for a number of American museums who had long believed the warriors to be forgeries,



19. The 'Etruscan' statues, *Big Warrior* and *Colossal Head* on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

obtained a signed confession from Fioravanti, who provided proof in the form of a missing thumb, which he had kept all those years since the sculptures' creation.

The museum then did scientific testing, which identified manganese in one of the glazes, a material the Etruscans did not use. How the warriors were actually made was more difficult to understand. Their enormous size dictated the use of a huge kiln to fire the clay, and this was problematic. Since the forgers did not have access to such an oven, they invented a clever system. They made the sculptures in the usual way, using unfired clay, on which they painted the glazes. Once the clay had dried, the sculpture was toppled to the floor and broke into shards. Those pieces were then fired in a small kiln and re-assembled.

There is something strikingly modern about the warriors, reminiscent of the pre-cubist Picasso *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which had been exhibited for the first time in 1916 in Paris. The similarity is presumably only a coincidence, but, as mentioned before, one of the reasons forgeries ultimately fail is because they unconsciously reflect the tastes of the time in which they were made.

#### ☞ Elena Gobbi's *Diana* ☞

Alceo Dossena (1878–1937) was the most famous forger of marble sculptures. Some of these masqueraded as rare examples of classical antiquities while others imitated masterpieces of the Italian Renaissance. Mario did not know him directly but became familiar with his work through an Etruscan sculpture owned by Elena Gobbi, one of Mario's assistants in Rome during the late 1940s, and sister of the famous baritone, Tito Gobbi. After Mario's move to New York in 1949, he and Elena stayed in touch, and in June 1952, she wrote that she had inherited an Etruscan statue of the goddess Diana made from polychromed terracotta. It had come to her in a packing crate, the statue in pieces and still covered with earth. Elena had taken the fragments to Angelo

Del Vecchio, the chief restorer at the Etruscan Museum in Villa Giulia, who cleaned and reassembled them and certified that the sculpture dated from the third century BC. Elena enclosed several photographs of the restored statue, which caused Mario to doubt the object's authenticity, but it was not until the following year that he had a chance to see it in person.

Elena was an old friend and he hated to disappoint her, but he believed her statue was a modern forgery and he told her so. Unconvinced, she sent it for technical analysis to the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro (ICR), Italy's official center for art restoration and research, founded in Rome in 1941. Their experts performed a number of tests and concluded that the sculpture was genuine. Mario still remained dubious and inquired among his old connections in the Via Margutta to see if anyone knew where the sculpture originated. One of his sources told him it had been made by Dossena's assistant, Gildo Pedrazzoni (1902–1963).



20. Elena Gobbi's 'Etruscan' statue.



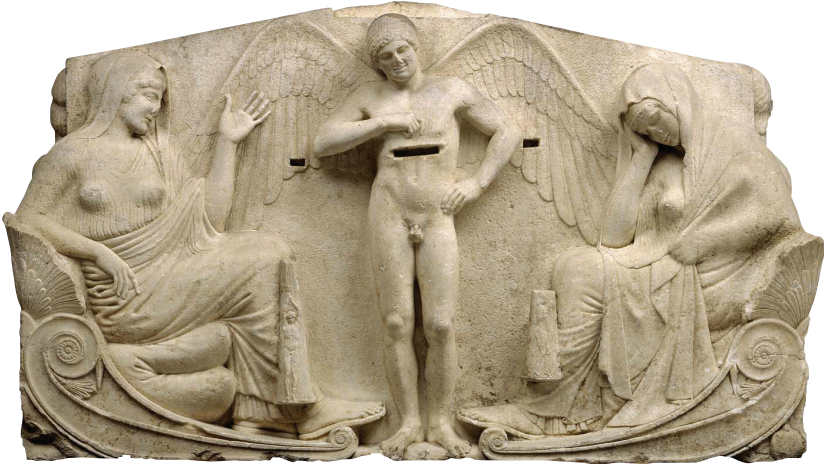
He was apparently an apt student, because the statue of Diana was very skillfully done.

Mario learned that the clever Gildo had taken the clay for his sculptures from a riverbed in Vulci, an important Etruscan site. The clay contained minute particles of gold, which had also been identified in authentic Etruscan terracotta sculptures from this area, and explains why the ICR considered it antique. To be convincing, forgeries must have a provenance, even if it is mythical. This statue, broken into pieces, had been deposited in a collapsed Etruscan tomb in the necropolis of Vulci. Mario said that the eventual buyer was present when it was excavated and had no reason to doubt the discovery. Several years later, Mario received his weekly issue of *Art News*, and there on the cover was Elena Gobbi's sculpture, accompanied by an article by Alfred Frankfurter, the magazine's publisher, extolling its beauty and importance. Mario couldn't let the story go any further, so he telephoned Frankfurter, whom he knew well, and told him what he had learned in Rome.

Mario had heard an amusing variant of the tomb caper from Teodoro Riccardi.

*Together with a fellow forger, he [Riccardi] had assembled a group of forgeries of important objects mixed together with some originals of minor importance. Their idea was to put them into an Etruscan tomb and close it as if it had never before been opened. Through a Florentine dealer, they made the acquaintance of an American museum director and invited this man to accompany them when they opened this "intact" Etruscan tomb. The American was naturally interested in acquiring something from the excavation. The appointment was at night, at the entrance to the tomb, where, by the light of acetylene lamps, they began to dig until they reached the door, which was made of rectangular blocks of tufa placed one on top of the other. Inside the tomb, the ceiling was partly collapsed, burying the objects that the forgers had carefully concealed. The tomb had been broken into in the past by grave robbers, who entered by simply punching a hole in the top of the mound—much faster than digging out the entrance—and this was also how the forgers had entered to plant their loot. As they dug, shards began to emerge. The American was extremely excited. He had never done anything like this before in his life. Finally, they arrived at the concealed objects, and*





21. Roman antiquity or Alceo Dossena? The *Boston Throne*, marble, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 82 × 161 cm.

*the American examined them carefully, emptying each vase of earth and cleaning it with water so that he could see the painted decoration. Suddenly the drama occurred: while emptying one of the vases, a lead pencil fell out. Evidently, one of the forgers had let it fall from his pocket while they were burying the vases. The infuriated American began to scream and beat them with a stick. "I'll have you all arrested," he threatened, empty, since he had been a party to this illegal excavation. The forgers fled, cursing their bad luck and, as for the American, it would have been far worse for him if he had ended up buying all those fakes.*

Not all the forgeries made in the early twentieth century have yet been proven to be false. For example, the authorship of one famous sculpture, the *Boston Throne*, is still the subject of debate. Some experts have attributed it to Dossena, while others believe it to be genuine. The problem is complicated by the fact that the *Boston Throne* is related to another work that was excavated in Rome near the present Ludovisi Palace, known as the *Ludovisi Throne*. The *Boston Throne* was supposedly found in the same area. Mario and I once saw them exhibited together and thought the *Ludovisi*

Throne much finer, but we were not experts and the two sculptures presented a purely formal problem, since there was no technical proof. Mario's friend, the great art historian Federico Zeri (1921–1998), knew a great deal about sculptures from antiquity and accepted both objects.

### ☞ The Getty Kouros and Armando Pacifici ☞

Some forgers were highly specialized. Mario said that Armando Pacifici, for example, was known for his skill in patination—that is, applying materials to freshly carved marble in order to make it look antique. He used various methods including wearing away the surface with acids, burying the piece in the ground and then pouring all sorts of noxious liquids over the site. Mario recalled that he once stopped by Pacifici's studio and, along with all the others who visited, was asked to urinate on an area in the garden where a new forgery was being treated.

Pacifici's name came up in relation to an important Archaic Greek kouros statue that had been purchased by the J. Paul Getty Museum. Federico Zeri was one of J. Paul Getty's consultants, and the collector had made him a trustee of the museum. Zeri often went to the board meetings in Malibu, especially when important acquisitions were being proposed. Aside from his extensive knowledge of Italian paintings, Zeri was an expert in antique sculpture, one of the areas in which the Getty collection was strongest. When Jiří Frel, the curator of the Greek and Roman Department, presented the kouros, Zeri examined the object closely and came to the conclusion that it was a modern forgery. The surface of the sculpture was characterized by a mottled, yellow-orange patina. Mario and Federico agreed that this was very like the effects produced by Pacifici. The acquisition was not approved, but Frel persisted and re-proposed the statue at a subsequent meeting, at a reduced price, and this time, the museum bought it, against Zeri's advice, for \$7 million.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

In the meantime, there was great excitement in Italy over the discovery of some carved stone heads by Amedeo Modigliani in a canal in Livorno. Legend had it that the artist had tossed them into the canal when he left his home town for Paris in 1909. In the summer of 1984, the canal was dredged and the heads were revealed. As it later turned out, however, four art students, bored by the monotony of the summer, had carved them with Black and Decker power tools and planted them as hoax. In the meantime, the Italian art establishment went wild with joy and the news was widely reported in the international media.

In a television interview, Zeri dismissed the sculptures as forgeries, and indiscreetly referred to a certain American museum's purchase of a fake kouros, declaring that this too would eventually



22. The Getty kouros, n.d., marble, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California, h. 206 cm.



23. The Anavysos kouros, ca. 530 BC, marble, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, h. 194 cm.

be revealed for what it was. He was obviously referring to the Getty. The museum was furious and quickly removed him as trustee, despite the fact that he had been appointed by Getty himself. This nasty episode rankled greatly with Federico even into his later years. As time went by, the curator was discovered to be dishonest and was dismissed, and the kouros is now considered to be a forgery by most of the experts in the field, including the Getty itself—even though the museum’s scientists couldn’t find any technical evidence to prove it. It is now catalogued as “unknown maker, Greek, about 530 BC or modern.”

### ☞ An Accidental Forgery ☞

The fake Modigliani heads were far from unique, and on one remarkable occasion Mario himself quite unwittingly (perhaps) made a forgery of his own. One of Mario’s friends in the late 1930s was a dealer called Enrico Scafetti. Scafetti was part of the Giosi clan, a family of successful dealers established in both Rome and Naples. Neither Mario nor Enrico had been to Paris, and they decided to make a trip, just the two of them, without any wives or girlfriends.

Mario wrote:

*We went to Paris not only for our own edification but also to try to do some business. In Italy in those last years of Fascism the situation had become very difficult, there was very little restoration work and commercial activity was also greatly diminished. Only those with ties to the regime or who belonged to the Fascist Party found employment. My small group of friends were often hungry and didn't have enough money to buy a meal. Three of us usually got together at noontime. One of my friends had a dog. We would count the money we had between us, which usually didn't suffice for three meals, so we bought something for the dog instead. One time in desperation I made a fake Mancini, framed it and put it under glass because the paint was still wet, a dead give-away. I showed it to a dealer, Pietrangeli, who immediately took it to show to a client. The client liked it and bought it right away. Pietrangeli brought me the money*



CAVEAT EMPTOR

*and I was saved. Unfortunately, a few days later he came to me and told me that the client had brought the painting back when he discovered wet paint stuck to the glass! The times were very bad.*

*[Regarding the trip to Paris.] We had brought with us a few small eighteenth-century French paintings that we hoped to sell but they weren't important enough for*



24. Edgar Degas, *Stefanina Primicile Carafa, Marchioness of Cicerale and Duchess of Montejasi*, ca. 1875, oil on canvas, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, 49 × 39.4 cm.

## CHAPTER 4

*the market in Paris at that time. A friend of ours, Ciccillo Giosi, a cousin of Enrico, had come to Paris from Naples with a portrait by Degas of one his Neapolitan relatives, the Duchessa di Montejasi, which he sold immediately to the dealer Paul Rosenberg. [It is now in the Cleveland Museum of Art.]<sup>7</sup> We were staying with our friend, Levi de Léon, who was an art dealer and a painter in his spare time. We were running out of money and had not been able to sell any of the paintings we had brought with us. Ciccillo had left with us a photograph of this Degas portrait, and one morning, I took a piece of blue-gray paper and made a portrait sketch in charcoal, copying from this photograph. A few days passed and I realized that the drawing had disappeared. I asked Levi de Léon's companion, who looked after the house, if she had seen the drawing lying around anywhere. She replied, I have a surprise for you, and gave me ten thousand francs. Levi de Léon had sold my drawing to Paul Rosenberg, I don't know for how much, certainly for more than ten thousand francs. That evening we all went to Maxim's to celebrate our good fortune. Many years later, in New York, I happened to see a Degas drawings exhibition at the Knoedler gallery. To my embarrassment, there was my drawing and, according to the catalogue, it had been shown at various other exhibitions. I don't think it's any longer accepted, at least I haven't seen it for many years.<sup>8</sup>*

*There was tragic sequel to the story of our friend Levi de Léon that I learned some years later from Robert Manning who worked with me at the Kress Foundation and had accompanied me to the exhibition at Knoedlers. When I confessed to him the story of the Degas drawing, he told me that by chance he had heard about Levi de Léon and his arrest by the Nazis. What had happened was this: he was in hiding in the country in the house of friends. Before leaving Paris he and his companion, Louise, had separated after a terrible fight, however she remained in the apartment they had shared. One day the SS came to the building where he and many other Jews had apartments, and Louise told them where Levi de Léon was hiding. He was arrested and died in the camps. She must have been a horrible person, although I didn't realize it at the time.*

### ☞ Giosi, Pulvirenti and the Musketeer ☞

Paintings can sometimes be made—and sold—as fakes, inspired by a sheer sense of fun and as a challenge to public and dealers alike. In this case, Mario knew all the participants, not all of whom were aware of their roles, perhaps: the dealer (Giosi), the artist (Pulvirenti), and the model (Prati).

*Giosi had discovered a young painter, Rosario Pulvirenti, a native of Catania, Sicily, thirty years old and very gifted. His work looked like that of Antonio Mancini in his late period when he painted thickly with great quantities of paint as in the portrait of Signora Pantaleone in the National Gallery of Modern Art [Rome] or the portraits of the Barons Fassini. On the other hand, Pulvirenti's landscapes were influenced by Armando Spadini. In other words he was an eclectic, without a strong artistic personality of his own, but a marvelous painter. An irresistible idea came to Giosi: to make a false Mancini. Via Margutta 33 was the home of a painter called Prati and his girlfriend, not a beauty. Her face was slightly oriental, her figure magnificent with very white skin. Prati himself looked like one of the three musketeers, tall, long hair, mustachioed with a beard. His face was artistic and he resembled Courbet. Giosi asked Pulvirenti to paint Prati's portrait dressed as a Musketeer. He found a seventeenth-century costume of a beautiful shade of pink. Pulvirenti did this two-meter tall portrait in a week. Giosi's maid showed me the painting in secret. It was a wonderful figure with a huge plumed hat on his head against a dark background like a Van Dyck. It seemed absolutely to be by Antonio Mancini. Giosi waited several months for the paint to dry and then, I heard, sold it for a large sum as a Mancini.*

*I became friends with Pulvirenti who was a very strange man. Like many of the great nineteenth century French painters, such as Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas, he loved to go to brothels but was embarrassed to go alone. In the evening after dinner he would stop by my apartment on Via della Croce, which happened to be the neighborhood with the highest concentration of brothels, and ask me to come for a walk with him. I knew very well what he meant by this. Some evenings he would bring a small drawing pad and would make rapid sketches. After a few years he wanted to change his style and he began to paint female nudes, in a bluish tonality, very decorative, with landscape backgrounds in the manner of El Greco. I still have a painting of his from*

*this period representing the Madonna in a landscape copied from an El Greco. Today his name is unknown. In the dictionary of nineteenth-century Italian artists compiled by Comanducci there is a self-portrait that looks exactly like a Mancini.*

### ✿ Pietro Toesca, Forgeries, and Expertises ✿

As Mario's reputation grew, collectors began to seek his advice on the attributions and authenticity of paintings for sale on the market. This brought him into contact with many prominent experts. Mario recounted an experience with one of the most notable of these, Pietro Toesca (1877–1962), professor of art history at La Sapienza, the University of Rome.

*One of my clients at this time was a certain Sig. Biancettini who was looking for important pictures to add to his collection. I told him that such works were extremely difficult to find and, when one did emerge, the price was colossal. One day he called me and said, "Mario, I have just bought three paintings, very important gold ground pictures, and I would like to show them to you." My studio was in Via Margutta and he lived in Via della Croce, quite nearby. I went to his house and he showed me his three acquisitions, all of which were fakes. Two were by Joni and one was by Vannoni. I immediately recognized the forgers from the quality of the gold backgrounds and the manner in which they were worked; both the gilding and the punching were perfect.*

*When I told Sig. Biancettini that his panels were fakes he brought out three large photographs with detailed expertises on the back written by Pietro Toesca attributing them, one to Neroccio de' Landi, one to Sano di Pietro and one to Matteo di Giovanni. Biancettini asked me if I was absolutely certain of my opinion. I told him I was completely sure. He immediately went to the telephone and called the dealer from whom he had bought the paintings. He was furious and threatened to denounce the man to the police if he didn't return his money instantly. Then he called Professor Toesca saying that he wanted to denounce him for fraud as well.*

*The next day I received a visit from Professor Toesca who knew my habits and when and where he could find me. He said, "Mario, are you sure that those three paintings are fakes?" I told him that I had not the slightest doubt and that I actually knew the forgers. I apologized to him for the difficult position in which he now found*



*himself, for which I was truly sorry. Poor Toesca began to cry. He said, "Mario, you know that when I attended the university no one taught us these things. The style of those paintings was right for the artists to whom I attributed them, as was the gold, the craquelure, in other words, I was completely fooled by them." I felt so sorry for Toesca that I really didn't know what to say to comfort him and we both cried. He was already in his eighties at that time and it was extremely distressing for me to see him in such a state. He was a great art historian and an even greater teacher as every expert in our field can attest. Most of the art historians of this past century had been his pupils.*

At that time, when a dealer presented a painting to a prospective buyer, it was expected that the piece would be accompanied by expertises, expert opinions attesting to the approximate date, the quality of the work in the context of the artist's oeuvre, and the correctness of the attribution. All the most important art historians offered such expertises, often written on the back of a photograph along with their signature. These authorities were sometimes compensated in a straightforward manner in fees for services, but on some occasions the payment took other forms. Bernard Berenson, for instance, had a secret partnership agreement with the art dealers, Duveen Brothers, of whom Joseph Duveen became the principal partner;<sup>9</sup> he would provide expertises for certain paintings and was paid a percentage of the net profit after they were sold. Most art historians, however, were paid a previously agreed sum of money. Over time, as knowledge has grown, many of these endorsements have proved to be mistaken, sometimes spectacularly so. More often, though, these expert opinions simply inflated the attribution, promoting a work from 'studio' or 'school of' to the master himself, accompanied by hyperbolic praise. Today, this practice is frowned upon, due to the obvious conflict of interest. Most museums do not allow their staff to be involved with the marketplace, although it is inevitably something of a gray area, since good curators are always keen to see new works of art.

Toesca was a distinguished scholar. These facts prompt hard questions about how the art and skill of connoisseurship develop. To a great extent, this ability is a gift, much like having perfect pitch

#### CHAPTER 4

or a photographic memory. It explains Mario's frustration whenever someone misattributed or failed to recognize a painting for what it truly was. He would exclaim, "He is completely blind!"—as if the proper identification were simply a matter of using one's inborn senses. Over the years, Mario dismissed scores of art historians and experts with this phrase. His opinion was usually right and would eventually be accepted. To a somewhat lesser degree, this skill can be cultivated by looking at and studying as many physical works of art as possible (as opposed to photographs and other secondary material), something Mario did in great depth, propelled by his quick intelligence and desire for understanding.

Indeed, it is quite remarkable that, even as a young man and despite his rudimentary formal education, Mario had already absorbed enough to be able to judge a painting on the basis of both historical knowledge and style, backed by his extensive knowledge of technique.

## CHAPTER 5

# The Istituto Centrale per il Restauro

THE ISTITUTO CENTRALE PER IL RESTAURO (ICR) opened its doors to the first students in 1941. Its mission was to train restorers, carry out research, experiment with new methods and materials, and restore works of art. A set of guidelines had been formulated over the course of several years by a committee whose members were Roberto Longhi, Giulio Carlo Argan (1909–1992), an architectural historian from the Fine Arts and Antiquities department of the government, and Cesare Brandi (1906–1988), a specialist in early Siennese painting who had been Argan's classmate at university. Argan was a convinced Fascist, who had joined the movement at an early date, and Longhi's brilliance and fame as an art historian gave him influence over the regime, although he did not have an official post. Brandi was appointed director and Mauro Pellicoli, a highly-regarded professional from Bergamo with close ties to Roberto Longhi and vast experience—for decades he had been entrusted with the restoration of all the most important masterpieces in Italy—was named chief restorer.

☞ Cesare Brandi and Mauro Pelliccioli ☞

Since the ICR was a state institution, it was necessary to be enrolled in the Fascist party to be taken on the staff. By this time, Mario had become an expert restorer, however his work was confined to privately owned paintings since he never joined the PNF. Mario was very critical of Cesare Brandi as a restorer and, after the fall of the regime, his resort to what Mario regarded as political expediency. Mario believed that he actually damaged paintings. He recorded his opinion of the staff of the new ICR in his memoirs:

*Cesare Brandi was the director of the Istituto Centrale. At that time both he and Carlo Argan were Fascists. Later they became ardent Communists. I had no use for such men and there were many of them in Italy at that time. In any case, he was a famous art historian and a theoretician of restoration philosophy and aesthetics about which he wrote well if somewhat hermetically. When the Istituto Centrale was started, they hired the famous Bergamasque restorer, Mauro Pelliccioli. I had known him for many years. He was an excellent restorer, considered the best at that time. He restored Leonardo's Last Supper in Milan where BB [Bernard Berenson] visited him on the scaffold and published his high opinion of the work in the Corriere della Sera. One of Pelliccioli's most famous restorations was of the great Mantegna frescoes in the Camera degli Sposi in Mantova.*

Pelliccioli often visited Mario in his studio and they exchanged views and confidences. On one occasion Mario was carrying out an unusual treatment, no longer used today, that is worth recording.

*Once [when Pelliccioli came] I was working on a small altarpiece of a Madonna and Child with Saints, very close to Lorenzo Lotto. I don't know where the painting is now. It belonged to Ilo Nunes, a marchand amateur who lived in Rome in a beautiful old tower in Piazza in Piscinula. He had bought it in Venice and while being transported it fell off the barge into the canal. Instead of immediately putting it upright [the boatmen] left it flat so the surface stayed wet for a long time. Fortunately, it was face up. Nunes sent it to me in Rome at the Galleria Palma and I secured*



25. Jacopo Tintoretto, *La Piscina Probatica*, 1559, oil on canvas, church of S. Rocco, Venice, 533 × 529 cm. Shown in a photo by Anderson before the Brandi intervention.



26. The painting today. Additions were removed not only at the bottom but also on the right and left sides. Unlike the other paintings in the church, it is now smaller than the architectural surround.

CHAPTER 5



27. Carlo Crivelli, *Pietà*, c. 1475, tempera on panel transferred to canvas, Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, 66.4 × 64 cm. Before Cavenaghi's restoration.



28. As it looks today. It is catalogued as Carlo Crivelli, restored by Luigi Cavenaghi.



*the paint to the canvas. The paint had become completely white. Pellicoli came to see it and said that it was easy to remove the white and took a big ball of cotton soaked with alcohol and wiped over the painting. Nothing happened. My system was to burn the surface. The picture was vertical on an easel. Little piece by little piece, in 10 cm squares, I wet [the paint] with alcohol and set it on fire with a match. The flame lasted just a second, and the color returned. This was the first time I tried this system on a painting that was blanched. I don't remember if I came up with this technique out of desperation or if someone suggested it. In any case, it is not in Secco Suardo. Pellicoli was amazed. He told me that [at the ICR] "they even had a scale to weigh farts" but that no one knew how to work on paintings. He was shocked to find on his arrival a fifteenth-century painting [a Filippo Lippi from the Galleria Nazionale di Arte Antica] that had been partly cleaned and semi-destroyed. [Essentially only the underdrawing and the gesso preparation were left.] One fourth of the painting hadn't yet been cleaned. When Pellicoli cleaned that part, it was in perfect condition.*

Pellicoli and Brandi disagreed on a fundamental level about approaches to restoration and came to dislike each other personally as well. Pellicoli began pouring his criticisms into Longhi's ear, especially the story about the Lippi. Longhi, no stranger to controversy, published an incendiary article in 1948 after Pellicoli had resigned from the ICR, claiming that paintings were being ruined under Brandi's direction, with the Lippi cited as crime number one. Brandi responded in kind. The case went all the way to the Ministry of Fine Arts which, after hearing a number of experts express differing views, ruled in favor of Brandi and changed the board of directors of the ICR, leaving Longhi out.<sup>1</sup>

Mario had further criticisms of Brandi:

*While his theoretical writings are admirable, he was a terrible restorer and, although he did not do the work himself, he was responsible for a great deal of damage. I remember his restoration of a masterpiece by Tintoretto, the *Piscina Probatca*.<sup>2</sup> The canvas, as was usual in Venice, was made up of several pieces of canvas seamed together horizontally. [Looms in that period could not produce cloth more than approximately a meter wide.] The composition shows figures seated at the edge of a pool. Some of them have their legs dangling down into the water. The seam happened to coincide with the*

edge of the water. Brandi, convinced it was a later addition, removed it. When I saw the painting reinstalled in the Church of San Rocco, I was aghast to see that it had been mutilated in this fashion. The missing piece had a stone wall, a bit of water and the dangling legs. Old copies and etchings of the painting show it with this part of the composition, which I thought was original. Since it is gone, there is no way to be sure, but even if it was a seventeenth-century addition it was essential to the meaning of the painting and a daring concept at that time. [There is a suggestion in the literature that it was by Jacopo's son Domenico, done not long after the painting was completed.]

Brandi was also a proponent of 'tratteggio', that is replacing missing areas of paint with neutral strokes of color. This was a new idea in this period and was promoted by art historians who were tired of being made fools of by clever restorers. I myself am in favor of neutral zones of some sort in cases when a large part of the painting is missing, but Brandi wanted the restorer's work to be completely scientific so that even small losses were compensated with hatching, an effect I find very disturbing.<sup>3</sup>

Mario was right that experts, quite understandably, did not want to be misled by the work of a restorer. A restoration by the famous Milanese restorer, Luigi Cavenaghi (1844–1918), illustrated what a real master could achieve. In 1924, the Fogg Museum of Harvard University accepted the gift of a *Pietà* by Carlo Crivelli that had been included the previous year in an exhibition at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in London, *Counterfeits, Imitations, and Copies of Works of Art*. The surviving original passages were beautiful and the missing central figure of Christ had been reconstructed with great skill. The museum acquired the painting as “an instructive object lesson to the students who in the future will be museum officials and collectors.”<sup>4</sup>

### ✻ A Brief History of Italian Restoration ✻

Mario was one of the last, and among the greatest, representatives of the traditional approach to the restoration of paintings, known as 'pictorial' restoration. This had produced many distinguished practitioners in the past, particularly the renowned nineteenth-



century school of Italian restoration in Milan and Bergamo, which centered around two men: the art historian and former physician Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891), the originator of the “scientific” approach to connoisseurship, and the chief restorer of the Brera Museum, Giuseppe Molteni (1800–1867).

Both Morelli and Molteni were keenly interested in the first-hand study of old master paintings, including their materials and techniques, as an important element in discovering the identity of the artist and the quality of the work. Molteni’s studio became the center of this developing approach to connoisseurship. The National Gallery of London had only recently begun to build their collection. The keeper and, later, director, Sir Charles Eastlake (1793–1865), his traveling agent, Otto Mündler (1811–1870), and the collector, Austen Layard (1817–1894), formed close friendships with Morelli and Molteni. This group had a decisive influence on international taste in old master paintings and how they should look.

Luigi Cavenaghi was Molteni’s successor. Recognized early on for his talent as a refined draughtsman and gifted painter, he was sent to the Brera from his hometown of Caravaggio when he was twelve years old and became a pupil of Molteni, whose lucrative practice he inherited in 1867. Along with restoring pictures, he continued to paint, and created settings for the collections of his private clients. He acted as a consultant for the Poldi Pezzoli Collection, the Ambrosiana, and the Accademia Carrara, and oversaw the reinstallation of the picture galleries of the Vatican Museum. He was careful about his materials and methods, and his restoration reports are still models of their kind.<sup>5</sup> His expert restorations embraced both Molteni’s pictorial methods, which he seems to have employed for paintings that were privately owned or on the market, along with a more conservative style for badly damaged works in public collections such as Leonardo’s *Last Supper*, which he spent five years cleaning and carefully consolidating without doing any imitative retouching but only toning down the losses. Like Molteni, Cavenaghi enjoyed international fame and

was revered by a succession of Italian government ministers until his death. Cavenaghi's role at the Brera and as principal advisor to the state was inherited by his pupil, Mauro Pellicoli.

A different approach was advocated by Giovanni Cavalcaselle (1819–1897), a contemporary of Morelli and, like him, one of the founders of Italian art history, who in 1863 published an open letter to the recently established government of Italy, in which he argued that conservation rather than restoration should be the primary objective in caring for the artistic patrimony of the state—that is, that the material remains of works of art should be stabilized and preserved as documents of a certain time and place, and the damages should not be retouched for aesthetic purposes.<sup>6</sup> Morelli strongly disagreed with Cavalcaselle, and the two vied to impose their divergent views, a rivalry that sometimes resulted in public quarrels. In 1882, Cavalcaselle criticized Molteni's deliberately balanced cleaning of Raphael's early masterpiece, *The Marriage of the Virgin*, in the Brera, finding fault with the new relationship between the figures and the foreground, while in 1890, Morelli expressed horror at the radical cleaning of Filippino Lippi's frescos in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, carried out under Cavalcaselle's supervision.<sup>7</sup>

These two philosophies coexisted in Italy throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even though Cavalcaselle's views became official policy in the 1880's,<sup>8</sup> a succession of ministers and superintendents continued to favor the work of restorers like Cavenaghi and Pellicoli until the establishment of the ICR.

Towards the end of his life, Cavenaghi defined restoration as, in essence, its own art form, "... an artistic elaboration whose purpose is the integration of a degraded work of art. . . . Restoration must be guided by a deep knowledge of the stylistic characteristics of the various schools, of the calligraphy of the master; it must be thought about and studied at length, doing the least possible and meticulously imitating the original",<sup>9</sup> a description which exemplified Mario's thinking.

The nature of restoration and the relationship of the restorer to the work of art changed under Brandi and Argan whose defi-

tion of restoration was “philological investigation with the aim of recovering and making visible the original text of the work ... carried out by specialized technicians who will be continuously under the control and guidance of scholars.”<sup>10</sup> There was no possibility that restorers would be able to exercise their own judgment. The role of the restorer exemplified by Luigi Cavenaghi was banished in Italy. More than half a century later, Italian restorers have still not recovered their lost status as professionals among the higher castes of art historians and scientists. Restorations are “directed” by art historians and it is not unusual that the restorer remains anonymous. There was no place in this scheme for someone like Mario, with his knowledge, brilliant mind and spirit of independence.

## CHAPTER 6

# War: Rome, Open City

### ☞ Via del Babuino ☞

ITALY DECLARED WAR in June 1940, in the wake of Hitler's invasion of France. Nonetheless, despite the Fascists still being in power, Rome remained an active commercial center with a thriving art world. In 1942 Mario became a partner in a gallery on the Via del Babuino with Enrico Scafetti, with whom he had earlier made the trip to Paris. He described one of their important purchases in his memoir:

*My friend Enrico Scafetti opened a gallery on Via del Babuino with another partner. After a while his partner decided to abandon their activity and my friend, who was not particularly expert in paintings, asked me if I would be interested in working with him. The idea appealed to me because I could continue my restoration work in the gallery in two upstairs rooms that were small but with good light. It was during the war, just before the bombing of Rome and the fall of the Fascist regime and commerce*

*in works of art was suddenly flourishing because people who had money were buying art as an investment.*

*My partner was very good at dealing with clients. He was attractive and cultivated. Before becoming an art dealer, he had a shop on the same street that sold canvas and artist's materials. His uncles, whose family name was Giosi, were in the antiques business in Naples. Occasionally my help would be asked to explain the condition or the attribution of a painting to a potential client. One morning I was working in the studio when an intermediary by the name of Giulio Veneziani told me that he had seen a painting in a villa on Via Appia Antica that he thought was nineteenth-century English. The owner of the house had died recently and the heirs were selling everything. For this painting, they wanted ten thousand lire. He said to me, if you buy it, I expect ten percent of the purchase price. I agreed to that and we went to the villa. The painting hung over the fireplace, in the "best parlor", as it was called in those days. It was a large landscape in an elaborate frame, and it was obviously from the nineteenth-century English school. In the landscape, there were two figures and a dog. I didn't know very much about English paintings, but it was beautiful and we decided to buy it immediately. We paid for it, put it in the carriage, and brought it to my studio.*

*It was black with smoke—evidently it had been hanging over that fireplace for many years. I removed the nails that held the picture in its frame and took the canvas out. To my surprise there was a signature that had been hidden by the rebate of the frame, which was contemporary with the painting. The signature read "John Constable, 1824, R.A.". I immediately began to clean the painting, which had never been touched. This meant first removing the layer of soot and grime with a mild soap and water solution. It cleaned beautifully and underneath there was a slightly yellowed original varnish that I did not remove. I put it back in its frame and we put it in the window of the gallery. A few days later one of Enrico's uncles, Giuseppe Giosi, said he had a client for the painting and asked us to send it to his gallery.*

*I remember that early summer afternoon when we, like everyone else, were hoping to make a decent sale so that we could go away to the seaside or the mountains. Giuseppe Giosi came to the gallery and gave us three hundred thousand lire in bills, which at that time were the size of handkerchiefs. It was a huge amount of money at that time, something equivalent to six hundred million lire today (\$600,000). The painting had been sold to Furmanik, a manufacturer of parachutes. I've never seen it again and have often wondered what happened to it. It was our first important sale.*

The gallery was just across the street from the billiard parlor where Mario still played on occasion, and a friendly neighborhood bar was convenient for the obligatory afternoon espresso. At the news-stand just outside his door worked Rita Venanzoni, a pretty and lively girl who was helping her mother. Rita often hung out at the bar, where she became friendly with the older, charismatic Mario. The ensuing romance lasted for several years, during which time the couple had a child. Mario left his wife, Fernanda, and rented a modern apartment in a neighborhood near the Foro Mussolini on the Via Flaminia. The baby was born in early January 1944, during the German occupation, and was named Antonio, after Mario's father. Rita and Antonio spent much of their time with Mario's mother and sister in their apartment near the Tiburtina train station.

### ☪ The Bombing of Rome ☪

By 1943, the war was going badly. Italy's armies had been defeated on all fronts, and the conflict had expended all the country's resources. Corruption was endemic, and the enormous sums spent on new weapons had proven wasted, because most were shoddily manufactured and faulty. Soldiers froze to death in the mountains of Albania because winter uniforms had never been supplied. Families lived in hope that news of their sons might arrive from one of the various fronts in Greece, North Africa, or Russia. The citizens of Italy had lost their faith in Mussolini and the regime. The final straw was the bombing of Rome by the Allies, especially the raid that brought 150 Flying Fortresses to the skies above the city.

The morning of July 19, 1943, Mario was in his gallery when Rome was bombed:

*Around 11 or 11:30 in the morning I was chatting with a friend at the door of the gallery I had with Scafetti when we heard the sound of hundreds of airplanes*

*flying towards the city. In a few seconds, they were over us and were headed towards the Rome train station, which was their objective. There must have been about 200 planes. Immediately after this, we heard bombs exploding a short distance away. I immediately thought of my mother and my sister with her daughters, who lived in the neighborhood of the station near the railroad bridge on the Via Tiburtina, which was one of the targets of the air raid. I jumped on my Vespa which was in front of the gallery and raced at full speed towards the site of the bombing. When I got to the railroad bridge I found that it was intact and I witnessed a scene that I will never forget. Thousands of people, completely covered with white powder, were running with their household goods, mostly mattresses, carried on bicycles, on their heads, on carts, or baby strollers. It was a spectacle from the apocalypse. Everyone looked like ghosts.*

*I went under the bridge and made my way to the building where my mother lived. The apartment door was open and there was no one in the house. Fortunately, the building hadn't been hit. I went downstairs to the entrance and at exactly that moment my mother, my sister, and her five daughters walked in. We embraced each other and I asked them where they had taken refuge and they answered, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, "under the railway bridge, the safest place." God and the incompetence of the American bombardiers had saved them. Instead of hitting the bridge they had dropped the bombs over the cemetery and the nearby church of San Lorenzo. The flower vendors in the square in front of the cemetery, all poor women, had been massacred. Many buildings had been destroyed, most of them near the cemetery. Evidently the bombs were launched a few seconds late. The pope [Pius XII] came almost immediately to console the survivors and the wounded.*

Never before had a pope left the Vatican spontaneously, without guards or escorts. The act was unprecedented.

Less than a week later, on July 24, the Grand Council of the Fascist Party, which had not convened for many years, met for more than twelve hours. After much behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, late in the night, they delivered a vote of no confidence in Mussolini as the head of the government. The following afternoon, *Il Duce*, turning up at his office as usual, was summoned to the Quirinale by King Vittorio Emanuele III. He was immediately arrested and escorted to a prison in the mountain stronghold of L'Aquila. When the news of Mussolini's arrest was broadcast, overjoyed

crowds poured into the streets of the capital, thinking that the war would soon end.

When the king announced that everything would continue as before, there was great disappointment. With the powerful New York cardinal, Francis Spellman, as a go-between, the pope began negotiating with President Franklin Roosevelt to have Rome declared an 'open city'. This meant that whoever controlled the capital would not defend it, in exchange for the enemy's promise not to bomb it. As the initiative did not produce the desired results, on August 14, 1943, the Italians unilaterally declared Rome an open city, *città aperta*.

The new government prevaricated about signing an armistice with the Allies, who had already taken Sicily and were poised to land on the coast south of Naples. Italy wanted to claim neutrality, which, inevitably, turned out to be an ineffective strategy, offending both sides. Churchill demanded nothing less than unconditional surrender. Germany had already begun to move troops into Italy following the arrest of Mussolini. An armistice with the Allies was finally signed on September 3, 1943, and announced over the radio on September 8. Some Italian air force and navy commanders were forewarned, but on many fronts the news had not yet arrived. The military based in Rome had not been given any instructions regarding the defense of the city. Although they resisted the German attack, they were hamstrung, because they had been ordered to retreat to Tivoli to protect the departure of the government and the monarchy. Chaos ensued and German troops immediately occupied Rome. Thousands of Italian soldiers were massacred or taken prisoner, while the king and top officials fled to Brindisi, a port in southern Italy under the control of the Allies.



### ☞ The German Occupation ☞

The Germans maintained that Rome was still an open city, but this was a fiction. Nazi troops constantly passed through the city under cover of night, headed for the front, and they stored military supplies in various depots near the railroads. The Allies continued to conduct air raids of strategic targets throughout the Occupation, resulting in significant civilian casualties.<sup>1</sup>

Even amid the chaos of war, daily life continued in occupied Rome. Mario's friend Palma Bucarelli, the director of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna, kept a diary<sup>2</sup> during the last six months of the German occupation. It provides some insight into the ordinary activities of Rome's professional class during this period. In it, Bucarelli recounts many visits to Mario's studio on Via del Babuino. Some were related to paintings that had been stolen from the museum and offered to Mario, who recognized them and alerted her. Other times, they exchanged even more valuable information, such as where to buy spaghetti on the black market that day.

Bucarelli describes the everyday inconveniences caused by the sporadic availability of electricity, telephone service, and hot water. Her anti-Fascist friends were in hiding, moving from one house to another, with the constant fear, shared by their friends and loved ones, that they would be arrested. Even so, they continued to engage in subversive activities whenever possible—from printing news-sheets and manifestos to performing more violent actions. It was said that there existed a list of people who were being sought by the SS and the Fascist police. Those who were arrested were brutally tortured and, if they survived, were then thrown into prison, mainly the so-called political wing of Regina Coeli in Trastevere, a former convent that had been converted into a prison in the late nineteenth century.

Food rations were continuously reduced by German decree and there was little available even on the black market. The search for food was constant, and Palma's diary often notes that someone

has told her that a certain item could be had at such-and-such a place if one got there right away. The officially rationed bread, the *pane nero*, was inedible and contained hardly any flour. One analysis described the following ingredients: elm tree pith, a little rye, dried chickpeas, maize, and mulberry leaves.<sup>3</sup> Romans still marvel at the shock they experienced when the American liberating troops presented them with American white bread, the infamous *pane bianco*, which bore little relationship to the bread Italians were accustomed to.

There were some enjoyments to be had: concerts at the Adriano Theater on Sundays, and musical afternoons. Because there was no electricity, everyone went home to bed after the sun set and waited for news of the Allies' arrival, which seemed long in coming. Romans somehow kept their sense of humor and jokes abounded. A wall in Trastevere bore the slogan: "Hold strong, Americans. We are coming to rescue you!" (*Americani! Tenetevi forte! Veniamo a liberarvi!*). The great Italian comedian Totò, appearing in a revue with Anna Magnani, would recount having spotted a dancer he liked in the chorus line and repeatedly inviting her to, "Come forward, come up to the front!" but she refused to move; Magnani demanded, "Why not?" and Toto's reply, "Because she is American!", brought the house down.<sup>4</sup> But joking aside, fifty thousand Allied soldiers died during the four months it took to advance the thirty miles between Anzio, where they landed, and Rome.

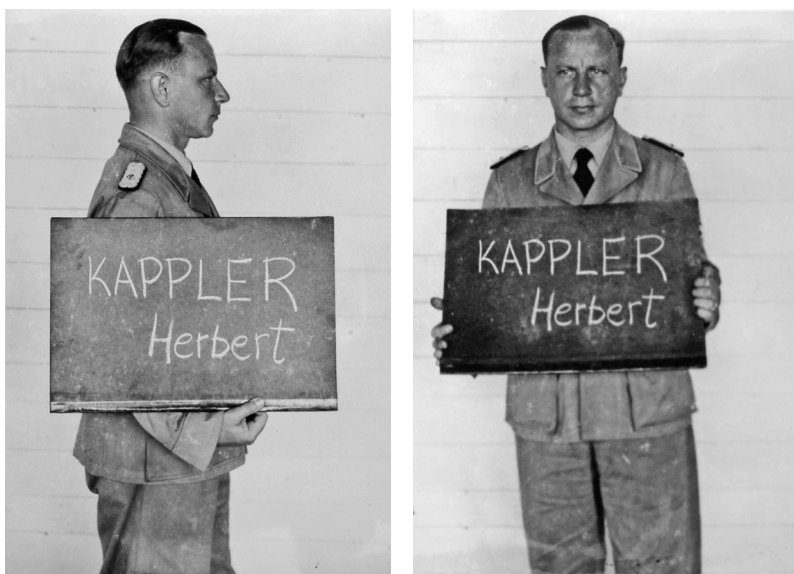
Palma and Mario were among the lucky ones. For many Romans in early 1943, daily life was desperate. Italy's economy had collapsed and food rations were below subsistence levels. Only those who could buy food on the black market, where the prices were approximately ten times the official rate, managed to get by. Thousands died of starvation.

## ☞ The Roman Jews ☞

Less than a month after the occupation of Rome, on September 26, 1943, Major Herbert Kappler, head of the Gestapo, summoned the chief Rabbi of the Jewish community to Villa Wolkonsky, the German embassy. He demanded fifty kilos of gold, threatening the immediate deportation of two hundred Jews from the Roman ghetto to Germany if the request was not met. The ghetto, originally walled with gates and curfews, had been created by Pope Paolo IV in 1555 and was only abolished in 1860 after the unification of Italy. Before that date, the restrictions imposed upon the Jews varied depending on the particular pope, but the obligation to attend a Catholic sermon every Saturday was a constant throughout the centuries although there were few converts. The ghetto walls, along with an ancient warren of rundown alleys, had been demolished in 1888, creating a quarter with wide streets and open spaces. In 1943, it was populated by poor Jews, primarily small shopkeepers and wholesalers.

Many of Mario's colleagues and friends on Via del Babuino were Jewish. He wrote:

*As soon as the German troops arrived the hunt was on for Italian Jews who, up until that time, although living under sanctions, had not been arrested. Via Babuino was a center of art dealers almost all of whom were Jewish. Many had gone to the countryside to hide, some in churches, in convents, or hidden by friends, but others had remained in the city, having changed their address and assumed fictitious names supported by forged documents. Some of the friends with whom I played billiards in a parlor just across the street from my studio were Jews who, their shops closed and having nothing to do, came to pass the time. One day a truck pulled up in front of the billiard parlor. It was full of SS soldiers and they arrested a number of these poor souls, who were never heard from again. One of them was a man called Fiorentini with whom I often played billiards. I had nicknamed him 'mozzarella' because he was such a terrible player and he always lost, especially to me. The Germans put him in the truck and took him away. There were a lot of informants.*



29. Herbert Kappler after his capture by the British in 1944.

Kappler gave the rabbi a deadline of thirty-six hours, and the news quickly spread throughout the city. With some contributions from non-Jewish Romans, and a promise by the Vatican to donate as much as fifteen kilos of gold in the case of a shortfall, the required fifty kilos were collected by 6 p.m. on September 28 and brought to SS headquarters in Via Tasso, where the Jewish representatives were sent away without a receipt of any kind. The Germans were perfidious and the reprieve was brief. Shortly after dawn on October 15, under a drizzling rain, SS troops invaded the ghetto and rounded up 1,259 men, women, and children, who were locked in railway carriages at the Tiburtina train station. A few people risked their lives to deliver packages of food or to carry farewell messages back and forth. In Florence, the Italian train conductor was replaced by a German, and the train proceeded directly to the death camp of Auschwitz, where most of the prisoners were immediately murdered.<sup>5</sup>

The Germans liberated Mussolini from his mountain prison on September 12, 1943, shortly after the occupation, and rather than return the former leader to Rome, they installed him as the head of a puppet government, with his personal guard and Fascist militia, in the northern city of Salò, near Lake Garda.

Although Mario wrote that he and his business partner, Enrico Scafetti, belonged to the Action Party (Partito d'Azione), the details he recounts indicate that he adhered to a different group, the Italian National Democratic Union (Unione Nazionale della Democrazia Italiana). This was a small organization formed by Placido Martini, a socialist lawyer originally from the Castelli Romani, who had been active as an anti-Fascist from the first days of the regime. As a result of his political activities he spent seventeen years in exile at various Fascist confinement prisons. After his release in 1943, he returned to Rome and became part of the resistance. Martini was a lone wolf and an idealist, who rejected membership in the umbrella group of anti-Fascist parties, the National Liberation Committee (Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale, CLN). He believed that the CLN was comprised of the political elite of the past, who would maintain the status quo after the war had ended. This stance would have appealed to Mario who was, by nature, cynical about the instruments of power. The Unione Nazionale operated only in Rome. Their primary activity was to conceal and provide aid to the thousands of soldiers who were either deserting the Nazi-Fascist military or refusing inscription; in most cases they were helped to cross beyond the front lines and return to their families, but around 700 liberated soldiers remained in Rome and became part of the military wing of the group, mounting actions against the Germans and the Fascists. In addition to Martini, a small core group directed these various undertakings, flanked by a few hundred sympathizers, like Mario. The entire leadership of the Unione Nazionale was arrested within a few days in late January 1944 and the organization was effectively wiped out. The party was so small that, for the sake of simplicity, Mario must have decided to say that he belonged to the well-known Partito d'Azione.

The penalties for engaging in even such non-violent activities against the Nazi-Fascists were severe. Offenders were arrested and could be shot or sent to a concentration camp in Germany. Mario was never a military man, but he told me that during that period he kept a revolver hidden in a disused water tank in the lavatory of his studio.

### ☞ A Narrow Escape ☞

When American troops made their carefully prepared landing at Anzio on January 22, 1944, they failed to take immediate advantage of the situation, and as a result, the Germans were able to occupy the mountains, trapping the Allied troops on the beach. However, on the day of the successful landing at Anzio, a patrol of American soldiers had managed to drive as far as the outskirts of Rome, leading the citizens to believe that liberation was imminent and that the Germans were fleeing. In the euphoria of the moment, many resistance groups let down their guard, continuing to meet in public places, planning their activities. They anticipated guerrilla actions and were prepared to mount an insurrection in support of the approaching Allies despite the danger. Herbert Kappler, the head of the SS, was well aware of the damage that such tactics could inflict and already had a network of paid informants in place, either traitors from within the parties or men who had succeeded in infiltrating them. Immediately after the Allied forces landed at Anzio, he ordered a round-up of all those under surveillance or who were suspected of partisan activities. Many members of the liberal and socialist factions of the resistance, such as the *Unione Nazionale* and the *Partito d’Azione*, were arrested while most Communists escaped the dragnet.<sup>6</sup>

Mario wrote about what happened to his friends:

*A few days after the Allies finally landed at Anzio [January 26, 1944] a group of us, all members of the Action Party, decided to celebrate with a lunch at La Rosetta, a famous restaurant in Piazza del Pantheon. We were eleven and the appointment was*

for twelve thirty at the restaurant.<sup>7</sup> That morning, we [Mario and Enrico Scafetti] were expecting one of our regular clients, Antonio Mandolesi, to come to the gallery to see a painting that we had attributed to Turner, although it may not have been by him. In any case, it was a very attractive view of the Grand Canal in Venice. He telephoned around noon to say that he would be fifteen minutes late. I have often asked myself what would have happened if he had not been late for his appointment. It is true that our lives are suspended from a slender thread.

Mandolesi arrived at one thirty and apologized for being late. He began to look at the little picture that I had just cleaned and varnished. He liked it very much and asked the price, after which he did a little negotiating, like any good businessman, offering half of the asking price. Scafetti, who was also a clever businessman, knowing his client well, had asked double what we had decided to sell it for. After a certain amount of bargaining, I succeeded in getting Mandolesi to raise his first offer. In the meantime, it was past two o'clock, and Mandolesi was still there. I said that I had an appointment for which I was already late, at which point he wrote a check and left. I made my way to the Rosetta as fast as I could. I got to the restaurant to find it closed, and there were a lot of waiters and other people standing outside talking. I asked someone what had happened and was told that the SS had come with a van and arrested ten people who were dining at the restaurant. Evidently a traitor had informed the SS about our meeting. The spy was certainly someone in our group, because no one else knew about the meeting. That same evening, those few of us from the directing committee who had not been arrested convened. In the meantime, we had managed to find out that our friends had been brought to Via Tasso, to SS headquarters, evidently to be interrogated. The families were all desperate, and we met every few hours to decide what could be done. We knew that those who were able to afford it could purchase a prisoner's release with gold. Not everyone was in a financial position to buy the gold coins for the ransom. Two of our friends, [Alfredo] Berdini and [Giacomo Marescalchi] Belli, were freed after their wives, at great sacrifice, managed to get enough gold.<sup>8</sup> [Agnese and Alfredo Berdini's grandson, Paolo, became an art historian and often visited Mario when he came to New York.] A high-ranking prelate [Monsignor Giovanni Montini, who later became Pope Paul VI and may have been related to the Berdinis], negotiated on their behalf, and they were released. We were not in a position to do anything for the other eight.

While we were trying to find money to finance their ransom, a terrible incident occurred. A platoon of SS soldiers, consisting of about two hundred men, guarded

the Palazzo Quirinale where the German high command was headquartered. Every day, they paraded through the streets of Rome, from their barracks to the Quirinale, accompanied by a small band, for the changing of the guard. Some partisans from the Communist Party [Rosario Bentivegna and Carla Capponi of the Gruppi d'Azione Patriottica (GAP)] had decided, without telling any of the other opposition parties, to put a remote-controlled bomb in a garbage can on the Via Rasella, part of the daily route of the SS platoon. The bomb was detonated [on March 23, 1944] when exactly half the platoon had marched past the garbage can. It was a massacre; thirty-three soldiers were killed. The surviving SS soldiers immediately began to search all the surrounding buildings, thinking that the bomb had been thrown out of a window. Many people were arrested—including a cousin of mine, who had a shop in that street, practically in front of where the explosion took place. General Kesselring was the commander of the German forces in Rome. He ordered 330 Italians to be shot as a response to the massacre—that is, ten Italians for each German killed. [In the end, 335 men were killed, due to the haste and confusion with which they were selected. When the Germans realized that the count was not right, they decided to murder all of them anyway.]

From the Regina Coeli prison and the SS headquarters in Via Tasso, 330 political prisoners—including our friends and a number of Jews—were rounded up. During the night, SS trucks brought them to the Fosse Ardeatine, as it is known today, on the Via Ardeatina. Their hands were bound behind their backs with wire and they were forced into one of the vast caves where pozzolana earth for making cement was quarried. Each one was killed by a pistol shot to the back of the neck. The horror of the scene is unimaginable. After they had all been killed, the Germans exploded a bomb at the entrance to the cave to seal it off.

About three months later [on June 4, 1944], the American and Allied forces finally liberated Rome from the Germans. With their help, we located the sealed entrance to the cave. The American soldiers made a hole above what had been the entrance to the cave and illuminated the interior with a strong searchlight. The corpses were piled one on top of the other, and the decomposing bodies had emitted vapors, which formed a sort of fog. That night I was unable to sleep or eat and could not help but think that if it hadn't been for that thirty-minute delay I would have been there among them.

A few days later, together with Berdini and Belli, we began the gruesome task of identifying the bodies. Hundreds of the victims' relatives were present. One of our friends, Avvocato Placido Martini, had two gold teeth, but his widow had great



*difficulty recognizing the body because the SS had removed them—probably while torturing him in Via Tasso. Several days later, we learned that the informant had been identified and was dead. He was found near his house with a bullet in the back of his neck.*

The Allied troops wanted to simply seal the cave and declare the site a cemetery, but the wives and relatives of the murdered men, whether Jewish or Catholic, wanted to identify their loved ones and give them a proper burial. The first group that entered saw great mounds of earth, which proved to be piles of bodies thinly covered with dirt. The space in the cave had been too small to hold all 335 men, so the Germans selected the victims in groups of six or eight, shot them in the back of the neck, and then the next group was brought in and made to kneel on top of the dead.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of July, American soldiers began to exhume the bodies. An Italian forensic doctor, Attilio Ascarelli,<sup>10</sup> helped the grieving relatives find their loved ones, a grisly endeavor due to the deteriorated state of the bodies. Twelve bodies remain unidentified, and efforts have recently been renewed to try to match their DNA with that of family members.

After the war, the Nazis and Fascists responsible were put on trial. The Chief of Police, Pietro Caruso, who had helped to round up the victims, was sentenced to death and shot by a firing squad the next day. The director of the Regina Coeli prison, Donato Carretta, was seized by a mob and drowned in the Tiber.<sup>11</sup> Herbert Kappler was tried by an Italian military tribunal and sentenced to life in prison.

For many years, there has been consistent and heated debate over how responsible the partisans who planted the bomb in Via Rasella were for the massacre that followed. The passionate disagreement was perhaps inevitable given the fragmented nature of a resistance movement composed of so many different political parties, in addition to the various independently operated splinter groups, a mirror image of post-war Italian politics. The Action Party belonged to a larger coalition of anti-Fascist groups, the



30. Le Fosse Ardeatine, exhuming the bodies.

National Committee for Liberation, which covered the entire political spectrum from Communists to monarchists and everything in between. The only common ground these groups shared was that they all wanted to fight the German occupation.

The organization responsible for the Via Rasella bomb was a faction within the National Committee, the Gruppi d'Azione Patriottica, GAP, as it was commonly known, which consisted of cells of three or four members, each acting on their own. In fact, for the sake of security, these cells were forbidden from collaborating. Their recruits were mainly university students, and

their purpose was to carry out violent acts against the Nazi–Fascist oppressors, such as committing assassinations and bombing locales frequented by German officers and soldiers. The GAP’s members were audacious, determined, and successful. The cell that carried out the attack on Via Rasella was composed of three people, all in their twenties: Rosario Bentivegna, a medical student and the principal actor, who, disguised as a street sweeper, planted thirty kilograms of dynamite in a public trash bin; Franco Calamandrei; and Carla Capponi. They acted without instructions from, or the permission of, the National Committee for Liberation [the CLN]. According to some writers, one of the GAP’s aims was to provoke the enemy and create a climate of fear and hatred, even if there was no strategic military objective.

German policy clearly stated that, in the case of any action taken against the occupying soldiers, ten Italians would die for every German killed. In the immediate aftermath of the tragedy, many Romans suggested that the partisans responsible should turn themselves in so that other lives could be spared. Mario felt strongly that the attack was an act of useless violence carried out by Communist fanatics and cowards with no loyalties except to the party. In 1949, Rosario Bentivegna and Carla Capponi were given medals of valor. Although Bentivegna defended the bombing as an act of war for the rest of his life, the episode divided not only the populace but the Communist Party itself.

After Via Rasella, the Germans meted out further punishment by reducing the bread ration from 150 grams a day to 100 grams. In some areas, there was no bread at all. The city was full of refugees—half a million had arrived during the two years that preceded liberation—and many people were starving to death in the streets, the hospitals, and the prisons. This is the context of Alberto Moravia’s, *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*), which was made into a film starring Sophia Loren.

There was a follow-up to Mario’s story of the Fosse Ardeatine. In a strange coincidence, while in Monte Carlo in the late 1990s, a friend asked us to join him for drinks at the apartment of Marilu

Mandolesi, an elegant Italian divorcée. Mario chatted with our hostess with his usual ease, particularly as they were both Romans, and her father had been a collector of paintings. She thought that perhaps Mario might have known him—his name was Antonio Mandolesi. Mario turned white. I was standing next to him and, worried, I asked him quietly if there was something the matter. Then, suddenly, I caught on, recognizing the name from Mario's memoirs, which I had been translating into English. This was evidently the same Mandolesi who was late for an appointment, and who had inadvertently saved Mario from the Fosse Ardeatine.

After 271 days of German occupation, at dawn on June 4, 1944, soldiers from the American Fifth Army slowly and stealthily entered the outskirts of Rome. Airdropped leaflets had warned Romans to stay off the streets. There was little resistance. The Nazis and Fascists abandoned their headquarters, jails, hotels, and apartments and fled. General Kesselring, German commander of the Italian campaign, had made the decision to evacuate without attempting to defend the city, abiding by the agreement that Rome was an 'open city'. Most Romans stayed awake all night, watching and listening behind closed shutters. Among them were Mario, his mother, his sister with her five daughters, his companion, Rita Venanzoni, and their five-month-old son, Antonio. Before long, tanks and entire columns of troops from the United States, England, Australia, New Zealand, India, and Morocco began pouring into the streets, and the city gave itself up to delirious abandon. Flour, chocolate, cigarettes, and chewing gum were grabbed in desperation by the starving populace, though these gifts were far too little to satisfy the needs of 1.5 million inhabitants. It would take a long time to address the food shortages, but the terror was over.

## CHAPTER 7

# After the War: Transitions

✿§ Pietro Maria Bardi and the Studio d'Arte Palma §✿

AFTER THE LIBERATION of Rome, Mario resumed work in the gallery on Via del Babuino. He had begun to make a reputation for himself as a restorer and connoisseur of old master paintings. One evening, a stranger stopped by and asked to see the painting in the window, a small panel by Biagio d'Antonio, a fifteenth-century Florentine painter, which was in perfect condition. The client decided to buy it and asked if he could pay in gold. Mario and Enrico had no reason to refuse, and the transaction was completed.

The customer's name was Pietro Maria Bardi (1900–1999), a well-known figure in the cultural world of pre-war Rome. He was a journalist, and a promoter and critic of contemporary art. During the Fascist regime, he had held the important position of director of the Galleria di Roma, the official showcase for modern



31. Pietro Maria Bardi, standing to Mussolini's right, at the formal opening of the *Exhibition of Rationalist Architecture* at the Galleria di Roma, showing the dictator his "table of horrors", a collage of works by academic architects opposed to modernism. Adalberto Libera leans on the table and Giuseppe Terragni is the figure between Mussolini and Bardi. March 30, 1931.

painting and sculpture favored by the regime. He had also been the standard bearer of the Rationalist Architecture Movement, MIAR (Movimento Italiano per Architettura Razionale). MIAR supported the avant-garde tendencies of modern architecture and design influenced by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus, whose dynamism was appealing to Mussolini in the early 1930s, as opposed to the pompous, imperial style of Marcello Piacentini preferred by conservative members of the leadership. Bardi's interest in Fascism, per se, was superficial; like many Italians, he was impressed by Mussolini's heroic masculinity and saw him as a strongman who had struggled and won, the founder of a new society, and the subject of a cult.

Bardi explained to Mario that he was about to open a large gallery, and he wanted it to represent all aspects of art, from the



traditional to the contemporary, and to provide such services as restoration and reframing in order to satisfy all the clients' needs. In the light of his beliefs, Bardi's choice of the overblown complex on Piazza Augusto Imperatore as premises for his new Studio d'Arte Palma was ironic. However, the large spaces and modern facilities were appealing. In addition to galleries, the twenty rooms could accommodate offices, a library, a frame studio, and so on. Bardi needed an expert in old master paintings, about which he knew little, and he invited Mario to set up a state-of-the-art restoration studio and become his partner. He also promised that all expenses and profits would be shared equally. Though Mario was doing well with Scafetti in the gallery on Via del Babuino, particularly after the sale of the Constable, he felt confined by the small space of the restoration studio, which could not even accommodate an assistant. Mario knew this was a great opportunity, and he decided to accept Bardi's offer, dissolving his partnership with Scafetti, much to Scafetti's own disappointment.



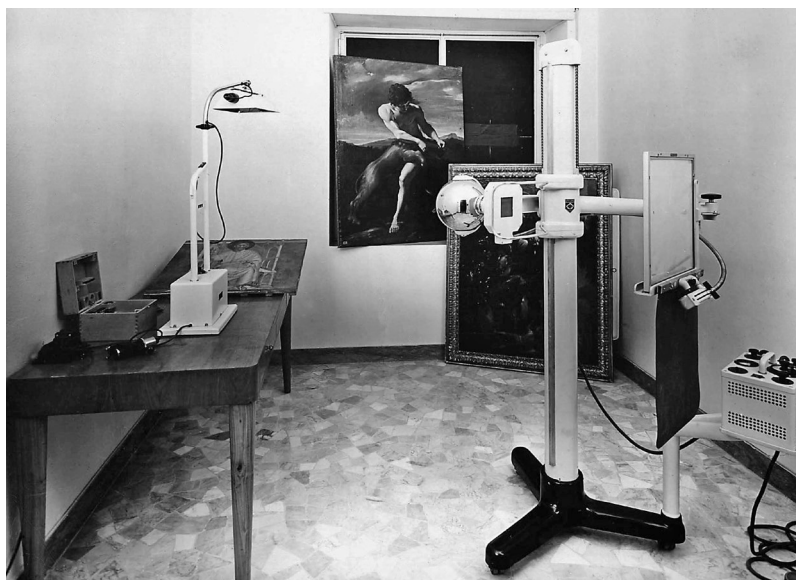
32. The restoration studio with triple north-light window.



## CHAPTER 7

The Studio d'Arte Palma opened in May 1944, not long before the end of the Occupation. (Mario officially became a partner in March 1945, although he evidently was a consultant before that date.)<sup>1</sup> Everyone believed the gallery was named in honor of the charismatic director of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Palma Bucarelli. Although she had not yet reached the powerful position she would later occupy, Bardi had known her for some time and was indeed very taken with her. In any case, the name had a nice ring to it, and Mario claimed that he liked it because he had always admired the great Venetian painter, Palma il Vecchio.

Mario chose three rooms with the best natural light for his restorer's studio. In addition to easels, relining tables, and the usual studio furnishings, he added the latest technical equipment, including microscopes and a machine for x-raying paintings. He had several assistants, including his old schoolmate from the Via San Giacomo, Amleto De Santis, a painter with strong Communist leanings, who had undertaken some particularly dangerous work



33. Examination room with x-ray machine.

during the Occupation, and De Santis's fellow radical, a painter called Giuseppe Barberi, known as Peppino. Their political associations would eventually create some problems during the McCarthy era after they moved to New York to assist Mario. There was also a reliner, Alvaro De Rossi, who bore the odd nickname *Zuppa di Pesce* ('Fish Soup'), and a restorer of antique furniture who specialized in eighteenth-century French *bouille* (a veneer of tortoise shell with inlaid copper designs). His nickname was *Cocilovo*, which means 'cook an egg,' and he was a marvelous craftsman. His workshop was outfitted with benches, machinery, and every woodworking tool imaginable.

The gallery's first exhibition, *Seventeenth-Century Italian Painting*, opened in December 1944 with a catalogue by Mario's friend, the young art historian Giuliano Briganti (1918–1992), who was just beginning to make a name for himself as one of the most intelligent and sensitive interpreters of the seventeenth century in Rome, as well as many facets of contemporary culture in the city.<sup>2</sup> The exhibition was a great success and established the gallery's reputation. The paintings had all been cleaned and restored and were displayed in period frames. According to Mario, five hundred people attended the inaugural evening. At that time, primarily through the efforts of Roberto Longhi, there was a revival of interest in seventeenth-century paintings, which had long been out of fashion.

### ✿ Palma Bucarelli ✿

The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna was temporally housed at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni until a dedicated building was constructed on the Valle Giulia in 1911. Mario began his relationship with the museum under the directorship of Ugo Fleres (see Chapter 2) and continued during the period that Roberto Papini was director. Papini did not have an entirely easy time at the museum. A new wing had been added but he had to deal with much

interference from the government, which appropriated most of the additional space to store works from the exhibition mounted to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Fascism. Political currents also constrained Papini's acquisitions, particularly of contemporary art. In 1941, after Italy entered the war, Papini was drafted to serve in the military. He was pessimistic about Italy's involvement and predicted to Mario that Hitler would win all the battles but would lose the war.<sup>3</sup>

He was succeeded (some, including Mario, suggested that he was ousted) by Palma Bucarelli (1910–1998), at the time a functionary of the Ministry of Fine Arts. Palma, as she was called, was a strong, independent woman with a colorful past in every sense, which she didn't trouble to disguise. Her family was originally Sicilian, but during her childhood they led a nomadic existence following her father's various postings as a government attorney, before finally settling in Rome. She obtained a good degree in art history from La Sapienza and, after passing the entrance examinations for the *sovrintendenza*, was appointed to a junior position at the Villa Borghese in 1933. From there, she rose rapidly through the bureaucracy. While at university, she became involved in a tragic love affair with an older married man, Arduino Colasanti (1877–1935), a distinguished art historian and General Director for Antiquities and Fine Arts, who committed suicide. Not long after, she met the great love of her life, the famous journalist Paolo Monelli, also married at the time, but whom she eventually married in 1963. Monelli was often on the road, affording Palma time to conduct many flirtations and love affairs with powerful men who could advance her interests, such as Giulio Carlo Argan. For this, she won the widely-disseminated sobriquet, "*il terno a letto*" or "lucky in bed", a play on the expression "*il terno a lotto*," meaning lucky at the lottery game. Although ascribed to others, Mario said that the epithet was invented by the witty and sharp-tongued Federico Zeri, which seems entirely plausible.

Palma was an imposing figure who worked obsessively to promote modern and contemporary art from many nations, which

she courageously and successfully exhibited and acquired while director of the National Gallery. It was sometimes even said that the extent of her ambition was rather cold-blooded. Such works include an important 1947 piece by Jackson Pollock, *Watery Paths*, which she succeeded in snatching from Peggy Guggenheim, her American rival with whom she was often compared. Palma scandalized the establishment, as much for her personal life as for her intellectual interests and groundbreaking exhibitions. For these things, she was repeatedly reviled, mainly by the Communist Party and press, who continued to follow the Stalinist line and opposed the abstract art she championed. In fact, the 1959 acquisition of Alberto Burri's *Grande Sacco*, and the 1971 exhibition featuring the ironic *Merda d'Artista* (*Artist's Shit*) by Piero Manzoni—the price of which fluctuated with the market value of gold—prompted parliamentary inquiries.

She had great style and made an indelible impression bicycling around Rome in couture clothing during the German occupation.



34. Palma Bucarelli.

She was known in particular for her eyes, which were a pale blue-violet with silver reflections. Although many artists painted her portrait, Mario thought that none succeeded in capturing her beauty, adding that perhaps only Titian himself could have done her justice. She played politics but had no political allegiance at a time when most Fascists became newly minted Communists to hold on to their appointments and power under the new post-war government. Mario was an old-fashioned Socialist and remained bitter over this papering-over of the Fascist past. It was one of the factors that eventually caused him to leave Italy.

By the 1950s and 60s, Bucarelli had become a celebrity, the most famous museum director in Italy, presiding over grand soirées in her elegant apartment at the museum, her clothes and jewelry rivaling those of such celebrities and fashion icons as Grace Kelly and Maria Callas.

Federico Zeri, a friend of Giuliano Briganti, visited the exhibition of seventeenth-century Italian paintings at the Studio d'Arte Palma and stayed to become Mario's collaborator. Mario described their first encounter in his memoir:

*During the Seventeenth-Century Italian Painting exhibition, among the great influx of visitors, was a young art historian, Federico Zeri. He had just received his doctorate in art history and was working with antiquities, one of his interests, in the Roman Forum. After visiting the show, he asked one of the guards who the owners of the gallery were and if he might talk to them. He introduced himself as an employee of the Ministry of Fine Arts and congratulated us on the exhibition. He knew Giuliano Briganti, who had done the catalogue, since they had both been pupils of Toesca. We talked for several hours, after which Bardi and I looked at each other with the same thought in mind: that the young man was, as the saying goes, 'un pozzo di scienza' ('a well of knowledge'). He could talk on any subject, any painter; he had an incredible memory and knew the provenance of many of the works on exhibition.*

*We asked him if he had some free time to collaborate with us, and he cordially agreed. There was not a day that he did not come to see what I was doing in the restoration studio. He had an insatiable curiosity to know how a work of art was made—something that was not taught at the university, even today. I mean the*

*mechanics of things, such as how a panel is prepared for a gold ground, the tooling of the gold, how Fra Angelico achieved his results, the different types of wood used for panels in different parts of the world. He was interested in the minutest details of the techniques of painting of various schools and periods. When the cases of paintings that I had bought in London arrived, he would study each one and would always find the correct attribution—not only the artist’s name but also the provenance of the painting, where it had been exhibited, and when.*

When the war ended, the art world, even though it had never been entirely dormant, even during the German occupation, fully reawakened. Many new galleries opened, showcasing emerging artists, while literary journals and social gatherings contributed to the rich ferment of cultural life in post-war Rome. The second exhibition mounted at the Galleria d’Arte Palma opened in April 1945. It featured the work of Giorgio Morandi, whom Bardi knew well from his Galleria di Roma days. Mario wrote that the show included approximately one hundred paintings, drawings, and etchings. It was very popular, both a critical and financial success. The still-life paintings were priced from 8,000 to 12,000 lire, which was a large sum of money in 1945. Mario and Bardi became friendly with the president of the British Council in Rome when they exhibited the work of *Fifteen English Painters* in late 1947, a show curated by Herbert Read. The consul wished to buy a Morandi for the Tate Gallery but had no funds so the Studio Palma made a gift to the museum of one of the artist’s still-life paintings. It has a beautiful antique frame, like many of Morandi’s paintings, and is still at the Tate.<sup>4</sup>

☞ Riccardo Gualino ☞

The Studio d’Arte Palma became a magnet for many sophisticated collectors of old master paintings. One of its clients was the Torinese industrialist, intellectual, and philanthropist Riccardo Gualino (1879–1964). Gualino had created a vast network of

businesses that rivaled those of the Agnellis and was courted by Mussolini in the mid-twenties. An open-minded thinker, he was treated as an enemy after he opposed the regime's policy of devaluing the lire. His financial ventures collapsed in 1929, and *Il Duce* took advantage of his bankruptcy to prosecute him for fraud. After a trial that lasted all of ten minutes, he was sent into internal exile—*al confine*—on Lipari, a tiny island off the northern coast of Sicily. Here he became an anti-Fascist of profoundly liberal beliefs. The Fascist punishment of internal exile was not, as Silvio Berlusconi later suggested, sending one's political enemies on a vacation. Although Lipari is now a tourist destination, at that time it was a bleak place, sparsely populated by only a few fishermen. The rations were meagre and the prisoners were policed by violent Fascist militia.

Gualino had been an avid art collector with wide-ranging interests before he was forced to sell many of his acquisitions to settle his debts. After he was released from exile, he recouped some of his fortune and began successful new ventures, which enabled him to begin collecting old master paintings again. His wife, who shared his interests, was a painter, and Bardi eventually arranged a small exhibition of her work. Mario met Gualino in a fortuitous encounter:

*[Gualino] wanted to sell two paintings from his collection, an anonymous Florentine fifteenth-century work and another close to Paolo Veronese. The price for both was one and a half million lire, a fair request, and I started to take out my checkbook. Suddenly he changed his mind and said, why don't I sell you a half interest in the paintings and we will remain partners? I agreed and after a short time I sold both of them for five million lire, which was an excellent profit. He came to my studio to collect his share and told me that, at that moment, Italian paintings could be bought in London at auction for a few pounds each. He asked me if I would be interested in going to London to buy paintings. I said I was interested but the laws in Italy at that time forbade the exportation of currency, as he well knew. He smiled and said, don't worry about that part of it, I can give you a letter of credit drawn on the Midland Bank in London and you can buy all the paintings you want, send them to Italy,*



*sell them here and we will divide the profits. I accepted his offer. I asked our director, [Francesco Monotti], who spoke a little English, to accompany me since I did not know a word of the language. We decided to leave as soon as possible.*

☞ London, 1945 ☞

*We arrived in London in an evening of horrible weather, foggy and cold. We tried to order a meal in the hotel restaurant but there was nothing to be had except tea and black bread. The hotel was an old Gothic-style nineteenth-century horror called the "Imperial Hotel." There was nothing imperial about it. The rooms were cold and dark, with little light. In Italy, even at that time, by comparison we lived like kings. The war had left the city in shocking condition with immense areas of destruction everywhere. You could barely make out where the streets had been amidst the rubble. The center had begun to function, there were some buses and taxis in circulation, and the Underground was working again. Even though our rooms were freezing, we slept deeply, tired from our trip. Francesco contracted a bad cold and had a fever.*

*We called the only person we knew in London, Herbert Matthews, the correspondent from the New York Times. We had gotten to know him when he was posted to Rome and, together with some members of the British Council, had visited the Morandi exhibition. In the morning, we dressed and went downstairs for a breakfast consisting of an omelette made with powdered eggs, a sausage that tasted like it had been stuffed with sawdust, and tea with no sugar or milk. Herbert accompanied us to the bank with the letter of credit, and we opened an account of £10,000, which was a lot of money at that time. We made the rounds of the various auction houses, all nearly empty. Paintings were being sold for nothing, a few pounds each, just as Gualino had said. After the destruction wreaked by the war, there appeared to be no interest in art, and because there were no collectors, the dealers weren't buying either. Private collections were being dismembered to pay for rebuilding and the new, exorbitantly high taxes. The art market was flooded. Aside from the auctions, there were dealers who sold paintings at very low prices. Padre Toncher had shelves full of paintings that were arranged like books. Bellesi was another dealer who sold paintings for two or three pounds; Dent's prices were from five to ten pounds. Everything was black with soot.*

*The first week, I bought about one hundred paintings for a total of £600, including works by Pannini, Zuccarelli, Tintoretto, Garofalo, Dosso, Francia,*

*Solimena, Canaletto, and others. Herbert Matthews invited us to dinner, and we met his wife, Nancie, and their children; it was an extremely pleasant evening. Herbert showed us a small painting by Morandi that he had bought directly from the artist in Bologna. He was very proud, as he had paid very little for it. Francesco went back to Rome after a few days, because he was still sick and could not get better in the dreadful London weather. I asked Nancie Matthews if she would help me buy paintings, as I was not able to make myself understood, and she happily came with me to the auction houses. Nancie spoke a little French and Italian so we were able to communicate perfectly.*

### ☞ Contemporary Art at the 'Palma' ☞

Pietro Maria Bardi's strengths were different from Mario's. Bardi had always moved through the modern and contemporary art world with ease, and he was a brilliant organizer. After the success of the Morandi exhibition, the gallery mounted, in quick succession, shows of Giacomo Manzù, Filippo De Pisis, Corrado Cagli, Renato Guttuso, and other modern painters, many of whom were Bardi's friends from his days at the Galleria di Roma before the war. Both figurative and abstract artists were represented without distinction, despite the split between the two groups that occurred after the war, with the Communists espousing figurative painting in line with Stalin's ideas about art, and the liberals supporting abstract and conceptual trends.

Corrado Cagli had been a fixture in the pre-war art scene, particularly at the small chic gallery, La Cometa, founded and directed by the society figure Contessa Laetitia Pecci Blunt, known to her friends as Mimì. It became a popular gathering place for artists and intellectuals of all sorts. The countess's title had been bestowed upon her by her great uncle, Pope Leo XIII (Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci), by combining the noble name, Pecci, with that of her husband, Cecil Blunt. Blunt was a wealthy New York banker, born Cecil Blumenthal, who had converted from Judaism to Catholicism and changed his surname. The Count and Countess

Pecci Blunt lived in a fifteenth-century palace near the Ara Coeli; the name is still carved into the palace's marble lintel in Roman lettering. When the racial laws were passed in 1938, among other restrictions, Jews were forbidden to own property and Jewish businesses were confiscated. The Galleria La Cometa was forced to close due to its association with 'Zionist art', and the Pecci Blunts moved to New York. Here they met Renzo Ravà, another Jewish exile from Florence, who was to become Mario's closest friend after the war. Corrado Cagli, who was also Jewish, left Italy around the same time, becoming an American citizen in 1941.

He joined the US army and witnessed the horrors of Buchenwald; the group of drawings he made there was exhibited at the Studio d'Arte Palma in November 1947. At the inauguration, a fight broke out between the figurative artists, the Communists, and the abstract artists, who were liberals and moderates. The latter mounted a collage at the gallery's entrance that featured some of Cagli's pre-war works with images of *Il Duce*, meant to serve as a reminder not only of Cagli's recent collaborations with and support for the regime, but also that of his fellow Communist painters. This led to the throwing of punches and the arrest of a number of painters, who ended the evening in detention at the local precinct. The incident remains famous in accounts of Rome's post-war art scene, though oddly enough, Mario never spoke of it, possibly finding the whole affair ridiculous.<sup>5</sup> He continued buying paintings in London and restoring them, as well as works belonging to various museums, including the Spada, Corsini, and Barberini Collections. The market for old masters was very active, and Mario said that when the paintings arrived from London, there was a line of dealers waiting to see them.

The Studio d'Arte Palma also offered Mario an opportunity to pursue another of his long-standing interests by allowing him to mount what may have been the very first exhibition of antique frames. This exhibition showcased a number of the finest examples Mario had been able to assemble over the years.<sup>6</sup> Mario first developed an appreciation for frames when he was a boy of



35. Exhibition of antique frames at the Studio d'Arte Palma in the late 1940s.

fourteen in his father's *bottega*. At that time, very few people took an interest in frames, and they could be acquired for prices ranging between 150 lire and 300 lire.

The cheaper frames included numerous examples of the seventeenth-century *pagnottella* type, of which there were provincial variations from the Marches, Naples, and Genoa, silvered and finished with a golden lacquer tinted with dragon's blood and gamboge to resemble gold. The most highly prized were fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florentine, Venetian, and Bolognese models, some designed by noted sculptors. Mario learned to identify their style, period, and origin. The Studio d'Arte Palma gave him an opportunity to share his passion for frames with the public.

This appreciation for antique and the occasional original frame contrasted with the usual practice in the art market of replacing old frames with modern reproductions. Joseph Duveen, the leading purveyor of old master paintings in the early part of the twentieth century, notoriously removed the existing frames from every painting that passed through his hands, replacing them

with new examples more to Duveen's taste. In museums across the United States, it is often possible to identify a Duveen provenance from the frames. For Renaissance works, Duveen commissioned frames from the Florentine dealer, frame maker, and occasional forger Ferruccio Vannoni, an associate of Federico Joni. Vannoni was a wonderful designer, and each of his frames is different—in itself a work of art with a distinct personality. Frames for eighteenth-century English portraits, a specialty of Duveen, were made in Paris based on French models. The elaborate ornaments are made of recut gesso—a finishing technique that involves re-carving the final, fragile gesso layer before gilding. They look like chiseled bronze. Today, antique frames are difficult to find and are valued as works of art in their own right. Curators and collectors seek to replace reproductions with period pieces and prices have risen accordingly.



36. A small tabernacle frame created by Ferruccio Vannoni for Duveen to house the *Madonna and Child with a Pomegranate* by the young Leonardo da Vinci.

## CHAPTER 7

After the war, life in Rome returned to a kind of normality. By 1947, the Studio d'Arte Palma enjoyed international success, and the two principals, Mario and, especially, the extroverted Bardi, had enlarged their circle of friends and business acquaintances. For the first time in his life, Mario was prosperous, and he bought and restored a *casa colonica* on the Via Appia Antica. The Via Appia Antica is a unique road, shrouded in mystery, studded with Roman ruins. At that time, many film stars resided in the neighborhood, behaving scandalously at drunken parties. Ava Gardner, who had lately left Frank Sinatra, was a temporary resident. While she lived there she conducted a tumultuous love affair with the great Spanish bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguín.

By the end of the decade, both Mario and Bardi, for quite different reasons, would leave Rome. However, the heady post-war years were filled with serendipitous encounters and unexpected opportunities, which would have far-reaching consequences for both of them.



37. Mario in the late 1940s.



☞ Cesare Zavattini ☞

Mario met Cesare Zavattini (1902–1989) in 1943 or early 1944, when Zavattini was already a successful writer of stories and screenplays, and a well-known gadfly. In the post-war period, he gained international fame for his collaborations with many of the great neorealist filmmakers, including Federico Fellini. He worked on such masterpieces as Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma, Città aperta* (*Rome, Open City*) Vittorio De Sica’s *L’Oro di Napoli* (*The Gold of Naples*), with the young Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni, and, later, *La Ciociara* (*Two Women*). He was nominated for an Oscar in 1948 for his script for De Sica’s *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*)



38. Mario's copy of the 1944 edition of one of Zavattini's books.  
The painting is on the back cover.



and again in 1952 for the motion picture *Umberto D.*, which Ingmar Bergman called his favorite film. Perhaps Zavattini's most famous collaboration with De Sica was on *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, 1970). His stories deal with the tragic fate of the many poor and downtrodden characters that filled Rome in the early 1950s. They are terribly sad, and I have always found them difficult to watch.

Within a short time, Mario and Zavattini became good friends. In that period, the writer decided that he wanted to paint, and he began to make tiny pictures of religious subjects, such as funerals and crucifixions in a deliberately naïve style, although, as he himself said, he had no talent for painting (“*negato per la pittura*”). Mario treasured a book Zavattini had given him: a minute volume, eight by six centimeters, and on the back cover, a heavily impastoed painting by the author of a priest saying mass in front of an altar. It is inscribed: “*Caro Mario. Questo è il primo colpo che do alla nostra amicizia*” (This is the first blow to our friendship). I do not know if he was referring to his own abilities as a painter or to the subject of the illustration, since Mario was fervently anti-clerical.

Zavattini was an extravagant and extroverted nonconformist, otherwise Mario's strange story about circumcision would be difficult to believe.

*One morning, Zavattini stopped by my studio and said to me, “Mario, I have decided to declare solidarity with these poor Jews by having a circumcision. Do you know a urologist?”*

*“Of course,” I replied, “he is a friend. If you want, I can telephone him right away. And I agree with you, so I will have myself circumcised too.”*

*“You're a real friend,” he replied.*

*We went to Doctor Granata in Via Frattina, who, when we told him what we wanted to do, said, “You're crazy! What if the SS arrests you? They'll think you're Jewish. I have never met anyone who wanted to be circumcised at your age and in such circumstances, but there's a first time for everything.” We explained to him the reason for our decision. It turned out to be an easy operation, fast and simple. We left feeling very satisfied.*

Zavattini came up with another idiosyncratic idea: to make a collection of self-portraits by contemporary painters, each eight by ten centimeters in size. As soon as he began publicizing this project, sometime around 1941, many artists agreed to participate, including Mario himself and Pietro Maria Bardi.

This collection of tiny self-portraits—all framed with the same simple molding—eventually grew to more than 1,500 pictures and covered every wall of Zavattini's apartment. It represented the entire history of Italian painting in the twentieth century, and ultimately became quite valuable, especially the self-portraits by famous artists. In 1979, financial circumstances prompted Zavattini to sell the entire collection at auction. Much of it is now dispersed, although the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan eventually purchased 152 of the best examples.

Many years later, Mario had the occasion to reminisce about his friendship with Cesare Zavattini with Jennifer Jones, one of the famous Hollywood actresses Zavattini had worked with, who was married to the great collector Norton Simon. The actress had starred in one of Zavattini's films, *Stazione Termini*, directed by De Sica and released in 1953 as *Indiscretion of an American Wife*. The movie did not have much success, despite the fact that it starred Jones and Montgomery Clift as the two lovers. In the late 1980s, Mario and I were in Los Angeles, and Norton Simon, who had worked with Mario for many years and often sought his advice, invited us to lunch. Simon was by that time severely disabled by a rare nerve disease, Guillain-Barré syndrome, and was confined to a wheelchair. He and Jennifer Jones lived in a modest ranch house at the top of one of the canyons, filled with wonderful Indian sculptures and second-tier post-Impressionist painters.

I had loved Jennifer Jones ever since I saw *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* when I was ten years old, and I was thrilled to have a chance to meet her. We were sitting around the dining table, Simon talking about this and that, but mostly about the purchases he had made that were now hanging in the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, which we had toured with him that afternoon. Most of

his remarks concerned the prices he had paid for the paintings and what they might be worth on the current market, which belied his great eye for quality and his achievement as a private collector. After all, he had assembled a collection that, at that time, rivaled—if not surpassed—that of the Getty and a number of other museums.

Suddenly, Jennifer Jones swept in, wearing a marvelous red satin full-length dress with a matching cape lined with pink satin. She looked and moved like a queen and I was totally star-struck as she talked about the various films she had played in while Simon gently teased her about being a ham actor. They clearly adored each other. She and Mario reminisced about Rome in the early 1950s, her role in De Sica's film and about Cesare Zavattini. When we were back in New York, she sent us a copy of *Stazione Termini* accompanied by a gracious note. I loved it and watched it many times.

### ☞ Ischia ☞

In the late 1940s, Mario acquired another house. He told me that, one day, after spending hours bent over his worktable at the Studio Palma, his back locked and he couldn't straighten up; his assistants had to carry him out in that position. He knew that in Ischia—a large volcanic island in the Gulf of Naples, near Capri—there were centers that used the local “radioactive” mud to cure all sorts of infirmities, especially those involving bones and muscles. Mario went to the island, and after spending a couple of weeks receiving mud therapy at the Regina Isabella Hotel, his back was healed. Ischia was only just being discovered as a resort at that time, and so the island was still very simple, with just thirty thousand inhabitants. Mario told me that it was made up mostly of fishing villages, with just a few dirt roads that were traveled only by the occasional donkey cart. He fell in love immediately and bought a piece of land in Lacco Ameno overlooking the Spiaggia degli Inglesi, where he built a house.

In the sixties, Ischia became the center of a glittering international scene, with famous residents including Luchino Visconti and the English composer, William Walton. High-society figures and Hollywood stars came to visit. By the eighties, the island had been overdeveloped and was not quite so exclusive. Although today the area around the port is crowded with day-trippers from Naples and much of the coast has been spoiled, when Mario lived there it was known as 'Paradise Island' and until he sold it around 1980, he went every summer, usually in August, to paint and entertain friends.

## CHAPTER 8

# The Florentine Connection

### ✿ Gualtiero Volterra ✿

ON ONE OF HIS TRIPS to London, Mario met the Florentine art dealer Gualtiero Volterra (1901–1967), the buying agent and partner of the marchand amateur Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Volterra was the youngest son of a family of Jewish antiquarians, and in addition to being a gifted connoisseur of Italian paintings, he was a brilliant concert pianist. Volterra had been a child prodigy, and Mario remembered hearing him perform at the Teatro Augusteo in Rome. In Florence, he had met and married an Australian music student, Patricia Kelly (1907–1993). Although his concert career was cut short—he was forced to take over the family’s failing business after the Wall Street crash caused a worldwide financial debacle<sup>1</sup>—Volterra and his wife remained important figures in the Florentine music world, and he continued to play the piano for several hours

each day in a soundproof studio that he had built in his villa, La Limonaia, at Bellosguardo. In 1939, Volterra, together with his wife and daughter, found refuge in Sydney, where they stayed until the war was over. With the exception of one nephew, the entirety of Volterra's family was rounded up during the German occupation of Florence and sent to the death camps in Germany.<sup>2</sup>

When Mario met Volterra, the Florentine dealer was negotiating for a group of works, primarily large altarpieces, from a renowned English collection that had been assembled by Sir Francis Cook in the second half of the nineteenth century and, to a lesser extent, by his grandson, Herbert Cook, an independent-minded amateur art historian. They assembled well over five hundred paintings, many of which had been sold by 1945. However, some gems still remained in the collection as unattributed or incorrectly catalogued works, and these continued to emerge years later.

At Gualtiero's recommendation, Contini Bonacossi began sending Mario some paintings to restore, including the Cook altarpieces, and asked him to come to Florence to look after additional works in his collection. Before the war, this role had been filled by Mauro Pelliccioli.

✿ Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi ✿

Mario had met Contini a few years earlier:

*I knew Contini already in another context. It was through a painting that I owned together with Emanuele Sestieri. One evening towards the end of the war I stopped by Sestieri's gallery, just inside the entrance of a building where there was also a tobacco shop. Emanuele was one of the great art dealers of his time. He said to me, "Mario, today I bought a painting which is driving me mad. I cannot figure out who is the artist." He showed me a small panel. I looked at it and said, "This is by Sassetta and it represents the death of Saint Anthony. It is one of the predellas of the altarpiece of which the central panel is now in the Louvre." Sestieri looked at me and said, "Mario, you have been very honest to tell me that. You could have kept it to yourself and bought*

*the painting, which I would gladly have sold to you. I will give you a half share of the painting at the price you would have paid.” I wrote a check and thanking him, wished him a pleasant evening.*

*Federico Zeri, the young art historian, today world famous, who worked with me at the Galleria Palma, went to see the painting the next day, and, in great excitement, told me the artist was not Sassetta but the Master of the Osservanza, a pupil of Sassetta who at that time was confused with the artist himself. The painting was in excellent condition. I removed the old varnish, did a few retouches in tempera, and revarnished it. Bardi was enthusiastic about our acquisition and began to think about a possible buyer. Count Contini, the greatest collector of Italian painting, came immediately to mind.*

Before moving to Florence, Count Contini and his wife, Vittoria, had lived in a grand apartment on the Via Nomentana, one of the most fashionable streets in Rome at that time. The couple became successful dealers while maintaining their status as marchands amateurs. Margherita Sarfatti, cultural icon and ex-mistress of Benito Mussolini, noted that Contini had great success selling paintings to the Nazis in the early 1930s.<sup>3</sup> Mussolini conferred the title of “count” on Alessandro and appointed him senator for life after he donated a collection of paintings to the Museum of Castel Sant’Angelo.

Around 1930, the Continis bought a nineteenth-century villa on the outskirts of the historic center of Florence. This villa was originally known as the ‘Strozzina’, or ‘little Strozzi’, because it had been constructed by a member of the same Strozzi family that had commissioned the famous Renaissance palace. By the time Mario and Bardi visited, it had been renamed Villa Vittoria, in honor of the countess.

*Bardi and I went to Florence and the count gave us an appointment that very morning. As we went through the gates of the Villa we were struck by the beauty of the magnificent garden, full of wonderful flowers, many types of rose bushes, and trees which seemed to date from the Renaissance. The entrance to the palace itself was a monumental staircase that ascended to the first floor. There were two landings and on each one was a pair*



*of life-size, sixteenth-century angels, of polychromed wood with great gilded wings. The entrance hall contained Renaissance furniture of carved walnut, partially gilded, typical Florentine work. It was breathtaking. We were conducted to a green sitting room with similar furnishings, hung with old master paintings.*

*After about ten minutes the count appeared. He was about six feet tall with a head like a Roman senator and slightly cross-eyed. His hair wrapped around his skull to conceal his bald pate, and he had a very forceful manner. We showed him the little panel. Like the clever dealer he was, he remained poker-faced. He asked the price and we told him we were asking fifty million lire at which point he shifted in his chair and said, no, it's not worth that price: I will buy it for forty-five but on the condition that I pay you half in money and the other half in trade for objects and paintings. We replied, well, let's have a look at what you are offering and we began to tour the galleries where there were masterpieces worthy of the Uffizi. Over every doorway was a majolica relief by one of the Della Robbia. Each room was named after a great artist whose works could be seen there: the Bellini room, the Titian room, the Tintoretto room, the Sassetta room, the Bramantino room, the Andrea del Castagno room, the Piero della Francesca room, and so on. The family's living quarters were on the upper floor, furnished in impeccable modern taste by Gio Ponti, the well-known architect and designer, and hung with works by contemporary Italian artists.*

*Contini took us to a large storeroom full of furniture, majolica, sculptures, pictures and so on. Some of the furniture was very beautiful. We selected a sixteenth-century walnut and gold table, an exceptional example, which is today in the Museum in São Paulo, as well as other extraordinary pieces. Among the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings we took one representing an Allegory of Music, which had been exhibited as a Velázquez in an exhibition of Spanish painting at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Rome in 1931 with a catalogue by Roberto Longhi. When I brought the painting to Rome and cleaned it I found the signature, "Mengs", which had been covered, probably before the count bought it.*

The identification of the Master of the Osservanza has always been contentious and became the subject of a quarrel between Cesare Brandi, who identified him as Sano di Pietro, and Roberto Longhi, who believed that he was an independent artist. The problem of associating the prolific and pedantic Sano, who signed his first work in 1445, with the creator of the poetic earlier

paintings was explained succinctly by Federico Zeri who wrote, “The anonymous painter is far too intelligent to be identified with Sano ... even though the morphological details share a striking similarity.”<sup>4</sup> Mario’s panel of the *Death of Saint Anthony* is now at the National Gallery in Washington, along with three other panels of the series. As Miklós Boskovits notes in his catalogue entry for the painting, a total of eight panels depicting episodes from the life of Saint Anthony have been identified as belonging to the same altarpiece in which they were arranged vertically around a central figure, probably of Saint Anthony, although the scholar does not believe this to be the fragment in the Louvre. The original destination of the altarpiece remains a matter of speculation, as does the date, with the weight of opinion, based on stylistic comparisons with documented works, tending to place it in the early 1430s. Over the years, the attribution has shifted from Sassetta, to the Master of the Osservanza, to the young Sano di Pietro with many art historians suggesting that the series represented a



39. Count Alessandro Contini  
Bonacossi.



40. Donna Vittoria.

collaboration among all three painters.<sup>5</sup> Recently a document came to light recording a payment for the altarpiece of the *Birth of the Virgin* in Asciano, in the past widely accepted as entirely by the Master of the Osservanza, to Sano di Pietro, ending seventy years of impassioned debate.<sup>6</sup>

☞ Sandrino Contini Bonacossi ☞

A few years later, when Mario began to restore paintings from Contini's personal collection at the Villa Vittoria, he became close to the family, which consisted of the count, Donna Vittoria, their two children, Alessandro and Vittorina, and a nephew who was also called Alessandro, nicknamed Sandrino so as not to confuse him with his older half-brother. Sandrino's genealogy was complex. Count Contini's brother, Oscar, married Beatrice Galli, the daughter of Countess Vittoria by a previous marriage. The couple moved to Argentina and in 1913 Elena became pregnant with twins. She gave birth in January 1914. Only one of the infants survived and the mother herself died two days later. Oscar Contini died in 1916. The count and countess brought the orphaned baby to live with them. He called them both mamma and papa but, in reality, they were his grandmother and uncle.

The count and countess adored Sandrino, the youngest of the family. When still a child, he developed a malformation of the spine. Vittoria did everything possible to correct the problem. His doctors prescribed a metal corset to be worn during the day and removed only at night. For this reason, Sandrino could not attend school and was educated at home by tutors. Perhaps it was this deformation that caused him to be full of complexes, with a sense of inferiority that manifested itself particularly in the self-destructive relationships with women that led to his tragic death many years later.

Sandrino was cultivated and brilliant and held two doctoral degrees, in art history and in literature. Those who knew him

recall an extraordinary personality, jovial, alert, a prankster, always ready with a facetious remark. His sense of humor was typically Florentine, edgy and biting. He was an anti-fascist and belonged to the Action Party. Immediately after the German occupation in September 1943, he was entrusted by the Florentine division of partisans, *Giustizia e Libertà*, with such essential but dangerous tasks as stockpiling stolen weapons, making explosives, carrying out acts of sabotage, and rescuing prisoners from the Nazi-Facists. Under the nom de guerre, *Vipera*, after the liberation of Florence he continued to fight courageously with other partisan brigades in northern Italy until the end of the war and engaged in political activity as the representative of the Tuscan section of the CLN to the Allied Forces.<sup>7</sup>

After the war, Sandrino became the count's secretary, taking care of the business aspects of buying and selling works of art, and was the effective curator of the Contini Bonacossi Collection. The count's older son, Alessandro, had other interests. He was a completely different character from Sandrino, a poet, rather serious and gloomy. The two men did not get along particularly well and Sandrino nicknamed his half-brother *Conte Pioggia* (Count Rain).

Mario and Sandrino immediately became friends.

*Many times, while I was working in the Villa, I stayed for lunch and dinner with the Continis. They had a Russian cook who was fantastic. She cooked both French and Italian food. I will never forget her ravioli and her tagliatelle. Almost every evening we stayed at the table after dinner, and, as we talked, mainly about paintings, Sandrino would take the glasses and build an enormous pyramid. The count watched him, suffering, until finally, thinking the pyramid would collapse, he yelled with a deep voice, "Sandrino! Stop it!"*

When Sandrino was in his early thirties, he met an actress, Elsa De Giorgi, at a society party in Rome. She was headstrong and ambitious and the idea of becoming a rich countess was appealing. She began a flirtation with Sandrino. Knowing Sandrino's weaknesses, Count Contini and Donna Vittoria were alarmed by this turn of

events, but Sandrino was so enamored that there was no opposing him. Elsa had managed to charm the Longhis, especially Roberto's wife Anna Banti, who pleaded her case. They were married in Rome in 1948. At first, they lived at Villa Vittoria, however, the countess could not bear the pretensions and airs that the actress immediately began to assume, and was not willing to allow her to dominate the household. To avoid friction, Count Contini bought the couple a house on the Via San Leonardo, perhaps the most beautiful street in Florence, just above the Forte Belvedere. Sandrino adored his wife and tried to satisfy her every whim.

### ☞ Roberto Longhi ☞

While working on Contini's collection, Mario collaborated with Contini's advisor, Roberto Longhi, whom he had first met at the time of the Rospigliosi sale. Longhi was born in 1890 in the small Piedmontese town of Alba. After finishing his studies with Adolfo Venturi at La Sapienza in Rome his first job was teaching art history at two Roman high schools. One of his students, the nineteen-year-old Lucia Lopresti, fell in love with him, and they married in 1924. She became an acclaimed novelist and is better known by her pen name, Anna Banti. However, Longhi did not seem to have been cut out for marriage. The couple was constantly in competition with each other, and they were famously unhappy together. Both Mario and Count Contini wondered whether it was love or hate that kept them together, for the answer was unclear.

Longhi first met the Continis toward the end of the First World War, when he was stationed with their son, Alessandro. Recognizing Longhi's gifts, they brought him into their circle. Between 1920 and 1922, the Continis traveled throughout Europe with the young expert, looking at some of the world's greatest collections and buying paintings. The Continis educated themselves, and Longhi polished his skills. During that trip, he kept a travel diary written in a self-invented shorthand.<sup>8</sup> He earned his first

## CHAPTER 8

university appointment in Bologna, in 1934, and in 1939, moved to a small villa in Florence. For most Italians, belonging to the Fascist party was a necessity and he became an influential figure during the regime; he was an advisor to Bottai, the powerful minister of culture, and was involved in all the important issues and decisions of his time. Longhi's passion for the visual and literary arts of all periods caused him to embrace such contemporary artists as Boccioni and De Chirico, among others, and he was involved in the lively art scene in Rome, as well as actively engaged with a number of avant-garde writers. These wide-ranging interests suffused his perceptions of many schools of painting that had previously not been appreciated, such as fourteenth-century Bolognese painting in which he teased out resonances of expressionism and abstraction.<sup>9</sup> When Mussolini made an alliance with Hitler in 1941, Longhi publicly denounced the fundamental basis of German aesthetics as "hysterical, stifled, and, above all, racist."<sup>10</sup> When the government collapsed in 1943, Longhi renounced Fascism and was suspended



41. Roberto Longhi, ca. 1930.

from his professorship at the University of Bologna for two years. In the post-war period both he and his wife had Communist sympathies.

In 1949 Longhi was appointed professor at the University of Florence. His facility in reading paintings—making them divulge their long-kept secrets—was extraordinary and derived from his method of intense scrutiny paired with study of the historical documents and context. The acuity, speed, and accuracy of his attributions made some of his English and American contemporaries think that he dabbled in black magic, which was an idea encouraged by his appearance, described by Federico Zeri as “smoky bronze, like an Indian or gypsy.” (“Il colore del viso, non scuro né abbronzato, ma simile alla sfumatura bruna che caratterizza gli zingari e certi indiani.”<sup>11</sup>) In addition to his indisputable genius as a critic and art historian, Longhi is also considered one of the finest prose stylists of the Italian language of the twentieth century.

Longhi’s relationship with the American critic Bernard Berenson began on a positive note in 1922, when the young scholar wrote Berenson a flattering letter, asking if he could translate his quartet of books, essential texts of Italian art criticism for the Anglo-American world, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (1894), *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1897), and *The North Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (1907). Berenson acquiesced and the work began in a promising manner, but it was soon halted after Longhi’s interpretation began to irk the older man. There would be considerable rancor—at which both men were adept—over the decades, until they reconciled not long before Berenson’s death.

Longhi was both admired and feared. Some of his former pupils speak of him with resentment. He was known for stinging jokes and wordplay; for example, he scorned the pupils of his rival, Mario Salmi, by deliberately conflating their surnames, so that Luciano Berti and Umberto Baldini became Bertini and Baldi. The entire fourteenth-century Sienese school was dismissed as “one of



those Memmis" (*uno di quei Memmi*), after the artist Lippo Memmi, and Sano di Pietro became Sano di Dietro (Sano from behind).<sup>12</sup> He often made stinging remarks; of an art critic to whom he had listened with apparent interest he opined, "*Sì, è bravo. Peccato che in un suo scritto su Firenze scambiasse per trecenteschi i campanili costruiti nell'Ottocento.*" (Yes, he's very good. It's a pity that in one of his publications about Florence he mistook bell towers constructed in the nineteenth century for thirteenth-century originals).<sup>13</sup> He turned his pupils against each other or used them as indentured servants.

Longhi amassed a wonderful collection of paintings, most of them out of fashion at the time, and each in marvelous condition under thick deposits of grime and discolored varnish. They are invariably examples of schools he studied, or painters whose identity he had established. There are also a number of paintings by his contemporaries, especially Giorgio Morandi, the great metaphysical painter, with whom Longhi shared a deep and abiding friendship, as attested by their extensive correspondence. He smoked continuously. In every photograph of Longhi, he has a cigarette in his mouth, and although it eventually killed him, he managed to live until the age of eighty. The paintings still hang in his house in Florence, which is now a foundation that also houses his library, photographs, and archives.

Mario seems to have been one of the few people who did not experience the dark side of Roberto Longhi's personality. When it came to the difficult people he encountered in his professional life, like Longhi, Mario adopted a stance of complete detachment. He did not believe in wasting his energy on pointless squabbles, and so he let any unpleasantness slide off. He was never defensive, and was an excellent and subtle judge of character. He enjoyed the security of being confident in both what he knew and what he did not. On occasion, Mario did lose this preternatural patience. This rarely happened, but it was very effective when it did. In most cases, though, he simply noted people's behavior, filed the information away, and acted accordingly in the future.

☞ Bernard Berenson ☞

Mario had decidedly mixed feelings about Bernard Berenson (BB), to whom he was introduced by Rush Kress, probably soon after he began work for the Kress Foundation. He wrote about this first encounter:

*Once Mr. Kress took me to visit BB at I Tatti. Apart from his inability to recognize fakes, he was the greatest non-Italian art historian of Italian painting of the Renaissance. His culture was vast and his memory that of a genius. He was one of the most extraordinary people whom I have had the good fortune to know. He made a striking impression on everyone and inspired great respect. When he entered the room, his appearance galvanized the group. He looked very ascetic, with a penetrating gaze in a sensitive and intelligent face. His eyes scrutinized everyone, trying to divine what sort of intellect each possessed.*

*He asked me to accompany him on his daily walk through the gardens, which was considered a great privilege. We strolled and talked and I addressed him as 'Professor'.*



42. Photo of Berenson inscribed to Rush Kress.

*He replied, "I am not a professor". We continued our walk and I decided I should call him 'Maestro'. Again, he interrupted, saying, "I do not have an orchestra. Please just call me Mr. Berenson."*

Over the years, Mario's attitude to Berenson developed into something more complex, as the two men came into conflict over Kress acquisitions. Mario grew critical of Berenson's abilities as a connoisseur, though he did not, for the most part, believe the famous scholar's motives to be dishonest. As a mild form of retaliation for their spats, Mario enjoyed recounting anecdotes about Berenson, which were usually related to the expert's uncertainty about the difference between a fake and an original. In his memoir, he shared the following story, which took place in the late 1940s:

*One morning, Count Contini greeted me with a little gold-ground painting by Pietro Lorenzetti of a Madonna and Child, saying, "Have a look at this and tell me what you think." I looked at it and replied, "Count, you are in a very playful mood this morning." I saw immediately, as he already knew, that the painting was a fake—in fact, a poor fake of the sort you could buy at that time in Via dei Fossi for two hundred lire. The count then showed me a letter from BB [as Berenson was called] in which he attributed it to Pietro Lorenzetti and advised the count to buy it as it was "worthy of your collection." It was a slightly altered copy of a famous painting by the Sienese master. At the time, I thought perhaps it was by Montefiore, a contemporary of Joni, Vannoni, Giunti, et al. That morning, I realized that BB did not understand about fakes.*

*Federico Joni, in his memoirs, recounts another episode about Berenson, whose name is changed only slightly to "Sonberen": One day Joni sent a cousin to BB with a painting that should have been by Sano di Pietro of a Madonna and Child. By this time BB recognized Joni's cousin and sent him away saying the painting was a fake. Sometime later, Joni found a real Sano di Pietro in perfect condition, and sent it to Berenson with this same cousin. BB looked carefully at the painting and said, "Tell your cousin that his work has improved greatly but not enough to fool me!"*

According to Mario, Berenson was acting in good faith, but more than once mistook a clever forgery for an original work.

This is surprising, because Berenson invested a great deal of time in the study of original paintings, often traveling great distances to see them, preferring not to rely solely on his extensive photo library. However, recognizing a fake is different from the essentially philological exercise of attributing paintings to a school or master. It requires a profound knowledge of the materials and techniques used in the manufacture of paintings.

Berenson's idealized, intellectual approach to his subject did not take these factors into consideration. This was demonstrated during Duveen's famous trial for impugning the reputation, and thus the market value, of a copy of the Louvre's *La Belle Ferronnière*, attributed to Leonardo. Berenson was called as an expert witness for the defense. The so-called Hahn Leonardo is on canvas. The Hahn's lawyer asked Berenson whether the Louvre picture was painted on wood or canvas, and the great Berenson, who did not know the answer, airily replied, "It's as if you asked me on what kind of paper Shakespeare wrote his immortal sonnets." Recognizing the Hahn painting as a copy is not terribly difficult. When it was finally sold at auction several years ago, everyone was surprised by the poor, almost amateurish quality of the famous imposter, and they marveled at the international sensation it had caused in the 1920s. Due to its fame, it was sold for \$1,500,000, which is not bad for a mediocre copy.

No scholar has a perfect eye, even for originals. Mario liked to tell another story about Berenson and Count Contini:

*When the portrait of Ranuccio Farnese that Gualtiero had bought from the Cook Collection arrived in Florence from London, there remained the problem that Berenson had published it as a copy many years earlier. When the count and the countess finally saw the painting, they exclaimed in unison: "BB is blind!" The count asked me to remove the discolored yellow varnish which obscured the painting and, when I did, the masterpiece that everyone knows today was revealed in its full splendor. Now it was hoped that BB would change his earlier attribution of the painting.*

*Count Contini telephoned Nicky Mariano, the inseparable companion of Berenson, with whom he was on very friendly terms. He asked her if she would*

## CHAPTER 8

accompany BB to Villa Vittoria to look at an important acquisition. In the meantime, I had completed whatever small retouches were necessary and it had been placed in a wonderful antique frame from the count's stock. One afternoon Berenson came with Nicky to see the Titian. I had set it up on an easel close to the window in good light. Count Contini introduced me to BB and said that I had restored the painting. He stood in front of the painting for a long time studying it in silence with a little magnifier that he always carried in his pocket, then finally said, "Yes, it is by him." He said that when he saw it many years ago in Richmond it was hanging between two windows. It was difficult to see and he had not been able to examine it properly. To my mind this was a poor excuse. The truth is that BB was never very good on Titian and Venetian painting in general. The count sold the portrait of Ranuccio Farnese to Kress for a large sum and today it is in the National Gallery of Washington. It is universally admired as one of the masterpieces of the collection and has been present at every major Titian retrospective of the last fifty years. Although over the years I have disagreed with Berenson's attributions on many occasions, it is to his credit that he was capable of revising his opinion. I have known many other art historians who, once they have made a pronouncement, will never change their mind.



43. Titian, *Ranuccio Farnese*, ca. 1542, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 90 × 74 cm.

## CHAPTER 9

# Barone Michele Lazzaroni

A NUMBER OF MARIO'S STORIES featured his dealings with a controversial character, Baron Michele Lazzaroni (1863–1934), an art dealer and forger.

Originally from Turin, the Lazzaroni family moved to Rome when the city became the capital of the new Italian Republic, and made a fortune in real estate development. Little is recorded about Michele Lazzaroni apart from his involvement in the failure of the Banca Romana in 1889, for which he was later arrested and tried (though he was released in 1894 due to insufficient evidence), but he must have been quite an unsavory character. Evidently, he was able to hide this aspect of his personal history, since he subsequently became a high-living society figure in Paris, the owner of a triplex apartment on the rue Spontini, near the Bois de Boulogne.<sup>1</sup> Lazzaroni also owned a palace in Rome, a villa with an important garden on the Via Appia Nuova, a palazzo in Venice, and a villa in Nice.

His art dealing activities were at their height in the second decade of the twentieth century when he successfully sold false or falsified paintings to Duveen using Berenson as a conduit. The Baron assiduously cultivated the friendship and trust of both Bernard and Mary Berenson through his luxurious hospitality, wonderful meals and wine, small gifts accompanied by charming notes, and, one would imagine, fascinating conversation.<sup>2</sup>

*While I was at the Galleria Palma, around 1944, I met the son of Baron Lazzaroni. He came one morning and said that he had some things which he wished to sell. We knew about his father and all his mischief, selling false works to Duveen, who had no idea about Italian art. In any case, we went to his palace which was in the center of Rome, between Via Condotti and Via Frattina. He had a beautiful apartment full of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings, most of which had been embellished by the baron's restorer, whose name was Verzetta. He had a studio in Paris and worked exclusively for Lazzaroni. The son asked us if we had any interest in them and we said we were mainly interested in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings. He showed us a Carlevarijs and a large Magnasco which we bought right away, and then he invited us to another room underneath his apartment which was full of antique frames, which we also bought, and several file cabinets containing photographs which his father used as reference material during his antiquarian career. We bought those as well, mostly sepia prints which were commonly used at the beginning of the century, and almost all from Alinari and Anderson. Unfortunately, much of this interesting collection was used to make the didactic panels for the exhibition we sent to Brasil. [This material has never been returned and seems to have disappeared.]*

*When the photographs and paintings arrived at the gallery Federico Zeri was fascinated, especially by the archival documentation. The files contained material evidence of the forgeries which the baron had sold. For example, there was a photograph of Giuliano de' Medici by Botticelli, printed in reverse in order to make the forgery that was sold by Duveen to Otto Kabn and which was the cause of a terrible quarrel between the great Botticelli scholar, Herbert Horne, and Bernard Berenson. Horne rightly considered the picture to be a fake. Eventually the painting went to the Thyssen collection. In the fifties, it was offered to the Kress Foundation by Knoedler's. I went to look at it and told Mr. Henschel that it was a fake. He couldn't believe it because there were so many expertises, including, naturally, that of Berenson. When I last*



heard of the painting, it was in a private collection in Milan, still published as an original by Botticelli.

There was also a photo of the Alessio Baldovinetti Madonna and Child from the Louvre, printed in reverse, which was used to make the fake that Duveen sold to Kress. The Cleveland Museum has a portrait of a man attributed to Bartolomeo Veneto, which is another of Verzetta's creations. Perhaps there is an original picture underneath by a secondary hand. The museum of the Galleria di San Luca in Rome has twelve or fifteen paintings which were given by Baron Lazzaroni, mostly from the period but improved by Verzetta in order to be able to attribute them to a better artist. In these restorations, or elaborations, Verzetta revealed his own personality, if you will, so that today his work can be recognized immediately because there is no doubt that every forgery reflects the taste of the time in which it was made. For example, the Greek and Roman sculptures which were restored in the sixteenth century, no matter how hard the carver tried to imitate the original, he could not escape from the style of his own time. It is even true of the Laocoön group which is said to have been restored by the great Michelangelo himself. The nineteenth-century restorations of the fresco of Giotto in Santa Croce and Piero in Arezzo rendered these works nearly unrecognizable until they were cleaned in this century. It is true of all fakes that, after a certain time has passed, it is easy to tell when they were made. For us today, looking at the false Vermeers made by Van Meegeren during the last war, it is inconceivable that they could have been accepted as genuine. And so, for the fakes by Joni, Vannoni, Giunti, Dossena and all the others. Not to mention the restorations of ancient sculpture that were carried out in the baroque and Napoleonic periods.

Mario remembered that Lazzaroni's restorer was called "Verzetta", but he knew neither his first name nor the exact spelling. Nothing is known about this man today, except for a brief mention by Federico Zeri, who essentially repeats what he had heard from Mario. Of the paintings in the X book<sup>3</sup> with a Lazzaroni provenance, only one records payment for restoration and transfer, and it's not to Verzetta. The reference to a restorer named "Verzetta," or something like that, may be misleading. There is evidence that the baron himself worked on the paintings he sold. According to Joseph Duveen's associate, Edward Fowles, who inherited the business after Duveen's death in 1939, Baron

Lazzaroni was not only a dealer and connoisseur but also a restorer. Fowles wrote that, "It was customary for him to pick up a good painting at an auction sale in which, beneath the grime and neglect of years, he could perceive (as he expressed it) hidden qualities. After cleaning, and a little judicious restoration (he was particularly adept at the use of glazes) its latent qualities would be fully revealed." On one occasion, during a lunch in early 1920, Lazzaroni told Fowles "... how he had developed into a first-class restorer: a good friend of his had sold the famous Colonna altarpiece by Raphael to the Parisian dealer, Sedelmeyer, and later discovered that one of the angels in the upper part of the picture had been damaged in the course of its removal. The friend ... brought it to Lazzaroni's studio in Rome. The Baron repainted the damaged angel, and it was later ... sold to J. P. Morgan. ... From that time onwards, Lazzaroni devoted all his free time to the restoration of pictures which he had purchased, and it was BB who first suggested that he offer some of them to Duveen's." <sup>4,5</sup>

Lazzaroni also left a collection of early Italian paintings to the Accademia di San Luca, the ancient artists' guild and museum. When Mario and I visited in the late eighties many of the Lazzaroni pictures were on exhibit. They were repainted in such a ludicrous way that we had to laugh. The Madonnas resembled silent film stars with little red-lipsticked, Cupid's bow mouths like Clara Bow. One has to be careful about any painting in whose provenance Baron Lazzaroni figures. Each one I have seen (and I look for them wherever I go) has been faked to some extent. It seems the baron couldn't resist the temptation to alter his wares in some way.

☞ Giuliano de' Medici ☞

As Mario mentioned, one of the most daring of Lazzaroni's fakes was a purported fourth version of Botticelli's portrait of Giuliano de' Medici, the beloved brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was stabbed to death during the Pazzi Conspiracy on Easter Sunday, April 26, 1478.

There has always been much speculation about the genesis of Botticelli's portraits of Giuliano. They may have been posthumous, based on a plaster death mask, a common practice during this period, or they may have been based on an earlier prototype, now lost, that was made during his lifetime. Perhaps this prototype, if it existed, would have been made to commemorate the untimely death of Giuliano's Platonic love, the most beautiful girl in Florence, Simonetta Vespucci (1453–1476).

The Giuliano portrait was an excellent choice for a forger, because there were already three variants, all considered autograph works. In each, the sitter is in partial profile, facing right, wearing a sleeveless red tunic over a green shirt with elaborate sleeves. In the Lazzaroni version, Giuliano faces left and wears a shapeless black robe with a small red collar. When the baron first brought the painting to ITatti, both Bernard and Mary were enraptured by it and believed that it was the first, lost, version. Duveen initially offered it to his best clients, Joseph Widener and Benjamin Altman, the most important collectors of the day, neither of whom were interested. Finally, it was purchased by the banker and philanthropist, Otto Kahn (1867–1934), for \$125,000, a steep price. The sale was greeted by international publicity<sup>6</sup> and was even featured on the front page of the *London Times*.

Herbert Horne (1864–1916) was an English art historian and contemporary of Berenson who also lived in Florence and studied the Italian Renaissance. He was an expert on Botticelli and, in 1908, published a widely-acclaimed monograph. Although they knew each other well and shared the same interests, Mary and Bernard

considered Horne an “enemy-friend”, of which they had many. The imperious Berenson did not tolerate any competitors.

When Horne saw the newly discovered Giuliano portrait in the *Times*, he wrote to Duveen’s to request a photograph of the painting, which was provided to him over Berenson’s objections. After studying it carefully, Horne decided it was a forgery. The ensuing scandal threatened to ruin Berenson’s reputation as well as his relationship with Duveen Brothers, who were terribly concerned at this turn of events, as Otto Kahn was one of their best clients. The historian and Berenson biographer Ernest Samuels recounts the unfolding of the conflict, and Horne and Duveen’s agitation:

Meanwhile, the Italian government got wind of the affair, and Corrado Ricci, a member of the Italian Fine Arts Commission, demanded of the reputed seller, Count Procolo Isolani of Bologna, whether he had sold a Botticelli to the Duveens. The count, of course, could honestly say that he knew of no Botticelli having been smuggled out of his collection. Even Baron Lazzaroni, the intermediary, had not known it was a Botticelli until Berenson had subsequently identified it. Ricci inferred from the count’s assurance that the picture was not authentic...

The Duveens were panic-stricken and questioned Lazzaroni’s honesty and Berenson’s competence. The only thing that would satisfy them, they insisted, was a declaration by the count that the picture had in fact been in his family for generations. Lazzaroni came back to London in triumph from Bologna with the required letter, and a photograph of the painting on the back of which the count stated that it was one of 28 that he had brought down from his Villa and sold to Baron Lazzaroni. Joe Duveen proposed showing the documents to Horne, but Berenson, seconded by Henry Duveen, objected that it would set a “dangerous precedent to be accountable to anyone as a tribunal.” To protect himself from Joe’s impulsiveness, Berenson kept possession of the documents...

“Ernest is in a funk,” Berenson reported, “and can’t get over it and Joe who is very impressionable can’t get over it, so again I don’t know what rash thing Joe will do.”...Berenson was convinced that a “systematic campaign had been made against the Botticelli which however is only the whipping boy, from both Florence and Berlin... Dowdeswell reported that Sirén had been dinning into all their ears that I am a hopelessly discredited person!” At the height of Berenson’s worry about the whole business, his wife, Mary, reassured him, writing that “... they [the Duveens] will probably come around,” for “they cannot do without thee in regard to Italian pictures.” But, she added, “if thee really and truly wants to get out of it, why we can change our extravagant way of life.”<sup>7</sup>

Mary’s comment referred to the costly renovations at their villa, I Tatti. Bernard’s response was to authorize the suspended improvements to the property to continue. Passing this message along to the Berensons’ architect, her beloved Geoffrey Scott, Mary declared, “Our feet are set upon the path of worldliness and riches and the devil take the hindmost.”

As fate would have it, the First World War began in August, and by the time it was over, Horne had died and everyone had forgotten about the Botticelli affair. After Otto Kahn’s death in 1934, the portrait of Giuliano, along with the great full-length *Saint George and the Dragon* by Carpaccio, was purchased by Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza (1875–1947) for his collection in the Villa Favorita on the shores of Lake Lugano in Switzerland.

After the Second World War, the baron, whose fortune derived from the family-owned steel company, was nearly bankrupt. He asked his curator, Dr. Rudolf Heinemann, to sell some pieces from the collection. Heinemann usually worked with Knoedler’s, Duveen’s rival, and the firm offered the Botticelli, along with a number of other works, among them the early *Madonna and Child* by Dürer, now in Washington, to the Kress Foundation. This was an odd choice, as the foundation had just purchased what some



44. The portrait of Giuliano de' Medici sold to Duveen by Baron Lazzaroni.



45. Sandro Botticelli, *Giuliano de' Medici*, 1478–1480, tempera on panel, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo, 54 × 36 cm.

consider to be the first version of Botticelli's Giuliano a year earlier from Wildenstein's. That version had belonged to the Cini family in Venice, who were also obliged to raise money during the war, and is the most elaborate of the three versions, at almost twice the size of the other two, with an open window and a mourning dove.

When Mario saw the Botticelli among the paintings offered by Knoedler's, he immediately recognized it as a forgery. He had a number of reasons: the modern look of the face—more regular and conventionally handsome than the jagged features of Botticelli's portrait—and the unusual way in which it was executed, with the entire painting made up of tiny brushstrokes. With close scrutiny, a network of tiny cracks, characteristic of aged paint, can be glimpsed under the present surface. It was common for Lazzaroni to take a worn painting of the period by a minor artist





46. Sandro Botticelli, *Giuliano de' Medici*, 1478–1480, tempera on panel, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 54.5 × 36.5 cm.



47. Sandro Botticelli, *Giuliano de' Medici*, 1478–1480, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 75.5 × 52.5 cm. Purchased by Kress from Wildenstein.

and refurbish it in the manner of an important painter. In addition, the flesh tones lacked the characteristic translucence of Botticelli's work. Altogether, it was a very strange object.

When provenance confirmed that it came from Lazzaroni, Mario could hardly believe that it had so many endorsements, including, naturally, Berenson's. It is now in a private collection and recent scholarship has catalogued it as "attributed to the workshop of Botticelli," although the entry for the Berlin *Portrait of Giuliano de' Medici* that appeared in the exhibition held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2012, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, does not hesitate to say: "It should be noted that there is a fourth portrait in the series, previously in Milan and now in an American private collection, which does not date from the fifteenth century and is often considered a forgery."<sup>8</sup>



## CHAPTER 10

# Assis Chateaubriand and São Paulo

**A**N EVENT OF SIGNIFICANCE to Mario's future was an unexpected visit to the Studio Palma by Assis Chateaubriand (1892-1968), the publisher of a chain of Brazilian newspapers. Mario wrote in his memoirs:

*One morning, while I was working in my studio at the Galleria Palma on some paintings belonging to Contini, we had an unexpected visitor. He was a Brazilian businessman, Assis Chateaubriand, and Gianni Agnelli had recommended us as a serious gallery for old masters. He said he wanted to start a museum in São Paulo and intended to buy important paintings. Skeptical at first, we showed him our paintings, and he chose several. The choices he made were not those of an informed connoisseur, and we pointed out to him that some pictures were museum quality and others were simply not. Our frankness pleased him and inspired faith in us. That morning, he bought three or four paintings and commissioned us to identify other museum-quality works on the market. Further, he invited us to go to São Paulo to help him get this museum started.*

*He was a remarkable man: a [Brazilian] Indian who was the publisher of a chain of newspapers called the Diarios e Emissoras Associadas. This put him in a unique position to raise money for his museum. Brazil was full of immensely wealthy industrialists and coffee barons such as the Pignataris, the Materasso family, and many others. Chateaubriand, through his newspapers, had the goods on everybody, and he would threaten the rich with public exposure if they didn't make a contribution. He was very short and dark-skinned with a large head, and he was extremely shrewd. Rumor had it that he had once killed a man. When I asked him if this was true, he just shrugged and said, "An Indian," in a deprecatory way.*

Bardi had recently married Lina Bo, an accomplished young architect who had worked with the renowned Gio Ponti on his influential post-war publication, *Domus* magazine. The couple went to Brazil in 1946, accompanied by Francesco Monotti, the director of the Studio d'Arte Palma, who had gone with Mario on his first trip to London. At that moment, Chateaubriand's collection consisted of only a few pictures, so Bardi decided to mount a didactic exhibition, which would illustrate and explain the different schools and periods of art to a largely untutored public. This would include pictures from both Europe and elsewhere in the world. At the time, the tiny Materasso Collection of modern art was the only museum in Brazil.

Mario stayed behind in Rome to prepare the panels for the didactic exhibition. He worked with Emilio Villa, an art historian and writer, who had been engaged to formulate a concept and write the text for the diverse group of images. Federico Zeri was also involved. Within a few months, they produced hundreds of panels of text and photographs, which were ready to be installed in the headquarters of the Diarios Associados. 'Chato', as he was called, began to publicize this venture in all his newspapers and "invited" wealthy Brazilians to participate for the good of the country.

## ✿ São Paulo ✿

Some months after the exhibition had opened, Mario finally went to Brazil:

*I took a TWA flight on the famous Havilland Comet that had four star-shaped engines. I think it was the most beautiful plane ever designed. We arrived in Dakar after about four hours, refueled and left again for São Paulo. From the window of the plane, I could see the moon, and the sky was full of stars. I went to sleep with the noise of the motors. When I awoke, I noticed that I could no longer see the moon from my window but it was instead on the other side. We seemed to be going back, and I asked the stewardess if my impression was correct. She said yes, one of the engines had failed and therefore we were returning to Dakar. We landed easily and were told that we would have to wait a bit while the engine was repaired. In fact, it turned out to be impossible to repair, and so we waited in Dakar for several days for a replacement engine.*

*It was the only time I visited Africa, and I still remember the colorful markets and the beautiful carriage of the women who wore headdresses like those in Piero della Francesca's fresco in Arezzo of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Both men and women were tall, but the women seemed taller with their long gray mantles and white caps. They walked slowly, like so many queens. The markets had every conceivable kind of fish, brightly colored blue, red, and yellow. I tried to imagine what sort of work our still-life painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have produced with those multicolored fish as models. I also understood the fascination that Africa had exerted on nineteenth-century painters, especially the French.*

*Finally, the plane left for São Paulo. Bardi was waiting for me and brought me to their house, which had a magnificent view of the forest, the Mato Grosso. The next day, we went to the offices of the Diarios Associadas where Bardi had mounted the didactic exhibition. It had been a great success, both among the public and the critics.*

*Traveling through the city by car I was not very impressed by the architecture in the center where the oldest buildings were, it seemed, quite colonial. On the other hand, the modern buildings and houses were very avant-garde. Some of them were wonderful, inspired by the great architects such as Le Corbusier and Gropius, who had worked in Brazil. After passing a few days in the offices of the Diarios Associados, where I had been assigned a room with a drafting table and some chairs, I began to*



48. Museu de Arte São Paulo, designed by Lina Bo Bardi.

*realize that Brazil was still a very primitive country. The only available newspapers and magazines were local, mainly in Portuguese, although the journalists all spoke French as well, practically a second language for educated Brazilians. I was also appalled by the poverty and the complete indifference that the rich displayed. One evening, we were invited to a party given by the multi-millionaire playboy, 'Baby' Pignatari. There were mountains of food, fountains of champagne, strolling orchestras, the women dripped with expensive jewelry. Tents had been set up all over the hillside lit by thousands of torches. The party went on for days and was said to cost over a million dollars, at that time, in 1948, an immense amount of money. From the party, one could see the feebly lit shantytowns where hundreds of thousands lived in dire misery. I could never have lived there.*

*Bardi would have liked me to stay on in Brazil. He found himself immediately at home there, and Lina Bo had already built a dramatic glass house suspended on columns overlooking the Mato Grosso. Bardi and Lina had decided to settle there, and he became the director of the new museum, for which, later on, Lina designed the building. Most of the important Fascists had sought refuge in Brazil after the fall of Mussolini, so he had many old friends there.*

### Acquisitions for Brazil

Mario acquired many paintings on behalf of Bardi for the new museum, his contacts with numerous dealers and their respect for his knowledge and honesty facilitating the deals that were made.

*On my trips to London I began to look for important paintings for the new museum. Through the Matthiesen Gallery we bought an important Velázquez, a full-length portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares for \$200,000. From Knoedler's I acquired the early Raphael Resurrection for \$400,000, which was a lot of money at that time, especially since the attribution to Raphael was controversial. I was convinced that it was by the master and urged its purchase.<sup>1</sup> A short time afterwards the drawings for two of the soldiers, in the collection of the Albertina in Vienna, were published and it is now universally accepted as Raphael. Another full-length portrait, this time by Titian, of Cardinal Madruzzo was also bought from Knoedler's.*

Mario and Bardi were hardly ideal partners, however. The hyperbole and tireless self-promotion in which his former partner now engaged as director of MASP irritated him, and he resented the way that Bardi claimed entire credit for assembling the museum's collection, including the old masters, about which he knew nothing. An example of this can be found in the Wikipedia entry for Raphael's *Resurrection*, which states, "... the work was acquired by the São Paulo Museum of Art. Pietro Maria Bardi, former director of the museum, took the responsibility of adding the Kinnaird *Resurrection* to the body of works of Raphael, based on the existence of two preparatory studies for the composition, starting a heated debate about its authorship."

In his memoir Mario went on to describe the many other acquisitions made for the museum:

*Wildenstein sold by far the greatest number of paintings to the museum. Georges Wildenstein and Bardi had developed a good relationship and Wildenstein was willing to extend credit to the museum for a large number of purchases that took years to*

pay, but the debt was eventually settled. By 1953 the collection of the museum was substantially complete. Wildenstein made masterpieces available at very favorable terms from their legendary holdings: Bernardo Daddi, Giovanni Bellini, Andrea Mantegna, Poussin, Goya, and Holbein. All of the French paintings came from Wildenstein including a Chardin, Fragonard, and works by Corot, Daumier and Delacroix. Impressionist and post-impressionist works by Manet, Renoir, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec were added as well as Paris school artists such as Picasso, Léger and Modigliani. From Wildenstein we also purchased a group of English paintings including works by Reynolds, Constable, and Turner. My role was to make the selection for the museum from the paintings that were being offered by the various dealers. It was a propitious moment in the art market. Extraordinary things were available and the prices were, in comparison to today's values, paltry.



49. Raphael, *The Resurrection of Christ*, 1499–1502, oil on panel, São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brazil, 52 × 44 cm.



CHAPTER 10

*In addition to the paintings we bought for the museum from major dealers, I purchased some sculptural works in London, from Baron Grundherr [Hugo von Grundherr (1874–1956)] whom I had met at the auctions. Apart from being a marchand amateur, he made very good forgeries of Frans Hals. His collection was in a castle, a gloomy place; the only heat was from the fireplaces and the rooms were sparsely furnished. I went to see him there and passed a chilly night but was able to purchase several large sculptures: a Greek marble statue of Athena, a large marble of Diana Sleeping, from the Barberini collection, very close to Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and*



50. Titian, *Cardinal Madruzzo*, 1552, oil on canvas, São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brazil, 230 × 131 cm.





51. Giuseppe Mazzuoli, *Diana Sleeping*, 1690–1700, marble, São Paulo Museum of Art, São Paulo, Brazil, 55 × 81 × 168 cm.

*another work by Valerio Villareale, for one hundred pounds each. They are all in the museum in São Paulo. I also bought a large Solimena, Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar, and a Jacopo Tintoretto portrait, so good that it could almost have been by Titian.*

Mario's role in forming the collection has never been recognized. Bardi alludes to this in a conciliatory letter<sup>2</sup> in which he says that whatever transpired between them, in the end, they both had great careers. Mario was a tolerant man and often made allowances for others' vagaries, but when he felt that someone had betrayed him, he erased that person completely from his life. Bardi continued as director of MASP almost until his death in 1999, at the age of ninety-nine. He remains to this day a revered figure in São Paulo.

PART TWO

New York and the  
Samuel H. Kress Foundation

What a marvelous fragment of social history is hidden behind the vast accumulation of panels and canvases! How curious as human types and how extremely significant for their period are figures like Samuel H. Kress and Mrs. Delora Kilvert! How fascinating and almost like characters out of fiction are men like Alessandro Contini Bonacossi and his wife Vittoria! Besides these, we have the art dealers competing against each other, and restorers suddenly reaching dizzy heights; and finally, art historians, even distinguished ones, busy writing certificates by the thousand.

Federico Zeri, "Early Italian Pictures in the Kress Collection", *The Burlington Magazine*, August 1967

## CHAPTER 11

# Welcome to America

❧ Samuel Henry Kress ❧

LIKE MANY OF THE GREAT entrepreneurs of the period, Samuel H. Kress (1863–1955) came from a modest background in rural Pennsylvania, near Allentown. As a boy, he worked in the stone quarries and, at seventeen, obtained the credentials to teach in a nearby one-room schoolhouse. He saved enough money to open a small “notions” store, which gradually grew into a wholesale business. Sam, as he was known, turned out to be a retailing genius; he went on to make a fortune with a chain of five-and-dime stores, drawing on the model created in 1876 by F. W. Woolworth in Utica, New York, and which had become popular in the late nineteenth century. The first S. H. Kress & Co. five-and-dime opened in 1896 in Memphis and was an immediate success. The stores were spread across the country but the greatest concentration was in the South and Southwest.<sup>1</sup>

These great emporiums of democracy offered their customers a large variety of wares, from sewing needles to china to clothing and everything in between at affordable prices. One could get just about anything at the “fivvy,” as my mother called our local store. Unlike today’s big-box stores, the Kress buildings were individually designed, and great fanfare accompanied each store’s opening. They became instant attractions in the many small cities where Kress built them, anticipating rapid growth. The first were in the Gothic Revival style, but between 1929 and 1944, an in-house architect, Edward Sibbert (1899–1982), designed sleek, modern structures characterized by the striking use of terracotta ornamentation on the façade, including the famous Kress logo.

The flagship store was located on New York City’s Fifth Avenue and 39th Street. For this location, Sibbert created an award-winning Art Deco building in the Mayan Revival style, which



52. Samuel H. Kress.



53. A Mayan revival relief from the flagship store on Fifth Avenue.

was erected in 1935 and torn down in 1980 to be replaced by a nondescript glass tower. However, many Kress buildings still survive on the main streets of towns small and large, from Charleston to San Francisco, the golden logo intact, although their interiors have been gutted and repurposed. Many have received landmark status. The importance and personal attention Samuel Kress gave to design and materials suggest he had always possessed the aesthetic sensibility that found its true outlet when he discovered the masterpieces of Europe's past.

Kress, like many Americans of his day and age, was a pious man, conscious of his social obligations, and his collecting activities were colored by a sense of civic responsibility from the outset. Kress's success was partly due to his exceptional attention to detail and ceaseless vigilance over his many ventures. He spent forty years building up his business, constructing and personally supervising each of his far-flung stores. This meant that he was constantly traveling and living mainly in a Pullman railway car. His

younger brothers, Claude and Rush, had been brought into the business and, in 1924, Samuel ceded the presidency and primary responsibility for the company to Claude.

In 1925, at the age of sixty-two, he bought a grand duplex penthouse apartment in a newly constructed luxury apartment building on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 83<sup>rd</sup> Street. By that time, he was one of the wealthiest men in the United States and began to invest his fortune in the acquisition of art. He acquired his first old master painting in 1926, a rather conventional decorative work by Hondecoeter. Following that initial purchase, he began buying art by the boatload, almost literally, until 1941, when the Second World War put a stop to commerce with Europe. Nonetheless, he did acquire a number of paintings from New York dealers during that period.

Starting with Italian paintings from the early schools and the Renaissance, he eventually widened his reach to include sculptures, small bronzes, medals, tapestries, and decorative arts—including an entire room from an eighteenth-century English house. Exceptionally taciturn, Kress left little in writing apart from a general expression of his intentions. One can only guess what his collection meant to him, apart from the declared moral purposes. At one time he thought of building a great museum on



54. Kress store in El Paso, Texas.



55. Terracotta reliefs on the store in Memphis, Tennessee.



Fifth Avenue. Had he done so, the hypothetical Kress Museum's collection of Italian old master paintings and sculpture would have surpassed the holdings of any museum in the country. This idea coexisted with a populist impulse to donate works of art to the small cities across the country where Kress had built his stores. By the time he created his foundation in 1929, Samuel Kress had already made individual donations of old master paintings to more than two hundred municipalities. During the depths of the Depression, he sent works from his collection around the country in an "art train," which enjoyed such success that its journey had to be extended to include more cities. He believed that art fostered social improvement and the development of good character and values among the citizenry.

### ☞ The Restorer and the Count ☞

The creation of the Kress Collection depended on a network of experts, advisors, and suppliers. Among these, two men played particularly important roles: Stephen Pichetto (1887–1949), and Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi (1878–1955).

Pichetto was an Italian American from a modest background. It is sometimes said that he was originally a portrait painter by profession, although there is no confirmation of this. Nor is it known where he trained as a restorer. He opened a studio in 1908, at the age of twenty-one. In New York City directories, he was listed variously as a restorer, an artist, or an art dealer—perhaps he was all three. There were few professional restorers in the United States at that time, and he quickly became a prominent figure in the New York art world. His clients included the pre-eminent dealer in old master paintings, Lord Joseph Duveen, as well as many important private collectors, and in 1928, he was appointed consultant restorer of the Metropolitan Museum, where he worked on a large number of paintings in a high-ceilinged, brightly lit attic.<sup>2</sup> But his greatest client of all would be Samuel Kress.

Pichetto may have met Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, the Italian art dealer, during one of Contini's earlier expeditions to New York, which began in the mid-twenties. His wife, Donna Vittoria, recorded in her diaries meetings with or visits to all the major collectors, as well as other dealers and their agents.<sup>3</sup> Accounts differ about when and how Contini met Samuel Kress and what role Pichetto played in that meeting.<sup>4</sup> Ann Hoenigswald suggests that Pichetto himself may have initiated the contact with Contini, serving as a conduit to Kress.<sup>5</sup>

Mario had a different story about the historic encounter between Kress and Contini, recounted to him, he said, by the count himself. He wrote:

*Contini was returning to Italy from New York on a transatlantic liner in the 1920s, a trip that he may have engineered expressly to meet Kress. He noticed a pretty woman walking on the deck with Mr. Kress, an American widow called Delora Kilvert, his close friend, companion, and official hostess until his death. One morning, Contini happened upon her, alone, enjoying the fresh sea air, and began a conversation about some of the great American art collections that were being formed. He asked if Mr. Kress was a collector and she said no. He feigned surprise. How was it possible, he asked, that an important magnate such as Samuel Kress was not interested in works of art like his peers, Morgan, Carnegie, Frick, and so forth? As he spoke, he took out of his waistcoat pocket a paper in which were folded two diamonds he had bought during his recent stay in New York. He held them up to the sun to examine their color and brilliance. Like every society woman at that time, Mrs. Kilvert was interested, and he pressed the precious gems into her hand to admire. She commented on how exceptionally beautiful they were. Contini said, "If you really like them, I will give them to you." She demurred, saying that she could not possibly agree to take such a valuable gift, but the count continued to insist and finally Mrs. Kilvert accepted both the diamonds and the count, who became a friend, opening one of the most exceptional chapters in the history of American collecting.*

Count Contini and Donna Vittoria did voyage to New York in December 1926. According to the meticulous diary that Vittoria kept for her children and grandson during their four-month-

long sojourn in the United States, Mrs. Kilvert paid a visit to the Continis on January 19, 1927, purchasing a length of antique velvet.<sup>6</sup> Two weeks later, an entry records that she asked the Continis' help in furnishing an apartment for her friend, a certain Mr. Kress.<sup>7</sup> A few days later, on February 13, the Continis went to the Kress apartment, bringing carpets, tables and eight paintings, which they hung on the empty walls.<sup>8</sup>

Although Samuel Kress never married, his relationship with the beautiful and resourceful Mrs. Kilvert endured for years. She looked after him, arranged his social life, and influenced his decisions concerning his art collection. In the many negotiations that took place between Kress and Contini over the years, she frequently served as an intermediary. Apart from his relationship with Mrs. Kilvert, little is known about Samuel Kress's personal life. His niece, the late Jocelyn Kress, reported that he was eccentric, extremely shy, anti-social, and exceptionally preoccupied with his health. She added that before 1925 he owned stacks of very bad art. Perhaps he owned the Barbizon landscapes and French academic paintings that were popular at the time, but if he ever had such a collection, it disappeared without a trace.

Samuel Kress's background as a mass-merchandiser seemed to influence his approach to collecting; he felt that he could get a better deal by buying paintings in bulk. His first major purchase from Count Contini consisted of 65 paintings and until the onset of the Second World War, most of his purchases were from the Italian dealer, who claimed credit for Kress's formation as a collector.

Contini and the ebullient and very intelligent Vittoria made an odd couple. He was a giant, well over six feet tall, while she was a tiny woman, pretty and a bit plump, with, as everyone noted, extraordinary blue eyes. Once they had arrived in New York, the couple would take an apartment at one of the great hotels, the Pierre or the Plaza. This always included a large room that they would furnish as an appropriate setting for the paintings they hoped to sell. The pieces of furniture they brought with them were

the finest examples of walnut and parcel-gilt Renaissance cassoni, consoles, tables, even period fire mantles, draped with lengths of red, blue, yellow, and green antique velvet. It was a style that had found favor with such legendary collectors as Isabella Stewart Gardner in the early part of the century and is still preserved in her museum. Antique velvet was so popular among American collectors that the fabric fetched astronomical sums. Mario said that several dealers in Rome traded exclusively in this material, but the demand for it collapsed along with the crash of the New York stock market in 1929. By the 1930s, this particular taste in decorating was in decline, but the Kress Foundation kept a supply of the precious velvet into the 1950s, using it to line the shadow boxes. These cases were popular among dealers and collectors, because they added importance and scale to smaller paintings, such as private devotional works or fragments of large altarpieces. Many Kress paintings retain these now outmoded surrounds, although the nap of the velvet has completely worn away.

A number of dealers used their skill as decorators to create irresistible settings, veritable Aladdin's Caves, for their wares. To entice the reticent millionaire Andrew Mellon, Joseph Duveen hired the floor below Mellon's apartment in Washington, filled it with furniture and paintings, and gave him the key.<sup>9</sup> Mitchell Samuels, the owner of French & Co., owned two buildings in the East 50s,<sup>10</sup> where he not only sold marvelous antiques from every period, but also offered upholstery services and maintained workshops where entire rooms were created for wealthy collectors from all over the United States. The rooms could be staged for a client's approval before the installation was shipped to their home.<sup>11</sup>

The Continis were no strangers to this approach and frequently availed themselves of Mitchell Samuels's services in their pursuit of Samuel Kress, for whom they tirelessly acquired furnishings, rearranging the rooms over and over again until Kress was satisfied. Nevertheless, after spending years touring the country from one city to the next with their paintings, offering them unsuccessfully to all the important collectors, the Continis were thrilled to have

finally found their very own client. They felt that they had inspired Kress to become a collector and were forming his taste.<sup>12</sup>

That same February of 1927, Stephen Pichetto appears for the first time in Vittoria's diaries. Vittoria describes him as the top paintings' restorer in America. His Italo-American dialect made her laugh.<sup>13</sup> Pichetto soon became very much a part of the process of marketing Contini's offerings to Kress. They visited him often during their stays in New York, and he helped them in various ways, consulting about the arrangement of the paintings in the apartment, and the progress of the negotiations with Kress to whom he provided flattering descriptions of their quality and condition.

A key element in the seduction of Sam Kress was Donna Vittoria's excellent Italian cuisine. In the diaries, a great deal of space is devoted to the dreadful American meals the Continis were served at private homes and at restaurants and the dyspepsia she constantly endured. Even at the finest tables, the food was bland at best, and she rejoiced in obtaining real Italian ingredients to tempt Kress's appetite. Vittoria was resourceful in any number of ways and was her husband's partner in every sense. The dour Kress was cajoled by her lively attention, and she encouraged him to collect for patriotic reasons, which must have appealed to him. Eyes twinkling, the countess waxed rhapsodic over the beauty of her paintings—about which she seems to have been entirely sincere—and ranted against the art historians who were relying on the new x-ray technique instead of their eyes to make attributions.<sup>14</sup>

Although her criteria for assessing the quality of her paintings appeared to be based entirely on emotion, Mario and others said that she really did possess an uncanny intuition about art. Mario often remarked on her intelligence, taste, energy, and instincts, and sincerely admired her. She was, by all accounts, an extraordinary woman and a driving force behind the Contini enterprises. Her husband, who was in charge of the business end, needed constant encouragement and would begin to despair after two or three months of dealing with the hard-nosed Kress. Their trips to

New York were framed as social visits, so they were forced to wait for Kress to bring up the subject of business transactions. It was always a cliffhanger, involving months of haggling—torture for Contini, but a process Kress appeared to relish. The business would be concluded at the very last moment, just as the desperate count was making arrangements to embark with his possessions, leaving the couple exhausted yet jubilant. The deal was always for the purchase of the entire “lot” as Kress called it, consisting of up to 160 paintings, primarily of the early Italian Schools.

With Contini’s encouragement, Kress became determined to own at least one example of a work by every Italian painter, masters great and small alike. Studded among the hundreds of paintings he acquired, were masterpieces, or “leaders,” as the department store magnate liked to call them, some of which came from Contini, while others were purchased from important galleries such as Duveen’s or Knoedler’s. One famous example is the *Allendale Nativity*, which Kress purchased from Joseph Duveen in 1938. To the dealer’s intense irritation, his expert, Bernard Berenson, would not agree on the painting’s widely accepted attribution to Giorgione. Berenson insisted that it was by the young Titian—still very fine of course, “one of the most fascinating Giorgionesque pictures ever painted,”<sup>15</sup> but not as desirable (or expensive) as a painting by the rare master from Castelfranco. The incident, which was widely publicized, was the cause of the definitive break between the dealer and the famous art historian. The weight of scholarly opinion was against Berenson, and he eventually accepted the painting as a Giorgione toward the end of his life. The general consensus today is that it is by Giorgione. However, this was not the only scandal connected with the painting. To the horror of the sophisticated international art world, Kress exhibited the work in the window of his Fifth Avenue store for the Christmas season, so that the public could enjoy it.

Stephen Pichetto’s collaboration became essential to the Continis as his role in Kress’s collecting activities and the running of the foundation grew. Pichetto was Samuel Kress’s most trusted

WELCOME TO AMERICA

advisor and had final approval on all purchases. John Walker, the curator and then director of the National Gallery of Art, draws a portrait of Pichetto during the 1940s, describing him as a “large, well-fed bullfrog, perfectly tranquil but ready to snap at any insect which might fly by. He had a cigar, lighted or unlighted, always in his enormous mouth. He would get up, invariably with an amiable smile, and take me through room after room where assistants were cleaning, inpainting, relining or cradling to point out some new Kress acquisition.”<sup>16</sup>

When Mario arrived in New York in 1949, only months after Pichetto’s death, he was taken to this studio where he became familiar with his predecessor’s practices. He said that Pichetto

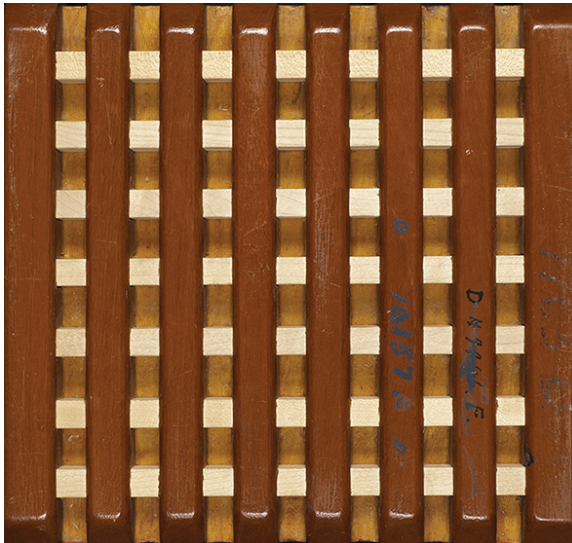


56. Samuel Kress and Stephen Pichetto in front of Giorgione’s *Allendale Nativity*, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.



inflated his fees and charged the foundation for work he did not do, as many of the paintings purchased from Contini had already been cleaned and restored in Florence. His method, as John Walker described it, was a sort of assembly line. Every painting on panel was thinned, flattened, and cradled. Paintings on canvas were relined, whether necessary or not. All were coated with thick, glossy varnishes, and Pichetto subsequently added a few minor, often unnecessary retouches. By 1950, the retouches had begun to alter, and “Pichetto whitening” became a notable problem as time went on.<sup>17</sup> Despite his shortcomings, Pichetto was articulate and persuasive, as surviving documents and a radio broadcast recording attest. He won the trust of the crusty Samuel, leading him to become, in time, both a trustee of the Kress Foundation and curator of the Kress Collection.<sup>18</sup>

The procedure known as cradling was widespread in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its basic purpose was to keep the wood panel flat and prevent it from splitting. Most of the



57. A cradle on the reverse of a small painting in the Kress Collection.

paintings that passed through the American art market in the twentieth century had been housed in churches and palaces with thick stone walls that tend to retain humidity. When the panels suddenly encountered the dry conditions of a heated American house or apartment, they often reacted dramatically and warped or cracked. The new owners, who had paid large sums of money for these objects, were consternated, as were, of course, the dealers. Panel paintings began to be cradled as a preventive measure, whether it was necessary or not.

Few panels in American collections escaped this fate. Another consideration in the flattening of panels was the taste of the time. The aesthetic of the Machine Age favored flat, mechanically smooth surfaces without a trace of cracks or other deformations and most wealthy collectors wanted paintings that looked flat, smooth, and glossy.

Like many restorers, Pichetto relined every painting on canvas that came through his studio. The new linen was pasted to the back of the original canvas with animal glue-based adhesive, the surface pressed repeatedly with fifty-pound heated irons. Pichetto's methods were the usual practice of most English and American restorers in that period.<sup>19</sup> Mario kept one of Pichetto's irons, which still bears an engraved plate reading "Property of the S. H. Kress Foundation." I have it in my studio, although I can hardly lift it. It is an invaluable teaching tool, as it makes it easy for students to understand how and why so many paintings look flat and rigid, with all the brushwork and liveliness of the surface obliterated.

In line with the streamlined aesthetic of the times, to achieve a perfectly smooth, enamel-like finish, Pichetto built up his final varnish with viscous solutions of dammar resin in turpentine, alternating with thin applications of shellac—a 'spirit' varnish dissolved in alcohol. The different solubility of the two materials allowed multiple applications so that a thick coating could be built up.

Another technique Pichetto used, recounted by Mario, was to build a dam around a painting and pour varnish onto the face to

create a surface like a mirror. I can confirm this practice; I have removed varnish coatings from Kress paintings that had telltale ripples in their surface. This highly varnished look was one that Duveen also prized and was preferred by his American clients.

### ☞ Samuel Kress's Decline and Pichetto's ☞ Sudden Death

Beginning in the early 1940s, Samuel Kress had a series of strokes. He lost mobility and speech. His youngest brother, Rush Harrison Kress, had been in the Kress company for many years by that time. He was a mild man, completely devoted to his dictatorial brother. After Mario came to New York, he heard the stories of how Samuel, during his frequent inspections of his stores, used to make Rush walk a few paces behind him. In order to take care of his brother, Rush, with his wife Virginia and their four children, moved into 1020 Fifth Avenue. He took over the operations of S. H. Kress & Co. and the foundation, determined to carry on his disabled brother's legacy.

On January 20, 1949, Stephen Pichetto died of a massive heart attack while walking along a Manhattan street. By then, the foundation relied on him completely for all its art-collecting activities, and his unexpected demise created a major problem for Rush Kress. Meanwhile, the large purchase from Contini made the previous year languished in storage, and Pichetto's staff was paralyzed without him. Mrs. Pichetto kept the studio open, and the bills mounted. The ties between the Kress Foundation and Pichetto's studio were so close that the foundation felt responsible for the studio's expenses whether or not any work was being carried out. This was not good business and the situation looked at risk. Guy Emerson, the vice director of the foundation in charge of the art program, urged Rush to proceed slowly, as Pichetto had warned them of the danger of paintings being spoiled by "careless and incompetent people ... in the field ... rumored to have 'ruined'

many paintings at the Metropolitan and Boston museums”.<sup>20</sup> This view was also held by John Walker, the curator of the National Gallery, and his mentor, Bernard Berenson, whom Rush Kress considered a friend. On the very day of Pichetto’s death, Rush sent a telegram to ‘the Count,’ as Rush always called him, who, before responding, asked Berenson for advice. In the flurry of correspondence that ensued, everyone counseled caution.

Berenson, Walker, and Contini all had an interest in who would be appointed to this important insider position. Contini supported Mario, with whom he had worked for several years.



58. Rush Harrison Kress with Baciccio's *The Sacrifice of Isaac*.

Neither Berenson nor Walker liked the idea of a Contini candidate, but they were unable to agree on any other suggestion. Walker suggested Giannino Marchig or Louis de Wild, both well-known restorers, but Berenson was not in favor of either man.<sup>21</sup>

Less than three weeks after the death of Pichetto, Contini wrote to Rush:

February 9, 1949

As I explained to you at length in my last letter, the choice of a candidate who possesses the many necessary qualities restricts the horizon considerably. Only one man – in my opinion – has my complete and unconditional confidence; that is the man who has the keeping of my own collection and to whom I have always entrusted the most important works. Naturally I have always been very jealous of this man, as I consider him irreplaceable; therefore, I have been faced with a serious case of conscience... B.B. whom I believe has always had a very high opinion of the way in which my pictures are kept, did not even think I would be willing to suggest him; but when I told him the news he seemed very pleased and agreed entirely ... This man has the temperament of a Master. His technical and artistic knowledge and his ability to inculcate into others love and care in their work make him substantially quite unique... I do not think he would be able to dispose of more than six months of the year for the US.<sup>22</sup>

Some years later, Guy Emerson, who by that time had become Mario's close friend, showed him another letter from Contini to Kress, which said, "Mario Modestini is the best restorer in the world, but don't let him know that I told you because it might go to his head."<sup>23</sup>

Kress acted on Contini's suggestion and immediately sent a telegram to São Paulo, where Mario was visiting, urging him to come to New York as soon as possible. Mario's friend, Gualtierio

Volterra, who was Contini's buying agent and business partner as well as a friend of Rush Kress, flew to New York to await Mario's arrival and smooth the way. Married to Patricia Kelly, an Australian, who also translated Contini's letters to Rush Kress and Berenson into English, Volterra spoke fluent English, while Mario knew only a few words.

Mario was glad to have an excuse to leave Brazil. On March 7, 1949, after a ten-hour flight, he arrived at La Guardia Field, where he was met by Volterra and taken to the Plaza Hotel. Here he checked into a spacious room with a large window overlooking Central Park. It cost \$8.50 a night. Mario never ceased to be amazed at how cheap it was; he kept the bill as a party trick to astound people years later when such a room cost \$600 a night. The next day, Gualtiero accompanied him to the foundation's offices in Stephen Pichetto's studio in the Squibb Building at 745 Fifth Avenue. Here he met Rush Kress and the staff. Mario was introduced to Dr. Herbert Spencer, a board member; Guy Emerson, the art director; "Red" Geiger, Mr. Kress's secretary; William Suida, research curator; and John Walker, chief curator of the National Gallery. Despite Mario's complete lack of English, with Gualtiero's help a discussion took place—mainly regarding what sort of task Mario would carry out as an example of his work and where he would do it.

*I chose a panel that had been recently cradled, *The Assumption of the Virgin*<sup>24</sup> by Paolo di Giovanni Fei, a Sienese artist of the fifteenth century, today in the National Gallery of Washington. It was a tempera painting with a gilded gold background, very dirty, covered with candle smoke, soot and old varnishes. I don't think it had ever been cleaned. The picture was sent to me at the Hotel Plaza where I had a large north-facing window with perfect light. My first problem was to find something to use to soften the fatty black soot deposits. Normally I used an unguent that I made up myself from various ingredients according to a recipe by Secco Suardo consisting of melted animal fat, linseed oil and Marseilles soap.<sup>25</sup> Being without my usual materials I had to improvise and bought a product called Pond's cold cream that women use to clean and protect their skin. I mixed this with a little bit of Marseilles soap and some raw linseed oil. I made various tests to see how long it was necessary to leave this creamy*

*emulsion on the painting, removing it with turpentine. In a few days, I had cleaned the painting and done some minor retouching with tempera colors. The painting was in a very good state. John Walker pronounced himself satisfied and told Mr. Kress that I had done a beautiful job. (See Plates IV, V, VI)*

The first order of business was to find a workspace for Mario and an office for the foundation.

*Although Mr. Kress wanted me to move into Pichetto's studio, I didn't like the space. Despite the fact it was on the fifteenth floor, the light was poor due to the very small windows, which meant that the restorers always had to work with electric lamps. While Gualtiero Volterra was still in New York, after a lot of looking, it was decided to take a suite of rooms at 250 West 57th Street next to the Art Students League, which would serve both as my studio and as offices for the Foundation. There was a big room with good north light from a large window. The collection already at that time consisted of about eight or nine hundred paintings, some on loan to the National Gallery, some at 1020 Fifth Avenue, the Kress residence, and many in storage at Morgan Manhattan and Atlas warehouses.*

There were a number of Italians in New York, many of them Romans Mario knew from the art world. Some of them were Jews and others anti-Fascists. Some found their way home again, while others ultimately made a new life in New York. Mario was in the fortunate position of having left Italy voluntarily for an exciting new job, although, like most expatriates, he always missed the enchanted Rome of his youth that the war had changed forever. However, the move to New York had not been an easy decision to make and in the beginning Mario agreed to work for the Kress Foundation only part-time:

*I stayed on until the middle of April and worked on several other paintings. After Gualtiero left, the wonderful research curator of the Foundation, Professor William Suida, the great Viennese art historian, befriended me and helped me in my conversations with Mr. Kress. We agreed that I would take on the responsibilities of the Kress collection for part of the year and would oversee the men on Pichetto's staff.*



WELCOME TO AMERICA

*Mr. Kress was very kind and cordial to me, which was, in fact, his nature. He was very American and, in some ways, had a taste for simple things. After we had confirmed our arrangement, he invited me to lunch at Horn and Hardart's restaurant, where, he said, they made the best coffee in town. The walls were made of little boxes with glass doors through which you could see the food offered. With a quarter or fifty-cent piece the door would open and you took whatever meal you had chosen. It was an interesting experience and naturally I never went back there again.*

*I traveled back to Rome to tidy up my affairs before returning to New York in July, as we had agreed. For the moment, not sure how long I would stay in New York, I did not completely close my gallery.*

Shortly after Mario's return to Rome, Kress's secretary, Red Geiger, began to cable that the workroom would be ready on April 25 and when will Modestini arrive? After much frantic correspondence between an anxious and impatient Rush Kress and a concerned Contini, Mario finally booked passage to New York on the Queen Elizabeth to assume his new responsibilities. Among his papers I found a radiogram dated July 12, 1949: WELCOME TO AMERICA SUIDA AND EMERSON WILL MEET YOU AT DOCK R H KRESS.

By August 19th a Rush Kress memo asks whether Modestini "needs any more paintings to work on during the next three weeks." Scrawled pencil note in the margin: "Now has 30."

## CHAPTER 12

# Carnegie Hall and Huckleberry Hill

FOLLOWING THE DEATH of Stephen Pichetto, Mario had only committed to working six months a year for the Kress Foundation, but the studio at 250 West 57th Street quickly became overcrowded with the avalanche of work that kept arriving from the storage warehouses. It was evident that the Kress Foundation's art program required Mario's full attention, and Rush Kress hounded him until he agreed to take a full-time position. Reluctantly, Mario was forced to make a decision about whether or not he would leave his beloved Rome for good, to which he ultimately agreed, though with great difficulty and not without regret. However, for various reasons—an unhappy marriage and complicated personal life, his terrible memories of the German occupation, and his disgust with contemporary politics—he was ready for a change. Many years later, he told me that Gualtiero Volterra had warned him to think carefully before making his decision, because once a person went to New York, they never returned to Italy.

Once Mario was back in New York, the final contracts were signed:

*My position with the Kress Foundation was formalized. I was named curator and conservator of the collection, for which I received a salary; space, materials, and other costs associated with the work on the collection were paid by the foundation, while I was responsible for staff salaries, living arrangements and so on. I sent invoices for each restoration, reframing, making of shadow-boxes and the like. This was very similar to Pichetto's understanding.*

*I found an apartment on Madison and 68th Street but the most important thing was to learn English so that I could communicate with the people I worked with, especially Mr. Kress who was difficult to understand in any case since he always talked with a cigar in his mouth. In my free time, I went to the movies where there was always a double bill. A friend from Rome [Rita Venanzoni] who had married an American military official had moved to New York and she often went with me to translate the dialogue. This helped me very much to learn English and especially the pronunciation and the sound of the language that is so different from Italian. Also, while I was working I often had occasion to talk to the employees of the Foundation who were all Americans and therefore I had to force myself to try to speak English. Professor Suida helped me very much, especially with Mr. Kress. In fact, I found myself more at home in Greenwich Village, still an artist's quarter, with its proximity to the Italian neighborhood. With the help of Guy Emerson, I found a wonderful duplex apartment at number 4 Washington Square North. The town house, in which Robert E. Lee had once lived, belonged to New York University to whom the Kress Foundation had been very generous. Subsidized by the university, the rent was only \$200 a month. It had an entrance on Fifth Avenue and another on Washington Square with tall ceilings and plenty of space. I lived there for many years.*

*I will always owe a great debt to Professor Suida for befriending me when I arrived in New York. I was like a fish out of water, not knowing a word of English, and he helped me in every way he could. Many evenings I was his guest for dinner with his family in Forest Hills. His wife was an excellent cook. Muti, as her family called her, was a very kind and gracious woman, adored by her husband. She was also the practical one in the family, as Suida himself was the classic absent-minded professor.*

 Renzo Ravà 

Mario had another friend in the city, whom he had met in Florence through Count Contini. Renzo Ravà came from a Venetian family of Spanish Sephardic Jews, but his grandfather, a banker, had moved to Florence in the nineteenth century. The family lived in Piazza Indipendenza, which was newly built and very fashionable at that time, and owned a country estate on the Pian dei Giullari, overlooking the city.

When the racial laws were passed in 1938, Renzo was dismissed from his position in the Faculty of Law at the University of Florence, where he had been the youngest person ever to be appointed professor. He decided to go to Paris, where he had always felt at home, but he found that France was much more anti-Semitic than Italy. He managed to secure a US visa at the last moment before the German invasion. In New York he made many friends among the colony of upper class Italians who, for various reasons, found the city congenial. While living there during the war, he got an American law degree at Columbia University.

Once the war was over, he returned to Florence. Renzo's siblings had remained in Italy where they all survived the Nazi occupation. The house on the Pian dei Giullari had been occupied by the Germans and was semi-destroyed. After restoring it, he decided to practice international law, and to live between Florence and New York, arranging legal and other matters for families, mainly the old nobility, who had interests in both cities. Alessandro Contini Bonacossi became one of his first clients, and through him he met Gualtiero Volterra and Mario. The three men became fast friends. During the time Mario and I lived together, Renzo would call every morning at 8:30, even when we had dined with him the night before, and they would talk for a half an hour. And that was just the first call of the day.

☞ Carnegie Hall ☞

By May of 1950, Mario had moved to a large studio in the tower of Carnegie Hall, with brilliant light and just across the street from the Kress Foundation. Two of his assistants from the Studio Palma came to help him, Amleto De Santis and Giuseppe (Peppino) Barberi. Both Amleto and Peppino were dedicated Communists and considerably more radical than Mario. During the German occupation, they had put up posters around Rome and risked their lives in other more dangerous activities. Mario loved Amleto, whom he believed to be one of the most gifted painters of the Scuola Romana and felt that he never received the credit he deserved. This was certainly not because of Amleto's political affiliations; the most successful artists in Rome were all Communists.

Peppino's arrival in New York was recorded by the *New York Times*. A blurb dated March 13, 1950, featured a photograph of Peppino at customs. "Restorer of old paintings here from Rome," it reads, and goes on to say that Giuseppe Barberi worked for the Kress Foundation and was on his way to Washington to restore the paintings of the National Gallery. Wearing a beret, he is opening his suitcase to show the tools of his trade, which include stained paint rags, a Communist newspaper, used paint brushes, and a tin of shoe polish. Rita Venanzoni, who met them at the airport, was their spokesperson: "Oh yes," she said, "the artists will be able to complete the restoration of the 150 paintings in the National Gallery by March 1951." Mario nearly died of embarrassment.

Mario needed to staff his studio quickly to deal with the huge Kress project, so he kept some of Pichetto's men:

*I took on three of Pichetto's assistants. Angelo Fatta was the carpenter who, under Pichetto's direction, thinned and cradled all the panel paintings. The cradles were well-made but excessively heavy and I tried to explain to him that this could cause further cracking of the original panel, but he was difficult to communicate with and fixed in his ways. Born in Sicily, he had come to the United States when he was twenty*

*years old and spoke a strange dialect, a mixture of Italian and Brooklyn English, that was, to me, incomprehensible. Henry Hecht, the reliner, and Paul Kiebart, a restorer, also came to work with me. Another Pichetto assistant, Frank Sullivan, was a sort of handyman. By some curious logic, John Walker hired him to be the restorer of the National Gallery.*

Walker liked to claim that Sullivan was the best restorer in the world because he never touched a picture, but Mario told me that he used to work on Paul Mellon's English paintings, lining four or five of them at one time, and that he spoiled many of them. Eighteenth-century English paintings are very delicate and difficult to clean, because they were painted using soft resins and other soluble substances, such as tallow, wax, and balsam.

The paintings arrived in such numbers that even after the move to Carnegie Hall, there was still not enough room. Mario recalled:

*I took a second studio for woodworking, framing, relining and so on, reserving the tower space for cleaning and retouching. For the moment, our needs appeared to be*

**RESTORER OF OLD PAINTINGS HERE FROM ROME**



Joseph Barberi checking brushes at the New York International Airport yesterday.

59. Peppino arriving at Idlewild in 1950.



60. Mario and his men at Carnegie Hall in front of *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers* by Giambattista Tiepolo. From left: Emilio Quarantelli, Robert Manning, Bartolo Bracaglia, Giuseppe Barberi (Peppino), Mario Modestini, Amleto De Santis, and Angelo Fatta.

*satisfied. I had brought two more of my Roman assistants to New York, Claudio Rigosi and Bartolo Bracaglia, and a wonderful frame restorer, the Florentine, Emilio Quarantelli, a great character of whom everyone became very fond, particularly Rush Kress, even though there was no way they could communicate with each other since Quarantelli only spoke pure Florentine dialect.*

During the McCarthy era, an informer denounced Amleto and Peppino as Communists, and they were deported back to Italy. It took some time to sort this out. Two years later, Guy Emerson wrote to Rush Kress that the pair had been granted visas as a result of the efforts made by Colonel Henry McBride, one of the officers of the National Gallery. Emerson goes on to say that they are the only men Professor Modestini can entrust with major work and



that they will “be a great help and comfort to Mario.” Everyone called Mario “Professore”, except his friend, Renzo Ravà, who actually was a professor.

### ☞ Huckleberry Hill ☞

The war in Korea began in June 1950 and, like many Americans, Rush Kress was alarmed, fearing that New York City would be one of the main targets of a nuclear attack. This was the era of backyard bomb shelters, air raid drills, and schoolchildren ducking under their desks. Kress decided to build a safe haven for the collection in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains, where he owned a vacation property called Huckleberry Hill. The construction work was completed in six months and was inspected in time for the October 1, 1951, board meeting. The location was very remote, in the far north-east corner of the state and the nearest town, Newfoundland, was five miles away.



61. Huckleberry Hill.

Mario had been involved, naturally, in designing the building. He described it in his memoir:

*The art facility consisted of three stories: the ground floor was a bomb-proof bunker large enough to store the entire Kress collection. It was fitted with rolling racks with all the paintings arranged by school and period so foundation and National Gallery staff and prospective regional gallery directors could easily examine them. Above the storage was a large restoration studio. There was a carpenter's shop for Angelo Fatta fully equipped with woodworking machinery and a separate studio for Emilio Quarantelli, the framer. The x-ray machine was in a lead sealed room in the basement. There was a photo studio although we did not have a photographer on the staff. Robert Manning, William Suida's son-in-law, had been engaged as my assistant to be in charge of the record keeping and he hired a photographer called Colden to come up periodically for several weeks at a time. We had photo equipment and whiled away many a winter evening doing our own photography of the work in progress so we would not lose time waiting for the photographer to arrive. Colden was ultimately replaced by Angelo Lomeo and his wife Sonja Bullaty (1923-2000), two real artists who made the best photographs of paintings I have ever seen. They became great friends.*

*The studio was fully equipped with every conceivable tool for restoration and examination to facilitate our work: microscopes, a fluoroscope, a custom-made apparatus consisting of a platform mounted on a hydraulic lift in order to work on oversized paintings, a press for relining and so on. When I hired Gustav Berger, later to become famous for his work with adhesives, he built us one of the first vacuum hot tables for wax relining according to the Dutch method.*

The black-and-white photographs produced by Sonja Bullaty and Angelo Lomeo were works of art in their own right. Sonja was a gifted artist. She paid great attention to the paintings she was photographing and always talked about how much she learned from them about composition, color, and tone, which she then applied to her own work. She was born to a Jewish banking family in Prague. When she was eighteen, she and her family were sent to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp not far from the city. From there she was shipped to Auschwitz and was one of the few prisoners to survive the final death march. After the war, her

schooling interrupted and her family murdered, she made her way back to Prague, where she became an apprentice of the great Czech photographer, Josef Sudek (1896–1976), before immigrating to the United States. Sonja and Angelo became lifelong friends of Mario as well as of Sandrino Contini Bonacossi after he arrived in New York in 1956. Sonja later befriended me as well. Despite what had happened to her, she was the most positive, optimistic person I have ever met. She had a great gift for life and greeted every day with joy.



62. Sonja Bullaty with Josef Sudek in Prague.

The staff numbered about ten men. The living quarters occupied the entire top floor of the building. Mario had his own room and there was a dormitory for the others, plus a kitchen, a dining room, and bathrooms. Two small houses on the property were available for married men or visitors.<sup>1</sup> This arrangement didn't suit everyone. Some restorers came and went very quickly. Mario wrote about one particularly short-lived appointment:

*One time I brought a young restorer from Florence, [Raoul] Montefiore, the son of an old-time forger. He was nicknamed "il gretolino" (the scratcher) because he loved to draw fine craquelure. He had asked to come, but when he saw this place in the middle of the forest, he went mad. After a week, he no longer worked but paced around the studio, smoking cigarettes. I suggested that perhaps he should go back to Florence. He agreed right away and I never heard from him again.*

When I would become too fussy over details in my own restoration work, Mario would call me *Gretolina*. "Gretolina, stop working, let's have some lunch," he would say, or, "What are you doing? Are you putting eyes on the fleas?"

Mario continued his description of Huckleberry Hill:

*The winter snows reached two or three feet in height. Often, we opened the door in the morning to find a white wall blocking the entrance. We couldn't go out until the plow came to clear the drive. The summers were hot and humid. Autumn and spring were the only two pleasant seasons. We worked from Monday morning until Friday afternoon when everyone returned to New York for the weekend. Occasionally we were snowed in for the weekend and we cursed the beastly weather.*

*It was very difficult to find a good cook. One man we hired had worked for the army. He used to take a piece of lard, tie it to the handle of the pot with a string, and let it boil for a while. Then he would remove it, wrap it up, and put it away to use another day. Another time one of the trustees had given us some wonderful beefsteaks, enormous. He cooked them until they had become like leather. After that I fired him. We knew a young couple who had just come from Italy. He was a lawyer, and she was an excellent cook. After a while, he found a job working for the television and we lost them.*

To add to the culinary difficulties, nearby Newfoundland was a dry town, but it was possible to obtain Mondavi or Gallo jug wine in another town, further away. It was the best they could get.

Evenings were spent playing cards or working in the photography studio. In warm weather, after work, the men fished from a stream that had been stocked with trout. On one occasion, Sandrino Contini Bonacossi was visiting and insisted on joining in, even though he was dressed in his best clothes. Someone gave him waders to protect his trousers, but somehow, he slipped, tumbled into the stream and, of course, his waders filled with water. He had no change of clothes and had to sit barelegged while his trousers dried. There was much joking and hilarity about this and other incidents.

It was a difficult living situation, although the many conveniences of the facility—purpose-built for optimal working conditions—partly made up for the discomforts, and the foundation did everything in its power to make life at the outpost tolerable. On the whole, the men were happy to have steady work and were better paid than they would have been in Italy. As for Mario, by the time the operation was moved to Huckleberry Hill, his dedication to the Kress Collection was so complete that he could, in his characteristic way, shrug off any inconvenience.

After visiting the Allentown Art Museum in the late 1980s, Mario and I, together with Marilyn Perry, the director of the Kress Foundation, drove to Huckleberry Hill out of curiosity and spent the night in the main house, which had been converted into an inn. Mario and I slept in what, he told me, had been Virginia and Rush Kress's bedroom. We had dinner at the inn and discovered that the town was still dry. The old studio was still there, empty and looking indestructible, it had a rather eerie atmosphere.

During the period when the art operation at Huckleberry Hill was active, Rush Kress and his family often came up to stay in their house. The children, especially Maggie, Jocelyn, and Francesca, became very fond of Mario, and they stayed in touch later in life. Virginia Kress still lived in Samuel's old apartment at 1020 Fifth



63. The restoration studio at Huckleberry Hill. Mario is standing in the middle of the photograph with El Greco's *Laocoön* (National Gallery of Art, Washington DC) to his right.

Avenue and we were often invited to parties there. During one of these there was some rather staid dancing in the Venetian Sitting Room and Jocelyn asked Mario to dance. Afterward, she came to find me and exclaimed "Congratulations! Mario just told me that you're getting married." I was dumbstruck—Mario hadn't yet told *me*.

## CHAPTER 13

# New York, New York

✿§ Federico Zeri §✿

**E**VEN AFTER HIS MOVE to New York, Mario continued to see Federico Zeri, with whom he had worked at the Studio d'Arte Palma, with some frequency. The scholar's reputation as a connoisseur was growing, and in the fifties and sixties, he often stopped in New York, to work on the Italian paintings catalogues for the Metropolitan Museum together with the curator, Elizabeth Gardner. He traveled about the country visiting museums, and was also writing the Italian paintings catalogue for the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore. He had become one of the principal consultants to the oil tycoon, J. Paul Getty, "the richest man in the world" according to *Time* magazine. Getty was buying old master paintings to add to his collections of eighteenth-century French decorative arts and classical sculpture for an eventual museum in Malibu, California, which was to inherit the bulk of his vast



fortune upon his death, though, at that time, this was known only to his lawyers and accountants. Mario had also recommended Federico to Georges Wildenstein, who needed an expert to replace the aging Bernard Berenson as his advisor on Italian paintings. Zeri was, of course, delighted to collaborate with the dealer. It was a great opportunity for him not only to study the gallery's legendary reserves, but also to earn substantial commissions on their sale.<sup>1</sup>

Mario wrote of Zeri in this period:

*In his various trips to New York, he often came to my studio where I always had a lot of paintings, from the Kress Collection and other private collections and museums. He would spend hours examining the paintings, considering whether the attributions were correct or not. In the evening, we frequented one of the few Italian restaurants in town together with our mutual friend, Sandrino Contini Bonacossi who was*



64. Mario Modestini making some last minute adjustments to a painting by Bernardo Strozzi in Seattle, Washington.

*working with me for the Kress Foundation. One evening Sandrino and I went to pick up Federico at his hotel. While we were there, he received a telephone call from Rome that his mother had died. He became mad with grief and wanted to kill himself by jumping out of the window. Sandrino and I managed to restrain him, I don't know how, hanging on to him by his jacket, trying to calm him down because he was totally beside himself. He left the next day for Rome and for days after that he wrote me desperate letters.*

Zeri wrote Mario many letters over the years, full of veiled hints, a combination of personal news and professional matters that it is evident Mario was meant to understand. Some are wickedly funny, if occasionally suffused with paranoia. In a letter dated January 14, 1958, after discussing his new book, Zeri writes that he is sad because his sister had lost custody of her son and then goes on to warn Mario about a conversation he had with Berenson, whom he had visited at Villa I Tatti. He writes that BB seemed to be furious with Mario for reasons that he, Zeri, did not understand. "I remained silent and didn't comment except to say that your work was the best by a long shot that I ever had ever seen, and that you are the only restorer of importance who also has an exceptional aesthetic sensibility."<sup>2</sup> Mario supposed that on that particular occasion Berenson was annoyed because he had prevented the Kress Foundation from purchasing what was supposed to be a self-portrait by Andrea del Sarto that BB had recommended to Walker. Mario didn't believe in the attribution and said that it was also a wreck.

Mario was one of the few people Federico loved, respected, and trusted. He wrote to Mario, "I think of you as one of the few friends I have had in my life."<sup>3</sup> In his published writings, he acknowledged the impact that Mario had on his development as an art historian several times:

Frequenting the art market, and especially those essential protagonists, the restorers, was more than precious, as it always is for someone who wants to learn to discover the innumerable

modifications, transformations and alterations which a work of art undergoes during its history, especially those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which was the area I had chosen. Obviously, I am not talking about identifying forgeries, I am only saying that this education was the most precious element in my formation. At that time, I went often to the Palma Gallery in Rome, which showed both modern and antique works; it had a restoration studio, directed by an extraordinary man, Mario Modestini. ... I consider him, together with Mauro Pellicoli, the most important restorer of our century. ... I believe that people such as Mario Modestini should be treated with veneration.

He had the eye of a great connoisseur and he revealed to me the many cunning deceptions used by restorers, and their techniques for faking or reconstructing ... and ways of making false craquelure in the paint layer. Among other things, Modestini ... has something which others in his field don't possess: a solid cultural base which extends into every field and a knowledge of all the aspects of art history, even the least visible ones. And finally, and this is his most unusual trait, he is immune from that characteristic which affects most of his colleagues ... a secret form of envy which is transformed into bitterness and acrimony, openly expressed, that the Germans call "Schadenfreude", that is joy, more or less hidden, in the misfortunes of others.<sup>4</sup>

Zeri owned a parcel of land near Mentana, just outside Rome, the site of an ancient town. In the early 1960's he began to build a villa there. While excavating the land numerous epigraphs were found, which he had embedded in the walls of the internal courtyard. Mario wrote in his memoirs:

*When I went back to Rome during the summers, I often went to see him [Zeri] while he was building his house in Mentana, begun by the architect [Luigi] Moretti and finished by Andrea Busiri Vici. In that house, he found the peace and serenity*

*to dedicate his life completely to his work, even though he continuously complained about the situation in Italy, the degraded condition of the museums, churches, frescoes, sculpture in public gardens destroyed by vandals, and, of course, other art historians. Despite his, at times, ferocious criticisms, his anger and bitterness were genuine, the result of deep feeling and frustration.*

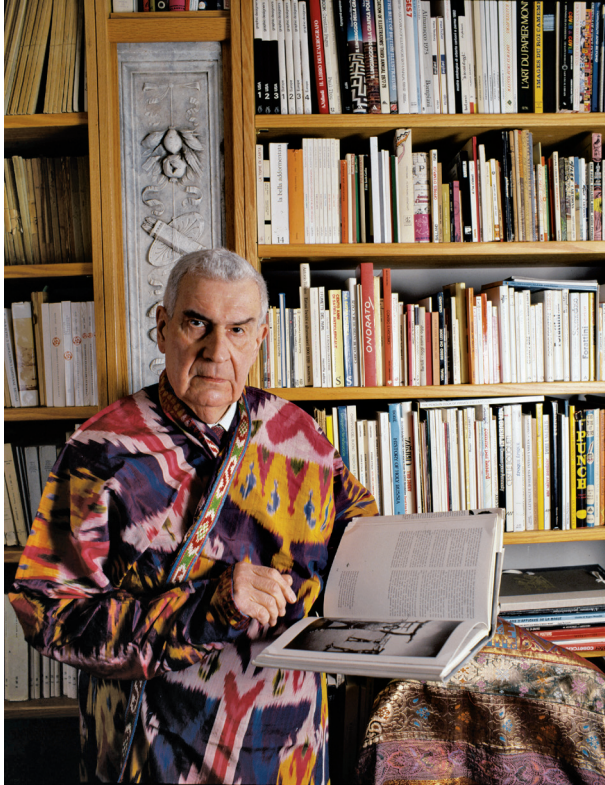
Like Berenson, Federico sought to see every painting he could and committed each of them to his exceptional memory. He had the legendary ability to recall every work in every collection he had ever seen, including where they hung, which is, of course, one of the tricks for training visual memory. It was a stunning feat and no one quite believed it until they heard him do it.

As a freelance scholar, Zeri's 'outsider' status allowed him to give free rein to his opinions, which he aired in several newspaper columns. His flamboyant, combative personality and fearlessness made him a perfect television personality. The bizarre always attracted him and he liked to wear all sorts of costumes on his shows. He became a popular figure, a household name, quite unusual for an art historian. His outspokenness landed him in a number of lawsuits for defamation, one of them brought by Cesare Brandi, after Zeri declared that a painting he had purchased for a museum as Raphael was "una crosta" (a scab), ridiculing it with the title "The Madonna of Captain Cook" because the plant behind the Madonna's head is a specimen from the South Seas that was not discovered until Cook's voyages in the eighteenth century. (Zeri was also an expert in botany.) In that trial, Mario was a witness for the defense.

Zeri was full of suspicions and contorted ideas that he repeated so often they were eventually regarded as fact. He insisted, for example, that Contini had met Donna Vittoria in a brothel, and that, because the count had a criminal past, he had assumed the identity of a dead soldier. He quarreled with almost everyone, including, eventually, his old friend, Sandrino. Mario reprimanded Zeri for his animosity towards their mutual friend and later, after Sandrino's tragic death, Zeri felt guilty about his behavior

and requested a photograph that Sonja Bullaty had taken at the National Gallery.

For Zeri, everything was a conspiracy, with himself as the intended victim. Effigies of his particularly loathed “enemies”—the art historian Giulio Carlo Argan and his friend Cesare Brandi—were hung by the neck like voodoo dolls inside the entrance of his house. I had heard for years about this weird practice but seeing it in person was unsettling. His practical jokes were childish and perverse, such as leaving a (fake) human hand dangling from someone’s car trunk, or making crank calls to a convent of nuns, pretending to be the laundry man and asking them about their underwear.<sup>5</sup> Usually



65. Federico Zeri in Moroccan dress, in his library at Mentana.

he would conduct these phone calls in a falsetto voice. Despite his unorthodox and sometimes cruel behavior, his prodigious mind made him one of the most influential art historians of his time.

In his later years, Federico's health began to deteriorate and it was difficult for him to walk. On October 5, 1998 Mario and I were watching the mid-day news and heard that Federico Zeri had died that morning of a massive heart attack. Mario was crushed.

### ☞ The Fire in the Studio ☞

Not long after he settled in New York, Mario discovered Greenwich Village. In the early fifties, it was in its heyday—full of artists, beat poets, and folk singers, as well as Italian Americans living in what is known as Little Italy, boasting shops that sold fresh pasta, good olive oil, cheeses, and other Italian specialties. The most beautiful part of the Village is Washington Square, a nineteenth-century quadrangle with buildings on all four sides of a large park that features a triumphal arch.

Most of the buildings that surround Washington Square were, and still are, owned by New York University (NYU), which uses it as part of its campus. Some of the gracious old townhouses were still rented out, though it was well-nigh impossible to obtain one of those apartments, as they were in great demand. The Kress Foundation was a large donor to Bellevue Hospital, a part of the university, and Mario's friend and colleague, Guy Emerson, used his connections to find accommodation for him. He managed to secure a duplex apartment in a Federal townhouse at the corner of Washington Square North. Mario lived on the first floor and had a studio on the second. In December 1955, he was preparing a large group of paintings for the 1956 quinquennial Kress Exhibition at the National Gallery. It was the day after Christmas, and several of his assistants were working in the Washington Square studio while Mario was at a meeting at the Kress Foundation on 57th Street. The meeting was interrupted by an urgent telephone call from

one of his assistants, telling him that the studio was on fire and to come downtown immediately. Mario said that he jumped in a taxi and told the driver that he needed to get to Washington Square as fast as possible because his house was on fire. "Everyone says that," replied the jaded New York cabbie.

Fire engines were already there by the time he arrived, and firemen were still carrying paintings out of the building. They were stacked everywhere—on the sidewalk, the balcony, wherever there was room. After the fire was extinguished and the smoke cleared, everyone began to assess the damage to the paintings. Five paintings were badly burned: a Magnasco; an Antonio Pellegrini; most of a long frieze by Tintoretto and studio (mainly studio); a Bernardo Strozzi genre piece of street musicians; and a landscape by Jan Brueghel the Elder, the left half of which was completely carbonized. This was the signed version of a nearly identical painting in the Vienna Museum and the most valuable and rare of the five.

A fireman in the smoking ruin showed Mario a painting he had saved by throwing a fire blanket over it; this was the portrait of a woman in her bath by François Clouet. In fact, the blanket managed to cover most of the painting, except for the two upper corners, which were badly burned. The fireman told Mario that he saw this beautiful naked woman and decided he had to protect her. At that time, the subject was thought to be Diane de Poitiers, the mistress of King Henry II of France.

The reason for the fire was soon discovered. NYU had sent a workman to strip the paint from the front doors along Washington Square North. Since Mario's house was the only one without a Christmas wreath, he began there, using a blowtorch. The door was flanked by thin, fluted pilasters, which concealed the wiring for the doorbell. Since the wood was old, there were some fissures through which the flames entered and set the wires on fire. When the man finished, the fire was not yet apparent. Slowly, it spread up through the conduit of the old wires. When it was already quite advanced, the men working in the studio began to notice smoke coming



through the floorboards. They immediately began to remove the paintings and called the fire department.

As luck would have it, not long before the fire, Mario had adjusted the insurance to reflect the real value of all the paintings in the studio so that the losses were paid for, even though money cannot replace a work of art, each of which is unique. An Italian journalist picked up this detail and began to publish articles in



66. François Clouet, *A Lady in Her Bath*, ca. 1571, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 92.1 × 81.3 cm.

Italian newspapers claiming that the fire had been set deliberately to collect the insurance money. This was absurd, of course, but the media thrives on scandal. Mario was sick about what had happened. Apart from the disastrous loss of five paintings, he had also lost many personal possessions, including all his private papers and mementos. He could not bear to stay there after the fire and moved to East 52nd Street, by the East River. This new apartment had a large living room with a double-height ceiling and a big window with northern light, and here he lived for many years. This was where I first met him. He always kept a fire extinguisher on hand and did not like to talk about the conflagration, which is why he did not write about it in the draft of his memoir.

## CHAPTER 14

# Samuel Kress and the National Gallery of Art

☞ Andrew Mellon: The Philanthropist ☞

THE BENEFICIARY OF THE LARGEST Kress gift was the National Gallery in Washington, for which the foundation continued to acquire paintings until 1960.<sup>1</sup> The museum was founded by an Act of Congress in 1937, and built for the nation by Andrew W. Mellon (1855–1937). Born in Pittsburgh during the era of coal and steel, Mellon made a fortune in banking and industry—one of the largest in the United States after that of John D. Rockefeller. He became a great philanthropist and, being public-minded, served as the Secretary of the Treasury for almost eleven years, in the administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. He had long lobbied to establish an independent National Gallery of Art in the nation's capital and was able to secure a prime location in an area known as the Federal Triangle, just north of the National Mall, which was lined with other important museums.<sup>2</sup> He lived

to see his project approved, and in 1937, just before his death, he donated his own collection of paintings and sculptures and funded the construction of the building, which was designed by the famous architect John Russell Pope (1874–1937). Prized Tennessee marble, a pinkish-gray limestone, was used lavishly throughout the traditionally planned museum, with its classical façade and stately stairway that led to a rotunda inspired by the Pantheon from which barrel-vaulted corridors opened onto spacious galleries. Neither Mellon nor Pope lived to see the finished edifice, but it represented the style and aspirations of both.

Andrew Mellon was not a natural collector like his friend from Pittsburgh, Henry Clay Frick, who had always loved paintings and assembled a faultless collection of masterpieces. Mellon's tastes



67. Andrew W. Mellon.

were rather pedestrian: he bought the Barbizon paintings that were popular at the time, until, in the early twenties, he began contemplating a national gallery. He then turned his attention toward the old masters, which he purchased mainly from Knoedler's gallery. It was through them that he learned of the "secret" sale of paintings from the Hermitage in Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), which Stalin had ordered to raise foreign capital. Knoedler's was part of a consortium of three dealers involved in the sale. Determined to secure the paintings for the new museum, by 1931 he had succeeded in acquiring twenty-three masterpieces, including Raphael's *Alba Madonna* and Jan van Eyck's *Annunciation*, for \$6,654,000. It remains a historic coup.

### ☞ David Finley: The Director ☞

Mellon's right-hand man was David Finley (1890–1977), an intelligent, sophisticated lawyer whom he had met at the Treasury Department during the early 1920s. Finley came from a distinguished South Carolina family, and his wife, Margaret Eustis, was a wealthy Washington society woman. Finley's father had been a congressman and thus he knew the political ins and outs of the capital city. Before anything was built or even approved, Mellon asked Finley to be the director of the nascent National Gallery and to take over the planning. Finley began to familiarize himself with the art world, the dealers, the collectors, and how the important European museums were run. In late 1936, when Mellon learned that Joseph Duveen intended to retire, he sent Finley to New York, where he purchased from Duveen twenty-four Italian Renaissance paintings and eighteen sculptures for the planned gallery.

According to Mario, David Finley was not a connoisseur, but he was knowledgeable in a general way, having assisted Mellon in building his collection over the years. Mellon was very much an Anglophile and was impressed with London's National Gallery, on which he based his own museum. Finley continued this model

of collecting, which was to exhibit only select master works, generously spaced, in well-lit galleries that had been expressly built for paintings.

He did not believe in crowding, and considered the old-fashioned hanging of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, with its paintings stacked to the ceiling, the nadir of museology. Nor did he favor exhibiting paintings, sculpture, and furniture together. After Mario began working for the Kress Foundation, which owned wonderful works of decorative arts, he urged Finley to add some furniture to the galleries. However, Finley was completely opposed to this idea, and for many years Washington's National Gallery remained focused on their old master paintings and an outstanding collection of European sculpture, donated principally by the Kress Foundation. Despite their differing points of view, Mario got along well with David Finley and he felt that they had mutual respect for each other.

In 1938, after Mellon had died and the building had become a reality, Finley realized that after the Mellon donation had been "distilled," as curator John Walker put it—by which he meant culling the wrecks, "duds," and fakes—only 125 paintings, among them the masterpieces from the Hermitage, would be on display, together with some of the mostly indifferent sculptures acquired from Duveen's stock.<sup>3</sup> Mellon had anticipated that, as the building neared completion, it would attract other important collections. This had not happened, and with the opening not far off, the museum would look terribly empty. Jeremiah O'Connor, the curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, suggested that Finley should talk to Kress. O'Connor had visited the overflowing treasure house that Samuel Kress's New York residence had become, and new works were being acquired all the time. O'Connor persuaded Kress to give Finley a hearing.<sup>4</sup> Finley and Samuel Kress met on April 18, 1939, at Kress's apartment, 1020 Fifth Avenue, where they discussed the collection and the new National Gallery for seven hours.<sup>5</sup>

☞ John Walker: The Curator ☞

Finley decided that the next step was to have John Walker, the museum's newly appointed chief curator, visit Kress without delay, and he asked Walker to return from Rome, where he had been the Resident at the American Academy. Walker was from a wealthy Pittsburgh family and was a childhood friend of Paul Mellon, Andrew's son and a trustee of the National Gallery, to whom he had earlier written from Rome, inquiring if there might be a post for him.<sup>6</sup>

While living in Italy, he frequented Villa I Tatti and studied with Berenson, whom he greatly admired. He enjoyed a good relationship with the elderly critic, who came to depend on his "pet biped,"<sup>7</sup> as he called Walker. With Berenson's backing, he was offered the coveted position, which he accepted in late 1938. Lingering in Rome, he had begun to plan the new galleries for Washington when he was abruptly summoned by Finley. In Walker's memoir, *Self-Portrait with Donors*, the title of the chapter devoted to the Kress brothers is 'Two Unwary Collectors', referring, it seems, to Samuel's dependence on Contini, whom Walker considered a charlatan, a "modern Cagliostro."<sup>8</sup> Mario said this was because the dealer once foolishly offered Walker a bribe, which not only offended him, but also made him suspicious.

Walker's criticisms have some validity. The count tended to keep the best pictures for his personal collection and, while there were always a few "leaders", the "lots" Kress's preferred dealer offered were something of a grab bag. Typically, there would be a number of works by lesser masters, painters that reflected Longhi's taste, important examples of Lombard and baroque paintings. Many were gold-ground paintings by rare masters, paintings that today command large sums. A number were in very poor condition. Every painting came with five or six expertises (that is, signed statements of authenticity) from the most prominent art historians of the day.



For some reason, Walker was completely blind to Berenson's trafficking in the market, first for Colnaghi, an important English gallery, and then through his lucrative arrangement with Duveen. Regarding Samuel Kress's naiveté in accepting the opinions furnished by Contini, Walker writes in his memoir, "It never seems to have occurred to him that these experts, except for Berenson, were subsidized by the vendor whose wares they were appraising."<sup>9</sup> The brilliant Roberto Longhi, Contini's expert, is lumped in with the rest of his colleagues, although he made many fewer mistakes than his rival, Berenson. Unlike the American, Longhi researched and published pioneering studies of the many tributaries of Italian painting in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not just the major figures of the Renaissance that Berenson admitted to the canon. Mario greatly admired Longhi and said that he was never taken in by a forgery. It should also be noted that although Longhi made a good living, he never became so rich from his activities that he could live like a prince, as Berenson did.

Mario came to know Walker well and wrote of him:

*Although he was a disciple of Berenson, he had never learned anything about connoisseurship. Berenson had a great deal of influence over him and from Villa I Tatti manoeuvred him to recommend purchases from Duveen and, later, Wildenstein, from whom Berenson drew a salary. Although Berenson's interests may have been pecuniary, Walker's were not. He was an honest man and his ties to Berenson were those of respect and loyalty.*

Walker was dubious about the implications of Finley's initial meeting with Kress in April 1939. He wrote:

Interesting Kress in the Gallery was a remarkable achievement but his board of trustees did not share David Finley's feeling of euphoria. They had heard rumors that the Kress Collection did not meet the high standard insisted on by Andrew Mellon. They therefore asked me to . . . return to America, and advise them on what they considered to be a somewhat questionable offer,

CHAPTER 14



68. The “storekeeper’s” apartment, 1940. The downstairs entrance hall with the *Allendale Nativity* on the right.



69. The Solarium with Titian, Giorgione, and Bartolomeo Veneto.

if and when it was made. Kress himself was as doubtful that he wanted the collection in Washington as were the trustees that they would accept it. . . . As soon as I disembarked I was taken to 1020 Fifth Avenue where I met Sam Kress for the first time. I remember his small blue eyes, as hard and piercing as any I have ever seen. His head, which seemed rather large for his stocky body, suggested one of those portraits of Roman emperors of the second century; and like the late rulers of Rome, his expression was one of innate suspicion. . . . The apartment, a two-story penthouse, was expensively decorated in what might be termed New York Renaissance . . . Italian paintings, lighted with reflectors, were hung from dado to ceiling in every room. Each panel or canvas was in a shadowbox lined with old velvet; red, green, and sometimes gray. These packaged primitives, heavily varnished and cradled, bore witness to a storekeeper's sense of order.<sup>10</sup> (See Plate III)

Just before his return to the United States, Walker had made what proved to be a serendipitous visit to Berenson to say his farewells. By chance, Berenson had just received photographs of the Kress Collection, which Samuel Kress had sent for his perusal. Walker spent his last few days at I Tatti cramming, under Berenson's tutelage, memorizing the attributions for his upcoming test in the Kress apartment. He admits that he was letter perfect by the time he left for New York, and it served him well. Walker continues the description of his visit to the Kress apartment:

Mr. Kress had a small black book which listed the works of art in each room, and as he and I walked from picture to picture he would say, "Mr. Walker, who do you think painted that Madonna?" I would study the picture for a moment and answer with some hesitation, "I believe, Mr. Kress, Berenson would attribute it to so-and-so. However, I don't doubt that Van Marle would disagree and ascribe it to such and such. Probably Longhi and Perkins would go along with Van Marle."

Mr. Kress would refer to his notes and say, "Very remarkable, Mr. Walker, that is exactly the case." ... Mr. Kress at the end of the day conceded that the new chief curator of the National Gallery knew something about Italian art. ... I never mentioned my lucky trip to I Tatti. The next day I was taken to Mr. Kress's office downtown. Again, I was shown hundreds of Italian Primitives, all in their shadow boxes, some in racks, some hung, some stacked against the walls. These 'items,' as their owner designated them, were carefully inventoried, as though they were spools of thread.<sup>11</sup>

A taint of snobbism and patrician arrogance runs through Walker's chapter about the Kress brothers, noted by the *New York Times* art critic, John Canaday, in his 1974 review of the book.<sup>12</sup> In contrast to his devotion to the Mellons, Walker belittles Samuel Kress and accepts his paintings holding his nose, anguishing that he is letting Andrew Mellon down by accepting works that do not meet the high standards of the initial donation. However, when the Kress gifts were made permanent in 1961, the National Gallery retained 121 paintings from the original group, including masterpieces by Bronzino, Correggio, Crespì, Giorgione, Guardi, Domenico Veneziano, Lotto, Luini, Piero di Cosimo, and other great painters, many of which had come from Contini Bonacossi.

John Walker liked to give the impression that the only good Kress paintings went to Washington and that the rest were discards, too inferior for the National Gallery.<sup>13</sup> This slur left a strong and entirely unjustified impression that remained pervasive until quite recently. Every Kress regional gallery has paintings that could hang in any museum, and even the study collections include some superb paintings that attest to the embarrassment of riches the collection possessed at the time of its dispersal.

After the death of Samuel Kress, the practice of buying paintings in "lots" ceased, and the foundation made a concerted effort to be more selective; works were purchased individually, sometimes at the request of John Walker, from dealers all over

the world. This was not a given, because in 1947—according to Guy Emerson, the art director of the foundation—Rush Kress was of the opinion that enough had been done for the National Gallery, and he was more interested in funding medical research. With Emerson's encouragement, he allowed himself to be persuaded by the National Gallery that his brother intended to do more to enrich the Kress Collection.<sup>14</sup> After that, Rush never wavered, and the foundation was able to make purchases that would have been impossible even a decade later. It was, as Mario well knew, a buyer's market.

Both John Walker and Mario deserve credit for this change in policy, even though he and the chief curator often disagreed about acquisitions, and not always in a congenial way. The tone seems to have been set early on, during Mario's first visit to the National Gallery, which must have been not long after his arrival in New York in 1949. He described what happened:

*When I visited Washington for the first time with Mr. Kress, Guy Emerson, and Professor Suida, we went for a tour of the galleries with David Finley and John Walker. I first stopped in front of two paintings by Vermeer from the Mellon Collection and remarked that they were fakes. Walker was horrified and told me I was crazy. In fact, those two paintings stayed on view for eighteen more years, until they were finally acknowledged as forgeries, perhaps by the famous Dutch forger, Van Meegeren. We continued our tour, and I found another fake, in the Kress Collection, a Madonna and Child that was supposed to be by Alessio Baldovinetti. This time Johnny Walker became very angry and told me that it had been bought from Duveen for \$300,000, which was a lot of money at that time, and was recommended by Bernard Berenson [who wrote to Samuel Kress congratulating him on his acquisition of the Baldovinetti as one of the most beautiful paintings in America and a masterpiece of Renaissance painting]. I asked Walker if he had ever made an x-radiograph of the painting, and he said no. I saw that it was originally painted on panel and that it had been transferred to canvas. I was sure there was another painting underneath. In fact, I was certain that the painting came from Baron Lazzaroni, who sold many pictures to Duveen. Lazzaroni usually bought paintings by a minor artist and then had his restorer in Paris, Vézetta, turn them into "masterpieces" by an important Renaissance*

CHAPTER 14

artist, although the Baron fancied himself a “restorer”<sup>15</sup> and sometimes he would ruin perfectly good pictures just for the pleasure of altering them.

I offered to x-ray the “Baldovinetti”, and about a month later the painting was sent to me in New York. I was delighted, because I would be able to prove that I was right. In fact, when I made the radiograph, there was a half-ruined Madonna and Child underneath the ‘Baldovinetti,’ by the Pseudo Pier Francesco Fiorentino. The forger had copied a photograph, printed in reverse, of a famous work by Baldovinetti in the Louvre. When Walker saw the x-ray, he asked me to clean the painting and the ruined Pseudo Pier Francesco emerged. Today it is in storage in the National Gallery.

On that first walk through the gallery I saw another fake, but I didn’t say anything because I thought I had given Johnny Walker enough bad news for one day.



70. Lazzaroni's Baldovinetti, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 79.5 × 60 cm.



*It was a gold-ground painting of a Madonna and Child, in thirteenth-century style, probably the work of a forger from Orvieto called Riccardi, who was the nephew of the infamous faker of Etruscan jewelry, Teodoro Riccardi, whom I described earlier. Finally, I saw yet another fake: a little Annunciation, also given to Baldovinetti—not by Verzetta this time but probably by a Florentine forger working in the thirties.<sup>16</sup> It was part of the Kress Collection and had come from Wildenstein, I believe through incompetence rather than bad faith.*

Despite their rocky start, Mario and Walker traveled together to Europe on several occasions and often collaborated, especially on the final purchases from Contini in the mid-fifties, when they tried to coax the dealer into selling some of the pieces from his personal collection. In the little correspondence I found in Mario's files, a very friendly letter from Walker praises his restorations and use of



71. The painting during cleaning, revealing the damaged Pier Francesco Fiorentino underneath.



frames—in particular the one he designed for the *Nativity* by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi, which was a challenge due to the near impossibility of finding an antique frame for a tondo, especially one of that size.<sup>17</sup> The two men continued to work together as late as 1968. Knowing how Mario felt about Walker—whenever his name came up, it was always preceded by “*quello stronzo di Johnny Walker*” (“that asshole, Johnny Walker”)—I was not surprised to learn from Walker’s letters to Berenson that the feeling was mutual. Walker hardly mentions Mario in his memoir, referring to him only once, offhandedly, as “the brilliant restorer, Mario Modestini,” while he goes on at some length about Pichetto’s qualities and how he failed to appreciate them at the time.

Mario believed that Walker wanted to limit the number of Kress paintings in the final donation to protect Andrew Mellon’s legacy. Shown here are just a few examples of paintings that could today belong to the National Gallery; all are in wonderful condition.



72. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio, *Youth Crowned with Flowers*, ca. 1490, oil on panel, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 39.1 × 28.9 cm.



73. Orazio Gentileschi, *Young Woman as a Sibyl*, ca. 1620, oil on canvas, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas, 82.5 × 73 cm.

CHAPTER 14



74. Pieter de Hooch, *Woman with Children in an Interior*, 1558–1560, oil on canvas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California, 67,6 × 53,6 cm.



75. Canaletto, *The Grand Canal from the Campo San Vio* (one of a pair), 1730–1735, oil on canvas, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee, 112 × 161 cm.

## CHAPTER 15

# The Regional Gallery Program

ONE OF THE MOST remarkable things about the Kress Foundation's donations was the flexibility offered to its beneficiaries, who could pick and choose from the ever-expanding art collection. John Walker decided that Washington would not accept more paintings than there were in the original loan. In order to improve the Kress Collection in Washington and fill in gaps, paintings were constantly swapped back and forth between the National Gallery and the foundation.

After Samuel Kress's commitment to Washington replaced his initial idea of a Kress Museum, he decided to create smaller Kress Collections in other American cities that did not yet have a museum. As noted earlier, Kress had made gifts of individual paintings to cities as early as the 1930s and had sent train carriages full of art travelling throughout the country in this same period. Ultimately, the foundation owned about 1,300 paintings, which meant that roughly 900 pictures, as well as some sculptures, were

available for distribution to museums in the heartland, through what became known as the Regional Gallery Program. This led to the development of eighteen regional museum collections.<sup>1</sup> In addition, twenty-three study collections, generally of approximately ten paintings, were formed for some colleges and universities.

Cities with major Kress stores were invited to apply to the Regional Gallery Program. Many of them did not have a proper museum building, but other suitable spaces were acceptable. As they were approved, the directors of the various institutions were invited, one by one, to come to Huckleberry Hill to peruse the collection and make their choices. Each regional gallery could choose approximately forty works of art. Normally the visit would begin in the storerooms, where the paintings were hung on sliding screens, arranged according to period and school on numbered racks so that pieces were easy to locate. This first inspection was followed by lunch with the staff, during which time the paintings under consideration were discussed. In the afternoon, everyone returned to the storerooms and again considered the paintings, making new selections, eliminating some and adding others. Many directors didn't have any experience with old master paintings and relied on the foundation to advise them. This task usually fell to Mario and his assistant, Robert Manning, who would discuss the relative merits of the works the directors were interested in. The selection for El Paso, one of the finest collections and the second to last to be formed, was made entirely by Mario and Robert, which gives an indication of just how rich the Kress Collection was, even at that late date.

The advantage of Huckleberry Hill was that it greatly facilitated the complicated logistics involved in the Kress Foundation's goal of donating the entire collection. It provided safe, humidity-controlled storage for one thousand paintings. (Of course, that number decreased as each regional gallery opened.) It was a convenient and relaxed setting in which the directors of the future regional galleries could sort through their preferences. There was a great deal of swapping until the final deeds of gift were made, and

the comings and goings of innumerable paintings could be easily tracked in the central facility. Occasionally, the foundation would grant a director's request to purchase a particular painting that was on the market.

Among Mario's other responsibilities, he made all the arrangements for mounting the exhibitions at each Regional Gallery. He therefore traveled a great deal during the decade he worked for the Kress Foundation, crisscrossing the country, going to every city where a regional gallery would open, accompanied by a lighting technician, Abe Faber. He consulted on wall colors and other details, and hung the paintings so that everything would be ready for the inaugural event a few weeks later. He then returned for the opening, accompanying Rush Kress and other foundation staff. Rush was very fussy about how each Kress collection looked, and the only person he trusted with the installation was Mario, who chose the frames, hung the galleries, and worked with lighting designers, photographers, and the foundation staff.

Mario also made countless trips to the National Gallery in Washington, where the largest number of Kress paintings were located, and he played an important, often decisive, role in the purchases the foundation made. This sometimes brought him into conflict with John Walker and, behind the scenes, Bernard Berenson, as well as Count Contini. At the same time, he himself was restoring paintings and overseeing the work of his assistants.

The Kress Collection was dispersed in 1961 to more than ninety institutions in thirty-three states, as well as Puerto Rico. In addition to the 1,300 paintings, the foundation possessed 158 sculptures, most of which went to the National Gallery, as did the 1,300 small bronzes, medals, and plaquettes. There were also the 13 panels of the Barberini tapestries, a selection of drawings, an eighteenth-century period room, furniture and other decorative arts, and 200 antique frames. Of the paintings, approximately 1,000 were by Italian artists including masterpieces by Cimabue, Duccio, Giotto, Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Filippo Lippi, Verrocchio, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Pontormo, Correggio, Bellini, Carpaccio, Giorgione, Titian, Lotto,

Tintoretto, Veronese, Carracci, Bernini, Strozzi, Tiepolo, Guardi, Canaletto, and Bellotto, and numerous other fine works by less well-known masters.

The other European schools of painting were represented by 300 pictures, encompassing French works by Clouet, Poussin, Claude, Watteau, Chardin, Boucher, Fragonard, David, Ingres, and other painters, and the marble bust of Cagliostro by Houdon. There were important examples of German paintings by Dürer, Grünewald, Altdorfer, Holbein, Cranach, and many other artists, and some good Dutch paintings. The early Flemish group included examples by Petrus Christus, Bosch, Memling, and form the core of the National Gallery's collection today. The foundation also acquired a group of Spanish paintings with important works by El Greco, Murillo, Zurbarán, and Goya.

### ☞ The Philadelphia Gift and Alfred Frankfurter ☞

The first Kress Regional Collection was inaugurated in July 1950 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in conjunction with the Diamond Jubilee celebration of the museum's founding. The museum's summer *Bulletin* was devoted to the group of twenty-six paintings, which were valued "in excess of \$1,000,000,"<sup>2</sup> and a summary catalogue by William Suida is prefaced by a letter from the foundation stating that these were not necessarily final selections, as they could eventually be supplemented and substituted with other pieces. There were some outstanding masterpieces in the group, six of which were ultimately claimed by the National Gallery. With only a few exceptions, the paintings were worthy of an important museum.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the opening trouble began to stir. In a column in the *New York Times*, "Donors, Museums and the Public," the critic, Aline Louchheim, reviewed the Kress loan. She praised a couple of paintings for their beauty and importance, notably canvases by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and El Greco, but in general, criticized



the museum for accepting such inferior works as paintings by Sebastiano Ricci and Magnasco, which she considered “more instructive than distinguished,” and compared Philadelphia’s standards unfavorably with those she claimed were applied by the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. Suida was chided for his “overly enthusiastic” attributions. Indeed, the research curator should perhaps have been more cautious in his attribution of certain works. *The Education of Cupid*, a recently acquired large canvas with a distinguished provenance, was given unequivocally to Titian.<sup>4</sup> While it is a fine picture and the great Venetian may have had a hand in its execution, it is considered to be mainly by Titian’s collaborator, Lambert Sustris.

Suida’s most contentious attribution was a half-length figure of Saint Sebastian. He believed, as had many scholars in the past, that it was by the young Raphael. The work had an impressive provenance, and an inscription on the back of the panel in a seventeenth-century hand was recorded in 1847, when it was sold from Edward Solly’s (1776–1844) second collection,<sup>5</sup> stating that it was by Raphael: “This St. Sebastian was painted by Raphael Sanzio of Urbino for the Counts degli Oddi in Perugia, I.A.D.S.P.”<sup>6</sup> The Oddi family were early patrons of Raphael and had commissioned the *Coronation of the Virgin*, now in the Vatican, from the young painter. From Solly, the painting went to the Cook Collection, where Tancred Borenius brusquely demoted it to Giannicola Manni, an obscure follower of Perugino, although Herbert Cook demurred, noting that claims for the youthful Raphael “might someday be admitted.”<sup>7</sup> After the painting was purchased by Contini Bonacossi, Roberto Longhi wrote a thoughtful opinion in which he outlined the reasons he thought that it was indeed by Raphael in one of his earliest phases.<sup>8</sup>

Mario, who restored Saint Sebastian in 1950, agreed that although there was a possibility the painting was by Raphael, it was not the right moment for the foundation to expose itself by insisting on an attribution to one of the greatest artists of the Renaissance given the published opinion by Borenius, and that it would have been wiser to call it “attributed to Raphael.”

On November 28, *Art News*, the influential magazine published by Alfred Frankfurter, ran an editorial about the Philadelphia exhibit. Frankfurter, after praising the benefactions of the Kress Foundation in general, wrote of the Philadelphia loan: “The pictures presently in the Philadelphia gift shed little glory upon the museum. . . . The best of this gift lies in about a dozen good examples of typical and average masters of the Italian Baroque and Rococo. . . . But a major disappointment is the actual use on labels . . . of such great names as Raphael and El Greco and Carpaccio.”



76. Attributed to the Master of the Greenville Tondo, *Saint Sebastian*, 1500–1510, oil on panel transferred to canvas on pressed-wood panel, Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, New Jersey, 76.7 × 53.4 cm.

Of the incident and its aftermath, Mario wrote:

*Poor William Suida was very upset, because he had made the attribution [to Raphael], and in some way, I too felt responsible for that initial defeat. I had a talk with Guy Emerson about what we might do to improve our relationship with the critics—especially Alfred Frankfurter and his Art News, a widely-read weekly that was taken seriously. It turned out that the Kress Foundation had never had any direct dealings with Frankfurter. In any case, Guy gave me carte blanche to contact Frankfurter and do whatever was necessary, on the assumption that the editor was ignorant of our collection and was under pressure from a clique of dealers, especially Wildenstein. I called him up and invited him to lunch. He accepted graciously and we met at a restaurant on Madison Avenue that he suggested.*

*Soon the conversation turned to the Kress Collection and before he had a chance to express any negative opinion, I proposed that he should devote an article in Art News to us for the year-end number, which was always a double issue. He was a little cool towards this idea and remained evasive. I got up my courage and asked him if \$25,000, a great deal of money at that time, would be enough to pay for the expenses of such an article. His eyes lit up, a smile brightened his normally severe expression, and he replied that it seemed like a fair offer. We then began immediately to discuss which paintings would be illustrated in the article. Our lunch continued until three o'clock, and then, with a handshake to seal the deal, we went our separate ways, I to the Kress Foundation where Guy Emerson was waiting for news of my meeting. I told him the details of our discussion, and he found my offer of \$25,000 a bit high. I explained that this article would, in effect, cause Frankfurter to take back all the damaging things he had said in the past and would not be appreciated by the New York dealers who had become our enemies. In the end, the article appeared with many color illustrations and spoke in glowing terms about the importance of the Kress Collection. However, to this day, the rumor persists that the Kress Collection is full of junk and that the National Gallery got the only good things.*

While Guy Emerson and the director of the Philadelphia museum, Fiske Kimball, made efforts to placate an offended Rush Kress, the Philadelphia trustees were concerned and over the next two years continued to put pressure on the Kress Foundation to make good on their promise to improve the collection in

Philadelphia. No doubt they felt neglected as they watched one masterpiece after another go to the National Gallery while their own requests were ignored. In fact, in January 1953, in a letter to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, the president of the museum, Rush Kress stated that the foundation would not be able to do anything more for Philadelphia until after the fifteenth anniversary exhibition in Washington opened in March 1956.

The frustrated museum trustees decided to act on their own and informed the foundation that they intended to return fourteen paintings, which “are not of the quality elsewhere established by the standards of our collections.” On May 14, in an uncharacteristic, harshly worded letter, the affable Guy Emerson tersely instructed Ingersoll to return the entire collection to the Huckleberry Hill storage facility before “our Curator, Mr. Mario Modestini” departed for Italy at the end of June. Rush Kress, who, as noted earlier, cared deeply about the Kress installations at each museum, made his annoyance clear as Emerson added: “The Foundation has never been wholly satisfied with the rooms assigned by your Museum to our Collection; the galleries assigned to the Kress paintings and sculpture in other museums with which we are dealing are in every case superior in size, lighting, etc. . . . It is our feeling that the providing of satisfactory rooms should be a condition of the final arrangements between the Foundation and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.”

In earlier correspondence with Ingersoll, Rush Kress explained that the foundation was in the process of opening three new regional galleries. “Since the hurried opening of the Philadelphia exhibition in 1950, we have had six openings during 1951 and 1952 and the shipments go out sometime during February for New Orleans and Houston, where we will have openings during the next several months, with the tenth opening at Tulsa, Oklahoma in the Fall of this year. Several cities are constructing buildings during the coming year and in 1954 for which we are now getting the paintings ready.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the staff of the foundation, and Mario in his role as conservator and curator, were busily engaged in acquiring

paintings not only for Washington but for the regional galleries during most of the decade of the 1950s.

☞ Masterworks for the Regional Galleries ☞

The North Carolina Museum of Art was the last regional gallery to open (in 1960). In 1947, through the efforts of a legislator and lawyer named Robert Lee Humber, the primary force behind the founding of the museum, the state authorized a \$1 million matching grant to buy a collection of works of art. This was unheard of at the time. W. R. Valentiner (1880–1958), a former assistant to the legendary director of the Berlin Museum, Wilhelm von Bode, and subsequently curator or director of several important American museums including the Metropolitan, the Detroit Museum of Arts, and the fledgling Getty, had just retired. He agreed to become the first director of the North Carolina Museum and to acquire paintings for the new institution. He knew the art market well and had superb taste. With the initial grant, he purchased over 120 masterpieces of the still unfashionable baroque period, as well as some eighteenth-century paintings that could also be had for reasonable sums. Among the European paintings he acquired are two great views of Dresden by Bellotto, unrivaled in the United States. For the matching grant, North Carolina approached the Kress Foundation. North Carolina's representative was Carl Hamilton, who fascinated both Federico Zeri<sup>10</sup> and Mario.

*One of the most interesting characters to take part in the regional gallery collections was the legendary Carl W. Hamilton (1886–1967). Around 1956 or '57, he came to Pennsylvania with the director of the Raleigh Museum in North Carolina, whom he was advising.<sup>11</sup> His credentials were impressive, as he had once been a great collector himself.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Kress invited Hamilton to dinner at 1020 Fifth Avenue where many extraordinary masterpieces—all part of the collection—were hung. Before dinner, Rush Kress always asked someone to say grace. When it was my turn, I would make a fake benediction in a combination of Italian and Latin that*



77. Giotto, *The Peruzzi Altarpiece*, 1310–1315, tempera on panel, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh, North Carolina, 105.7 × 250.2 cm.

amused the guests. This time, Mr. Hamilton, whom Mr. Kress had never met, offered to give thanks for the meal and quoted a long passage from the Bible. Mr. Kress was a passionate devotee of the scriptures, and he immediately asked his guest if he knew the Bible well. Hamilton answered that he knew it by heart. Mr. Kress could hardly believe this and asked one of his daughters to get the Book,<sup>13</sup> from which he began to ask questions. As soon as he began to read a line, Carl Hamilton would finish it. Mr. Kress was very impressed, and they became great friends.

In fact, Mr. Kress asked me if I would help with the selection of paintings for the museum in Raleigh. I knew that they had already assembled a collection of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings and that therefore they needed medieval and Renaissance Italian paintings, as well as a few large baroque canvases to complement what had already been acquired. There were important altarpieces from the Cook Collection by Massimo Stanzione and Domenichino, which had been offered to the National Gallery. Johnny Walker, following Berenson, was not interested in Italian painting after 1600 and turned these, as well as many other masterpieces of baroque painting, away. In addition to these important large canvases, there was a polyptych given to Giotto and assistants by Richard Offner that we had acquired, partly from Wildenstein and partly from another dealer. The five panels had been separated from each other in the past and we were able to reunite them. The altarpiece had been painted for the Peruzzi Chapel in the Franciscan church of Santa Croce in Florence, whose walls are still covered with frescos by Giotto and his followers. After we managed to buy all five panels, a tabernacle frame was made, and I offered it to



THE REGIONAL GALLERY PROGRAM

*Johnny Walker for the National Gallery. He refused it, saying, in these exact words, "Oh, no, Mario. Perhaps the central panel but not the four saints." I was horrified; dumbstruck by his words, I could only reply feebly that I would never separate the panels of the polyptych, which we had labored so hard to reassemble.*

*A few days later, Carl Hamilton came to talk about the schedule for consigning the paintings to Raleigh, the catalogue, and so on. I said to him: "Carl, I had a thought, that in order to complete the Kress Collection in your museum you should have one painting of world-class importance." "Which one?" he asked me. "The Giotto polyptych from the Peruzzi chapel." He looked at me in amazement and said, "You must be kidding." "No," I said, "it's true. You can have it." He nearly fainted.*

While Mario was fond of Carl Hamilton, the museum director he admired most was Walter Heil from San Francisco. Heil also benefited from Walker's shortsightedness.



78. Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The Realm of Flora*, ca. 1743, oil on canvas, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, California, 71.8 × 88.9 cm.



*One morning a woman came to the foundation with a photograph of an unpublished painting by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Suida and I looked at it and, convinced that it was right, asked the price. The owner told us she was asking \$15,000. Mr. Kress agreed to buy it. It was in excellent condition and only required removal of yellow varnish. We immediately thought it was something for the National Gallery, and after it had been cleaned, we sent it to Washington. Mr. Walker, together with Mrs. Shapley and Perry Cott, the curators, decided that it was not by Giovanni Battista but by his son, Giandomenico, and sent it back to New York. Suida and I were furious and decided to show it to Walter Heil, the director of the De Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco for whom we were assembling a beautiful group of paintings. When we showed him the picture, he couldn't believe his eyes, especially when we told him that the National Gallery had refused it. His first comment was, "Are they blind!"*

The painting is one of the artist's masterpieces, and today it is published in every monograph about Giovanni Battista; it is one of the centerpieces of the Kress Collection in San Francisco.

Many of the directors knew little about old master paintings. Walter Heil was an exception. He made his selection and to complete the collection asked Mr. Kress if he would buy a painting of Saint Francis by El Greco.

*Walter Heil was an excellent connoisseur, and he often came to New York to do research and visit the galleries. One morning while walking along Third Avenue, where there is a cluster of small antique shops, he spotted a Renaissance marble bust of Cosimo de' Medici. He went in to have a closer look and asked the price. They were asking \$3,000. He managed to keep a perfectly straight face, wrote out a check, and bought the sculpture. He had it sent to a warehouse to be packed and shipped to San Francisco and invited me to come and see it. It was an exact replica of the bronze bust of Cosimo I by Benvenuto Cellini, which is in Palazzo Vecchio. I looked at it carefully and it made a very good impression. The carving was exceptional and reminded me of the marble crucifix in the Escorial by Cellini, which I happened to have seen a few years earlier. I had been particularly struck by this crucifix because of the quality of the execution and the tragic expression of the figure of Christ.*

*I told Walter of the similarity and asked him if he had ever seen the Cellini in the Escorial. He hadn't and, in fact, it is a little-known work, partly because the*

*museum is not a popular destination like the Prado, since it is a bit outside Madrid. My feeling was that the bust was by Cellini, possibly with some collaboration, after the bronze of Cosimo I. The news that a Cellini had been bought in New York for \$3,000 spread like wildfire and, naturally, was greeted with some skepticism, especially by the dealers. In fact, poor Walter had a hard time convincing the specialists that his discovery was right. I believe that later it was exhibited at the Bargello in Florence, where it was favorably received, as a studio work by some, and as autograph by others. Eventually Walter went to Spain and saw Cellini's crucifix in the Escorial. He called me as soon as he returned, excited by the similarities in execution of the figure of Christ and the bust which he had bought on Third Avenue for his museum.*

### ✻ Framing the Kress Collection ✻

Mario had loved period frames from the time he was a boy helping in his father's *bottega*. He inherited his father's collection of frames and continued to add to it over the years, accumulating around three hundred fine examples from different periods, mainly Italian. He was very knowledgeable about different styles, which he had learned from his father and from an odd job he had drawing profiles of frames for a gilder near Piazza Navona.

When he moved to New York, he sold his frames to Count Contini, who also had a passion for them and had his own collection. When Mario began working for the Kress Foundation, he found that there was a dearth of good frames. Pichetto had always used reproductions, and it wasn't as easy to find antique frames in New York as it was in Italy. At the time of the move to Huckleberry Hill, the foundation purchased Contini's frames, and Mario hired the Florentine specialist, Emilio Quarantelli, to fit them to paintings according to their style and period. In many of the regional gallery and study collections every painting has a wonderful frame. It is difficult to match paintings and frames, however, so not all of them were used. Nearly two hundred were left over, most of which were given to the National Gallery, and some to the Metropolitan Museum. In the meantime, interest

in good frames grew, and in 1990, the Met held an exhibition of Italian Renaissance frames in the Lehman galleries, which included the richly carved examples Robert Lehman had collected.

### ☞ The Scientist and the Restorer ☞

The Kress Foundation had long been committed to the proper conservation of the works in its collection. The foundation's support, and his own seriousness of purpose about the materials he used, allowed Mario to collaborate with a conservation scientist, Robert Feller, to develop new stable materials for retouching and varnishing. Traditional varnishes—dammar and mastic—are made from natural resins, the sticky substances exuded by plants and trees; after these substances are collected, they harden and are then dissolved, usually in turpentine, which is itself a distillate of the gummy substance exuded by pine trees. No matter how carefully these resins are prepared, they oxidize over time and become yellow and slightly opaque.

Dr. Feller, whose research was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, was working with synthetic resins that he thought might be substituted for the more traditional natural materials. Mario was particularly interested in finding a stable medium for retouching, and Feller supplied him with a number of different polymers to try. A couple of his assistants at Huckleberry Hill prepared panels with samples of paint made from various combinations of pigments and resins, both new and old. They took them to the National Gallery, where they were put under the glass roof, above the lay lights, to age. After some months, they were taken down and the results studied. It seemed to Mario that the most promising binders were from a low molecular weight polyvinyl acetate resin, manufactured by Union Carbide as PVA AYAB. Like all plastics, the appearance and handling properties were initially not very sympathetic, but by manipulating it with different solvents and at different viscosities, they found a

satisfactory solution. Mario used a dilute solution of the PVA in ethyl alcohol and mixed it with high-quality dry pigments on the palette. The use of polyvinyl acetate as a medium for retouching was subsequently widely adopted, with individual variations, and is still in use, since it has proven to be one of the most stable of the twentieth-century resins.

Mario also wanted a synthetic varnish that would not turn yellow in twenty years. The Dutch company Talens had developed a new product, intended as a conservation varnish, for their Rembrandt series, choosing a synthetic polycyclohexanone resin called AW<sub>2</sub> with properties similar to dammar. Feller was experimenting with other resins and came up with one he called Mellon varnish 27H, from a resin in the class of methacrylate polymers.<sup>14</sup> AW<sub>2</sub> had better handling properties, so Mario used it as an initial brush varnish and followed with a spray coat of 27H. He was quite happy with this technique. One day—one that is now famous in the annals and lore of the history of paintings conservation—Feller sent out a general alert to immediately stop using 27H. The results of artificial aging tests, published in 1957 by a scientist at the Scientific Department of London's National Gallery, had shown that the resin cross-linked under certain circumstances, which could mean that it would eventually become insoluble. Everyone, including the National Gallery, was alarmed by this news.

Mario was summoned to a meeting in Washington in December, attended by Feller, John Walker, Perry Cott, Guy Emerson, and Frank Sullivan. The conversation was taped. As he explained about the cross-linking of 27H, poor Feller was in a panic, urging everyone to remove it from all the paintings they had used it on without delay. That would have entailed removing the restoration as well; in some cases, the retouching was fairly extensive and represented hundreds of hours of work. Mario thought the whole thing was a little ridiculous and, as usual, remained calm. He assured the group, especially Feller, that he had always put a coat of another material, either a dammar, Talens Rembrandt, polyvinyl

acetate resin, or beeswax under the 27H, which he only used as a final varnish. He guaranteed this, so that the terrified scientist would not have to accept responsibility for anything that might happen to the Kress Collection in the future. Mario was made to sign a paper confirming that he had been advised of the risks.

So much for artificial aging: not only has 27H remained soluble, but Mario kept a bottle that sat on his windowsill for fifty years where it remained water white. However, it is just as well that he stopped using it, because 27H, and most other high molecular weight synthetic resins, although they do not yellow, have turned gray over time, muffling the colors, and they tend to separate from the surface—sometimes the coatings can even be peeled off like sunburnt skin. They are very unattractive, and removing them is deeply unpleasant because, unless they can be peeled off, toxic aromatic solvents are needed, and the dissolved resin tends to smear, rather than coming off quickly as the natural resins do.

Artificial aging has its purposes, but there is no more reliable test than the passage of time. Mario first used the new retouching medium in 1953 on the *Madonna and Child* by Perugino (see Plates VII, VIII, IX), now in the National Gallery, and varnished the painting with Talens Rembrandt varnish. Whenever I went to the gallery with Mario, he would go to the painting to check the restoration. A few small retouches have faded due to the use of a fugitive variety of red lake; otherwise, they have not altered in sixty years, and the thin varnish is not particularly yellow. Hanging nearby was a painting by Signorelli, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, that he had restored only a few years before the Perugino, using egg tempera, watercolor, drained oils, and dammar varnish. Those retouches were distinctly discolored, as were those of a Mantegna portrait, restored with the same technique. Another painting in Washington, restored in the fifties using PVA AYAB, is the severely damaged *Allegory* by Piero di Cosimo. Recently I decided to have a close look at it. From a few feet away, it reads perfectly. When you really stick your nose on it, you can see that among the hundreds of little retouches, some are ever so slightly discolored and I wonder if Mario used 27H

THE REGIONAL GALLERY PROGRAM

varnish which might have absorbed dirt. Other paintings, notably the extensively damaged El Greco in the Metropolitan Museum, *The Vision of Saint John*, restored by Mario in 1956 with AYAB, look perfect, as many conservators and curators over the years have acknowledged with astonishment. It is quite a testament not only to Mario's skill but to his pursuit of stable materials.

## CHAPTER 16

# The Art of Acquisition

### ❧ The Early Fifties ❧

MARIO'S PASSION FOR PAINTINGS, especially of the Italian schools, was the centerpiece of his life from childhood onward. He had absorbed everything that was available to him in Rome and Florence—museum collections, private holdings, paintings on the Italian and London markets, whatever he could manage to see. He had an excellent visual memory, a prerequisite for a connoisseur, and due to his work as a restorer, familiarity with the materials and techniques of paintings from every period. Until he went to New York, scope for his talents was limited. While he had been able to buy paintings on the London art market just after the war, he did not have the money to acquire important works, only what the Palma Gallery could sell to their Italian clients, paintings that he had purchased for five or ten pounds. Mario was never a salesman. That was Bardi's purview.



Mario preferred to stay in the background and was a master at keeping his own counsel.

It is the dream of every great connoisseur to build a collection, and Mario was no exception. One might think that with enough money it is easy to do, but collecting requires more than that. Some knowledge of the school or period is essential, as is taste, in the sense that the collector must possess an aesthetic response to quality and be able to discriminate among similar pieces to choose only the best examples. It is essential to obtain the best expert advice, but ultimately a great collector must follow his own instincts, which requires courage and confidence.

Mario's opportunity to acquire great paintings came when he went to work for the Kress Foundation. During that period, from 1950 until 1961, extraordinary works of art were available. It has always been the case that wealthy and determined collectors are offered many of the important pieces that come on the market, and the Kress Foundation was then considered a major player. The net earnings of the Kress Company in 1952 were \$9,148,011, and the foundation owned 43 percent of the shares. The equivalent amount today would still be a vast amount of money, but now it would not be enough to accomplish what was possible then. The price of old master paintings was much lower in the 1950s than it is today, as important works cost hundreds of thousands, not millions, of dollars. In those days, the Kress Foundation could buy whatever it wanted, and the dealers beat a path to their door.

Rush Kress was wholly committed to ensuring that his brother's wishes were carried out, and he pursued new acquisitions with intensity, all the while keeping an eye on the bottom line. The most expensive purchase was the tondo of the *Nativity* by Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi from the Cook Collection, which had been sent to the United States for safekeeping during the war, after which it was put up for sale. Just as it was about to be sent back to England in 1947, the foundation purchased it from the dealer Francis Drey for \$400,000. In 1955, *A Lady in Her Bath* by François Clouet was acquired from Rosenberg & Stiebel for \$365,000. Other highly

important paintings purchased in the \$150,000–260,000 range included Jacques-Louis David's full-length portrait of Napoleon; Dürer's double-sided *Madonna and Child* and *Portrait of a Man*; Titian's portraits of Doge Andrea Gritti and Vincenzo Cappello; and the Grünewald *Crucifixion*. It was a golden age.

Every five years, the foundation held an exhibition of its recent acquisitions at the National Gallery. The first was in 1946. In preparation for the 1951 exhibition, Rush Kress, William Suida, Guy Emerson, and Mario scoured the premises of every dealer in New York for suitable paintings to add to the list, which already included masterpieces by Botticelli, Mantegna, Sebastiano del Piombo, Cosmè Tura, and Titian.

### ☞ Count Vittorio Cini ☞

Two of the paintings that were featured in the 1951 exhibition had a tarnished provenance, although the foundation was not aware of this when they were purchased. In 1949, Wildenstein offered them *The Feast of Herod* by Benozzo Gozzoli, one of the most charming works by this painter, and *Giuliano de' Medici* by Sandro Botticelli, which, like the Clouet, cost \$365,000, among the highest prices the foundation ever paid for a painting.

Both of these had once belonged to Count Vittorio Cini (1885–1977), a Venetian industrialist with complex interests in various sectors of the economy, and an art collector. He had received many honors and favors from Mussolini during the early years of Fascism, but had broken with the dictator after he made a pact with Hitler and entered the war. When Germany invaded Italy in 1943, the SS arrested many anti-Fascists, among them Vittorio Cini, who was sent to the Dachau concentration camp. His son, Giorgio (1918–1949), tried every diplomatic channel to liberate his father, but without success. Finally, he learned that it would be possible to buy his father's release by bribing the German commander with gold. To obtain the precious metal, he

clandestinely sold two paintings from his father's collection, *The Feast of Herod* and the portrait of Giuliano de' Medici discussed earlier. He managed to secure his father's transfer to a prison hospital in Friedrichroda and then, in a dramatic rescue by air, brought him to the safety of Switzerland.<sup>1</sup>

When Mario arrived at the Kress Foundation in 1949, these two paintings had already been purchased for the National Gallery from Wildenstein's, and Mario cleaned and restored them, finding that they were both in excellent state under layers of old, yellow varnish.

When the Italian government learned that an American museum had acquired two paintings formerly owned by Count Cini, one of the most important Italian art collectors, he was charged with illegal exportation, a criminal offense. Although the export of works of art without a license is illegal in Italy, the regular import of art works into the United States is not forbidden by any law, so neither the foundation nor the National Gallery had any obligation to comply with the Italian government's demands. Their only recourse was to pursue the former owner. Cini asked Wildenstein if he could buy back the paintings but they had already been sold. Federico Zeri, advisor to both Count Cini and Wildenstein at this time, contacted Mario and asked if he would meet with Cini, who was desperate, to discuss if there were any way he might have the paintings back from the Kress Foundation. Mario wrote:

*I was in Rome on my summer holidays and went to see Count Cini at the Grand Hotel where he lived together with his wife, Lyda Borelli, a beautiful woman who had been one of the great actresses of the Italian cinema. He offered to pay the Kress Foundation the price paid to Wildenstein, plus interest, and all the expenses they had incurred in acquiring the paintings. I explained to him that the paintings had already been given to the National Gallery, the transaction completed, and the cost of the paintings accounted for in the tax filings; therefore, it was quite impossible to return them.<sup>2</sup> Count Cini had been pleading with me and was extremely upset. I felt very sorry for him, but I had to represent the position of the Kress Foundation and the*

*interests of the National Gallery. Sadly, I bid him farewell and he graciously thanked me for what little I had been able to do for him.*

These events followed closely on the heels of a tragedy in Count Cini's life. His son Giorgio's private plane had crashed as it neared the landing strip in Cannes and he had been killed. In his memory, Count Cini purchased the Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, where he created a foundation with a rich endowment that is still active today.<sup>3</sup>

The scandal over the Cini pictures continued until at least 1956, when Nicky Mariano, Bernard Berenson's companion, wrote to Virginia Kress, pleading Cini's case, reporting that the attacks in the press had worsened. She asked if Rush would be willing to give the two paintings back in exchange for other works of art, or, if not, to write to Cini "telling him that this is impossible" so that he would have something to prove that he had made every effort to repatriate the two pictures.<sup>4</sup>



79. Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Feast of Herod and The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist*, 1461–1462, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 23.8 × 34.5 cm.

🌀 French & Company 🌀

Mitchell Samuels of French & Company was one of Rush Kress's favorite dealers. He was a cordial and charming man with a wonderful sense of humor, always ready with a joke or a story. Rush loved to listen to his tales of the great chases of an earlier generation of collectors, such as Frick and Widener.<sup>5</sup> The gallery was located on East 57th Street, in a five-story building crammed with every kind of art object: majolica, tapestries, Renaissance bronzes, sixteenth-century Venetian glass, antique cut velvet brocade, paintings, antiquities, and European furniture dating through the eighteenth century. Mario said it was like Aladdin's Cave. Everyone loved to go there, except for John Walker, who found Samuels' stories tedious.<sup>6</sup>

Mario's first visit to French & Company was in late 1949. That day, ten paintings were purchased, ranging from \$4,000 to \$155,000. They included Tiepolo's *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers* (\$40,000) and El Greco's *Holy Family* (\$30,000). The highest price was \$155,000 for a large panel by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend. The story of that acquisition, as recounted by John Walker, reflects the give and take that went on between the foundation and the National Gallery:<sup>7</sup>

The major painting this dealer still possessed, and which he had been unable to sell to these giants of collecting, was a large and very darkened panel of uncertain authorship for which he wanted half a million dollars. I thought the price ridiculous and the panel, an "Assumption of the Virgin," not particularly desirable; but Rush Kress loved bargaining with his friend, always beginning his negotiations with the phrase "You'll have to sharpen your pencil." How sharp the pencil became in the case of this particular painting I do not know, but it was acquired against my advice and contrary to my better judgment. When it was cleaned, however, I recognized that I was entirely wrong. It proved to be in miraculous condition. Although its



authorship remains uncertain, it is generally considered to be by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend, whoever he is, but I ruefully admit it is one of the most beautiful Flemish pictures in the entire National Gallery.

The foundation asked musicologist Emanuel Winternitz from the Metropolitan Museum to study the instruments the angels are playing. He found that each is an accurate rendering of a known fifteenth-century example, and the painting actually cleared up confusion about some of them.



80. The Master of the Saint Lucy Legend, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1485–1500, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 199.2 × 161.8 cm.

☞ Carpe diem: Grünewald and Jacques-Louis David's ☞  
*Napoleon in His Study*

After the 1951 exhibition, a moratorium was declared on new purchases until suddenly, in 1952, John Walker learned that a painting by the rarest of masters, the mysterious German mystical painter Matthias Grünewald, a privately-owned *Crucifixion*, had been released for sale in Vienna. Guy Emerson broached the matter to a skeptical Rush Kress: “An emergency matter has come up which



81. Matthias Grünewald, *The Crucifixion*, 1511–1520, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 61.3 × 46 cm.



I hesitate to lay before you ... however our policy of not buying paintings at the moment always had the qualification that we must consider exceptional items when they came on the market.”<sup>8</sup> The price was \$260,000, and if they did not act quickly there were other buyers, including dealers, who would snap it up. Rush Kress was not particularly impressed by the photograph—Grünewald was not his cup of tea—but, luckily, he went along with his advisors.

In 1954, the Kress Foundation acquired a life-size, full-length portrait of Napoleon, Emperor of France, by Jacques-Louis David. He is shown in his study in the Tuileries, standing in front of his desk, the legs of which are adorned with gilded cat-like heads.



82. Jacques-Louis David, *Napoleon in His Study*, 1812, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 203.9 × 125.1 cm.

The imposing throne chair was designed by David. The clock reads 4:13, which is probably in the early morning, since the candles have burned down. The overall effect of the painting is very colorful, with red velvet, green plush carpet, gilding, and the magnificently painted red, white, and blue uniform adorned with large medals and epaulets. It is the first version of this composition, of which the artist made at least four replicas, and was painted for a Scottish Catholic nationalist and admirer of Napoleon, the immensely wealthy Alexander Douglas, 10th Duke of Hamilton. The scholarly consensus is that the painting is entirely by David with the possible exception of some of the background. Often the artist would assign parts of his larger works to one of his able assistants, who included Ingres and Baron Gros.

After the painting had passed through various English collections, Wildenstein's purchased it in 1951. To celebrate the arrival of the painting at the National Gallery, the dealers hosted a formal dinner. Georges Wildenstein had managed to acquire a Napoleon brandy for the occasion, bottled in 1812, the same year the portrait was painted. After dinner, the guests eagerly awaited this nectar. A taste was poured into tiny glasses so that everyone could have a sip. Mario recalled that it was a strange, grayish, turbid liquid that, when everyone raised their glasses, tasted like dishwater. Such a disappointing end to the story of this great acquisition!

❧ Serendipity and Chance: *Marchesa Doria Spinola*, ❧  
*Doge Andrea Gritti and Nino Pisano*

Mario remembered each thrilling discovery made in the 1950s as if it had happened just yesterday, and his memoir is rich with such stories. Sometimes ingenious errors could lead to happy outcomes when skill and intuition combined in evaluating a painting.

*Not long after I arrived in New York, Mr. Kress asked me to come to the apartment at 1020 Fifth Avenue and have a look at the paintings that were displayed there. As*

we looked around, Mr. Kress stopped in front of a portrait of a woman and asked me what I thought of his Leonardo. I looked at the painting and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Kress, but this painting is not by Leonardo, it is by Giampietrino." Giampietrino was a Milanese follower of Leonardo. I don't know if he was ever his pupil. I asked Mr. Kress where they had acquired the painting and he told me Duveen's. He was naturally very upset and immediately called the Kress Foundation's lawyer, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Kress, Mr. Hawkins, and I went to Duveen's, which at that time was still in its original premises on Fifth Avenue and 56th Street, a magnificent Beaux-Arts building by Carrère and Hastings, the architects of the Frick mansion, which Duveen had commissioned for the New York gallery. It has since been torn down and the site is now occupied by the Steuben Glass building.



83, Peter Paul Rubens, *The Marchesa Doria Spinola*, 1606, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 152.5 × 99 cm.

## THE ART OF ACQUISITION

*We explained to Mr. Edward Fowles that the Kress Foundation believed he had sold them a painting that was not by Leonardo but by Giampietrino and we would like him to take it back. Mr. Fowles was consternated and pointed out that the picture had been published as a Leonardo by William Suida, the curator of the foundation. We insisted and much discussion among the lawyers ensued. Finally, not wishing to lose an important client, Mr. Fowles agreed that we could choose something else from their stock. Mr. Kress asked me to have a look around, and I immediately spotted a beautiful portrait by Peter Paul Rubens of the Marchesa Doria Spinola, as well as a small Madonna and Child, called studio of Verrocchio, which I believed was by the young Leonardo. After more negotiating, it was agreed that we could have the two paintings for a small additional payment and the deal was settled. The Rubens is*



84. *Madonna and Child with a Pomegranate*, by the young Leonardo, before 1475, according to Mario. Oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 16.5 × 13.4 cm.

today in the National Gallery as is the little *Madonna and Child*, which is attributed to Leonardo. I found an antique fifteenth-century tabernacle for the *Madonna and Child* to replace the charming, though modern, frame designed by Ferruccio Vannoni, with which Duveen had framed the painting.

Mario would forcefully disagree with the present attribution of the little *Madonna and Child* to Lorenzo di Credi, as well as the date assigned, 1475–80. His opinion was that Leonardo, as a young apprentice in Verrocchio's studio, made this little panel before he painted the angel and the distant landscape in the *Baptism of Christ* in the Uffizi, which is dated 1472–75.

The *Doge Andrea Gritti* enjoyed a much happier fate.

*One morning, I was working in the studio at 250 West 57th Street when I received a phone call from Mr. [Jack] Henschel of Knoedler Galleries. He said they had just received a Titian, the portrait of the Doge Andrea Gritti, which they had acquired in Vienna, and would I like to see it. My first thought was that it must be a copy of the portrait from the Czernin Collection, but I thought I might as well have a look at it anyway. I met Henschel at Manhattan Storage. The canvas was off its stretcher and had been rolled, face out, fortunately. We unrolled it on the floor. It was in excellent condition under an old discolored varnish. It had never been relined and there was a drawing, a study of the Doge, on the back of the canvas. It was clear that it was the original, and I said to Henschel, "This picture must have been stolen!" "No," he replied, "it has been granted a regular export license by the director of the Vienna Gallery, Dr. Buschbeck, who has studied it and concluded that it is by Palma Giovane, an assistant of Titian."*

*I could hardly believe my eyes and ears. I immediately called Mr. Kress, who was at the foundation that morning, and told him he must come right away and to bring Suida with him. When they arrived, Suida, who was himself Viennese, was as incredulous as I had been and at first also thought that we were being offered a stolen picture. Mr. Kress was much taken by the strong personality of the Doge that the artist had succeeded in capturing. Needless to say, we bought it there and then.*

*When the painting arrived in my studio, I reinforced the edges with strips of canvas and mounted it to a stretcher. It is exceedingly rare to find a painting of the sixteenth century that has never been relined. The linen was in good condition and*



## THE ART OF ACQUISITION

*there was the drawing on the reverse, and for all these reasons I did not wish to reline it. I searched among our collection of antique frames looking for something suitable for this great portrait. I found a sixteenth-century Venetian frame by Luca Mombello, Titian's frame maker, which was about the right size. I had the frame sent to the studio and tried the painting in it. To my wonder and amazement, it fit the picture perfectly. As paintings were not standard sizes in the sixteenth century, this is a semi-miraculous occurrence, and it is possible that this was, in fact, the original frame. The whole affair was serendipitous. The same cannot be said for the fate of Dr. Buschbeck. Sometime later, on one of his frequent visits to Venice, he was walking along the molo when he was swept into the canal by a wave. His body was carried out to sea and*



85. Titian, *Doge Andrea Gritti*, 1546–1548, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 133.6 × 103.2 cm.

*never recovered. I have always believed that this was a vendetta on the part of Titian who was angered by the man's presumption and stupidity. In any case, the painting is now one of the treasures of the National Gallery.*

When styles and taste change, works of art are sometimes modernized to conform to contemporary preferences, masking their original beauty and it is an occasion for rejoicing when the eye of an expert and the skill of a restorer work in concert to return such altered objects to their initial conception.

*In 1948, Count Contini bought two sculptures from the Florentine art dealer Gianni Salocchi. The life-size wooden figures represented the Virgin and the Angel of the Annunciation. Sometime in the seventeenth century, the parish priest of the church who owned them decided to bring them up to date. He must have considered them too severe and he had a sculptor make them look baroque by adding draperies made of gilded papier mâché. Salocchi had bought them from a church near Pisa. No one had understood the importance of the two statues because of the baroque trappings but Salocchi intuited that they were much older than the seventeenth century because of the character of the heads. He had them brought to his gallery and began to remove the applications of papier mâché. Underneath, he found the original drapery, sculpted in wood in a style consistent with the heads.*

*Before the baroque folds were added, the statues had been repainted numerous times, but some of the original polychrome survived. The count asked me if I would mind cleaning them, and I told him that I could work on them in Rome so he agreed to send them to me. The work took a long time because of the numerous repaintings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries before the baroque drapes were added. Beneath these, the statues were extraordinary. The count, accompanied by Gualtiero Volterra, came to Rome many times while I was restoring them over a period of six months. When they were finished, I sent them back to Florence.*

*Roberto Longhi was the first person to see them and he attributed them to Nino Pisano [the most important Italian sculptor of the fourteenth century]. Then [Cesare] Gnudi saw them and said the same. The count wanted to offer them to Kress, his most important client. Gianni Salocchi had obtained export permits before he removed the baroque draperies, so there was no problem about sending them out of the country. At around the same time, the count had prepared a large group of*



paintings to sell to Rush Kress, among which were several important works—mainly paintings that Gualtiero Volterra had bought in London and Paris. [The shipment was sent to New York] where the negotiations were long and difficult involving many meetings between the count and Mr. Kress.

Volterra always participated because the count's English was not very easy for Mr. Kress to understand. During one of these encounters, the count must have said to Mr. Kress, in his unique brand of English, something to the effect that, if considered as just a part of the whole package of paintings, the sculptures were practically free. What Kress instead heard was that the count was making a gift to him of the sculptures and he immediately stood up and embraced Contini, thanking him profusely. Volterra, who had understood how the mistake happened, said to the count with exaggerated calm, "My dear count, do you know what you have just done? You have made a gift to Mr. Kress of the two sculptures." Naturally the count could not go back on his word and tell Mr. Kress that there'd been a misunderstanding. He had to make the best of the situation. The mistake cost him \$1 million, which is what the sculptures were worth at that time. In fact, Rush gave the two sculptures to the National Gallery shortly afterward and took a deduction of \$1 million.

This was not the most extraordinary thing in the story of the two sculptures. [Some years later], when the Kress Foundation decided to publish a catalogue of the entire collection, the sculpture volume was entrusted to Professor Ulrich Middeldorf [University of Chicago and Kunsthistorisches Institut, Florence] who, after examining the sculptures, declared that they were fakes and that was how he intended to catalogue them. I was violently opposed to this ridiculous idea and decided to take myself to Florence where Middeldorf was living to talk to him about the sculptures and tell him what I knew about them. I went to Florence where I had lived for quite some time while I was restoring paintings for the count. Florence is a city that always puts me in a good humor because of all the interesting memories it evokes in my mind. But on this occasion, I was not happy. I was not looking forward to trying to convince Professor Middeldorf to change his mind. I made an appointment and went to see him. I noticed that he received me somewhat coldly, perhaps because he had been informed by Mary Davis of my reaction to his ideas about the sculptures. I began by telling him the story of how I had seen the sculptures when they still had pieces of papier mâché baroque folds nailed to them and of the many layers of repaint that I had removed, the oldest one, in tempera, dating back to at least to 1500, followed by repaintings with oil colors in the seventeenth century.

*He listened to me, but I could tell that in his heart he didn't want to believe the evidence I was presenting. As far as he was concerned, all these facts were part of an elaborate ruse by the forger to establish the antiquity of the sculptures. Such an intricate plot was completely absurd, like a James Bond film! To demonstrate how knowledgeable he was on the subject of forgery, he then informed me that the portrait of a woman of the Sassetti family by Domenico Ghirlandaio in the Thyssen Collection was also a fake, done by a clever forger at the end of the nineteenth century. [Mario had cleaned the painting and knew it well.] We discussed fakes and forgers, but he continued to insist on his opinion of the sculptures: according to him, they were copies after an Annunciation in marble in the church of Saint Catherine in Pisa. To this I answered that it was not unusual for sculptors at that time to begin with a wooden model that was later executed in marble. We talked for nearly three hours, and I cannot say that at the end of our conversation I had succeeded in changing his mind. In*



86. Nino Pisano, *The Annunciation: The Virgin and The Angel*, 1325–1350, wood, polychromed and gilded, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 159.4 × 47.3 × 36 cm.

*the Kress catalogue, he compromised and called them copies after a fourteenth-century Pisan artist, and, at the end of his entry, adds that Mario Modestini has shown the copies to be contemporary with the originals. Many years later, I told this story to John Pope-Hennessy who told me that I was right and the two figures are “absolutely” by Nino Pisano.*

The two sculptures were featured in the 1956 exhibition of recent Kress acquisitions at the National Gallery<sup>9</sup> along with 83 paintings and over 25 other sculptures. On display were three Titians; two Tintoretos; the Grünewald *Crucifixion*; David's *Napoleon*; the Clouet, as well as works by Cimabue, El Greco, Fragonard, Ghirlandaio, Goya, Memling, Pontorno, Rubens, Saenredam, Paolo Veneziano, Veronese, Watteau, and Zurbarán, to name but a few. The sculptures included Desiderio da Settignano's Tabernacle, Bernini's bust of *Monsignor Francesco Barberini*, and Houdon's bust of *Caçliostro*.

Mario had every reason to be proud. Not only had he been involved with the acquisition and restoration of all the paintings, but he had also installed the exhibition, something on which Rush Kress always insisted, whether for the Kress permanent installation or the special exhibitions, despite the fact that it was a gallery rule that only the director was allowed to do the hang. He looked forward to what would be added within the next five years.

## CHAPTER 17

# The Last Picture Sale

THE 1950'S SAW THE CONCLUSION of Mario's long professional relationship with Count Contini Bonacossi, culminating in the tortuous negotiations for the last group of paintings the dealer offered to the Kress Foundation.

Count Contini had been selling paintings to the Kress brothers since 1927, and despite the haggling, every two or three years, the entire "lot" was always purchased; cherry-picking individual paintings from the group had never been part of the process. After the war, correspondence between Rush Kress and Contini resumed as did acquisitions from the Florentine dealer. In 1948 the foundation purchased fifty-three paintings from Contini for \$1,255,000.00, and an even larger deal of \$4 million was made in 1950 for 125 works.<sup>1</sup> Contini originally agreed that the unusually large debt could be discharged over time, but suddenly changed his mind and insisted on full payment, so that the foundation was forced for the first time to take out a loan for \$2 million. This was

still being paid off in 1952, when Rush Kress made a trip abroad, stopping in Florence to see his old friend, “the Count”, as he always called Contini. At the Villa Vittoria, Kress approved a new selection of paintings and signed a preliminary letter of commitment. Later that day he went to Rome and, while relaxing in his hotel room, suffered a small stroke. Mario and Sandrino supervised his care and Kress was able to return to New York a month later.

The foundation’s board was opposed to making another large purchase from Contini and, at its December meeting, took the position that the contract was not valid on account of Rush’s health at the time he signed it. Contini felt that he had been double-crossed and, not without reason, blamed John Walker, whom he disparagingly referred as “*lo zoppo*,” because of his limp.<sup>2</sup>

From that point on, the letters exchanged between the two parties record a cat-and-mouse game in which the count resorted to a variety of intrigues in order to sell all the paintings in the “lot,” and the foundation made strenuous efforts to accept only the paintings they wanted. First, the count sent Gualtiero Volterra to New York to act on his behalf. Volterra was an intelligent, worldly man who realized that times had changed and that he was in a difficult position, caught between the foundation’s interests—represented by his great friend Mario, who, in this instance, was allied with Walker—and his longtime business associate, Contini, who stubbornly insisted on having his way, hammering Rush Kress with letters telling him what his brother, Samuel, would have done.

Contini went to great lengths, at one point pleading with Delora Kilvert to intervene with Samuel, who was bedridden, paralyzed and mute.<sup>3</sup> Rush, who by now agreed with the board, would not concede and repeatedly refused to send the down payment of half a million dollars the count demanded. Kress informed the dealer that there were only five paintings the foundation was interested in: *The Madonna di Spoleto*, by the Badia a Isola Master, very close to Duccio;<sup>4</sup> two paintings by Tintoretto, a portrait, and *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, which Mario insisted on; Titian’s *Saint John on Patmos*; and Veronese’s *Saint Lucy*.

The foundation had launched their second phase of collecting, for which they wanted only the best works on the market to fill the gaps in the National Gallery's collection or to satisfy the wishes of particular regional galleries. Allentown, for example, wanted a good representation of German paintings to reflect the history of the Pennsylvania 'Dutch' who had settled the area (the Kress family included). In order to acquire a variety of works, the ad hoc art committee turned to many different dealers. In February 1953, Volterra reported to Contini that the board had just approved the acquisition of the Grünewald (\$265,000), four panels by Juan de Flandes (\$105,000), and thirteen baroque paintings proposed by Mario (\$90,000), and advised the count to seek counsel from Berenson, who may or may not have known about the complex maneuvering taking place. BB was concerned that some of the paintings on the foundation's wish list were of national importance and should never leave Italy. They were, in fact, subject to notification by the state according to a law passed in 1939 to restrict the export of works of art. Others had been purchased on the international art market and were in Italy in temporary importation, in theory at least, qualifying for an export license. Berenson proposed Andrea Solario's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, which he rightly considered a masterpiece by the artist. In the course of the negotiation, Berenson seems to have capitulated to pressure from Contini and wrote to John Walker telling him that he should accept most of the paintings the dealer was proposing but on this occasion Walker did not heed his advice.<sup>5</sup>

The wily count continued to harry Rush Kress with scolding letters about his failure to act, saying this would be the last opportunity anyone would ever have of buying from his own collection while at the same time warning Volterra not to disabuse him of this notion. Finally, when Kress's attempts to ward him off had been exhausted, Contini sent a group of seventeen paintings to Huckleberry Hill to be stored and insured at his own expense. The business dragged on into April of 1954, when Contini, accompanied by his new wife, Atala Pampaloni (Vittoria had died in 1949),

## THE LAST PICTURE SALE

Sandrino, and Gualtiero and Patricia Volterra, made a trip to New York in an attempt to seal the deal.<sup>6</sup> The entire party joined Rush Kress at Huckleberry Hill, where Mario was tending to several of the paintings that had been wrested from the private collection—Tintoretto's *Saint Paul*, Veronese's *Saint Lucy*, and Bronzino's portrait of an ailing Eleonora di Toledo.

On June 7, 1954, the Kress Foundation formally offered Count Contini \$2 million for 17 paintings. The foundation received the contract in early July and sent Contini's attorney, Renzo Ravà, a check for \$1 million with the balance to be paid in ten quarterly installments. But there was one outstanding matter. Item 17 specified that the count would supply "a painting or paintings from your collection of a value not less than \$100,000.00 to be selected . . . by Messrs. John Walker and Professor Mario Modestini . . . worthy, in their opinion, to be in the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Art."



87. Huckleberry Hill. From left: Patricia Volterra, Count Contini Bonacossi, a laughing Mario, unknown woman (Virginia Kress?), Sandrino Contini Bonacossi, and Guy Emerson.





88. June 1954, on the steps of the National Gallery. Front row from left: David Finley, Rush Kress, Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, Mario Modestini, Patricia Volterra, Gualtiero Volterra. Back row, from left: Sandrino Contini Bonacossi, Perry Cott, Colonel Henry McBride, Guy Emerson, Huntington Cairns, 'Red' Geiger, Macgill James.

Contini jealously guarded his private collection (perhaps he was pining for the lost Tintoretts, Bronzino, and Titian) and refused to cooperate with Walker and Mario. The count complained bitterly that their list included paintings which “cannot be exported, with the exception of two paintings which—because of their great popularity—could never be granted the necessary export permits.”<sup>7</sup> The dealer could act with impunity because he knew that the foundation would not abrogate the contract. They had no appetite for a messy lawsuit and some of the masterworks that the National Gallery wanted might have to be returned. Besides, half of the purchase price had already been paid. The agreed upon quarterly payments continued to be sent to Renzo Ravà until the



89. Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, ca. 1545, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 152.4 × 236.2 cm.

count's death a little over a year later, by which time a sum of \$500,000 was still owed to Contini's estate. In January 1957, the debt was settled by deducting \$100,000 for the famous, undelivered "Item 17".<sup>8</sup>

### ☞ Sandrino's Disappearance ☞

Sandrino Contini Bonacossi would soon become the focus of a scandalous and mysterious disappearance. On July 31, 1955, the seventh anniversary of his marriage to Elsa De Giorgi, Sandrino disappeared along with 30 million lire he had collected on behalf of the count, which he was meant to deposit in the bank. Mario, who had become a close friend of Sandrino and knew how completely besotted he was with his wife, said that he had gone deeply into debt maintaining Elsa's luxurious lifestyle of sable furs, jewels, and Dom Perignon, the only alcoholic beverage of which she would

partake. For months, Italian headlines were filled with the dramatic story as the mystery of the ‘Count’s’ whereabouts continued to deepen. Elsa claimed to be broken hearted and had no idea why he had left. She moved out of the house on the Via San Leonardo that Count Contini had bought for the couple, absconding with the entire contents of Sandrino’s office that she used for years to blackmail his relatives. Elsa never admitted that the real reason for his disappearance was her husband’s discovery that she was having an affair with the young writer, Italo Calvino (1923–1985).

Elsa had literary ambitions and, ostensibly, Calvino was helping with her first novel, *I Coetanei*, based on Sandrino’s courageous career as a partisan behind the Gothic Line during the German occupation. Until her death in 1997, Elsa maintained that she and her husband were profoundly in love and that the reason Sandrino had abandoned her was because of his involvement in a sinister plot hatched by the Contini family and their retainers—including Mario—to cover up some sort of illegal activity, and that it was only after his disappearance, to ease her loneliness, that she began her affair with the young Calvino, which lasted until 1958. This story contradicts the dates on over three hundred passionate letters from Calvino, and the deception was confirmed when Elsa illegally sold them to a popular magazine many years later, to the intense irritation of Calvino’s widow and literary executor.<sup>9</sup>

One day, many months after his disappearance, Sandrino telephoned Mario from Paris. He had tried to join the French Foreign Legion but had been rejected and he was alone, broke and desperate. Mario said that he had promised Donna Vittoria that he would protect Sandrino:

*On her deathbed, she [Donna Vittoria] sent for me and said, “Mario, send everyone out because I must speak to you in private.” She spoke to me of Sandrino, about whom she was very worried, married to an adventuress—for that’s what she called her [Elsa De Giorgi]. She asked me to help him when he needed it because she foresaw what, in fact, later happened.*

Mario told Rush Kress about Sandrino's plight, knowing that though Rush liked to play the part of a tough businessman, he was tenderhearted and instinctively generous. Rush was very fond of Sandrino and immediately brought him to New York to conduct research for the foundation, a task for which he was well-suited. Sandrino, though brilliant, was never cut out to be an art dealer, the career his uncle had been grooming him for.

He and Mario worked closely together for the Kress Foundation, sorting out the many details involved in the distribution of the collection, researching, and writing catalogue entries. Mario had many stories about Sandrino's frequent visits to Huckleberry Hill. He was a wonderful mimic, witty, and liked to clown around; he seemed to have been happy during that period. Mario and his friend Renzo Ravà loved Sandrino, and he made many friends in New York.

Unfortunately, Sandrino was bedeviled by problems; among other things, he was financially improvident. Before his uncle died, he had given Sandrino an important piece of property, a large building in the Piazza della Repubblica in Florence, as his inheritance. For reasons related to his divorce from Elsa De Giorgi, Sandrino immediately sold the building. He then met a woman who, Mario said, bore an astonishing resemblance to Elsa, and spent all his money on her until he was flat broke. The woman rapidly left him for another man.

### ☞ The Death of Sandrino ☞

After the Kress Collection was dispersed in 1961 there was nothing for Sandrino to do at the foundation. Rush Kress had died and could no longer protect him. In 1970, the director of the foundation, Mary Davis, sent him to the National Gallery in Washington to become the curator of the photo archive, a task he accomplished with great distinction, acquiring many rare collections and setting up collaborations with other institutions. However, Sandrino had

no friends in Washington. He was lonely, his fortune was gone, and he became depressed. His life came to a tragic end, as Mario described:

*There were always attractive secretaries at the National Gallery. Sandrino used to pay compliments to a particularly pretty one. One morning, he met her during the coffee break and couldn't resist giving her a kiss. The girl was extremely offended and complained to her superiors. One of them asked Sandrino to leave the museum<sup>10</sup> and gave him the minimum pension. He was desperate and didn't know what to do. He came to New York and told the whole story to Renzo and me, I told him not to worry, because I would hire him as the secretary of my [restoration] company. But he had taken the firing from the National Gallery very badly, and there was the problem of finding an apartment in New York. All these things made him very discouraged.*



90. Sandrino Contini Bonacossi.

## THE LAST PICTURE SALE

*One evening [October 17, 1975], I had a premonition, and I called him after dinner. There was no answer, and I continued to call him until two in the morning without success. At eight in the morning, I called his [former] secretary and told her that I was very worried about him and asked her to go to his apartment to see what had happened. She went there, and the building manager, who had the keys, said that he wanted the presence of a policeman before he opened the door. Unfortunately, my presentiment was right; he had hanged himself in the bathroom with telephone wire. I called while the police were still there, and one of them answered, saying to me that there had been an accident. I called Renzo and we decided to go to Washington immediately. Identifying the body and the other formalities were deeply distressing.*

Ironically, Sandrino believed that he had finally obtained a divorce from Elsa De Giorgi at the time of his death, but the decree had not yet been finalized. Thus, she remained Sandrino's widow for the rest of her life, a position that allowed her to create problems not only for the Contini family, but also for the Italian state in the matter of the donation of the fabled private collection assembled by Alessandro and Vittoria Contini Bonacossi.<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER 18

# Missed Opportunities

THE ACQUISITION OF GREAT works of art is, by its very nature, dotted with missed opportunities and efforts that fail for a variety of reasons. Mario often regretted what might have been. On occasion, he experienced intense frustration seeing a real prize slip from the Kress Collection's hands.

### ✿ The Ruspoli Goyas ✿

Odd as it may seem, a Florentine family possessed, by inheritance, three masterpieces of portraiture by the Spanish artist Francisco Goya (1746–1828). These had been painted between 1783 and 1784 for Goya's patron, the Infante Luis de Borbón (1727–1785), who, as the youngest son of Philip V, entered the church and was named Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo when he was barely eight years old. In 1754, he abandoned his vocation and, it is said, enjoyed



MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

a frivolous life as an aesthete and patron of the arts until 1776, when he married the beautiful María Teresa de Borbón y Vallabriga (1758–1820), who came from a noble but not royal family. As a consequence of this morganatic union, the couple and their issue lost certain privileges and rights of succession and were banished to internal exile on an estate far from Madrid and the life of the court.

Luis withdrew to Arenas de San Pedro, a small town nestled at the foot of the Sierra de Gredos mountain range, not far from Ávila. Spectacularly endowed by nature and blessed with a temperate climate similar to that of Tuscany, it was ideal for the Infante's small court, whose members occupied themselves with



91. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *The Countess of Chinchón*, 1783, oil on canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 220 × 140 cm.

music, literature, and the other arts. Goya visited in 1783 and 1784 to paint portraits of Luis's family and friends, culminating in an oversized (over 8' × 9') "conversation piece" of the entire group, one of the great masterpieces of the eighteenth century.

One of the figures in the group portrait is a tiny blond sprite, who looks mischievously out from behind her older brother with open-eyed excitement. She is one of Don Luis's three children, called, like her mother, María Teresa. Goya seems to have had a special feeling for this child, later known as the 15th Countess of Chinchón, and painted her twice later in her life. A standing portrait, now in the Uffizi, was painted around 1797—the year that she was maneuvered by the corrupt Queen María Luisa into a humiliating marriage to the hated prime minister, Manuel de Godoy. With this marriage, the queen obtained a wife with royal blood for her favorite, and María Teresa was granted the royal privileges lost by her father. Shortly thereafter, Goya made another touching portrait of his friend, pregnant and seated, adorned with symbols of fertility.<sup>1</sup> María Teresa gave birth to a daughter, Carlota Joaquina de Godoy y Borbón (1800–1886). Don Luis's granddaughter and sole heir,<sup>2</sup> she married the Roman Prince Camillo Ruspoli in 1820. The couple moved to Florence, where Carlota lived until her death. They had two sons. Adolfo, the eldest, returned to Spain and had numerous descendants, while Luigi remained in Florence, where his line was extinguished in 1969 upon the death of Paolo Ruspoli, Marquis of Boadilla del Monte.

The portraits were tightly held within the family. The group portrait was known through a small copy, but the original had not been seen by anyone outside the family until 1902, when Spanish art critic Elias Tormo recorded it hanging in a room together with fourteen other portraits, all but one by Goya, at Boadilla del Monte, Don Luis's palace near Madrid.<sup>3</sup>

The decision to divide the Goya portraits among Carlota's descendants, with branches in Spain, Florence, and Paris, may have taken place in 1904, when a male heir was born to the Spanish Ruspolis. The Florentine Ruspolis took ownership of

*María Teresa de Borbón y Vallabriga on Horseback*, the group portrait, and the full-length standing portrait of the Countess of Chinchón. The paintings still had not been seen by any scholars apart from Tormo, and no photographs had been published. This is always a crucial matter for families in Italy owning important paintings that they might one day wish to sell, because a published work would risk notification by the state. The potential sale value is higher if the works can be offered discreetly on the open market without export restrictions.

On May 29, 1951,<sup>4</sup> John Walker wrote Mario a cryptic note asking him if, while in Italy for the summer, he would visit Princess Ruspoli in Florence.<sup>5</sup> He said that he had already spoken to her about Mario and she was prepared to receive him. Walker had arranged for Mario to see the Goya, which he had perhaps heard of through his contacts in European high society, because specialists knew nothing of its existence until 1967 when it was published by the scholar José Gudiol.

Walker and Mario hoped that it might be possible to obtain an export license, as the painting was not by an Italian artist and had been imported into Italy from Spain before the stringent restrictions of the 1939 law went into effect. It was a long shot, but a matchless opportunity for the Kress Foundation and the National Gallery, if the painting was, indeed, what they supposed.

Mario told me that he saw the group portrait in a family villa on the Via Bolognese, where it was kept because it was too large to pass through the front door of the princess's house in the city, and that the price was not terribly high—around \$50,000. He was not shown the other two Goyas. Mario's friend, the lawyer Renzo Ravà—who knew everything there was to know about the Florentine nobility—looked into the legal status of the painting. To everyone's great disappointment, he learned that the paintings had been essentially smuggled into Italy from Spain in 1904. The owners had not declared them to customs officials or asked for a temporary importation license. There was not even any proof that they had come from Spain. Under the circumstances, there was no



92. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *The Family of the Infante don Luis de Borbón*, 1783–1784, oil on canvas, Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Traversetolo, Parma, 248 × 328 cm.

chance the Goya would be granted an export license. As soon as the paintings came on the market, the state could exercise the right of preemption. Since the painting was so important, its appearance would cause an international sensation and neither the foundation nor the National Gallery could afford to be involved in the illegal exportation of a work of art from Italy.

That was the end of that acquisition. In 1974, *Maria Teresa on Horseback* and *The Countess of Chinchón* were acquired by the Uffizi. The group portrait ended up with a private collector, Luigi Magnani, the son of a rich industrialist from Reggio Emilia, who dabbled in art history, music, and literature. Magnani had a small private museum in his late nineteenth-century villa outside Parma, now known as the Magnani Rocca Foundation. The museum is a bit out of the way and there is no context for the painting in the

oddly assorted collection. The group portrait is too large to be easily moved and is, therefore, rarely loaned to Goya exhibitions. It would have looked magnificent in Washington.

### ☞ Goya's Painting Technique ☞

Mario had a special passion for Goya, acquired while working on many of his great paintings over the years, and knew that they were particularly sensitive to solvents. In 1983, many years after the events just described, Mario was entrusted with the restoration of the full-length portrait of the Marquesa de Santiago, a sitter with a notorious reputation in her day. The present owner, the Getty Museum, describes her as follows: "Known for her dissolute lifestyle, the Marquesa died at the age of forty-three, three years after Goya made this portrait. An English visitor to Spain once described her as 'very profligate and loose in her manners and conversations, and scarcely admitted into female society and said to boast of her nocturnal revels.'"<sup>6</sup> In the portrait, she looks as if she has had a hard night; she was known to mask her plainness with heavy paint and powder, and her face is grotesquely made-up as she stares almost insolently at the viewer.

The restoration was complex for several reasons. The canvas is made of two pieces of linen, stitched together vertically, with the seam running right through the middle of the composition, transecting the head of the sitter. Though originally it was scarcely visible, a thoughtless, but standard, relining had pushed the seam forward, which Mario felt was particularly disturbing because of its placement. Francis Moro, a professional reliner with whom Mario often collaborated, removed the lining canvas and coaxed the seam back into plane, after which a new canvas backing was adhered with glue paste.

The painting had not been cleaned in many decades. Mario found that the thick varnish had been artificially tinted with dark pigments, a common practice in the nineteenth century. It wasn't

CHAPTER 18

especially difficult to remove, and due to Mario's usual care, the cleaning was going nicely, until he got to the black dress, which, he said, was soluble in everything, even mild mineral spirits. The varnish was thick, brown, and cloudy, muffling the richness of the deep black dress, so that it was necessary to remove it somehow. He tried an old technique, rubbing the varnish in a circular motion with the palm of his hand, creating enough friction to pulverize the brittle resin. Once it began to powder, the resin dust served as a fine abrasive, which continued to wear away the discolored resin



93. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes, *The Marquesa de Santiago*, 1804, oil on canvas, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California, 209.6 × 126.4 cm.



until most of the varnish was removed. Obviously, when getting close to the paint surface, great caution was necessary. Mario said it came out perfectly; the only drawback was that his hands were destroyed in the process.

✎ Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio ✎  
*Saint John the Baptist*

While the *Family of the Infante Don Luis de Borbón* eluded Kress for want of an export license, another painting of capital importance—this time by Caravaggio—was near at hand, and its loss might have the dubious distinction of being the greatest painting the Kress Foundation did not buy. This was Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, now in Kansas City. Although their versions of the incident differ greatly, in the end it was a heartbreaking disappointment for both Mario and Johnny Walker.

The opportunity to purchase the painting came through Theodore Rousseau, the chief curator of the Metropolitan, whom Mario had met not long after his arrival in New York, as Mario describes:

*During my first year in New York, I went with Mr. Kress and a group from the foundation to visit the Metropolitan Museum. The director, James Rorimer, and Theodore Rousseau, the chief curator, accompanied us. As we walked through the galleries I stopped in front of a painting by an old friend. Rousseau noticed my close attention and said, "How do you like that picture?" I said it was a very good painting by Joni. "Oh," he said, "was he a pupil of Neroccio?" "No, he died twenty years ago." I explained to him that the Neroccio was an excellent forgery, one of Joni's best.*

*After my discovery of the false Neroccio from the Robert Lehman collection, I became quite good friends with Rousseau. I often lunched with him at his favorite restaurant, the Veau d'Or, where he had a fixed table. Rousseau was of French origin and in fact was a descendent of the school of Fontainebleau painter. Also, I was able to speak French with him, which, at that time, was a bit easier for me than English. One morning he called and asked me to come to the museum to look at a painting and*



*I went the same day. In his office was a splendid painting of Saint John the Baptist by Caravaggio. By chance I had just come back from Naples where I had seen the copy of this picture in the museum of Capodimonte. He asked me what I thought of the picture. I replied, "It is a masterpiece." "I agree with you one hundred percent" he said, "but unfortunately a book was recently published on Caravaggio by BB in which he considers the Naples version to be the original and, therefore, my trustees cannot approve the purchase."*

*"My dear Ted" I said, "you know perfectly well that BB has never understood seventeenth-century Italian painting. I can't imagine why he has written a book on Caravaggio. And I must tell you another thing, he is not capable of distinguishing a copy from the original work." "I'll have another try with my trustees," he said, "but I don't think I will succeed in convincing them." I asked to whom the painting belonged and Ted told me it was being offered by Agnew's of London. I said, "Listen, Ted, if you don't buy it, please let me know so that the Kress Foundation can have it." "Fine," he said. Three weeks later Ted called me to report that, unfortunately, he was not going to be able to buy the painting for the Metropolitan and he had spoken with Mr. Geoffrey Agnew who agreed that it could be sent over to the Kress Foundation.*

*The painting arrived the next day and I showed it to Mr. Kress with great excitement. Finally, we would have a Caravaggio for the National Gallery. Mr. Kress was delighted and said he would ask Johnny Walker to come and see it. I had to agree to this but in my heart I was very worried because of the relationship between Walker and BB. In fact, Mr. Walker came and immediately pronounced it a copy of the Naples picture. I defended the attribution saying that this picture was the original and the one in Naples was a copy. At that point, Walker said to Rush Kress, let's call BB at I Tatti and you can talk to him about it. It was ten in the morning in New York, therefore four in the afternoon in Italy. Walker phoned BB, told him the reason for the call, and Mr. Kress got on the line to talk directly with Berenson. After he hung up Mr. Kress said that with BB against it, the foundation could not buy the painting. I told Walker that he was making a terrible mistake, that the National Gallery would not have another opportunity to add a Caravaggio of that importance to its collection. In fact, the Gallery does not possess a painting by the master even today.*

*I went back to my studio but was so angry and upset that I couldn't concentrate on my work. Finally, it was five-thirty and everyone had gone home except for me, stewing over the events of that miserable day, and Mr. Kress, writing his daily memorandums. Mr. Kress came into the studio<sup>7</sup> and said, "Mario, you really believe*

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

in that picture, don't you?" "Oh yes, Mr. Kress, one hundred percent." "How much are they asking for it?" "Eighty thousand dollars." "Offer them sixty."

This was a great moment that demonstrated that Mr. Kress had more faith in my judgment than in Berenson's. It was too late to call London and there was nothing I could do until Monday morning. At six a.m. I phoned Mr. Agnew, whom I did not know at that time, and communicated Mr. Kress's offer. I was heartbroken when he replied that the painting had been sold to the museum in Kansas City over the phone on Friday. In John Walker's memoirs, he admits that missing the Caravaggio was perhaps his greatest curatorial error. In his version of the story he says that his wife



94. Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, 1604–1605, oil on canvas, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 172.72 × 132.08 cm.

*was related to the owners of the painting and she was sure that it was the original, but, unfortunately, he did not listen to her. He doesn't mention that Friday at the foundation and my attempt to persuade him to accept the painting, which could and should be in the National Gallery today.*

Walker wrote, "The mistake still haunts me."<sup>8</sup>

In 1948, Bernard Berenson took a sudden interest in Caravaggio, whom Roberto Longhi had been studying for many years. Seventeenth-century painting had never been Berenson's specialty, but Longhi was organizing a historic exhibition in Milan, which opened to great acclaim in 1951, and perhaps Berenson didn't want to be left out. In 1951, he published a small book, *Del Caravaggio. Le sue incongruenze e la sua fama*<sup>9</sup> in which he noted that there were two versions of this particular painting: one in Naples at the Capodimonte Museum and a second on the English art market. He considered the Naples version to be the original and the other a copy. He later changed his mind and subsequent editions of the book reflect this.

Caravaggio was one of the most innovative painters in history; his work enjoyed enormous success and influenced painters all over Europe. During his lifetime, his fame was so great that, in order to satisfy the demands of collectors for his rare canvases, they were copied—often by excellent contemporary painters—even before his death, which caused, and continues to generate, a great deal of confusion about which version is original. The question of whether Caravaggio himself created replicas of his own work is still hotly debated. Mario believed that he did not.

### 🎨 *The Cardsharps* 🎨

Caravaggio had so many followers that there is difficulty in identifying the originals and the muddle has been compounded as his style went out of fashion in the eighteenth century. Tantalizing descriptions of originals lurked in inventories, writings by his

contemporaries, descriptions in old guidebooks, and sometimes in photographs. One of the most famous of the missing paintings by Caravaggio was an early work, painted around 1594–95, *The Cardsharp*, the picture that brought the young artist to the notice of his first patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte (1549–1627). Its movements from one proprietor to another were perfectly documented until 1899, when the collection belonging to Prince Maffeo Barberini-Colonna di Sciarra, scion of several important Roman families, was sold in Paris. The Paris firm, Braun, made an accurate photograph of the painting at the time of the sale.

The painting was very popular in its time and there are dozens of copies; the earliest one that is recorded was made in 1615, just a few years after the artist's death. With the documented original missing, the better copies could be very misleading. In 1950, the Kress Foundation thought it might be on the verge of acquiring the original, but once the picture was subjected to Mario's exacting eye, it proved to be no more than a copy, to everyone's great disappointment.<sup>10</sup> The incident, however, helped cement Mario's reputation as a keen connoisseur with the likes of Rudolf Heinemann (1902–1975), one of the most revered art experts of the day and part-owner of the painting. As Mario remembered the event:

*One day, Mr. Henschel from Knoedler's telephoned the foundation offices asking us if we would come and see an important painting, the lost Sciarra Caravaggio. The next day, a group of us—including Mr. Kress, Dr. Suida, Guy Emerson, and John Walker—went to the gallery. It was displayed in a private room, on an easel, and was newly restored by William Subr, with a beautiful antique frame. It made a magnificent impression against the red upholstered walls, and everyone was greatly excited. I went up to it to examine it closely, and my sense was that it was not the quality of the master. Mr. Henschel showed me an old photograph taken by the famous Parisian photography firm Braun, while it was still in the Sciarra Collection. As I compared the photo with the painting in front of us, I realized that they were not the same picture. I pointed out to Mr. Henschel and Mr. Balaj that the cards on the table were at a slightly different angle and, most telling, that the pattern of age cracks, which was perfectly visible in the Braun photograph, was different from that of their*

*painting. As paintings age and the different layers dry and move according to changes in humidity and temperature, the ground and the paint layers crack. Every painting has its own distinct pattern. No two are the same. This meant, of course, that the painting was not the lost original. There was extreme consternation and embarrassment all around as this news sank in. They had bought it in Paris, believing that it was the Sciarra painting, and had clearly presented it in good faith—otherwise they would not have shown it together with the Braun photo. Unfortunately, in their excitement, they had not looked closely enough. Johnny Walker was terribly disappointed.*

*This was around 1960. Sometime later, a friend of mine from Rome, Leopoldo di Castro, a sculpture dealer on 57th Street, called me to say that Dr. Rudolf Heinemann would like to meet me. I, of course, knew of him. He was the most important authority [on paintings] in the international art world, and his pronouncements were considered infallible. I went along to the Ritz Tower, where he had an apartment. Although he was a dealer, he never kept business premises, but worked with a few select galleries, chiefly Knoedler's in New York and Agnew's in London. We made small talk and then he said to me, "Congratulations!" "For what?" I asked. "The Caravaggio. You were right." After that, he called me often to show me paintings he wanted to buy.*

Many years later, in 1986, the autograph Caravaggio turned up. When it first appeared, several eminent art historians disregarded it as another copy. Through the insistence of a French restorer, Gilles Panhard, at the time a Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum, who knew the painting's provenance, two experts, John Brealey and Keith Christiansen, went to see it armed with the Braun photograph, and had it sent to the museum for examination and restoration. When the old lining canvas was removed, Cardinal del Monte's seal was revealed on the reverse of the original canvas.

As was common in the seventeenth century, the composition is closely cropped, especially along the upper edge. For later taste, this placement seemed suffocating, and it was common practice in the eighteenth century to extend compositions with a five- or six-inch addition at the top and sometimes also on the right and left sides. *The Cardsharps* had such an addition, as could easily be seen in the x-rays. During the restoration, the addition was removed and



MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

the painting lined and mounted on a smaller stretcher. The work was acquired by the Kimbell Art Museum.

There are dozens of copies of *The Cardsharps*. In 2006, another one appeared in a Sotheby's sale in London, catalogued as a seventeenth-century follower of Caravaggio. The composition included the extra space in the upper part of the painting that was provided by the later addition to the Kimbell painting, but it was painted on a single piece of canvas. It was sold for £42,000 (\$80,000), and the buyer turned out to be an eminent art historian and an expert on Caravaggio, Sir Denis Mahon, who was, at that time, ninety-two years old. Sir Denis, together with another Caravaggio expert, Professor Mina Gregori, published the painting as the first version of *The Cardsharps* and arranged for it to be exhibited in several small Italian cities. Gregori is what is known as an "expansionist"—that is, she believes that Caravaggio made more than one version of his paintings, and she has accepted



95. Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, *The Cardsharps*, ca. 1595, oil on canvas, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 94.2 × 130.9 cm.

many of these in the past. Her views are often not widely accepted, however, in Italy the discovery was breathlessly reported, with its value touted as being up to \$50 million.

Unsurprisingly, the previous owner of the painting, who had consigned it to Sotheby's, sued the auction house for negligence and breach of contract. The trial was held in October 2014 and was widely covered by the press. Dr. Richard Spear, another art historian who has spent a lifetime studying the artist, was the expert witness for the defense. At a late stage, not long before the trial began, Sotheby's asked if I was willing to address a few technical points. The prosecution's two experts had produced a bewildering amount of technical evidence to prove that not only was the painting by Caravaggio's own hand, but that it preceded the Kimbell painting, the only way to account for the difference in format. Some years earlier, when I first saw a reproduction of the Mahon painting, as it was called, the fact that it included the addition immediately convinced me that it was a copy made after the extra strip of canvas had been applied to either the Sciarra painting or some early copy. I dismissed it out of hand. The frame was eighteenth-century, which is when I assume it was painted.

Technical analysis has an important role in the examination of paintings and provides valuable information about the artist's working process. It can prove beyond a doubt that an artwork was made with modern materials and is therefore a copy or a deliberate forgery. It cannot prove that a painting is by the hand of the artist, although it can help to shed light on a difficult attribution when comparative evidence is available. The interpretation of technical evidence is not always straightforward and requires expert knowledge of painters and painting technique. In the Sotheby's case, the judge came to a decision based on visual evidence such as brushwork, the build of layers, the draughtsmanship, and the skill with which details such as feathers were rendered, in other words, the methods of traditional connoisseurship.<sup>11</sup>



### ☞ The Barberini Tapestries and Bernini ☞

*Around 1951 Mitchell Samuels of the firm French and Company invited Mr. Kress to visit the gallery because he had some interesting paintings to show him. As usual Rusb asked me, Guy and Suida to accompany him. Samuels was also an excellent connoisseur, particularly of tapestries for which he had a true passion. In fact, that day he showed us a series of tapestries which had been made for the Barberini Palace in Rome, based on designs by Rubens and Pietro da Cortona. There were thirteen, of different sizes, depicting episodes from the Life of Constantine. Seven were of French manufacture based on Rubens sketches commissioned by Louis XIII and presented as a gift to Cardinal Francesco Barberini. He in turn commissioned the missing five episodes from his court painter, Pietro da Cortona who was responsible for the ceiling fresco of the Great Hall of Palazzo Barberini, *The Apotheosis of the Barberini Family*, one of the masterworks of seventeenth-century painting. The twelve tapestries and a baldachino for the traditional papal throne completed the decoration of the Hall. Mitchell Samuels explained the history of the series and recounted how he had spent years reassembling the group that had been dispersed in the nineteenth century.*

*Mr. Kress immediately grasped the importance of the tapestries and asked the price. Some needed work, which gave Mr. Kress an excuse to haggle, a practice that he had learned from his brother Samuel and which amused him enormously. I don't recall exactly what we paid for the series, around two hundred thousand dollars, more or less. After concluding this transaction we continued on through the gallery where we discovered three beautiful paintings: a *Madonna in glory* attributed to the Flemish painter called the *Saint Lucy Master*, a *Giovanni Battista Tiepolo*, a subject from Roman history, and, finally, a large, signed painting by *Largillière*, a double portrait of a boy with his tutor, which is an unusually penetrating character study of the older man but painted with the usual flourish and panache of the great eighteenth-century court painter. All three are now in the National Gallery. The prices in comparison to what these paintings would bring today were ridiculously low. The large Tiepolo cost thirty thousand dollars, the *Largillière* twenty-five and the *Saint Lucy Master* fifty, a total of one hundred thousand dollars for three paintings of exceptional quality.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Kress was delighted with his acquisitions and, in fact, he had made a very good deal. He thought that the tapestries would be perfect at the National Gallery and shortly thereafter he showed them to Johnny Walker who, after a discussion with David*

*Finley, refused them. They were then sent for restoration to Florence where there was an excellent workshop that specialized in this.*

*After the National Gallery turned them down it occurred to me that there might be a way to return the tapestries to the Palazzo Barberini in Rome so that they could be hung in the space for which they were designed. According to its statute, the Kress Foundation could not give them to the Italian State; however an exchange would be possible. As I thought the problem over, I remembered a Bernini sculpture, representing Truth, which stood in the courtyard of Bernini's former home, a palazzo in the Via della Mercede in Rome, and was for sale by the heirs of the sculptor for about fifty thousand dollars. I had not previously thought it would be possible to get permission to export the work. However, I thought that if the Kress Foundation offered to give the Barberini tapestries back to Italy in exchange for an export license for Truth, we*



96. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Truth Unveiled by Time*, 1646–1652, marble, Galleria Borghese, Rome, h. 280 cm.



97. Pietro da Cortona, *The Apotheosis of the Barberini Family*, 1633–1639, Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

*might be able to come to an agreement that would benefit everyone. I proposed this to Mr. Kress who thought it was an excellent plan but first he wanted to make sure that John Walker was interested in the Bernini for the gallery. Naturally, this time, Walker thought it would be a magnificent addition to the collection. There was not a sculpture by Bernini in any American museum.*

*When I next went to Italy for my summer holidays I brought with me a whole slew of photographs of the Barberini tapestries. I met with my old friend Federico Zeri who was enthusiastic about restoring the great hall of the Palazzo Barberini to its former glory. In fact, Federico campaigned all his life for the integrity of the Palazzo Barberini, which had been partially assigned to military use and other inappropriate functions. With his backing, we began to plan how to present the proposal, which would have to be approved at the highest levels of the ministry. I decided first to talk to the Superintendent of Fine Arts for the City of Rome. When he saw the photos of the tapestries he immediately understood the significance of my proposal but the idea of granting an export license for an important sculpture by Bernini was for him an insurmountable obstacle. He did not act on behalf of the export license and the whole idea finally fizzled out. It was perhaps naive of me to think that an Italian official would agree to export a Bernini sculpture for whatever reason. In fact, eventually*



98. One of the Barberini tapestries, after a design by Peter Paul Rubens, *The Battle of the Milvian Bridge*, 1623–1625, wool and silk, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 492 × 737 cm.

*the sculpture was purchased by the government and is now in the museum of the Villa Borghese where it keeps company with several other, far greater, sculptures by the same master such as Apollo and Daphne and the David. Still today I cannot help but believe that it would have been better for the City of Rome to have the complete set of Barberini tapestries back in their original context rather than to add one more very good, but not first rate, sculpture to a collection which already boasted the greatest works by Bernini. Not only that, but Truth Unveiled had never been properly sited at the time it was made and, for some reason, had languished for three centuries in the corner of the courtyard where the sculptor left it. The Barberini tapestries were ultimately given to the Philadelphia museum where, for lack of a better alternative, they were hung on a balcony and are seldom seen.*

## CHAPTER 19

# Endings

**H**UCKLEBERRY HILL MIGHT have been conducive to intense and demanding work with its isolation and lack of distractions, but it was perhaps surprising that the restorers and assistants put up with the distance from friends and often family for so long. Finally, the cracks began to show as Mario relates.

*I was often in and out of the city to visit dealers, attend foundation meetings, and go to Washington. In order to be able to work on as many paintings as possible, after the fire, we took a studio at 16 East 52nd Street, where I and some of my assistants worked, while we continued to commute much of the time to Huckleberry Hill, preparing for the 1956 Exhibition at the National Gallery. My assistants and I had spent all those years working in the Pennsylvania mountains while we were preparing the paintings for the regional galleries. One day, my assistants decided that they had had enough bosky solitude and went on strike to make the point that it was time to go back to New York. I talked the situation over with Guy Emerson, who said he would bring it up with Mr. Kress.*



*After many meetings, it was decided that we would bring everyone back to New York, where we would look for a new studio. This news was greeted with great jubilation by my staff. The studio at 16 East 52nd Street was also more convenient for the directors and curators of the regional museums who visited New York to follow the final work on what were ultimately to be their collections. Reframing and panel work continued to be done at the studio in Pennsylvania. Angelo Fatta, the carpenter, and Emilio Quarantelli were both men of a certain age, one with grown children, and the other a widower who didn't mind being in an out-of-the-way spot, whereas the younger restorers wanted to live in the decidedly more vibrant atmosphere of the city. After the move, the atmosphere in the studio improved greatly, and there was a return to the easy, friendly, and sociable relationships that we previously enjoyed and which are essential to any group of people who work closely together.*

### ❧ The National Gallery Opening ❧ and the End of Kress's Original Mission

The conclusion of the intense effort to build the Kress Collection arrived somewhat suddenly, brought on by unexpected financial reversals. Around 1960, the stock of S. H. Kress & Co. declined precipitously as consumers embraced the new malls that began to replace the urban five-and-dime store, putting the continued existence of the foundation in jeopardy. The trustees, all businessmen, believed that Rush Kress, who was apparently becoming somewhat confused,<sup>1</sup> was incapable of facing the problem and making a decision. The fortunes of the foundation depended on the value of the shares of S. H. Kress & Co., of which it owned 42 percent. These holdings represented over 70 percent of the foundation's assets, and dividends were declining.<sup>2</sup> Spearheaded by Franklin Murphy (1916–1994), who had been appointed trustee in 1953,<sup>3</sup> a strategy was devised in early 1958 to take over the company in a proxy fight, a precedent-setting maneuver that, as the *New York Times* wrote, was to “affect the status of six thousand other nonprofit foundations and trusts with some \$7.5 billion in assets.”<sup>4</sup> An angry Rush Kress reacted, demanding the resignations

of the trustees involved. An emergency board meeting in March ended in a stalemate, and Rush, after much anguish, suddenly reversed himself and surrendered control of the company to the trustees, who reorganized the foundation, paid its outstanding debts, and made a settlement with the Kress family that included the apartment at 1020 Fifth Avenue and a group of paintings. All the other properties were sold, including Huckleberry Hill. The foundation sold its shares of S. H. Kress & Co. to Genesco in 1964 for \$27 million.<sup>5</sup>

Following the death of Rush Kress in 1963, Franklin Murphy became chairman of the executive committee and president of the foundation, a position he held until his death.<sup>6</sup> Murphy was intelligent, erudite, and aggressive. A medical doctor by training, his administrative abilities had propelled him to the role of chancellor of the University of Kansas, his home state, at the age of thirty-five, after which he went on to become the chancellor of UCLA and chairman of the board and chief executive officer of the *Los Angeles Times*. He played an important role in Los Angeles's burgeoning cultural scene and was on the boards of the Ahmanson Foundation and the Getty Trust, and a founder of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Because of the historic relationship between the Kress Foundation and the National Gallery of Art, he also became a trustee of the National Gallery. Over the years, Murphy frequently sought Mario's advice about prospective acquisitions for the Los Angeles County Museum.<sup>7</sup> Mario was always cordial but considered him ruthless after the way he had treated the elderly Rush Kress. The old master paintings world is a small place, and the two men had many encounters over the years. I doubt Franklin Murphy was ever aware of how Mario felt about him.

With diminished resources, the mission of the foundation had to be redefined. It withdrew from the business of acquiring works of art, as well as its other focus, medical research. It concentrated its philanthropy on the advancement of scholarship and connoisseurship of European art by giving study and travel





99. Franklin Murphy extending a Deed of Gift to Phyllis de Young Tucker, president of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

grants to American art historians engaged in research in this field. Benefactions to the National Gallery continued. The collection had become all that Samuel Kress had ever dreamed and was already enriching the lives of Americans, not only in Washington but across the land. The final deeds were drawn up and, in December 1961, the collections were formally donated to the various museums. *National Geographic* and *Life* magazine featured stories about the “The Great Kress Giveaway.”<sup>8</sup>

An anthological exhibition was held in Washington in 1961. Everyone involved was very proud of what had been accomplished. The collection had been dispersed far and wide across the nation, according to Samuel’s original idea that man did not live by bread alone, and art and beauty were essential for the education of young Americans and the formation of good character and values. Many important government figures attended the opening, including



100. John Walker talking to John F. Kennedy.

President John Kennedy and his wife, Jacqueline. Cabinet members, senators, congressmen, and ambassadors assembled to honor the Kress gift. It was a memorable evening. Mario went to the opening with Guy Emerson, and they were among the first guests to arrive. It was a formal occasion, and even the checkroom attendants were in black tie, giving rise to an amusing incident recounted by Mario.

*As I entered the rotunda entrance, I saw a man in black tie hanging up a coat, and so I handed him mine. He kindly took it from me with a half-smile and hung it up. Guy was next to me, and as we walked toward the galleries, he said, "Mario, do you know to whom you gave your coat at the checkroom?" "No." "It was the chief justice of the United States, Earl Warren." What a tremendous gaffe! I was speechless.*

President Kennedy thanked Rush and Virginia Kress and congratulated them on the beauty and importance of the works

exhibited. Rush had been ill for some time and was in a wheelchair. Nevertheless, he stayed all evening, until the end, accepting universal compliments. Mario reflected later:

*The end came rather abruptly and left me with some regrets. Especially that there was not time to restore all of the paintings, particularly those in Washington—something we had always intended to do. Consequently, many important works still have the thick and discolored varnishes added by Pichetto, now dull, dusty, streaky and full of blached retouches.*

*Another project we often discussed was a Kress institute to train conservators of paintings and, in particular, young Americans, because, at that time, most restorers came from Europe. Although there are several restorers whom I consider my pupils, the frenetic activity from 1949 to 1961 did not allow time to realize this dream, which is a pity, since it would have had a great influence on the approach to the restoration of works of art in this country and perhaps avoided some of the controversies that later ensued.*



101. Mario and Rush Kress at the National Gallery with El Greco's *Laocoön*.

## ENDINGS

*I remained consultant to the Kress Foundation and also to the National Gallery for many years, working closely with Mary Davis, the president of the foundation, Fern Shapley, Colin Eisler, and Ulrich Middeldorf on the Kress catalogues and various Kress restoration projects in Europe.*

On Mario's retirement, he received a gracious letter from Franklin Murphy. It is dated April 2, 1962.

Dear Mario,

Now that the Kress Gift to the Nation has been consummated and this project draws to a close, I want to express to you personally and on behalf of all of the Trustees our enormous gratitude for your dedication in making this whole thing possible. It is my own view that you have been a crucial enzyme in this entire process. Your competence—indeed, virtuosity—in restoration has been the central fact in this project, and, in a way, the collection is as much a monument to you as to anyone else.

Jackals may snarl and vultures may swoop but the reality remains serenely unaware of both.<sup>9</sup>

All of us in the Kress Foundation and, in fact, the American public generally, will always be in your debt.

Sincerely,

Franklin D. Murphy  
Chancellor (UCLA)

Mario played many roles during his years at the Kress Foundation in addition to restorer: expert, connoisseur, curator, manager, diplomat, and negotiator all come to mind. He was fifty-five years old and briefly considered returning to Europe, perhaps to open a studio in London, but soon he had more work than he could handle in his new studio at 434 East 52nd Street. Thus, began yet another chapter in his professional life.

PART THREE

Tales and Techniques  
of a Great Restorer

Mario Modestini is a rare, and maybe unique, being: an excellent restorer, he is also, rather unusually, a great connoisseur of paintings with an infallible eye.

Federico Zeri, "Cronaca di un colpo mancato.  
La Vergine dei falsi," *La Stampa*, April 13, 1986

## CHAPTER 20

# New Clients and Friends

### ☞ Mario's Studio ☞

MARIO CONTINUED TO WORK with the Kress Foundation until the paintings were dispersed to their final locations, the records were filed, and the mission of the foundation redefined. The latter changed from a primary focus on building collections of old master paintings for Washington, the regional museums, and the study collections<sup>1</sup> to “advancing the history, conservation, and enjoyment of the vast heritage of European art, architecture, and archaeology from antiquity to the nineteenth century”<sup>2</sup> through a grants program. This new type of philanthropic work was, however, primarily administrative, and the foundation no longer employed conservators and art historians directly.

For many years, Mario continued as a consultant for the foundation, but he no longer needed the large studio at 16 East 52nd Street. Many of his assistants retired or returned to their



lives in Italy, and those who remained had sufficient experience to work on their own. By the time all the loose ends with the Kress Foundation, the National Gallery, and Huckleberry Hill were tied up, Mario was tired of administrative and management tasks. The satisfaction he had experienced acquiring paintings on the art market had been enough to persuade him not to undertake so many other activities foreign to his nature. Without the goal of creating an art collection, he had little interest in the many peripheral tasks that it entailed. Indeed, apart from his work for Kress, he had never been an organization man. Quite the opposite. He missed the luxury of sitting at his easel in front of a great painting, teasing out its secrets with patience and intuition.

Mario had been gone from Rome for so long that he no longer had a professional presence there. Because of Italy's strict export restrictions, the art market had become more or less stagnant. In



102. Mario in the early sixties.

addition, restorers in Italy did not enjoy the same status as they did in England and the United States. He considered establishing a studio in London, in one of the wonderful nineteenth-century ateliers that were available there.

Instead, he decided to stay in New York. He rented an apartment at 434 East 52nd Street, which had a double-height living room with a great north-lit window. Fifty-Second Street is a cul-de-sac between First Avenue and the East River, and is characterized by a peace and quiet rarely found in Manhattan. The mysterious Greta Garbo lived in the adjacent building; no one bothered her as she went to the post office and shopped at the fish market. When Mario did cross paths with her, he would gallantly say, "Good day, Miss Garbo," and her head, always masked by a large hat, would incline ever so slightly. Federico Zeri was wildly titillated by the mere idea of Garbo's presence on the street and fantasized all his life that he had formed a close relationship with her.<sup>3</sup>

Mario's studio was also his living room, and he worked at two easels placed near the windows. The natural light sometimes needed to be supplemented by powerful photo lamps. He had a tabouret and a small stool with a hole in the center that conveniently held a mahlstick. Bottles of varnish and pots of African violets shared the deep window ledge. A small second bedroom was used as an office and supply storage.

Mario seems to have retained a couple of assistants only for a transition period after leaving the large Kress studio. The back room was too crowded with files and materials for anyone to do restoration work, and Mario, for the most part, enjoyed working alone. Those outside the field might assume that a great deal of scientific equipment is necessary for the restoration of paintings. While analytical tests will always provide interesting information about materials and the artist's process, the most important part is the understanding that restorers develop in their privileged relationship to the picture. Many things are necessary: a knowledge of artists' materials and techniques and a high level of skill, but above all, innate sensitivity, intuition, and intelligence. When he set

up privately, Mario dispensed with all the technical paraphernalia that he had at Huckleberry Hill so that he could concentrate on the paintings themselves. All the intelligence, knowledge and skill that he had used in his former position for a plethora of less relevant matters he now focused on the picture on his easel.

As curator and conservator of the Kress Foundation, Mario had made many contacts with potential clients for this new phase of his professional life. Within a short period of time many of the most important Italian paintings that passed through the art market came to his studio. In addition to his impeccable work, Mario was easy to deal with, intelligent, and straightforward, qualities that inspired confidence. At the height of his career he was considered the finest restorer of Italian paintings in the world, and because he was secure in his knowledge, he did not behave in a grand way as others in his profession sometimes did. From counts to carpenters, he treated everyone with the same courtesy and respect. He was renowned and trusted by his peers from all fields in the art world.

### ❧ William Suhr ❧

Another legendary restorer had a studio in New York at this time, the German Wilhelm—or William—Suhr (1896–1984). Suhr was a decade older than Mario. A handsome man, he had an unusual background: both his parents were actors, and as a youngster he performed with his mother's company. First apprenticed to a stonemason, he subsequently enrolled in the Royal Art Academy in Berlin, where he was encouraged to restore paintings (like Mario, he was an autodidact). He came to the attention of Wilhelm Valentiner, an assistant of von Bode, the director of the Prussian museums. When Valentiner took the post of director at the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1924,<sup>4</sup> he offered Suhr the position of restorer. Suhr made his home in the United States and worked for Duveen, as well as for other dealers, collectors, and museums. He ultimately moved his studio to New York and became the restorer

for the Frick Collection, where he worked on many of its great masterpieces.

‘Billy’ and Mario were both friends and rivals. Mario had made the acquaintance of Rudolf Heinemann, the highly venerated dealer of old master paintings, when he identified Knoedler’s Caravaggio as a copy. From then on, Heinemann gave Italian paintings to Mario for restoration, while continuing to entrust northern European paintings to Suhr. Prior to this, Rudolf had engaged Suhr almost exclusively, so there was sometimes a bit of an edge to his relationship with Mario. Suhr was an excellent painter and could imitate certain artists—Holbein, for example—to perfection, including the mordant gilding. Even experienced restorers have, at times, been confused about the actual state of paintings restored by Suhr, as another of Mario’s stories will illustrate.

#### ✿ Rudolf Heinemann and Baron Heinrich von Thyssen ✿

Although Mario went through a period of hesitation about his future after his time with the Kress Foundation ended abruptly, there were aspects of this transition that he welcomed. One was the close relationships and partnerships he formed with some of the most important dealers in old master paintings.

Rudolf Heinemann was born in 1901 in Berlin, where he attended university, and after obtaining his doctorate, like Valentiner, he became the assistant of Wilhelm von Bode. Bode recommended Heinemann as advisor to the German-Hungarian industrialist Baron Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza (1875–1947), who was collecting paintings for the Villa Favorita, his estate on Lake Lugano in Switzerland. Heinemann helped Thyssen add to his collection, making a number of important acquisitions. In 1934, paintings from one of the great Roman princely collections came on the market. After years of wrangling, an agreement was formulated between the Barberini heirs and the Italian state, the *fedecompresso* Barberini. Similar to the later settlement with the

Contini Bonacossi heirs, some of the paintings were granted an export license in exchange for the donation of the Barberini Palace and part of the collection to the state. Heinemann acted quickly and was able to purchase such rarities as portraits by Carpaccio, Raphael, and Domenico Ghirlandaio, as well as Caravaggio's *Saint Catherine* and Dürer's *Jesus among the Doctors*. Also in the mid-1930s, he acquired from other sources Frans Hals's *Family Group with a Negro Servant in a Landscape*, Sebastiano del Piombo's *Portrait of Ferry Carondelet and His Secretaries*, and Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII.

Not all of Heinemann's purchases were of equally high quality. Along with Bode, he fell for one of Van Meegeren's fake Vermeers—a ridiculous portrait of a woman in a blue hat wearing what appears to be a blanket on her shoulders. He was also taken in by the portrait of Giuliano de' Medici attributed to Botticelli, which Mario considered a forgery (Chapter 9). Heinemann continued to advise Heinrich Thyssen and his son, Hans Heinrich, known as Heini (1921–2002), for many years, even after his 1935 move to New York, where he worked in partnership with several important firms, such as Knoedler's, Rosenberg & Stiebel, Frederick Mont, and Agnew's.

Mario worked closely with Heinemann, and it was undoubtedly through him that he was introduced to Heini Thyssen's circle. Heinemann had a villa in Lugano, and he persuaded Mario to buy a small apartment there, where he could work on the paintings in the Thyssen Collection during the summer.

Heini Thyssen dominated local society, jet-setting with his coterie of hangers-on and a succession of wives, and Mario became part of this small, incestuous group. Rudolf and his wife, Lore (1914–1996), entertained dealers, collectors, and curators, who hoped to procure some of the paintings that Rudolf had kept for his own collection. Lore Heinemann was a handsome woman, blond, tall, and blue-eyed. Her classic Aryan appearance notwithstanding, she was from a Jewish family in Mannheim. After the war, she came to New York where she worked at Lord & Taylor, the elegant department store on Fifth Avenue. She and Rudolf

somehow met, he fell in love with her, and they married. Mario told me that for many years, Rudolf had been in a relationship with an older woman, who was also his patroness and advisor. This woman owned the villa in Lugano and a country estate in Westchester's Mount Kisco—both of which she left to Rudolf after her death. Mario said that Rudolf never told her about Lore and continued to keep a weekly appointment with her in New York. On these evenings, at Rudolf's request, Mario often took Lore to dinner, and they became involved. Their relationship lasted for many years, although, over time, Mario grew increasingly restless. Lore was socially ambitious and reveled in the company of the rich and famous, like Heini Thyssen. Mario was charming and comfortable with any group, and was a convenient social partner for Lore. However, celebrity and fame had never held much attraction for him, and he wearied of playing a role every evening. He also was repelled by Heini Thyssen's decadent lifestyle; he drank heavily and his behavior became increasingly erratic. Also distressing to Mario was the fact that Lore was a miser, famously so—a fact that was commented on even at her memorial service—and was ungenerous to those who worked for her. Perhaps the best times the two shared were weekends at Lore's property in Mount Kisco. Sandrino Contini Bonacossi nicknamed Mario "the Count of Monte Kisco." Billy Suhr and his wife, Henriette, lived nearby on a twelve-acre farm called Rocky Hills, which they had transformed into an extraordinary garden. Despite the tensions, Lore and Mario remained together until he met me in the mid-eighties.

Whatever Mario truly felt about the company he was in, the bon vivant side of his personality helped him to join wholeheartedly in some of the extravagances that took place in Lugano. He recalled an anecdote that gives a taste of his life in high society:

*I knew several of Heini's wives, and we had many amusing times together, although his turbulent personal life was always cause for concern among his friends. One summer afternoon in Lugano, Heini said, "Why don't we go to Harry's Bar in Venice for dinner? We'll take my plane. I'll pay for the fuel, and Mario, you pay for the meal."*

*I accepted. There were six of us. Cipriani's most famous invention is the "Bellini" cocktail, made from champagne and the fresh juice of white peaches. Everyone began ordering them, to my alarm, and dozens of Bellinis were consumed as well as a great quantity of Harry's exquisite but expensive food. When I got the bill I nearly fainted. I think Heini got the better end of that deal.*

☞ Geoffrey Agnew ☞

Mario and Geoffrey Agnew, the head of the pre-eminent London firm, Thomas Agnew & Sons, became great friends, and together with Heinemann, they made important purchases—some of which were significant discoveries, such as the portrait of Giacomo Dolfin



103. Titian, *Giacomo Dolfin*, ca. 1531, oil on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California, 104.9 × 91 cm.



by Titian. When the painting was offered at auction at Christies in 1977, it had been much repainted. A red drape had been added to the background and it appeared to be in such a battered state that most buyers were leery. Mario saw at once that it was a masterpiece by Titian and not as damaged as it appeared to be. He convinced Agnew and Heinemann to bid on it, and it went for a reasonable price. After Mario had secured the crumbling paint and removed the overpaint and varnish that had accumulated over centuries, the painting emerged in wonderful condition, and Agnew sold it to the Los Angeles County Museum where it is one of the masterpieces of the collection.

☞ Eugene V. Thaw and Giovanni di Paolo ☞

Eugene (Gene) Thaw (b. 1927) was a generation younger than Mario, Heinemann, and Agnew. After graduating from Columbia University, Thaw opened a small business dealing in twentieth-century prints. At that time, this period was not as popular as it is today. He entered the then more important old master market around 1965, when he acquired six predella panels by the Sienese painter Giovanni di Paolo from the Stoclet Collection in Belgium. As Thaw tells the story, he went to Rudolf Heinemann, whom he did not yet know, to ask if he would like to be his partner in the purchase. Rudolf contacted Mario, and the three men met at a bank on Madison Avenue to look at the panels, which depicted scenes from the life of Saint Catherine of Siena. They were beautiful but required a lot of work. Mario cleaned them and sent them to Christian Kneisl, a specialist in Vienna, to be transferred to a stable support. After the panels returned to New York, Mario began the restoration, which took quite some time, and Gene was beginning to grow desperate, because he had borrowed part of the money for his share from one of his wife's relatives. Finally, nearly at his wits' end, he got a call from Heinemann that the paintings were finished and he could see them in Mario's studio.<sup>5</sup>

The Giovanni di Paolos were just the beginning of Thaw's activities in the field of old master paintings. Over time, he, Rudolf, Geoffrey Agnew, and Mario worked closely together acquiring paintings, mainly at auction, and obtained wonderful examples that in those days could still be found in New York and London and were sometimes unrecognized. After Heinemann's death, Eugene Thaw succeeded him as the foremost dealer of old master paintings in New York. Thaw often says that he sold many paintings directly off Mario's easel by bringing prospective clients to see them while they were being cleaned, a technique that he learned from Rudolf Heinemann.<sup>6</sup>



104. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine Invested with the Dominican Scapula*, 1461, tempera on panel, 24.6 × 39.2 cm. After Mario's restoration. (See also Plates x and xi)

☞ Frederick Mont and *The Burning of the Heretic* ☞

Another close friend of Mario's was Frederick Mont (1894–1994), a distinguished dealer with exquisite taste. Born in Vienna as Friedrich Mondschein, he embodied the cosmopolitan refinement that the city retained, even after the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the First World War. He was an accomplished pianist and had studied with the famous composer, Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951). His Galerie Sanct Lucas was very successful. By the mid-thirties, the atmosphere in Vienna began to change under the influence of Adolf Hitler, whom many Austrians admired. Fred, or Fritz (as he was sometimes called), was Jewish, and wisely emigrated to the United States in the early thirties. When the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938, Aryan friends ran the gallery there for him while, in New York, he opened a business in the Ritz Tower and changed his surname to Mont. Fred had many clients in Vienna—including the famous Czernin Collection, for which he was sole agent—and the Kress Foundation bought a number of paintings through him.

Mario wrote about a painting he and Fred bought around 1975 that came from a mysterious source, an occurrence that exemplifies the anonymous provenances in the art world that were prevalent at the time. This phenomenon still exists to some extent today but has been tempered by a greater awareness of the legal problems that can arise, sometimes causing the buyer to lose the artwork. Illegal exportation is one issue, and a provenance that indicates theft or Nazi plunder is another grave matter. This incident illustrates how varied and surprising are the ways in which important works come to light.

*One day, Fred came to my studio and said someone would be arriving with a painting at ten o'clock. We waited and the bell rang from downstairs, admitting a person who came into my studio and opened a paper-wrapped package revealing a small panel. I thought it was by Sassetta (ca. 1400–1450), and, sotto voce, advised Fred to buy*



105. Sassetta, *The Burning of the Heretic*, from the predella of the Arte della Lana altarpiece, 1423–1426, tempera on panel, Art Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, 24.6 × 39.2 cm.

*it immediately. We were a bit taken aback by all this. We had no idea who this man was. He said he was selling the painting on behalf of a priest who had owned it for many years. We asked him to show us some kind of identification, which he did—he was Italian. I always wondered if he himself was the priest, disguised in civilian clothes. It was one of the strangest acquisitions I have ever seen take place. At that time, Federico Zeri was in New York, working on the Metropolitan Museum catalogues, and he came to my studio almost daily. I showed him the painting, which I had begun to clean. Zeri, without hesitation, said that this was one of the predella panels from Sassetta's 1423 altarpiece made for the Arte della Lana (the wool guild). [Painted for the church of Santa Maria del Carmine in Siena, it was dismantled in 1777 and subsequently dispersed. Although the central panel is lost, other compartments are scattered among twelve museums, including the Louvre, Berlin, and the National Gallery in London.] How this panel [of the Burning of the Heretic] ended up in the hands of a priest is a complete mystery. In any case, Geoffrey Agnew ultimately sold the painting to Melbourne.*

To this day, the provenance the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne provides for this picture gives the ownership prior to Agnew's only as "unknown private collection," followed by "bought by an unknown dealer."

### ✿ Julius Weitzner and Canaletto ✿

Julius Weitzner (1896–1986) was another legendary dealer whom Mario knew well. Weitzner had a gallery in London and one in New York on 57th Street between Madison and Park Avenue. He was notorious for cleaning paintings himself immediately after they came into his hands. His gallery was on the mezzanine floor with a large window facing the street, which Mario often frequented, and he said that passing by, you could look up and see Weitzner cleaning pictures in the light from the big window.<sup>7</sup> Mario wrote:

*One morning, I was walking across 57th Street, and I happened to see him working on a large Magnasco, an artist with a style so characteristic that it is easily identifiable even from a great distance. I went up the stairs to his premises and saw that, in places, he was removing original paint. The artist had made certain changes, known as 'pentimenti', or 'changes of mind' in Italian, correcting the initial conception, and Julius was scrubbing away at these passages to reveal the underpaint. I pointed out to him that he was ruining the picture, and he had to admit that I was right. I asked him the price, and, in fact, he sold it to me for a very reasonable amount, considering that he had partly spoiled it.*

*Julius was an extraordinary man. He had begun as a violinist and loved music. His wife was an excellent pianist, and they often invited a few friends to musical evenings. Their beautiful daughter was a gifted painter, who later moved to Rome to a studio in my old haunt, the Via Margutta. Recognizing that his career as a concert violinist would be limited due to his abilities, he decided to abandon the instrument and began to deal in old master paintings, his second passion. In this field, he enjoyed more success than he had with music. He went to auctions in London and Paris and with his acute ear<sup>8</sup> managed to buy paintings of a certain interest and at a cheap price,*

*which he then sold in New York at a considerable profit. But he also purchased many important things; at a London sale, he bought a beautiful Duccio di Buoninsegna that he sold to the National Gallery of London, and an important Rubens that he sold to Norton Simon. The most amazing of all his purchases was the great Titian, Diana and Actaeon, which appeared in an important sale in London. Many dealers, including Rudolf Heinemann and Geoffrey Agnew, were considering the purchase, but everyone knew it would fetch a huge price. There was much discussion about the painting but Weitzner kept his own counsel. To everyone's surprise, on the day of the sale, carried away by the beauty and importance of the painting, he was the highest bidder at a record price of around £4 million (then over US\$11 million), which he was actually not able to pay. The next morning, in a panic, he began to call around to all the dealers who had been interested in the picture, asking them if they would like to buy a share. Before the morning passed, the news arrived that the National Gallery of London wanted the painting, which, under English law, they had the right to buy at the adjudicated price and deny the work an export license. Julius was delighted to be off the hook—he had hardly slept the previous night.*

*Another time he bought a magnificent Canaletto, a view of the Grand Canal with the church of the Salute, a large canvas about two meters wide. Robert Lehman was interested in the painting, and he went to Weitzner's shop on 57th Street to see it. To his horror, he found him cleaning the painting. "Stop immediately," he said. "I will buy it on one condition; that you stop cleaning it and send it to Mario Modestini."*

### ✎ Harold Wethey ✎

In addition to the various individuals involved in the commercial side of the art world, Mario also came to know many art historians and scholars. The American art historian, Harold Wethey (1902–1984), was an expert specializing in Titian and El Greco. Once a scholar becomes the acknowledged authority on a particular artist, his opinion is crucial for the attribution, without which a painting, however beautiful, cannot be sold for its true value. Mario first encountered Wethey in connection with El Greco's portrait of his brother, Manusso Theotokopoulos, that he had purchased from the Contini heirs and sold to Norton Simon. Mario had worked on



many paintings by El Greco and possessed specialized knowledge of the artist. He wrote:

*A few months later [1962], Wethey's book on El Greco was published, and in it he described this portrait as "Italian school, 17<sup>th</sup> century." I had restored many paintings by El Greco, including the Laocoön in the National Gallery, and The Vision of Saint John in the Metropolitan Museum, and I was absolutely convinced of the authenticity of this portrait. I gathered together various x-radiographs of paintings by El Greco, including the portrait of the man in fur [Manusso Theotokopoulos], made an appointment to see Dr. Wethey at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, where he had taught for many years, and took Sandrino Contini Bonacossi along with me. When Sandrino and I showed him all the comparative material we had collected,*



106. El Greco, *Manusso Theotokopoulos*, the artist's brother, 1603–1604, oil on canvas, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California, 47.0 × 38.7 cm.



*Dr. Wethey changed his mind, agreed that the painting was indeed by El Greco and wrote me a letter to that effect for Norton Simon.*

Wethey was the author of the complete catalogue of Titian's work. With his great love and understanding of Titian, Mario had close collaborations with both Wethey and the Venetian scholar Rodolfo Pallucchini (1908–1989), a close friend. Mario and Pallucchini were usually in agreement about attributions, while Wethey was often the odd man out. In his frustration with his American colleague, Pallucchini wrote to Mario in 1970 that he had just seen Wethey's first volume on Titian, which he found, "really absurd, [as] he continues to give the Prado panel as well as the Glasgow adulteress to Giorgione, and dates the Thyssen Madonna to 1515! This book on Titian helps one to understand the stupidity of the author of the El Greco book!" Wethey was a fine scholar but academic art historians are sometimes out of touch with the objects themselves, whereas Pallucchini was steeped in the splendor of the art that he encountered daily just by walking the streets of Venice.

Mario's files contain dozens of letters from Wethey, which he frequently marked with a red pencil; nevertheless, from that contentious beginning, by the time the art historian died in 1984, they appeared to have become quite fond of one another.

### ✿ John Brealey and the Metropolitan Museum ✿

When I met Mario, toward the end of 1983, in connection with the Kress Foundation, I was a conservator in the paintings conservation department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. My education in restoration, connoisseurship, and many intangible and subtle matters began there. I was hired during an interregnum between two department heads. Hubert von Sonnenburg (1928–2004) had just left the museum to head the Doerner Institut in Munich, a center for research into art materials. Thomas Hoving (1931–2009), the



107. John Brealey during a seminar for museum directors and curators.

flamboyant director, wished to appoint a man who had been trained in the same tradition as von Sonnenburg and held similar views, particularly regarding the all-important issue of the cleaning of paintings. John Brealey and von Sonnenburg had both been trained by Johannes Hell (1897–1974), a German restorer from Berlin, who had fled Hitler’s regime and established himself in London just a little too late since, when he arrived in 1937, his former boss at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum, Helmut Ruhemann (1891–1973), was already firmly ensconced at the National Gallery. Ruhemann had been dismissed from the museum by the Nazis as early as 1933, and Hell, whose wife was Jewish, lost his position somewhat later, as the racial laws tightened.<sup>10</sup> When the cleaning controversy over the treatment of the pictures in the National Gallery broke out in 1946–47, Ruhemann and Hell found themselves on opposite sides of the debate over what defined acceptable cleaning, as opposed to the “over-cleaning” of which the museum was accused in the press (see Chapter 24). Ruhemann was a radical cleaner and believed that every particle of foreign material should be removed from the

paint layers—an approach that John Brealey termed archaeological or hygienic, since no thought was given to achieving an equilibrium of the formal aspects of the composition. Hell preferred a conservative approach, which he had described in a 1933 article that rejected radical cleaning.<sup>11</sup>

As a young man, John Brealey, influenced by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (1884–1979), the dealer of Picasso and Braque whom he met in Cambridge before the war, was primarily interested in modern painting. John spent the war in India, after a medical examination declared him unfit for active service, and traveled around the subcontinent giving lectures, including radio broadcasts, on cubism. After demobilization, he returned to London, where he made the acquaintance of Anthony Blunt (1907–1983), the great Poussin scholar (many years later, unmasked as a Russian spy), who suggested that John become a picture restorer and referred him to Johannes Hell.<sup>12</sup> Brealey worked as a private conservator in London and many important paintings were entrusted to him, including works from the Royal Collection, the Wallace Collection, Prince's Gate and the National Trust, which oversaw numerous country houses, such as Petworth, where John gained experience with the paintings of J. M. W. Turner, whose technique made his works very difficult to clean.

Brealey was exceptionally intelligent and miraculously articulate in front of a work of art, a rare gift. He expounded ideas about the restoration of paintings that seemed revolutionary to me and my peers at other institutions, all young enough to be impressed. His passionate advocacy for understanding the relationships within



108. John and I share a light moment while his portrait is taken for the *New York Times* in the early 1980s.

a painting and respecting its intrinsic values during the cleaning process was enlightening, first for a few staff at the Metropolitan, then for an ever-widening group of professionals. It was as if John had been rehearsing his entire professional life, readying himself for the opportunity to assume the role of leader of a movement. He was a gifted and generous teacher.

With his highly quotable remarks, John became famous and was lionized by the press. In reality, he was a socially awkward, lonely, and deeply insecure man, who could be prickly, difficult, and even rude, but his self-deprecating humor and innate humanity made up for his flaws. He arrived in New York alone (his wife having refused to come) in an emotionally battered state. He knew few people in the city and quickly came to depend on me and his two other staff members for companionship—a sort of alternative family. For example, before finding an apartment, he was keen on the idea that we might all rent a townhouse together. Sometimes being a member of the department felt a little like belonging to a cult.

Insecure as he was, John felt jealous of Mario and indeed their first meeting was not propitious. Not long after John was appointed at the Met, Mario asked him to lunch at his apartment. John had recently visited the Cleveland Museum and admired their two predellas by Giovanni di Paolo, which Mario had restored many years earlier, though evidently John was not aware of this. When Mario showed John the cleaned state photos, he was shocked by the condition and exclaimed, “Naughty boy!” On returning to the museum, he told us that he had lunched with Modestini, who was “a very dangerous man.” There were several similar incidents and on at least two occasions John effectively blocked the acquisition of paintings Mario had restored. Eventually, Mario had his revenge. It was unusual behavior for him but he once told me that he was like a crocodile, immobile in the water, but if something really angered him, he could strike at lightning speed.

✎ Mario's Revenge ✎

John was the consultant to Ted Pillsbury, the director of the Kimbell Art Museum, at the time actively acquiring old master paintings, and they were keen to buy something from the legendary Heinemann Collection. Lore Heinemann owned a Holbein portrait that she wanted to sell. The painting had been restored by William Suhr many years earlier and was a masterpiece of the restorer's art, but the thick varnish had become dull and discolored. Mario had



109. Circle of Hans Holbein, *Thomas Lestrangle*, 1536, oil and tempera on panel, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 39.4 × 26.7 cm. Before cleaning.

always advised Lore not to touch the painting, because he knew the condition. He instructed Lore to insist that John and Ted could examine the Holbein in her apartment for as long as they wished, but that she should not send it to the museum until the purchase had been confirmed. The two men accepted her conditions and the Kimbell purchased the painting, after which it was sent to the Metropolitan for restoration.

Once the painting was in the studio, John began to grow concerned. Under the microscope, it became obvious that it was covered with tiny, modern brushstrokes, typical of Suhr's restorations. Maryann Ainsworth, an art historian and member of the conservation department, had examined a number of Holbeins with infrared technology and expressed her doubts. John decided not to clean the painting but to just revarnish it with a light spray. As he did this, the varnish layers suddenly reacted violently, blanching and contracting into a gel-like mess. There was no other solution except to clean the picture and Suhr's entire restoration—including the sitter's gold chain—disappeared. What remained was a work of indifferent quality that was definitely not by Holbein. Although Ted Pillsbury complained to Gene Thaw who brokered the sale, because of the agreement, it could not be rescinded.

This was the background of John's relationship with Mario when, a few years later, John heard through the grapevine that Mario and I had been seeing each other. He came up to me in the studio one day and said there was something he wanted to discuss. This was often the preamble to an awkward conversation that usually took place in the lining room, unless someone was working there, in which case the stairwell served. I followed him to the lining room where he whispered, "Don't pay any attention to what those old bats are saying," and wished me well in the most heartfelt way. I was deeply touched by this episode, which is embedded with astonishing clarity in my memory. It was entirely characteristic of a side of John that few people were aware of: his deep affection and loyalty to his staff and friends, and his belief in romance, even though, unhappily, such happiness was never to be his lot.

## CHAPTER 21

# Notable Restorations

### ✿ Giorgione ✿

THE REMARKABLE WORK Mario carried out over the course of his long career, restoring hundreds of important paintings, was widely considered to be a model of the art of restoration. The *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman* by Giorgione is a perfect example of how Mario maintained the delicate balance between competing responsibilities—the obligation to facilitate the viewer’s appreciation of the work of art and the equally compelling obligation not to falsify it. When the Kress Foundation purchased the portrait, the sitter’s black silk brocade jacket, among other passages, had been completely overpainted to conceal severe abrasion. Mario cleaned the painting, removing the overpaint, and carefully retouched the myriad of tiny losses to make the pattern of the brocade legible again. Otherwise, he made no attempt to disguise the condition of this badly damaged, yet still imposing, picture by one of the rarest of all painters.



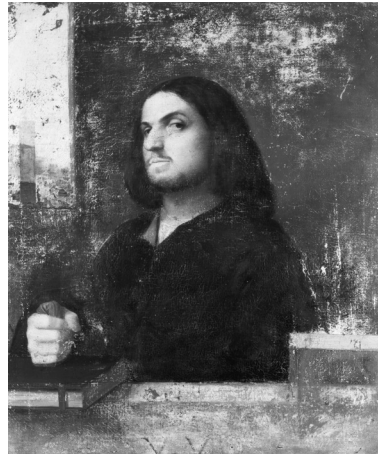
NOTABLE RESTORATIONS

The pentimenti of the knife the sitter once held in his fist and the changes in the architecture of the parapet had been partly exposed by a previous savage cleaning and the view through the window is in ruinous state. The losses that spoil these passages have been slightly subdued so that they do not disturb the whole. As I have already stated, the most difficult part of restoring old master paintings is knowing when to stop. That is the mark of a great restorer.

After it entered the National Gallery, the painting was catalogued as by both Giorgione and Titian and, more recently, inexplicably reassigned to Cariani. These changes in attribution annoyed Mario, who had studied both artists closely all his life. He always pointed out to me that Giorgione could be recognized by certain stylistic traits: the small hands and the well-preserved folds of the white fabric, which are like bent steel—quite unlike Titian's painterly treatment. Nonetheless, the two artists worked closely together in a rapidly evolving style so it is difficult to distinguish between them and opinions about authorship fluctuate.<sup>1</sup> (See Plates XII, XIII, XIV)



110. Giorgione, *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman*, before cleaning and restoration.



111. The Giorgione with the overpaint removed.

☞ El Greco's *Vision of Saint John* ☞

During the 1950s, although primarily employed by the Kress Foundation, Mario occasionally took on other work, including a picture that presented an exceptional restoration challenge. In 1956, Ted Rousseau bought a late painting by El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*, which is thought to depict the Opening of the Fifth Seal from the Apocalypse. Although it is a large canvas, it is only the lower half of a towering altarpiece commissioned from El Greco in 1608 for the church of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist Extra Muros in Toledo. It was returned to El Greco, perhaps because he had not completed it, and is listed in the 1614 inventory of his possessions made after his death in that year. It passed through several hands and was relined in 1880 at the Prado.<sup>2</sup> At that time, the top half of the painting, which may have been the part left unfinished when El Greco died in 1614, was removed and probably discarded. In 1905, it was purchased by the Spanish artist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870–1945) for one thousand pesetas, under circumstances that make for a fascinating story—as Mario related it—although it doesn't align exactly with the known provenance:<sup>3</sup>

*Zuloaga went to a church to which a convent of nuns was attached. Entering the sacristy, he saw a canvas hanging over a door, curtaining off the passage to another area. Being a painter, he recognized that this canvas was the back of an antique painting. Curious, he got closer and turned over one of the corners and, in fact, as he suspected, there was a painting on the other side. He immediately realized that it was a work by El Greco and he asked one of the nuns why the canvas was hung with its face turned in toward the door. She said that there were some nudes in the center of the painting and so they had used it to cover the door as if it were a curtain. Unfortunately, the painting had been damaged by being continually moved as the sisters went in and out of that door. The painter asked the sister if he could speak to the mother superior because he would like to make a donation to the convent. He was introduced to the mother superior and told her that he would like to buy a proper velvet drape to cover the door, in whatever color she preferred, and offered one thousand pesetas in exchange*

for the old canvas. The offer was accepted. Zuloaga, after a while, returned to the convent with the velvet drape and the money, rolled up the painting, and brought it to his studio. He mounted it on a stretcher and restored the damages with oil paint and a big brush, doing his best to imitate El Greco's style.

Given the ill treatment it had received, the picture presented daunting restoration challenges. In his attempt to cover up the myriad losses due to the crumbling of the brittle paint in response to the crinkling of the canvas, Zuloaga repainted it rather generously and exhibited it in his Paris studio, to which the young Pablo Picasso was a frequent visitor. Picasso's biographer, John Richardson, wrote that the painting "had an incalculable influence on his style, beliefs and aspirations; it reconfirmed his faith in his *alma Española* (his 'Spanish soul'); and it played a key role in the conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, not only in its size, format and composition, but in its apocalyptic power."<sup>4</sup>

When the painting arrived at the Met, it was examined by the conservator, Murray Pease, who made x-radiographs that revealed the extensive loss of original paint under Zuloaga's reworking. Approximately one quarter of the picture seemed to be missing. Mario said that Pease declined to work on it, and he and Theodore Rousseau, the chief curator, were at a standoff. Shortly after, Mario and Ted were lunching at Le Veau d'Or and the subject of the El Greco came up. Mario agreed to have a look at it and later recalled the situation:

*Murray Pease, the staff restorer, came to examine the picture, bringing some x-radiographs. He and Ted Rousseau were not on good terms and, although he had refused to work on the painting, he was nonetheless rather put out that I had been called in. In one of our discussions, he pointed to a beautiful green drapery passage of thick copper resin, vitreous as enamel, and, to my surprise, insisted that it should be removed as it was part of Zuloaga's repainting. I pointed out to him that in one of the x-radiographs, the drape was held up by a fragmentary hand belonging to one of the angels, so it could not be modern.*



112. El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*. Details of damaged passages.

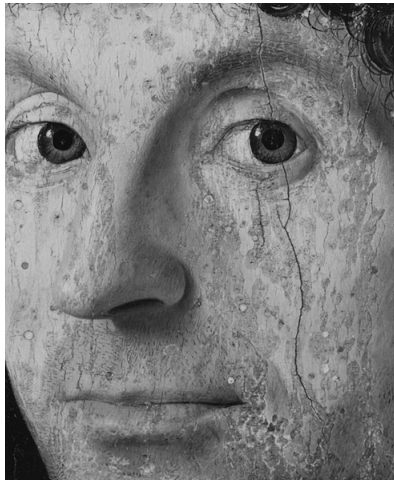
Mario and two assistants worked on the canvas for seven months in a large space in the attic with good light. They removed Zuloaga's repainting, revealing extensive losses of paint and preparatory layers down to the bare support. (See Plate xv)

After removing the repaint, the back of the original canvas—a damask checkerboard pattern like a tablecloth, often used in Venice during this period—was cleaned and the painting was relined with wax resin. Mario must have chosen this adhesive because it would consolidate the brittle paint layers. Once the painting was on its new stretcher, the restoration began. El Greco customarily laid out his pictures in the bold and efficient manner of Tintoretto, putting a red ground or priming over the entire canvas. Mario and his assistants used a filling material of the same red color for all the losses and pressed a canvas texture into it to imitate the original surface. Carefully carried out, this phase quieted the noisy distractions of the fractured losses. The successive delicate and exacting phases took many months and were finished in 1958. Despite its sad history of neglect and mutilation, the painting looked wonderful. Theodore Rousseau was delighted and inscribed the *Bulletin* devoted to the new acquisition, “To Mario Modestini, to whom the Met and El Greco owe so much.” The painting has been loaned all over the world, and everyone marvels at how well Mario's work has held up. It is a great tribute to him. (See Plate xvi)

## ✎ Antonello da Messina ✎

One of the qualities that made Mario such a great restorer was his ability to adjust to problems, finding the right material and method to address the issue, as well as the skill to actually bring his ideas to fruition. Among the most stunning examples of this is his restoration of a portrait by Antonello da Messina, the great Sicilian artist and one of the first Italian painters to both use oil paint and exploit its unique characteristics in the way of the great Flemish painters.

This particular painting had languished on the market, since scholars did not accept the attribution to the master, believing it to be by his follower Antonello de Saliba. Rudolf Heinemann decided to take a chance and bought it, hoping that Mario would be able to do something with it. Mario cleaned the painting and said that after the varnish and repaints were removed, it looked like it had a horrible skin disease. He noticed that darkened repaints and



113. Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Man*.  
Detail of the worm tunnels before restoration.

shallow fills had been carefully applied into long channels where the original paint had caved into the extensive worm tunneling in the wood. After carefully removing this later material, he found, to his surprise, that the original color remained at the bottom of the worm tunnels, below the rest of the surface. He did not want to cover the original paint again, but the surface irregularities made the painting look terrible. (See Plates xvii and xviii)

After mulling over this problem, he decided to use his reliable resin medium, polyvinyl acetate, to fill the depressions, building it up until it was the same level as the surface. It was a finicky procedure that took a great deal of time and patience, since resin shrinks after the solvent has evaporated, and each depression required multiple applications. When this was finished, by an optical trick, the paint in the depressions looked as if it was at the same level as the rest of the surface. After that, very little retouching was required, because the painting was otherwise in reasonably good state. It was purchased as Antonello da Messina by Baron Thyssen and is one of the masterpieces of that collection. This was a rare find, as there are very few paintings by Antonello and many of them have been spoiled by cleaning. (See Plate xix)

### ❧ The Kress Ghirlandaio ❧

In addition to his specialist knowledge based on his study of the stylistic features of Giorgione and Titian, Mario was also expert in distinguishing among works by Verrocchio and the talented painters of his studio in the late 1470s and early 1480s: the young Leonardo, Ghirlandaio, Perugino, and Lorenzo di Credi. There is much disagreement among scholars about the work of these artists, and he enjoyed discussing the vexing problem with Everett Fahy, Federico Zeri, and, of course, with me.

A beautiful *Madonna and Child* was included in the final Kress purchase from Contini, who had bought it in London as a work by Verrocchio. When it was acquired, the background was colored



NOTABLE RESTORATIONS

battleship gray, and the rest of the painting was covered with prominent darkened retouches. It looked dreadful, but Mario could see the quality that would emerge if it was properly restored. After he cleaned it, both Berenson and Zeri immediately published it as early Ghirlandaio. To everyone's surprise, under the modern gray paint of the background, traditional gold leaf over red bole emerged. In High Renaissance Florence, gold backgrounds were not only archaic and out of fashion, but were explicitly condemned by such influential aestheticians as Leon Battista Alberti. All the other Madonnas from Verrocchio's studio have landscape backgrounds. Although still occasionally questioned, there was no doubt that Ghirlandaio's use of water gilding in this painting was deliberate, perhaps in response to a request from a patron. Ghirlandaio knew



114. Ghirlandaio, *Madonna and Child*. Before cleaning: the background had been painted gray. (See also Plates xx and XXI)



how to use gold; he came from a family of goldsmiths and had been trained in his father's shop. His nickname means "little garlands," referring to the gold ornaments that were fashionable in the 1470s to adorn ladies' hair. Although he gained fame as a fresco painter, Ghirlandaio's few works on panel are executed with egg tempera rather than oil, and he embellished them with lavish amounts of the most refined mordant gilding imaginable. The mordant is colorless and imperceptible, and the patterns are so precise that, until the presence of gold leaf is confirmed under the microscope, one assumes that they were done with gold paint.

After the Ghirlandaio was cleaned, even though the painted passages were in better condition than they at first appeared, the gold leaf was badly damaged and completely missing on the left side of the panel, although most of the bole was intact.<sup>5</sup> Mario replaced the missing gold using a wax mordant and distressed it so that it looked much like the right side. When he visited the National Gallery, he took great delight in playing a guessing game in front of the painting, asking whoever was with him which side was original and which was not. It is very difficult to tell.

### ☞ Rubens's Self-Portrait ☞

Rudolf Heinemann's nemesis was the French firm, Wildenstein & Co. The rivalry was so bitter that Mario had to be careful in his dealings with them so that Rudolf would not take offense, although he surely knew that Mario restored paintings for them. Even before moving to New York, Mario knew Georges Wildenstein (1892–1963) through the São Paulo museum and continued to work with his son, Daniel (1917–2001) and later with Georges' grandson, Guy (b. 1945). The family's wealth was legendary, as was the secrecy that surrounded their stock, which one writer estimated at ten thousand paintings in 1978.<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, Mario worked on a number of masterpieces for Wildenstein's. Perhaps the most important was an ex-Rothschild

NOTABLE RESTORATIONS

picture, a Rubens self-portrait that he restored in 1977, also playing an essential role in its authentication.<sup>7</sup> He wrote:

*Daniel Wildenstein called me one morning and asked me to come to the gallery to look at a painting by Rubens. When I got there, he showed me into one of the private viewing rooms. The walls were upholstered in red velvet and hung with red velvet drapes. He drew back one of the drapes and I saw a large painting that appeared to be by Rubens. It portrayed the artist, dressed in elegant black silks and a wide black hat, together with his young second wife, Helena Fourment, and their infant child. Daniel said, "Mario, I'm going to leave you alone with this picture. Please look at it carefully because there are several different opinions about the condition and the authorship. I would like to know what you think." He gave me a file containing reports and photographs and left. Alone in the room with this great work of art, because it was, even at first glance, a masterpiece, I examined the panel itself, which seemed in good*



115. Peter Paul Rubens, *Rubens, His Wife, Helena Fourment, and Their Son, Frans*.  
The two heads and two hats are plainly visible.



116. Peter Paul Rubens, *Rubens, His Wife Helena Fourment and Their Son Frans*. A detail of the head during cleaning, revealing the wide cracks caused by the underlying bitumen black of the first hat. Some of the fissures are so deep that they were filled with white putty. Mario told me he had restored some of the cracks in the face, making them narrower, before this photograph was taken, so that they would not look so terrifying.

*condition. The back of the oak panel had been cradled in England in the last century. Apart from the head of Rubens, which was completely repainted, everything else seemed well preserved. I began to read the file. A conservator on the West Coast [Ben Johnson of the Los Angeles County Museum] had examined the painting and written a report saying that it was in ruinous state and that, as proven by the x-radiographs, the head of Rubens had been repainted in the eighteenth century by an English artist, possibly Joshua Reynolds.<sup>8</sup> Daniel came back and asked what I thought. I replied that the painting seemed to me to be a masterpiece by Rubens, and that the only problem was the head, which had been repainted. Daniel asked me if I would clean it. I agreed and he sent it to me right away.*

*In the light of my studio, I could see that the flesh tone of Rubens's head, under the repainting, had wide cracks, indicating that the artist had reworked the area while the paint underneath was still fresh. In fact, in the x-radiograph, it was obvious that*

there was a major *pentimento*: at an early stage, the artist had changed his mind about that part of the composition and moved the head to a different position. Originally, Rubens was looking down at the child, and in the subsequent revision he looked toward his wife. I can easily imagine that when she saw the painting, she reproved him, saying, "Why don't you look at me!" Whatever the reason, the change had been made when the first head was already substantially complete, so that the second head was painted over the original's black hat. Rubens used a beautiful, rich black color called bitumen that is made from tar. It never really dries, especially when it is thickly painted in an underlying layer. In this case, it had begun to slip under the final version of the face, causing the flesh tones to shrink, leaving exceptionally wide, black contraction cracks that separated areas of wrinkled, shrunken flesh tone. For this reason, the entire face had been painted over in the nineteenth century. When I removed this repainting, the original head emerged with its wide black contraction cracks, one of which was in the center of the face. They were so deep that they have been filled with gesso putty. I surmised that Rubens had also done the initial sketch with bitumen, because there were drying cracks in other passages, especially in the area of Rubens's legs. The rest of the painting did not present any difficulties.

After removing the old yellow varnish layers, I called Daniel over to see how the work was progressing. When he saw the picture cleaned of the repainting, with its wonderful coloration that had been obscured by the yellow varnish, he realized that he was in the presence of a great work, entirely by the hand of Rubens. He told me that it had been offered to Norton Simon, the Getty, and the Los Angeles County Museum, who had all turned it down on the basis of the report by the restorer. I said to Daniel that the painting belonged in an important museum, and he immediately thought of the Metropolitan. Daniel called John Pope-Hennessy, who was a friend and advisor of Charles (1895–1986) and Jayne (b. 1919) Wrightsman, great collectors of old master paintings and eighteenth-century French decorative arts, and the principal patrons of the Department of European Paintings. When John came to see it, he immediately told the Wrightsmans that they had to buy it. In the meantime, I had restored the cracks in the head and the painting was in its full splendor. John returned with Mrs. Wrightsman, who was enthusiastic about the painting and indicated that she would like to see it at the Metropolitan one day. She asked if it were possible to send it to Palm Beach so that Charles, who was ill and unable to travel, could see it. Daniel's gallery director, Harry Brooks, took the painting down to Florida in a climate-controlled truck. Charles was very excited and immediately was in favor of

CHAPTER 21

*the purchase for a price of around \$3 million. When the painting came back to my studio, many art historians came to look at it, having heard that the Wrightsmans were buying it for the Met. A few were embarrassed, as they had to revise their former opinion, but others, I believe, remained skeptical for many years. Norton Simon often told me how much he regretted not buying it when it was offered to him, but that he trusted the restorer who had condemned the painting. It is now one of the glories of the Metropolitan Museum. It takes great courage to buy a disputed work; the fact that it is hanging on the walls of the Met is due to the knowledge, sensitivity, and courage of John Pope-Hennessy and the Wrightsmans.*



117. Peter Paul Rubens, *Rubens, His Wife Helena Fourment and Their Son Frans*, ca. 1635, oil on panel, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 203.8 × 158.1 cm.

## CHAPTER 22

# A Few More Forgeries

**R**UDOLF HEINEMANN WAS, on several occasions, the beneficiary of Mario's expertise with forgeries. Mario wrote about some of these experiences in his memoirs.

*One morning [in 1961] Rudolf Heinemann called and asked me if I would come by his place to look at the London auction catalogues [for the June 14th sale] that had just arrived, because there was a painting that he was interested in buying. It was a Benozzo Gozzoli [Saint Nicholas of Bari Providing the Dowry for Three Poor Maidens] that, judging from the reproduction, looked intriguing. He asked me if I could go to London to see the painting before the sale. When I arrived at Sotheby's early in the morning, the sale room was empty. The art dealers, who usually are the first at the viewing, hadn't yet arrived. I examined the painting, and realized that it was a fake by my old friend, Federico Joni. I asked one of the attendants to call Mrs. Carmen Gronau, one of the vice presidents, and an expert in the old masters department. She came down to the gallery to greet me—we had known one another for a long time—and I told her my impression. She took the news rather badly, and*



told me that John Pope-Hennessy had confirmed the attribution and considered it to be an important work by the artist. Was I certain in my assessment, she asked? I replied that I even knew who had painted it. The provenance of the painting was said to be an English gentleman, who had inherited it from his father many years earlier. This story must have been invented. In any case, I don't know what finally happened between the owner and Sotheby's, but the picture was withdrawn from the sale.

Another incident illustrates how some especially clever forgeries get passed along to other ill-informed buyers.

One time [in 1974], Dr. Heinemann came to me with a small panel painting of Christ at the Column [actually 'Man of Sorrows'].<sup>1</sup> At first glance, it appeared to be late fifteenth-century French, very rare and therefore important. He asked me if it should be cleaned and what I thought of it. I looked at it carefully and told him that it was a fake. You can imagine the reaction of the most famous art dealer in the world! "It cannot be," he replied. "Absolutely, I have not the slightest doubt," I answered. He must have paid a great deal of money for the painting because he turned white and began to tremble. He repeated many times, "Are you absolutely sure, Mario?" and I continued to reply, "Absolutely, I have no doubt." Finally, he accepted my judgment and was convinced that he had been cheated. "Now, what can be done?" he asked. "Very simple," I replied. "Put it in an auction in New York, since you bought it in London, and act quickly." So, he took it to Parke-Bernet, which was on Madison Avenue at that time. The day of the auction, we both went to see if the picture would sell. To my great surprise, who should we see but the director of a famous museum and his curator? They sat in the front row, whispering to each other like conspirators. I was sure that they were there for Heinemann's picture. In fact, they were the successful bidders and immediately got up and left the room, clearly delighted with their purchase. I can only imagine what happened when the painting went to the museum's restoration department, where, after quite some time, it was pronounced a fake. It has never emerged again, nor was it returned to Parke-Bernet, probably because the two museum men were too embarrassed to admit their mistake.

Being the victim of a con is humiliating, and when a famous museum is taken in by a forgery, the embarrassment clings for years. For the public, there is a delicious sense of schadenfreude



when elite experts, given to making lofty pronouncements, make clamorous mistakes. The story of the purported fifteenth-century French panel was quietly put to rest, but the memory of certain cases can linger for decades. One of the most famous examples is a painting depicting Saint Catherine, supposedly by the rare German artist, Matthias Grünewald, that appeared in 1974. Mario tells the story:

*In the summer of 1974, I was vacationing in Lugano, where I looked after the Thyssen Collection, and one morning went to Dr. Heinemann's villa. He had just received the mail and there was a letter from Sherman Lee, the director of the Cleveland Museum, with a photograph of a standing female saint that was supposed to be one component of a large altarpiece. A cursory glance revealed some resemblance to Grünewald, although closer examination showed it to be a rather crude fake. Heinemann and I both exclaimed, "This must be a joke!" He said, "The director wants my opinion about this painting but I cannot answer him. I will have to pretend that I never received the photograph. The painting is too obviously fake." The museum had purchased the painting for \$1 million from a dealer in New York, my old friend, Fred Mont. When I returned to New York, I found a message from Sherman Lee inviting me to come to Cleveland, ostensibly to consult about a restoration. The truth was that he wanted me to look at the Grünewald, and he showed me the painting when I visited several days later. I told him what he, at that point, already knew—the painting was a modern forgery.*

Grünewald is one of the rarest masters; his surviving works are few and this purported to be a lost painting that was recorded as having disappeared in a shipwreck. [According to Grünewald's biographer, Joachim von Sandrart (1606–1688), three of his altarpieces were taken by Swedish troops as war booty in 1632 and were lost when the ship sank.] Using this story as a source, the forger had used a Grünewald drawing of Saint Catherine to fabricate a painting that conformed to a hypothetical sequence of events—the original wood panel was waterlogged and the paint layers had been transferred to a canvas support. It had been done in the clumsiest way imaginable. It was painted on canvas prepared with a stiff, brittle ground. When dry, the canvas was removed from the stretcher and rolled first in one direction and then in the other to make the cracks. Then it was glued to an old board and patinated with a dark color, which had stained the cracks, making them look old. The museum returned the

CHAPTER 22

*painting to Fred Mont, who refunded their money. It was a strange story all around. Fred was an excellent connoisseur. Sherman Lee also had a good eye and had bought very well for the Cleveland Museum, of which he was director for many years. It had been cleaned in New York by William Subr, a great restorer specializing in northern painting, who did not notice there was anything wrong with it. It was really a very clumsy forgery, and I can only assume that everyone wanted it to be a lost Grünewald so much that they were blinded to the reality.*



118. Fake Grünewald of Saint Catherine.

#### A FEW MORE FORGERIES

Later Hubert von Sonnenburg carried out analytical tests, which confirmed it was modern, and even traced it to the forger, a fellow Bavarian called Christian Goller, who, like Joni, claimed that he had painted it for his own pleasure and neither knew nor cared what happened to it after that.

## CHAPTER 23

# Misattributions, Studio Replicas, and Repainted Originals

THE ACQUISITION OF OLD MASTER paintings is complicated by many factors, and, as we have seen, mistakes have often been made. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that many collectors now prefer modern and contemporary works with more straightforward attributions. Forgeries are, of course, the most famous of the art-world pitfalls. Another difficulty is presented by the existence of multiple versions of a painting—either replicas by the artist himself or copies by his contemporaries. The poor condition of a picture can sometimes disguise its true authorship, or deceptive repainting by a restorer can enhance an attribution, although, like forgeries, time usually reveals the truth. Mario's skill in deciphering paintings was one of the qualities that made him so valuable to his clients.

In the past, the supreme importance of the expert's opinion has favored dubious attributions. Many of the greatest scholars were engaged in the ambiguous practice of becoming paid advisors

for dealers, as discussed earlier in relation to Bernard Berenson. Roberto Longhi, a passionate poker player, handed out expertises of dubious accuracy as payment for his gambling debts to three less than scrupulous art dealers, Vittorio Frascione, Pasquale Falanga, and Dino Fabbri. Federico Zeri, who may have heard this story from Mario, later accused Longhi of authenticating fakes. Mario told me that Longhi sometimes furnished inflated attributions to artists who were followers or imitators of a famous name. Mario baptized these as the “*Pressappoco* (more-or-less) Masters.”

### ✂ Unrecognized Originals: A Claude Lorrain and Others ✂

As amazed as Mario was by fakes that passed for originals, he was even more astounded when original paintings went unrecognized. He often talked about one particular example, a painting by Claude Lorrain (1604–1692) in the Kress Collection at the National Gallery. *The Herdsman* was acquired from Wildenstein in 1945. The painting had a distinguished history. It was featured in an important exhibition of landscape painting in Paris in 1925, where it was deemed “an incomparable masterpiece,” unsurpassed by any Claude Lorrain in France, and was accepted by a succession of scholars. At that time, it was in the collection at Houghton Hall, Norfolk, property of Lady Sybil Sassoon (1894–1989), wife of the Marquess of Cholmondeley, who had inherited it from her grandfather, Baron Gustave Salomon de Rothschild (1829–1911). The first doubts on its autograph status were cast by the Claude expert Marcel Röthlisberger, who conjectured in his 1961 catalogue raisonné, that it was by a skillful imitator of Claude, a Dutch painter in the circle of Jan Both (1618–1682). His assertion was based partly on the uncharacteristically large figure of the herdsman and the format of the picture. Mario was flabbergasted by the notion that the painting wasn’t autograph. In discussions with John Walker,<sup>1</sup> he pointed out that the original painting had been pieced out with additions on all four edges,<sup>2</sup> probably in the early nineteenth

century. The seven-inch-wide addition on the left included most of the herdsman figure. Röthlisberger noted that the edges looked different but interpreted the join between the original canvas and the addition as an indent made by an earlier frame. He did not understand that they were not part of the original. Mario cleaned the painting in 1968 and told me that the central part was beautiful and in perfect state. When Röthlisberger saw it after cleaning, probably in Mario's studio, he changed his mind<sup>3</sup> and confirmed it as an early work by Claude of around 1635, praising the complex composition and the capture of the atmosphere of a specific hour.<sup>4</sup>

The painting's authenticity has again been questioned in the most recent museum catalogue in which it is attributed to a seventeenth or eighteenth-century follower of Claude.<sup>5</sup> Regrettably, the reader cannot study this interesting issue of connoisseurship for themselves, as the picture is no longer exhibited.



119. Claude Gellée, known as Claude Lorraine, *The Herdsman*, n.d., oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 120.7 × 160 cm.





120. Claude Gellée, known as Claude Lorrain, *The Judgement of Paris*, 1646, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 112.3 × 149.5 cm.

This was not the only genuine painting by Claude in Mario's experience that was mistakenly spurned, this time as the work of a nineteenth-century imitator or forger.

*Geoffrey Agnew was one of the most important art dealers in London, a man of fine appearance with a deep baritone voice that intimidated people who didn't know him. He was outspoken about his opinions. In other words, he had a strong personality. We were good friends, not only professionally but also because we liked one another. I did a lot of work for his gallery. One of the paintings I restored for him was a Claude Lorrain, *The Judgement of Paris*, now at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Ted Rousseau saw it at Agnew's in London and asked for it to be sent to the Metropolitan Museum as a possible acquisition. After it was cleaned it was extraordinary and in perfect condition. Perhaps for this reason, when it arrived in New York the chief restorer, [Hubert von] Sonnenburg, claimed that it was a nineteenth-century fake and the museum*



*didn't buy it. Shortly thereafter it was published as Claude by the expert, Marcel Rötliberger.*

☞ Optimistic Attributions: Raphael's *Portrait of a Woman* ☞

1970 marked the centennial of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. On December 15, 1969, on the eve of the celebrations, the director, Perry Rathbone, made the sensational announcement that they had acquired a small panel by Raphael, a portrait of a woman. The appearance of a new Raphael filled the headlines of the national and international press, but problems with the acquisition began almost immediately. Rathbone and his most trusted curator, Hans Swarzenski, had purchased the work from a dealer in Genoa, Ildebrando Bossi, who claimed that it had belonged for centuries to an aristocratic family in that city, descendants of the Dukes of Urbino, one of whom had been among Raphael's early patrons. It had been studied years earlier by Pietro Toesca, a well-regarded art historian whom Mario had known in Rome in the 1930s; Toesca had accepted the attribution, and no one had seen it since. Competition among museums for increasingly rare masterpieces was at its peak. In 1961, the Metropolitan Museum had purchased Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* at auction for a record price, and the National Gallery had scored an even greater coup by securing Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci* a few years later.

The most coveted paintings were still in Europe, and some countries, Italy in particular, had enacted draconian statutes governing the export of works of art. Nonetheless, Rathbone and Swarzenski were willing to take the risk if the portrait was indeed by Raphael. To determine this, they asked the opinion of an eminent Raphael scholar, John Shearman, who, after studying the photographs, accompanied Rathbone and Swarzenski to Genoa to see the painting in person. As Belinda Rathbone writes in a recent book about her father, "That [the painting] was previously

unknown to him added to its promise, for it was only such an unknown work that could stand a chance of export from Italy . . . it could have come from anywhere.”<sup>6</sup> Shearman accepted that the painting had belonged to Pope Julius II, as the dealer claimed, but rather than the traditional identification of the sitter as Maria Della Rovere, argued that the painting was instead a portrait of the young Eleonora Gonzaga made before her marriage in 1505 to Francesco Maria Della Rovere, the nephew of Pope Julius II, whose 1506 portrait by Raphael belongs to the Uffizi. The painting was judged to be in reasonably good state for a work of the period. When it arrived in Boston, it was immediately put on exhibition, and Shearman published his discovery in the February 1970 issue of the *Burlington Magazine*.<sup>7</sup>

The complexities surrounding the arrival of the painting in Boston are detailed in Belinda Rathbone’s book. In brief, Swarzenski carried it through customs in his briefcase without declaring it, and this set off a complicated series of events that ultimately caused the return of the painting to Italy, as well as Perry Rathbone’s resignation.

Rodolfo Siviero had been in charge of the commission to recuperate art stolen by the Germans. He had a volatile temper and hungered for recognition after his office and importance were downgraded in the postwar era. One of his spies informed him that the little painting in Boston had been illegally exported from Italy, and he seized the chance to regain the spotlight. Pursuing the case with great tenacity, in a short time he had uncovered all the details, including the fact that it had been imported into the United States in violation of customs law.<sup>8</sup> This was supposed to be one of his greatest triumphs, though unfortunately rather short-lived. It did not take long after its appearance and publication for the art historical knives to come out. Some experts considered it a fake, while others simply questioned its attribution to Raphael. Mario had followed the controversy, but he hadn’t seen the painting while it was in Boston. He first had occasion to examine it after its return to Italy. He wrote:

*I knew Siviero well, having once helped him recover a stolen work, and as soon as I came to Italy for the summer, he called with great excitement to tell me that he had the painting, and would I come and look at it. I went to his office in the Palazzo Venezia in Rome. After the usual pleasantries, he handed me the little portrait, which I took over to the window to look at in good light. I immediately thought that the painting was not by Raphael, but rather by a northern Italian painter in the circle of Francia or Costa. Some restorer had tried to make it look as much like Raphael as possible but without much success. In fact, in my entire career, I have never seen a successful transformation of a school painting into the master, although there have been many attempts. Every falsification—such as those Lazzaroni had commissioned from his restorer, Verzetta, in Paris—reflects the taste of the time in which they are painted. Unconsciously, the forger puts the flavor of his own period into his work.*



121. The Boston Raphael, on deposit at the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 27 × 21.5 cm.

*Siviero asked me what I thought of the recovered painting. When I told him my opinion, that it was a painting of the Emilian School aided by a restorer, his face turned scarlet and he screamed at me that I didn't understand anything. Fortunately, at that very moment, there was a knock on the door and Giuliano Briganti, the great art historian, entered. He had also been invited by Siviero to see the Raphael. I was still holding the portrait, and I handed it to Giuliano. His opinion was the same as mine: that it was by a mediocre master. Siviero was naturally furious, so Giuliano and I decided it would be best to leave him alone. It was a great embarrassment for him after all the work [he'd done] and the publicity he had generated. The director and the curator of the Boston Museum had no recourse; the money that had been paid for the painting was lost, and they were both fired by the board of trustees when the scandal broke.*

After the painting was returned, it was cleaned at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro. As Mario noted, it was a badly abraded painting from the period, and it had been very much repainted to make it more closely resemble a work by the young Raphael.

Portraits seem to be particularly susceptible to shaky opinions and interpretations. As John Shearman wrote: "Famous names and distinguished provenances grow on portraits as casually as barnacles on a boat's bottom, and they are rightly regarded with suspicion."<sup>9</sup>

### ☞ Primary Versions and Studio Replicas: Lorenzo Lotto ☞

Another type of misattribution involves the relationship of secondary versions or copies of the original, or first version, of a picture. Mario wrote about one such discovery that he and Rudolf Heinemann made in London in 1960:

*Rudolf and I were looking through the London sales catalogues and noticed a painting by Lorenzo Lotto, [Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and Nicholas of Tolentino]. It had been published by the expert Cecil Gould as a copy after a work in the National Gallery, London. I went to London and became convinced that the painting in the sale was the original one [and the National Gallery version a copy of it]. When it arrived*

in New York, I cleaned it (it was in very good state) and Rudolf immediately sold it to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston as a Lotto. Naturally, the director, Perry Rathbone, was very happy to have the painting, since the only other Lotto they owned was a battered replica.

After Mario cleaned the Lotto, Gould immediately changed his mind, convinced that it was the original and the London version, which is in poor state, was a replica. When a technical study was made of the two paintings in the late 1990s,<sup>10</sup> light was shed on the very interesting relationship between the two works. Both paintings were examined with infrared reflectography, which uses electromagnetic wavelengths from 700 to 2,500 nanometers to penetrate the paint layers and reveal the initial drawing. In the Boston painting, the underdrawing was freehand and it was obvious that the artist had planned the composition directly on the canvas, as many alterations were made, some even after the initial lay in of paint. The most important change was to the position of the



122. Lorenzo Lotto, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, detail, oil on canvas, transferred from original canvas, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 94.3 × 77.8 cm.



123. Lorenzo Lotto, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, detail, signed and dated 1522, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London, 91 × 75.4 cm.

Child's head, which was shifted from a frontal pose to the final one where he looks at Saint Nicholas.

When the infrared reflectograms of both paintings were compared, the drawing of the London painting proved to be simpler, more mechanical than that of the Boston picture, perhaps made from a cartoon,<sup>11</sup> although it was not an exact copy. The conservators noticed that when a change was made in one painting, it was also made in the other. The build-up of the paint layers was also the same. They concluded that the Boston painting was begun first, but soon after, perhaps at a client's request, Lotto or one of his assistants started another version and the two paintings were worked on simultaneously. Apart from the underdrawing, the biggest technical difference between the two paintings is the choice of blue pigment. For the Boston version, the expensive ultramarine made from lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone, was used while the blue in the London painting is the less costly azurite.

The technical examination proved that Mario was right in his assessment that the Boston painting is the first version. I have seen both paintings many times since Mario told me this story. Aside from the blue, there is a great difference in the quality of handling between the two, suggesting that an assistant may have worked alongside Lotto to paint much of the second version, which is usual studio practice.

### ✎ Repainted Originals: A Lazzaroni Botticelli ✎

A third instance of misattribution concerns a painting that was a superb example of a master's work in good condition, but so extensively repainted that the attribution was not apparent.

In the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for restorers to cover up the original with their own work, sometimes to conceal damage but occasionally just to alter the painting according to their own view of what would be attractive to the market. Some collectors are tempted to buy such reworked paintings in the hope





124. Sandro Botticelli, *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John* before its acquisition by Michele Lazzaroni. The photo from the Frick archive showing the painting before it was reworked. (See also Plate xxii)



125. Detail during cleaning. The mordant gilding was modern.



that there is a reasonably well-preserved original underneath the modern paint, while others shun them unless the results of a full technical study are available.

Mario always kept an open mind and used his own judgment.

*Many years after I bought Barone Michele Lazzaroni's archives from his son, Cesare Canessa, a Roman dealer, wrote to tell me that the daughter of the baron was trying to sell a painting by Botticelli. When I returned to Italy for my summer vacation, out of sheer curiosity, I accompanied Canessa to the Palazzo Lazzaroni to see the painting, sure that I would be shown another of Verzetta's fabrications. The painting was in fact heavily restored but well-conceived, worthy of the master. The heads of the Madonna and Child were beautiful and I concluded that the painting was absolutely right. I told Rudolf Heinemann about it but when he heard the name Lazzaroni he said that he didn't want to waste his time. I finally convinced him to look at it but he was particularly out of sorts since he had caught his finger in the car door, and he*



126. During cleaning, Lazzaroni had added strands of hair as well as a scarf.

said he wasn't interested. I told him that in that case I would buy it myself. Then he changed his mind.

I sent it to New York and cleaned it. The Madonna's mantle was completely new, repainted, and had been embellished with elaborate mordant gilding—a specialty of Verzetta. Under Verzetta's "restoration", the original drapery emerged. Part of the sleeve had been scraped down to the preparation, which retained the original incisions to indicate the design.

I showed the painting to Everett Faby, a brilliant connoisseur who knew this corner of the quattrocento better than anyone. He was director of the Frick Collection at that time and knew the photo archives extremely well. He remembered seeing a photograph of the painting before the sleeve had been scraped off, and shortly thereafter sent me a print, which I used to restore the missing yellow drapery. The restored painting was accepted by all the experts. Dr. Heinemann showed it to Sherman Lee, who bought it for the Cleveland Museum. I think it must be the only authentic painting by a master of the Renaissance to have come from Lazzaroni. It is very difficult to understand why he was not satisfied with a beautifully preserved painting by a great artist and felt compelled to 'improve' upon it by scraping down the sleeve, repainting the mantle, and adding extensive mordant gilding so that, in the end, it resembled the fakes he usually dealt in. (See Plate xxiii)

### ☞ Norton Simon's Botticelli ☞

Duveen Brothers' last remaining branch on 18 East 79th Street ended its business activities in 1964. The London and Paris galleries had already closed, as had the previous New York showroom—a glorious thirty-room edifice on the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and 56th Street, the design of which was inspired by a wing of the Ministère de la Marine in Paris.<sup>12</sup> The California industrialist and collector Norton Simon, while negotiating the purchase of a small painting by Giorgione with the then owner of the firm, Edward Fowles, decided to buy the 79th Street building, the library, and whatever was left of the stock for \$4 million.<sup>13</sup> Among the eight hundred art objects, Simon's interest was caught by a panel of a Madonna and Child, purportedly by Botticelli, that had been

completely repainted. Mario said that the collector was convinced there was a real Botticelli under the modern paint. For years, he begged Mario to clean it, until finally Mario agreed. No one could resist that much pressure from Simon, who was famously insistent. From under the repaint, a beautiful but badly damaged Botticelli emerged. Most of the flesh tones had been worn down to the green underpaint by past cleaning with harsh solvents, and there were numerous losses—especially in the heads of the Virgin and Child. Everett Fahy again followed the restoration, and Mario told me that on one of his visits he said, “Mario, stop. That’s enough.”



127. Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna and Child with Adoring Angel*, ca. 1468, tempera on panel, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California, 88.9 × 68 cm.

Fahy's comment and Mario's openness to it raise several important issues about performing restorations of this kind on such a heavily damaged picture. Laymen (or "lemons," as Mario used to pronounce the word) often ask conservators how they are able to match the colors. Color matching is a skill that can be mastered with application and patience. Apart from matching the paint's hue and tone, many other techniques are needed to give restored losses the hard, vitreous look of antique paint with its patina and cracks. It is important to have a good teacher—and it is difficult to find one. Creating a retouch that imitates the original is, nonetheless, just mechanics. The greatest challenge is in knowing how far to carry a restoration. What is acceptable for a conservatively restored painting or for one that is more fully retouched, but with taste (that indefinable, elusive quality) and respect, is somewhat fluid. Behind these parameters lurks the danger of an over-restored painting, which has lost the character of the original and taken on the personality of the restorer.

Knowing when to stop is the most difficult part of a restoration, especially when the painting is very damaged. There is a fine line between a presentable restored picture and one that has been muffled by excessive retouching, and it can be crossed in an instant without the restorer being aware of it. Drawing one crack too many, adding one small speck, can tip the balance. It is a challenge to maintain a critical eye as the work goes on, and the fresh perspective of a colleague—such as Fahy in the above account—can be invaluable in preventing the original paint from being overpowered by retouching. The goal is to allow what is left of the artist to dominate. I do not believe that one-size-fits-all systems with specific rules are helpful. Every painting is different, so the decision is necessarily subjective, and, for this decision to be well-informed, it is essential to look hard at as many paintings as possible over one's career, to solicit discussion and advice from colleagues, and to always be critical of one's own work.

☞ Reflections on the Art of Restoration ☞

An essential quality for a restorer is therefore a delicate balance between caution and self-confidence, which is different from ego. Mario, as his surname implies, was always humble in the presence of a painting. He regarded paintings as the manifestation of the artist's mind rendered with such ordinary materials as oil, egg, or gum mixed with some minerals. At any stage in a restoration it is all too easy to manipulate these materials so that they no longer conform to the author's vision. Sometimes it is necessary to be bold and remove ancient repaints and embellishments that distort the creative intent while simultaneously clinging to the perishable remains of the original.

Mario wrote his reflections about the cleaning process, at my request, in the 1990s:

*I have been asked to describe my approach to paintings, not an easy question to answer since every painting presents its own problems. I always approach paintings with great respect, humility, and a certain fear to touch them with solvents, afraid to spoil them. I begin cleaning by making a small test in a corner, or some unobtrusive place, never making a cleaning test in the center of a painting. I try to remove the varnish as evenly as possible over the entire composition, not only the highlights. This is particularly important with baroque paintings. You have to stop before going too deep, and always leave a little patina. Many times I have been criticized by dealers, who would say that the painting wasn't clean enough for Americans. I prefer to use solvents that evaporate quickly. Very rarely I use dimethylformamide, only to remove tough overpaint. Sometimes you have to use ammonia, diluted of course.*

*The cleaning of gold grounds is a very delicate operation. My father was a gilder, a frame maker, and a restorer of polychrome sculpture. Since the age of fourteen, when I went to work in his shop, I have worked with gold and have had a lot of experience with gold-ground paintings. Many, like the Paolo di Giovanni Fei [see Chapter 11], haven't been cleaned for centuries and are covered with a black crust consisting of oil, soot, glue, and grime that are extremely difficult to remove. Sometimes, if a gold-ground painting has never been cleaned, under the dirt and varnish there is a gray*

*patina, original to the painting, consisting of a sealant made from beaten egg whites or else a little bit of absorbed dirt. This should never be removed. Sometimes it can also be found over the gold ground [which would have given it] a slightly matte quality to subdue the newly burnished gold.*

*Many paintings have been ruined by the use of strong alkaline cleaning agents, such as caustic soda, or lye, used extensively in the nineteenth century. I like Secco Suardo's unguent for softening hardened dirt and oil. It consists of melted ox fat (*grasso di bue*), linseed oil, Marseilles soap, and very little water. It requires patience, as it does not work immediately. One of my earliest experiences as a restorer was with the Rospigliosi Collection in Rome, before its dispersal. Many paintings from the Palestrina villa had never been cleaned and were covered with a hardened black crust of smoke and soot from the fireplaces, which could only be removed with the pomade. [For cleaning gilding] anything containing water has a ruinous effect, since the gold leaf is bound to the bole preparation with a mild gelatin solution, easily undermined by moisture. I also avoid solutions containing alcohol [because it's chemically close to water]. Acetone mixtures I have found to be safe. Sometimes I have used acetone and linseed or mineral oil [to avoid blanching that occurs as the varnish breaks up]. Unguents, as long as they are an emulsion containing mainly oil and just a touch of soap, can also be used safely.*

*Often, the punched decoration of the gold ground is clogged with dark-brown, discolored varnish, left behind by previous cleaning. Usually I try to remove these deposits, softening them with a waterless paint remover, applied with a tiny brush, and then cleaned mechanically under the microscope, dot by punched dot, which takes a lot of time and patience. This product does not harm the gold. I like to use very thin varnishes and hate shiny surfaces, especially for early paintings. The gold ground should never be varnished; if there is blanching from the cleaning, put a bit of linseed oil into some mineral spirits [put it on a cloth and go over the gold] and immediately dry the surface completely. Early paintings need very subdued surfaces, otherwise they look sticky. Artists have always had good taste, and I don't believe they ever liked their pictures to look glossy.*

As Mario knew, the problems of over-cleaning stem, in part, from the illusion that there is such thing as a clear and unequivocal line separating original surface and later accretions, and from an oversimplification of the complexities involved in the way a picture changes over time [see Appendix].



✂ Retouching Controversies: Alfio Del Serra ✂

Retouching is a contentious issue in restoration circles and the debate over how to treat areas of damage and paint loss became one of the dividing lines between the approach of traditional restorers and that of Cesare Brandi, who wanted the viewer to be able to distinguish between original and restoration. Mario often felt that this idea had been carried too far when the losses became more visible and important than the original. Everyone agrees on the essential premise that the artist's vision should never be camouflaged by the personality of the restorer.



128. Raphael, *Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi*, 1518–1519, oil on panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 155.5 × 119.5 cm. For comparison see Figures 129 and 130.



In this regard, nothing raised Mario's ire more than the work of a famous Florentine restorer, Alfio Del Serra, who retouched so obsessively that many of the paintings he worked on looked airbrushed, changing the entire character of the painting. Mario could spot Del Serra's work from the far end of a gallery the minute he walked in. Every painting had the same spongy quality. Oddly enough, in a culture of restoration that had invented, then imposed, visible retouching throughout the country, this man's work was exalted, and he always worked on great masterpieces. It was a complete contradiction, but no one in Florence seemed to notice.

Del Serra was an intelligent and sensitive man. His 1985 article in the widely-read *Burlington Magazine*<sup>14</sup> about the cleaning



129. Raphael, *Self-portrait with a Friend*, ca. 1518, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 99 × 83 cm.

of tempera paintings and the importance of original varnishes was of great importance. I thought that he had done lovely work on several important paintings in the Uffizi, particularly Duccio's *Rucellai Madonna* and Botticelli's *Venus*. But when it came to other Renaissance works, and particularly to Venetian painters, I had to agree with Mario that something had gone wrong. The final straw for Mario came sometime around 1995 at an exhibition at the Uffizi devoted to Florentine mannerist painters of the sixteenth century. The famous Raphael portrait, *Pope Leo X with Cardinals Giulio de' Medici and Luigi de' Rossi*, was on view after a recent cleaning and restoration by Del Serra. Mario flew into a rage and literally began to yell, "Assassini!" ("Murderers!") right in the galleries, which, luckily, were fairly empty. Eventually a guard took notice, and shortly thereafter, someone came down to find out what was wrong. Mario said, "Don't you see what has happened to this painting?" and so on. It is a wonder we were not thrown out or even arrested!

Commenting on this experience, Mario wrote:

*To my horror, the character of the sitter had been completely changed by the restoration: the head and hands were puffy and grotesquely simplified, as if Botero rather than Raphael had painted them. The portrait looked like one of those reproductions painted on porcelain—evidently, he wished to improve on the artist's work! I can recognize the work of this restorer from two hundred yards away. I would like to suggest to the art historian in charge of this restoration and to the director of the museum that they should have this painting cleaned of the excessive retouches that camouflage this masterpiece of the Renaissance.*

Mario was not the only one who was unhappy with Del Serra's work. While other critics were reluctant to speak out, Mario, as he often pointed out, could say whatever he wanted at his age. The role of the restorer is to stand aside and not put himself between the viewer and the artist. A colleague told me that the way Del Serra restored paintings was quite unorthodox: he cleaned the painting piece by piece and, as he cleaned, he glazed the highlights, or areas he thought were too bright, with watercolor, and retouched every



130. Raphael, *Andrea Navagero and Agostino Beazzano*, 1516, oil on canvas, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome, 76 × 107 cm.

tiny imperfection. One consequence is that no photographs exist of the cleaned state of the highly important paintings entrusted to him. The results have been particularly calamitous for Titian, whose great nude, the *Venus of Urbino* in the Uffizi, now looks as if her body has no bones, and all sense of anguish in the *Penitent Magdalene* in the Galleria Palatina has been extinguished. Fortunately, I am certain that the paintings are perfectly fine underneath the fanatic retouching. Unfortunately, it will be several generations before they will be seen again free of the smothering watercolor additions.

## CHAPTER 24

# Cleaning and Controversies

MARIO'S PASSION FOR WORKS of art and their appearance caused him to become intensely upset when he witnessed the results of ignorance, arrogance, and poor judgment. This sensitivity was illustrated when we visited the National Gallery in London in the late 1990s to see the group of seven panels by Sassetta, the magical fifteenth-century Sieneese painter who had been so important in Mario's life. The paintings are not in optimal condition. Over the centuries, they have suffered from flaking paint and are worn, as they have been cleaned and restored several times since the Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece, to which they originally belonged, was broken up and the compartments dispersed in the early nineteenth century. The panels belonging to the National Gallery were restored by Stephen Pichetto, Mario's predecessor at the Kress Foundation. Pichetto thinned the wood supports, applied the usual cradles, and would almost certainly have varnished them heavily with alternating layers of dammar/shellac to achieve a smooth surface,

as was his practice. London's National Gallery acquired them in 1934. In 1974, they were again cleaned and restored. The panels have not been gently treated. For over a century, the National Gallery has been criticized for its strong cleaning, and the Sassettas are something of a poster child for this approach as far as many Italian experts are concerned. The National Gallery is not to blame for all of the condition problems, however, there is no doubt in my mind that if they had been cleaned and restored by Mario, for example, they would not look as raw as they do presently.

Paintings are infinitely complex, composed of many thin layers all of which play an essential role in the conception the artist initially achieved. As John Brealey, the former department head at the Metropolitan Museum, constantly emphasized to those who diminish the importance of cleaning and restoration as merely cosmetic: "The way the picture looks *is* the picture." The restorer, often in conjunction with the art historian, determines a painting's appearance—that is, its very meaning as a work of art. It is a terrifying responsibility, which is why the subject is so emotionally freighted.

There are two poles in the debate about the cleaning of paintings. The first supposes that it is possible to be completely objective in removing everything from the paint surface that is not part of the original: dirt, varnish, retouching, regardless of how the painting looks. The second is necessarily subjective and holds that while cleaning a painting, the conservator must be constantly attentive and strive to maintain the relationships among the formal values of color, value, tone, line, and shape so as not to disrupt the illusion of space and form, which has often been affected by various alterations that have occurred over time. Mario was interested in how a painting ultimately looked—whether it was in "balance", as he described it. He was devastated when he saw paintings that had been scrubbed until the whites gleamed bright and the surface enamel (that is, the exudation of the medium that occurs as the pigments settle), as he described it, eroded to reveal fresh colors.

Mario played a major role in a bitter controversy surrounding the cleaning of a Rubens and a Rembrandt at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. It was not the first controversy regarding the cleaning of paintings. In the mid-nineteenth century, a flurry of protests resulted in resignations and dismissals at several European museums in response to public criticism of newly cleaned paintings. In London, in October 1846, a letter to the *Times*, signed 'Verax', complained that four paintings from the National Gallery "had been subjected to a terrible ordeal at the cleaners' hands." The ensuing debate lasted from 1846 until 1853, when a Royal Commission of Enquiry was appointed to investigate the charges. In the intervening period, Sir Charles Eastlake, the keeper of the museum, resigned his position, partly in response to the storm of criticism. A thousand-page report was presented to the House of Commons. In 1855, Eastlake was reappointed as the museum's first director, and for the rest of his tenure he adopted a cautious approach to restoration, "because the cleaning of pictures is a subject which admits of no proof, and it is one on which the public mind may be easily unsettled."<sup>1</sup>

Virulent attacks on the Louvre's cleaning policies erupted in 1793 and again between 1848 and 1860, when, ultimately, the curator of paintings, Frédéric Villot—who had initiated the cleanings—resigned. An outcry arose in Munich in 1861 about cleaning at the Pinakothek. A commission was formed and the controversy was resolved by the intervention of Dr. Max von Pettenkofer, a distinguished chemist and a pioneer of modern hygiene. Pettenkofer invented a process for regenerating old varnishes using solvent fumes. This method, or variants of it, became famous in the following years, and was used extensively on the continent as well as in England, with the result that very few paintings were cleaned in Europe until the mid-1930s.<sup>2</sup>

For many years, the subject of the cleaning of paintings lay quiescent, until another controversy developed at the National Gallery in London just after World War II, when paintings that had been cleaned while in storage returned to the galleries.

Again, there were many letters to the press, and an exchange of views by professionals was published in the *Burlington Magazine*. This time the museum responded by mounting an exhibition in 1947 accompanied by a catalogue, *An Exhibition of Cleaned Pictures*, which sought to address some of the issues regarding varnishes and their removal. When this failed to allay public discomfort, a commission of inquiry was again established. The report of the Weaver Committee recommended that an adequate conservation department be created, to work in concert with an internal chemical laboratory staffed by scientists.

Linking scientific research to traditional conservation was not a new idea. During the second quarter of the twentieth century, the study of historic painting techniques and materials, and the identification of new, stable substances to replace the traditional ones, became a subject of interest to chemists. Several countries had already formed institutes for this new approach to the study and conservation of works of art. Harvard's Fogg Museum was among the earliest and one of the most active centers from which a generation of a new type of conservator emerged.<sup>3</sup> The traditionally trained restorer did not, however, disappear and two schools developed, becoming increasingly polarized. In a 1982 lecture, the influential Belgian aesthetician, Paul Philippot, son of a renowned restorer at the Institut Royale du Patrimoine Artistique in Brussels with whom he often collaborated, as well as a supporter of Cesare Brandi and the Istituto Centrale di Restauro, recognized that two tendencies existed, which he labeled the technological-scientific camp and the historical-humanist school. He noted, "The meeting of these two evolving components would inevitably give rise to conflicts," and noted that the two positions were deeply entrenched.<sup>4</sup> In addressing the problematic nature of varnish removal, Philippot had earlier written that restoration necessarily involves critical judgement because the irreversible alteration of the materials of the painting over time precludes a precise determination of the original state. Therefore, an approach that claims scientific objectivity is illusory



and in itself subjective because it chooses to ignore the aesthetic reality of the work.<sup>5</sup>

### ☞ The National Gallery of Art ☞

In 1971, J. Carter Brown III made an important acquisition for the National Gallery, the first for the new director: a life-size group portrait by Peter Paul Rubens of the family of Balthasar Gerbier, begun while the artist was staying with Gerbier at York House in London in 1629.<sup>6</sup> Gerbier brought the painting with him to Brussels when he served as King Charles I's agent from 1631 until 1640. When Gerbier returned to England, Rubens' widow, H  l  ne, presumably purchased the painting from him since it is recorded in her collection in 1646. There is a gap in the provenance but by 1724 the picture was back in London at Lord Radnor's house in St. James's and subsequently passed through several English private collections until it was acquired by the London dealer (and Mario's friend) Geoffrey Agnew. The painting was considered to be among Rubens's finest works.

Agnew's sold it to the National Gallery for \$2.5 million, a record price for a Rubens at that time. Brown was anxious to secure the painting and, although it needed attention, it went to Washington before it had been cleaned. Agnew naturally assumed that the painting would be sent to Mario, who had a long association with the museum, but that is not what happened. The newly appointed assistant director at the National Gallery, Charles Parkhurst, had a background in conservation, and the responsibility for this had been largely assigned to his portfolio.<sup>7</sup> The National Gallery had never had its own department.

On July 30, at Carter Brown's request, Parkhurst wrote to Mario to ask if he could undertake the necessary restoration work, adding that the National Gallery intended to get at least one other proposal for treatment. Mario was away for the summer and did not receive the letter; however, Geoffrey Agnew was aware of its contents and

became rather concerned. He wired Mario and made sure that he had a copy of the letter. Mario immediately sent a telegram to Parkhurst saying that he could look at the painting soon after he returned to New York on September 30th. Not wishing to delay the cleaning of this major acquisition, and perhaps pleased with the opportunity to introduce the technological-scientific approach to the National Gallery, Parkhurst sent the painting to Oberlin where, as director of the Allen Art Museum, he had set up a conservation department in 1953 under the direction of Richard Buck (1903–1977), from the Fogg Art Museum, a leading exponent of this school of thought. Buck was particularly interested in structural work and decided to remove the old glue lining and replace it with a wax lining, considered by most American conservators to be a superior method. The relining required a great deal of time. In addition, three scientists were engaged to analyze the materials of the painting. In any event, the process took the better part of two years. In the meantime, Parkhurst formed a small conservation department at the National Gallery, appointing Victor Covey, a specialist in packing and shipping, with “incredible hands”,<sup>8</sup> as its head and, as chief paintings conservator, Kay Silberfeld, a pupil of Richard Buck; both came from the Baltimore Museum of Art where Parkhurst had been director prior to his appointment in Washington.

After the *Gerbier Family* returned to the National Gallery in 1973 and went on display, whispering began among the cognoscenti. Geoffrey Agnew was shocked and angry when he saw the picture and began complaining forcefully to his client and friend, Paul Mellon, the president and principal patron of the museum, that the painting had been ruined during its two-year treatment in Oberlin, as he had feared it would be.<sup>9</sup> Michael Jaffé, a Rubens scholar and professor at Cambridge University, shared this opinion, and they continued to protest to Mellon over the next several years.

In May 1977, another of Paul Mellon’s advisors, the British restorer, John Brealey, recently appointed to head the paintings conservation department at the Metropolitan Museum, stumbled

into this explosive situation. Brealey was an impassioned and articulate advocate of the historical-humanist approach to the cleaning of paintings with a gift for garnering publicity for his views. He had already antagonized the American conservation establishment. Parkhurst decided to invite Brealey to visit “the lab”—a term John detested—in Washington, reasoning that one should “know one’s enemy.”<sup>10</sup> Brealey accepted the invitation, assuming it had been extended at Paul Mellon’s behest. Two paintings were being cleaned at that moment: Rembrandt’s *The Mill*, and *Soap Bubbles* by Chardin. The paintings were lying on tables, under fluorescent lights, the usual method for cleaning used by the scientific school to guarantee objectivity, rather than on easels as John and Mario did, in order that the effects of the varnish removal on the pictorial values could be observed.<sup>11</sup> John had a volatile temper and flew into a rage, provoking a nasty altercation with the defensive Kay Silberfeld. He returned to New York in a state of agitation, convinced that he had let Paul Mellon down. Early Monday morning he called Mellon’s office intending to apologize for his behavior only to learn that Mellon knew nothing about the visit.

In September, an article appeared in the *Washington Post*, describing the cleaning of *The Mill*. Both Paul Mellon and former director, John Walker, were astonished by the news. Mellon later recalled that Walker “went white with rage, saying, ‘They’ll absolutely ruin it.’” Mellon later wrote:

I became very disturbed and angry to realize that as President of the Gallery I had been left to find out about the cleaning of the Rembrandt in a newspaper article. I also wondered why the conservators should have begun with, above all, what many considered one of the Gallery’s most important and perhaps most controversial paintings.<sup>12</sup>

Deeply worried, Mellon overcame his reluctance to interfere with the professional staff and wrote to Carter Brown in October:

“The Trustees, you and your Staff, and myself will be held responsible for the maiming, if not the destruction, of some of our own masterpieces.”<sup>13</sup> In March 1978, he invited Geoffrey Agnew, Michael Jaffé, and Mario to visit the conservation department, see the paintings, and give their views. Before the meeting, Mellon declared a moratorium on the cleaning of paintings. From May 2<sup>nd</sup> until May 5<sup>th</sup> the three experts looked at the paintings that had been recently cleaned and prepared to give a preliminary report on their findings at the end of the visit.

Mario described to me what transpired. A meeting was held in the conservation department, attended by the director, various staff members, and the trustees, including Franklin Murphy, whom Mario knew well from the Kress Foundation. Except for the unfailingly gracious Paul Mellon, the three men felt that they were regarded as adversaries and the atmosphere was hostile. Murphy was especially angry and demanded that someone explain exactly what was wrong with the cleaning of *The Mill*, which had become the center of the controversy. Mario said that Agnew and Jaffé remained silent and it was left to him to address the group. With the painting finally on an easel, he tried to put the problem into plain words. First of all, he said, the darks in the foreground had become much darker than they were when originally painted and much of the detail had been lost.<sup>14</sup> The slight opacity and discoloration of the old varnish had made the landscape appear lighter and had subdued the sky. Now that it had been removed, the bright sky, which had decolorized from the original blue to a light gray, nearly white, was blindingly evident while the landscape was dark and illegible. There was no spatial connection between the two halves of the composition; the cleaned painting was completely out of balance.

Murphy understood what Mario was saying and asked what could be done. Since all the old varnish had been thoroughly removed, Mario recommended that the only way at this point to bring some harmony to the picture was to glaze the sky with watercolor so that it would recede and give the painting a thin,

saturating brush varnish to bring out whatever detail remained in the dark foreground. (The latter might seem obvious, but it was not something that American conservators would normally have done at that time, preferring to spray surfaces with high molecular-weight synthetic polymers that had none of the properties of traditional resins like dammar and mastic.)

Agnew and Jaffé wrote reports to Paul Mellon that were highly critical of all the paintings they had seen and of the staff, calling their work “amateurish” and recommending that they be replaced. Mario’s report was somewhat more diplomatic. Agnew advanced the idea that a new conservator, someone with the requisite experience, be appointed. He suggested Mario’s former pupil, Gabrielle Kopelman, a Belgian trained by Albert Philippot in Brussels, who was at that time the restorer of the Frick Collection, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and other public and private collections. Mario himself would act as consultant. Mellon was in favor of this idea and Kopelman’s appointment was given serious consideration. However, during her preliminary visit to the conservation department she was tactless and overbearing, angering Silberfeld who declared that she would not be able to work with her.<sup>15</sup>

Understandably, Covey and Silberfeld turned to their colleagues for support and letters from American conservators and art historians poured in. Sheldon Keck, considered the leader of the American conservation establishment, wrote to Mellon, excoriating him for his interference and alluded to a “commercial connection linking Jaffé, Agnew, and Modestini that merited greater attention.”<sup>16</sup> The records of the controversy are laced with prejudicial remarks of this sort on both sides. As in this case, members of the “scientific” camp dismissed their adversaries’ concerns as a mere mask for financial motives and there was a tendency to distrust “self-serving non-Americans”.<sup>17</sup> For their part, the critics often displayed contempt for American conservators, called them naïve, and inferred that their backgrounds rendered them incapable of sophisticated thinking.

In August, Mellon wrote to Mario, Geoffrey Agnew, and Michael Jaffe:<sup>18</sup>

I'm afraid my investigation of the National Gallery conservation work and your visit (to say nothing of John Brealey's earlier visit) have stirred up a hornet's nest. Articles have appeared in the Washington papers describing, rather inaccurately, the two conflicting approaches to conservation; the present staff is up in arms, claiming that they have not had "due process" and are accused of wrong-doing without the possibility of defense; they have written not only to the press but also to various heads of conservation bodies (such as Sheldon Keck); and Parkhurst has produced a huge volume of correspondence from their partisans in which the Trustees and myself are accused of putting the advances in conservation back hundreds of years! ... We have decided to invite a panel of approximately nine American directors, art historians, and conservators to give us their opinions ... I certainly am still greatly disturbed by the extremely damning evidence produced during our meeting last May.

Each panel member visited the conservation department and filed reports. Even though not all their statements endorsed the work that had been carried out, particularly regarding the seventeenth-century Dutch paintings—several were in fact quite damning<sup>19</sup>—Parkhurst was nonetheless able to deftly bowdlerize the panel's findings in a summation for the trustees submitted in October, concluding that the staff had worked according to the highest professional standards. The controversy was damaging the museum's reputation and the reassurance was welcome even if the outcome was imperfect. The staff resumed work on the collection.<sup>20</sup> New procedures were put in place that required the board of trustees to sign off on all restoration proposals, a solution of questionable value since trustees are usually not experts

and their position precludes challenging the professional staff, an issue that had been an important part of the debate.

Sometime later, at a lunch with some staff and trustees at John Walker's house in Washington, Mario remarked that *The Mill* looked much better now that the sky had been toned down. Someone angrily denied that anything "cosmetic" of that sort had been done. Andrew Robison, the curator of drawings, came to Mario's defense and said that he was correct—that he himself had seen the sky being glazed. This was considered an important point by the scientific side, which did not approve of "glazing over the original" to mitigate aesthetic dissonance, as Sheldon Keck emphasized in a talk about cleaning controversies presented at the annual meeting of the American Institute for Conservation in 1983.<sup>21</sup>



131. Rembrandt van Rijn, *The Mill*, 1645–1648, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 87.6 × 105.6 cm.



Both Mario and John Brealey felt let down by the conclusion of the controversy. Mario washed his hands of the National Gallery. The feisty president of the Kress Foundation, Mary Davis, wrote to Carter Brown, "I am telling you right now that no permission will ever be given to touch a Kress object, period...you are not going to ruin the Kress Collection."<sup>22</sup>

However, the museum still had the problem of the *Gerbier Family*. Michael Jaffé's expressed his views on the appearance of the painting, which he had known since 1962, in an essay he wrote for an Agnew's publication:

In the *Corpus Rubenium* ... published in 1977, that is some years after the painting had undergone treatment by the late Richard Buck, Frances Huemer wrote that: 'In addition to the careless peripheral painting, the painting and drawing of the heads is unconvincing, often with a splotchy overpainting. Not only is the hair stringy and fussy (compare the impressionistic hair of the little girl in the *Peace and War*; in Madame Gerbier's hair the background is a flat gray with superimposed reddish locks), but the brushstrokes on the face are dry and hard. The irises of the eyes are painted so that they appear almost a solid brown with circular centers, with even lighter outer parts. This is contrary to the way Rubens paints ... The Washington painting may be a workshop copy never completed ... Its weaknesses are in the painting itself, a deadness of areas, and a certain deadness of expression. It has a fatal lack of unity in the construction of forms.'

Deadness and lack of unity are thus seen in the aftermath of a cleaning imprudent in approach to the problems actual or potential ... and correspondingly insensitive to the optical effects ... After 350 years, the boldly and freely painted surface of the Washington version was in all essentials well preserved; but something needs to be done to bring its parts into keeping again. A clumsy relining calls attention to the

joins in the canvas; insufficient appreciation of the way in which Rubens matched his ground tone on the added strips to the nodal piece is another cause of the present lamentable discontinuity of impression; the dryness and hardness, remarked by Miss Huemer, are functions of unskilled varnishing. Much could be remedied.<sup>23</sup>

Paul Richards, the Washington Post journalist whose article about the cleaning of *The Mill* had begun the controversy, was also displeased by the painting's generally discordant appearance and returned to the subject in October 1978.<sup>24</sup> He wrote: "The [gray] underpaint with which Rubens sketched his faces, and which he later covered over, is now visible again so that the eldest daughter looks as if she has not shaved."

In January 1979, Carter Brown asked Mario if he would be willing to take on the restoration of the Rubens, at Mr. Mellon's request. Mario waited until April to reply:

*There is not much I can do. My idea was to put back some glazes and try to restore the harmony . . . as has been done with the Rembrandt. . . . That however is against the ethical conception of scientific restoration and the National Gallery would not like it. . . . The only thing that should be done is to change the varnish. . . . Considering that confidence in your restorers has been re-established, I think they could easily revarnish the Rubens.*<sup>25</sup>

It took over a year for Franklin Murphy to convince Mario to accept the *Gerbier Family*. He agreed on the condition that it would be sent to him in New York where it arrived in December 1980.

His restoration report notes that the varnish applied by Oberlin less than a decade earlier was already gray and slightly opaque and had not saturated the paint layer. It was thick, rubbery, and disagreeable to remove. The retouching, especially of the heads, was excessive and, in some passages, unnecessary. Mario observed that patches of the old discolored varnish remained in the darkest areas. After he finished the cleaning the appearance of



132. Peter Paul Rubens, *Deborah Kip, Wife of Sir Balthasar Gerbier, and Her Children*, 1629–1630, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 165.8 × 177.8 cm.

the painting immediately improved. He considered relining the canvas again but decided that the slight gain didn't justify such an intervention. Of the actual state, he wrote that the gray priming was exposed in the mid tones of the flesh so that, as Paul Richards observed, all the figures, including Madame Gerbier, sported a five-o'clock shadow. The red curtain had lost its final glazes and the sky was patchy with some areas darker than others due to chemical alterations. Mario gave the painting a brush coat of a synthetic varnish with characteristics that resembled those of the natural resins, but which yellows only slightly over time.<sup>26</sup> Many passages had to be glazed to replace the final modeling that had been removed; the blond hair of the children had been rubbed

down to the white underpaint. (Mario said that they looked like albinos.) The confusion due to a pronounced pentimento of the red curtain, the dissonance caused by the different preparations of the central section and the additions,<sup>27</sup> and the abraded state of the sky were attenuated with retouching.

The painting returned to the National Gallery on March 3, 1981 and was installed in the galleries without fanfare. Few people realize that it was once the subject of a scandal, which is as it should be.<sup>28</sup>

### ☞ The Sistine Chapel ☞

Not all cleaning controversies have merit. The most contentious and highly publicized of the past century revolved around the restoration of Michelangelo's frescoed vault in the Sistine Chapel. In the course of the fourteen-year-long endeavor, Mario and I became friends with Gianluigi Colalucci, the chief restorer of the Vatican, as well as Fabrizio Mancinelli, the curator; we were part of a group of conservators who inspected the finished result in April 1987 and issued a statement to the press, praising the work on the vault.<sup>29</sup>

The cleaning of the lunettes began in 1980 when the frescoes on the entrance wall in the series of the twenty-eight popes were about to be finished.<sup>30</sup> The papal portraits occupied the uppermost register, above the scenes from the life of Christ. A vertical scaffold had been erected, and the restorers found themselves just below Michelangelo's lunette of Eleazar and Mathan. From the scaffold, Colalucci could see the black crust composed of centuries of dirt, soot from the candles and braziers used to light the chapel, and the layers of animal glue and resinous wine applied centuries earlier. Unlike the vault, the lunettes had never been cleaned and were much dirtier.<sup>31</sup> It was very difficult even to make out the colossal images. The fact that they could be seen at all from the floor of the chapel was only due to the powerful artificial lights that were trained on them.

Colalucci could not resist making a small, hesitant cleaning test, which revealed that there was bright color under the black coating. In his recently published book about the restoration, *Io e Michelangelo*, he describes how, after further tests, he, Fabrizio Mancinelli, and Carlo Pietrangeli, the director of the Vatican Museums, made the momentous decision to clean the entire lunette and show it to their colleagues. Colalucci, who had been trained at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro under Cesare Brandi, whom he revered, had been at the Vatican for thirty years and specialized in wall paintings. It was serendipitous, because at that moment, there were three intelligent, courageous, and experienced men at the Vatican, who shared a long professional history. Colalucci, Mancinelli, and Pietrangeli respected one other and were to collaborate closely in all the decisions taken during the epic enterprise. From the first cleaning tests, they were keenly aware that this restoration would change art history and that the responsibility for all that entailed was theirs.

The Eleazar and Mathan lunette emerged completely transformed, with unexpectedly brilliant colors. The cleaning confirmed that the paintings had been executed in true fresco, an exigent technique that Michelangelo mastered during his apprenticeship with Domenico Ghirlandaio. It consists of painting the color—pigments ground in water with no binder—onto fresh plaster where it calcifies, becoming part of the wall. Great skill is required, because the artist has only one day to work on each area before the plaster sets. Changes can be made only by removing the layer of plaster itself and starting over again. One of the great advantages of this method is its permanence; fresco is not subject to the alterations that most other techniques undergo. In the Sistine, the state of preservation was superb with the exception of a few passages that were marred by insoluble black encrustations of mineral salts caused by the infiltration of water into the wall over the centuries. The drawing and modeling of the figures was boldly executed without any hesitation and enhanced by the colors Michelangelo had chosen: brilliant yellows, reds, purples,

and greens. When the cleaning of the Eleazar and Mathan lunette was finished, a group of experts convened to discuss the results. Their opinion was overwhelmingly positive, and Pietrangeli with his two colleagues decided to proceed.

In 1982, I spent several weeks in Rome, helping with the preparations for the exhibition, *The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art* that opened at the Metropolitan Museum in February 1983. The cleaning of the lunettes was underway in the Sistine, and as a guest of the Vatican, I was invited to visit the scaffold where the restorers were working, a privilege that I will remember for the rest of my life. The scaffold was in front of the lunette of Roboam–Abias. The two images were colossal, and I could get up to within a foot away—except that it is not the best way to look at them. The colors, of course, were glorious, bold and vivid, but what struck me most was the assurance and speed with which they were executed. Marks made by a brush as wide as that of a house painter swept across the plaster, at the same time rendering the modeling with absolute perfection. Although the first to be cleaned, the lunettes were the last to be painted, and the mastery that Michelangelo had achieved by then was breath taking—one of the huge lunettes had been painted in its entirety in a single day. Unlike many other sections of the Sistine ceiling, there are no incisions or evidence of the image having been transferred from a cartoon, only black charcoal drawing under the paint. But apart from this sublime virtuosity, the painting exhaled otherworldly genius. It was preternatural. I felt as if I should be on my knees.

I was able to follow the progress of the restoration from the scaffolding many times after that, but the first time, as with everything, was the most poignant. The last time I visited, in 1987, the cleaning of the vault was finished. I was with a group sponsored by the Kress Foundation, and we had lingered on the scaffold until after closing time. By the time we descended, the lights had been turned off and from the floor of the Sistine, the ceiling appeared to be filled with sculptures, not paintings. The strong artificial lights flattened the images so this effect was not



normally apparent. In the past, the extra illumination had been necessary but now that the ceiling had been cleaned, the natural light in which the great cycle had been conceived was in perfect harmony with the vibrant palette, and the forms resolved into a perfect three-dimensional illusion.

Not long after the first cleaned lunettes were exposed, Frank Mason, an American academic painter, began to voice hysterical accusations that Michelangelo's paintings were being over-cleaned and ruined. I had had a previous encounter with Mason, whose group of academic painters picketed outside the Metropolitan Museum after Rembrandt's *The Noble Slav* was removed from the galleries to be cleaned by John Brealey, not long after his arrival in 1975. John went outside and confronted the small posse. He convinced them to hold their fire until the painting was back on the walls, at which time he promised to answer all their questions. During



133. Jacopo della Quercia, *Ilaria del Carretto*, detail, ca. 1405, marble, Church of San Martino, Lucca, 88 × 244 × 66.5 cm. Before cleaning.



those discussions, it became clear that none of them understood anything about materials or technique. When the episode was over, the “Masonites,” as John called them, gave him a sort of diploma with a seal of approval and were never heard from again.

By the time Mason attacked the Sistine cleaning, he had enlisted James Beck, a professor of Renaissance art at Columbia University, who gave the group credibility, and they had a new name, Art Watch International. A few years before the Sistine ceiling controversy commenced, Beck had publicly criticized the cleaning of the funerary sculpture by Jacopo della Quercia of Ilaria Del Carretto in the cathedral of Lucca, one of the most beautiful sculptures of the Renaissance. Ilaria died when she was still only a girl, and her tomb is particularly moving, depicting her supine young body with her pet dog at her feet. Mario and I loved it and went to see it many times. The marble had taken on a beautiful patina over the centuries and looked like old ivory. When we saw it after the cleaning, we were heartsick: the marble was stark white and granular, as if it had been freshly cut.<sup>32</sup> We agreed with James Beck, who had been sued by the restorer for defamation although he was ultimately acquitted.

In the case of the Sistine, the Art Watchers were ignorant about frescos and unwilling to engage in a discussion and look at the evidence. The controversy sprang from an emotional attachment to the *terribilità* of the old Michelangelo, tonal and somber, which we now know was a complete distortion of his intentions. However, the controversy made good copy for a number of years, and memories of it linger. There was no lack of accurate information about the restoration of the Sistine. The Vatican openly shared the discoveries being made not only with specialists but also members of the general public. The scaffold was open and was visited by over one thousand people in the course of the restoration. Mancinelli and Colalucci traveled the world giving lectures, holding conferences and press briefings; every minute of the cleaning was documented with photographs and film. The arguments advanced in this period are too complex to address here. Briefly, the critics

believed in the notion of a “final layer,” the *ultimo mano*, referenced by contemporary sources and which Vasari specifically identifies as an embellishment of the frescoes with gilding and details painted *a secco* with pigments bound with animal glue. Vasari notes that these were never completed due to the impatience of the pope. Beck and his supporters imagined that the *ultimo mano* was a final black glaze with which Michelangelo toned down his work. There is no evidence for this, either historical or material.

More than halfway through the cleaning, the restorers discovered something decisive about Michelangelo’s final intention.



134. The Sistine Chapel ceiling before cleaning.



135. After cleaning.

All the interventions on the Sistine ceiling are documented. The first was in 1566 when a painter, Domenico Carnevale, consolidated some cracks, filling them with new plaster. Embedded in this ancient repair was a small piece of original fresco that had been buried for 420 years. The color was exactly the same as the adjacent passages that had been cleaned. It did not have a black glaze that Beck and his followers insisted was the final layer. The fragment was carefully left in place and not cleaned. However, even this did not impress Art Watch, who continue to insist that Michelangelo's "shading" has been removed.

I am by no means opposed to responsible criticism of restorations; indeed, I lament the lack of scrutiny. Among the interpreters of the various arts only restorers intervene on the actual materials and change their nature forever. This is why the subject is taboo: no one wants to be responsible for spoiling a work of art nor is there any restorer who has never made a mistake.

## CHAPTER 25

# Please Do Not Varnish This Painting

### ☞ “Crimes Against the Cubists” ☞

IN THE LATE 1970S, the issue of varnishing impressionist and modern paintings became a much-discussed subject in the paintings conservation community. It originated with the report of an inscription that had been found on the back of a painting by Camille Pissarro. On the reverse of *Paysage à Chaponval* was written, “Please do not varnish this painting,” in the artist’s own hand.<sup>1</sup> John Brealey was immediately intrigued. The Metropolitan’s great collection of impressionist paintings was temporarily off-view while the galleries were being rebuilt, and the entire department began to remove the old varnish coatings, which usually leaves behind blanched residues, so that previously varnished pictures could not be left without any varnish. At first, we began to apply a thin varnish. As our taste for matte surfaces developed, we used various techniques intended to leave a minimal amount of varnish

to achieve this look. A few paintings had never been varnished, and they became the touchstone for our efforts.

In 1980, an important Picasso retrospective at MoMA moved the artist's biographer, John Richardson, to publish a scathing denouncement of how many of the cubist paintings in the exhibition and elsewhere had been spoiled by varnish and wax relining, especially those from American museums.<sup>2</sup> John Brealey, and many others, joined the crusade to raise awareness of this irreversible problem, more dire in its consequences than the right amount of varnish on an impressionist painting. Picasso and Braque, in their cubist period, used porous, absorbent materials and played with the juxtaposition of matte and shine, smooth and granular, and even began to collage pieces of newspaper onto their paintings. These delicate effects were obliterated when the pictures were relined with wax and varnished because these alien materials penetrated the canvas, the ground, and the paint layers, darkening them and obscuring the original texture.

As previously mentioned, Mario worked on numerous paintings for Wildenstein's, which included not only old masters but also more modern works. Beginning early in their history, the firm cultivated a specialty in impressionist and early modern paintings and, as they continued to add to their stock, sent some of them to Mario for his attention. He did not agree with their ideas about varnishing. Mario said that on one occasion they returned a Monet to him after he had cleaned it, saying that it needed more varnish. Reluctantly, he gave it another coat. The next time Wildenstein's sent him a Monet, he decided to do a superficial cleaning just to remove the dirt and send it back. He said they were ecstatic over how wonderful it looked!

Wildenstein's predilection for varnishing impressionist paintings had historical precedents. Paul Durand-Ruel (1831–1922), the first art dealer to promote works by the impressionist painters, including Monet from whom he purchased over one thousand works,<sup>3</sup> would tone down some of the brightest Monets with a tarry glaze and have them generously varnished so they would be



more appealing to collectors unaccustomed to the impressionist aesthetic.<sup>4</sup>

One disagreement Mario had with Wildenstein over varnishing particularly upset him. Daniel Wildenstein sent him a neoclassical-style Picasso, a portrait of his first wife, Olga Khokhlova, a former dancer with the Ballets Russes. Mario was impressed by the tonal quality, the drawing, and the speed of the unerring brushwork. He said it was really just a very large sketch. He removed a yellow coating and brushed on a thin coat of diluted varnish, just enough to saturate the slight blanching always left by the removal of a varnish so that the surface remained semi-matte; he was convinced that the appearance was suitable for the picture, similar to how it looked when Picasso finished it. Once again Wildenstein sent it back to him, complaining that the surface should be evenly glossy. Mario was obliged to give it more varnish but said it spoiled the whole effect. Later, when someone complained about the varnish—as must have happened when everyone finally came to accept the importance of matte finishes—Wildenstein’s doubtlessly blamed Mario!

### ☞ Van Gogh’s *Iris* ☞

Every painting presents a unique problem. In 1980, through Wildenstein’s, the Joan Whitney Payson Museum at Westbrook College in Portland, Maine, sent Mario one of Van Gogh’s masterpieces, *The Iris*. The painting was on loan to the museum, along with other works that had been inherited by Mrs. Payson’s children upon her death in 1975. She had purchased the painting from Knoedler’s in 1947 for \$10,000. Mario said that it had never been varnished but was covered with thick dust and grime, and it took him a long time to remove this build-up from inside the thousands of brushstrokes, many of which had become very brittle. The canvas had never been lined and was full of bulges, since the linen had not been strong enough to resist the weight of

the passages of thick impasto as they dried, and it was falling off the stretcher.

For many years, Mario had worked closely with a reliner in New York, Francis Moro, for whom he had great respect. After lengthy consultation and experimentation, they devised a system using a bed of sand to protect the impasto during the relining.<sup>5</sup> It was very successful. After the painting was re-stretched, Mario brushed on a bit of Talens Rembrandt Retouching Varnish diluted with odorless spirits, because he felt the darks were badly sunk and needed to be saturated, and sent it back to Maine. As the decade of the eighties passed, prices for impressionist paintings rose to vertiginous heights. In 1987, the sale of one of Van Gogh's sunflower paintings for \$32 million at Christie's in London caused a huge stir both in the art world and in the public imagination.<sup>6</sup>

The Payson *Iris*es was a much more important painting, and in 1989, John Payson decided that he could no longer afford to keep it. Amidst wild speculation and excitement at Sotheby's, the hammer dropped at just under \$54 million, setting another record. The successful bidder was an Australian businessman, Alan Bond, who declared bankruptcy not long after and never paid for the picture. In 1990, Sotheby's sold it privately to the J. Paul Getty Museum for an undisclosed price.

The head of paintings conservation at the Getty, Andrea Rothe, heeded the recent trend for unvarnished paintings and decided to "de-varnish" it completely, even of the tiny amount that Mario had added. When we visited a couple of years later, Mario was disappointed with the result, because he thought that the shadows, painted with pure Prussian blue, looked dead and desiccated.

Van Gogh worked with ready-made tubes of paint made of pigments ground with drying oil. Typically, he squeezed the color directly from the tube, without using any diluent, to achieve the high impasto. For the darks, he habitually used pure Prussian blue. This blue-black pigment is very finely divided and requires a lot of medium to wet it out. Over time it becomes dry and crusty so that passages painted with it scatter the light, robbing the shadows





136. Vincent van Gogh, *The Irises*, 1889, oil on canvas, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California, 74.3 × 93.3 cm.

of their true depth. This also happens to black paint and other dark colors. The “wetness” of paint is one of the elements that affect our perception of distance, and painters are very conscious of different levels of gloss and how they affect not only color but the illusion of space in a composition.

The idea that all modern paintings should be left without varnish has now given way to the idea that certain passages may require a bit of adjusting to account for the changes in gloss that occur over time. Pissarro’s request ‘not to varnish’ his own high-key paintings is not necessarily applicable to every impressionist and post-impressionist painting, because not all painters of the period held that view.<sup>7</sup> For example, Vincent’s letters to his brother, Theo, often contain instructions for caring for his pictures after they arrived. He requested that the surfaces be oiled<sup>8</sup> after the paint was completely dry, but Theo, who died not long after his brother,

was not able to do this for the hundreds of canvases stored in rolls everywhere in his house.

☞ *Au Lapin Agile* ☞

During the period when Mario and I were working together in his studio, Wildenstein's sent him another Picasso, also from the Payson family: the 1905 *Au Lapin Agile*, named after a cabaret and bar in Montmartre where Picasso hung out, settling his bills with paintings.<sup>9</sup>

The picture depicts an ill, unhappy-looking Harlequin and a woman in profile having a drink, while a musician plays in the background. It was painted on a commercially prepared canvas with a thin, white ground. By the time Mario received the painting, it already had an old glue lining and was swamped with unevenly applied, thick, yellow, deteriorated varnish, which made the thinly painted image nearly illegible. Mario let me work on this haunting picture, while he hovered in the background, offering his advice on what turned out to be a problematic cleaning. The varnish was a natural resin, either dammar or mastic, and dissolved easily. After the first passes with swabs dipped in volatile solvents, the painting began to reveal itself as a loosely painted sketch in excellent condition. I doubt that it had ever been cleaned before. The background was painted in washes directly on the white preparation, which stood in for the highlights in some passages—for example, the flesh tone of the face and hand of the woman—creating a sharp contrast with the thick impasto of the features and the high collar of the red dress. At one point the red and yellow paint began to bleed. This unsettling occurrence, not uncommon in paintings of this period, would prove problematic in attaining an even surface. After letting the paint settle for several days so that any residual solvent would be released, I went back to the red and yellow using a mixture that evaporates instantly, removing as much varnish as I could in one pass, which did not disturb the color. All

the same, the surface looked blotchy and blanched because of the unevenly distributed residues of old varnish. Because of the way Picasso incorporated the white ground into the composition, it is clear that *Au Lapin Agile* was never intended to be varnished, so it was necessary to devise some way of achieving a matte look.<sup>10</sup> With local varnishing and wax spray, the result was as satisfactory as it could be under the circumstances, and the painting was returned to Wildenstein's. We heard nothing more about it until it appeared at auction.

The sale was accompanied by great publicity. It was 1989, the end of a glitzy decade fueled by junk bonds and leveraged buy-outs, when the frenzied market for impressionist, post-impressionist,



137. Pablo Picasso, *Au Lapin Agile*, 1905, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 99.1 × 100.3 cm.

and early modern paintings was at its peak. Art had become a currency. The late Robert Hughes reported the results of the sale in the cover story of the November 27 issue of *Time* magazine:

Up to last Wednesday night, Picasso's 1905 *Au Lapin Agile* was widely expected to become the most expensive painting ever sold at auction. . . . It was a far better picture than the Picasso self-portrait, "Yo Picasso", that had made a freakish \$47.85 million last May. . . . *Au Lapin Agile* could go, said rumor, to \$60 million. But in the end, publishing magnate Walter Annenberg bought it for \$40.7 million, and two or three people clapped. . . . Only \$40.7 million. And was that less or more than the GNP of a minor African state? On the other hand, wouldn't it buy only the under-cart of a B-2, and maybe the crew's potty? Or a dozen parties for Malcolm Forbes? That a night's art sale could make a total of \$269.5 million and yet leave its observers feeling slightly flat is perhaps a measure of the odd cultural values of our fin de siècle.<sup>11</sup>

The painting now belongs to the Metropolitan Museum, and whenever I visit the Annenberg Galleries I sidle up to it to scrutinize the surface. So far it hasn't altered. I used to be quite pleased with it, but I now find that the surface is too even and lacks liveliness without the contrast of gloss and matte passages. I am reminded of one of John Brealey's maxims, that "pictures always make a fool of you."

## CHAPTER 26

# Retirement

IN EARLY 1987, I resigned my position at the Metropolitan Museum because Mario and I wanted to spend more time together in Italy. Since moving to the United States in 1950, Mario had always spent his summers in Europe and made several other trips throughout the course of each year, mixing business with leisure, visiting friends and family. As a full-time employee, I couldn't accommodate this schedule, so I rearranged my life and left the Metropolitan with regret. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. I loved the institution and, after thirteen years, it had in many ways become a surrogate family.

At that time, Mario's own career had slowed down. He suffered from acute pain in his right shoulder and arm, due partly to arthritis and to the wear on his joints and nerves from repetitive movements. He winced every time he put on a jacket or coat. Many of his old clients had retired, and the younger dealers worked with restorers of their own age. Although he couldn't keep up the pace that the



138. At our farmhouse in Troghi, 1994. (Photo by Sonja Bullaty)

market demanded, Mario still occasionally took on projects while I continued to survey the dispersed Kress Collection.

In 1988, a colleague from the Met, Margaret Holben Ellis, asked me to teach the core course in painting conservation at New York University's Conservation Center. Eventually, I combined teaching with the conservation needs of the Kress paintings in the regional galleries and, in 1989, with the support of the Kress Foundation, began the Kress Program in Paintings Conservation, which offered study and restoration of Kress paintings to museums that did not have their own conservation departments. Mario's interest and collaboration in this endeavor was invaluable to me, the students, and the Kress Foundation. We also found that with a more flexible schedule we were able to look for a country house not too far from Florence.



## ✿ Troghi ✿

We chose Florence because Mario's friend, Renzo Ravà spent 6 months of the year there. The two men were inseparable. Finding a house that suited us turned out to be more difficult than we expected. The cost of *case coloniche* (old farmhouses) had risen, and they were becoming scarce. After much looking, we found a *casa colonica* with a large *fenile* (barn) in the Val d'Arno near a town called Troghi in the commune of Rignano sull'Arno. The house was structurally sound but had been abandoned for many years and required a great deal of restoration.

The simple farmhouse is very old. It is indicated on a sixteenth-century map, and church documents record two families living there or, in one entry, twenty-seven "souls" so it must have been quite crowded. The original dwelling probably consisted of two rooms, one over the other, with the ground floor for the animals. There is a typical common room upstairs, with an enormous fireplace furnished with stone benches so that people could keep warm after the fire was spent. Rooms had been added over the centuries, so that it is a bit crooked.

Someone had begun to restore the house twenty years earlier. The *geometra* (surveyor) told us that the local council had halted the work on the house, because the owner had opened a large window (no alterations to the existing structure of these farmhouses are allowed). In Italy, there is a remedy for such situations called the *condono*—a sort of pardon for building violations, declared every so often when the government needs money. There had been a *condono* since the window violation, which we were able to satisfy by paying a fine.

Like most farmhouses in Tuscany, ours had been part of a large estate that consisted of the main house, Villa Antica, situated on the top of a hill, whose origins date back to at least the eleventh century when it was a branch of the Cistercian community of Vallombrosa, and twenty-four tenant farmers' houses like ours in



the valley below. On the crest of another hill, there is a church, San Cristoforo in Perticaia, which has been rebuilt many times over the centuries. The Lombards colonized the area in the fourth century and Troghi is probably a Germanic name. It is thought that the original sanctuary dated from the eighth century. A neighbor found a holy water font in the woods, with a primitive image of a man that resembles some of the carvings in the ninth-century church in Gropina, just across the river. Perhaps it came from the first San Cristoforo.

From the church, there is a breathtaking bird's-eye view down the Valley of the Arno, the landscape that Leonardo often painted. Mario said, "The priests always pick the best locations" ("*Vedi, i preti hanno sempre i posti più belli!*"). An aged farmer still worked the land nearby and told us that before the war, hundreds of farm workers came from miles around to walk up to the church on Sunday. There were once shortcuts, well-trodden trails through the woods, but most of them are now overgrown.

Apart from its proximity to Florence, we liked this area because it was not overrun by foreigners, like the Chianti. Mario drove into town every morning to have coffee, buy his favorite newspaper, *La Repubblica*, and chat with the owner of the bar and the *pensionati* who hung out in front of the local recreation association. He was perfectly content chatting with the carpenters and construction workers, and preferred their company to that of more fashionable people. The townspeople knew that he was a famous art restorer and liked him all the more for his simplicity and ease with them, a quality described as being "alla mano."

Mario had a special rapport with the stonemasons and liked to plan improvements to the property. He had a large circular wall constructed to make a garden and visually connect the two buildings. Renzo, who liked to tease Mario, called it 'the Pincio', one of the seven hills of Rome. Mario, however, was undeterred and continued to design more walls, a courtyard, several stairs, and finally the swimming pool, once we had the necessary permissions. Since the surrounding countryside has been designated as part of

the Italian cultural patrimony these were not easy to obtain. Many government agencies had to be consulted. When the pool was ready to be tiled, he chose a classic blue color, and the workmen, taking advantage of the clement weather, quickly began cementing them in place. When an inspector visited to make sure the work was according to the landscape regulations, the tiling was more than half finished. He informed Mario that only muted green, gray, and ivory color tiles were allowed. Mario thought this was nonsense and said to him that he was eighty-five years old and had seen many houses in his lifetime, and the swimming pools were always *blue*. Had the inspector ever seen a *gray* swimming pool, he demanded? "Ridiculous!" Mario said firmly, with considerable indignation, and brushed him off. We never heard anything about it again.

After living in New York for so long, Mario had little patience for Italian bureaucracy. If a foreigner criticized Italy, he would have been offended, but he himself exploded from time to time saying, "*Che paese di merda!*" ("What a shit country!") Or when someone cut corners or took off the extra days that bookended a holiday, called the *ponte*, he would mutter cynically, "*Il paese di Bengodi!*", referring to the town in the *Decameron* where the grapevines are strung with ropes of sausages, the mountains are made of parmesan cheese, and the river is the best Vernaccia wine.

On July 16, 1991, we were married in Rignano. Our close friends, Renzo Ravà and Katharine Baetjer, were our witnesses. Katharine's husband, Jim, acted as photographer and their two sons, James and George, joined in the proceedings. The boys had always called us "Dianmario" and the youngest one told his mother that he did not understand why we were going to the town hall because we were already married, which was true. It was a very casual ceremony and took place in the library of the *comune*, which featured a large rubber plant. The mayor, in a polo shirt and khakis, officiated. When it was over we went home and had lunch.

☞ “Senza Fine” ☞

Mario and I had a favorite song, one that we heard being played on a piano one night in the piazza of Bergamo Alta during our first summer together. It is a waltz called “Senza Fine” (Without End), which is not well-known, even though it is by Gino Paoli, perhaps the finest composer of Italian popular music of the postwar period. Mario told me that Paoli had written the song for the seventeen-year-old Stefania Sandrelli, with whom he had fallen in love. When their story ended, Mario said, the songwriter had attempted to kill himself. It was romantic and tragic, and I knew that Mario was thinking of the bittersweet aspect of our relationship due to the difference in our ages. He seemed to have tears in his eyes. Even though it is an obscure tune, since Mario died I occasionally hear it being played, often in the most unlikely contexts, and it always makes my heart stop.

There is a tree of black figs behind the *fenile*, and in late August, there is an abundance of the succulent red fruit in their dark purple skins. The birds competed with me to get the ripe ones. One day in 2002, I spotted a good crop at just the right stage.



139. Mario at ninety-five. (Photo by Pasquale Galasso)

I climbed onto the roof to pick them, and arranged them on a plate. I brought them to the studio, where Mario proceeded to paint a wonderful still life, tonal and hushed, in just a few hours. It was the last painting he ever made.

☞ New York ☞

As much as we loved our house, it was rather isolated and a bit gloomy in the winter. Mario's health was beginning to fail, and I thought that he could get better care in New York. In 2001, I found a two-bedroom apartment on the Upper East Side. It was in terrible shape and had to be completely renovated. We had a wonderful time choosing wall colors, bathroom tiles, and cabinets, hanging the paintings and buying a few pieces of furniture at auction. As usual, Mario engaged with the workmen, who adored him.

Soon after we moved in, Mario decided that he no longer wanted to go out. He was too short of breath to walk and too proud to be seen in a wheelchair. I brought him exhibition catalogues, which we looked at together and he later studied, and that seemed to be enough for him. The apartment is on a high floor, and he loved watching the sunsets over Central Park. In the summers, we still went to Troghi, where Mario said to me one morning: "Do you know how much I love you?" I said, "I love you more." I can see and hear him now, looking at me with his extraordinary blue eyes.

Mario died in our apartment in New York on January 28, 2006. He was almost ninety-nine. I thought I was prepared, but I wasn't. I felt like my heart had been ripped out.

Mario liked to quote old adages. One always broke my heart slightly every time he said it, even though for him it was just a silly rhyme:

*L'insalata vien nell'orto*  
*Maramà, perché sei morto*  
 (There is salad in the garden,  
 Maramà, why did you die?)

## EPILOGUE

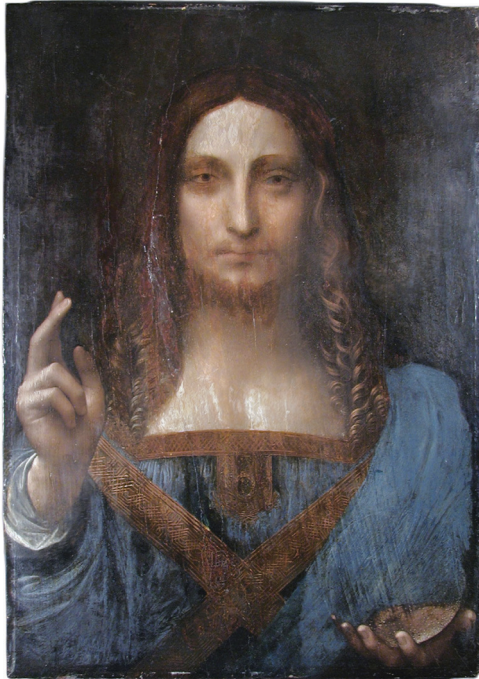
### *The Salvator Mundi*

IN APRIL 2005, an old friend, Robert Simon, a Renaissance scholar and dealer in old master paintings, called and asked if he could stop by with a painting. At that time, I had an easel at home, because I thought that it would interest Mario if I were working on a painting. Robert arrived with the picture, which portrayed Christ as the *Salvator Mundi*, the Savior of the World. I put it on the easel, and he pointed out the exceptional quality of the blessing hand, a passage that was well-preserved and not repainted like the rest of the composition. I rarely worked on paintings that were not part of the Kress Collection and, evidently, I wasn't all that impressed at first, because I suggested he take it to one of my former pupils. Robert said, "I think this needs a grown-up," so I went to fetch some cotton wool and some solvents. I prepared a mild mixture of acetone and mineral spirits, commonly used to remove natural resin varnishes, and, rolling some cotton on a stick to make a large swab, began to clean the painting. The varnish was

## EPILOGUE

gloppy and thick and dissolved easily, as did most of the weird retouching that made the head of Christ look like a clown's mask. While I was working, a broken-up pink shape emerged, just to the right of the thumb of the blessing hand. Robert had already seen what he suspected might be a pentimento in that area in a photo he had taken with his digital camera on the night setting, which uses infrared wave lengths that penetrate the upper layers of paint.

The sixteenth-century panel was very thin and had an irregular surface, partly due to the thin ground that revealed the marks of the tools used to dress the wood. It had been glued to another board, which had been reinforced by a nineteenth-century cradle. Once the varnish was removed, a wide, off-white fill made of gesso and glue was exposed, running from top to bottom, and covering



140. The *Salvator Mundi* as I first saw it in 2005, after the Cook Collection restoration had been removed.

some of the original paint. I softened the gesso putty with moisture and pushed it off with a blunt knife, recovering a modest amount of original paint. It became apparent that the generously applied fill material concealed a check in the wood and a disfiguring knot. The two sides of the check had sprung at some point, leaving not only a gap but also a significant step. The sloping fill had helped conceal this difference in level but, unfortunately, it was not the only measure that had been taken to level the uneven surface: at some point in the past the step had been shaved down from the front with a sharp plane. Raw wood was revealed along the check, and adjacent areas of paint that were not affected had also been shaved away. It was shocking. (See Plate xxiv)

After Robert left, I showed the painting to Mario. I didn't know how he would respond to it, but he immediately took it in his hands and looked at it for a long time. After a while, he said that it was by a very great artist, but he didn't know who—a painter a generation after Leonardo—and that part of its power derived from the fact that it was just slightly larger than life. It was the first time I heard



141. Leonardo da Vinci, red chalk preparatory study of drapery folds, Windsor Castle.



the name Leonardo mentioned in connection with the painting. In retrospect, I realized that the Leonardo that Mario knew was the young artist of *Ginevra* and the Uffizi *Baptism*—he had never focused on the few late works, which are quite different. When I next spoke to Robert, he showed me images of some of the many versions of the *Salvator Mundi* by pupils and followers of Leonardo, of varying quality, and an etching of Leonardo's painting made in the early seventeenth century. The original painting by Leonardo had been lost for centuries. Two beautiful drawings in red chalk on red paper, studies for the right arm and the drapery, were preserved in the English Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.

Robert's painting had been in a famous English collection formed by Sir Francis Cook in the late nineteenth century, where it was catalogued as "after Boltraffio," and had been sold in the 1950's for £48, or about \$135. It was not difficult to understand why it had fetched so little, since the head was almost entirely repainted. Other passages, however—especially the blessing hand—had not been covered up, and I still find it strange that of the many experts who combed through the Cook Collection when it was sold off after the war no one noticed this.

I didn't see the painting again for almost a year. For many months, it was with a panel restorer, who freed it from the marouflaged board and cradle, so that the gap along the check could be realigned. Mario and I went to Troghi, which turned out to be a terrible journey because of Mario's compromised health, but he was always happy there and I didn't know what was the best decision to take. We returned to New York in September and in late January 2006 Mario died.

My grief was profound and unrelenting. For months, I could do nothing but cry, although I had two courses to teach, which forced me to pull myself together a bit. I subsisted on white wine, sedatives, and sleeping pills—a dangerous combination. Even though Mario was almost ninety-nine when he died, we had become almost the same person over our twenty-three years together. Half of me was gone. He had been a lover, companion, father figure, and

THE SALVATOR MUNDI

mentor, and became, at the end, like a child over whom I hovered anxiously every moment. I was completely inconsolable. I couldn't look at his photograph or read his memoir without sobbing. My friend, Katharine, who had introduced us and been a witness at our wedding, helped me through this awful period.

The *Salvator Mundi* returned to me in November 2006. The surface was much improved. I knew by then that the painting could possibly be the lost Leonardo and, in hindsight, it should have been obvious the moment it was cleaned, but there is a vast gulf between possibly and probably. There are many paintings that circulate in the art world that the owner believes to be by a great master. Accompanied by huge dossiers of opinions and scientific tests, they travel from one expert to another for years, often



142. The *Salvator Mundi* as it looked when it was in the Cook Collection. Note the hands and the wonderfully preserved curls hanging over the left shoulder.

## EPILOGUE

decades. Occasionally, one of them is alleged to be a Leonardo, by whom there are only fifteen or sixteen paintings. For such a rare and famous artist, the bar of authenticity is set very high, and no serious person wants to risk making a fool of themselves by proposing that a painting is by Leonardo unless they are 100 percent certain and can make an airtight case. From the material standpoint, indications of the painting's autograph status were, from the beginning, implied by the number of changes the artist had made. Apart from the pentimento of the thumb, it became obvious that other shifts had occurred before the composition was finally realized. Notably, the stole had been moved down and to the left, and where the paint was worn, a first idea for the embroidery decoration could be seen quite clearly.

Perhaps I didn't want to fully believe that the painting was by Leonardo as a self-protective measure. I was working on it by myself, with Robert's excellent eye as an advisor, as if it were any ordinary, battered-up, sixteenth-century Italian painting whereas a restorer working on a painting by Leonardo in a museum would



143. Infrared reflectography (IRR) detail of the blessing hand showing a pentimento of the thumb.

have extensive backup, or even a committee overseeing the work. Fear, like over-confidence, is detrimental to a complex restoration.

I worked slowly on the losses in the face, using a vibrant pink, similar to the actual undercolor of the original flesh tones, to cover the exposed white preparation and wood that had been revealed when the painting had been planed down. This gave me a better understanding of the structure of the face. With tiny brushes, I began to add the upper layers. One fear was useful to retain: that of covering some of the original, thereby losing small clues about the final modeling. I wasn't entirely alone. As I worked, I carried on a conversation with Mario in my head. Everything he had ever taught me came into play and, when I made a mistake, I could hear him say, "The nose is crooked," or, "He looks like he has a toothache." I began to yearn for this voice and worked sometimes for eight-hour stretches, as if in a trance. I became friendly with the guard in my studio at the Conservation Center, with whom I had worked out a deal to stay until the very last minute. I went home exhausted, and Mario stayed with me until I fell asleep. I had conjured him into being, and I know that I couldn't have done the restoration without his help. The mystical power of Leonardo's conception added to this sensation.

One evening, in late 2007 or early 2008, as I was nearing the end of the restoration, I was working on a particularly difficult area in the damaged upper lip. The transitions were so subtle that they were invisible up close and only resolved from a distance. There were no brush marks in the original paint—it looked as if it had been blown on. The Louvre had published a book called *Mona Lisa: Inside the Painting* with high-resolution images of details of her features. I was studying her mouth, and all at once, I could no longer hide from the obvious. The artist who painted her was the same hand that had painted the *Salvator Mundi*. It was the first time that I had permitted myself to entertain that notion. My breath caught, and with trembling hands, I covered the painting with a black cloth from the photo studio. I went home and wrote to Robert. He had evidently already decided that the painting was

by Leonardo, and my announcement that I was completely sure that it was, indeed, by him did not come as a surprise.

Of course, Robert's opinion and my epiphany did not make the painting into a Leonardo. Only the experts could decide. One of them, Carmen Bambach, a drawings specialist, was at the Metropolitan Museum, and we asked her to look at the painting. She sat in front of it for a long time, then asked us what we thought it was. Robert remained silent, and, having nothing to lose because I am not an art historian, I finally said, "I think it is by Leonardo." She paused and said, "Well, it's not by Boltraffio." Boltraffio is Leonardo's best pupil, an infinitely refined artist, but he has his own personality, which is different from the master's. Just invoking his name meant that the only other possible painter was Leonardo himself. I finished what I had to do over the next two weeks, had the painting photographed, and Robert took it back to his gallery—this time in a fitted case. He showed it to a friend, Nicholas Penny, the director of the National Gallery in London, who agreed with him about the attribution and told Keith Christiansen, curator of paintings of the Metropolitan Museum, an excellent connoisseur, that he should have a look at it. Although distressed by the picture's state, Christiansen agreed with the attribution. Neither Penny nor Christiansen were Leonardo specialists.

As fate would have it, the National Gallery was planning an exhibition of Leonardo at the court of Milan for 2011. Penny suggested that Robert bring *the Salvator Mundi* to London where it could be viewed and evaluated. The painting was set up on an easel in the conservation studio where, one by one, Leonardo experts from around the world came to study it. They all concluded that the *Salvator Mundi* was the lost Leonardo, which is something of a miracle, given how contentious scholars can be.

When the painting returned to New York, I saw it on many occasions and became increasingly dissatisfied with my hastily concluded restoration. This is inevitable, especially when the painting is a damaged work by a great artist. Although I was aware

of this, I itched to have it back. Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* in London had just been cleaned, and I made an appointment to see it. It is relatively well-preserved and, at that time, was the only late Leonardo that was not encumbered with centuries-old, thick, yellow, decayed coats of varnish like the *Mona Lisa* and *Saint John the Baptist* in the Louvre. When I saw it, I was struck by the richness and depth of Leonardo's blacks and realized that the principal problem of the *Salvator Mundi* was that the image was imprisoned by the nineteenth-century, sludge-colored repaint of the background. In a few areas, mostly around the contours of the figure, the original deep black was visible, and I knew from one of the cross sections that Leonardo had paid great attention to it, building it up with four layers consisting of two different blacks, and black mixed with vermilion. I explained this to Robert, who immediately understood.

The *Salvator Mundi* was returned to me, and I was overjoyed to see it again. There were two solutions for the background: either to glaze the brown sludge to make it darker, or to remove it, on the chance that a good portion of the original background could be recovered. With great apprehension, I decided to remove the overpaint, not only because of its color but also because it was extremely thick in comparison to the original paint. I slowly removed the muddy brown under the microscope with a small scalpel. Some of the original black paint had survived, although, as I continued, I found that there was not as much as I had hoped. Most of the background had been harshly scraped and smeared unevenly with gesso putty, which explained the thickness of the repaint. It looked horrifying, with exposed wood and gesso and only small islands of the original black. It was the first time in the course of the restoration that I was truly terrified. There was no alternative. I would have to repaint much of the background.

For retouching, I use high-quality dry pigments, and I had a number of different blacks to work with—bone black, which Leonardo was known to favor, and a sixty-year-old tin of finely ground, pure ivory black that I had inherited from Mario, which is no longer made. I had never used it but suddenly remembered

Mario talking about how special it was. All the leftover colors from Mario's studio were in boxes, because there was not enough cabinet space for them. With fingers crossed, I began to search for it, and it appeared, just as he had told me. After I had polished and distressed my new paint, the result was reasonably satisfactory, at least when compared to the previous iteration. The difference it made to the painting was astounding: the great head surged forward and became much more powerful. I allowed myself to think that the decision I had taken was not so terrible after all. With the figure now more prominent and three-dimensional, some minor areas of loss and wear began to clamor for attention. This sequence is an essential part of the process of restoring a damaged painting.

Luke Syson, the curator of the National Gallery's Leonardo exhibition, asked to borrow the painting, notwithstanding some caviling from colleagues about exhibiting a work that was on the market. The discovery of a lost Leonardo was too important to ignore. In August 2011, *Art News* broke the story of the painting's discovery, after which articles appeared everywhere. CNN International made a short documentary called *The Lost Painting*, which was shown concurrently with the opening of the exhibition in early November, *Leonardo: Painter at the Court of Milan*. Robert and I figured prominently in the film. The correspondent spoke with me about the painting in the studio at the Conservation Center. He asked me how I felt when the painting was finished, after I had worked on it for such a long time. I paused. The answer that came spontaneously was that it was like a death, because I had felt so close to Mario while I was working on it, but I stopped myself and said instead, "It was like a break-up."

I arrived at the opening at the National Gallery in London in a state of great anxiety about how the *Salvator Mundi* would look in the company of other, better preserved, paintings by Leonardo. It was in the very last gallery. I caught my breath when I finally saw the painting through the crowd of people viewing and discussing it. It was beautifully lit and seemed to glow from within, as if with pride at the fact that it had survived so much abuse and ignorance



and was finally taking its rightful place. At that moment, my doubts disappeared. I saw the *Salvator Mundi* again a number of times before the exhibition closed in February. The power of Leonardo's image of a divine being, a god, affected many people. I received messages from people unknown to me, saying that the painting had touched them and that I was holy because I had brought this image back. Some people wept in front of it. I understood perfectly why this painting could stir such emotions. I believe that, before it was damaged, it was Leonardo's supreme achievement as a painter. Pietro Marani, a Leonardo scholar in Milan, now believes it dates from the last years of Leonardo's life, around 1515. (See Plate xxv)

I had hoped the painting would stay in the United States, but unfortunately there was a great deal of chatter about the condition, many curators and dealers disdaining it as a "wreck." After a few false starts, it became clear that there would be no American buyer for the painting, one of only sixteen easel paintings, by my count, fully accepted by the majority of scholars as primarily from the artist's hand. Sometime in April 2013, Robert told me that the painting was being sold to a European who wished to remain anonymous and was acting through Sotheby's private sales division.

It subsequently emerged that Sotheby's buyer was a Swiss shipping and storage tycoon, Yves Bouvier, who was flipping paintings to a Russian billionaire, Dmitry Rybolovlev, at a fifty percent markup. By the time that Rybolovlev learned the truth, the middleman had pocketed one billion dollars.<sup>1</sup> The Russian collector appointed a new agent to look after his interests, the New York art advisor, Sandy Heller, and launched numerous lawsuits against Bouvier, which continue to wind their way through the courts in several countries. Rybolovlev's humiliation and chagrin at being fleeced, as he saw it, caused him to sell a number of the purchases he had made through Bouvier, often at a loss, it has been said.

In July 2017 I received a message that someone wanted to talk to me about Leonardo. I was occupied with other things and at first ignored it until, later in the day, I deciphered the name of

the caller, which had been misspelled: the Sandy Heller Group. I called immediately and was told that the *Salvator Mundi* would be arriving in New York shortly and I was not to inform anyone. On Wednesday evening, July 19, the painting was delivered to the Conservation Center under guard in great secrecy and was stored in the vault. On Thursday, two young men from Christie's, Loïc Gouzer and Alex Rotter, co-chairs of the Post-War and Contemporary Art department, came to look at it. Despite the fact that it was somewhat difficult to see the painting because of the reflections from the glass, Loïc was clearly moved by the image.

Apparently, the *Salvator Mundi* would be sold once the details had been worked out. I was pleased because since the National Gallery exhibition had closed in January 2012, no one had been able to see the painting and I hoped that this time the owner would share it with the public and scholars. Rybolovlev, as everyone knew by now because of the lawsuits, had paid 127 million dollars for the painting. A deal was brokered: the *Salvator Mundi* would be auctioned at Christie's on November 15 as the highlight of the modern and contemporary sales with a 100 million dollar reserve, which meant that the consignor would receive that amount whether or not the painting sold. The news was successfully kept under wraps until the announcement was made at a press conference on October 10th. Christie's sent the painting on a two-week world tour, about which I had some concerns, but various precautions had been taken: it was shipped and exhibited behind glass in special packaging that controlled the relative humidity and an exceptionally well built double crate had been constructed to cushion the vibrations. A museum would not have agreed to this but the painting was on the market, and I realized that it was essential that prospective buyers in far-flung locations could examine it in person. My Kress Fellow, Shan Kuang, and I supervised the reframing and packing at Christie's. The crate was painted black. Tears came to my eyes as I watched the lid go on.

Hundreds of thousands of people lined up to see it in Hong Kong, London, San Francisco and New York. Most of them had

never seen a painting by Leonardo in their lives and might never see one again. Christie's produced a video of viewers looking at the *Salvator Mundi* called "The World is Watching." A camera mounted under the frame captured the reactions of faces in the crowd: enraptured, tearful, meditative as they gazed. I was elated that so many others shared the emotions that I felt about the *Salvator Mundi*.

It was inevitable that a storm of criticism and mud-slinging would erupt, mainly from social media, but also fueled by articles in such responsible print outlets as the *New York Times* and *New York Magazine*, which quoted self-described "experts" who knew nothing either about Leonardo or restoration. Robert Simon, Christie's, and I weathered this together and refrained from responding in kind although at times the remarks about the restoration were wounding. Even though cleaned state images had been published in Christie's catalogue, a former museum director who should have known better posted that 80 percent of the painting was by me! I might have been flattered by the idea that I could imitate Leonardo da Vinci well enough to fool the experts if it were not so patently absurd. I knew precisely what I had done and no one was more critical of its flaws than I was myself.

The night of November 15, the auction room was filled to overflowing, and many people had been turned away. The *Salvator Mundi* was the ninth painting in the sale. I held my breath, fearing that the reserve might not be met, but the bidding swiftly overtook the 100 million dollar minimum. The price climbed, sometimes by small increments, punctuated by dramatic pauses, to 200, 300, 350 million dollars. Christie's experts on the dais manned the phones, tending to two clients who continued to vie with each other up to 370 million dollars. In a stunningly bold move, the next bid vaulted to 400 million and the auctioneer gaveled the lot down. In less than ten minutes every record for a work of art sold at auction had been shattered.

"Vindication" was the word on everyone's lips at Christie's. For weeks the auction house, the painting's attribution, and its restoration had been questioned, mocked and vilified, but nothing

## EPILOGUE

could change the fact that the *Salvator Mundi*, which had been nearly lost to the world, had triumphed.

Weeks passed. Everyone wondered who had bought the picture. On December 7, the *New York Times* reported that a minor Saudi prince was the buyer of record. In less than 24 hours the *Wall Street Journal* published a scoop: US intelligence had confirmed that the little-known prince had merely acted as a proxy for the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia. The purchase of an image of Jesus, no matter who had painted it, had potentially dangerous political ramifications and the Saudis hastened to issue a denial, claiming that the Crown Prince was actually a stand-in for the Emir of Abu Dhabi where an acclaimed new museum, planned in collaboration with the Louvre, had just opened. The Louvre Abu Dhabi immediately corroborated this news.

I was relieved that the *Salvator Mundi* would be in a museum rather than a bank vault and in the days before the sale I had rather hoped that the Louvre Abu Dhabi, with its vision of representing all cultures and religions, would provide a home for this most universal of all western paintings. As Emmanuel Macron said at the museum's opening, beauty can fight against hatred even when all else has failed. I know Leonardo would approve.

## APPENDIX I

## Technical Matters and Essential Principles

FOR THE BENEFIT of readers who might not be knowledgeable about the materials and restoration techniques used in old master paintings, I provide here some basic explanations about their manufacture and the degradation caused by chemical reactions within the complex matrices of pigments, mediums, adhesives, and varnishes of which they are composed. Often these individual components change over time in different ways in relation to one another, making it difficult, and, at times, impossible, for the viewer to perceive the artist's original intent.

### ☞ Tempera Painting ☞

Italian paintings from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century are usually called “temperas.” This word can be misleading, because tempera is used to describe both paints bound with egg yolk as well as with gum, animal glue, and other aqueous mediums. It is, therefore, desirable to make some distinctions within this broad category. The term “distemper,” for example, refers to paint made from pigments and some sort of water-soluble adhesive, usually animal glue. In the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance in Italy, Flanders, and elsewhere, this medium was used to paint directly onto finely woven linen, *tüchlein*, that was not prepared

with a ground. Most surviving examples date from the fourteenth century, but it is thought that other paintings in this method existed earlier.<sup>1</sup> The technique is so fragile that only a few examples of work in this medium have survived, even though the original output was enormous. Many of these paintings on textile were ephemera—created as stage sets, parade or processional banners, and other decorations. However, a number of important artists, Dürer and Mantegna, for example, chose this technique for its particular aesthetic qualities and the effects that could be achieved



144. Dieric Bouts, *The Resurrection*, ca. 1455, distemper on linen, Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California, 89.9 × 74.3 cm. One of a group of relatively well-preserved *tüchleins* by the artist. The blue strip on the top was evidently covered by a framing element and retained its original color, while the rest of the sky has altered—a dramatic instance of the sorts of changes in original appearance that are not uncommon in paintings of every school and period.<sup>2</sup>



with it: the colors dried very matte and fresh, as in manuscript illuminations; the paint could be handled broadly, and the unprimed cloth absorbed some of the medium and gave the surface a velvety look. As a practical matter, these works of art were also easier to transport than wood panels. Today, one can only imagine the brilliance and refinement distemper paintings originally possessed. Most survivals have darkened and lost some of the modeling due to chemical alteration of certain pigments, and washing, relining, and varnishing. The damage cannot be undone.

A more permanent medium for painting was made from pigments ground in water and bound with egg yolk. The same pigments were used with both binders, because, until the nineteenth century, the painter's palette was limited to a small number of colors. The commonly adopted ones are easily enumerated. Earth pigments are stable, plentiful, and inexpensive, and come in red, yellow, green, and brown colors of varying hue, tone, and opacity but were not very vibrant. For more brilliant effects, there were only a few other possibilities. Red pigments include the brilliant color known as cinnabar (the naturally occurring mineral) or vermilion (the synthetic form); red lead, the orangey color still used to paint bridges; red lakes, rich, and translucent like strawberry jam. Other lake pigments made from vegetable dyes were also used for glazing, but they faded easily. A handful of blue pigments were available: the copper-containing azurite, made from the crushed-up mineral; some synthetic copper blues; ultramarine, rare and expensive, extracted by an elaborate process from the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli; smalt, a pigment related to glass, that easily loses its color over time; the dark, ink-blue indigo from the woad plant. For green pigments, there was crushed-up malachite, the gritty verdigris, and the beautiful, but unstable emerald-hued copper resinate derived from it. Yellows were more plentiful: there were several shades of stable, brilliant, and opaque pigments based on lead, tin, and antimony; the bright-yellow arsenic-containing orpiment and the related realgar, a brilliant orange color. Lead white was ubiquitous because of its opacity, stability, and fine

particle size. Occasionally, white made from chalk or gypsum was used—especially for painting on lime plaster, whose alkalinity caused white lead to darken. Several black pigments made from carbonized organic matter such as bone, ivory, and plants were available. A few rich browns and blacks based on tarry substances were useful for oil painting. While only a few of these materials actually decolorized over time, a number of them were subject to other degradation processes, such as darkening or blanching.

Most of the medieval and Renaissance Italian paintings that have survived were painted using the medium of egg tempera. These works were painted on a prepared wood panel. The process was lengthy and involved as much artisanship as artistry. Various documents exist that record the process. After obtaining a commission from a patron, the painter ordered a wood support from a specialized carpenter or wood carver, who constructed the panel or altarpiece from planks of seasoned wood and attached the molding and other framing elements, which could be quite elaborate. The kind of wood depended on the region: poplar was ubiquitous in Tuscany, while some types of clear pine, cypress, or fruitwood were more common in the north. Often, for large works, painter and carpenter collaborated on the design. For smaller, less important works, the carpenter might have some ready-made supports already on hand. The flat part of the panel was coated with many layers of gesso, an inert white powder made from gypsum bound with animal glue. (In Northern Europe, the grounds tended to be chalk.) There were two types of gesso: a thicker, coarser variety called *gesso grosso*, which was used to build up the surface, filling in the irregularities in the hand-hewn wood, followed by many layers of the fine *gesso sottile*. For the moldings and other decorative elements—in order not to clog the delicate carving—only *gesso sottile* was used. By the time the many coats of gesso had been scraped and sanded, the surface was as smooth as ivory.

Up to this stage, the work could have been done by the panel maker. Now, the support was ready for the painter. The next step was to transfer the design to the gesso, typically using a *cartone*,

described in Chapter 23. The outlines and main features of the design were pierced with sharp tools, or “pricked,” to make tiny holes through which black powder was dusted, or “pounced,” leaving a series of dots called *spolvero*. These were then reinforced with black chalk or a liquid drawing medium. Sometimes there are incisions rather than pounced lines, and there were other methods for copying the design onto the panel to make copies.

Once the design was laid in, the gilding could begin. The areas to be gilded, including the moldings, were coated with a few thin layers of a clay-like substance called bole; it was usually red, but other colors were used on occasion. Giotto, for example, often used green bole. Bole provided a cushion so that the thin leaves of gold could be burnished with a hard, smooth object—such as an animal



145. Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, *Altarpiece*, 1402, tempera on panel, Church of San Domenico, Cortona, 208 × 251 cm.

tooth or agate—until it took on the appearance of solid metal. The impression was heightened by the warm color of the bole. After the gold background was burnished, it was elaborated with designs made by metal punches of different shapes and sizes, and could be glazed with translucent lake pigments to achieve results that are truly resplendent. It is not known if this phase of the work was done by specialists or by the painter himself. In the fifteenth century, a number of artists had been first trained as goldsmiths. I suspect that as the gold backgrounds became more elaborate in the latter part of the fourteenth century, in a big studio the task was carried out by skilled artisans working with the painter to develop the designs.

Egg tempera is relatively viscous and dries quickly. It had to be made fresh every few days, because the yolks would begin to rot and stink. It was painted out with small brushes in short strokes in many gradations between shadow and highlight using hatched lines. Sometimes, especially in Siena, passages depicting costly fabrics, such as brocades, were painted on top of gold leaf and then partly scraped off to form designs. This technique is called *sgraffito*. To decorate the edges of garments or embellish angels' wings, patterns were often drawn on the paint layer with a sticky liquid called a mordant, which could be clear or colored, an oil, resin, or an aqueous layer such as fish glue, ox gall, or garlic juice. The gold leaf was laid over this at just the right moment and stuck only to the mordant. After it had fully dried, the residue was brushed away.

A few different kinds of final coatings are mentioned in contemporary handbooks: mixtures of oil and resin, but often the use of beaten egg white, known as glair, was recommended as an initial protective coating. Egg tempera dries very quickly superficially, but other processes involving the oily component take much longer, resulting in a bond between the paint and the original coatings at their interface. The egg white becomes slightly gray over time (and has frequently been mistaken for dirt in the past), but it cannot be removed without damaging the paint. Often, the final modeling is lost or abraded in ill-considered cleanings.

Paintings that retain their egg white sealant are, by contrast, in marvelous condition with a slightly gray patina from the egg white. The Nardo di Cione in the National Gallery in Washington is a wonderful example and is one of the best-preserved paintings of the fourteenth century.



146. Nardo di Cione, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1360, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 76 × 66.4 cm. Individual parallel brushstrokes are used to build up the form in a typical egg tempera technique. The orange dress of the Child has been gilded, painted, sgraffitoed, and punched. The dress is red lake; the blue is lapis lazuli. The only color that has altered is the copper green of the lining of the blue cloak, which has darkened to a blackish brown. Originally, it would have been an emerald color. The border of the blue cloak is decorated with mordant gilding.

## Oil Painting

While Italian painters of the early Renaissance were creating masterpieces with egg tempera, their contemporaries in the Netherlands were using drying oil as a medium. Unlike tempera, which initially sets quickly by evaporation, oil paint dries slowly and can be manipulated so that different hues blend seamlessly into one another, giving a more naturalistic effect. The colors are richer and more saturated, with greater depth in the shadows. Oil paint is also more translucent than egg tempera and can be applied in many thin layers to create illusion with the use of translucent dark glazes and light scumbles (an opaque layer to give a softer effect). These visual effects increase over time as the complex molecules of the medium continue to polymerize.

The reason for the greater translucency of oil paints is the difference in the refractive index of egg yolk and linseed or walnut oil. The refractive index is a measure of the degree of transparency or opacity of a given material, which is determined by the way light is bent, or refracted, as it travels through it. Each material has a different refractive index (RI), which is expressed as a number. For substances with more than one constituent, such as paint, the closer the numbers are, the more transparent the substance will appear and vice-versa. Egg yolk has an RI of 1.35, while linseed oil is 1.49. Pigments have higher index numbers, varying from 1.56 for chalk, to a range between 2.9 and 3.25 for vermilion. The refractive index of drying oil increases as it ages, approaching that of the more translucent pigments. A demonstration of this is neatly illustrated by a painting in the Metropolitan Museum, Matthew Pratt's *The American School*. The subject is a group of American painters in Benjamin West's London studio. The artist at the easel holds a palette and is about to commence painting. The odd thing is that there is apparently no drawing or sketch of any kind on the canvas, which is completely contrary to actual practice. However, when the painting is viewed with ultraviolet light, a white drawing of



a veiled woman appears. The white pigment used for the drawing in this period could have been either white lead (RI 1.94) or chalk (RI 1.56). When the artist painted his picture, the white drawing was legible. As the linseed oil became more opaque over time, the difference between its RI and that of the pigment, presumably chalk, decreased until the white lines of the drawing became completely transparent and thus invisible, except under ultraviolet light.

In a similar fashion, dark pigments in oil paintings become deeper and more translucent with time, while pigments with a high RI—those containing a heavy metal such as lead white and lead tin yellow, but also others such as realgar, cadmium, and vermilion—retain their original brilliance and sharp detail.

Some pigments are more stable in linseed oil than in egg tempera—vermilion, for example—while others, such as smalt and even lapis lazuli, undergo a chemical reaction in combination with oil that alters their appearance and can even cause them to



147. Matthew Pratt, *The American School* (detail), 1765, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 91.4 × 127.6 cm.



148. A detail of the painting under ultraviolet light. A schematic drawing of a veiled woman leaning with her elbow on a parapet is plainly visible.



completely decolorize. Copper greens often become brown or black. Strong light causes some pigments to fade—for example, tints made from vegetable dye. Some other colors also fade—for example, early forms of Prussian blue, which became a staple of the painter's palette around 1730. The glorious views of Dresden by Bellotto, so admired now for their cool, silvery light, originally had blue, not gray, skies. Occasionally, when a painting is removed from its old frame, which has covered the edges and protected the paint, startling color changes are revealed. It was once thought that after a century or so, inherent changes in oil paintings would halt, which was a comforting notion. In recent years, however, scientists have discovered that additional processes—especially the formation of lead soaps—cause alterations that are ongoing. This phenomenon has lately been verified in the works of Rembrandt and other seventeenth-century Dutch painters, and sometimes, viewing these paintings, I cannot rid myself of the idea that I am watching a slow-motion chemistry experiment in progress. It is disconcerting to say the least.

## APPENDIX II

# Restoration Practices

## ☞ Varnishes ☞

**A** PART FROM CHEMICAL degradation of the original materials, there are other factors that can alter the original appearance of paintings. The most obvious and significant is the deterioration of varnish. Most paintings are varnished, partly as a protective coating, but mainly to saturate the dark colors. Sometimes the artist does this as part of the finishing stages of the work, and sometimes it is performed by another hand. Many painters expressed their preferences, or left instructions, about varnishing. Sometimes a particular varnish was recommended, or a method of applying it. Some painters wished to varnish only certain passages, depending on the final placement of the work and the ambient light. Inevitably, as time passed, these decisions fell to others.

Historically, varnishes are made of natural resins—dammar and mastic are the most common—dissolved in turpentine or oil. These materials discolor, becoming yellow, orange, and even brown, as they age. Their surfaces become dull and slightly opaque as they oxidize. Paintings also accumulate dust, soot, grime, and nicotine deposits from the atmosphere. As the image became obscured by these sorts of coatings, more varnish would be applied—a common practice in museums, churches, and private collections, because it temporarily revived dull and darkened surfaces, making the paintings more legible. Eventually, these complex, multiple layers of varnish and grime become so thick and disfiguring that it

is desirable to remove them. This process is rarely straightforward and can engender a great deal of debate and controversy. Both the removal and the re-application of varnish have implications for the character and final appearance of a painting. [See, for example, Chapter 24 “Cleaning Controversies” and Chapter 25 “Please Do Not Varnish this Painting”.]

### ☞ Cradling ☞

Wood remains sensitive to changes in humidity no matter how old it is. Dry conditions cause wood to shrink across the grain, resulting in warping and separation along the joins. In response to these dimensional changes, the layers of preparation and paint can detach from the panel, form blisters, and flake off. It was reasoned that if there was less original wood to react, this process could be halted. The cradling operation consists of first thinning the wood, sometimes down to a veneer-like thickness. Typically, notched bars of new wood were then glued to the back of the panel in the direction of the grain. Across the grain, other strips were slid into the notches but not adhered, in order to allow the wood to expand and contract with changes in humidity. After the glue was applied, the cradled panel was put into a press while the adhesive set so that it would be completely flat. There are several problems with this approach. The most common issue is that the moveable strips that cross the grain can swell and lock in place so that the panel splits or the crisscross pattern of the cradle appears on the front of the paintings.

Another purpose of cradling was to flatten warped panels. This operation often compressed the paint, resulting in the formation of ridges that follow the direction of the grain. The thick varnishes popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to conceal these deformations. The tendency of the original wood is to return to its warped configuration creating tension with the flat cradle and leading to the formation of blistered and flaking paint.

The cradle then has to be removed, allowing the panel to relax and resume its natural warp.

### Transfer

A more radical approach to the problems of wooden supports is the transfer operation, in which the paint is separated from the panel. The basic procedure is as follows, although there are variations: layers of paper or fabric were glued to the face of the painting to protect it. The picture was then turned over and the original wood support removed with chisels and other sharp tools, until the ground was exposed. The original gesso was washed off. The back of the paint layer was then completely exposed. A new ground was brushed onto the reverse of the paint, often with a piece of cheesecloth embedded between several layers of application, and finally a linen canvas was adhered with animal glue. The reverse was pressed with fifty-pound heated irons until the new support was almost dry and the whole ensemble was then put into a press. The transferred painting could then be mounted on a stretcher as if it were a canvas painting.

The texture of the new canvas is often visible on the front of the painting after the protective facing is removed, resulting in a completely different surface from the smooth one originally imparted by the wood panel and gesso ground. To avoid this effect, later on, smooth, solid mounts were used such as pressboard, balsa wood, and fiberglass. Today, very few paintings are transferred, but the results of this practice can be seen at the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg and in the Italian galleries in the Louvre. For a long time, transfer was considered a tour de force, and it provided the more forensic-minded restorers and art historians a chance to study the process of painting as well as the underdrawing from the reverse before infrared imaging of various sorts became available.

Additional Notes on Cleaning

Sheldon Keck, a graduate of the Fogg program and conservator of the Brooklyn Museum, together with his outspoken wife, Caroline, were the most prominent American exponents of the technical-scientific school. In May 1983, he addressed the American Institute of Conservation's annual conference and delivered the official view of the recent controversy at the National Gallery (see Chapter 24). He explained the different approaches as he saw them:<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, no aged painting is exactly as it was when first completed. Whether its actual state represents its artist and period will depend on the extent of deterioration, damage and loss. Not all masterpieces offer an equal degree of extant original. But there are some curators, directors, collectors, dealers and restorers who fear seeing a painting cleaned to expose its actual state, because such revelation might entail loss of face, loss of monetary value and loss of reputation for professional expertise. This point of view should, however, be recognized for the personal protection it is, rather than used, as some do, to extol non-uniform, selective cleaning as the safe way to return a painting to its alleged original state. . . . We should clearly recognize that non-uniform cleaning customarily avoids areas covering losses, abrasions or color changes in the original paint, and is itself an alteration. . . . Although it is salutary to recognize historical patterns of thinking, which have accompanied altered appearances of paintings down through the ages, we should remain undistracted from our responsibility to prolong the life of each painting we treat with minimal alteration from its actual state.

It is not true that "non-uniform" cleaning avoids areas of loss, old retouching, or alteration, nor is it true that the thorough cleaning Keck endorses does anything to prolong the life of a painting.

The standard bearer of the historical-humanist approach, John Brealey, expressed his views in a 1976 article in *Art News*,<sup>4</sup> and it is interesting to compare them with Keck's:

The paint film . . . undergoes chemical processes that transform the colors and thus destroy the original harmony. . . . Darker colors become even darker and more translucent with time, until subtleties of modeling and detail disappear in impenetrable shadow. . . . If the colors changed equally, the balance of the picture would be maintained, but they do not. Some colors, such as ultramarine, change only slightly, others become lighter. The dulling of the darker colors makes the brighter ones too vibrant by contrast and the distortion of color relationships distorts the spatial relationships. . . . You cannot hope to do the right thing by an artist by simply removing discolored varnish and attending to the mechanical defects, reducing the work of art to a laboratory specimen. Everything that you do to a painting has aesthetic consequences. . . . To pretend that it is not a matter of interpretation is incredibly naïve. . . . Of course, you have to know the scientific side. One takes that for granted—but it's not enough.

As a practical matter, the two methods differed significantly. In the technical-scientific method, the painting was placed flat on a table, illuminated by artificial light. The conservator, often using some sort of magnification, determined the correct solvent—often choosing among four different formulations known as Keck 1, 2, 3, and 4. With small swabs soaked in the solvent, the removal of the coatings progressed square by square, row by row, removing every bit of varnish and dirt until no color appeared on the white cotton swab. The procedure included removing even very old deposits of varnish and medium caught between the brushstrokes. This system is what Ernst Gombrich was referring to, writing in the *Burlington Magazine* “what resisted our solvents must have been a glaze, what dissolved was evidently only a varnish.”<sup>5</sup>



The traditional approach of the historical-humanist restorers differed in several ways. First of all, the painting was examined and cleaned upright on an easel in natural light (artificial light could be used for retouching, but never for cleaning). Using a mixture of volatile solvents of varying proportions—most often consisting of acetone and mineral spirits—varnish was removed in a broad way in overlapping circular movements. Large swabs were used, which left a barely perceptible amount of varnish behind. The effect of the cleaning was continually evaluated by saturating the paint surface with mineral spirits or temporary varnish, and then stepping back for considered study. When most of the varnish had been removed, the painting could be examined with ultraviolet light, which causes remnants of varnish to fluoresce a pale-green color; these areas were marked with chalk, and the cleaning was evened out. It was important to pay as much attention to the dark passages as to the lighter areas of paint and to avoid leaving pools of varnish on the surface, especially in the corners.

Following the cleaning controversy in Washington, an English conservator, Gerry Hedley, tried to mediate the conflict between the two schools of thought by defining three distinct methods, or schools, of cleaning: according to this interpretation, there were “selective” cleaners (John Brealey’s approach), who removed varnish from the picture where they saw fit, according to how the formal values in the painting developed in relation to each other during the cleaning process; “partial” cleaning referenced a French concept that the varnish should be thinned evenly all over the picture, leaving an appreciable amount behind to resolve the problem of tonal imbalance; “total” cleaners—that is, the technical-scientific school—removed all the discolored coating from the surface, leaving only the original material.<sup>6</sup> Many felt that this latter method was the most objective, and some proposed that, if the cleaning revealed tonal discrepancies, the colors and contrast could be adjusted by glazing the original with a transparent color that would imitate the effect of discolored varnish.

PLATES

PLATES



1. Federico Icilio Joni, *Virgin and Child*, n.d., tempera on panel, private collection,  
74 × 44 cm.

PLATES



11. Umberto Giunti, *Madonna and Child*, 1920–1929, tempera on panel, Courtauld Gallery, London, 88.2 × 45.7 cm. Long considered to be a sublime work by Sandro Botticelli, this painting is now recognized as one of Giunti's greatest forgeries. Once suspicion fell on the picture, it was an easy matter to prove its modern origins, since Giunti used some pigments that did not exist in the fifteenth century. The truism that forgeries reflect the taste of their time is clear here in the expression of the Madonna's face and her exaggerated Cupid's bow lips, typical of the fashion in the 1910s and 1920s.



PLATES



iii. The Venetian Sitting Room in the Kress apartment with paintings by Domenico Veneziano, Masolino, Duccio, Perugino, and others.

PLATES



iv. Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *The Assumption of the Virgin*. Before the 1949 cleaning.



v. Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *The Assumption of the Virgin*. After cleaning.

PLATES



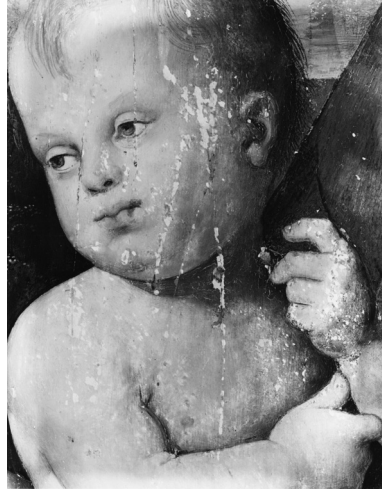
vi. Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, 1400–1405, tempera on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 66.7 × 38.1 cm. The painting as it appears today.



PLATES



vii. Pietro Perugino, *Madonna and Child*.  
Detail after cleaning, 1953.



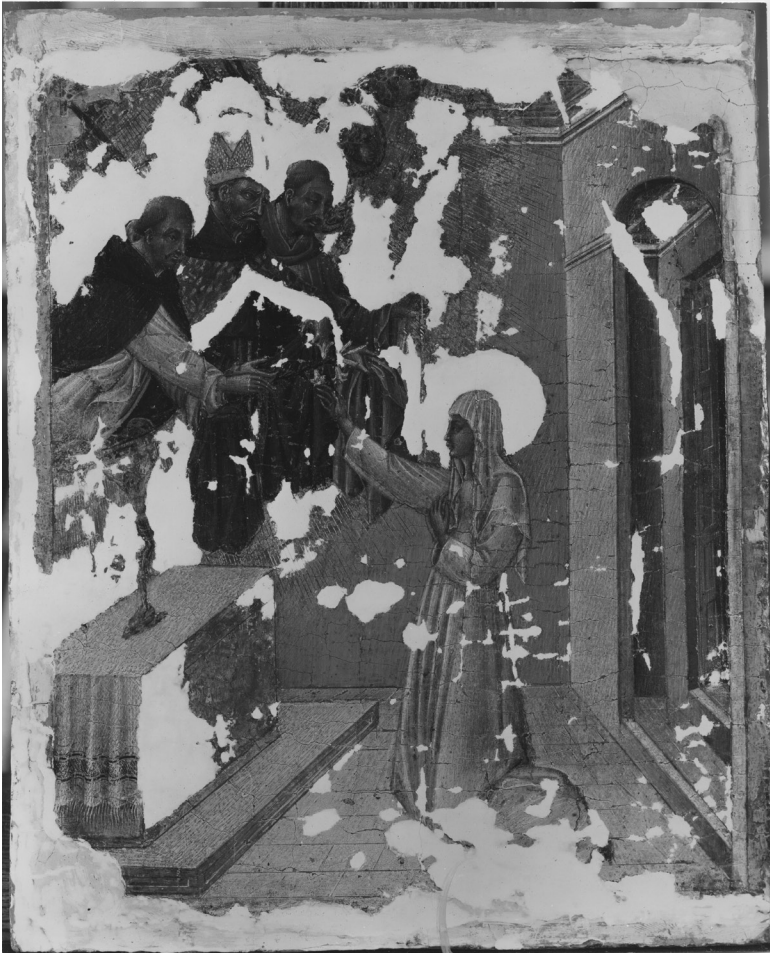
viii. Pietro Perugino, *Madonna and Child*.  
Detail after cleaning, 1953.

PLATES



ix. Pietro Perugino, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1500, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 70.2 × 50 cm. The painting as it appears today.

PLATES



x. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine Invested with the Dominican Scapula*.  
After transfer, in the cleaned state with new fills.



PLATES

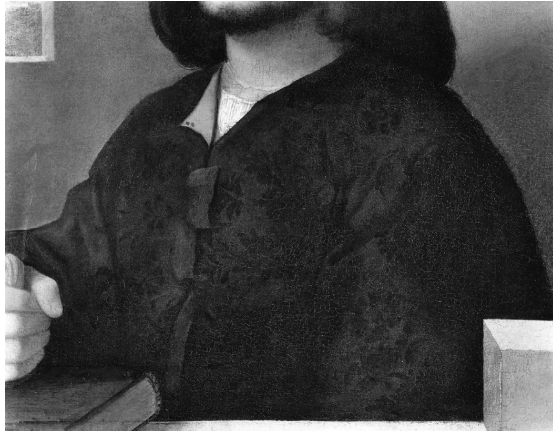


xI. Giovanni di Paolo, *Saint Catherine Invested with the Dominican Scapula*, 1461, tempera on panel, Cleveland Museum of Art, 24.6 × 39.2 cm. The painting as it appears today.

PLATES



xii. Giorgione, *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman*.  
A detail in the cleaned state.



xiii. Giorgione, *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman*.  
The same area after restoration.

PLATES



xiv. Giorgione, *Portrait of a Venetian Gentleman*, 1510–1515, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 76.2 × 63.5 cm. The painting as it appears today.



PLATES



xv. El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*. The painting in the cleaned state.



PLATES

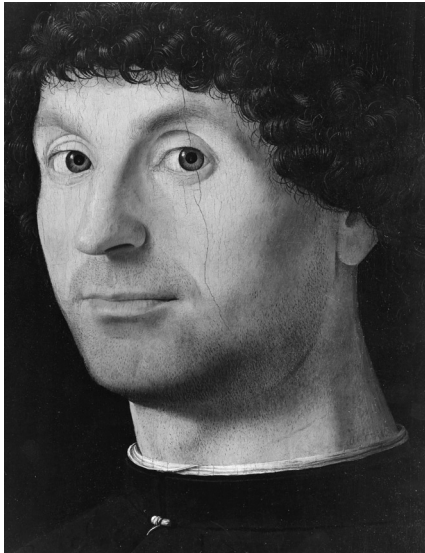


xvi. El Greco, *The Vision of Saint John*, 1608–1614, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 222.3 × 193 cm. The painting as it appears today.

PLATES



xvii. Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Man*. The painting after cleaning but with the insect tunnels still filled with old putty and retouching.



xviii. Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Man*. Detail after restoration.

PLATES



xix. Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Man*, 1472–1476, oil on panel, Thyssen Collection, Madrid, 27,5 × 21 cm. A recent image.



PLATES



xx. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Madonna and Child*. The cleaned state.

PLATES



xxi. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Madonna and Child*, 1470–1475, tempera on panel transferred to hardboard, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 73.4 × 50.8 cm.  
The painting as it appears today.

PLATES



xxii. Sandro Botticelli, *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John*.  
The painting as it appeared when Mario received it.



PLATES



xxiii. Sandro Botticelli, *Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John*, ca. 1490, tempera and oil on canvas, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, 67.9 cm diameter.

The painting after restoration.



PLATES



xxiv. Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* after cleaning.

PLATES



xxv. Leonardo da Vinci, *Salvator Mundi*, early 16th century, oil on panel, 65.6 × 45.4 cm.  
After restoration in 2011.

## NOTES

# Notes

## Introduction

- 1 I incorporated some of the material from Mario's memoir in an essay on the restoration of the paintings in the Samuel H. Kress Collection; it was published in early 2006, only a few weeks after Mario's death. He lived long enough to see the galleys, which gave him enormous pleasure and gratification. See Dianne Modestini, "Mario Modestini and the Samuel H. Kress Collection," in *Studying and Conserving Paintings*, Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection (New York and London: Archetype, 2006), 42–62. [http://www.kressfoundation.org/uploadedFiles/Kress\\_Collection/Conserving\\_the\\_Kress\\_Collection/Studying%20and%20Conserving%20Paintings.pdf](http://www.kressfoundation.org/uploadedFiles/Kress_Collection/Conserving_the_Kress_Collection/Studying%20and%20Conserving%20Paintings.pdf)
- 2 William Hogarth, *Analysis of Beauty* (London: 1753), 118–19.

## Preface

- 1 "Paintings. The Flight of the Bird," *Time*, March 3, 1967, 72.

## Chapter 1

- 1 Eugenia Tognotti, *La "spagnola" in Italia: Storia dell'influenza che fece temere la fine del mondo (1918–19)*, (Milan: Angeli, 2002).
- 2 Marco Percoco, "Health Shocks and Human Capital Accumulation: The Case of Spanish Flu in Italian Regions," (December 2014), [https://marcopercoco.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/flu\\_revision2.pdf](https://marcopercoco.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/flu_revision2.pdf)
- 3 *Ras* is the title for Ethiopian chieftains. They defeated Italy in 1896.
- 4 In 1977, Fazzini made a monumental sculpture of *The Resurrection* for the new audience hall of the Vatican, which features prominently in the pope's televised appearances.

## NOTES

- 5 Emma Amadei, "Piazza di Spagna. La più bella piazza del mondo," *Capitolium* file 28 (1953), 3-4.

### Chapter 2

- 1 Rossana Bossaglia and Elvira Lapenna, *La pittura italiana dell'Ottocento nelle collezioni private reatine: con un omaggio ad Antonino Calcagnadoro nel settantesimo dalla scomparsa* (Bologna: Bora, 2005) (author's translation).
- 2 Augusto Jandolo, *Studi e modelli di via Margutta (1870-1950)* (Milan: Casa Editrice Ceschina, 1953).
- 3 Kurt Cassirer, *Die ästhetischen Hauptbegriffe der französischen Architektur-Theoretiker von 1650-1780* (1909); Kurt Cassirer, "Einige Bemerkungen zu Pietro da Cortona," *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt* 57 (1921-2): 479-83.
- 4 This book was first published in 1866, followed by at least four updated editions until 1927.
- 5 Bruna Amendolea, Laura Indrio, *Palazzo Valentini. Storia di un palazzo e di una istituzione* (Roma: Bardi Editore, 2005), 122-34. The section, "La sala del Rettorato e suoi arredi", records that Vincenzo Fiordigiglio decorated the room with bas reliefs and designed the furniture. Figures 69 and 70 reproduce the drawing for the ceiling and a detail of one of the cassettoni. Fiordigiglio is credited but this sketch must be the one Mario describes executing.
- 6 The complex has recently been restored and converted into condominiums.

### Chapter 3

- 1 See: Luciano Osbat, s.v. *Clemente IX, papa*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 26 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1982).
- 2 *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, January 24, 1932: 5.
- 3 Nunzio Primavera, *Brief Guide to the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini Palace and Garden*. n.d. <http://www.coldiretti.it/organismi/cikdurettu/Guida%20Palazzo%20Rospigliosi%20ingl.pdf>
- 4 Angela Negro, *Paesaggio e figura. Nuove ricerche sulla Collezione Rospigliosi* (Roma: Campisano Editore, 2000), 190-92.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 91-5.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 199. Lot no. 661. *Madonna e Bambino con S. Anna, S. Caterina e S. Giovannino*, oil on canvas, 160 cm × 120 cm, "La Madonna è rappresentata contro un fondo di paesaggio con il Bimbo in grembo. A destra S. Caterina, a sinistra S. Anna con S. Giovannino."
- 7 Jonathan Harr, *The Lost Painting* (New York: Random House, 2005).

### Chapter 4

- 1 Gianni Mazzoni, ed., *Falsi d'autore: Icilio Federico Ioni e la cultura del falso tra Otto e Novecento* (Siena: Protagon, 2004).

## NOTES

- 2 Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1979), 252–3.
- 3 Franca Fedeli Bernardini reports that Sabatello, as a Jew during the German Occupation, found assistance from the “parroco Salvatore Mercuri” of Vallepietra, and in gratitude, donated a *Crucifixion* by Orazio Borgianni to Vallepietra’s Santuario della SS. Trinità in 1949. See “Un Centro di Documentazione a Vallepietra”. <http://www.aequa.org/vI/index.php/un-centro-di-documentazione-a-vallepietra-sulla-festa-della-ss-trinita/>
- 4 According to a statement found among Joni’s papers—a detailed account of the confusing tale, written presumably for his lawyer—the entire business turned out to be extremely complicated. It involved several court cases against Sister Margherita brought by Jandolo, a bankrupt middleman called Fineschi, and Joni himself, who visited the nun together with Mario in a failed attempt to retrieve the painting. Joni wanted to pursue the matter in another lawsuit to recoup the ten thousand lire fee and intended to publicize the story in the press with a photo of the painting in question, “Let the chips fall where they may” (“Accada quello che accada”). Sister Margherita subsequently absconded to Buenos Aires with the painting and the money. (Courtesy of Gianni Mazzoni, Siena.)
- 5 Gisela M. A. Richter, *Etruscan Terracotta Warriors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, with a report on structure and technique by Charles F. Binns (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1937).
- 6 The published accounts of these forgeries vary in the identification of authors of the forgeries and include—in addition to or instead of the three individuals mentioned by Mario—Riccardo Riccardi and Virgilio Angelino Riccardi.
- 7 *Stefanina Primitice Carafa, Marchioness of Ciceralo and Duchess of Montejasa*, oil on canvas, 49 × 39.4 cm. What is known of the picture’s provenance suggests that Giosi was acting as agent for the Neapolitan Carafa family. Mario’s account sheds additional light on the painting’s provenance, which the Cleveland Museum of Art lists as: “Carafa Family, Naples. Mrs. Millicent A. Rogers. Paul Rosenberg & Co., New York, by 1942. Purchased by Leonard C. Hanna Jr., on 25 June 1951. Bequeathed to the CMA in 1958.” See the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art, [http://library.clevelandart.org/provenance2/prov\\_search.php?artist=D](http://library.clevelandart.org/provenance2/prov_search.php?artist=D) If this is correct, then presumably Paul Rosenberg sold the painting twice: first to Mrs. Rogers and then to Mr. Hanna. Rosenberg’s gallery in Paris was seized after the Nazis invaded France in June 1940. All the works of art were confiscated except for a number of paintings that Rosenberg had, with some foresight, already stored abroad or that were on loan to museums, especially MoMA in New York. A few months later, the dealer and his family escaped to New York, where he opened a new gallery, Paul Rosenberg & Co., first at 79 East 57th Street and then at 20 East 79th Street. See Anne Sinclair’s book about her grandfather, *21, rue La Boétie* (France: Bernard Grasset, 2012).



## NOTES

- 8 “The Duchess was painted by Degas about 1868 in a portrait now in the Mellon Collection which was preceded by a life-size portrait head in oil (fig. 125). A related charcoal drawing formerly in the collection of T. Edward Hanley that was last sold publicly at the Palais Galliera, Paris, 1973, does not appear to be by Degas.” Jean Sutherland Boggs et al., *Degas* (New York and Ottawa: Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Gallery of Canada, 1988), 254.
- 9 Duveen Brothers was a partnership founded by Sir Joseph Joel Duveen (1843–1908) and his brother, Henry J. Duveen (1854–1919) in 1868. Duveen Brothers had galleries in London, New York, and Paris. Joseph Joel’s son, Joseph Duveen, later Lord Duveen of Millbank, joined the firm and expanded their trade from porcelain, tapestries and other decorative arts into old master paintings, taking full command of the company after his uncle’s death. Other partners were Armand Lowengard, Joseph Duveen’s brother-in-law, and Edward Fowles. <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/provenance-info.1102.html#biography>

### Chapter 5

- 1 Maria Cristina Bandera and Giuseppe Basile, *Longhi-Brandi. Convergenze-divergenze; Atti dell’Incontro di studio presso La Fondazione Longhi, 27 May 2008* (Italy: Il Prato, 2010).
- 2 Mario wrote that the work was done in 1937. This would have to be verified with the records at the Istituto Centrale per il Restauro.
- 3 The ‘tratteggio’ system uses striated lines of different colors, which, at a certain distance, are blended by the eye and can even suggest modeling but can be recognized by the viewer as modern additions. Some examples of tratteggio are more successful than others. In the worst cases, the tratteggio can become distracting and more noticeable than the original.
- 4 *Notes (Fogg Art Museum)*, 2, no. 2 (June 1926): 71–81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4300838>
- 5 Matteo Panzeri, “Dinamiche del restauro in Italia tra Ottocento e Novecento e orientamenti di Luigi Cavenaghi” in *Luigi Cavenaghi e i maestri di tempi antichi* (Caravaggio: Banca Credito Cooperativo, 2006), 140–51.
- 6 “Sulla conservazione dei monumenti e oggetti d’arte e sulla riforma dell’insegnamento accademico,” in *Rivista dei Comuni italiani* 4–5, (1863).
- 7 Alessandro Conti, “Giovanni Morelli ed il Restauro Amatoriale,” in *Giovanni Morelli e La Cultura dei Conoscitori* (Pierluigi Lubrina Editori, 1993), 1159–73.
- 8 In 1877, guidelines following the recommendations of Cavalcaselle regarding paintings were promulgated, and in 1880, regarding frescoes. Simona Rinaldi, “La tutela e la sua storia” (2008), 6. <http://dspace.unitus.it/bitstream/2067/1173/1/Rinaldi-Conoscere.2.pdf>
- 9 Luigi Cavenaghi, “Il restauro e la conservazione dei dipinti,” *Bollettino d’Arte* XI–XII, (1912): 488–500. “Intorno al modo del restauro non si possono enunciare

che alcuni assiomi fondamentali lasciando al senso d'arte del restauratore l'applicazione pratica. Il restauro deve essere condotto con la guida della più larga conoscenza dei caratteri stilistici delle scuole, della *calligrafia* dei maestri: deve essere lungamente pensato e studiato, eseguito il meno possibile e meticolosamente dissimulato. Perciò il lavoro del restauratore, se può concedere entusiasmi come per un'opera d'arte personale, è avaro di personali soddisfazioni e difficilmente apprezzato.”

- 10 See: *La teoria del restauro nel Novecento da Riegl a Brandi*, edited by Maria Andaloro, “Restauro e istituzioni” by Mario Serio (Nardini Editore 2006), 14. “Il restauro delle opere d'arte è oggi concordemente considerato come attività rigorosamente scientifica e precisamente come indagine filologica diretta a ritrovare e rimettere in evidenza il testo originale dell'opera, eliminando alterazioni e sovrapposizioni di ogni genere fino a consentire di quel testo originale una lettura chiara e storicamente esatta. Coerentemente a questo principio, il restauro, che un tempo veniva esercitato prevalentemente da artisti che spesso sovrapponevano una interpretazione personale alla visione dell'artista antico, è oggi esercitato da tecnici specializzati, continuamente guidati e controllati da studiosi: a una competenza genericamente artistica si è così sostituita una competenza genericamente artistica; si è così sostituita una competenza rigorosamente storicistica e tecnica.”

### Chapter 6

- 1 Jane Scrivener [Jessica Lynch, Mother Mary St. Luke], *Inside Rome with the Germans* (New York: Macmillan, 1945).
- 2 Palma Bucarelli, *1944: Cronaca di sei mesi* (Rome: De Luca, 1997).
- 3 Scrivener, *Inside Rome*, 144.
- 4 Giampiero Mughini, *Che belle le ragazze di via Margutta: i registi, i pittori e gli scrittori che fecero della Roma degli anni Cinquanta la capitale del mondo* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004), 64.
- 5 Giacomo Debenedetti and Estelle Gibson, *October 16, 1943* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).
- 6 Francesco Guida, *Placido Martini. Socialista, Massone, Partigiano*, (Firenze: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2016), 171–2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 173. “The group of directors met at 2 p.m. at the trattoria *La Rosetta* at the Pantheon, Martini's habitual lunch place, in a reserved room. Mario Magri, Giacomo Marescalchi Belli, Alfredo Berdini, the police commissioners, Antonio Colasurdo and Raniero Buccelli met, together with Martini ... The group did not notice that at a short distance away two bystanders, after having watched them for a long time, left the room. A little while later three men, Tullio Corsetti, Alfredo Navarini e Andrea Iacchella, dressed in civilian clothes and armed with pistols, burst in followed by three Germans from the SS with a machine gun. They were commanded by Tullio Corsetti who pointed his gun at Placido Martini. The arrested men left the restaurant with their hands tied

## NOTES

behind their necks and got into a covered truck, escorted by two motorcyclists from the SS, which brought them to Via Tasso to the headquarters of the German political police.” (“Riunito il gruppo dirigente dell’Unione alle ore 14 presso la trattoria *La Rosetta* al Pantheon, mensa abituale di Martini, in una sala riservata convennero a pranzo con lo stesso Martini, Mario Magri, Giacomo Marescalchi Belli, Alfredo Berdini, i commissari di polizia Antonio Colasurdo e Raniero Buccelli. . . . Il gruppo non si era accorto che a breve distanza altri due astanti, dopo averli osservati a lungo, lasciavano la sala. Poco dopo irrupero tre uomini in borghese armati di pistola, Tullio Corsetti, Alfredo Navarini e Andrea Iacchella, seguiti da tre tedeschi delle SS con il mitragliatore. Li comandava Tullio Corsetti che puntò l’arma contro Placido Martini. Quindi gli arrestati lasciarono il locale con le mani intrecciate dietro la nuca per salire su un camion coperto che li portò in Via Tasso al comando di polizia politica tedesca, scortato da due motociclisti SS.”)

- 8 *Ibid.*, 180. Giacomo Marescalchi Belli was released from Via Tasso on February 11 and Alfredo Berdini at the end of February.
- 9 Robert Katz, *Death in Rome* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 164–67.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 226–7.
- 11 Ray Moseley, *Mussolini: The Last 600 Days of Il Duce* (Dallas: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004).

## Chapter 7

- 1 Viviana Pozzoli, “Lo Studio d’Arte Palma: Storia di un’impresa per il commercio artistico nell’Italia del dopoguerra”, *Acme* 2, 2016, 145–173. This article, based on the author’s doctoral thesis, contains much information about the short history of the gallery.
- 2 Giuliano Briganti, *Mostra di pittori italiani del seicento: Studio d’Arte Palma, dicembre 1944–febbraio 1945* (Rome: Studio d’Arte Palma, 1944). Exhibition catalogue.
- 3 After the war, Papini became a professor of architectural history at the University of Florence. He and his wife were close to Bernard Berenson and lived for many years in a *dépendence* of Villa I Tatti, where Papini’s library is still housed.
- 4 The painting is catalogued as “Presented by Studio d’Arte Palma, Rome (purchased from the artist 1947).”
- 5 Giampiero Mughini, *Che belle le ragazze di via Margutta*, 110–111.
- 6 The frames were artfully draped and drawings for theatre scenery were disposed about. Although Mario considered this primarily an exhibition of frames, officially it was described as “Mostra internazionale di scenografia.” It opened in May 1946.

## Chapter 8

- 1 Simone Bargellini, *Antiquari di ieri a Firenze* (Florence: Casa Editrice Bonechi, 1981), 118–132. The Volterra had five galleries in Florence as well as one in

## NOTES

- London and another in Paris. After the death of the oldest brother, Giuseppe, in 1932, the business failed.
- 2 Patricia Volterra, *The Times of My Life or What I Remember* (Florence: Industria Tipografica Fiorentina, 1987). This memoir, privately printed, contains some valuable information about the figure of Gualtiero Volterra, as well as his business associate, Count Alessandro Contini Bonacossi, and Rush Kress, which is incorporated in later sections of this book.
  - 3 Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman* (New York: Morrow, 1983), 399.
  - 4 David Alan Brown and Miklòs Boskovits, *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2003), 493. Letter to Miklòs Boskovits dated 28 August 1998, "L'anonimo pittore è troppo intelligente per identificarsi con Sano... I dati morelliani, però, coincidono in modo impressionante."
  - 5 *Ibid.*, 487–90.
  - 6 Maria Falcone, "La giovinezza dorata di Sano di Pietro: Un nuovo documento per la 'Natività della Vergine' di Asciano," *Prospettiva*, no. 138, April 2010, 28–34.
  - 7 Pier Giorgio Ardeni, *Cento ragazzi e un capitano. La brigata Giustizia e Libertà "Montagna" e la Resistenza sui monti dell'alto Reno tra storia e memoria* (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2016). There are many references to Sandrino and his importance as a *partigiano*. See especially pp. 351–361, 444–446 and 485.
  - 8 The diary is in the archives of the Longhi Foundation in Florence and has never been published.
  - 9 Observations made by Francesco Arcangeli in the 1971 video, "Roberto Longhi, Un Maestro. Part II". [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7crMk8RTj3I&t=2165s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7crMk8RTj3I&t=2165s)
  - 10 "Estetiche a fondamento climaterico, ambientale e, soprattutto, razzistico." See: Simone Facchinetti, s.v. *Longhi, Roberto*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 65 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005).
  - 11 "Roberto Longhi nel ricordo di Federico Zeri", extract from: Federico Zeri, *Orto aperto*, (Milano: Longanesi, 1990). [http://www.parcoletterario.it/it/voci/roberto\\_longhi\\_ricordozeri.html](http://www.parcoletterario.it/it/voci/roberto_longhi_ricordozeri.html)
  - 12 Antonio Paolucci, "Ricordo di un maestro: Roberto Longhi," in *Longhi-Brandi. Convergenze-divergenze* (Florence: Il Prato, 2010), 13.
  - 13 Katz, *Death in Rome*.

## Chapter 9

- 1 Edward Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers* (London: Times Books, 1976), 122.
- 2 Correspondence from Michele Lazzaroni in the Berenson Archives, Villa I Tatti, Florence.
- 3 The X book is a ledger that records the costs and expenses of the paintings Duveen owned together with Berenson. It is part of the Duveen archive, now at the Getty Center, although the original was retained by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where the archive was housed for many years.

## NOTES

- 4 Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, 122–3.
- 5 It cannot be correct that the picture had been damaged, because I restored the Raphael altarpiece at the Metropolitan Museum and neither of the angels had been repainted.
- 6 Page 40 of the X book records the purchase price as 100,000 French francs, equivalent to \$20,000.
- 7 Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 180ff.
- 8 Keith Christiansen and Stefan Weppelmann (eds.), *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 175. Exhibition catalogue.

### Chapter 10

- 1 One of the artist's earliest works, it is now thought to have been painted between 1499 and 1502 for the altarpiece in Città di Castello, since disassembled. Mario argued strongly for its acquisition when he was still advising the São Paulo Museum of Art and later he made a note on his manuscript: "You know who said I was right? A certain Roberto Longhi!"
- 2 Letter in the author's possession.

### Chapter 11

- 1 It is said that Samuel Kress and his competitor, Sebastian Kresge, agreed not to compete with each other in the same regions of the country. Kresge's stores were mainly in the Northeast and Midwest.
- 2 Ann Hoenigswald, "Stephen Pichetto, Conservator of the Kress Collection" in *Studying and Conserving Paintings*, Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection (New York and London: Archetype, 2006), 31–41.
- 3 Fulvia Zaninelli, *Vittoria Contini Bonacossi. Diario Americano, 1926-1929*, (Prato-Siena: Gli Ori, 2007–8), 19. Countess Contini wrote eight diaries dated 1926–27, described as the second trip to the United States.
- 4 The relationship is referred to by John Walker in his memoir, and references to Pichetto are a refrain in Vittoria Contini Bonacossi's diaries.
- 5 Hoenigswald, "Stephen Pichetto".
- 6 Zaninelli, *Vittoria Contini Bonacossi*, 105. "Ore 16:40. Se ne andata ora la Signora Kilvert e si è portata via una coperta di velluto, e poi c'è speranza di vendere oltre la coperta, qualche quadretto."
- 7 *Ibid.*, 141. "10 febbraio 1927 Ore 18.30. . . . La prima visita al mattino fu a casa della signora Kilvert che ha già comperato qualche mobile da noi, un tavolino (a pezzo fiorentino) ed un braciere di S. Lorenzo. Essa ci ha chiamati per dare un consiglio d'ammobiliamento di un appartamento che sta ammobiliando per un suo amico sig. Kress. Così le abbiamo fatto spostare cassoni, candelabra, io ho levato tanti cianfrugli che erano di troppo su un caminetto. E mancano quadri, così speriamo di remediare. . . ."
- 8 *Ibid.* " . . . Siamo entrati nel salone ed abbiamo disfatto tutto e messo a modo nostro, dopo finito sembrava un angolo di via Nomentano [Contini's apartment in Rome], la signora era tanto contenta e soddisfatta!"

## NOTES

- 9 S. N. Behrman, *Duveen* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 195ff.
- 10 The gallery was on 210 East 57th Street and the warehouse and workrooms were located on 203 East 56th Street.
- 11 Zaninelli, *Vittoria Contini Bonacossi*, 168.
- 12 Ibid., 179. “5 March 1927 Ore 19. . . . Sono stanchissima, veniamo ora da casa Kress, abbiamo rimesso (per la decima volta forse) a posto il salotto. . . due o più ore in piedi. . . . Speriamo in un altro affare, sarebbe una grande soddisfazione, perché è un cliente creato da noi e nuovo, non ha che quadri nostri.”
- 13 Ibid., 143.
- 14 Elsa De Giorgi, *L'Eredità Contini Bonacossi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1988), 68.
- 15 Bernard Berenson, in a letter written to the art critic Royal Cortissoz, published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, October 17, 1937, quoted by Ernest Samuels in *Bernard Berenson*, 438.
- 16 John Walker, *Self-Portrait with Donors* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974).
- 17 The blanching was caused by a reaction between zinc white and damar resin.
- 18 Hoenigswald, “Stephen Pichetto”.
- 19 Italian linings are gentler and leave the surface texture with fewer alterations. Flour is mixed with the glue, and they can be removed quite easily.
- 20 Hoenigswald, “Stephen Pichetto”.
- 21 Correspondence between Bernard Berenson and John Walker, I Tatti Archives.
- 22 Letter in the archives of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 The subject of this painting was erroneously identified as *Madonna and Child* in my article about Mario in 2006. See Modestini, “Mario Modestini”.
- 25 “No. 3. Pomata ammolliente. Prendi *sapone bianco di soda*, di quello che serve per uso di toeletta, parti una; *grasso di vitello* stato bollito e stacciato, parti due; *olio d'oliva* del migliore, parti tre ed *acqua* parti sei. Tagliuzza minutamente. Metti il sapone e il tutto in vaso di terra vetrato ed a fuoco moderato, sempre rimescolando, portalo ad ebollizione e lascialo bollire sino a che questi ingredienti si siano bene incorporati, ed abbiano formato una pomata di mediocre densità. Versala in vaso di terra o di vetro, lasciala raffreddare, poi coprila e conservala pe' tuoi bisogni. Dura indefinitivamente.” Count Giovanni Secco Suardo, *Il Restauratore dei Dipinti* (Milan: Ulrico Hoepli, 1918), 557.

## Chapter 12

- 1 In addition to those already mentioned in the previous chapter (Amleto De Santis, Giuseppe Barberi, Paul Kiehart, Angelo Fatta, Emilio Quarantelli, and Henry Hecht), the core group included Claudio Rigosi and Bartolo Bracaglia, two more of Mario's Roman assistants. Later, restorers Gabrielle Kopelman and Gustav Berger joined the staff, although they did not work at Huckleberry Hill. See Modestini, “Mario Modestini,” 42–62.



## NOTES

### Chapter 13

- 1 Burton Fredericksen, *The Burdens of Wealth: Paul Getty and His Museum* (Bloomington, Indiana: Archway, 2015). Detailed information about J. Paul Getty's collecting activities, including his advisors and the early history of the museum, has recently been published by a former curator of the Getty Museum.
- 2 "A Firenze ho avuto una colazione con BB, che mi è parso inferocito contro di te, per ragioni che non comprendo. Io sono restato in silenzio, e non ho fatto commenti, solo ho detto che i tuoi lavori sono di gran lunga i migliori che abbia mai visto, e che tu sei il solo restauratore di gran classe che abbia anche una eccezionale sensibilità estetica." Letter dated January 14, 1958.
- 3 "Ti penso come ad uno dei rari amici che ho avuto nella vita." Letter dated October 7, 1986.
- 4 Federico Zeri, *Confesso che ho sbagliato. Ricordi autobiografici* (Milan: Longanesi & Co., 1995), 60–61 (author's translation).
- 5 For more stories about Zeri's fascination with ladies' panties, see Fredericksen, *The Burdens of Wealth*.

### Chapter 14

- 1 The Kress Collection in Washington ultimately consisted of 390 paintings, 2,045 pieces of sculpture, a number of drawings, and a group of period frames.
- 2 A National Gallery of Art already existed as part of the Smithsonian, now known as the National Collection of Fine Arts. An independent museum was established by an Act of Congress on May 24, 1937, based on the promised gift of Mellon's art collection—which he created for this express purpose—and the donation of funds for the construction of the building.
- 3 John Walker, *Self-Portrait with Donors*, 131.
- 4 John Walker, in his preface to *Art Treasures for America: An Anthology of Paintings and Sculpture in the Samuel H. Kress Collection* (London: Phaidon Press, 1961), XIII, wrote: "The Gallery received unexpected, but vital help. Two lovers of art, Jeremiah O'Connor, then Curator of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and Herbert Friedmann, Curator of Birds at the Smithsonian Institution, had for some years spent their leisure together, intent on the favorite pastime, seeing as many private collections as possible. In the winter of 1938, they visited the Kress Collection in New York. They left dazed by the splendor of what they had seen. On his return to Washington Mr. O'Connor wrote Samuel Kress urging him to give his collection to the new National Gallery. The letter argued strongly against private museums and pointed out that the pledge of the United States Government to provide funds for the support of the new institution offered security for the future of the collections. It was an eloquent appeal and must have been effective. The correspondence continued, and on April 18 (1939) Mr. O'Connor conveyed to Mr. Finley an invitation to call on Mr. Kress."
- 5 *Ibid.*, XIX.

## NOTES

- 6 Ibid., XIII.
- 7 Behrman, "The Days of Duveen. IV-B.B.", *The New Yorker*, October 20, 1951, 46.
- 8 Walker, *Self-Portrait*, 134.
- 9 Ibid., 136.
- 10 Ibid., 136–138.
- 11 Ibid., 138.
- 12 John Canaday, "John Walker Knew Art—Even If He Didn't Love It," review of *Self-Portrait with Donors*, by John Walker, *New York Times*, November 10, 1974.
- 13 Letter, January 10, 1975, from Mary Davis, president of the Kress Foundation, to John Walker regarding his memoir, *Self-Portrait with Donors*: "What saddens me most is not your patronizing attitude toward the Kress brothers—after all, they are dead and cannot be hurt—but your attitude towards the Collection. It seems to me that in your hatred of Contini-Bonacossi and your attempt to expose what you consider his devious methods, you downgrade the entire Collection. There are, as you know, many extremely beautiful and important Contini paintings in the National Gallery, and many more not in the Gallery which some art historians believe should be there. . . . You will recall I wrote a letter to the Burlington Magazine (which it published) defending you when your policy was criticized. . . . It is unfair, I think, that while Kress gifts still continue to the Gallery, our entire Collection can be downgraded—except, of course, at the National, for which you take credit."
- 14 Walker, *Art Treasures*, IX–X.
- 15 Fowles, *Memories of Duveen Brothers*, 122–23. Fowles praises Lazzaroni, saying how much he learned about paintings from him and that he was a marvelous restorer.
- 16 This painting is now at the Snite Museum at Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana. Shapley, I: 114, catalogues it as "style of Baldovinetti," meaning that it is by a much later hand. The Snite now calls it "attributed to Baldovinetti."
- 17 Mario based his version of the frame on the large Botticelli tondo in the Uffizi. He worked with Fabio Bucciarelli, the Florentine framer, who had been trained by Ferruccio Vannoni.

## Chapter 15

- 1 The eighteen regional galleries are located in Allentown, PA; Atlanta, GA; Birmingham, AL; Columbia, SC; Coral Gables (Miami), FL; Denver, CO; El Paso, TX; Honolulu, HI; Houston, TX; Kansas City, MO; Memphis, TN; New Orleans, LA; Portland, OR; Raleigh, NC; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Tucson, AZ; Tulsa, OK.
- 2 Draft of a press release dated October 3, 1950.
- 3 Giovanni Bellini, *The Infant Bacchus*; El Greco, *Holy Family*; Piazzetta, *The Madonna and Infant Christ Appearing to S. Filippo Neri*; Perin del Vaga, *The Nativity*; Sansovino, *Madonna and Child*; Tiepolo, *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers*.

## NOTES

- 4 The painting was supplied by Titian to Rudolf II and was subsequently in the collections of Queen Christina of Sweden and the Duc d'Orléans.
- 5 Edward Solly was an important collector, who, in 1821, sold his first collection to the Prussian state, where it formed the core of the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. It includes an early Raphael known as the *Solly Madonna*.
- 6 “*QUESTO S. BASTIANO È STATO DA RAFFAELLO SANZIO DA URBINO DIPINTO PER I SIGNORI CONTI DEGLI ODDI PERUGIA. I.A.D.S.P.*” The meaning of the abbreviation I.A.D.S.P. remains unknown.
- 7 Tancred Borenius, *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House, Richmond and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook* (London: William Heinemann, 1913), 67, no. 58.
- 8 Archives of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, dated April 1948.
- 9 All correspondence and internal memorandums, as well as the *Art News* editorial, are in the archives of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.
- 10 Federico Zeri, *Un favoloso collezionista. Fasto e miseria di un re dei ruggenti anni '20*, in: Mai di traverso (Milan: Longanesi, 1982), 202–204.
- 11 He probably came with the associate director, James B. Byrnes. Mario would surely have remembered if he had come with Valentiner, who died about this time, in 1958. Byrnes stayed at the North Carolina Museum of Art until 1960, the year the Kress gift was finalized.
- 12 Meryle Secrest, *Duveen: A Life in Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 181ff. According to Secrest and other sources, Carl W. Hamilton had been an entrepreneur and a well-known collector during the 1910s and 1920s. There is evidence, however, that his collecting activities were based largely on speculation. By the time Mario met him, he had experienced financial reverses and had lost his collection.
- 13 Rush Kress was very fond of the Bible. Julian Agnew said that when he visited the family in London, he immediately asked for the Bible and began to read from it. The foundation published a Bible illustrated with paintings from the Kress Collection. It was notably absent from Mario's books!
- 14 Iso-Amyl Methacrylate. For more information about the results of the aging tests performed on the resin see “The History of Synthetic Resin Varnishes,” AIC Wiki, last modified March 26, 2014, [http://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/III.\\_The\\_History\\_of\\_Synthetic\\_Resin\\_Varnishes](http://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/III._The_History_of_Synthetic_Resin_Varnishes)

## Chapter 16

- 1 See: Maurizio Reberschak, s.v. *Cini, Vittorio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 25 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1981).
- 2 Mario said that this was not exactly true, because the final deeds of gift were not made until 1961. Neither the National Gallery nor the Kress Foundation had any intention of giving up the two paintings, which had been purchased legitimately. As explained in an earlier chapter, the foundation's method was to allow the National Gallery, and in some cases also the regional galleries, to swap

## NOTES

- paintings from earlier 'donations' and substitute them with others as they were acquired. The 'gifts' still belonged to the foundation until 1961.
- 3 "The Giorgio Cini Foundation is a non-profit cultural institution based in Venice, Italy. It was constituted by Vittorio Cini, in memory of his son Giorgio, with the aim of restoring the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore (devastated after 100 years of military occupation) and of creating an international cultural center that would re-integrate the Island into the life of Venice." The small but select house museum at San Vio containing some of the collector's greatest treasures opened to the public in 1984. <http://www.cini.it/en/foundation>
  - 4 Letter in the archives of The Samuel H. Kress Foundation.
  - 5 John Walker, *Self-Portrait*, 150–51.
  - 6 *Ibid.*, 150.
  - 7 *Ibid.*, 150.
  - 8 Archives of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.
  - 9 *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection. Acquired by The Samuel H. Kress Foundation 1951-1956* (National Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1956).

## Chapter 17

- 1 The following purchases were made from Contini between 1948 and 1954: \$1,255,000, June 1948; \$450,000, March 1949; \$4,000,000, June 1950; \$156,000, July 1950; \$2,000,000, June 1954.
- 2 Walker had polio as a child.
- 3 De Giorgi, *L'Eredità Contini Bonacossi*.
- 4 The *Madonna of Spoleto* was sold by Contini in 1955 to the Cini Collection in Venice. The dealer appears to have done a sort of bait and switch. A different *Madonna and Child*, listed as by the Badia a Isola Master, was included in the 1954 purchase and is in the National Gallery. The Cini panel is a beautiful painting, very close to Duccio, purchased by Contini from a collection in Spoleto. Rush Kress's letter must refer to this painting, which was not given an export license, and not to the latter, which Berenson thought was a fake when he first saw it, as did I. It is a damaged, mediocre painting of a Duccesque type and is never exhibited.
- 5 In a letter dated March 21, 1985 (in the author's possession), Berenson's biographer Ernest Samuels, who had found confirmation of Berenson's assistance to Contini in the archives at I Tatti, asked Mario if he knew of any financial arrangement between the two men and if Wildenstein was involved in the negotiation. I do not know if Mario replied but he always told me that Berenson was not paid by Contini, though he was given gifts, which included a painting by Lorenzo Lotto and jewelry for Nicky Mariano.
- 6 Patricia Volterra, *The Times of My Life*. Her recollections of some minor details about the trip are interesting, but the date she assigns to it (1950) is incorrect. The actual sequence of events is documented by the Contini correspondence

## NOTES

- published in Elsa De Giorgi's book. In the short preface, Volterra says that she wrote the manuscript eleven years earlier (around 1976) based on memory.
- 7 Mario and Walker had selected three paintings in temporary importation: Bellini's *Portrait of Jorg Fugger*, Zurbarán's *Still Life*, and Catena's *Adoration*.
  - 8 Complete documentation of this and all other purchases made by the Kress Foundation is housed in their archives.
  - 9 Stefano Paolo, "Elsa, Italo e il conte scomparso," *Corriere della Sera*, August 4, 2004.
  - 10 This episode was not the immediate cause of Sandrino's dismissal, which took place following another incident some time later.
  - 11 Sandro Pazzi, *La Donazione Dimenticata: L'incredibile vicenda della collezione Contini Bonacossi* (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2016).

## Chapter 18

- 1 X-radiographs made by the Prado after its acquisition in 2000 reveal that it was painted over a standing portrait of Godoy.
- 2 Maria Teresa's older brother went into the church and her younger sister died without issue.
- 3 Rita de Angelis, *Opera Pittorica Completa di Goya* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1974), 98.
- 4 Letter in the author's possession.
- 5 Emilia Orlandini del Beccuto (1873–?) married Camillo Ruspoli (1865–1944), Marques de Baodilla del Monte. They had two sons, Luigi Ruspoli (1898–1944) and Paolo Ruspoli (1899–1969). Both died without issue. The title passed to a Spanish cousin, Camilo Ruspoli, 4th Duke of Alcudia and Sueca (1904–1975). "Genealogy of Don Manuel de Godoy y Alvarez de Faria and Maria Teresa de Borbón y Vallabriga," Genealogy.eu, last modified November 3, 2003. <http://genealogy.euweb.cz/other/ruspoli.html>
- 6 "Portrait of the Marquesa de Santiago," website of the J. Paul Getty Museum. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/706/francisco-jose-de-goya-y-lucientes-francisco-de-goya-portrait-of-the-marquesa-de-santiago-spanish-1804/>
- 7 This episode evidently took place when Mario had a studio in the new Kress offices at 250 West 57th Street, that is, very shortly after he began to work for the foundation.
- 8 Walker, *Self-Portrait*, 34.
- 9 The book was first published by Electa (Florence) in 1951. There is no doubt that Berenson believed in the Naples version, although he later changed his mind, which must have caused some friction with John Walker—despite Walker's devotion to the old scholar. Berenson's handwritten manuscript for the book, which he began on December 22, 1948, is in the archives at I Tatti. (Writings, Caravaggio, Box 1/3). In Part I, p. 42, he wrote: "There exist other treatments of the semi-nude Baptist. Only one deserves mention here. It is represented by two versions, one at Naples is superior, the probable original, while Prof. R. Longhi reproduces [it] as being in the London market (Proporzioe I, pl. 18).

## NOTES

- 10 John Spike, *Caravaggio* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2001), 26–27, catalogue no. 4. The painting was found in a storeroom in 1950 and belonged to one Antoine de Rothschild.
- 11 In this regard, it is worthwhile to read Justice Rose’s full decision in *Thwaytes v Sotheby’s*: “*Thwaytes v Sotheby’s* [2015] EWHC 36 (Ch) (16 January 2015),” BAILII. <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Ch/2015/36.html>
- 12 In fact the Largillière was bought in 1954. The purchases made from French and Co. in early 1950 were: the panel by the Master of the Saint Lucy Legend, *Queen Zenobia Addressing Her Soldiers* by Tiepolo and *the Holy Family* by El Greco. The total paid on that occasion was \$225,000. Mario seems to have confused the El Greco and the Largillière. See page 261.

### Chapter 19

- 1 Margaret Leslie Davis, *The Culture Broker: Franklin D. Murphy and the Transformation of Los Angeles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 265.
- 2 Ralph Lowell Nelson, *The Investment Policies of Foundations* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1967), 49.
- 3 Davis, *The Culture Broker*, 264.
- 4 As cited in Davis, *The Culture Broker*, 266.
- 5 Nelson, *The Investment Policies*, 49.
- 6 Davis, *The Culture Broker*, 167.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 192. Regarding the proposed purchase of Titian’s *Giacomo Dolfin*, Murphy wrote to Robert Ahmanson: “Modestini has cleaned more great Italian pictures than any living person and I would trust his judgment about authenticity quite as much as I would any art historian.”
- 8 *Life*, November 16, 1953, and *National Geographic*, December 1961.
- 9 Murphy was a well-read man and may have been inspired by a poem published in the British journal *Punch* in 1855 about Austen Henry Layard, a collector of northern Italian paintings that he bequeathed to the National Gallery, and an archaeologist who discovered the ancient Assyrian city of Ninevah: *Layard in eager zeal the mask from jobbery to strip, / Mistaken on a point of fact, has chanced to make a slip, / So down the vultures swoop on him, the ravens, and the crows, / The wolves, jackals, and poodle dogs of state that are his foes.*

### Chapter 20

- 1 The purpose of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation originally included healthcare as well as art-related goals. After 1961, it became a singular mission of funding “scholarship, research and conservation of European works of art and historic architecture.”
- 2 “Our Mission,” the website of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, <http://www.kressfoundation.org/>



## NOTES

- 3 Federico Zeri, *Confesso che ho sbagliato*, 113–5.
- 4 This was not Valentiner's first post in the United States. In 1908, on Bode's recommendation, he was appointed curator of decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum. In 1914, he returned to Germany to enlist as a private, where, by chance, his sergeant was the great German expressionist painter Franz Marc, who died in the war. In 1921, Valentiner returned to the Metropolitan for a period, during which he organized the first exhibition of German expressionist painting at Anderson Galleries. Originally a Rembrandt scholar, his interests were wide-ranging; at Detroit, he commissioned the Mexican communist Diego Rivera to paint the controversial lobby murals of the new building, which opened in 1927, the year he hired William Suhr. Later, he worked for the Los Angeles County Museum on acquisitions, and in 1953, he became director of the nascent Getty Museum. As discussed earlier in this book, in 1955 he became the founding director of the North Carolina Museum of Art, where he purchased a brilliant group of Italian baroque paintings. See Lee Sorensen, "Valentiner, W. R.," *Dictionary of Art Historians*, [www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/valentinerw.htm](http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/valentinerw.htm)
- 5 Heinemann sold two to the Cleveland Museum and one to the Thyssen Collection. He kept three for his own collection, which his widow, Lore, left to the Metropolitan Museum in her will. Here, they joined two other panels from the same predella in the Robert Lehman Collection, which have a different provenance. A ninth scene, *The Death of Saint Catherine*, belongs to a private collection.
- 6 Interview with Eugene Thaw, *Art Newspaper*, October 1994, 24–5.
- 7 It is not all that unusual for the dealers of old master paintings to clean works themselves. One reason for this is that they are so eager to see what the piece looks like after a sale; additionally, at least some dealers dislike paying a restorer for something they think they can do themselves just as well, if not better.
- 8 An art-world joke, meaning that surreptitiously listening to the opinions of others supplants real connoisseurship with one's own eyes.
- 9 The Lehman heirs sold it many years later, and the painting is now in the collection of the Getty Museum.
- 10 Joyce Hill Stoner and Michael von der Goltz, "The Heritage of Adolph Goldschmidt and Johannes Hell in the History of Twentieth-Century Conservation," *Studies in Conservation* 50, no. 4 (2005): 275–283.
- 11 Jacob Simon, ed., "British Picture Restorers, 1630–1950," website of the National Portrait Gallery, London, first edition March 2009, last updated March 2016, <http://www.npg.org.uk/research/programmes/directory-of-british-picture-restorers/british-picture-restorers-1600-1950-h.php> – see entry for Johannes Hell.
- 12 John and Anthony Blunt became friends. They worked closely together, particularly following Blunt's appointment as keeper of the Queen's Collection. When in 1979, the news broke that Blunt was the fourth man engaged in espionage for the Soviets, John was shattered; like many others, he was torn, because while he detested the act, he loved the man.

## Chapter 21

- 1 Presently, the painting is given to Giovanni Cariani, a Venetian painter influenced by both Giorgione and Titian but whose distinct style is difficult to confound with either of his older contemporaries. Mario would surely have said that the art historian who made this attribution was completely blind.
- 2 Harold Wethey, *El Greco and His School* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 2:77.
- 3 The painting was purchased by Zuloaga in Córdoba in 1905, after it had been cut down and relined. There is no doubt that the type of flaked losses and their location throughout the composition must have occurred when the canvas was unconstrained and crumpled. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436576>
- 4 John Richardson and Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso: 1881–1906* (New York: Random House, 1991), 1:87, 429–31, 474.
- 5 It has been said that in the past, when gold-ground paintings were out of fashion, the leaf was often scraped off for its value and sold.
- 6 Lee Sorensen, “Wildenstein, Daniel,” *Dictionary of Art Historians*, [www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/wildensteind.htm](http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/wildensteind.htm)
- 7 It is not true, as reported by Burton Fredericksen in his book, *The Burdens of Wealth: Paul Getty and His Museum*, that Mario had a share in the Rubens. His invoice added an extra charge for ‘research’. Owning a share in paintings is not an arrangement Mario ever had with Wildenstein, except for a couple of paintings from the Studio d’Arte Palma that he and Pietro Maria Bardi sold to Wildenstein’s in 1949. I have a one-page document recording that transaction with a short list of art works. Fredericksen also falsely claims that Mario was convicted of the illegal export from Italy of a painting that Mario believed—and continued to believe—to be an early work by Rubens, *The Death of Samson*, which was purchased by the Getty with full knowledge of its provenance. Mario was absolved in full by the Corte Suprema di Cassazione as not guilty, because he, in fact, had nothing to do with its illegal exportation from Italy. Finally, it is not true that Mario offered other illegally exported paintings to the Getty. Fredericksen may be confusing Mario with another Italian restorer/dealer in New York from whom the Getty, and other museums, purchased a number of paintings illegally exported from Italy over many decades.
- 8 Johnson was perhaps thinking of the painting by Rubens at the Metropolitan Museum, *Venus and Adonis*. See Walter Liedtke, *Flemish Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1984), 1:151, fig. 29. “The condition is fair: The paint surface is considerably rubbed overall, and there are many small repaintings. The head of Adonis was repainted at an early date (eighteenth century?); radiographs and old copies indicate that his expression, originally, was melancholy.”

## NOTES

### Chapter 22

- 1 I believe this painting to be a small panel in the collection of the Cloisters entitled *Man of Sorrows with a Donor*. It resembles a Christ at the Column, in that Christ is crowned with thorns and covered with wounds and is holding a large cross; the angel in the lower right is holding a column. It was purchased in 1974, and is catalogued as “last quarter of the 15th century with modern additions.” It is not on view. The provenance is: Emil Renders, Bruges (by 1926–March 1941); Alois Miedl, Brussels and Bilbao (1941–1969; inv. no. 59); Hester Diamond, New York (by 1969–sold 1974); [Christie’s, London (June 28, 1974)]. The museum director and curator at that time would have been Thomas Hoving and Jack Schraeder. Mario always swore that the buyers were from the Metropolitan.

### Chapter 23

- 1 Letter dated November 14, 1968, from John Walker to Mario Modestini. “I believe the Claude should be left essentially as it is, except that you will clean it and do whatever is necessary to make the added portion harmonize with the original . . . we shall write a label which will say that the upper part of the shepherd was added at a later date.”
- 2 The additions compose approximately 6” (15.24 cm) of the height and 9.50” (24.13 cm) of the width of the cut-down original.
- 3 Marcel Röthlisberger, “Claude Lorrain in the National Gallery of Art,” *Studies in the History of Art* 3 (1969–1970): 34–57, repro.
- 4 Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* (Oxford, 1977), 285–286.
- 5 Philip Conisbee et al., *French Painting of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogues (Washington: 2009), 109–113. Distributed by Princeton University Press.
- 6 Belinda Rathbone, *The Boston Raphael* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2014), 145, 161.
- 7 John Shearman, “Raphael at the Court of Urbino,” *Burlington Magazine* IV, 112, no. 803 (February 1970): 72–78.
- 8 Rathbone, *The Boston Raphael*, 168, 170–1. “. . . by law at that time, any object worth more than \$10,000 must be declared upon entering the country, whether dutiable or not. . . . Failure to make a declaration in customs was potentially punishable by forfeiture of the imported object as well as a civil penalty equal to its value.”
- 9 Shearman, “Raphael”, 75.
- 10 Jill Dunkerton, Nicholas Penny, and Ashok Roy, “Two Paintings by Lorenzo Lotto in the National Gallery,” *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 19 (1998): 52–63.
- 11 Before they began to paint, artists often made one-to-one drawings for compositions known as cartoons from the Italian word *cartone*, which means a

## NOTES

large piece of paper. These summary designs were transferred to the prepared canvas or panel by several different methods. They belonged to the studio and were subsequently used to produce other versions of successful compositions, executed either by the artist himself, his studio assistants, or a combination of the two. The lines of these transferred drawings are often mechanical and schematic.

- 12 Behrman, *Duveen* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972), 15. See also Christopher Gray, "Where Old Masters Flew Off the Walls: The Elegant Architecture of Fifth Avenue's Past," *New York Times*, December 5, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/realestate/the-elegant-architecture-of-fifth-avenues-past.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/07/realestate/the-elegant-architecture-of-fifth-avenues-past.html?_r=0)
- 13 The purchase was the subject of an exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum, October 24, 2014 to April 27, 2015. "Lock, Stock, and Barrel: Norton Simon's Purchase of Duveen Brothers Gallery," the website of the Norton Simon Museum, <http://www.nortonsimon.org/lock-stock-and-barrel-norton-simon-s-purchase-of-duveen-brothers-gallery#>
- 14 Eve Borsook and Alfio Del Serra, "A Conversation on Painting Techniques," *Burlington Magazine* 127, no. 982 (January 1985): 4–16.

### Chapter 24

- 1 Jaynie Anderson, "The First Cleaning Controversy at the National Gallery, 1846–1853," in *Opinion, Appearance, Change: Evaluating the Look of Paintings*, edited by Peter Booth and Victoria Todd (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1990): 3–7.
- 2 The Pettenkofer process was not without its own harmful effects. The initial method consisted of exposing blanched and cracked varnish to the fumes of ethyl alcohol. The procedure made the varnish clear and brilliant again, but the effect was transitory. To make the treatment more long-lasting, Pettenkofer secretly added copaiba balsam, rubbing it over the surface of the varnish before exposing it to the alcohol fumes. The copaiba, which contains a penetrating oil, swelled the paint as well as the varnish, the two layers bonding together at the interface, which can make subsequent varnish removal problematic.
- 3 The most renowned were: Morton C. Bradley Jr., a private conservator in Boston; Richard Buck (1903–1977), director of the Intermuseum Conservation Association, Oberlin, Ohio; Rutherford Gettens (1900–1974), conservator at the Freer Gallery in Washington DC; Albert J. Jakstas (1916–2000), conservator of the Gardner Museum in Boston and the Art Institute of Chicago; Elizabeth Jones (1918–2013), who directed the conservation center at the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, and conservator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Sheldon Keck (1910–1993), Brooklyn Museum of Art; Caroline Keck (1909–2008), Brooklyn Museum of Art; MoMA; Murray Pease (1904–1965), Metropolitan Museum of Art. George Stout (1897–1978), the most famous of the Monuments Men, who

## NOTES

- was played by George Clooney in the film, founded the conservation department of the Fogg Museum, Harvard University. He was director (1947–1954) of the Worcester Museum, Worcester, MA, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (1955–1970). Several of them were dismissed from their positions due to criticism of their work on paintings or subsequently blamed for spoiling entire collections.
- 4 Paul Philippot, “La restauration dans la perspective des sciences humains,” in *Pénétrer l’art, restaurer l’œuvre: hommage in forme di florilegio* (Kortrijk: Groeninghe, 1990), 491–500.
  - 5 Paul Philippot, “The Idea of Patina and the Cleaning of Paintings,” *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings* (J. Paul Getty Trust, 2004), 391–395. The essay was originally published in French in the *Bulletin de l’Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique* in 1966.
  - 6 *Deborah Kip, Wife of Sir Balthasar Gerbier, and Her Children.*
  - 7 Parkhurst had been the director at the Allen Memorial Art Center of Oberlin College, where he had established a conservation department to serve not only Oberlin but other museums in the Midwest. It was headed by paintings conservator, Richard Buck, from the Fogg, a leading exponent of the technological-scientific school.
  - 8 Neil Harris, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013) 226.
  - 9 *Ibid.*, 227–228. According to some critics the painting already had condition problems when Agnew sold it and he blamed its inherent deficiencies on the restoration. This is not substantiated in the publication *Studies in the History of Art* (Volume 5, 1973) about the conservation of the Rubens at Oberlin, written by their experts. The art historian, Wolfgang Stechow, wrote of the Rubens that “it brings to the United States one of the finest group portraits of the seventeenth century. Indeed, the picture is more than that: it is one of the great documents of that era.” (p. 7) Richard Buck wrote that “In general details in paint and brushmarking remained fresh and crisp. Damage was slight, remarkably inconsequential for a painting of its 350 odd years.” (p. 51).
  - 10 *Ibid.*, 233.
  - 11 *Ibid.*, 232. The author’s assertion, based on information from Joyce Hill Stoner, that there just happened to be no easels in the studio that day, and that it “was not normally the case” that pictures were cleaned lying flat is simply not true. In a memorandum to Sheldon Keck, Victor Covey and the other members of the department clearly state the opposite: “During his [John Brealey’s] visit, he criticized U.S. training programs and regional centers, and when he learned that our usual practice is to clean paintings flat on the table and that we make use of binocular stereo microscopes, he said that that was why paintings all over America were being ruined and particularly singled out New Haven, Hartford and the Fogg.

NOTES

- 12 Paul Mellon, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon: A Memoir* (William Morrow, 1992), 311.
- 13 Harris, *Capital Culture*, 231.
- 14 See the Appendix for an explanation of this alteration.
- 15 Documents in the author's possession.
- 16 Harris, *Capital Culture*, 241.
- 17 Harris, *Capital Culture*, 244.
- 18 Letter in the author's possession.
- 19 Everett Fahy, director of the Frick Collection and former head of the Department of European Painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, wrote: "Most of the pictures I examined seemed to be presentable. But a few—the Hobbema, the Manet, and the Rembrandt *Mill*—still raise questions not only about the skill of the Gallery's restorers but more importantly about the competence of the Gallery's curators. . . . The Hobbema should not be exhibited in its present state. While I doubt that the Gallery's restorers abraded the paint surface, they, or the Gallery's curators, should have had the good sense not to accentuate the painting's bad state of preservation by cleaning it. . . . In the case of the Manet, I believe the cleaner was insensitive to the overall tonality of the painting. The whites jump out at one, and the surface is altogether raw. . . . I believe the Rembrandt *Mill* is a victim of a similar lack of judgment. Granted, little irreparable harm has been done. Yet, seeing the state in which the Hobbema landscape was left, I certainly would not have entrusted it to the same restorers." Sydney Freedberg shared Fahy's opinion, but the wording of his letter was more diplomatic. Hubert von Sonnenburg's report was very negative and he judged Silberfeld to be naïve. See Harris, *Capital Culture*, 245-250.
- 20 Harris, *Capital Culture*, 251.
- 21 This remark is not included in a text of the talk published in 1984 (*Journal of the American Institute of Conservation*, Volume 23, Number 2, Article 1). I attended the meeting and remember this comment being made with considerable vehemence by Mr. Keck.
- 22 Harris, *Capital Culture*, 253.
- 23 Michael Jaffé, *Rubens's Madame Gerbier and Her Children: A Dealer's Record. Agnews 1967-1981*, (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1981), 77.
- 24 Paul Richards, "A Tale of Two Paintings," *Washington Post*, October 29, 1978, L1, 8, 9.
- 25 Letter dated April 16, 1979, in the author's possession.
- 26 Talens Rembrandt Varnish. In 1981 the formulation was the polycyclohexanone, Ketone Resin N, in white spirits.
- 27 Richard D. Buck, "Rubens: The Gerbier Family: Examination and Treatment", *Studies in the History of Art* 5 (1973), 32-43. The Gerbier family is painted on a support made up of six pieces of canvas. The ground and imprimatura layers of the central section have slightly different characteristics than the outer strips, however visually they are all pale grey in tone. This patchwork support is not

## NOTES

- uncommon for Rubens although it is found mainly in his landscapes and portraits of his own family and friends.
- 28 I can see Mario's work because I am so familiar with his hand. Fortunately, he used thin varnishes and stable retouching materials so little has altered over the years.
- 29 The visit was organized and funded by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and was an initiative of Dr. Marilyn Perry, president of the foundation. The group included John Brealey of the Metropolitan Museum, David Bull from the National Gallery, Andrea Rothe of the Getty, Leonetto Tintori of Florence, Mario, and myself.
- 30 Pierluigi De Vecchi et al., *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 6–7. Restoration of the fifteenth-century paintings was begun in 1965 and lasted until 1974. In 1980, a scaffold was erected on the entrance wall to proceed with the restoration of the sixteenth-century paintings of the series of the life of Christ, as well as the register above with portraits of the popes.
- 31 The vault had been cleaned with bread dough and Greek wine by the painter Carlo Maratta in the seventeenth century.
- 32 Somewhat later, an architectural firm commissioned by the diocese decided to exhibit it with its component parts separated and mounted on poles. This approach was popular in Italy in the eighties and nineties. It has now been put back together and toned, as noted.

## Chapter 25

- 1 The painting is in the Musée d'Orsay. The inscription reads: "*Veulliez ne pas vernir ce tableau, C. Pissarro.*"
- 2 John Richardson, "Crimes against the Cubists," *New York Review of Books*, June 16, 1983, 32–34.
- 3 Website of the Durand-Ruel et Cie, <http://www.durand-ruel.fr/>
- 4 David Bomford, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, and Ashok Roy, *Art in the Making: Impressionism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 101.
- 5 This is an idea that goes back to eighteenth-century Venice, when it is recommended in writings by Pietro Edwards (1744–1821), the conservative restorer charged at the time with looking after paintings in Venice.
- 6 The buyer was Japanese, who paid record prices for impressionist paintings in the late eighties.
- 7 Pissarro actually preferred to have his paintings framed behind glass, "in the English way."
- 8 By this, I presume he meant to rub or brush some sort of drying oil over them.
- 9 The name is a pun derived from a sign painted by André Gill, which shows a rabbit jumping out of a saucepan—thus "lapin à Gill." The cabaret was also frequented by other impoverished artists from the neighborhood, such as Amedeo Modigliani, among others.



## NOTES

- 10 First, I locally varnished the passages that needed a bit of saturation and sprayed the entire surface with a thin solution of Mario's AYAB in alcohol, which sealed the uneven surface, followed by a complete varnishing with a nearly dry brush. The surface was still too glossy, so I used another of Mario's techniques: a final spray of bleached beeswax in trichloroethane to make it perfectly matte.
- 11 Robert Hughes, "Art and Money," *Time*, November 27, 1989, 60–65.

## Epilogue

- 1 Sam Knight, "The Bouvier Affair," *The New Yorker*, February 8 and 15, 2016.

## Appendix

- 1 Caroline Villiers, *The Fabric of Images: European Paintings on Textile Support in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (London: Archetype Publications, 2000).
- 2 David Bomford, Ashok Roy, and Alister Smith, "The Techniques of Dieric Bouts: Two Paintings Contrasted," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 10 (1986): 39–57. In the National Gallery's related painting, *The Entombment*, the pigments chalk and azurite were identified in the sky; the latter is thought to have degraded.
- 3 Sheldon Keck, "Some Picture Cleaning Controversies: Past and Present," *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation*, 1984, 2, 73–87.
- 4 Sylvia Hochfield, "Conservation: The Need is Urgent," *Art News*, February 1976, 26–33. Interview with John Brealey.
- 5 Ernst Gombrich, "Dark Varnishes: Variations on a Theme from Pliny," *Burlington Magazine* 104 (1962): 51–55.
- 6 Gerry Hedley, "On Humanism: Aesthetics and the Cleaning of Paintings" in *Measured Opinions*, (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, London, 1993), 152–66.

## *Index of Names*

- Agnelli (family) 134  
Agnelli, Gianni 170  
Agnew, Geoffrey 292, 293, 322–324, 326, 328, 357, 379, 380, 382–384, 386, 490  
Agnew, Julian 482  
Ahmanson, Robert 485  
Ainsworth, Maryann 335  
Alberti, Leon Battista 343  
Altdorfer, Albrecht 242  
Altman, Benjamin 165  
Amadei, Emma 471  
Amendolea, Bruna 472  
Anderson, Jaynie 489  
Andrea del Castagno 149  
Andrea del Sarto 216, 241  
Anesi, Paolo 71  
Annenberg, Walter 403  
Antonello da Messina (Antonello de Antonio) 341, 342  
Antonello de Saliba 341  
Arcangeli, Francesco 477  
Ardeni, Pier Giorgio 477  
Argan, Giulio Carlo 99, 100, 106, 130, 219  
Ascarelli, Attilio 121  
Augustus (first Roman emperor) 63  
Baciccio (Giovanni Battista Gaulli, called il Baciccio or il Baciccio) 71  
Baetjer, Katharine 408, 415  
Balay, Roland 295  
Baldini, Umberto 155  
Baldovinetti, Alessio 163, 233–235, 481  
Bambach, Carmen 418  
Bandera, Maria Cristina 474  
Banti, Anna (pseudonym of Lucia Lopresti) 153  
Barberi, Giuseppe (Peppino) 129, 205, 207, 479  
Barberini (collection and family) 68, 176, 241, 299–302, 319  
Barberini, Francesco (cardinal) 299  
Barberini-Colonna di Sciarra, Maffeo 295  
Bardi, Pietro Maria 125–128, 132–134, 136, 140, 143, 148, 171–174, 177, 256, 487  
Bargellini, Simone 476  
Bartolomeo, Veneto 163  
Basile, Giuseppe 474  
Batoni, Pompeo 71  
Beck, James 393–395  
Behrman, S. N. 478, 480, 488

INDEX OF NAMES

- Bellesi, Giuseppe 135  
 Bellini, Giovanni 149, 175, 241, 481, 483  
 Bellotto, Pietro 242, 247, 436  
 Benedetti, Sergio 74, 75  
 Bentivegna, Rosario 120, 123  
 Berdini, Agnese 119  
 Berdini, Alfredo 119, 120, 475, 476  
 Berdini Paolo 119  
 Berenson, Bernard (BB) 73, 78, 97, 100, 155, 157–160, 162, 163, 165–167, 169, 192, 197–199, 215, 216, 218, 228, 229, 231, 233, 236, 241, 248, 260, 276, 292–294, 343, 355, 476, 477, 479, 483, 484  
 Berenson, Mary (born Costelloe) 78, 79, 162, 165, 167  
 Berger, Gustav 209, 479  
 Bergman, Ingmar 142  
 Berlusconi, Silvio 134  
 Bernini, Gian Lorenzo 68, 176, 242, 273, 299–302  
 Berti, Luciano 155  
 Biagini, Alfredo 36  
 Biagio d'Antonio da Firenze 125  
 Bianchettini (signor) 96  
 Binns, Charles F. 473  
 Bloemen, Jan Frans van (called Orizonte) 71, 72  
 Bloemen, Pieter van (called Monsù Stendardo) 71, 72  
 Blunt, Anthony 332, 486  
 Blunt, Cecil (count; born Blumenthal) 136, 137  
 Blunt, John 492  
 Bo Bardi, Lina 171, 173  
 Boccioni, Umberto 64, 154  
 Bode, Wilhelm von 247, 318–320, 485  
 Boggis, Jean Sutherland 474  
 Boltraffio, Giovanni Antonio 414, 418  
 Bomford, David 492, 493  
 Bond, Alan 399  
 Borelli, Cini Lyda 259  
 Borghesani 81  
 Borghese, Scipione 70  
 Borgia, Orazio 473  
 Borenius, Tancred 481  
 Borsook, Eve 489  
 Bosch, Hieronymus 242  
 Boskovits, Miklós 150, 477  
 Bossaglia, Rossana 472  
 Bossi, Ildebrando 358  
 Botero, Fernando 373  
 Both, Jan 355, 362  
 Bottai, Giuseppe 154  
 Botticelli, Sandro (Sandro di Mariano Filipepi, called Botticelli) 54, 162, 163, 165–169, 241, 258, 320, 363, 365–367, 373, 481  
 Boucher, François 242  
 Bouvier, Yves 421  
 Bracaglia, Bartolo 207, 479  
 Bradley, Morton C. jr. 489  
 Bramantino (Bartolomeo Suardi, called il Bramantino) 149  
 Brandi, Cesare 99, 100, 103, 104, 106, 149, 218, 219, 371, 378, 390  
 Braque, Georges 332, 397  
 Brealey, John 20, 296, 330–335, 376, 380, 381, 384, 386, 392, 396, 397, 403, 443, 444, 490, 491  
 Briganti, Giuliano 129, 132, 361, 392–395, 476  
 Bronzino, Angiolo 232, 277, 278  
 Brooks, Harry 347  
 Brown, David Alan 477  
 Brueghel, Jan the Elder 221  
 Bucarelli, Palma 113, 114, 128–132, 475  
 Buccelli, Raniero 475  
 Bucciarelli, Fabio 481  
 Buck, Richard D. 380, 386, 489–491  
 Bull, David 491  
 Bullaty, Sonja 209, 210, 219  
 Burri, Alberto 55, 131  
 Buschbeck, Ernst 268, 269  
 Busiri Vici, Andrea 217

INDEX OF NAMES

- Buy, Anita 41  
 Byrnes, James B. 482
- Cagli, Corrado 136, 137  
 Calamandrei, Franco 123  
 Calcagnadoro, Antonino 49, 50  
 Callas, Maria 132  
 Calvesi, Maurizio 64  
 Calvino, Italo 280  
 Canaday, John 232, 480  
 Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal, called *il Canaletto*) 83, 136, 242, 327, 328  
 Canessa, Cesare 365  
 Cannistraro, Philip V. 476  
 Cantalamessa, Nicola 36  
 Cappello, Vincenzo 258  
 Capponi, Carla 120, 123  
 Carafa (family) 473  
 Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi, called *il Caravaggio*) 74, 105, 291–298, 319, 320  
 Cariani, Giovanni 486  
 Carlevarijs, Luca 162  
 Carnegie, Andrew 188  
 Carnevale, Domenico 395  
 Carpaccio, Vittore 167, 241, 244, 320  
 Carracci, Annibale 242  
 Carrère, John Merven 266  
 Carretta, Donato 121  
 Carter Brown, John III 23, 379, 381, 386, 387  
 Caruso, Pietro 121  
 Cassirer, Kurt 54, 55, 472  
 Cassirer, Paul 54  
 Catena, Vincenzo 483  
 Catherine of Siena (saint) 323  
 Cavalcaselle, Giovanni 106, 474  
 Cavenaghi, Luigi 104–107, 474  
 Cecconi, Lorenzo 73  
 Cellini, Benvenuto 250, 251  
 Cézanne, Paul 54, 175
- Chardin, Jean-Baptiste-Siméon 175, 242, 381  
 Charles I (king of England) 379  
 Chateaubriand, Assis 170, 171  
 Chiesarotti 73  
 Christiansen, Keith 296, 418, 477  
 Christina of Sweden (queen) 481  
 Christus, Petrus 242  
 Churchill, Winston (sir) 112  
 Cimabue (Cenni di Pepo called *Cimabue*) 241, 273  
 Cini (collection) 168  
 Cini, Giorgio 258, 260, 482  
 Cini, Vittorio (count) 258–260, 482  
 Clement IX (pope; born Giulio Rospigliosi) 68, 71  
 Clift, Montgomery 143  
 Clooney, George 489  
 Clouet, François 221, 242, 257, 258, 273  
 Coccorante, Leonardo 73  
 Colalucci, Gianluigi 389, 390, 393  
 Colasanti, Arduino 130  
 Colasurdo, Antonio 475  
 Colden 209  
 Coleman, Enrico 44  
 Colonna 71, 164  
 Colonna, Piero (prince) 61  
 Colonna Gioeni, Margarita 71  
 Comanducci, Agostino Mario 96  
 Conisbee, Philip 488  
 Constable, John 109, 127, 175  
 Conti, Alessandro 474  
 Contini, Oscar 151  
 Contini Bonacossi (family) 152, 153, 189–191, 280, 283, 320, 328  
 Contini Bonacossi, Alessandro (count) 80, 146–149, 151–153, 158–160, 170, 187–189, 191, 192, 194, 196–199, 201, 204, 218, 228, 229, 232, 235, 241, 243, 251, 270, 271, 274–280, 283, 342, 476, 481, 483  
 Contini Bonacossi, Alessandro Augusto 151–153

INDEX OF NAMES

- Contini Bonacossi, Alessandro (Sandrino) 151–153, 210, 212, 215, 216, 218, 275, 277, 279–283, 321, 329
- Contini Bonacossi, Vittoria (born Erminia Vittoria Feroldi) 148, 151, 152, 188, 189, 191, 218, 276, 280, 283, 478
- Contini Bonacossi, Vittorina 151
- Constable, John 109, 127, 175
- Cook, Francis (sir) 147, 159, 414
- Cook, Herbert Frederick (sir) 147, 243
- Coolidge, Calvin 224
- Corot Jean-Baptiste-Camille 175
- Correggio, Antonio Allegri (called il Correggio) 232, 241
- Corsetti, Iside 64, 65
- Corsetti, Tullio 475, 476
- Cortissoz, Royal 479
- Costa, Lorenzo 360
- Cott, Perry B. 250, 253
- Courbet, Gustave 95
- Covey, Victor 380, 383, 490
- Cranach, Lucas 242
- Crespi, Luigi 232
- Crivelli, Carlo 104
- Czartoryski (collection) 23
- D'Annunzio, Gabriele 37–39, 55
- Daddi, Bernardo 175
- Daumier, Honoré 175
- David, Jacques-Louis 242, 258, 263–265, 273
- Davis, Margaret Leslie 484, 485
- Davis, Mary 271, 281, 309, 386, 480
- Dazzi, Arturo 36
- de Angelis, Rita 484
- De Chirico, Giorgio 154
- De Giorgi, Elsa 152, 153, 279–281, 283, 478, 483
- De Kuzmik, Livia 57
- De Mutiis, Fernanda 65, 110
- De Pisis, Filippo 49, 136
- De Rossi, Alvaro 129
- De Santis, Amleto 48, 65, 128, 129, 205, 207, 479
- De Sica, Vittorio 141–144
- De Vecchi, Pierluigi 491
- Debenedetti, Giacomo 475
- Degas, Hilaire-Germain-Edgar 94, 95, 473, 474
- Del Carretto, Ilaria 393
- del Monte, Francesco Maria (cardinale) 295, 296
- Del Serra, Alfio 371–373, 489
- Del Vecchio, Angelo 87
- Delacroix, Eugène 175
- della Quercia, Jacopo 393
- Della Robbia (family) 149
- Della Rovere, Francesco Maria 359
- Della Rovere, Maria 359
- Della Torre, Angelo 48
- Dent 135
- Desiderio da Settignano 273
- di Castro, Leopoldo 296
- Diamond, Hester 487
- Diane de Poitiers 221
- Dolfin, Giacomo 322
- Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri, called il Domenichino) 248
- Dominguín, Luis Miguel 140
- Dossena, Alceo 86, 87, 89, 163
- Dosso (Giovanni Luteri, called il Dosso) 135
- Douglas, Alexander (10th duke of Hamilton) 265
- Drey, Francis 257
- Duccio di Buoninsegna 82, 241, 275, 328, 373, 483
- Dunkerton, Jill 488
- Durand-Ruel, Paul 397
- Dürer, Albrecht 167, 242, 258, 320, 428
- Duveen, Henry J. 166, 474
- Duveen, Joseph (lord) 78, 97, 138, 139, 159, 162–167, 187, 190, 192, 196, 226, 227, 229, 233, 266, 268, 318, 474, 477
- Duveen, Joseph Joel 474

INDEX OF NAMES

- Eastlake, Charles 105, 377  
 Edwards, Pietro 492  
 Eisler, Colin 309, 488  
 El Greco (Dominikos Theotokopoulos, called El Greco) 72, 73, 95, 96, 242, 244, 250, 255, 261, 273, 328–330, 338–340, 481, 485  
 Eleonora di Toledo 277  
 Emerson, Guy 196, 198, 199, 201, 203, 207, 220, 233, 245, 246, 253, 258, 263, 295, 299, 303, 307  
 Este, Lionello d' 51  
 Eustis, Margaret 226
- Fabbri, Dino 355  
 Faber, Abe 241  
 Facchinetti, Simone 477  
 Fahy, Everett 342, 366–368, 490, 491  
 Falanga, Pasquale 355  
 Falcone, Maria 477  
 Faller, Judith 31  
 Farnese, Ranuccio 159, 160  
 Fatta, Angelo 205, 209, 304, 479  
 Fazzini, Pericle 41, 471  
 Fedeli Bernardini, Franca 472  
 Fei, Paolo di Giovanni 199, 369  
 Feller, Robert 252, 253  
 Fellini, Federico 46, 141  
 Ferraguti (commendatore) 68, 70, 72  
 Fiedler, Ernest (Ernie) 23, 24  
 Finley, David 82, 226–229, 233, 300, 480  
 Fioravanti, Alfredo 85, 86  
 Fiordigiglio, Vincenzo 54, 57, 61, 472  
 Fiorentini 115  
 Fiske, Kimball Sidney 245  
 Flandes, Juan de 276  
 Fleres, Ugo 55, 56, 129  
 Forbes, Malcolm 403  
 Fortuny, Mariano 44  
 Fourment, Helena 345  
 Fowles, Edward 163, 164, 267, 366, 474, 477, 481
- Fra Angelico (Guido di Pietro, called il Beato Angelico) 133, 236, 241, 257  
 Fragonard, Jean-Honoré 175, 242, 273  
 Francia (Francesco Raibolini, called il Francia) 135, 360  
 Francis of Assisi (saint) 32  
 Frankfurter, Alfred M. 88, 242, 244, 245  
 Franz Joseph II (prince of Liechtenstein) 22  
 Frascione, Vittorio 355  
 Fredericksen, Burton 479, 480, 487  
 Freedberg, Sydney 491  
 Frel, Jiří 90  
 Frick, Henry Clay 188, 225, 261, 266  
 Friedmann, Herbert 480  
 Furmanik, Giuseppe 109
- Galli, Beatrice 151  
 Garbo, Greta 317  
 Gardner, Ava 140  
 Gardner, Elizabeth E. 214  
 Garofalo (Benvenuto Tisi, called il Garofalo) 135  
 Gauguin, Paul 175  
 Geiger, "Red" 199, 201  
 Gerbier (madame) 386, 388  
 Gerbier, Balthasar 379  
 Gettens, Rutherford 489  
 Getty, J. Paul 214, 479  
 Ghirlandaio (Domenico Bigordi, called il Ghirlandaio) 272, 273, 320, 342–344, 390  
 Giampietrino (Giovanni Pietro Rizzoli, called Giampietrino) 266, 267  
 Gibson, Estelle 475  
 Gill, André 492  
 Gimignani, Ludovico 71  
 Ginevra de' Benci 23  
 Giorgione (Giorgio da Castelfranco, called Giorgione) 192, 232, 241, 330, 336, 337, 342, 366, 486

INDEX OF NAMES

- Giosi, Francesco (called Ciccillo) 92, 94,  
95, 473  
Giosi, Giuseppe 109  
Giotto di Bondone 163, 241, 248, 249,  
431  
Giovanni di Paolo 323, 324, 333  
Giunti, Umberto 82, 83, 158, 163  
Gnudi, Cesare 270  
Gobbi, Elena 86, 87, 88  
Gobbi, Tito 86  
Godoy, Manuel de 286, 484  
Godoy y Borbón, Carlota Joaquina de  
286, 287  
Goller, Christian 353  
Golz, Michael von der 486  
Gombrich, Ernst 443, 493  
Gonzaga, Eleonora 359  
Gould, Cecil 361, 362  
Gouzer, Loïc 422  
Goya, Francisco 175, 242, 273, 284,  
286–289  
Gozzoli, Benozzo (Benozzo di Lese)  
258, 349  
Granata (doctor) 142  
Grassi, Luigi 73  
Grassi, Marco 73  
Gray, Christopher 488  
Gregori, Mina 297  
Gregory IX (pope; born Ugolino di  
Anagni) 63  
Gritti, Andrea (doge) 258, 268  
Gronau, Carmen 349  
Gropius, Walter 172  
Gros, Antoine-Jean (called Baron Gros)  
265  
Grundherr, Hugo von (baron) 176  
Grünewald, Matthias 242, 258, 263, 264,  
273, 276, 351, 352  
Gualino, Riccardo 133–135  
Guardi, Francesco Lazzaro 73, 83, 232,  
242  
Guarino, Antonio 64  
Gudiol, José 287  
Guggenheim, Peggy (Marguerite) 131  
Guttuso, Renato 49, 136  
Hahn, Andrée 159  
Hals, Frans 176, 320  
Hamilton, Carl W. 247–249, 482  
Hanley, Edward T. 473  
Hanna, Leonard C. jr. 473  
Harding, Warren G. 224  
Harr, Jonathan 74, 76, 472  
Harris, Neil 490, 491  
Hastings, Thomas 266  
Hawkins, O. V. W. 266  
Hecht, Henry 206, 479  
Hedley, Gerry 444, 493  
Heil, Walter 249, 250, 251  
Heinemann, Rudolf 167, 295, 296, 319,  
320, 322–324, 328, 395, 341, 344, 349–  
351, 361, 365, 366, 486  
Heinemann, Lore 334  
Hell, Johannes 331, 332  
Heller, Sandy 421  
Henry II (king of France) 221  
Henry VIII (king of England) 320  
Henschel, Jack 162, 268, 295  
Hitler, Adolf 60, 108, 130, 154, 258, 325,  
331  
Hobbema, Meindert 490, 491  
Hochfield, Sylvia 493  
Hoenigswald, Ann 188, 478, 479  
Hoffmann, Josef 36  
Hogarth, William 17, 471  
Holbein, Hans 175, 242, 319, 320, 334, 335  
Holben, Ellis Margaret 405  
Holzer, Jenny 59  
Hondecoeter, Melchior d' 186  
Hoover, Herbert Clark 224  
Horne, Herbert 162, 165–167  
Houdon, Jean-Antoine 242, 273  
Hoving, Thomas 330, 487  
Huemer, Frances 386, 387



INDEX OF NAMES

- Hughes, Robert 403, 492  
Humber, Robert Lee 247
- Iacchella, Andrea 475, 476  
Ilo Nunes, Giacomo 100  
Indrio, Laura 472  
Induno, Gerolamo 44  
Ingersoll, Robert Sturgis 246  
Ingres, Jean-Auguste-Dominique 242, 265  
Isolani, Procolo 166
- Jacovacci, Francesco 55  
Jaffé, Michael 380, 382–384, 386, 387, 491  
Jakstas, Albert J. 489  
Jandolo, Augusto 53, 65, 80, 472, 473  
Johnson, Ben 346, 487  
Jones, Elizabeth 489  
Jones, Jennifer 143, 144  
Joni, Icilio Federico 77–83, 96, 139, 158, 163, 291, 349, 353, 473  
Julius II (pope; born Giulio Della Rovere) 359
- Kahn, Otto 162, 165–167  
Kahnweiler, Daniel-Henry 332  
Kappler, Herbert 115, 116, 118, 121  
Katz, Robert 476, 477  
Keck, Caroline 442, 489  
Keck, Sheldon 383–385, 442, 443, 489–491, 493  
Kelly, Grace 132  
Kelly Volterra, Patricia 146, 199, 277, 476, 483  
Kennedy John F. 307  
Kennedy Onassis, Jacqueline 25, 307  
Kesselring, Albert Konrad 120, 124  
Khokhlova, Olga 398  
Kiehart, Paul 206, 479  
Kilvert, Delora 188, 189, 275, 478  
Kinnaird (lord) 174  
Kip, Deborah 386, 388  
Kirbi, Jo 492
- Kneisl, Christian 323  
Knight, Sam 492  
Kopelman, Gabrielle 383, 479  
Kresge, Sebastian 478  
Kress (family) 184, 276, 305  
Kress, Claude 186  
Kress, Francesca 212  
Kress, Jocelyn 189, 212, 213  
Kress, Maggie 212  
Kress, Rush Harrison 157, 158, 160, 163, 186, 196–203, 205, 207, 208, 212, 233, 241, 245–248, 250, 257, 258, 260, 261, 263–268, 270, 271, 273–277, 281, 291–293, 295, 299, 301, 303–305, 307, 308, 476, 482, 483  
Kress, Samuel H. 183–194, 196, 212, 224, 227–229, 231–233, 236, 239, 275, 306, 478, 480  
Kress, Virginia 196, 212, 260, 307  
Kuang, Shan 422
- Landi, Neroccio de' 80, 96, 291  
Lapenna, Elvira 472  
Largillière, Nicolas de 299, 485  
Latini, Giuseppe 73, 82–84  
Lattanzi, Enrica 31, 32  
Layard, Austen Henry 105, 485  
Lazzaroni (family) 161, 365  
Lazzaroni, Michele (baron) 161–166, 168, 169, 233, 360, 365, 366, 477, 481  
Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) 36, 126, 172  
Lee, Sherman 351, 352, 366  
Léger, Fernand 175  
Lehman, Robert 252, 291, 328  
Leighton, John 492  
Lenin, Vladimir (Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) 60  
Leo XIII (pope; born Vincenzo Gioacchino Pecci) 136  
Leonardo da Vinci 22, 23, 25, 100, 105, 159, 266–268, 342, 358, 407, 413–415, 417–421, 423, 424

INDEX OF NAMES

- Levi de Léon 94  
 Libera, Adalberto 59  
 Liedtke, Walter 487  
 Lippi, Filippino 106  
 Lippi, Filippo (called fra Filippo) 103,  
 236, 241, 257  
 Locatelli, Andrea 71, 72  
 Lomeo, Angelo 209, 210  
 Longhi, Roberto 72, 80, 99, 103, 129,  
 149, 153–156, 228, 229, 231, 243, 270,  
 294, 355, 478  
 Longobardi, Nino 38  
 Lopresti, Lucia 153  
 Loren, Sophia 43, 123, 141  
 Lorenzetti, Pietro 82, 158  
 Lorenzo di Credi 23, 268, 342  
 Lorrain (Claude Gellée, called Claude  
 Lorrain) 242, 355–358, 488  
 Lotto, Lorenzo 100, 232, 241, 361–363,  
 483  
 Louchheim, Aline 242  
 Louis XIII (king of France) 299  
 Louise (companion of Levi de Léon) 94  
 Lowengard, Armand 474  
 Luini, Bernardino 232  
 Luis de Borbón (prince of Condé) 284,  
 286
- Macron, Emmanuel 424  
 Madruzzo, Cristoforo (cardinal) 174  
 Mafai, Mario 48, 49  
 Magnani, Anna 114  
 Magnani, Luigi 288  
 Magnasco, Alessandro (called il Lissan-  
 drino) 162, 221, 243, 327  
 Magri, Mario 475  
 Mahon, Denis 297, 298  
 Mameli, Vito 73  
 Mancinelli, Fabrizio 389, 390, 393  
 Mancini, Antonio 65, 92, 95, 96  
 Mandolesi, Antonio 119, 124  
 Mandolesi, Marilu 124
- Manet, Édouard 175, 490, 491  
 Manglard, Adrien 71  
 Manni, Giannicola 243  
 Manning, Robert 94, 209, 240  
 Mantegna, Andrea 100, 175, 254, 258, 428  
 Manzoni, Piero 55, 131  
 Manzù, Giacomo 136  
 Marani, Pietro 421  
 Maratta, Carlo 492  
 Marc, Franz 485  
 Marchig, Giannino 73, 198  
 Marescalchi Belli, Giacomo 119, 120,  
 475, 476  
 Margherita (Sister) 473  
 María Luisa de Borbón y Vallabriga 286  
 María Teresa de Borbón y Vallabriga  
 (countess of Chinchón) 285, 287, 484  
 Mariano, Nicky 159, 160, 260, 483  
 Martini, Placido 117, 120, 475, 476  
 Martini, Simone 82  
 Mason, Frank 392, 393  
 Master of Badia a Isola 275, 483  
 Master of the Osservanza (Maestro  
 dell'Osservanza) 148–151  
 Master of the Saint Lucy Legend 261,  
 262, 299, 485  
 Mastroianni, Marcello 46, 141  
 Materasso (family) 171  
 Mattei, Asdrubale 74  
 Mattei, Ciriaco 74  
 Matteo di Giovanni 96  
 Matteotti, Giacomo 51  
 Matteucci, Mario 73  
 Matthews, Herbert 135, 136  
 Matthews, Nancie 136  
 Mazzoni, Gianni 78, 472, 473  
 McBride, Henry 207  
 McCully, Marilyn 486  
 Medici, Cosimo I de' 250, 251  
 Medici, Giuliano de' 162, 165–168, 259, 320  
 Medici, Lorenzo de' (called the Magnifi-  
 cent) 165

INDEX OF NAMES

- Mellon, Andrew W. 190, 224–229, 232, 236  
 Mellon, Paul 22–24, 206, 228, 232, 380, 381, 383, 384, 387, 490  
 Memling, Hans 242, 273  
 Memmi, Lippo 156  
 Mercuri, Salvatore 472  
 Mezzana, Corrado (professor) 48  
 Michelangelo (Michelangelo Buonarroti) 163, 389–395  
 Middeldorf, Ulrich 271, 309  
 Miedl, Alois 487  
 Millicent, A. Rogers 473  
 Modestini, Antonio 31, 32, 40, 51  
 Modestini, Antonio jr. 110  
 Modestini, Concetta 32  
 Modestini, Guglielmo 40  
 Modestini, Luigi 32, 33, 51  
 Modestini, Luigi (beato) 32  
 Modestini, Pasquale (don) 32  
 Modigliani, Amedeo 91, 92, 175, 492, 493  
 Molteni, Giuseppe 105, 106  
 Mombello, Luca 269  
 Monelli, Paolo 130  
 Monet, Claude–Oscar 397  
 Monotti, Francesco 135, 136, 171  
 Mont, Frederick (born Friedrich Mondshein) 320, 325, 351, 352  
 Montefiore, Raoul 158, 211  
 Morandi, Giorgio 53, 63, 133, 135, 136, 156  
 Moravia, Alberto (Alberto Pincherle) 123  
 Morelli, Giovanni 105, 106  
 Moretti, Luigi 217  
 Morgan, John Pierpont 164, 188  
 Moro, Francis 289, 399  
 Moseley, Ray 477  
 Müндler, Otto 105  
 Murillo, Bartolomé Esteban 242  
 Murphy, Franklin 304, 305, 309, 382, 387, 485  
 Mussolini, Benito (called Il Duce) 38, 39, 52, 57–59, 61–63, 110–112, 117, 126, 134, 137, 148, 154, 173, 258  
 Muti (Suida) 203  
 Napoleon I Bonaparte (emperor) 258, 264, 265  
 Nardo di Cione 433  
 Navarini, Alfredo 475, 476  
 Negro, Angela 472  
 Nelson, Ralph Lowel 485  
 Nero (emperor of Rome) 63  
 Nerva (emperor of Rome) 63  
 Notte, Emilio 64, 65  
 O'Connor, Andrew 74, 75  
 O'Connor, Jeremiah 227, 480  
 Oddi (family) 243, 481  
 Offner, Richard 248  
 Olivarez, Gaspar de Guzmán (count-  
 duke) 174  
 Orlandini del Becuto, Emilia 484  
 Pacifici, Armando 90  
 Pallavicini, Camilla 68  
 Pallavicini-Rospigliosi (family) 69, 71  
 Pallucchini, Rodolfo 330  
 Palma il Giovane (Giacomo Negretti,  
 called Palma il Giovane) 268  
 Palma il Vecchio (Jacopo Negretti, called  
 Palma il Vecchio) 128  
 Pampaloni Contini Bonacossi, Atala 276  
 Panhard, Gilles 296  
 Pannini, Giovanni Paolo 135  
 Pantaleone (signora) 95  
 Panzeri, Matteo 474  
 Paoli, Gino 409  
 Paolo IV (pope; born Gian Pietro Carafa) 115  
 Paolo VI (pope; born Giovanni Battista  
 Montini) 119  
 Paolo, Stefano 483  
 Paolucci, Antonio 477

INDEX OF NAMES

- Papini, Roberto 56, 57, 129, 130, 476  
 Parkhurst, Charles 379–381, 384, 490  
 Parsons, Harold 85  
 Passacantando, Piero 73  
 Pavia, Goffredo 73  
 Payson (family) 398, 399, 401  
 Payson, John 399  
 Pazzi, Sandro 483  
 Pease, Murray 339, 489  
 Pecci Blunt, Anna Laetitia (Mimi; con-  
 tessa) 136, 137  
 Peck, Gregory 45  
 Pedrazzoni, Gildo 87, 88  
 Pellegrini, Giovanni Antonio 221  
 Pelliccioli, Mauro 73, 99, 100, 103, 106,  
 147, 217  
 Penny, Nicholas 418, 488  
 Percoco, Marco 471  
 Perin del Vaga 481  
 Perkins, Frederick Mason 231  
 Perry, Marilyn 20, 21, 212, 491  
 Perugino (Pietro Vannucci, called il Pe-  
 rugino) 243, 254, 342  
 Pettenkofer, Max von 377, 489  
 Philip V (king of Spain) 284  
 Philippot, Albert 383  
 Philippot, Paul 378, 489  
 Piacentini, Marcello 36, 59, 126  
 Piazzetta, Giovanni Battista 481  
 Picasso, Pablo Ruiz 86, 175, 332, 339, 397,  
 398, 401–403  
 Pichetto, Geraldine 196  
 Pichetto, Stephen 187, 188, 191–200, 202,  
 203, 205, 206, 236, 251, 308, 375, 478  
 Pier Francesco Fiorentino (pseudonym)  
 234  
 Piero della Francesca 149, 163, 172  
 Piero di Cosimo 232, 254  
 Pietrangeli 92  
 Pietrangeli, Carlo 390, 391  
 Pietro da Cortona (born Pietro Berret-  
 tini) 299  
 Pignatari (family) 171  
 Pignatari, 'Baby' (Francisco) 173  
 Pillsbury, Ted 334, 335  
 Pinturicchio (Bernardino di Betto, called  
 il Pinturicchio) 71  
 Pirandello, Luigi 55  
 Pisanello (Antonio di Puccio Pisano,  
 called Pisanello) 51  
 Pisano, Nino 265, 270, 273  
 Pissarro, Camille 396, 400, 492  
 Pius XII (pope; born Eugenio Maria  
 Giuseppe Pacelli) 111  
 Poldi Pezzoli, Gian Giacomo 105  
 Pollock, Jackson 131  
 Pomodoro, Arnaldo 55  
 Ponti, Giovanni (Gio) 149, 171  
 Pontormo (Iacopo Carrucci, called il  
 Pontormo) 241, 273  
 Pope, John Russell 225  
 Pope-Hennessy, John (sir) 273, 347, 348,  
 350  
 Porcella, Amadore 72  
 Poussin, Nicolas 68, 175, 242, 332  
 Pozzoli, Viviana 476  
 Prati (a painter) 95  
 Pratt, Matthew 434  
 Primavera, Nunzio 472  
 Primicile Carafa, Stefanina (duchess of  
 Montejasi) 94  
 Pulvirenti, Rosario 95  
 Quarantelli, Emilio 207, 209, 251, 304,  
 479  
 Radnor (lord) 379  
 Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio) 106, 164,  
 174, 218, 226, 241, 243–245, 309, 358–  
 361, 373, 477, 481  
 Rathbone, Belinda 358, 359, 488  
 Rathbone, Perry 358, 359, 362  
 Ravà, Renzo 137, 204, 208, 277, 278,  
 281–283, 287, 406–408

INDEX OF NAMES

- Read, Herbert (sir) 133  
 Reid Parkhurst, Mary Jennings 68  
 Rembrandt, Harmenszoon van Rijn 436  
 Renders, Emil 487  
 Reni, Guido 70  
 Renoir, Pierre-Auguste 175  
 Reynolds, Sir Joshua 175, 346  
 Riccardi, Amadeo 85  
 Riccardi, Riccardo 235, 473  
 Riccardi, Teodoro 84, 85, 88, 235  
 Riccardi, Virgilio Angelino 473  
 Ricci, Corrado 166  
 Ricci, Sebastiano 243  
 Richards, Paul 388, 491  
 Richardson, John 339, 397, 486, 492  
 Richter, Gisela Marie Augusta 85, 473  
 Rigosi, Claudio 207, 479  
 Rinaldi, Simona 474  
 Rivera, Diego 485  
 Robison, Andrew 385  
 Robusti, Domenico (son of Tintoretto) 104  
 Rockefeller, John D. 224  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano 112  
 Rorimer, James 291  
 Rosa, Alberto 64  
 Rosa, Salvatore 71  
 Rosati, Alberto 53, 54  
 Rosenberg, Paul 94, 473  
 Rospigliosi (family) 66–73, 83, 153, 370  
 Rospigliosi, Giambattista 68  
 Rospigliosi, Girolamo (prince) 67–70, 72  
 Rospigliosi, Giulio (pope Clement IX) 68, 71  
 Rospigliosi, Giulio Cesare 71  
 Rospigliosi, Giuseppe (prince) 68, 69  
 Rossellini, Roberto 141  
 Rothe, Andrea 399, 491  
 Röthlisberger, Marcel 355, 356, 358, 488  
 Rothschild, Antoine de 484  
 Rothschild, Gustave Salomon de (baron) 355  
 Rotter, Alex 422  
 Rousseau, Theodore (Ted) 291, 292, 338–340, 357  
 Roy, Ashok 488, 492, 493  
 Rubens, Hélène 379  
 Rubens, Pieter Paul 267, 273, 299, 328, 344–347, 377, 379, 380, 386, 387, 487, 490, 491  
 Rudolf II (emperor of Austria) 481  
 Ruhemann, Helmut 331  
 Ruspoli (family) 284, 286  
 Ruspoli, Adolfo 286  
 Ruspoli, Camillo (1865–1944) 484  
 Ruspoli, Camilo (1788–1864) 286  
 Ruspoli, Camilo (1904–1975) 484  
 Ruspoli, Luigi 286, 484  
 Ruspoli, Paolo 286, 484  
 Rybolovlev, Dmitry 421, 422  
 Sabatello, Armando 79–81, 472  
 Saenredam, Pieter 273  
 Salmi, Mario 155  
 Salocchi, Gianni 270  
 Samuels, Ernest 166, 167, 472, 477, 479, 483  
 Samuels, Mitchell 190, 261, 299  
 Sandart, Joachim von 351  
 Sano di Pietro 96, 149–151, 156, 158, 477  
 Sandrelli, Stefania 409  
 Sansovino, Jacopo 481  
 Santi di Tito 72  
 Sarfatti, Margherita 57, 148  
 Sartorio, Giulio Aristide 44  
 Sassetta (Stefano di Giovanni, called il Sassetta) 147–150, 325, 326, 375, 376  
 Sassetti (family) 272  
 Sassoon, Sybil (marquess) 355  
 Scafetti, Enrico 92, 94, 108–110, 117, 119, 125, 127  
 Schoenberg, Arnold 325  
 Schraeder, Jack 487  
 Sciarra, Barberini-Colonna di (family) 295, 296, 298

INDEX OF NAMES

- Scipione (Gino Bonichi) 48, 49  
 Scott, Geoffrey 167  
 Scrivener, Jane 475  
 Sebastiano del Piombo 258, 320  
 Secco Suardo, Giovanni (count) 54, 103,  
     199, 479  
 Secrest, Meryle 482  
 Sedelmeyer, Charles 164  
 Serio, Mario 475  
 Sestieri, Emanuele 67, 147  
 Sestieri, Ettore 67, 72  
 Shakespeare, William 159  
 Shapley, Fern Rusk 250, 309  
 Shearman, John 358, 359, 361, 488  
 Sibbert, Edward 184  
 Signorelli, Luca 254  
 Silberfeld, Kay 380, 381, 383, 491  
 Simon, Jacob 486  
 Simon, Norton 72, 143, 144, 328, 330,  
     347, 348, 366, 367  
 Simon, Robert 411–423  
 Sinatra, Frank 140  
 Sinclair, Anne 473  
 Sironi, Mario 49  
 Siviero, Rodolfo 359–361  
 Smith, Alister 493  
 Snowden, Marian 69  
 Solario, Andrea 276  
 Solimena, Francesco (called “l’Abate  
     Ciccio”) 67, 136, 177  
 Solly, Edward 243, 481  
 Sonnenburg, Hubert von 330, 331, 353,  
     357, 491  
 Sorensen, Lee 485, 487  
 Spadini, Armando 95  
 Spear, Richard 298  
 Spellman, Francis Joseph 112  
 Spencer, Herbert 199  
 Spike, John 484  
 Spinola-Doria, Brigida (marchesa) 267  
 Stalin, Joseph Vissarionovich 136, 226  
 Stanzone, Massimo 248  
 Stechow, Wolfgang 490  
 Stewart Gardner, Isabella 78, 190  
 Stoner, Joyce Hill 486, 490  
 Stout, George 489  
 Strozzi (family) 148  
 Strozzi, Bernardo (called il Cappuccino  
     or il Prete Genovese) 221, 242  
 Sudek, Josef 210  
 Suhr, Wilhelm (William) 295, 318, 319,  
     321, 334, 335, 352, 485  
 Suhr, Henriette 321  
 Suida, William (born Wilhelm Emil)  
     199–201, 203, 209, 233, 242, 243, 245,  
     250, 258, 267, 268, 295, 299  
 Sullivan, Brian R. 476  
 Sullivan, Frank 206, 253  
 Sustris, Lambert 243  
 Syson, Luke 420  
 Swarzenski, Hans 358, 359  
 Szoldaticz, Giorgio 44  
  
 Tavazzi, Filippo 71  
 Terragni, Giuseppe 59  
 Thaw, Eugene (Gene) V. 323, 324, 335,  
     486  
 Theotokopoulos, Manusso 72, 328, 329,  
     486  
 Thyssen (family) 162, 272, 330, 351  
 Thyssen-Bornemisza, Heinrich (baron)  
     167, 319, 320, 342  
 Thyssen, Hans Heinrich (Heini) 320–322  
 Tiepolo, Giambattista 242, 250, 261, 299,  
     481  
 Tiepolo, Giandomenico 250  
 Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti, called il  
     Tintoretto) 103, 135, 149, 177, 221,  
     242, 273, 275, 277, 278, 340  
 Tintori, Leonetto 491  
 Titian (Tiziano Vecellio) 132, 149, 160,  
     174, 177, 192, 241, 243, 258, 268–270,  
     273, 275, 278, 323, 328, 330, 337, 342,  
     374, 481, 485, 486

INDEX OF NAMES

- Toesca, Pietro 96, 97, 132, 358  
 Tognotti, Eugenia 471  
 Toncher (padre) 135  
 Tormo, Elias 286, 287  
 Totò (Antonio De Curtis, called Totò)  
     114  
 Toulouse-Lautrec, Henri 95, 175  
 Tura, Cosmè (Cosimo) 258  
 Turner, (Joseph Mallord) William 119,  
     175, 332  
 Valentiner, Wilhelm Reinhold 247, 318,  
     319, 482, 485  
 Van Dyck, Anthony 95  
 Van Gogh, Theo 400  
 Van Gogh, Vincent 54, 175, 398, 399  
 Van Marle, Raimond 231  
 Van Meegeren, Han 163, 233, 320  
 Vannoni, Ferruccio 96, 139, 158, 163, 268,  
     481  
 Vanvitelli, Luigi 71, 72  
 Vasari, Giorgio 394  
 Velázquez, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y  
     149, 174  
 Venanzoni, Rita 110, 124, 203, 205  
 Veneziani, Giulio 109  
 Veneziano, Domenico 232  
 Veneziano, Paolo 273  
 Venturi, Adolfo 153  
 Venturini Papari, Tito 48  
 Verga, Giovanni 55  
 Vermeer, Jan 163, 233, 320  
 Veronese (Paolo Caliari, called il Ve-  
     ronese) 134, 242, 273, 275, 277  
 Verrocchio, Andrea del 241, 267, 268,  
     342, 343  
 Verzetta 162, 163, 233, 235, 360, 365, 366  
 Vespucci, Simonetta 165  
 Villa, Emilio 171  
 Villareale, Valerio 177  
 Villiers, Caroline 493  
 Villot, Frédéric 377  
 Visconti, Luchino 145  
 Vittorio Emanuele III (king of Italy)  
     39, 111  
 Volterra (family) 147  
 Volterra, Gualtiero 146, 147, 159, 199,  
     200, 202, 204, 270, 271, 275–277, 476  
 Volterra, Giuseppe 476  
 Walker, John 22, 23, 193, 194, 197–200,  
     206, 216, 227–229, 231–236, 239, 241,  
     248–250, 253, 261–263, 275–278, 287,  
     291–296, 299, 301, 355, 381, 385, 478–  
     484, 488  
 Walton, William 145  
 Wanda (granddaughter of Cantalames-  
     sa) 35  
 Warren, Earl 307  
 Watteau, Antoine 242, 273  
 Weitzner, Julius 327, 328  
 Weppelmann, Stefan 477  
 West, Benjamin 434  
 Wethey, Harold 328–330, 486  
 Widener, Joseph 165, 261  
 Wildenstein (family) 168, 259, 265, 344,  
     397, 398, 401, 402, 487  
 Wildenstein, Daniel 344–347, 398, 483,  
     487  
 Wildenstein, Georges 174, 175, 215, 229,  
     235, 245, 248, 258, 259, 265, 344, 355  
 Wildenstein, Guy 344  
 Wild, Louis de 198  
 Winternitz, Emanuel 262  
 Woolworth, Frank Winfield 183  
 Wrightsman, Charles 347, 348  
 Wrightsman, Jayne 347  
 Zaninelli, Fulvia 478  
 Zavattini, Cesare 141–144  
 Zeri, Federico 90–92, 130, 132, 148, 150,  
     155, 162, 163, 171, 214–220, 247, 259,  
     301, 317, 326, 342, 343, 355, 477, 480,  
     482, 485



INDEX OF NAMES

Zivieri, Alberto 48

Zuccarelli, Francesco 135

Zuloaga, Ignacio 338–340, 486

Zurbarán, Francisco 242, 273, 483

## Bibliography

- Alfieri, Dino, and Luigi Freddi. *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista: 1. Decennale della marcia su Roma*. Rome: PNF - Direttorio nazionale, 1933.
- Amendolea, Bruna, and Laura Indrio. *Palazzo Valentini: storia di un palazzo e di una istituzione*. Rome: Bardi Edizioni, 2005.
- Andaloro, Maria. *La Teoria del Restauro nel Novecento da Riegl a Brandi*. Florence: Nardini Editore, 2006.
- Anderson, Jaynie. "The First Cleaning Controversy at the National Gallery, 1846–1853," in Victoria Todd (ed.), *Opinion, Appearance, Change: Evaluating the Look of Paintings*. London: Institute for Conservation, 1990.
- Ardeni, Pier Giorgio, and Francesco Berti Arnoaldi. *Cento ragazzi e un capitano: la brigata Giustizia e Libertà "Montagna" e la Resistenza sui monti dell'alto Reno tra storia e memoria*. Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2017.
- Bambach, Carmen C. *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice, 1300-1600*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Bandera, Maria Cristina, and Giuseppe Basile. *Longhi-Brandi. Convergenze-divergenze*. Florence: Il Prato, 2010.
- Bargellini, Simone. *Antiquari di ieri a Firenze*. Florence: Casa Editrice Bonechi, 1981.
- Behrman, Samuel Nathaniel. *Duveen*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972.
- Berenson, Mary, Barbara Strachey, and Jayne Samuels. *Mary Berenson: A Self-portrait from Her Letters and Diaries*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985.
- Bettina, Elizabeth. *It Happened in Italy: Untold Stories of How the People of Italy Defied the Horrors of the Holocaust*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011.
- Biadene, Susanna, and Mary Yakush. *Titian: Prince of Painters*. Munich: Prestel, 1990.
- Boggs, Jean Sutherland, et al. *Degas*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1988.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bomford, David. *Rembrandt: Art in the Making*. London: National Gallery, 2006.
- Bomford, David, and Jo Kirby. *Art in the Making: Italian Painting before 1400*. London: National Gallery, 1996.
- Bomford, David, Jo Kirby, John Leighton, and Ashok Roy. *Art in the Making: Impressionism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Bomford, David, Ashok Roy, and Alister Smith. "The Techniques of Dieric Bouts: Two Paintings Contrasted." *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 10. London: National Gallery, 1986.
- Borenius, Tancred. *A Catalogue of the Paintings at Doughty House Richmond and Elsewhere in the Collection of Sir Frederick Cook, Bt. I. Italian Schools*. London: William Heinemann, 1913.
- Boskovits, Miklós, and David Alan Brown. *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century*. National Gallery Catalogue. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Bossaglia, Rossana, and Elvira Lapenna. *La pittura italiana dell'Ottocento nelle collezioni private reatine: con un omaggio ad Antonino Calcagnadoro nel settantesimo della scomparsa*. Bologna: Edizioni Bora, 2005.
- Bosworth, Richard J. B. *Mussolini*. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- Brandi, Cesare. *Il restauro. Teoria e pratica*. Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1994.
- Briganti, Giuliano. "Via Margutta." *Cosmopolita*. Rome, 1945.
- Briganti, Giuliano. *Mostra di pittori italiani del Seicento*. Rome: Studio d'Arte Palma, 1944.
- Brown, David Alan. *Leonardo da Vinci: Origins of a Genius*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Bucarelli, Palma. *1944: cronaca di sei mesi*. Rome: De Luca Editori, 1997.
- Bucarelli, Palma, and Lorenzo Cantatore. *Cronache indipendenti: arte a Roma fra 1945 e 1946*. Rome: De Luca Editori, 2010.
- Campbell, Lorne, Susan Foister, Ashok Roy, and Rachel Billinge. "Early Northern European Painting." *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 18, no. 7 (1997). New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Cannistraro, Philip V., and Brian R. Sullivan. *Il Duce's Other Woman*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993.
- Capitolium: rassegna mensile del Comune di Roma*. Rome: Tumminelli — Istituto Romano di Arti Grafiche, 1953.
- Capitolium: rassegna mensile del Comune di Roma*. Rome: Tumminelli — Istituto Romano di Arti Grafiche, 1937.
- Capitolium: rassegna mensile del Governatorato*. Milan, Rome: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1930.
- Cavenaghi, Luigi. "Il Restauro e la conservazione dei dipinti." *Bollettino d'Arte*, X-XII (1912).
- Christiansen, Keith, and Patricia Rubin. *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011.
- Civai, Alessandra, and Silvia Muzzin. *Luigi Cavenaghi e i maestri di tempi antichi*. Caravaggio: Banca Credito Cooperativo, 2006.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Conisbee, Philip, Richard Rand, and Joseph Baillio. *French Paintings of the Fifteenth through the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Contini Bonacossi, Alessandro, Roberto Longhi, and August L. Mayer. *The Old Spanish Masters from the Contini-Bonacossi Collection*. Rome: Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1930.
- Davis, Margaret L. *The Culture Broker. Franklin D. Murphy and the Transformation of Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- De Giorgi, Elsa. *L'eredità Contini Bonacossi: l'ambiguo rigore del vero*. Milan: Arnaldo Mondadori, 1988.
- De Luna, Giovanni. *Storia del Partito d'Azione: [La rivoluzione democratica] 1942/1947*. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1982.
- De Vecchi, Pierluigi, and Diana Murphy. *The Sistine Chapel: A Glorious Restoration*. New York: Abbeville, 1999.
- Deakin, Frederick William. *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler, and the Fall of Italian Fascism*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- Debenedetti, Giacomo. *The Sixteenth of October 1943 and Other Wartime Essays*. Hull, UK: University Texts, 1996.
- Del Serra, Alfio. "A Conversation on Painting Techniques." *The Burlington Magazine* 127, no. 982 (1985).
- Di Castro, Francesca. *Storie e segreti di Via Margutta*. Rome: Palombi Editori, 2012.
- Diamond, Hanna. *Fleeing Hitler: France 1940*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Dunkerton, Jill, Nicholas Penny, and Ashok Roy. "Two Paintings by Lorenzo Lotto in the National Gallery". *Technical Bulletin* 19, no. 1 (1998): 52–63. London: National Gallery.
- Duveen Brothers. *Duveen Pictures in Public Collections of America: A Catalogue Raisonné with Three Hundred Illustrations of Paintings by the Great Masters, Which Have Passed through the House of Duveen*. New York: William Bradford Press, 1941.
- Eisler, Colin. *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1977.
- Falasca-Zamponi, Simonetta. *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Falcone, Maria. "La giovinezza dorata di Sano di Pietro: un nuovo documento per la Natività della Vergine di Asciano." *Prospettiva* 28–48 (2010). Florence: Centro DI.
- Feller, Robert L. *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of their History and Characteristics*, vol. 1. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 2012.
- Ferrario, Rachele. *Regina di quadri: vita e passioni di Palma Bucarelli*. Milan: Mondadori, 2010.
- FitzHugh, Elisabeth West. *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, vol. 3. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1997.
- Fleres, Ugo. *Roma nel 1911: guida ufficiale della città e dintorni con accenni all'esposizione*. Rome: Amministrazione della Rassegna, 1911.
- Fowles, Edward. *Memories of Duveen Brothers*. London: Times Books, 1976.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Fredericksen, Burton. *The Burdens of Wealth: Paul Getty and His Museum*. Bloomington, IN: Archway Publishing, 2015.
- Gentile, Emilio, and Suzanne Dingee. *La Grande Italia: The Myth of the Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.
- Gombrich, Ernst. "Dark Varnishes: Variations on a Theme from Pliny," *The Burlington Magazine* 104 (1962).
- González-Palacios, Alvar. *Fasto romano: dipinti, sculture, arredi dai Palazzi di Roma*. Milan: Leonardo-De Luca, 1991.
- González-Palacios, Alvar. *Le tre età*. Milan: Longanesi, 1999.
- Guida, Francesco. *Placido Martini. Socialista, Massone, Partigiano*. Florence: Angelo Pontecorboli Editore, 2016.
- Harr, Jonathan. *The Lost Painting*. New York: Random House, 2005.
- Harris, Neil. *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the Reinvention of the Museum Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.
- Hedley, Gerry. *Measured Opinions: Collected Papers on the Conservation of Paintings*. London: Institute for Conservation, 1993.
- Hochfield, Sylvia. "Conservation: The Need is Urgent," *Art News* 75, no. 2 (1976).
- Hoenigswald, Ann. "Stephen Pichetto, Conservator of the Kress Collection" in *Studying and Conserving Paintings. Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Collection*, (2006): 31–41. New York and London: Archetype.
- Hogarth, William. *Analysis of Beauty*. London: J. Reeves, 1753.
- Hughes, Robert. *Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History*. New York: Vintage Books, 2012.
- Hughes, Serge. *The Fall and Rise of Modern Italy*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Iannazzi, Ugo, Eugenio Maria Beranger, Pietro Clemente, Marco D'Aureli, Fulvia Caruso, and Nadia Truglia. *Gente di Ciociaria: concetto territoriale, condizioni economiche e sociali, migrazioni, religiosità, credenze popolari, balie e modelle*. Arce: Aequa, 2007.
- Jaffé, Michael. "Rubens's Madame Gerbier and her Children." *A Dealer's Record. Agnews 1967-1981*, London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1981.
- Jandolo, Augusto. *Le memorie di un antiquario*. Milan: Casa editrice Ceschina, 1938.
- Jandolo, Augusto. *Studi e modelli di Via Margutta, 1870-1950*. Milan: Casa editrice Ceschina, 1953.
- Joni, Federico, and Gianni Mazzoni. *Le memorie di un pittore di quadri antichi (Affairs of a Painter)*. Siena: Protagon Editori Toscani, 2004; parallel text.
- Katz, Robert. *Death in Rome*. New York: Pyramid Books, 1968.
- Keck, Sheldon. "Some Picture Cleaning Controversies: Past and Present." *Journal of the American Institute for Conservation* 23, no. 2 (1984): 73–87. Reprinted in: *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings*, edited by David Bomford and Mark Leonard. Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004.
- Knight, Sam. "The Bouvier Affair." *The New Yorker*. February 8 and 15, 2016.
- Lamb, Richard. *War in Italy: 1943-1944. A Brutal Story*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1996.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Mahon, Denis. "Fresh Light on Caravaggio's Earliest Period: His *Cardsharps* Recovered." *The Burlington Magazine* 130, no. 1018 (1988): 10–25.
- Mazzoni, Gianni. *Falsi d'autore: Icilio Federico Joni e la cultura del falso tra Otto e Novecento*. Siena: Protagon Editori Toscani, 2004.
- Mellon, Paul. *Reflections in a Silver Spoon*. New York: William Morrow, 1992.
- Mills, John, and Raymond White. "The Mediums Used by George Stubbs: Some Further Studies," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 9 (1985). London: National Gallery.
- Modestini, Dianne Dwyer. "John Brealey and the Cleaning of Paintings." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 40 (2005). New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Modestini, Dianne Dwyer. "Leonardo da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* Rediscovered," in *Leonardo da Vinci's Technical Practice: Paintings, Drawings and Influence* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2014), 139–152.
- Modestini, Dianne Dwyer. "Mario Modestini and the Samuel H. Kress Collection," in *Studying and Conserving Paintings: Occasional Papers on the Samuel H. Kress Foundation* (2006), New York, London: Archetype.
- Moncada, Valentina, Maria Chiara Salmeri, Valentina Di Pietro, and Emanuele Condò. *Atelier a via Margutta: cinque secoli di cultura internazionale a Roma*. Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 2012.
- Monelli, Paolo, and Lucio Villari. *Roma 1943*. Turin: Einaudi, 2012.
- Morgan, Philip. *The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Mosely, Ray. *Mussolini: The Last 600 Days of Il Duce*. Dallas: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004.
- Mughini, Giampiero. *Che belle le ragazze di via Margutta: i registi, i pittori e gli scrittori che fecero della Roma degli anni Cinquanta la capitale del mondo*. Milan: Mondadori, 2004.
- National Gallery of Art. *Paintings and Sculpture from the Kress Collection acquired by The Samuel H. Kress Foundation 1951-1956*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1956.
- Negro, Angela. *La collezione Rospigliosi: la quadreria e la committenza artistica di una famiglia patrizia a Roma nel Sei e Settecento*. Rome: Argos, 1999.
- Negro, Angela. *Paesaggio e figura: nuove ricerche sulla Collezione Rospigliosi*. Rome: Campisano Editore, 2000.
- Nelson, Ralph L. *The Investment Policies of Foundations*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1967.
- Otis, Frances Louise. *Diary, 1943-1944* (selections). Wisconsin: Wisconsin Historical Society, n.d.
- Painter, Borden W. *Mussolini's Rome: Rebuilding the Eternal City*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005.
- Panzeri, Matteo, Giacomo Agosti, and Elisabetta Manca. *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*. Bergamo: Pierluigi Lubrina Editore, 1993.
- Parricchi, Umberto, and Fulco Pratesi. *Un paese immaginario: Anticoli Corrado*. Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1984.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Partito d'Azione. *La situazione italiana (novembre 1943)*. Naples: Centro Meridionale, 1943.
- Partito d'Azione. *L'Italia libera: organo del Partito d'Azione*. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore (reprint), 1975.
- Pazzi, Sandro. *La donazione dimenticata: l'incredibile vicenda della collezione Contini Bonacossi*. Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2016.
- Philippot, Paul. "La restauration dans la perspective des sciences humains," in *Pénétrer l'art, restaurer l'œuvre: hommage en forme de florilège* (Groeninghen: Kortrijk, 1990).
- Philippot, Paul. "The Idea of Patina and the Cleaning of Paintings," in *Issues in the Conservation of Paintings*, edited by David Bomford and Mark Leonard. (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 2004).
- Plesters, Joyce, and Ashok Roy. "Nardo di Cione's Altarpiece: Three Saints." *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 9 (1985): 21–37. London: National Gallery.
- Portelli, Alessandro. *L'ordine è già stato eseguito: Roma, le Fosse Ardeatine, la memoria*. Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2014.
- Pozzoli, Viviana. "Lo studio d'arte Palma: storia di un'impresa per il commercio artistico nell'Italia del Dopoguerra," *Acme* 69, no. 2 (2016): 145–174.
- Primavera, Nunzio. *Brief Guide to the Rospigliosi-Pallavicini Palace and Garden*. n.d.
- Richardson, John, and Marilyn McCully. *A Life of Picasso*. New York: Random House, 1991.
- Richardson, John. "Crimes against the Cubists," *New York Review of Books*. June 16, 1983.
- Richter, Gisela. *Etruscan Terracotta Warriors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1937.
- Röthlisberger, Marcel, and Katrina V. H. Taylor. *Report and Studies in the History of Art*, 3 (1970): 34–57. Washington DC: National Gallery of Art.
- Roy, Ashok, ed. *Painting in Antwerp and London: Rubens and Van Dyck*. London: National Gallery, 1999.
- Roy, Ashok. *Artists' Pigments: A Handbook of Their History and Characteristics*, vol. 3. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 2012.
- Samuels, Ernest. *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981.
- Samuels, Ernest, and Jayne Samuels. *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Legend*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1987.
- Saunders, David, Marika Spring, and Andrew Meek. *The Renaissance Workshop*. London: Archetype Publications, 2013.
- Schmitt, Sibylle. "Examination of Paintings Treated by Pettenkofer's Process," in *Cleaning, Retouching and Coatings: Technology and Practice for Easel Paintings and Polychrome Sculpture* edited by John S. Mills and Perry Smith. Preprints of the contributions to the Brussels Congress, 3–7 September. Brussels: IIC, 1990.
- Scrivener, Jane. *Inside Rome with the Germans*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1945.
- Skaug, Erling S. *Punch Marks from Giotto to Fra Angelico: Attribution, Chronology, and*



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Workshop Relationships in Tuscan Panel Painting with Particular Consideration to Florence, c. 1330-1430*. Oslo: IIC Nordic Group, 1994.
- Sox, David. *Unmasking the Forger: The Dossena Deception*. South Yarra, Victoria: Louis Braille Productions, 1990.
- Spike, John T. *Caravaggio*. New York: Abbeville, 2001.
- Stille, Alexander. *Benevolence and Betrayal: Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism*. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Stoner, Joyce Hill, and Michael von der Goltz. "The Heritage of Adolph Goldschmidt and Johannes Hell in the History of Twentieth-Century Conservation," *Studies in Conservation* 50, no. 4 (2005).
- Tentori, Francesco. *P.M. Bardi, con le cronache artistiche de L'Ambrosiano 1930-1933*. Milan: Edizioni Mazzotta, 1990.
- Thomas, Anabel. *The Painters Practice in Renaissance Tuscany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Tognotti, Eugenia, and Gilberto Corbellini. "La spagnola in Italia: storia dell'influenza che fece temere la fine del mondo, 1918-19". *Studi e ricerche storiche* 303 (2002). Milan: Franco Angeli.
- Villiers, Caroline. *The Fabric of Images: European Paintings on Textile Support in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*. London: Archetype Publications, 2000.
- Volterra, Patricia Kelly. *The Times of My Life or What I Remember*. Florence: Industria Tipografica Fiorentina, 1986 (privately printed).
- Walker, John. *Art Treasures for America: An Anthology of Paintings and Sculpture in the Samuel H. Kress Collection*. London: Phaidon Press, 1961.
- Walker, John. *Self-portrait with Donors: Confessions of an Art Collector*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974.
- Ward, David. *Antifascisms: Cultural Politics in Italy, 1943-46: Benedetto Croce and the Liberals, Carlo Levi and the "Actionists"*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996.
- Wethey, Harold E. *El Greco and His School*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962.
- Zaninelli, Fulvia. *Vittoria Contini Bonacossi, Diario Americano, 1926-1929*. Prato-Siena: Gli Ori, 2007.
- Zeri, Federico. *Mai di traverso: Storie e ricordi di quadri, di libri, di persone*. Milan: Longanesi, 1982.
- Zeri, Federico. *Dietro l'immagine: conversazioni sull'arte di leggere l'arte*. Milan: TEA, 1987.
- Zeri, Federico. *Orto aperto*. Milan: Longanesi, 1990.
- Zeri, Federico. *Confesso che ho sbagliato: ricordi autobiografici*. Milan: Longanesi, 1995.

## *Illustration Credits*

### **Text images**

1. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art/Jack Malipan Travel Photography/Alamy Stock Photo
2. From the author's collection
3. From the author's collection
4. Bob Thomas/Popperfoto/Getty Images
5. Public Domain
6. © Smandy/Dreamstime.com
7. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
8. Courtesy of The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives
9. From the author's collection
10. From the author's collection
11. Website of Museo Antropologico "Gente di Ciociaria", July 2012.
12. Jack Malipan Travel Photography/Alamy Stock Photo
13. "Room O – The Year 1922 up to the Beginning of October" in the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution*. (Rome: The National Fascist Party, 1933; 187)/reproduced from Hofstra University Special Collections
14. "Room U – The Sanctuary of the Martyrs" in the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution*. (Rome: The National Fascist Party, 1933; 229)/reproduced from Hofstra University Special Collections
15. © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome
16. Courtesy of the Historic Images Outlet
17. © National Gallery of Ireland

## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

18. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
19. Alfred Eisenstaedt/The LIFE Picture Collection
20. From the author's collection
21. © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
22. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.
23. Realy Easy Star/Salvatore Pipia/Alamy Stock Photo
24. © The Cleveland Museum of Art
25. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive, inv. 97718
26. Cameraphoto Arte, Venice/Art Resource, NY
27. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive, inv. 52722
28. Imaging Department © President and Fellows of Harvard College
29. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
30. Carl Mydans/The LIFE Picture Collection
31. Istituto Luce – Cinecittà
32. From the author's collection
33. From the author's collection
34. Rome, National Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art, by permission of Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e Ambientali e del Turismo
35. From the author's collection
36. Joshua Nefsky
37. From the author's collection
38. From the author's collection
39. Archivio Cesare Visconti di Marcignano, Università degli Studi dell'Insubria
40. Archivio Cesare Visconti di Marcignano, Università degli Studi dell'Insubria
41. Ghitta Carell/Archivio della Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi
42. From the author's collection
43. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
44. Scala/Art Resource, NY
45. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
46. Christoph Schmidt/Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0
47. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
48. Andre M. Chang/Alamy Stock Photo
49. João Musa/Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand
50. João Musa/Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand
51. João Musa/Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand
52. Courtesy of the Kress Foundation
53. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
54. Chris Howes/Wild Places Photography/Alamy Stock Photo
55. Tony Charnock/Alamy Stock Photo
56. © Kress Foundation

## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

57. From the author's collection
58. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gallery Archives
59. Clipping in author's collection
60. From the author's collection
61. From the author's collection
62. © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
63. From the author's collection
64. From the author's collection
65. Massimo Listri
66. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
67. Courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington DC
68. Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
69. Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
70. From the author's collection
71. From the author's collection
72. North Carolina Museum of Art
73. Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
74. Courtesy of Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
75. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art
76. Princeton University Art Museum/Art Resource, NY
77. North Carolina Museum of Art
78. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco
79. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
80. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
81. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
82. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
83. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
84. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
85. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
86. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
87. From the author's collection
88. From the author's collection
89. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
90. From the author's collection
91. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
92. Fondazione Magnani Rocca © 2017, Photo Scala, Florence
93. Digital image courtesy of the Getty Open Content Program
94. Nelson Trust, Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, photo Jamison Miller

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

95. Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
96. Vito Arcomano/Alamy Stock Photo
97. Gallerie Nazionali d'Arte Antica di Roma, Palazzo Barberini, photo: Mauro Coen
98. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art
99. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gallery Archives
100. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gallery Archives
101. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Gallery Archives
102. From the author's collection
103. Courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art
104. From the author's collection
105. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
106. The Norton Simon Foundation
107. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
108. Photo © Jack Mitchell
109. © Agnew's, London/Bridgeman Images
110. Kress Collection of Historic Images, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
111. Kress Collection of Historic Images, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
112. From the author's collection
113. From the author's collection
114. From the author's collection
115. From the author's collection
116. From the author's collection
117. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
118. © The Cleveland Museum of Art
119. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
120. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
121. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
122. © 2017 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
123. © National Gallery, London/Art Resource, NY
124. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive
125. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive
126. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive
127. Norton Simon Art Foundation
128. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence
129. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY
130. Alinari/Art Resource, NY
131. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
132. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
133. De Agostini picture library/De Agostini/Getty Images

## ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

134. Wikimedia Commons
135. Wikimedia Commons
136. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program
137. © 2017 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
138. From the author's collection
139. Pasquale Galasso, from the author's collection
140. © 2005 Robert B. Simon/Photograph: Robert B. Simon
141. Royal Collection Trust/© HM Queen Elizabeth II 2017
142. Courtesy Witt Library, Courtauld Institute of Art, London
143. Image Capture Courtesy Charlotte Hale, Metropolitan Museum of Art
144. Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena CA
145. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons
146. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
147. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
148. From the author's collection

## Plates

- i. Courtesy of Gianni Mazzoni
- ii. The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London
- iii. Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
- iv. Foto Reali Archive, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
- v. Kress Collection of Historic Images, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
- vi. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art
- vii. Kress Collection of Historic Images, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
- viii. Kress Collection of Historic Images, Department of Image Collections, National Gallery of Art Library, Washington DC
- ix. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art
- x. From the author's collection
- xi. The Cleveland Museum of Art
- xii. From the author's collection
- xiii. From the author's collection
- xiv. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art
- xv. From the author's collection
- xvi. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- xvii. From the author's collection

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

- xviii. From the author's collection
- xix. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza/Scala/Art Resource, NY
- xx. From the author's collection
- xxi. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC
- xxii. Bologna, Zeri Photo Archive
- xxiii. © The Cleveland Museum of Art
- xxiv. © 2011 Salvator Mundi LLC/Photograph: Tim Nighswander/Imaging4Art
- xxv. Joshua Nefsky



## *Acknowledgements*

**M**ANY PEOPLE HAVE assisted me in the long course of writing this book. I must first acknowledge Margherita Andreotti who helped me recast and shape the cumbersome first draft, check the references for accuracy, and who has, at many points along the way, encouraged me to continue. In addition, I am grateful to friends who read versions of the book at various junctures, offering criticisms, suggestions and reassurance: my late sister, Denise Dwyer; Teolinda Barolini; John Kaufmann and Jane Weihe; Catherine Lukaszewski; Max Marmor; Puck Meunier; Katharine Ogden Michaels and the late Lenny Michaels; Cheryl Rossum; Ashok and Phoebe Roy; Robert Simon; Dian Smith; Edwin Weinberger; Fulvia Zaninelli. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Karen Weinstein.

Katharine Baetjer, in addition to reading several early versions of the manuscript, supported me and Mario in innumerable ways over the years and has generously proofread the final text.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Margot Note indefatigably chased down the illustrations and image credits. Eve Leckey has been an invaluable editor in the book's final stages. Chelsea Cates at the Samuel H. Kress Foundation swiftly tracked down references and images from their archives. I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the late Pina Pasquantonio and the American Academy in Rome, which afforded a perfect environment while I struggled with the first draft. A number of libraries and archives were generous with their resources including the Biblioteca Berenson; the Fondazione Longhi; the Frick Art Reference Library; the New York Public Library; the Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington; and, in particular, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

Finally, this book would not have seen the light of day without the timely intervention of Walter Cassola who introduced me to my publishers, the extraordinary Casalini family of Torrossa in Fiesole to whom I will always be grateful for the exceptional interest they have taken in both me and my book and their attention to the most minute details: Barbara Casalini, Michele Casalini, and Francesco and Sofia Dilaghi, who are also responsible for the Italian translation.