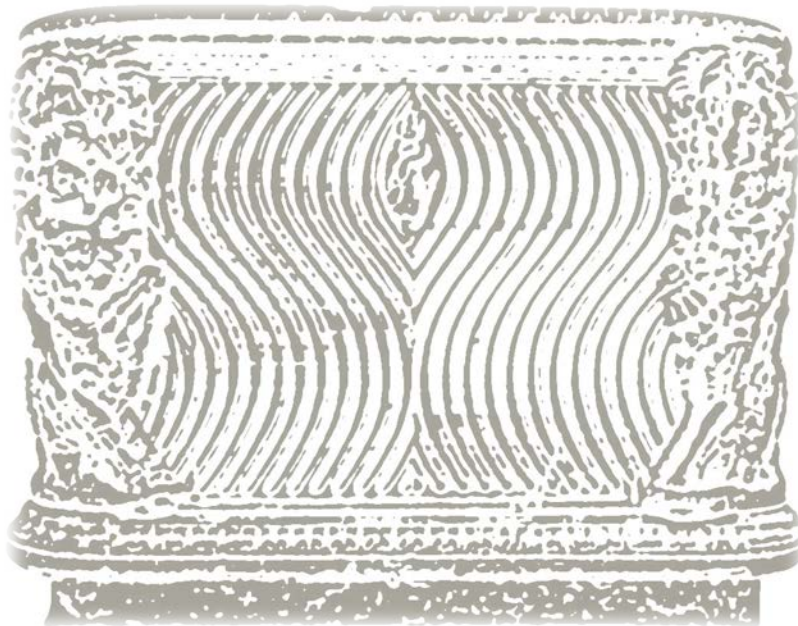


'MECENATI OF THE XXI CENTURY' 2018

Enhancing the Bank of Italy's architectural and artistic patrimony

Speech by the Director General for Property and Tenders of the Bank of Italy

Luigi Donato



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European Parliament – Brussels

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first thank you for the invitation to take part in today's event. It is indeed a great honour for me to receive this award because the Bank of Italy firmly believes that art has a role to play in promoting both cultural and economic development.

1. The Bank of Italy's architectural and artistic patrimony

The Bank of Italy has always been very aware of the importance of enhancing its considerable architectural and artistic patrimony, which consists of numerous historic buildings and over 3000 works of art from various periods. This patrimony is a great responsibility, but it is also a unique opportunity for the Bank as an institution devoted to public service and keen to emphasise its social responsibility.

The art collection began at the time of the construction of the Bank's headquarters at Palazzo Koch in Rome (1886-1892), during which many archaeological artefacts were discovered. Precious objects such as marble statues, finds of the Roman period, and terracotta sculptures are on display in the Bank's premises and admired every day by employees, scholars and visitors.

Nowadays, enhancement means increasingly sharing artworks and promoting cultural events, because art is a driving force of economic and social growth, especially in Italy, which boasts one of the world's largest artistic heritages.

In its historic buildings, the Bank has recently displayed paintings by contemporary artists, including emerging artists, with the intention of supporting their work.

These modern works, with their bright colours and essential lines, create a pleasant contrast with the austere surroundings of the Bank.

Enhancement also means opening historic buildings to the public more frequently. Crowds of people visit the Bank's buildings in Rome and in other cities where branches are present, taking part in special guided tours.

Since 2011, the art collection has been available on the Bank's website: in the online museum, the public can admire the most important works in the collection and read about their history. This virtual tour of masterpieces from different ages is commented by leading art historians.

In this way, through art, the Bank opens itself up to the community and, above all, to young people.

2. Unitary idea of artistic heritage. Merging art and technology

We could say that the Bank has a unitary idea of artistic heritage: the buildings are used as places of life and work and they are certainly not simply evidence of the past. A key issue is the merging of heritage and technology.

The objective is to find a sustainable level of technological progress that respects the constraints of historic buildings while at the same time attaining a high level of functional efficiency.

When restoring the façades of its historic buildings, the Bank employs only the most highly skilled specialists, working under the supervision of Monuments and Fine Arts Department. In Venice, the original techniques were reproduced and in Palazzo delle Papesse in Siena the Bank also reconstructed the history of the materials used, down to the single brick.

Even in modern spaces – like the Donato Menichella Centre in Frascati or the building in Via Quattro Fontane in Rome - the clear lines of the architects who designed them dialogue with artworks from every era.

3. The art collection: from Riccardo Gualino

This meeting is entitled 'Mecenati of the XXI Century' ('21st Century Patrons of the Arts').

How could we not mention Riccardo Gualino, the great Italian industrialist and art patron? The Bank acquired the most important part of its collection in 1933, after Gualino's bankruptcy, as payment of an extremely large debt. Gualino was a leading financier and collector, who supported artists and gave a large part of his rich collection to the museums of the city of Turin. The Bank received a large share of the liquidation of Gualino's property and, at the same time, saved his important collection from division.

Many masterpieces arrived in the Bank, especially the collection of Oriental art. Now these treasures are exhibited in Palazzo Koch in Rome and attract the interest of the public for their exceptional quality and importance.

The Bank is currently in the process of setting up a new exhibition space in Palazzo Koch for the Oriental artworks and is organising, together with the Turin museums, a major exhibition of Gualino's original collection.

4. The exhibition 'Altre stanze anni '50-'60': Frascati, Latina, Bari, Palermo

The Bank's art collection has been enriched over time with new purchases. Since the '80s, these have mostly been works by modern and contemporary Italian artists.

The exhibition 'Altre stanze' brings together these works.

The exhibition covers an important period of Italian history: the '50s and '60s. At that time, Italy was eager to put the war behind it and to emerge as a democratic nation: people looked forward to a new period of prosperity and happiness. This was the Italy of the first television

programmes and music festivals: our 'Happy Days'. It was also the Italy of the economic miracle, accompanied, however, by the first protests for workers' rights.

The country quickly became an industrial power, partly thanks to the institution of the EEC or Common Market, established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Italian society progressed, public education improved, and families could afford to buy their first cars and scooters.

But these were also difficult times of social conflict and political contrasts. The rapid economic growth was not without its critics and the would remain largely unresolved.

There were strong political tensions in the rest of the world too, which then resulted in the Cold War and the Vietnam War. The mood of the *dolce vita* captured by Fellini in 1960 seemed far away.

Youth protests left a strong mark on society, leading to new cultural models. Unfortunately, the '60s ended in the worst way, with the start of terrorist attacks, all intended to destabilize democracy.

The artists of the exhibition 'Altre stanze' describe with passion the spirit of those times, transmitting it to the public.

We are proud of the success of this project. For the first time, 43 works by those great Italian artists are shown together in an itinerant exhibition, taking in Frascati, Latina, Bari, soon Palermo. To date it has attracted over 75,000 visitors.

The exhibition is also an example of synergy and cooperation between public institutions: the Bank, the town councils, the museums, the experts of the Monuments and Fine Arts Department. A team effort has brought to a larger public, and particularly to the younger generation, the Italian art of that period, when economy, politics, institutions, society and, of course, art underwent major changes, caught up in the 'climate of fervour'.

5. An interesting story: Balla's house and Bal Tic Tac

I would like to conclude by mentioning the Bank's projects relating to Giacomo Balla, the great Italian Futurist painter.

The Bank of Italy has contributed to the restoration of Balla's house, his last residence in Rome. The Bank has done the conservation work and is now helping to arrange the re-opening of the house as a museum.

Let us enter this futuristic atmosphere! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOKazbkAX98>

In exchange, Balla has left us a wonderful gift: during renovation work in one of the Bank's building in Rome, we discovered the wall paintings of Bal Tic Tac, a futuristic cabaret theatre designed and decorated by Giacomo Balla. This place will also be made accessible to the public.

Let us have a look together this extraordinary discovery! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vaxPay2rtI8>

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Thank you for your attention.

I hope that you will have the opportunity to visit the Bank of Italy's collection in the future.